MICHIGAN WOMYN’S MUSIC FESTIVAL: PLACE MAKING AND THE QUEER PERSISTENCE OF FEMINISM

by

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Abstract

This dissertation research is designed to advance knowledge concerning contemporary conceptions of sexual citizenship, queer history and the context and performative nature of feminism during a time of “post-feminism” (Faludi, 1991; Fraser, 2009; McRobbie, 2004). I investigate feminism as it is enacted at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival (hereafter referred to as the Festival). The Festival is an event that grew out of the second wave feminist movement in the 1960s and 1970s. It has survived decades of liberation movements, identity politics and related political struggles, threats from the religious right, transsexual inclusion/exclusion debates and so on. Unlike many of the feminist events that closed their doors in the 80s and 90s (Case, 1996) over the last 35 years this festival has grown into one of the oldest and largest lesbian feminist gatherings in the world (Cvetkovich and Wahng, 2001; Morris, 1999; Ryan, 1992; Taylor and Rupp, 1993). Since the mid-1980s, discussion about the “end of feminism” and what post-feminism means has increased (Faludi, 1991; Fraser, 2009; Jones, 1994; McRobbie, 2009; Modleski, 1991). Post-feminism sometimes refers to a new kind of anti-feminist sentiment, one that differs from the backlash faced by feminists in the 1970s and 1980s. Post-feminist discourse can imply that equality has been achieved and that feminists can now focus on something else. Within the pages of this dissertation, the avenue of study I engage in investigates the convergence of second-wave feminism (Daly, 1978; Dworkin, 2002; MacKinnon, 1989; Millet, 1970) in a post-feminist time. What does it mean to engage in various feminist identity practices whose time is past? How do the lived embodiments of race, gender difference, sexual alterity, and variations of bodily capacity structure the time and timing of particular collectivities? This project’s major animating question asks, then: How does feminism persist in a time of post-feminism?
Preface

This dissertation is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, C. J. Rowe. Approval for this research was given by the Behavioural Research Ethics Board at the University of British Columbia (H11-00909) on June 20, 2011.
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Well, I traveled a long way
And it took a long time to find you . . .
But I finally found you . . .

- Alabama Shakes “I Found You” (2011)

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For Bruno. There will always be a warm beer waiting for you by my fire.
Chapter One. Welcome Home: An Introduction

Image 1 County Road (2011)
Setting the Stage

We turned left onto the dirt road leaving the pavement behind in a cloud of dust. The windows are wide open so that we can feel the change in temperature and smell the freshness in the air shift as we move from farmers’ fields full of overgrown asparagus to the woods that will be our home for the next month. Two-foot tall ferns cover the forest floor, the dirt road is mottled in shades of brown as the sun shines through the lush leaves and branches overhead. The car is filled with the kind of electricity that only excitement can build as we return to “the Land.” As we return “home.” It seems to take forever to drive over the familiar hills, valleys and turns to the front gate. To that big iron gate that opens up onto the Land. This year will be my 13th year working at the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival, one of the longest running women-only festival in the world.

I’m one of up to 500 women who work the Festival each and every year. Pre-festival I’m one of a handful of carpenters who build stages, raccoon cages, showers, and any wooden structure that is needed for the Festival. During the Festival, I am one of many drivers who shuttle the “Festival goers” around “the Land” with a big red Massey Ferguson tractor pulling a colourfully topped surrey. The rhythms on the Land are cyclical in nature. We build the Festival from the ground up and we all play a part in running the Festival as smoothly as possible and then, together, we take it all apart again and put it “to bed” until the next year. Our Worker community consists of women from all walks of life—different ages, abilities, races, sexual orientations and such. We take on jobs, roles, and responsibilities that are not traditionally viewed as women’s work. We are carpenters, mechanics, electricians, plumbers, heavy lifters, master cooks—who cook for hundreds and then thousands of women—we are sound technicians, musicians, child care workers, and drivers of tractors and old farm trucks. We all love our jobs and we return each and every year, or as often as we can, for many reasons—because we love the work, our Festival community, our chosen family, and/or the Festival itself. In many ways this is a story about why some of us come to this place, engage with difficult political conversations, tensions and debates, and the rituals that keep us grounded and linked to a global network of chosen family, queer community and feminism.
Introduction

I’ll be postfeminist in a postpatriarchy. - A bumper sticker

Bundled within the excitement expressed above are layers of history, feminism, hope, performance and the persistence of memory that, together, help to create this queer world. The Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival was founded on a philosophical concept that arose out of the women’s music movement and radical lesbian feminist politics of the 1970s. Since its inception, the women’s movement has moved through significant changes, from the rise and growth of women-only spaces, women’s publications and women’s shelters to the closing of women’s bookstores and other women-only spaces (Case, 1996). At this point in time, it has become commonplace to hear the proclamation that feminism is at an end, that we are in a time of postfeminism. If feminism has served its purpose and gender equality has been achieved why then does this intentional women’s community persist at a time when it, and the movement that it grew out of, is being told that it is done, is at an end, has achieved its goals, and is no longer needed? This dissertation will draw on the experiences of long-time Festival workers to explore knowledge concerning the nature of feminism during a time of postfeminism (Faludi, 1991; Fraser, 2009; McRobbie, 2004). It will also explore contemporary conceptions of sexual citizenship (Berlant, 1995; Muñoz, 2009), queer temporality (Buckland, 2002; Halberstam, 2005; Kristava, 1981) and the performance of memory as it is linked through remembrances, performance and their ritualized telling (Buckland, 2002; Muñoz, 2009; Taylor, 2003).

1970s (Lesbian) Feminism

Let us begin by exploring the origins of lesbian separatist politics and the creation of separatist space to understand the links between the Michigan Women’s Music Festival and feminism more generally. The Women’s Movement of the 1960s and 1970s transformed society and shifted the lives of many individuals. It was an exciting time for
women as feminist activism challenged social relations that were taken for granted, gave voice to what was traditionally left unspoken and influenced generations of people of all genders. The women who were active at this time were drawn together by common political goals. They shared their personal stories through consciousness raising groups and began to think about their lives and the lives of women to come in new ways. They protested, argued with one and other, discussed oppression and redefined what it could mean to be a woman in society. They opened women’s bookstores, started women’s music festivals and established women’s study classes and programs. They opened rape crisis centres and battered women services, and looked towards creating change for themselves and for the future. All of this took place during the height of the “second wave” feminist movement in the last 1960s and early 1970s.

The lesbian separatist spaces and communities that sprang out of this time can be tracked back to the early 1970s with the founding of The Furies. The Furies was a group established in reaction to the distancing of lesbian struggles from mainstream feminist politics and the active rejection of lesbians from feminist organizations and groups (Stein, 1991, p. 113). This group, and the separatists that followed, established lesbianism as an active strategy and radical political position where the separation of women from male culture was pinnacle. These women argued that in order to engage in a successful feminist practice, all women should actively disengage with mainstream society and develop separatist communities away from patriarchal power relations and oppression. The slogan for the movement was “if feminism is the theory, lesbianism is the practice” (Johnston, 1973) and separation allowed for the conception of women creating transformative cultures and the founding of what came to be known as a Lesbian Nation (Johnston, 1973). In developing alternative communities, lesbian feminists created a women’s culture and their own institutions based upon their own theories, practices and values. Feminist bookstores, women’s music festivals, artists’ and writers’ collectives are all boundary strategies (Taylor and Whittier, 1992). Academics often note that social movements hinge upon the active and ongoing construction of collective identity. One central tenet in deciding who belongs to the collective identity depends on determining who to exclude (Phelan, 1993; Taylor and Whittier, 1992). While all social and identity
movements are in the business of exclusion they are predicated on creating an alternative to daily struggles, a horizon of possibility and hope that the community is working towards.

The Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival (hereafter referred to as, the Festival) is an example of a cultural event and, some would argue, an institution that came out of the lesbian separatist movement. This movement was predicated on creating separate but real spaces in society that excluded men and allowed women, particularly lesbian women, to create social structures, living arrangements, and festivals based on principles that celebrated women, their abilities, their work and their art. The goal was to provide them with an escape from the “real world” and a place to explore potentials otherwise unattainable in mainstream society. The Festival would aptly be described as a “heterotopia” (Foucault, 1984, p. 3), a space outside of space that offered those women marginalized in society a place to connect, reinvigorate, inspire and grow.

Her car pulled up to the front of the house later than I expected. I remember that I had been waiting up to see her so I could get a hug and tuck her in. She walked in exhausted and ready for food and a stiff drink. She’d been on the road for a good 15 hours and was dog-tired after working herself to the bone for the last four weeks. This was my first real introduction to the Festival. My university roommate had told me all about it the year before, over the phone, but this time I not only had the chance to see her as she arrived post-Festival, with wild exhausted eyes, but I remember holding the Festival’s guide in my hands that night for the very first time. It was nothing I’d ever seen before. There were concerts for days and nights on end; the list of films with feminist and lesbian content blew my mind, and the workshops . . . Where to even start with the depth and breadth of workshops? There was everything from how to build a cob structure, to Amazon archery, to white privilege, to sex toys 101. I remember thinking then and there that I was going to go next year no matter what it took. And I did . . .

The Festival happens every year in August. Thousands of women from around the world make an annual journey away from their homes to the Festival grounds (hereafter referred to as, the Land) where they literally build a culture and community based on
tradition, notions of family, memory and hope. The Festival was founded in 1976 as an alternative to the male dominated music industry and as a response to the North American social landscape that surrounded it. It has grown over the last 36 plus years, into one of the oldest and largest lesbian feminist gatherings in the world (Echols, 1989; Ryan, 1992; Taylor and Rupp, 1993). The women who run and build this festival consist of a largely volunteer, all-female workforce (hereafter referred to as the Workers). These Workers provide the labour for nearly every job that is needed on the Land, no matter what size. They spend up to a month each summer living in tents long before and after the weeklong festival, building and taking apart the town that emerged to house the Festival. They are literally building their own community, their own reality. Each year the 650-acre parcel of land begins and ends in its natural state—the electrical and plumbing lines are installed and buried beneath the soil and then later dug up and dismantled the structures are built and then disassembled, and at the end of the Festival the fields and wooded areas are painstakingly combed for trash and any signs of human presence are removed. Every year, the Festival unfolds, in all its ritual, repetition and tradition.

The collection of Workers that come together every year creates a community that, while not bound by geography, is pulled together by identity politics, performance, memory and a shared sense of purpose. The community is a space that has survived decades of liberation movements, identity politics, S/M (sadism and masochism) political struggles, the Sex Wars, threats from the religious right, tensions surrounding the inclusion/exclusion of trans women, debates around boy children and the post-modern examination of language and texts, among other thing. There are ongoing struggles and divisive debates and tensions specifically around issues of inclusion and exclusion and the political structure of the Festival. A majority of the texts that explore the Festival focus on the more contentious aspects of identity based social movements, specifically the exclusion of transsexual women from the Festival (Boyd, 2006; Califia, 1997; Gamson, 1997) and ethnographic studies that investigate the Festival as a community with all its intricacies (Barber, 2011; Higgins, 2008; Kendall, 2008; Morris, 1999). This dissertation argues that to begin to understand the persistence of the Festival, as a
reflection of the persistence of feminism in the larger North American society, one needs a suitable critical lens through which to examine this feminist project.

Feminism is based on a social justice approach of reflecting on the past, facing gender based struggles in the now and looking towards the future for social change. Fellow Worker and U.S. Professor Bonnie Morris describes the Festival as “an entire city run by and for lesbian feminists. Utopia revealed. An Eden-build by Eves” (1999, p. 60). A more productive form of criticality might be to look towards the transforming nature of the utopian vision and the utopian practices that are performed within these spaces and how political discourse and embodied learning are inherent components of the Festival. Social movements that are identity-based often invoke utopic notions of community that are harnessed to motivate and affirm their existence. It is this within this movement of working towards something that holds the potentiality of change that might be a productive mode of investigation to recognize, examine and explore. It is always within this social space that disagreement, conflict and political discourse arises within feminist communities and the feminist movement more generally. The Festival is a key example of feminism in practice. The Festival persists at a time when it is being told that it is behind the times, its political positioning is out of date, and its identity practices are “out of time” just as feminism more generally is being told that it has achieved its goals and women are now equal in society.

This dissertation explores the embodied performance of feminism in a lesbian feminist space in order to understand why and how feminism persists in a time of postfeminism. It focuses on examining the persistence of feminism in order to advance knowledge about contemporary conceptions of sexual citizenship, add to the archival documentation of the Festival and explore the Festival’s significance to Western feminism (Cvetkovich, 2003; Daly, 1978; Dworkin, 2002; MacKinnon, 1989; Millet, 1970).

The Festival: From a Collective to Now

As we move towards defining the key questions being addressed in this dissertation, I thought it would be fruitful to make space to talk about the genesis and evolution of the Festival. In particular, I’m interested in drawing out the history of the Festival’s
“management” system as a key consideration in the exploration of feminism in a time of postfeminism.

In 1976, a then 19-year-old Lisa Vogel along with her sister Kristie Vogel and some friends established the We Want the Music Collective (WWTMC). Under the moniker WWTMC they founded the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival as a way to begin to address some of the concerns that were being raised within the women’s music movement at that time. Some of these concerns included the inherent homophobia, sexism, classism and racism that was deeply entrenched within the music industry. Specifically, they were interested in looking to create a space for women musicians, women with technical music skills and women audience members to come together for at least a week a year to find support and build their own sustainable community. In the beginning, a small collective of women shared ownership and produced the event; however, over the years this model shifted and the responsibility landed on the shoulders of Lisa Vogel and Barbara “Boo” Price who were equal partners in the Festival until the mid-1990s. Since 1995, Lisa Vogel has been the sole owner and producer of the Festival who, along with a small number of paid staff, works year round to organize the week-long festival. Each year, as the cyclical nature of the Festival unfolds, the office staff move from their home base in Oakland, California, to Walhalla, Michigan, where, gradually, over a few months, Workers begin to gather. First working from the office in Walhalla and, as the number of Workers grow and the Festival date gets closer, the Workers move onto the Land where they will grow in number and spend up to six weeks together building, running and then disassembling the Festival site. While the Festival was once run using a consensus-based model over the years the decision making process has evolved. While some decisions are still made collectively at Worker community meetings the decisions that affect the Festival in terms of navigating financial decisions and big picture visioning rely on the judgment of the WWTMC.

**Research Questions**

When I began this research project, I was not sure where my writing might take me. After reviewing various bodies of research, some of which can be found in the literature review
in the next few pages, a spark of curiosity grew within me—I wanted to more deeply understand the draw of the Festival and the urge to return. Why did I feel the need to return as a Worker every year? What is it about that place, the women who congregate there and the work that pulls my body, mind and spirit to return? I have learned so much over the last fifteen years by being an active member in that community. In many ways I have grown up there and my own personal feminist practices have been deeply influenced by the on-the-ground approaches to feminism that I have learned by physically engaging with this Festival. My own history with the Festival and the way my literature review unfolded lead me to the following questions:

1) What does it mean to engage in various feminist identity practices that appear out of time?
2) How do lived embodiments of race, gender difference, sexual alterity, and variations of bodily capacity structure time and timing of queer world making?
3) How does feminism persist in a time of postfeminism?

In order to investigate these research questions, this dissertation draws on the intersecting theories of memory, embodied performance, hope, temporality and feminism. While addressing my research questions, I draw upon specific discourses, conversations and knowledges within each of these theoretical domains to form my arguments. In the following section, I provide a review of the relevant theories and literature that will help to propel this research in order to begin to understand the persistence of memory and the performative aspects of queer world making within the Festival. This body of research explores the performative practice involved in the negotiation of memory through the recreation of already existing community knowledge and assumptions. In order to articulate the convergence of these theoretical lines I will explore four broad themes: Postfeminism, Feminist Promise, Utopia in Practice and Embodied Memory and Performance.

This dissertation sets out to explore the “persistence of feminism” as it pertains to various facets of late twentieth-century North American feminist cultural practices. Despite having been the site of considerable conflict over time, these feminist cultural practices
display a stubborn resistance to change—a resistance that could be described as “persistence.” Persistence is typically defined as the continuation of a course of action in spite of opposition, difficulty or failure.¹ My intention in this dissertation is to understand how the lesbian feminist practices that emerged in the 1970s—and were then enacted at the Festival—have persisted into the present in a period described by some scholars (Faludi, 1991; Jones, 1994; Modleski, 1991; McRobbie, 2009; Fraser, 2009) as postfeminist. It is through this investigation that I hope to broaden our understanding of feminist and lesbian world making practices and the engines that enable them to endure since the 1970s. The Festival as a material and discursive incarnation of feminist values and embodied practices provides a unique opportunity to explore the complexities of feminism(s) (such as the persistence of inequality despite commitments to social justice) and to inquire into the ways in which feminism is deployed over time and through time.

What do you mean by “post”? 

We are at a time when popular culture is proclaiming that we are at the end of feminism. That is, we are in the age of postfeminism, where feminism finds itself relegated to the past within a history of social movements. There is a sense of nostalgia for those who were feminists at the peak of the second wave in the 1970s when feminism seemed to have a clear object (women) and a clear goal (to rid our social world of gender inequity). However, this nostalgia may be nothing more than a trick of memory as feminism has, since its inception, held a contentious space. Feminism has defined, refined and defied an array of ever-abundant definitions, positions, goals and objectives. This has had the effect of splintering what was originally recognized as “the” feminist project into something that is difficult to recognize or, as Kavka describes, feminism has slipped into a “paradoxical state of visible invisibility” (2001, p. iii). That is, the more “feminism” becomes a visibly public term, the less intelligible it becomes to both its supporters and its skeptics.

The rise of the use of the term postfeminism can be marked historically within the 1990s. It is a term that found footing within academia and the media and then later came to mean different things to different group of academics, social critics and feminists. There is, however, confusion about the meaning of postfeminism. Indeed, not only has “postfeminism” been used to announce the end of feminism, it has been adopted by some “third wave” feminists, and through its definitions and appropriation has become a site of feminist politics in and of itself.

The origin of the term “postfeminism” was traced by Nancy Cott (1987) to a group of women who had formed a radical literary group in Greenwich Village in 1919. According to Cott, this group founded a new journal with the thinking that “we’re interested in people now—not in men and women.” This group took the stance that politics, social life, the economy and moral codes “should not have anything to do with sex,” and should be “pro-women without being anti-man.” They called this stance “post-feminist” (Cott, 1987, p. 282).

The initial conception of postfeminism came about because of the perceived successes of the first wave of feminism, the suffragette movement. In this usage, “post” expresses an almost evolutionary progress of feminist ideas. Others (like Kavka, 2002) used the term as it was framed by Toril Moi in Sexual/Textual Politics (1985) to champion a feminism that would dispel the binary of liberal feminism and radical feminism. To Moi, application of the word “post” to feminism is both a methodological and a theoretical shift away from the dialectical synthesis (p. 13). Others mark the next significant use of the term “postfeminism” as occurring in the 1980s when the popular press brought postfeminism back into cultural discourse as a reaction to second wave feminism and its collective activist politics (Genz & Brabon, 2009, p. 11). However, the more one delves into the intentions and theories behind postfeminism the more overwhelmed one can become. I am interested in teasing out the implications of postfeminism in order to better understand feminism within time and history. I am particularly interested in feminism within history because postfeminism seems to denote that we are at the end of feminism and in order to understand this ending we must attempt to grasp where this break from, this end to, feminism occurred. I want to know if there still is something called feminism
Can we understand it better by writing a history? Because of the proclamation that we are at the “end” of feminism, are we really at the end of this history? Is there only one history to account for and, if so, whose history are we taking account of?

While the configuration of postfeminism invokes a narrative that insists we are at a time “after” feminism, the meaning and progression of “post” are not close to being resolved. As Amelia Jones (1990) attests, “what is post but the signification of a kind of termination—a temporal designation of whatever it prefaces as ended, done with, obsolete” (p. 8). In this way, “post” can point to a thorough break where postfeminism vehemently declares the demise of feminism where feminism is seen as “gone, departed, dead” and “homeless and groundless” (Hawkesworth, 2004, p. 969). Postfeminism, in this context, points to the “pastness” of feminism, the end of a specific feminist history, one that encounters a generational shift in comprehending the relationships between women and men and between women themselves. As I explore later, postfeminism is conjured most often by young feminists to indicate, “we are no longer in a second wave of feminism” (Gillis and Munford, 2003, p. 2). The conception of feminist change has sparked a number of struggles between “generations” of women and feminists that are often referred to as the “mother-daughter” conflicts.

An alternate view of “post” unlike those described above, is the idea that the “post” in postfeminism implies a genealogy in need of revision. Those who ascribe to another application of the “post”—postmodernism—favour this position. Here the prefix is conceived of as being part of a process of continual transformation. Within their analysis of postmodern theory, Steven Best and Douglas Kellner (1991) state that the “post” indicates “a dependence on, a continuity with, that which follows” (p. 29). Within this framework, the “post” of feminism suggests that feminism should remain in the postfeminist state in which it is currently situated and that it is not being rejected or dismissed but is instead being held as its own platform of analysis.

What makes it particularly difficult to interpret the meaning of postfeminism is that feminism itself has never had one unifying, agreed upon, universal agenda or definition from which we could measure the positive or negative impact that “post” has on
feminism. Geraldine Harris (1999) argues that feminism has never had “a single, clearly defined, common ideology” nor has it ever been constructed around “a political party or a central organization or leaders or an agreed policy or manifesto, or ever been based upon an agreed principle of collective action” (p. 9). Rather, it could be said that feminism has always consisted of numerous working definitions that vary depending on context, individual philosophy, specific issue and locale. Feminism exists on philosophical, political, local and personal levels. It is used by a diverse array of individuals for specific issues just as it advocates universally for women’s equality. Feminists are brought together under the political investment of gender-based equality while they are simultaneously fractured by the multiplicity of perspectives, goals and personal practices that grow out of that particular conception of social justice. To assume, then, that there is even one easily identified construct called “feminism” ignores the diverse political practices, understandings and identifications situated under a feminist practice. Indeed, one cannot look back at a unified and stable feminist past to a time before “the introduction of a particular vigorous and invasive weed into the otherwise healthy garden of feminism” (Elam, 1997, p. 55).

Another difficulty with understanding the “post” in postfeminism is that feminism is not dead. Feminism has a history, one that is ongoing but difficult to pinpoint because of the various feminisms there remain active and relevant. To demystify this I explore two present concerns in academic feminism: how can we write a history of feminism; and, at this particular historical juncture, how can “postfeminism” help us to understand and articulate a feminist history in terms of an “ethic.”

**History of Feminism/Generational Thinking**

> History may be a compilation of lies; nevertheless, it contains a few truths, and they are the only guides we have for the future.
> 

With its roots in the suffragist movement of the early 1900s and the second wave feminism of the 1980s, the term postfeminism re-emerged in reaction to second wave
feminism. Postfeminism, as it appeared towards the notional end of the first wave and then again at the notional end of the second wave, could be viewed as a generational shift in feminist thinking, one that might suggest that the equality sought through those movements had been achieved. If one were to look at it this way, one could conceive of feminism as a cyclical process of rebirth that occurs after a successful grand-scale revolutionary stage (or “waves”) of feminist activism. In this sense, one could consider this a time of “post-revolution” and a move away from the mobilizations of the first and second wave movements (Stacy, 1987, p. 8).

Julie Ewington (1994) proposes, “it is not feminism that we are ‘post’ but one historical phase of feminist politics” (p. 119). Postfeminism, then, urges feminists to begin to investigate its own history to create “an account of its own temporality that does not simply mimic the modernist grand narrative of progress” (Ewington, 1994, p. 67). By looking at feminism and the rise of postfeminism in this historical sense, it would appear that postfeminism denotes a time when feminists can take stock of the achievements that have been made and critically engage with the challenges that contemporary feminist politics and theory face. By framing postfeminism within this analytical stance postfeminism appears to offer feminists a space to study and critically engage with what feminism has done and what should be done next. In this sense, feminism is always in process, making changes within itself and transforming. Ann Brooks (1997) views postfeminism as “feminism’s ‘coming of age,’ its maturing into a confident body of theory and politics, representing pluralism and difference” (p. 1). Since the 1960s and 1970s, feminism has gone through a wide range of changes including significant shifts in conceptual frameworks “from debates around equality to a focus on debates around difference,” an increased “mainstreaming of feminism,” younger generations of women who have redefined feminist identity and goals, and it has moved away from a collective based activist politics (Brooks, 1997, p. 4).

The relationships between the feminist activity of the 1960s and 1970s are linked to but different from the feminist activity of the 1980s, 1990s and the 2000s. The young women who have come into feminism in more recent times entered while they were situated in very different cultural, social and political climates than those who entered in the heyday
of the second wave. In *Feminist Generations* (1996) explores the persistence of the radical women’s movement within the context of the radical feminist community in Columbus, Ohio. Nancy Whittier explains that “just as the links between political generations grow from structural and social relations . . . so, too, are the differences grounded in the changing social structures and cultural contexts that organize the lives of women at different times” (1996, p. 235). It should not be surprising then that the “postfeminist generation” has had different experiences than those of the “longtime feminists who acquired a sense of the world and themselves in a different era” (Whittier, 1996, p. 226). However, neither members of this “postfeminist generation” nor “longtime feminists” are a homogeneously unified group. A person’s age is less of a factor than the time one comes out as an activist and the experiences that one has had as an individual. For example, activists from the same era might not agree with each other because of their experiences and backgrounds. While collective identity might last over time, everyone changes over time. While commonalities and conflicts shift over time, these shifts often hinge upon issues concerning race, class, sexual identity, experience and ideology and changes in the external contexts that drive how individuals, organizations and political movements evolve. This passing of time, created an age difference that is not measurable chronologically but discursively (Braidotti, 1989, p. 91). Younger women were brought up in feminism and benefited due to the trials of those women who came before. We owe a debt to those whose efforts and political action created a more expansive and equitable definition of what it means to be a woman. While a generational understanding is one useful way to understand how feminism has changed over time, as relations across generations are unavoidable in a movement that has a long history (Whittier, 1995, p. 226), it is not the only way to conceive of the “post” in feminism nor is it the only way to frame a feminist history.

**Mother/Daughter: The struggle to grow**

So many roads and so much opinion
So much shit to give in, give in to
So many rules and so much opinion
So much bullshit but we won’t give in
The shift in the feminist movement to postfeminism can also be conceived of as a rift in the relationship between the mother and the daughter. Griselda Pollock (2007), in her lecture at The Museum of Contemporary Art for the WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution exhibition, states that “what we have now is a visual culture of the daughter which appears to draw its strengths from certain aspects of this look Mom (an aspect of early feminism) look what I’ve got, raising my skirt, I want you to see this,” (2007) which pushes us to consider a larger question of generational dynamics and the notion of time. This imagery indicates an urgency and concern surrounding the lack of transmission of feminist heritage onto the next generation. This generational gap, according to Rosi Braidotti (1989) appears to create a need for what Luce Irigaray calls the “theoretical genealogy of women” or “a feminine symbolic system” (as cited in Braidotti, 1989, p. 96). This formulation of the generational gap “rests on the notion of sexual difference as its working hypothesis . . . the sudden eruption of the Oedipal plot within feminist theory” and it “also means that the thorny knots surrounding the maternal body as the site of origin has reinvested the women’s movement” (p. 96). The intersection of all three draws naturally on psychoanalytic theory. This mother-daughter debate can be seen as both the symptom and the privilege of this particular enactment of sexual difference (Jardin, 1989).

Rebecca Walker (1995) articulated this generational divide between the second wave mothers and the postfeminist daughters quite eloquently in the introduction to her anthology To Be Real: Telling the Truth and Changing the Face of Feminism. As the daughter of well-known activist, poet and writer Alice Walker, she states: young women coming of age today wrestle with the term “feminist” because we have a very different vantage point on the world than that of our foremothers. . . . For many of us it seems that to be a feminist . . . is to conform to an identity and way of living that doesn’t allow for

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individuality, complexity, or less than perfect personal histories. (p. xxxiii).

Young feminists are fearful that feminism, as an identity, will direct and restrict their lives, will promptly pit them in opposition with someone else, and will put them in a place where they will have to choose one side of a binary—female/male, black/white, good/bad.

Within this argument, a temporal and critical distancing occurs between the new generation of feminists and those seen as the feminist establishment. It is a shift from a feminism that seems dated and rigid to one that is much more in support of difference and ambiguity. This generational conflict is explained by Imelda Whelehn (2005) as consisting of daughters who want to point out to their feminist mothers that the world has changed quite considerably since they were young feminists. . . . [W]hen it comes to feminism . . . young women assuredly do not want the “rules” perceived to be handed down from the motherhood. (p. 179-80)

The second wave feminist “mother” is seen as a historical figure who is out of date and whose time has passed or, as McRobbie (2003) articulates, “a psychic policewoman, disallowing girls from the pleasure of imaging the thrill of pre-feminist womanhood” (p. 135). Feminists who are looking to reinvigorate and reframe the feminist movement in the twenty-first century often apply this logic. They are looking to transform the old feminism into a feminism that is relevant, modern, holds new meanings and has sex appeal (Genz & Brabon, 2009).

As a reaction to postfeminism, the feminist “mothers” accuse their “daughters” of historical oversight, their apparent amnesia when it comes to the history of feminism and for abuse of their feminist heritage. As articulated by Lynne Segal (2003), this new branch of feminists “were able to launch themselves and court media via scathing attacks on other feminist” and have been “appropriated by a managerial elite” who work within neo-liberal values and who are “eager to roll back welfare for workfare” (p. 152). Segal argues that the radical edge of feminist politics had faded by the 1990s and that there was “a kind of cultural forgetting of the intellectual legacies of feminism” even though there is still some “radical residue lingering for those who wish to find it” (Adkins, 2004, p.
Critics of postfeminism (Fraser, 2009; McRobbie, 2009) view the social and political implications of this time as being politically conservative and as an insidiously sexist media-driven attempt to indirectly devoid our society of feminist gains. Posed as if feminism has already been achieved, postfeminism characterizes it as “a hegemonic negotiation of second-wave ideals” while “working with patriarchal theory” to make use of feminist conceptions of equality for non-feminist ends (Dow, 1996, p. 88; de Toro, 1999, p. 16). Popular culture is criticized as being one of the primary culprits in co-opting feminism’s language, such as “equality” and “empowerment,” and portraying an illusion of equality that women literally “buy into,” which ultimately places more pressure on women’s continual social subjugation at a much more unconscious level (McRobbie, 2009).

Susan Faludi (1991) argues that postfeminism is a backlash against feminism and the grounds that were gained by the second wave feminist movement. From her perspective, postfeminism or anything that labels itself “post” is “bound to be reactive” to what came before it and is, in most cases, reactionary (p. 5). While not a full on attack on feminism “[t]he backlash is at once sophisticated and banal, deceptively ‘progressive’ and proudly backward” (p. 12). While it does not refuse feminism and equal rights explicitly, it rearticulates them in terms of individualist politics and centres on consumer pleasure and personal choices. From this perspective, “post” is situated in a precarious place that suggests both an assault on and a misappropriation of a “parasite riding on the back of the original movement which benefits from the ground it was won but uses this for its own means” (Kastelein, 1994, p. 5). As Ann Braithwaite (2004) explains “feminism is ‘written in’ precisely so that it can be ‘written out’; it is included and excluded, acknowledged and paid tribute to, and accepted and refuted, all at the same time” (p. 25). After this rather pessimistic view, it is heartening to grasp Griselda Pollock’s argument, which is that in the wake of the 1990s backlash, postfeminism was wrapped in attractive packaging and made to look more sexy and fun in juxtaposition with feminism, which was looked upon as being old fashioned and dreary. She states:

We now have to stand firm and both reclaim feminism’s actual historical configuration from its miss-representation and recognize that, at the same time, it is not time confined, it is constantly evolving and it is an
engagement with an intervention in shifting historical and cultural configurations which must go on if we are going to survive. (2007)

From a practical perspective when looking at women’s struggle for education, access to economic security and basic safety, it is glaringly apparent that women’s equality has not been achieved. As Pollock states, “it seems to me inconceivable that in 2007 after 30 years or more of active feminism on a global scale that the general condition of women economically, socially and physically is as atrocious as it is now” (2007). With this in mind, how can we be in a postfeminist era—in a time when feminism has apparently ended—when there is clearly so much work still to be done.

Towards the end of Angela McRobbie’s (2009) book, The Aftermath of Feminism, she introduces her readers to the idea that there is a need for critical exploration of the limitations of the “waves model of feminism” (p. 154). For McRobbie, this representation of feminism supports the “linear narrative of generationally-led progress” by creating visible “waves” that allow for pinpointed, time-related conceptions of the feminist movement(s). This formulation restrains the possibility of writing a complex ancestry of feminism(s) and, instead, allows for the more generalized historical representation of feminism with “beginnings and endings and which remain suspicious of theory and is tied to simplistic ideas and Western-dominated kinship metaphors about mothers and daughters” (p. 154). In this way, these perspectives hinder activists, as the concept of feminist waves is an obstruction to the conception of new ideas and innovative practices.

I have chosen to give space to those feminists working in the field of postfeminism to explore some of the arguments circulating in academic feminist criticism. I am drawn to McRobbie and Pollock’s arguments, which suggest that feminism is not confined in or by time and that the linear narrative does not fit an ever evolving feminist practice. There may be more productive ways to understand feminism than by confining it within the concepts of feminist “waves.” One way is to explore an alternate understanding of feminism within, or rather out of time.
Ethical Feminism

A barrier to understanding the “post” in postfeminism is that feminism is not dead. Feminism has a history, one that is ongoing but difficult to pinpoint because of all the various feminisms that are active and relevant. This section explores the difficulty behind placing feminism along a historical trajectory and investigates how the concept of ethical feminism can help build an understanding of the complexities inherent in all feminist practices in and through time.

In “The end of sexual difference?” Judith Butler (2001) argues that there is no single definition of feminism, but that “feminists everywhere seek a more substantial equality for women, and that they seek a more just arrangement of social and political institutions” (p. 414). However, as feminists make space to contemplate what feminism means and how to act feminists are soon faced with the challenges of using the terms that they use and what they mean when they use them. Feminism dwells within a zone of contestation where politics and practice are continually critically engaged and re-engaged. Butler discusses three terms that often conflict with one another: sexual difference, gender and sexuality. Drawing on the work of Luce Irigaray, Butler explores the persistence of sexual difference and, rather than focusing on defining the term, she proposes to explore the questions that arise when we think about sexual difference. Sexual difference, then, is something that prompts feminist inquiry.

By extending Butler’s analysis of “sexual difference,” “gender” and “sexuality” why can we not pull this analysis further to understand “feminism”? As Kavka (2002) suggests, it is difficult to develop a clear definition of feminism because “a linear history of feminism is not possible for the reason that each term, including ‘feminism’ itself, is caught up in a history of multiple definitions that change with each shift in the conceptualization of justice” (p. 37). This search for justice runs simultaneously from multiple perspectives under the umbrella of feminism. Within this layering of feminism(s) each term “sexual

difference,” “gender” and “sexuality” can be understood and employed differently by different feminists attempting to make very distinct arguments and move forward very particular social justice claims. For example, if we were to understand feminist history by mapping out histories of feminism as Kavka does and begin by focusing on sexual difference within a feminist history, we could say “that an emphasis on sexual difference (seventies/eighties material feminism) shades into a focus on gender (eighties/ nineties poststructuralist feminism), which has since become an interest in the practices of sexuality (nineties feminism to present)” (Kavka, 2002, p. 37). However, if we were to begin our mapping with gender “since it was the separation in the early seventies of sex/nature from gender/culture that allowed women to imagine that a liberation from the effects of social difference was possible” (Kavka, 2002, p. 37) our mapping of a feminist history would look radically different. When viewed from this perspective, terms such as “sexual difference,” “gender” and “sexuality” all serve to underscore the “ethical history of feminism” (Kavka, 2002, p. 7).

By mapping terminology over time, we can position ourselves to better understand the different ways in which feminists have engaged with such concepts to understand identity practices, power and privilege. As an example of how identities and definitions of terminology can be understood differently by feminists and feminism over time, let us turn our attention to the concept of “butch-femme.” Writers and thinkers such as Judith Halberstam (1998a and 1998b), Lynda Hart (1994) and Sally Munt (1998) have acknowledged that the phrase “butch-femme” refers to those who identify as hetero-gendered or homosexual and center on certain practices that can be traced back to “working class lesbian communities in the United States” after the Second World War (Noble, 2004). These identity practices went underground in the 1970s when lesbian feminists condemned their practices arguing that butch-femme reproduced power relations present in heterosexual relationships. As Bobby Noble (2004) states, “lesbian-feminism sought to recentre lesbianism as quintessentially feminist by privileging a lesbian subject position—the woman-identified women—that disavowed all manifestations of masculinity and femininity” (p. xi). However, butch and femme as identities re-emerged towards the end of the notorious feminist “sex wars” in the 1980s.
(Chapkis, 1997; Duggan & Hunt, 1995). In this time period, butch-femme was re-conceptualized as a “lesbian gender identity that eroticized gender, not power, differences” (Noble, 2004, p. xi). The interrogation of gender suggests that gender “is a category that alters across time, region, social class, and ethnicity” (Noble, p. xiii). Therefore, one could argue, there is no one definition attached to these terms as the meaning behind such terminology can be conceived and re-conceived over time depending on one’s or a group’s political focus.

Our understandings of terms, then, differ depending on the theoretical and political understanding that is being undertaken or articulated. The term articulation comes from Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe’s (1985) theoretical work where it is defined as “any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice” (p. 105). As a critique, the theory of articulation “seeks to break the links between concepts that are the residue of opinion and custom . . . knowledge presupposes a kind of rupture, a disarticulation of ideas that enables us subsequently to construct newly grafted articulations (Noble, 2004, p. xv). Articulation, as a theory and a method, is a way to comprehend social formations without falling into essentialism or mechanical affiliations (Slack, 1996). Jennifer Slack (1996) writes, “articulation is a way of thinking the structures of what we know as play or correspondences, non-correspondences and contradictions, as fragments in the constitution of what we take to be unities” (p. 112). Stuart Hall (1996a) grounds the notion of articulation using the metaphor of a British truck where the back of the truck is linked to the front of a trailer. Both components are independent objects that do not need to be attached to one another but together they can hold specific meaning. At any point, they can be broken apart from each other and their meaning and understanding may be articulated differently. Therefore, an articulation can be made between two different or contradictory elements and this connection is not necessary, essential, determined, or absolute for all time (p. 141).

Laclau and Mouffe’s (1985) theory of articulation, I think, helps strengthen what Butler argument about the ambiguity of feminist language and history. She is attempting to move away from the fixed definition of words to reinvigorate such terms as sexuality,
gender and sexual difference within a mobility that leaves them open and not fixed. Much as Irigaray does with the notion of sexual difference, one way to achieve the necessary mobility of these terms would be to leave them as questions. Doing so would leave these concepts continuously open for investigation and re-investigation. As Butler (2001) states, sexual difference then “is not a given, nor a premise, nor a basis on which to build a feminism . . . rather, [it is] . . . a question that prompts a feminist inquiry, it is something that cannot quite be stated” (p. 418) and is therefore left open for interrogation and is not permanent in meaning. With these factors in mind, it might be argued that the notion of feminism does not have a universal definition and the issue of “what will and will not be included in the language of universal entitlement is not settled once and for all” (Butler, 2001, p. 430). Therefore, sexual difference, gender, sexuality and feminism are all terms that must be left open in order to retain their political effectiveness.

Feminist Promises

One step forward five steps back.
We tell the truth they turn up the laugh track.
Feminists we’re calling you.
Please report to the front desk.
Let’s name this phenomenon.
It’s too dumb to bring us down.

- Lyrics from Le Tigre’s song “FYR” (2001)

While I think that feminists worldwide would agree that they are in search of equality, an attempt to define “feminism” as a universal construct would come under quick scrutiny and differences would emerge. Feminism, while fractured in terms of its political and theoretical goals, is unified by the feminist quest for social justice. While feminism is fragmented in its objectives, it is united by its dedication to a concept of justice. Rather

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than being complacent with the idea of feminism as a unifying concept a critical analysis would entail examination of the fractures and ruptures within the practice of feminism. This approach offers another way to explore the thoughts, ideas and theories that mark the promises that situate feminism within a larger ethical history (Cornell, 1995; Kavka, 2002, p. 36).

It is here that I would like to turn to Julia Kristeva’s article Women’s time (1977) to draw on her two dimensions of time. Within this piece, Kristeva problematizes the relationship between feminism and temporality. Kristeva draws out two temporal dimensions: the first is “the time of linear history or cursive time” (p. 14) which is where political change occurs and is where we find feminists campaigning for rights and security and the second is “the time of another history” or “monumental time” (p. 14) with is the time associated with the reproduction of life. Within the concept of monumental time, time appears to some as no time at all, as if it is part of nature/natural. This is the notion of time feminist analysis has reached. It is the level of the psychic life, fantasy, desire and this strange conjugation of thought and physicality (Pollock, 2007). Kavka (2002) argues that it has been difficult, since Kristeva’s claim to speak “unself-reflexively about feminist history, linear or otherwise, let alone to take on the mantle of producing ‘a history’ of feminism” (p. 29). On the other hand, we are at a time (from the perspective of being in a time of postfeminism) where feminism is being asked to find its time in history; however, the development of a linear history of feminism seems elusive at best. How do you plot the departure, progression and arrival of something so complex and so diverse that is situated out of time (Kavka, 2002, p. 34)?

The “post” in postfeminism refers to the self-critical pretext of feminism that persists in seeking social justice and making advancements outside of linear history. Certainly, feminism is progressive without being entrenched in the progression of time because it is fueled by the abstract notion of justice for women. A comprehensive linear history of feminism will never be written because the purpose of feminism will always be in flux, will constantly be refining and critically engaging its own purposes, aims, goals and meanings. The critical engagement that is necessarily a part of feminism is what keeps
feminism out of time as it is continuously in fluctuation and contingent on the theory driving the social change. The promise of feminism then is a utopic vision.

Feminists struggle to help us conceive of our world, our social relations, our culture and our interactions with one and other differently. They urge us to critically engage with our surroundings, to see the world differently. Feminism is not only about the critique of patriarchal power relations it is inherently a critical engagement of the creation of alternatives to existing power relations. It has been embroiled in the “negative or reactive project—the project of challenging what currently exists . . . criticizing prevailing social, political and theoretical relations” (Grosz, 1990, p. 59) and proposing strategies and alternatives. As argued by Elizabeth Grosz (1990), feminism cannot afford to stay “simply reactive, simply a critique” as it risks affirming “the very theories it may wish to move beyond” (p. 59). As Grosz (1990) argues:

To say something is not true, valuable, or useful without posing alternatives is, paradoxically, to affirm that it is true, and so on. Thus coupled with this negative project, or rather, indistinguishable from it, must be a positive, constructive project: creating alternatives, producing feminist, not simply anti-sexist, theory. Feminist theory must exist as both critique and construct. (p. 59)

Feminists and feminism urges us to imagine a future, a future that is not yet here but could be attained if we can imagine it, theorize it and make incremental on-the-ground change towards it. It is partly due to this utopian view, one that looks to a future based on social justice, that feminism itself cannot be situated within a linear time. It is also due to feminism’s lack of one single definition that hinders it and prevents it from orienting towards a temporal history. As Kavka (2002) most eloquently points out, feminism “can be best thought of as multiple practices that share historical links to an umbrella term” (p. 32). Feminism’s history does not allow description or definition in terms of linear time. Labeling feminism as “post” denotes that feminism is not at its end but that it is out of time. Feminism, then, can be seen as a utopian history rather than a temporal history. It is a history and a practice that is driven by the hope for change, by the promise of a world becoming a different place, a place based on equity, social justice and ethics. As Drucilla Cornell (1995) has written, “feminists are continually calling on all of us to re-imagine our forms of life” (p. 79). Other feminists have pursued related lines of thought and have
argued that “we need to be pragmatic” if we want to “project utopian hopes, envision emancipatory alternatives, and infuse all our work with a normative critique of domination and injustice” (Bordo, 1993, p. 242).

**Utopia in Practice**

Utopianism has a long tradition of inspiring feminist political thought. In fact, one could argue that the basis of feminism is utopian in nature. To assume that change is achievable and beneficial, a utopian vision builds from the adverse analysis of its own social world to imagine ideas and possibilities that have the ability to inspire radical change against discrimination, exploitation and oppression. In José Muñoz’s (2006) examination of queer punk stages he aptly describes utopia as “an ideal, something that should mobilize us, push us forward” (p. 9). In this way, utopia has the ability to render potential outlines of a world that is not quite here, a horizon of possibility, something to aspire to and build towards. It compels us to ponder utopia as a “temporal disorganization” (Muñoz, 2006, p. 97), a point in time when the present is transcended by a future of possibility that is more desirable and socially just. For Muñoz, utopia is an ideal form of critique that reminds us something is missing in the present and that what the present holds is not enough. Feminism, in particular, provides us with a lens of social justice that helps us imagine something beyond the present and recognize that there is something to work toward, build and aspire to.

Ernst Bloch played an important role in Muñoz’s theory of utopia as affect (Muñoz, 2006, p. 2). Block (1986) makes a distinction between abstract utopias and concrete utopias. According to him, abstract utopias propel “potentially transformative political imagination” (Bloch, 1986, p. 146). However, abstract utopias often fail as they are not associated with any historical link. Concrete utopias are associated with a historical consciousness, to particular struggles, and to concrete or potential collective action. Abstract utopias constitute the mundane comforts of everyday life whereas concrete utopias, while potentially associated with daydreaming, constitute the hopes of a group of people, of a collective movement or of an individual who is dreaming for many.
Minoritarian subjects are often cast as hopeless in a world without utopia, without seeing possibilities outside of the normative. Hope’s affect can be neatly tied into what Giorgio Agamben (1999) articulates as “potentiality” (Muñoz, 2006, p. 91). Along with other more “negative” emotions (such as anger, shame, disgust and hate), hope drives people to form bonds. These emotions can be described as being affectively structured and anticipatory in action. Agamben (1999) goes on to describe the “anticipatory illumination of art,” that participates in “a process of identifying certain properties that can be detected in representational practices helping us to see the not-yet-conscious” (1999, pp. 178-181). This not-yet-conscious can be described simply as a utopian feeling. According to Muñoz, we can best “understand this illumination as a surplus of both affect and meaning” (2009, p. 99). The idea of hope and its affective emotional link is central to the argument of a feminist utopia.

Shutting down utopia is an easy move as utopia and hope are prone to creating the feeling of disappointment for those it holds promise. Lee Edelman, in his book No future: Queer theory and the death drive (2004), compels the reader to consider that “the structuring optimism of politics of which the order of meaning commits us, installing as it does the perpetual hope of reaching meaning through signification, is always . . . a negation of this primal, constitutive and negative act” (p. 3). In this argument, the hope found within political spectrums fails queers because it is a politics that was not made with them in mind. For Edelman, this hope echoes solely on the platform of generational futurity. He argues that because queers cannot biologically reproduce, queers should give up hope and, instead, embrace a particular suppression that is at the root of our despair within the symbolic. In Edelman’s opinion, queers gain a certain enjoyment and pleasure from giving up on politics, futurity and hope (2004). While Edelman’s view of reproductive futurity is compelling I am reluctant to embrace the rejection of such concepts as politics, hope and futurity.

To help move this argument forward I will pull from Lauren Berlant’s writing on the politics of affect in public life. In an essay titled ”68 or Something” Berlant (1994) begins by stating “this essay is written in favor of refusing to learn the lessons of history, of refusing to relinquish utopian practice, of refusing the apparently inevitable movement
from tragedy to force that has marked so much of the analysis of social movements generated post ‘68’ (1994, p. 124). I think there is something to learn from this discourse of queer theory for feminists considering the place of feminism within history and in the time to come. While queers are being told that they do not fit into the heterosexual temporality, or straight time (Halberstam, 2005), and are being told that there is no future but the here and now of our everyday life, feminists are being told that feminism is dead and that feminists have won. I argue that there is something to be accomplished by utopia, by glimpsing at the past to look towards the horizon of futurity. By confidently asserting that change is desirable and possible, a feminist utopian vision draws on a negative analysis of the present society to formulate possibilities for change in a future that holds “the power to inspire revolt against oppression and exploitation” (Moi, 1985, p. 122). Bloch (1995) and Muñoz (2009) both demonstrate that these anti-utopian assertions are rooted in conservative politics as a way of neutralizing the gaining back of what has been lost in the “revolutionary contents of the utopian dream” (Moi, 1985, p. 122).

**Queering Memory**

*I love the feeling that happens by day two or three, when whatever it was I didn’t know I was carrying in my body or on my skin or in my head is gone, and I’m walking shirtless. I’m not wearing a beater under my t-shirt or whatever, and someone notices, says something... Read more flirting, or just noting the change of time on my body, that I’ve grown up or that I’m taller, the moment when I realize I’ve arrived back in my body. I am standing tall like I never can do for very long at home, but [that I] do the entire time I’m here. It’s a unique kind of upright.*

The notion of the “theater of memory” (Buckland, 2002, p. 18) draws on the idea of the enactment of memory through body and space where the past is restored and reinterpreted through motion, allowing us to see how past experience as expressed through memories shape an individual’s and a group’s movements. It is a space where performance materializes into what she refers to as “queer lifeworlds” (Buckland, 2002, p. 2). The theater of memory connects people to the past, to spaces and to others. According to Jose Muñoz (2009) memory is constructed and always political. It is
through remembering and the ritualized tellings of these rememberings through performance, film, writing, music or visual culture that potential world-making is possible. Memory and the ways in which it is enacted through the body and represented in archives (Taylor, 2003) holds crucial implications for understanding queer memory and queer world-making. It is through the performance of memory and its link to the past, to space and to others that frames this dissertation research.

Like feminist politics, which draws on notions of hope and futurity as fuel for continual struggle, queer politics, according to Muñoz (2009) in his investigation of gay male culture, “needs a real dose of utopianism” because “utopia lets us imagine a space outside of heteronormativity” (p. 35). Muñoz (2009) views “queer-world making as functioning and coming into play through the performance of queer utopic memory, that is, a utopia that understands its time as reaching beyond some nostalgic past that perhaps never was or some future whose arrival is continuously belated—a utopia in the present” (p. 37). These “queer memories of utopia” and the hope and affect that structure them help queers carve out “space for actual, living sexual citizenship” (p. 35).

Kamala Visweswaran in her book Fictions of feminist ethnography (1994) asks two questions that I find particularly useful for this project. The first is “how might a feminist ethnography pose the question of memory and identity?” and secondly “how are the identities of self related to the mechanics of memory, and the relevance of the past? Or, more specifically, what are the identity defining functions of memory?” (p. 67). Visweswaran brings up the issues of memory and historical identity as she articulates the role they play in imagining ethnography. I draw on Visweswaran’s work further in my Methodology Chapter as I begin to articulate my place within this project as a researcher and as a member of the Worker community.

Memory, as we are aware of it, is just as steeped in remembering as it is in the loss of memory (Nora, 1989, p. 15). Oral historians are often cautioned that “all memories are subject not only to simple, gradual erosion over time, but also to conscious or unconscious repression, distortion, mistakes, and even to a limited extent, outright lies” (Davis & Stern, 1989, p. 2). However, it is memory that ties individuals to history. The
everyday visions and representations of self are understood as ways to unearth cultural attitudes, world visions and understandings of history as they relate to such things as the individual’s role within historical processes (Visweswaran, 1994, p. 68). Memory “enables the closures of repetition [and] proves to be the agent of historical sense and of political understandings, that is, it provides the openings” (Sangari, 1987, p. 169). The persistent memory in Sangari’s reference is the only record remaining of the massacre. As Sangari (1987) states, “the plague of insomnia which leads to collective loss of memory is equivalent to the loss of historiography, of a usable past, indeed of historical agency” (p. 169).

There is always the risk of forgetting and of loss of marginalized memories. However, memory also serves to empower nation states. As Homi Bhabha (1991) explains “people are the historical objects of a nationalist pedagogy, contributing to the authority of nationalist discourse; they can only be the subjects of a process of nationalist signification” (p. 295). Bhabha prompts us to remember that the telling of one individual’s story requires “the telling of the collective itself” (p. 292). Chronologies and historical understandings are destabilized when neither a past nor a future can be depicted. The subject of such a history, then, is held within a temporality that is suspended and a nation that is rejected. The subject speaks between time and place (p. 309) thereby unlinking memory from place. This unlinking can be eloquently linked to what Pierre Nora (1989) termed *milieux de memoire*, which refers to the “real environments of memory” that depict embodied knowledge and include “gestures and habits, in skills passed down by unspoken traditions, in body’s inherent self-knowledge, in unstudied reflexes and ingrained memories” (p. 15). Nora’s work sheds light on a fundamental discord between history and memory:

Memory and history, far from being synonymous, appear now to be in fundamental opposition. Memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its name. It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious and its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived. History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer. Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past. (1989, p. 8)
Nora further elaborates that “memory is by nature multiple and yet specific; collective, plural, and yet individual. History, on the other hand, belongs to everyone, and no one, hence its claim to universal authority” (p. 9). Memory is steeped within the material, within images, objects, places and expression. Memory is embodied and rests outside of temporal continuities and is, unlike history, linked to progress. This split, between memory and history, creates a gap for further investigation.

As mentioned above, Buckland’s (2002) work investigates the role that the theater of memory has had in the creation and materialization of lifeworlds over time and in space. For Buckland “the disparity between history, as it is discursively inscribed, and memory, as the bodies that bear the consequences both of its inscription and its remembrance embody and perform it, has tremendous implications for the cognitive and physical construction of queer lifeworlds” (2002, p. 21). Buckland’s (2002) notion of the “theater of memory” is predicated on the thought that the body itself is a theater of memory (p. 18). Buckland outlines two prominent aspects of this concept. The first is that it is a performance between the one remembering and the audience. Within the context of an interview, we can understand the performance as an interaction between the ethnographer and the informer. Second, there is an everyday theater of memory located in neighborhoods, at concerts, and in dance clubs, where “memories of past experiences shaped both the individual and the group’s movements, and their performance materialized queer lifeworlds” (p. 18). These theaters of memory create a sense of self that centralizes being queer. The embodied performance of the participants within the theaters of memory connects the participants to the past, to places and to others. This is a critical way in which queer lifeworlds materialize in the face of heteronormative public culture. This form of queer world making is active, conscious and deliberate in the ways in which it fashions the self and the environment in which it is situated. This fashioning is done through the physical, embodied social practices of navigating through and creating space within places.

While memory is most obvious in material culture—archives found in museums, statues, memorial plaques—it is no less performative. These performances are found in the everyday embodied repetition of acts, such as festivals, parades, protests, and rituals, which all
work to help societies remember (Hoelscher and Alderman, 2004). Thrift and Dewsbury (2000) state that performance is “a means of carrying out a cultural practice—such as memory—thoroughly” (p. 420). Miranda Joseph (2002) suggests that performance’s temporality is not one of simple presence but instead of futurity. Performance is the seed that inspires a potential for witnesses and audiences. The real power of performance is its capacity to develop a shared way of knowing and recognition among audiences. It assists the progression of common understanding and belonging.

**Embodied Memory and Performance**

When I think about the Festival in reference to my research, I think of it as an event. While there are many beginnings and endings on the Land for festival Workers they are part of our routine or, rather, they are ritualized and performed similarly year after year. I can’t imagine working opening day Monday without people screaming “Festie Virgin” to the women who are experiencing the Festival for the first time or closing Monday when women leaving are asked to drive safely amidst cries of “see you in August.” Just as I can’t fathom the opening ceremonies without everyone singing of “Amazon Womyn Rise” or the candlelight vigil (the official closing ceremony) without torches, fire, chanting, humming and ritual. These are just of few of the many cultural performances that make up each Festival.

Performance, according to Victor Turner (1982), opens up a whole world of possibilities in terms of the understanding of a culture’s character. With a comprehension that performances are universal and relatively transparent, Turner argues that different communities and cultures can grow to understand each other simply “through their performances“ (as cited in Schechner & Appel, 1990, p. 1). Cultural performances, like ritual and dance, are often framed so that they can be understood and differentiated from cultural practices around them. While this may be the case, performances can constitute and be representative of something larger and more meaningful. Turner (1985) argues contrary to this belief and states that “the idea that performance distills a ‘truer’ truth than life itself runs from Aristotle through Shakespeare and Calderón do la Barca, through Artoud and Grotowski and into the present” (p. 4). Joseph Roach (1996) goes on to
theorize our understanding of performance and its role in conveying knowledge by stating:

Performance genealogies draw on the idea of expressive movements as mnemonic reserves, including patterned movements made and remembered by bodies, residual movements retained implicitly in images or words (or in the silences between them), and imaginary movements dreamed in minds not prior to language but constitutive of it. (1996, p. 26)

The Foucauldian (1977) sense of archaeology as it pertains to the conception of the body is “the reciprocal reflections they (bodies) make on one another’s surfaces as they foreground their capacities for interaction” (Roach, 1996, p. 25). By understanding movement and storytelling as performance and as performances of embodied memory, the roots of affective power on the audience and the performer are not necessarily situated within queer archeology but are found within the retelling.

Cultural performance works as a pivotal act of transfer that transmits social knowledge, identity and memory by way of what Richard Schechner (1985) has called “twice behaved behavior” (p. 36). Performance is a form of analysis in performance studies that can be used to understand the significance of everyday practices and events—dances, ritual, parades, funerals, protests, theater or anything that involves theatrical and rehearsed behaviours. These performances are often set apart from other events around them in order to create a discrete focus of analysis. At times, the bracketing is part of the event itself as it has, as part of its enactment, a clear beginning and end—such as a dance or protest—and does not run “seamlessly into other forms of cultural expression” (Taylor, 2002). To understand something as a performance is to recognize a thoroughly localized ontological affirmation. That is to say that something that is understood as a performance in one culture or cultural setting may be understood as a performance while the same performance or act might not be similarly recognized elsewhere. Therefore, these types of performances have a “limited time span, a beginning and an end, an organized program of activity, a set of performers, an audience, and a place and occasion” (Milton Singer, 1984, p. xii). According to Richard Bauman (1989), these forms of performances exist permanently in “markings” (p.262). These performances are situated and understood both within and outside of lives lived as well as by the distinctions that are marked by the beginning and the ending of each life (Bauman, 1977).
A cultural performance is not something that you can just happen upon and be ignorant of. When you pick up a book, witness a film, observe a wedding, overhear an oral history or attend a music festival one steps into a time and space in which thought and action are heightened, stylized and set apart by symbolic or conventional indicators of a start and finish. A few of the markers that are familiar to us are statements such as “once upon a time” and “the end.”

**What’s To Come**

I am an archivist and a writer. In this dissertation, I attempt to link the theories to the data collected, analyze it, and then translate it into this dissertation. Each chapter to come is intended to offer readers different ways to engage with this work. As with feminism(s) more broadly, the work presented in these chapters is framed in a very particular way with very specific theories and questions driving this work. My intention is to invite discussion and critical interrogations of feminism, what it is, and how feminist arguments can differ on an array of issues, such as from S/M (sadism and masochism) debates to the tensions surrounding the inclusion/exclusion of trans women from women only lesbian feminist spaces, to name a few. In keeping with what I perceive to be a long and rich history of feminist engagement this is but one piece of a much larger and ongoing discussion. Looking ahead, here is what is explored in the following chapters:

Chapter Two, “Processing: The Process of Methodology,” outlines the theoretical and conceptual methods drawn upon to position and execute this project. Embodied knowledge, autoethnography, narrative as performance, stories shared by others and archival research shapes the course and structure of this dissertation. This chapter outlines the methods used to shape this study and outlines the identities of those who were involved in the conversations found in these pages. It critically engages with my place as both an archivist and a member of the Festival community and delves into the nitty-gritty details of my methodology as it pertains to any dissertation project such as voice, structure, format, and so on.

Chapters Three, Four and Five follow a pattern in keeping with Edward Soja’s (1989) proposal that the embodiment of world making should be studied historically within “a
triple dialectic of space, time, and social being” that “re-entwines the making of history with the social production of space” (p. 12). These three chapters concentrate on all three dialectical themes although in each chapter the emphasis is placed on one element as it relates to the others. Because the space of queer and feminist world-making is created out of movement—through walking, turning, sitting, driving—and is created through relationships between bodies as they are expressed through movement, I am interested in the tensions between space, time and social being. I suspect this may be part of the process that provides queer worlds with their force and movement.

Chapter Three, “The Land: Making Place, Taking Space,” explores the concepts of space-making within the lesbian feminist landscapes of the Festival. The Workers who congregate on the Land each summer consciously build the Festival and its community from the ground up and then disassemble it. The combination of work, music, social structures, art, ongoing political tensions and ritual all work together to create this lesbian feminist construct each and every summer. This chapter explores the production of space and the significance of cultural practices, such as parades, rituals, physical signs and the naming of certain spaces that play a role in helping this particular community remember and re-enact its lesbian feminist roots.

Chapter Four, “Embodying the Body: The Making of Queer Worlds,” explores how our bodies as cultural mediums, carry and enact meaning within our cultural surroundings. This chapters looks at the ways in which the Festival provides some bodies with the space to imagine their lives and bodies differently, while others who are constrained by embodied expectations specifically situated around gender and gender presentation experience the space in different ways. Although the Festival is viewed as a place to celebrate the differences of women’s gendered selves some people fall out of line with what that means and who has access to this space.

Chapter Five, “From Theory to Practice: Timing Feminism and Feminist Time,” sets out to explore the discourses surrounding community building at the Festival and how this embodiment and performance of utopic vision-making has created a complex relationship between the Festival and the Workers who attend it. Memory and embodied lesbian
feminist practice are present at the Festival and this chapter looks at the repetitive and performed aspects, from the raising of the Night Stage to the closing bonfire at the end of Long Crew, and their significance as the Festival unfolds each summer. This chapter goes on to explore the significance of feminist time and whose time it is. The Festival is a particular site of discourse making, one that has power to define and restrict the performances and the subject formation that happens within its borders.

In Chapter Six, I wrap up this project with a discussion that stem from the questions driving this inquiry. Within those pages, I will discuss the significance and implications of this dissertation in feminist discussions more broadly and the Festival community itself and I will explore the limitations present within this dissertation. From there I begin to etch out future areas of exploration and inquiry and the ways in which I might be able to continue to engage with and through this work.
Chapter Two. Processing: The Process of Methodology

Image 2 Super Power Repair Shop (2011)
Setting the Stage

Learning how to live in this community is its own process. It’s like a methodology all of itself. I barely remember my first Festival. I do know it was both exciting and intimidating to see and meet so many confident, sexy and articulate queer women all in one place. Learning to live in this community took years. I remember reading the handout Staff Services gives out to each worker when we arrive on the Land. It reads “Welcome to the Land!” and outlines how to live together through all of our diversity. It breaks down everything from accessibility, chem-free space, quiet time, amplified music, the schedule of community meetings and newcomer gatherings, how close to camp to your neighbours, meal times, and respecting difference. The note “about living together” outlines the differences and complex identities that make up this community and acknowledges that because of the intensity of the work/life balance, at times, we will face conflict with one and other. Things come up. The community asks each Worker to respect, be gentle, and appreciate each other’s differences. We are asked, in essence, to commit to taking time to listen and grow in ways that will allow relationships to be formed. The intention is for Workers to consciously work together to build a community based on diversity. The handout outlines an agreement that asks us to bring this spirit with us each day, each moment and in each interaction we have with each other. In this way, the community agreement is a kind of “methodology,” it outlines how to approach others, how to respect difference and how to understand what’s happening around us. It is about finding new ways to understand and look at our surroundings and how we interact with one another in order to understand the world we are attempting to create.

Introduction

In the following pages, I seek to outline the journey I took to develop my methodology. I begin by exploring the methodological frameworks drawn on to frame this dissertation. I then move on to outline the methods I used in this project. I spend a little time locating myself as a long-time Festival worker and an academic. I explain the data collection process, I draw out and frame my process of analysis, and, finally, I explore the concept of voice as it relates to my methodology and to this dissertation.
From Theory to Practice

As I explored in the last chapter, memory and the embodiment and physical performance of memory are a focal point of this dissertation. While memory is most obvious in material culture—archives found in museums, statues, memorial plaques—it is no less performative and can be seen in how we move our bodies through time and space. Performances are part of the everyday embodied repetition of acts, such as festivals, parades, protests, and rituals, which all work to help societies remember (Hoelscher & Alderman, 2004). Nigel Thrift and J-D. Dewsbury (2000) state that performance is “a means of carrying out a cultural practice—such as memory—thoroughly” (p. 420). For any performance-based analysis to occur, researchers need to enter public space—”public in the sense of accessible, available to memory and sustained through collective activity” (Berlant & Warner, 2000, p. 326).

I seek to explore how the performance of memory works to animate and sustain feminist separatist spaces and, more broadly, feminism itself using a particular methodological framework. In this chapter I explore relevant literature and theory on performance and its link to cultural memory. I then examine theory on the concepts of embodied and performed knowledges, which are the foundation upon which my methodological framework is grounded. My research explores the performative practice involved in the negotiation of memory through the recreation of already existing community knowledge and assumptions. The persistence of feminism, I argue, is predicated on the embodied negotiation of memory, space, and political engagement.

Embodied Knowledge: Critical Feminist Methodological Framework

Every year, as I drive onto the Land butterflies fill my stomach with excitement. I anticipate the month ahead. Re-connect with old friends. Live in my tent. Eat each meal under the open sky. Enjoy music and dance under the stars. Work my body hard next to competent and strong women.

My history, my present and what I conceive to be my future is deeply enmeshed with my Festival experiences. This Festival, the community of workers that gather at the Festival
each year, makes up much of my chosen family. Arriving on the Land is like a homecoming, a family reunion of sorts.

Writing this dissertation has been a work of pure joy and, at times, an excruciating task because of my place in the Festival, my relation to this community and the work we do there together. In this dissertation, I strive to balance the complexities of my personal experience with the intricate experiences of my interviewees and the complex nature of the Festival. While engaged with this project, I continually questioned myself and asked: How will I ethically intervene with and draw on my interview data? How will I make sense of the hours of transcription spent to make my interviews, focus group and field notes more legible on my computer screen? How will I give voice to those who took time out of their Festival experience to, as Pearl so eloquently stated, “help [me] get my PhD”? This is where my methodological approach comes in.

My methodology draws on autoethnography, narrative analysis and archival analysis. In using these methods, I undertake a critical feminist cultural studies approach to methodological data collection, analysis, and interpretation. In order to investigate the persistence of feminism in a time of postfeminism and embodied queer world-making, I chose a combination of methodologies that are most suitable for my long-term, ongoing engagement with the Festival as a participant, community member, researcher and archivist. These methodologies include autoethnography, interviews, a focus group, and archival analysis. The research for this project took place at the Festival. The Land holds within it cultural practice and memory attached to the Festival just as any individual and collective holds in themselves. Being completely immersed in the Worker experience and, over a period of one month, interacting with hundreds and then thousands of women formally and informally allowed me to engage in what Clifford Geertz (1973) termed a “thick description” of culture (p, 3). Thick description provides the researcher with the tools not only to describe a culture to an outsider but also to articulate the behaviour within that culture. In order to accomplish this goal, the investigator must immerse herself within the culture she is studying deeply enough to explain the behaviour and context in a meaningful way.
**Autoethnography and My “Place”**

In their book *In a queer time and place* (2005) Jack Halberstam writes about how queer studies question assumptions of subculture participants and academics because many queer academics belong to and participate in the queer subcultures that they are interested in studying. According to Halberstam, there is “a new generation of queer theorists—a generation moving on from the split between densely theoretical queer theory in a psychoanalytic mode, on the one hand, and strictly ethnographic queer research, on the other” (2005, p. 163). Because I have been working at the Festival since 1998 and have developed many strong relationships with people over the years, I make space in this dissertation to incorporate the stories of those I interviewed as well as my own.

Memory and remembering happens through narrative—as the performance of language, as a way for us to live out our relationship to one another, to events and to become intelligible in our cultural world—and through the investigation of embodied action, movement and local dialect. Narrative has offered researchers an innovative way to construct a performative methodology. Autoethnography is a way to engage with both research and writing “that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno) . . . Thus, as a method, autoethnography is both process and product” (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). Much like the expectations placed on ethnographers, autoethnographers treat their data analytically, critically and view them through interpretive lenses in order to unearth cultural meanings and translate the social significance of what is recorded, observed, told and remembered. The outcome of such a comprehensive self-examination is the formulation of a much deeper “cultural understanding of self and others directly and indirectly connected to self” (Chang, 2008, p. 49). For this project, I turned to such writers and scholars as Carolyn Ellis (1991, 2004, 2006, 2011) and Carol Rambo/Ronai (1992, 1995, 1996, 2005) for guidance and inspiration.

*I remember my first Festival like it was yesterday. Or was it another lifetime ago? My university roommate, the one I was randomly assigned to live with in residence, came out to me about a year or so after I did. If only we’d known we were a couple of dykes living*
together those two years, I think life could have been a bit easier in small town Nova Scotia for both of us if we had. She started going to the Festival a few years before I did. She was the one who convinced me that I should go, that I’d love it. That first year was both difficult and rewarding. I had never seen so many strong and capable women building, working and playing together like this before. At times, I remember not being able to make sense of it all. There were new faces everywhere and a whole new world of possibility was opened up for me. All I really knew was that I was a dyke. That I was a feminist. That I wanted to be a part of this Festival.

I’ve been a Worker at the Festival since 1998. I’ve driven tractors. Built stages. Moved a lot of heavy stuff. Helped cook meals for hundreds of women. I’ve been invited on crew as a crew member, Crew Leader, as an Assistant Coordinator and as a Coordinator. I’ve attended community meetings, community workshops, facilitated conversations and community meetings, engaged in political debates, pushed myself to my loving, living and learning limits in ways I’d never imagined before. I am deeply held in by this Festival just as I hold my Festival sisters close. This all said, while I might make it all seem utopic in nature, there are difficult and complex pieces to my experiences at the Festival. It’s within these difficult places I am investigating and that I focus on in this dissertation.

As a method, autoethnography draws on both autobiography and ethnography. In autobiography, the author is recounting past experiences that are assembled using hindsight (Denzin, 1989; Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). In ethnography, researchers study cultural practices, relationship patterns, beliefs, values and shared experiences in order to better understand a culture (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). With this approach, the researcher becomes a participant observer in the cultural setting, takes field notes, conducts interviews with cultural members, examines members’ ways of speaking and relating, analyzes artifacts, print culture, art, clothing, books and photographs to better understand their research objectives. Autoethnographers draws on both of the above perspectives as he or she selectively draws on past personal experiences made possible because of the researcher’s cultural identity or position within a particular culture. An autoethnographer uses “personal experience to illustrate facets of cultural experience, and, in so doing, make characteristics of a culture familiar for insiders and outsiders”
As a long term Festival Worker, I am uniquely positioned to because of my volunteer position in the Worker community and my role as a researcher. Both of these identities are deeply interrelated and complicated. Working at the Festival is an immersive experience. We are all expected to work eight hours a day or more depending on the needs of the Festival. When I am there for long crew (the crews that Work for a month on the Land), I use my body in ways that I do not have the opportunity in my life outside of the Festival. For long crew I am on Carps Crew, the crew of carpenters that build the Festival with hammers and drills. For short crew, I am part of the leadership team for the Shuttle crew, responsible for both accessible and general transportation of festigoers (Festival attendees).

This research draws on my own observations as a participant at the Festival, and has provided me the opportunity to investigate my experiences as a long time Festival worker more critically. This research has provided me with a new lens through which to interact with my fellow workers and has given me the opportunity to draw on the storied experiences of the Festival’s community of workers in order to investigate the larger social dynamics within our cultural experiences.

**Narrative as Performance**

Richard Schechner (1985), offers insight into how performance can be harnessed as a methodology that scholars can use to understand performance in every day events. For example, gender, sexuality, and race are all identities that are rehearsed and performed on a day-to-day basis in the public sphere and can be understood through a performance lens. Embodied performance, as it is wrapped up in cultural practices, offers a way of knowing and broadens our understanding of narrative to include creative potential. In, *The Storyteller*, Walter Benjamin (1969) writes that “the storyteller takes what [s]he tells from experience—[her] own or that reported by others. And [s]he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to [her] tale” (p. 87). Here, Benjamin is drawing a connection between narrative as both something that is made and experienced by the listener and as something that is achieved through talking, telling, and listening (Peterson & Langellier, 2006, p. 173). Narrative is a product of embodied lived reality as opposed
to a conduit utilized to recount, represent, and recognize past events. It is a site for both work and play, for engaging in discourse, and for challenging and affirming experiences and identities (Austin, 1975; Peterson & Langellier, 2006, p. 174).

Harold Scheub’s (1977) work on oral narrative performance states that the performer of oral narratives utilizes the materials of his or her culture much as a painter uses color . . . it is a sensual process, dependent on the elaborate network of relationships that constitutes the narrative production, and image and body movement are essential links in this activity.” (p. 345)

What is interesting here is the way in which narrative as performance is intelligible within a specific location. As Corrine Squire (2008) notes, there is an “interdependency between personal stories and culturally circulating plot lines” (p. 139). Therefore, the performance of language and story-making are available in the “public sphere” (Gergen, 1994). Stories constitute a critical means through which we make ourselves understood and be seen and intelligible within our social world(s). As K. J. Gergen (1994) states “not only do we tell our lives as stories: there is also a significant sense in which our relationships with each other are lived out in narrative form” (p. 186). We give meaning to our relationships and our lives through narratives. Barbara Hardy (1968) argues that, “we dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative” (p. 5). Narratives, then, can be seen as a form of accounting and though not objective in nature, are immersed in social action and social life. Narratives work to make cultural events visible and because day-to-day events are steeped in narrative, they become embroiled in stories. These events achieve the sense of “a beginning,” “a low point,” “a climax,” and “an ending” (Gergen, 1994, p. 186). In this way, narratives bring worlds into being. Narratives draw on language, which is made intelligible within public settings. Within these public settings, the language used to construct a narrative works to create and reinforce culture. By inviting participants to share their narratives, culture can be made visible through the language they use, which is publicly available within any cultural setting.
Narratives are part of social life; they are not individual but are guided by common structures and understandings and are therefore a product of social relationships and interchange. There is interdependency within social interactions and narratives as they explore a person’s past, present and potential futures and are not unique but are made intelligible through this cultural interdependency. Gergen (1994) develops “a view of narration as a discursive resource” one that is rich and holds “the potential to construct a historical legacy that is available in varying degrees to all within that culture” (p. 207). In order to be intelligible, an individual must be connected with and borrow from a “cultural repository.” This performance of narrative, secures a relational future, present and past.

The form of narrative I am interested in focusing on in this dissertation is experience-centered narrative (Squire, 2008, p. 42). This form of narrative is based on work that explores stories of various lengths and can be about actual or fictitious events that the narrator has experienced or simply overheard. This form of narrative research “encompasses varying media, too: not just speech, but also writing . . . visual materials . . . and narratives in hearing in objects and actions—the arrangement of objects on mantelpieces, the everyday activities of shopping, cooking and eating” (Anderson, Squire & Tamboukou, 2008, p. 5). The primary topic of study in this field of work is the life experience of the narrator and is linked to both memory and performance. The individual in experience-based narrative gives voice to both external and interior expression. They recount their memory through embodied actions that are linked to the storied expression and to embodied gestures. These performances vary from each community and time, place, and audience. That is to say, a story that someone shares one day in one environment might change the next. As Taylor (2003) asserts “while performances travel and influence and challenge other performances they are, in a sense, always in situ: intelligible in the framework of the immediate environment and issues surrounding them” (p. 3). The performance of narrative can be read as something that is both constructed and real. To study narrative as performance offers an interesting contribution to methodological inquiry. As Baum and Briggs (1990) state, performance within narrative “invites critical reflection on communicative processes” (p. 61).
Using this methodology, I seek to open up space for both my interviewees and myself to share our stories and our memories in order to draw out the larger social significance of these narratives, cultural practices and knowledge(s). Sharing stories and narratives about personal epiphanies is a way that people use to communicate everyday knowledge and understanding. It is a way to pass on cultural meaning, history and cultural dynamics onto others. It is a familiar form. The retelling of stories is a socially reflexive way of relating to life, through both living and reliving our stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994). The Festival’s Worker community is no different. We share stories during the workday, at meal times and in the evening around fire pits, around crew circles and in personal “living rooms” where impromptu gatherings often happen on the way to bed. Festival stories abound and fill a sense of belonging, a link to a larger history and meaning.

**Place, Mobility and Memory Geography**

There is growing recognition of the ways in which place influences knowledge formation, especially when it comes to the method of drawing out knowledge that is generated in specific places. For example, when researchers “go out” into the “field” to compile their research there is (whether implicit or explicit) a recognition that site-specific practices of knowledge and meaning making by social groups is important (Amit, 2000) and that place influences the formation of identity. The growth of this acknowledgement may be rooted, in part, in the existentialist accounts of Martin Heidegger’s (1962) who coined the term “being-in-the-world” (p, 69) and by the influence of phenomenology and its explorations of perception (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Ben Anderson (2004) has also suggested that geographical inquiry⁵ plays a role “in the dialectic between people” (p. 255). This work is similarly documented by Yi-Fu Tuan (1974), Robert David Sack (1997), and Jean Hillier (2001). From these bodies of research we can see how our human experience is deeply rooted in spatiality.

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⁵ Anderson’s work is found in a subdiscipline of geographical inquiry. This form of inquiry explores the significance of sound and geography. Through his work he has explored the intersections of music, memory and place, as well as other areas of study.
My experiences and memories of the Festival are deeply entrenched in the Land. In so many ways the Land is, like us, a living breathing entity. For instance, we, as a community, mourn the loss of trees when they are struck down by lightning. There a whole crew dedicated to preparing the Land, which includes taking care of any damaged trees and devising ways to hamper the erosion of the earth. We’ve also set up stages in (mostly) natural bowl shaped formations to help amplify the music. All Workers work on the Land, sleep on the Land, play on the Land, and many of the stories that are shared while living on the Land are attached to her.

Edward Casey (2010) marks that “the relationship between self and place is not just one of reciprocal influence . . . but also, more radically, of constitutive coingredience: each is essential to the being of the other. In effect, there is no place without self and no self without place” (2001, p. 684). This stance, as Crang and Travlou (2001, p. 163) argue, discards accepted understandings of space as an apathetic backdrop and time as fruitful and creative. Instead, it acknowledges geographical frameworks and the passage of time as an integral part of human existence. If we follow this argument, place moves from being constructed as the “passive stage” where actors play, to a environment that has an impact and can influence and even facilitate these interactions. Places are attached to and involved with action and we cannot be removed from it (Tilley, 1994, p.10). Looking at it this way, places are an effect of action, a production of human practice, a means and a background. Holding residence in and inhabiting space form an unavoidable relationship.

In his writing, Edward Casey (2010) explores the different ways in which the body and place influence and inform one another. He writes, the “lived body encounters the place-world by going out to meet it” while, at the same time, the body “bears the traces of the places it has known” (2010, p. 688). Through this practice, social strata are inscribed on the body and include such social classifications as race, class, gender, and gender identity. It is only over time and through this reciprocal relationship that this process affects the meaning of places. Maurice Halbwachs (1992) writes that because of the deeply linked nature of self and place, memory as it is embedded in space is linked to both the personal and the cultural (see also Crang & Travlou, 2001). Embodied practice adjacent to time accumulates meaning within places and these places are attached to
personal memories that mix with individual and (possibly) societal cultural meaning (Anderson, J., 2004, p. 256).

Let me tell you a story about this past summer. It was the day after our first Community Meeting, so it would have been a Thursday evening after dinner. One of the Workers asked why we didn’t make more time after work to share stories about the Festival and the Land. She was fairly new to the Worker community. She expressed that she wanted to learn more. So, one of the mechanics decided to connect with two other long term workers, folks who’ve been involved with the Festival since the beginning, to take a drive around the Land on Bo Bus. I had the pleasure of driving Bo or Boadicea, named after the queen of the British Iceni who lead the uprising against the Romans, for the tour. I had a front row seat! We spent the time together on that bus listening to stories, a narrated tour of sorts, from the dump all the way to the front gate and back “downtown.” All of us witnessed the creation of a new map of the Land and we each walked away with at least one, if not dozens, of new stories to share and re-tell. The reason why we make maps of things is to make sense of them, to, in a way, own them, to claim them and possess. During that time together, we physically re-mapped the Land with stories, history and lore.

Social geographer Edward Soja (1989) writes that the embodiment of world making should be studied historically within “a triple dialectic of space, time, and social being,” that “re-entwines the making of history with the social production of space” (p. 12). Because the space of queer world making is created out of movement—through walking, turning, sitting, driving—and is created through relationships between bodies as they are expressed through movement—moving close to or away from what’s avoided and engaged with—I am interested in the tensions between space, time and social being. I suspect that the interplay between these three elements provides queer worlds with their force and their movement. Because of the deep connections of place, memory, and embodied performance, it was particularly important to capture stories and personal accounts in the locations that were the focus of this dissertation, the Festival and Camp Trans. By being located in these spaces—living, breathing, working and playing—the
stories that were shared were more immediately connected to memories of one’s personal experiences on the Land (Anderson, J., 2004).

One of the methodologies that I am drawing on in this dissertation is found within the scholarly work done by Jon Anderson (2004). Anderson formulated a method that broadens the ways in which social scientists explore individual formulations and understandings of the world and developed a tool to be harnessed alongside other methodologies such as interviews and ethnography. Anderson explores the possibility of harnessing the “coingredience” of the “person-place” relationship in order to build a socio-spatial understanding of knowledge. Those who conduct research in the field are aware of the practices, routines and habits through which individuals and groups inscribe their knowledge onto places (p. 257). As a way to further investigate this method, J. Anderson’s paper explores how the “process of spatializing social knowledge plays a role” in the work that Anderson had previously completed on radical environmentalism (Anderson, J., 2002). Anderson argues that by employing a cultural practice called “bumbling”—or walking aimlessly—the researcher can use this tool to spur unrecalled knowledge of the “life-world” (p. 257). Anderson found that by combining his interviews with place and motion he was able to form a useful alliance to create an innovative methodological approach. By utilizing the practice he was able to have undisrupted conversations with the activists and was able to prod the activists to remember and access memories and knowledge. The memories and emotional connections that surfaced during these conversations were prompted by questions and by the connections between the place and the individual. Because of this relationship, it was possible for Anderson to harness the capacity and influence of the physical place that held the respondent’s knowledge and triggered memories (p. 258). Anderson’s methodology of walking while talking is an innovative approach that combines the interview with an embodied activity, walking, that engages respondents in place and memory. Anderson notes how knowledge located within particular places is more easily accessed when you are physically in and engaged with those places. For the purposes of this dissertation, I drew on the relevant implications of place, activity and memory and asked my interview participants to go for a walk with me to one of their favourite places on the Land. On the way, we connected
about our workdays, I heard stories about why they chose that particular location and we talked about our relationship to the Land and the Festival itself.

The Limitations of Narrative and Memory Work

While many narratives are shared linearly, life itself is not experienced linearly. Feelings and thoughts often move forward then back and circle around again (Ronai, 1992). Life lives through the eyes of the subject. His or her eyes, as Denzin (1992) states, are “like a camera’s, . . . always reflexive, nonlinear, subjective, filled with flashbacks, after-images, faces merging into one another” (p. 27). Narrative inquiry and interpretive studies are transformative as they take the realist ethnographic notes and interviews and transform them into a narrative story, one that moves from a mere representation of interactions and cultural events to an evocation (Ellis, 2004, p. 127). Narrative then can be seen as a performance in and of itself. The representation becomes less of a “historical truth” and becomes more about the “narrative truth” or as Spence (1989) characterizes, “the criterion we use to describe when a certain experience has been captured to our satisfaction” (p. 28). The “story” becomes less about obtaining a “truth” and concentrates on the articulation of the social meaning and experience. The narrative looks to keep memory alive in the now. It is because of narrative that we learn the significances of “the past as incomplete, tentative, and revisable according to contingencies of present life circumstances and our projection of our lives into the future” (Bochner, Ellis, & Tillmann-Healy, 1997).

As Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1964) states, “I tried to give the past not a survival, which is the hypocritical form of forgetfulness, but a new life, which is the noble form of memory” (p. 59). As I am reminded by Heewon Chang (2008), “memory is not always a friend to autoethnography; it is sometimes a foe” (p. 72). Memory is a fickle thing. It can be selective; it distorts the past, has its limits and can be at times unreadable. Some memories stay clear and come to the forefront on people’s minds while others fade away or are forgotten altogether. Memory can also trigger extreme emotions (Chang, 2008; Ronai, 1996), glorifying positive experiences while avoiding sharing those that are more hurtful or unpleasant. Despite its precariousness both personal and cultural memory are
central to this dissertation. The work taps into the wealth of personal information provided by the individuals who participated in this project as it exposes the cultural significance of memory to communities of people.

**The Nitty-Gritty: An Overview of the Process**

Within this work, I engage with a critical feminist methodological framework in order to capture the experiences of Workers and Camp Trans\(^6\) participants at the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival. My aim is to produce an account that will help us better understand the persistence of feminism in a time of postfeminism. To achieve this, I investigated the daily activities engaged by Festival Workers and undertook an investigation of the tensions inherent in any feminist pursuit. Drawing on current theoretical approaches to postfeminism, embodied memory and performance, and sexual citizenship this dissertation is positioned to add voice to existing conversations in this area of study. This dissertation is also meant to be a piece among many that document the history, memory and ongoing conversation about the Festival. Academics like Ann Cvetkovich (2003), Laurie Kendell (2008), Bonnie Morris (1999) and others have been documenting and archiving aspects of the Festival and these multiple pieces are needed to capture the complexity and dynamism of the Festival’s community and their place making practices.

**The Land: The Site of Study**

The research site for this dissertation is the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival. This festival is held annually each year during the first full week of August and is located on a 650-acre patch of land located in the northwestern part of Michigan State.

According to the Festival’s website:

\[^6\] Camp Trans is a protest space that is set up just outside of the Festival’s gates as a protest against the Festival’s exclusion of trans women. I will explore this further later in this chapter and within each subsequent chapter.
Michigan is a music and performing arts festival that stirs up a steady mix of emerging artists, returning favorites, and new-to-Michigan pros. It’s a space to mix and mingle with thousands of womyn in a village inspired by feminist values and built through a unique collective ingenuity. This is a week to relax in the sun, play hard in the woods, engage deeply and connect with community. Each year brings together the most amazing cross-generational multi-cultural group of womyn to live as friends, lovers, neighbors all. Bring the best of who you are—will you recognize yourself everywhere. (Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival, 2012)

Every year thousands of women from around the world make their pilgrimage to the Festival where they literally build a culture and community based on tradition, notions of family, and hope.

**The Workers**

The group of women who run and build this Festival consists of a largely volunteer all-female workforce. These Workers provide nearly all the labour that is needed at the Festival, no matter the task. They spend anywhere from ten days up to a month living in tents on the Land, long before and after the weeklong festival, building and taking apart the city that houses it all.

For the purpose of this research project, I chose to talk to Workers who have been part of the Worker community for five or more years. As GP states in Ann Cvetkovich and Selena Wahng’s article “Don’t Stop the Music” (2001) “one can learn to enjoy Michigan better the longer one goes. It’s too enormous to be gotten and understood in any concise way until you’ve really invested some years and built one-on-one relationships” (p. 141). The more time one has in the community leads to deeper involvement in the community and more profound connections to the history and memory attached to the Festival.

For a bit more context about the Festival’s Worker community, it is important to note that the Workers are divided up into different crews, such as the Carps, who build the stages; LACE Hardwar, the crew that delivers all the heavy furniture and puts up all the circus tents; Main Kitchen, the crew that feeds the thousands of women who attend the festival and who cook over large fire pits; Garbage; Gaia Girls; Brother Sun, the boy child care crew; Traffic, who direct traffic on the Land; and Garbage; Recycling; Staff Services; and
Performer Support, to name a few. Each worker crew is responsible for a set list of tasks though they all help each other when needed. They are the backbone of what make the music happen and the Worker community is the group that constitutes the focus of this dissertation.

**Camp Trans**

At the end of July 2011, I had the opportunity to connect with and run a focus group session at Camp Trans. According to the website:

Camp Trans is an annual celebratory gathering of trans folks & allied non-trans folks who converge for a week on the coast of western Michigan, with the original intent of protesting the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival for their exclusion, marginalization of, and don’t-ask-don’t-tell policy regarding hating on trans women who seek to/attend the music festival. (Camp Trans, 2012)

In 2011, Camp Trans was a smaller gathering than previous years. My impression was that numbers were down because the camp had experienced a couple of very volatile situations in 2010 and that this year’s organizers were trying to build a different tone at the camp. One of the elements that these camp organizers drew upon to help create this tone was to change the timing of the camp. Traditionally, Camp Trans has taken place the same week as the Festival itself. This year, camp organizers decided to hold the protest camp a week early in order to focus attention on regrouping and healing as a community. They also used this time to plan future Camp Trans protests, to build community, and to simply enjoy camping with other transgender identified people and their allies. Camp Trans is set up outside the Festival, just down the county dirt road not quite a mile from the front gate.

Camp Trans originated in 1991 when a transsexual woman, Nancy Burkolder, was asked to leave the Festival because Festival Workers became aware of her transsexual status. In the following few years Camp Trans set up outside of the Festival’s front gate to protest the Festival’s women-born women-only policy. In 1999, after a brief hiatus they returned as the Son of Camp Trans and have since been a constant presence outside the Festival.

**Interviews and Focus Group**
I conducted interviews with thirteen members of the Worker community at the Festival. Due to the number of Workers at the Festival (which fluctuates from 80 to 300 over the four-week period) I used self-selected sampling as a tool to help me connect with potential participants. Participants were solicited through a poster distributed to the various volunteer work crews at the Festival. I found that snowball recruitment was the most effective way to reach these “hard-to-reach” participants (Faugier and Sargeant, 1997) as word of mouth was the key to individual involvement. All of the conversations I had with other Workers took place after regular work hours and on their days off so as to not disrupt the Festival’s work schedule. I also received permission from the Festival’s operator, Lisa Vogel, to engage in this study in 2011.

To capture the social and cultural aspects of each participant I asked each person to share with me their age, racial identity, socioeconomic status, the number of years that they had worked at the Festival, their gender identity and sexual orientation. Some of the women shared with me other aspects of their individual identities. This information can be found in the table 1 below where I have chosen to use the heading “social or cultural aspects” in order to more capture what they shared with me and to reflect the social/cultural aspects that are important to them but not part of my original list of identifications. When you look at the table below, you will notice that some women use certain identities to define their gender identity and/or sexual orientation. For example, some participants used the term “queer” to describe their gender while others used the term to describe their sexual orientation. These identities are not fixed but are creative, flexible and hinge on personal insights and identification processes.
### Table 1: Festival Interview Participant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant (pseudonyms)</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Socioeconomic status</th>
<th>Years as worker</th>
<th>Gender identity</th>
<th>Sexual orientation</th>
<th>Social or cultural aspects</th>
<th>Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bo</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Working class</td>
<td>15 years (1 year as a festie)</td>
<td>Woman, femme</td>
<td>Dyke</td>
<td>Mom</td>
<td>Graduate School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teddy</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Middle class</td>
<td>9 years</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>Polyamourous</td>
<td>Some college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pumpkin</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>25 worked (3 to 5 years as a festie)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>Monogamous, feminist</td>
<td>Some college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demming</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Working class/Blue collar</td>
<td>34 years</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Queer</td>
<td>Feminist</td>
<td>Post grad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dottie</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Caucasian, half Jewish</td>
<td>Lower middle class</td>
<td>5 years (7 years as a festie)</td>
<td>Femme</td>
<td>Queer</td>
<td>Fag hag</td>
<td>High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearl</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Working class</td>
<td>15 years</td>
<td>Female, femme</td>
<td>Queer</td>
<td>Type one diabetes</td>
<td>Some college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harriet</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Middle class</td>
<td>7 worked (2 as a crafts woman)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td></td>
<td>High school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tallulah</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Native American and Caucasian</td>
<td>Working class</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>Femme, cisgendered female</td>
<td>Queer, lesbian, dyke</td>
<td></td>
<td>Some college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant (pseudonyms)</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Race</td>
<td>Socioeconomic status</td>
<td>Years as worker</td>
<td>Gender identity</td>
<td>Sexual orientation</td>
<td>Social or cultural aspects</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruby</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Working class</td>
<td>29 years (1 as a festie)</td>
<td>Female, butch</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>Activist</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosita</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
<td>9 years (8)</td>
<td>Queer</td>
<td>Queer</td>
<td>Nerd, pan-</td>
<td>College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant (pseudonyms)</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Race</td>
<td>Socioeconomic status</td>
<td>Years as worker</td>
<td>Gender identity</td>
<td>Sexual orientation</td>
<td>Social or cultural aspects</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rocky</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Cherokee/Irish</td>
<td>Blue collar</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>sexual</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree and some college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanna</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Blue collar</td>
<td>29 years</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>Lesbian mother</td>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deluxe</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>White American</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Queer</td>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>Grad school</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The focus group took place at Camp Trans the week before the beginning of the Festival. To prepare and find participants for this focus group I engaged in a number of activities. About a month before I left for the Festival, I contacted the workshop organizers for Camp Trans through email. I shared my research goals, theories and questions with them and told them a bit about myself and my relationship to the Festival. At first, we talked about the focus group being part of their workshop series but after further reflection, we decided that I should visit Camp Trans once it was set up, post my recruitment flyers in the camp’s general area and make myself available to speak to any camp participant who might want more information about my project. We decided that this would be a much better approach as it would allow the community a chance to decide whether they were interested in participating in my project or not.

Once at the Festival, and after Camp Trans was set up, I had the opportunity to visit Camp Trans two times before we ran the focus group. The focus group discussion occurred inside one of the camp’s community tents and lasted from an hour and a half to two hours. Nine people took part in the discussion and there was a good mix of returning new Camp Trans participants. There were also participants from different parts of the world and with diverse gender and racial identities. One of the difficulties I encountered while conducting my focus group session was that four of those who participated in the session came in and out of the conversation. A couple of individuals arrived mid-way through the session after being out of the camp to do a town run while two others went in and out because they were responsible for making that evening’s communal meal. Because of this, I was unable to capture everyone’s identities as reflected in table 2 below.

**Table 2 Camp Trans Focus Group Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant (pseudonyms)</th>
<th>City of residence</th>
<th>Gender identity</th>
<th>Sexual orientation</th>
<th>Race</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Laurie</td>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>St. Paul, Minnesota</td>
<td>Woman, Transwoman</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>Scottish, Irish and English descent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessie</td>
<td>Madison, Wisconsin</td>
<td>Gender Queer, Woman, Trans</td>
<td>Queer</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant (pseudonyms)</td>
<td>City of residence</td>
<td>Gender identity</td>
<td>Sexual orientation</td>
<td>Race</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nat</td>
<td>Chicago, IL</td>
<td>Gender queer leaning, femme or androgynous</td>
<td>Pansexual</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>Minneapolis, MN</td>
<td>Woman, transwoman, genderqueerish</td>
<td>Pansexual</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The names assigned to each participant are pseudonyms that I chose to ascribe to each individual. To respect the diverse gender identities of those who engaged in this conversation with me I have used “gender neutral” names to refer to these participants. One of the limitations of the personal information above is that due to time restrictions and my own nervous excitement, I did not collect as many personal social and cultural identity markers as I did with the Workers I talked to at the Festival. In retrospect, this was a bit short-sighted as I think it would be useful to be able to draw out any significance that might be attached to the age of the participants.

**Archival Data**

Existing archival data were collected for this project and include Festival promotional material, Festival programs, articles printed in *Lesbian Connections* magazine, a film titled *Radical Harmonies* (2002) about women’s liberation and the women’s music festivals that came out of them, and my own personal archive of photos as background images and as items of analysis that do not show pictures of identifiable individuals. This material includes promotional fliers and posters, the Festival’s website, the Festival’s promotional film *Michigan Fever!* (2004), and the Festival Worker community’s guide to community living which outlines the Festival’s expectations for workers and provides guidelines on how to live and work together on the Land.

One of my archival data pieces is a collection of entries taken from *Lesbian Connections* magazine about the Festival and the controversies that have occurred over the years. *Lesbian Connections* is:

a grassroots forum, which means it’s truly written by our readers. On its pages you’ll find info for lesbians on places to live and where to travel, lesbian B&Bs and guesthouses, websites, cruises, festivals, conferences, lesbian land and retirement communities, products (books, CDs, DVDs,
etc.), campgrounds and retreats, lesbian lawyers and realtors, as well as the comic strips “Dykes to Watch Out For” and “Bitter Girl,” and much more. There are also reviews, articles, and letters dealing with whatever issues LC’s readers are talking about, from gay marriage to health issues, relationships, and politics. (Lesbian Connections, 2012)

Published since 1974, this magazine has proven to be one of the longest standing archives of the difficult conversations, tensions and political debates that have taken place at the Festival. Since its inception, this magazine has provided a venue for lesbians to share their experiences, their political beliefs, and experiences. After each Festival, there are often countless entries over the next few issues of the magazine that discuss Festival experiences and the politics that were encountered on the Land. The focus of my collection includes the S/M debates, the exclusion of transgender women, gender expression, and boy children on the Land.

**Voice: Mine, Yours and Ours**

How to represent the subjects involved in this research has been a source of constant ethical and methodological struggle for me. As a researcher, I have sought to sketch out the social and cultural meanings behind the narratives shared, the experiences I have had and have documented the rituals, events and signs that contribute to the Festival’s place making practices. To focus my methodology and my critical feminist gaze, I committed myself to “maintaining the integrity of the phenomena and preserving the viewpoint of the respondents, as expressed in their everyday language” (Fontana & Prokos, 2007, p 64). The task at hand is to represent the intricacies and complexity of my participants’ lives and the narratives that they shared with me. Identities are multiple and, at times, contradictory just as they can be partial and strategic. As Kamala Visweswaran (1994) states “the underlying assumption is, of course, that the subject herself represents a constellation of conflicting social, linguistic, and political forces” (p. 50). Or as Carol Smart articulates, subjects “are selves-in-process, not fixed at the point of interview but part of their own past and the socio-cultural history that has helped shaped them, and of course selves in the process of becoming” (2009, p. 4). The narratives shared are not interpreted as the “truth” of any individual subject rather they are seen as expressive and
ideological in their own form. What each subject articulated was used to explore the similarities and contradictions that were shared and uncovered during my research.

In, *Reflexivity and Voice*, Andrea Fontana and Anastasia Prokos (2007) draw on the work of Rosanna Hertz to understand the importance of “voices.” That is “how we (as authors) express and write our stories, which data we include and which data we exclude, whose voices we choose to represent and whose voices we chose not to represent” (p. 63). Deciding what data to share, what to include and exclude was one of the most difficult aspects of working with the narratives shared with me. At times, I found myself wishing to share more than I could because the narratives were so rich. Since a theoretical framework, that I have already articulated, shapes this dissertation, I chose the stories and narratives based on how they moved within the theoretical framework. These stories and narratives helped to further problematize and formulate glimpses of “answers” to this research project. Saying this, I think it is still important to recognize that my role in this work is similar to a mapmaker. I take the multiple realities of the world around me along with the complex social dimensions that are inherently part of any social and physical landscape and synthesize them into a two-dimensional representation. To do this I had to leave out certain dimensions in order to give priority and voice to others. The people I had the opportunity to talk to know the Land and the Festival intimately and through my carefully crafted questions I was able to create a project that explores aspects of the Festival (and feminism more generally) in way that animates it and makes it understandable.

During this project, I wore many different hats. I wore the hat of a Worker, of a friend, of an ally and of a student writing a dissertation. These different roles deeply influenced my own philosophical perspectives. I began this project recognizing both the strengths and challenges attached to these multiple relationships. My prior relationships to the Festival and the Worker community strengthened my ability to approach this work and this project ethically and responsibly. This history and these relationships grounded me and while I was at the Festival, I was deeply conscious of my actions, words and care just as I am now that this work has continued. I still have deep relationships with many of those that I had a chance to engage with in this project. We are still part of the same “chosen
“family,” in fact most of the individuals I had a chance to talk to for this project are close to my heart and we have years of friendship behind us. I’m acknowledging this because I think it is important at the onset to explicitly articulate this point. When we made time to talk specifically about this project and address the questions that have driven how I write this dissertation our years of familiarity with one and other created a very comfortable dynamic when we were engaging in our conversations. Each person seemed comfortable asking me questions, raising concerns, taking our conversations to deep places and telling stories that I had never had the chance to hear before. This project has allowed me to deepen my connections to this community in exciting and challenging ways. I also approached this work and my connections with the Festival and Camp Trans communities from the perspective of my own trans history and my personal struggle to discover and rediscover my gender identity—an identity that continues to move and (re)shape.

A question that was raised by UBC’s ethics board while I was preparing for my research at the Festival was to do with my leadership role at the Festival. In 2011, I was the Shuttle crew coordinator and I, along with my two assistant coordinators, was responsible for a crew of over 20 people. Because of my role on this crew, it was determined that to avoid conflict I should not conduct interviews with any of my Shuttle crew members. Once at the Festival this limitation was easy to address, as I was able to reach out to Workers from other crews to participate in this project.

To keep the messiness and authenticity of voice, as much as I could as a researcher with a theoretical lens behind me, I created a text that is more laden with texture by incorporating long and short narrative segments from the stories shared in the interviews and focus group. The voices of these women and people who shared their stories have given me the ability to represent their perspectives and memories in this work and in so doing, I am attempting to bring them into this work of knowledge production more explicitly. Their voices are important and the messiness of multiple views, different perspectives, and memories is part of everyday life. Saying this, I do question myself and how I “chopped” up the narratives in the following chapters. Did I take too much out or too little? Is this quote taken out of context? These are questions that I turned to every
time I pasted a new passage in each section and I continue to question as I read and re-read each page. As Dorothy Smith (1987) states:

> The problem [of a research project] and its particular solution are analogous to those by which fresco painters solved the problems of representing the different temporal moments of a story in the singular space of the wall. The problem is to produce in a two dimensional space framed as a wall a world of action and movement in time. (p. 281)

To help mitigate this issue, my dissertation is organized in a way that is intended to make the reader think and engage with the reading, decoding and understandings differently. Because memory is such a fickle thing and everything remembered happens on top of other things, this dissertation is being presented in a way that is more suited to voice. In this work I do what writers such as Geraldine Pratt (2000) and Carol Smart (2009) have suggested, which is to think more thoroughly about how we engage readers through the composition of our writing and how the reader can be engaged differently through the reading of text.

**Format**

In terms of the layout and form of this dissertation I am drawn to the “layered account” format used by Carol Rambo (1992, 1995, and 2005) and to the performative stylings of Patti Lather and Chris Smithies (1997), Annemarie Mol (2002), and Mary Bryson and Lori Macintosh (2010). By drawing on all of these models, I present this work in a much more interactive way, allowing the reader to interact with the research, literature, methodology, the Land and my analysis in an engaging way. This format allows my voice as a researcher and a Festival community member to find space amongst the myriad stories being shared by those who took part in this project. I hope that I have accomplished this through a layered format, by layering and weaving various kinds of information together and by inserting pictures into the text in order to build a relationship between not only those whose narratives are being shared but the Land itself.

Through a format that folds forward and back, this project weaves together method, theory, political interpretations, data and analysis. By challenging you, the reader, with shifting styles, this dissertation is intended to draw you out of your comfort zone and
locate you as a thinker willing to trouble what is often taken for granted. Through this process, it is my hope that you will become an active participant. This format also allows me to position my experiences alongside data, relevant literature and analysis. Layered accounts uses multiple voices, introspection, reflexivity and vignettes (Ellis, 1991, 2004) to draw readers into the “emergent experience” of undertaking and writing research (Roni, 1992, p. 123) and to “conceive of identity as an emergent process” (Rambo, 2005, p. 582; Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2001). This approach is described by Rambo (2005) “as a postmodern reporting technique,” which allows the researcher to draw on a multitude of voices, “from theory to personal story, from anecdote to fantasy to draw attention to and make more visible aspects and topics that might be otherwise missed by more traditional formats“ (p. 563). While this form of writing seems disjointed at times, it is through this process that I hope to engage with readers using this performance-based process. This project will ask you to project more of yourself into the reading with the hope that you will take more away from it (1995, p. 396).

In this work, and as articulated earlier in this chapter, I draw on J. Anderson’s (2002) notion of coingredience and the “process of spatializing social knowledge” and I attempt to embody it within these written pages. Each section of narrative represented in this work took was spoken at the Festival in an attempt to connect with memory as it relates to and is inspired by the lived embodied environment. In almost every case the Land is a key aspect of each Worker’s experience and is deeply connected to her memory and performance. In order to build a relationship between the memories shared through narrative and their link to place, I have integrated photographs of the physical land in order to not only contextualize each story shared but to draw the reader into the Land, into the place that these memories and stories originate and are deeply connected with. You will notice that each photo is stretched, distorted and faded into the background so that it helps to convey the distortions present in memory and the significance of and attachments to space. I wrote this dissertation in a way to engage the reader in the written work and the stories shared. It is meant to be a creative representation of text and the photos are an integral part of this process.
Ronai (1992) reminds us that while many stories are shared linearly life itself is not experienced linearly. Feelings and thoughts often move forward then back and circle around again. Narrative inquiry and interpretive studies (Bochner, 1994) are transformative because they use the realist ethnographer’s notes and transform them into a narrative story, one that moves from a mere representation of interactions and cultural events to an evocation (Ellis, 2004, p. 127). This evocation is central to my research.

Earlier, within these pages, we read about Geraldine Pratt’s work (2000) where she urges us to ask, how might we construct texts and performances that more fully challenge the reader, that urge them to become more aware and to be more challenged by their multiple identifications? As Pratt states “we must search . . . for ways of writing, for our own representational strategies, that challenge the hegemony of dominant ways of seeing and allow for the fractured landscape of identification and dis-identification” (p. 649). I think that this dissertation, by employing a hybrid layered account, does just this. It engages readers in a way that challenges them to engage with the writing, the stories, the theory, the Festival and feminism in ways they might not have before.
Chapter Three. The Land: Making Place, Taking Space

Image 3 The Land from Space: Google Maps (May 2012)
Setting the Stage

The Land. Two words that bring a world of meaning to mind when I write them down or say them aloud or hear them used in a very particular context. The Land. That is what we, the Workers, performers and festigoers who attend the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival call the 680 acres of forest in the mid-western part of Michigan state that houses the Festival each year. It is a magical place that you can find on Google Maps, if you know where to look. I could tell you a lot of stories about that place. There was that time I set up camp in a haunted camping spot. There was that morning I found a raccoon in a garbage barrel and tipped it over so that the sleepy critter inside could meander off into the woods for sleep. There was that ejaculation contest I went to where there were a lot of tarps and gloves and women laughing and cuming. Or, maybe that time when I was invited to help, along with the other Workers, to carry a goddess across the Night Stage bowl as part of the Opening Ceremonies. There was also that time when a tractor driver drove the tractor into the big gas drum by Shuttle Base. Thankfully, there wasn’t an explosion. There are too many stories to tell some of them are exhilarating and leave me feeling powerful while others hurt my heart and lead me to question myself and this space. Needless to say this plot of land holds a lot of energy and power because of the last 36 plus years of Festival. There are memories that keep bringing me back, a sense of longing to return, there is a psychic energy that you can almost feel pulsating through the Land especially once the festiegoers arrive and the music and the laughter start pumping through the trees. It is all of this (and more) combined the work to build this place and propel it into being.
Introduction: Place, Space, Gender & the Land

Culture is like a climate. You know, it’s all around you but you don’t necessarily notice it. Unless you are like a penguin in the desert and we are like the penguins, the lesbians. There was nothing in the culture that nourished us. That helped us to flourish.

- Joan E. Biren (JEB) (Mosbacher, 2002)

Women’s culture was created by lesbians because we had to have it. We needed it.

- Alix Dobkin (Mosbacher, 2002)

Our lives are defined by the limits of imagination.

- Fiona Buckland (2002, p. 86)

There is an intricate connection between the physical place, the Land, and the sense of community and belonging that develops at the Festival each summer. In so many ways, the Land is just as active a player in this construct as the individual Workers, performers, and festigoers who attend the Festival each year. There is a history attached to the Land, as are sentiments, memories, embodied practices, and other ritualized and remembered experiences. Part of the purpose of this dissertation is to explore how social spaces—specifically feminist spaces—are built, produced, and reproduced and how they are socially manifested and performed. Following the work of Henri Lefebvre (1991) there is work to be undertaken in order to understand the production and shape of space (p. 321-5). Drawing on the work of feminist geographers I argue that performance does not:

Take place in existing locations: the city, the bank, the franchise restaurant, the street. These “stages” do not preexist their performances, waiting in some sense to be mapped out by performances; rather, specific performances bring these spaces into being. (Gregson & Rose, 2000, p. 441)

The Festival is a space that is brought into being. Every year the Workers transform this forested area in Michigan into:

- a city built from the ground up by feminist values. This city relies upon the unique energies of each woman to bring [the] conscious community to life, and the shared experience of thoughtful living extends from [the] annual community out into the larger world. (Festival Program, 2010, p. 6)

If you arrive on the Land before the work begins you will find tree frogs, deer, wild turkeys, raccoons and other wildlife that is gradually pushed off the Land while the
Festival is being built up and run. As the Festival winds down and the Workers return the Land back to her natural state, the animals slowly move back in and take over. The walkways may still be etched into the ground but the sound of people’s voices, music and generators are gone. The soundscape is taken over by the song of the tree frogs, the scurrying of mice, the hum of the cicadas, the hoot of the Barred Owls, and the howling of coyotes. Within each and every wave of Workers, performers and festiegoers, the space is both physically built and performed into being and that performance has strong links to the feminism of the 1970s. You can get glimpses of the history through the work of the Workers. It is embodied in their physical engagement with the Land, in the narratives that are shared, and in the way that people mentor and teach others about their Worker and community roles—from the new Workers joining the community to more seasoned Workers being mentored into new roles, in new crews or as crew leaders, and in the signs that adorn the Land to mark place and significance.

This section of my dissertation explores how social spaces are built, produced, and reproduced through socially manifested and performed interactions—from the physical space and the political discourses that brought some spaces into being to the experience of cultural practices and rituals. Within these enactments, memory is most obviously unearthed in material culture and it can be found in the performance of everyday embodied repetitions of acts. As Thrift and Dewsbury (2000) state, performance is “a means of carrying out a cultural practice—such as memory—thoroughly” (p. 420). In the case of the Festival, these repetitions are iterated in parades, rituals, physical signs and in the definition of space, all of which play a role in helping this particular community remember and re-enact its feminist roots in the present.

As we move into this analysis, allow me to share two narratives to help set the tone for this chapter. In my interviews, these participants spoke to me about the what keeps them coming back to the Festival and the importance of the Land. In answering Vanna stated:

It’s a really good question; that I’ve pondered myself. And I don’t know if it’s, it’s not easy to explain, or pin down. And um, I think it is large parts the people and also the place. I think the place is really important, just the ferns and the woods, all the, I mean, it’s so beautiful here. And especially, when I was younger, like, really young here, just so much. I did so much just hanging out on my own, in the woods and wandering around
exploring. And I know that there are other beautiful woods, all over the place, (laugh) but um, there’s definitely something about the place, as well as the people. And the people change and sometimes you come and certain people that you’ve been attached to here aren’t here, or there’s new people. And it’s always an amazing connection that you make in this place, with people. I think it’s, it’s the people themselves but also just how we interact here, and the kind of connection that you make with the people here that makes it so special or amazing. (36, Caucasian, blue collar, 29 years as a Worker, female, bisexual, lesbian, mother, Master’s degree)

Building on this, Pumpkin, another participant shared:

It’s an organization that’s run by women and is designed for women. And it’s in a community where women are allowed to be what they can be, everything that they can be. And it’s a community with little kids, like the twins that are out there, that are growing up in this community, knowing that and being able to see that there are no limitations. And I think, you know, maybe I’m not a scholar in the way that I can define feminism very accurately. But to me, feminism is about making a world that’s safe and viable and comfortable for women to be in. And in that sense, I think the Festival is very feminist... So, it amazes me that Lisa [Vogel] has been able to have this happen, year after year after year. And she still keeps pulling the community together. And the Land keeps pulling the community together and the community keeps pulling us together. You know? It’s not just one thing, it’s all of it. And I think it’s, I mean, I think it’s this space too. I really believe that this is sacred space, in many different ways. (57, Caucasian, poor, 25 years as a Worker, 3 to 5 years as a festiegoer, lesbian, female, monogamous, feminist)

The central question that this chapter explores, is how are feminist spaces created and sustained? What are the complex everyday materializations, social practices and representations through which this particular space is constituted?

Feminist Space Making

For over 36 years, the Festival has been making space for women by women. From its inception, the Festival has been about creating space for women to live a different life, 

7 This dissertation will critically engage with who is considered to be a woman and what it means to be considered part of a group of women within the context of the Festival.
one based on feminist principles, outside of their everyday lived experiences. As Lisa Vogel, the Festival’s producer was recorded saying in the film Radical Harmonies:

> they [the women] come for the community. The concerts are the celebration of the community. But the community is something where we get to experiment with a value system that is almost the antithesis of how the value system works in the real world. (Mosbacher, 2002).

In the interviews I conducted for this research several themes in the narratives help illuminate the significance of place-making for the Workers at the Festival. Henri Lefebvre’s, The Production of Space, (1991) argues that space is a socially produced construct. He insists that our comprehension of space should move from the notion of “always already” that exists as an objective category, to the sense that space is produced socially. Through this movement, Lefebvre acknowledges labour in a particular space when he states “physical space has no ‘reality’ without the energy that is deployed within it . . . Energy cannot . . . be compared to a content filling an empty container” (p. 13). In developing his theory, Lefebvre was working with urban planners, which led him to think about the links between space and social labour. In this way, the act of space making at the Festival can be understood as a form of conscientious labour to create social space that is located outside of mainstream patriarchal society and that allows women to (re)create and sustain women’s culture.

Within the space and the spaces that are created at the Festival, feminism and its interpretations are retained, interpreted and retold through the body and the Land. Due to the intersection of memory, play, embodiment and the quotidian that occurs on the Land, feminism(s) find an opportunity to release its potential at the Festival. When asked why she returns to the Festival every year Pearl shared that it was because of “the opportunity to be with some of the most important people in my life. The opportunity to see this creation basically, to help midwife this creation, into the world.” She went on to equate her role as a Worker to being a midwife who helps bring a creation into the world. That being a Worker is like seeing “the end of something and seeing the beginning in that end. And also knowing that it’s going to happen, I mean, [I’m hoping] and trying to ensure that it’s going to happen again, every year.” As we will explore in this section, we will
The Lay of the Land

**Field Notes: Friday, July 22nd**

Tonight I had the pleasure of driving folks around the Land on Bo bus. The idea behind the drive was to give folks a driving tour around the Land along with story sharing from three Workers who have been part of the Festival in different ways since its beginning and a few other long time Workers. It was amazing to drive around, see the Land and hear the connections to the past and history of the Festival. Stories included how Lisa Vogel found the present Land. She described the first time she drove onto the Land and how when she got to Tree Line she felt like she was “coming home” and “like I’ve been here before.” Stories about the dog zone, where Workers for a few years would keep their dogs. And how the dogs would “pack up” and become hard to deal with. How Brother Sun used to be down past the present dump and they moved it so it would be more accessible to parents and how, one year, there was so much rain people had a hard time making it out to visit their boy children because the road was so muddy. Stories about where stages were, the Main Kitchen was, where showers were, and why they were all moved. Stories about how the Land has been changed over the years. Some stories included how they got rid of the hill on the back road and used the soil to build the bowl at the Night Stage. How DART camping has always been DART camping on this Land and how its location has never moved. How there was controversy the first year of DART and how the collective voted to keep it there the next year and it stayed for accessibility reasons—because it’s close to the stages and the Main Kitchen. How the present Diana Goddess body was made with wood from a tree found in a very particular part of the Land, a spiritual part of the Land that is considered by the witches who attend to be the “power center” of the Land. Also, how the body of Diana was left with the crafts women for three years to be carved out and fully adorned. Other interesting Festival facts were shared like how the first Festival was set up and run by 20 Workers and over 3500 festiegoers came. The bus ride was an excellent adventure. It allowed those of us who chose to participate, a chance to learn more about the history we are working within, [and to] build a stronger connection with the Land, and hear more about peoples’ personal stories, experiences and connections to the Land and the Festival.

*There is a lot of storytelling here. Stories about things folks did years ago, who is and isn’t still coming. The stories help to tell the history behind the community’s decisions to run or build things a certain way. Sometimes we over build or over do things but there is*
almost always a good story behind it. These stories help to build a collective oral history of the Festival. And, this community is often eager to hear more. Almost every year, one of the long-time returning Workers hosts a Land Walk before Festival and walks with the participants to different areas of the Land telling stories about its history. When I think about the theory I’m working with in this dissertation I wonder about there being an active movement here against “post-queer” and “post-feminism” as there is an active attempt to share stories, to link into the past and understand how we as a community and as individuals have grown out of the feminist movements behind us. There is a sense of empowerment in that, in knowing a shared past, in order to understand how things are shaped in the current context of now as they reaffirm a hope for the future. How is feminist space-making enacted in this space? What constitutes feminist space making and how does it persist?

In order to get oriented with the space as it is organized on the Land, let us take a walk on the Land together. Let us explore the landscape that the Workers build up each summer. Remember that the Land when the first round of Workers arrive is wild. There is hay growing, in places knee deep, in the parking lot, in the Night Stage bowl and in all of the fields. There are no structures and you would have to know where to dig in order to find the wells, the Main Kitchen fire pits, and the power lines. If you did not know what you were walking into and through you would probably find yourself wondering what goes on in this place? Why are there asphalt walkways along some of the dirt roads? Why is there a concrete pad in a certain area? You would be walking through this place with no real understanding of its significance outside of the deer grazing in the fields and the wild turkeys wandering along the forest’s edge. This is a place that is built out of sweat, tears, a bit of blood and a lot of love and is sustained by physical embodiment and a sense of shared memory making.

The first Festival was not held on its current plot of land located close to the town of Heart in the North Western section of the state of Michigan. The We Want The Music Company (WWTMC), the overarching company that owns and runs the Festival, purchased this plot of land in 1982 so that the Festival could have its own stable plot of land to host the festival each year. Before that time, the Festival was hosted on two other
rented locations in the state of Michigan. I had the opportunity to interview a few Workers who have been part of the Festival community since its beginning in the mid-1970s. Here is an excerpt from my interview with Ruby:

CJ: Where was the old Land?
Ruby: Mount Pleasant
CJ: Which is?
Ruby: It’s the southern part of Oceanic County. We’re on the very northern border of the county now.
CJ: How many years was it held on the old land?
Ruby: Well, let’s see. The very first Festival was in 1975. And that was in Mount Pleasant, on the old, old Land. And then it was in Hesperia ’76, ’77, ’78, ’79, ’80, ’81. Six years in Hesperia. Right. ’82 was the first year on this Land. (55, white, working class, 29 years as a Worker, 1 year as a festiegoer, female, lesbian, butch, activist, bachelor’s degree)

It has taken years for the Festival’s Land to etch itself into the “town” that it evolves into every summer. Over the years, new camping areas have been developed to accommodate the diverse needs of the women who attend, from chem-free and sent-free camping areas to the ever-growing Family Camping and Over 50’s camping areas. By exploring the physical layout of the Land and the various areas that are created within its boundaries we can begin to explore how feminist ideals of women-only space are socially sculpted onto the Land. Take a look at the Festival’s map of the Land below. Each year this map is printed on the back of the Festival’s program and a number of the maps are mounted on stakes, which are pounded into the ground to help define and orient women to the Festival’s terrain. Overlaid on the physical place, this map is an archival piece that resonates with the past, with memory and the politics of feminist place making. From this map we can begin to tease out the strands of Feminist history and memory as it relates to this particular space. There are areas of the space with names like Amazon Acres and Solanas Ferns that speak to a particular culture and sense of feminist links.
Solanas Ferns is named after Valerie Solanas, a radical feminist writer who is well known in feminist circles for her book *SKUM Manifesto*. Written in 1967, this manifesto calls for women “to overthrow the government, eliminate the money system, institute complete automation, and destroy the male sex” (p.1). This message resonates with the creation of women’s only space and holds keen parallels to the larger feminist social movement that was taking place in the mid to late 1960s. For example, the emergence of Solanas’s work coincides with French author and feminist philosopher Monique Wittig’s utopic narrative *Les Guérillères*, published in 1969, which speculates a time when women win a war against men and begin to build their own culture based on a matriarchal framework. Another example of feminist imaginings can be explored by examining the names of camping areas like Amazon Acres, Crone Heights, Bush Gardens, Mother Oak, and Bread and Roses. “Bread and Roses” is a slogan that finds its origin in a speech given by Rose Schneiderman in 1912 when she spoke out about
women’s and workers’ rights at the Lawrence Textile Strike in Chicago, Illinois (as cited in Eisenstein, 1982, p. 32). Over the years, this slogan has been written into poems and trade union chants and has become a statement of solidarity and union work in North America.

Other feminist and women-centered names are worked into the landscape of the Land and help to create this imagined space. The main road running through the Land is called Lois Lane, focusing on the female lead in the Superman comic strip that, by the 1970s, was portrayed as a whip-smart, tough journalist and intellectual equal to Superman. Then there are the wood chip paths through the woods named “womb way” and “womanly way” and there are areas marked with little tent icons to identify “support venue.” These support venues include OASIS, which is a space available to those in need of emotional sober support, the WOMB, which provides all the festival-goers with most of their healthcare needs, the Cuntree Store, where you can purchase anything you might not have packed for a week in the woods, from ice-cream bars to tents and Festival t-shirts, and GAIA which is the girls summer day camp space for children over four years of age. All of the language used draws on feminist historical moments, uses goddess centered language, or makes reference to women and woman’s anatomy to build the women centered space that is the Festival.
Feminism, Cultural Practices and Place Making

In the film *Radical Harmonies* (2002) Lisa Vogel was captured stating:

> they come for the community. The concerts are the celebration of the community. But the community is something where we get to experiment with a value system that is almost the antithesis of how the value system works in the real world.

These values resonate throughout the Land through the structures, images, systems and embodied cultural performances and rituals that take place on the Land and they all work together to (re)create this imagined community each year.

There were many significant cultural practices noted by the women that I interviewed. While many of them drew out memories of similar practices that were communal in nature, others shared narratives of rituals that they engage in every year at the Festival that are more personal and individual in nature. This section of the chapter investigates some of the narratives and the significance that they hold in feminist place making practices at the Festival. I explore the significance of signs, music, the Festival’s opening ceremonies and the closing bonfire for the Workers. These moments of Festival time are used to highlight how feminist culture is embodied in this space. That is, how feminism and embodied feminist acts help to create a temporary village that materializes once a year as a product of the hard labour of a handful of Workers. These women are literally living a world differently through space and time, creating a culture and cultural memory through place making.

The Use of Signs: Significance

On opening Monday, the field in front of Shuttle Base is transformed into a drop off and loading zone. Days before the front gates open, Shuttle crewmembers use stakes, binding twine, flagging tape, signs and screws to shape the once unruly field into a semblance of organization. Or, so we Workers like to think. Often times festigoers, especially those driving onto the Land for the first time, are overwhelmed by the set up and all the signs directing women in all directions. It is their first real peek into how the Land is transformed each year into some form of an organized entity. Wooden stakes, binding
twine, flagging tape and signs physically shape this city. There is even a crew on the land called the Signs Crew. This is the crew that makes all of the Festival signs, including concert signs and any sign that a crew might need for their area. These signs are used to help orient women to the space and to build visual association and community on the Land. Unlike the signs we see in our everyday lives that use a limited array of female bodies to sell products and promote particular lifestyles and body types, the signs on the Land reflect the diversity of women and women’s communities that congregate at the Festival each summer. Some signs are functional, like the one below that asks women to wear bottoms while in the food line at the Main Kitchen to the one below it that has deeper roots in the feminist consciousness and the Festival’s celebration of women and women’s power in the world and women’s relationships to nature.

![Image 6 Main Kitchen, What to Wear (2011)](image-url)
While conducting interviews, I had the opportunity to speak to Vanna, a Worker on the Signs crew. She shared with me what the significance of working on the Festival signs is for her each year:

For me now, working on signs, painting the concert schedule signs is what we do every year, everything else varies, but that’s kind of a neat thing to do. And then to go install them, it’s sort of like a documentation. And they do save all those for archival purposes. Um, they haven’t done anything with them in a long time, like, not since the twenty-fifth, so over ten years. But they’re all there, if they ever want to do a show of them, or display of them. (36, Caucasian, blue collar, 29 years as a Worker, female, bisexual, lesbian, mother, Master’s degree)

The practice of making the signs for the Festival is an important aspect of place making for this individual and the impact that the signs have as a visual display of women’s culture is another important component of the signs. Signs are used to advertise the concerts at each stage and often draw on lesbian feminist design elements from tie-dye in 2011 to the use of labrys, a symbol for female or matriarchal power, in 2010. Signs are located all over the Land to mark trails, define space, and help to infuse the environment with a sense of community and identity. 

Image 7 Community Centre Crone
(2011)
with feminist art and build a visual sense of belong and imagined place making on the Land.

Image 9 Acoustic Stage Concert Signs (2011)

Image 8 Night Stage Concert Signs (2010)

Image 10 Galz Kitchen/Worker Kitchen (2011)
Even the signs that are created for the Worker community, like the one above depicting a bunch of women running towards a kitchen raccoon who is cooking up a delicious meal over cauldrons, help to build a sense of community and belonging. This image is significant as the Galz crew has taken on the raccoon as their mascot. Over the years, large populations of raccoons have inhabited the Festival. These raccoons are fans of the Worker kitchen as they try to make late night raids to procure any food they can. This is often a fruitless mission since all the food is either locked up in raccoon cages (wire cages built to store food in and keep raccoons and other critters out) or in standalone walk-in fridges that are tightly sealed to keep the cold temperatures inside and critters outside.

The naked women running brings to mind the wonderful food that the crew produces in order to keep the Workers fed and resonates with notions of female empowerment and freedom—in this case, the freedom to run naked in a field towards something delicious and well deserved. The Workers, as a community, gather in the Belly Bowl for three square meals a day and during the Festival itself, Galz provides an additional meal, the midnight meal, which takes place just after the last Night Stage show.

These signs are one piece of a much larger presence of meaning and cultural making on the Land. These signs convey ideas of female empowerment, linking women to a matriarchal culture and connect the individuals in the space to a much larger concept, or as Clifford Geertz calls them “webs of significance” (1973, p. 5). In his discussion of culture, Geertz calls attention to the importance of symbols in culture making. Symbols are important because “they are tangible formulations of notions, abstractions from experience field in perceptible forms, concrete embodiments of ideas, attitudes, judgments, longings, or beliefs (1973, p. 91). Geertz was interested in exploring the cultural activities that ritual, symbol and myths evoke. He urged philosophers not to become stuck philosophizing within one’s own mind. He wrote:

To undertake the study of cultural activity—activity in which symbolism forms a positive content—is thus not to abandon social analysis for a Platonic cave of shadows, to enter into a mentalistic world of introspective psychology or, worse, speculative philosophy, and wander there forever in a haze of “Cognitions,” “Affections,” “Conations,” and other elusive entities. Cultural acts, the construction, apprehension, and utilization of
symbolic forms, are social events like any other; they are as public as marriage and as observable as agriculture. (1973, p. 91)

The signs noted above and the embodied rituals depicted below are all components of much larger “webs of significance” that come together on the Land and draw people back each and every year.

**Opening Ceremonies: Music, Place and Memory**

Music is part of social life and it influences our understanding of it. It articulates our understanding of and relationships with people, culture, time, place and ourselves. Music informs our sense of place. According to Martin Stokes (1991), music can inspire, evoke and organize

> collective memories and present experiences of place with an intensity, power and simplicity unmatched by any other social activity. The ‘places’ constructed through music involve notions of difference and social boundary. They also organize hierarchies of a moral and political order. (Stokes, 1991, p. 3)

The city and community of the Festival are built around a music festival, a festival full of workshops, parties, celebrations, rituals, and meal sharing within a collaborative work environment. The women’s movement and music, and their influence on a small collective of women, were two of the larger social critiques that originally pulled this Festival together. It should come as no surprise that I am making space in this dissertation to focus on the importance of music and music-making at the Festival.

On the Opening Night of the Festival, an opening ritual is envisioned, rehearsed and performed for the entire Festival community. Each year, Lisa Vogel and her team devise and bring to life a new intention and theme for the Festival. The theme may be in response to larger social issues or a celebration of women’s power and the community’s link to women centered religion. In 2011, the summer I conducted my research, the focus of the opening ceremony was on the element of fire, the power of the Amazon archer and on flight. An elder and longstanding member of the Festival community took centre stage amongst the dancers and people dressed in white to loosen two lit arrows at targets located amidst the audience, which then burst into flame.
The Opening Ceremony sets the theme for each Festival and is the one community ritual that almost everyone participates in. After each ritual a mix of the performers from the performers list for that year perform Maxine Feldman’s song *Amazon Women Rise* which usually drives the audience to tears of joy as they sway and sing the song at the top of their lungs. While this song has been sung at the Festival since 1976, in 1985 *Amazon Women Rise* became the Festival’s anthem. This song has set the stage for each Festival, welcoming women from all over the world, ever since. Through its lyrics and musical rhythm, this song brings the audience together with a shared story. A story of recognition, it links to a similar past, memories and past, future, and present power. Each individual woman who has been part of the Opening Ceremonies audience had a narrative to share about their experience. Rosita shared what it was like for her growing up at the Festival:

I remember coming when I was little, opening ceremonies and Elvira Kurt, were the two things I cared about at the Night Stage. Like, we go to opening and I’d be like “Oh, I don’t need to see these next two acts.” And I’d, like, wander back to Gaia or whatever. Um, because, and even, back then, I don’t think it so much about the “woo” but it was about the spectacle. You know? It kept me entertained in a way that the music didn’t. Um, but I’ve been talking a lot with people about how Opening Ceremonies is the one thing here that does get me kind of ‘wooy’ and teary eyed. It’s like, “Yeah, look at us.” You know? We’ll all stand up and we’ll all sing Amazon Woman. It’s like “Look at us. We’re great.” I had this moment, I guess it wasn’t opening ceremonies, a couple years ago, where I was sitting with some friends, and one of them had a daughter. And, I was like playing with this daughter, and she was dancing to the music, and we were kind of dancing to the music. And, I was looking at her, and I was like, this little blond kid, and I’m like, “Oh, you were, that was, that was me, like fifteen years ago.” And, it was just this perfect moment of like, you and you’re going to get to hopefully grow up here. And it was really a sort of full circle sort of thing . . . . But there is something about opening that almost always gets to me. And I’m like, “I’m not crying. There’s something in my eye. This is “woo” and it’s silly. But oh my god, we’re amazing (laugh) Goddess, I guess. (laugh) (22, white, lower middle class, 9 years as a Worker, 8 years as a festigoer, queer, female, nerd, pansexual, college)

The Opening Ceremonies can have an even deeper meaning for the Workers involved with performing the ritual in front of the Festival’s audience. Each year, Workers are invited to participate. You never know what you are going to be asked to do until you reach the first rehearsal but it is always a powerful experience to be part of such a
powerful welcome and ritual. Tallulah shared with me what the importance of the Opening Ceremonies is for her:

I always do opening ceremonies. I participate in it as an active part of it, if I can. And I’ve rarely missed that. The significance there is really feeling like you’re a part of not only welcoming the women who travel from all over the world to be here, but blessing it for them. You know, giving your, kind of blood, sweat and tears, even if it’s silly, even if you’re just running around a Maypole, or, you’re doing whatever it is you’re asked to do, to be a part of that, in a way that you feel included in, and it’s just so overwhelming and beautiful, to be a part of that ceremony, no matter what part of it you are, even if you are just sitting in the audience that year. You feel attached to it in a way where you finally realize why you’re doing all this work, to make this Festival happen, for all these women to come, because it’s not, as a Worker, you can get caught up in the working experience, that this is your Festival and we’re already having a Festival or whatever. But we do this for these women who spend their money to take one week a year, to come here, and be safe. And you know that they’re not always safe out there in the world, but that they are, here. And just to see, you know, their faces light up and feel their energy and their tears. And you know you’re doing it for something that’s bigger than yourself. You feel a hundred percent part of the community, in that moment . . . They’ve been really thrilling. I would say lighting the paper lanterns was incredible, simply because it was a huge amount of trust, placed in us, to give us, you know, very, very flammable objects that we were very careful with, and the women were so excited to see that happen. And it was a two person process. You had to trust your partner, you had to keep the area safe. And it was a really beautiful part of it. But I also loved the year that all we did was stand up with a sign, with one word on it, you know, while a beautiful song was being played. And it was the most simple and simplistic thing you can think of: stand up with a sign, with a word on it. My word was “plenty.” And in that moment with Ferron singing, and with the other sisters standing up at their time, and the reaction from the crowd, I mean, I was, like, bawling and shaking the entire time, just holding up a sign, because it felt like you were holding up the whole community at that point. It was really beautiful. (33, Native American and Caucasian, working class, 10 years as a Worker, queer, lesbian, dyke, femme, cisgendered female, some college)

For those women who are attending the Opening Ceremony for the first time it can be a bit of a shock, not understanding what is happening to the audience around you. Rocky shared a time where she and her partner helped guide a couple of new attendees through the experience:

Well, one year we were swaying and singing Amazon Woman, there were these two women, brand new women. They’re from Missouri, not very far
from where we live, it was their first time here. And they were like, “Whoa. Holy gee, what is going on?” And as we talked to ‘em, it turns out they both grew up Pentecostal, in the church, and had led really repressed lives. And I was like “Oh, I understand. I grew up in the church.” Even though we weren’t Pentecostal, our experiences were the same. They’re like “This is so amazing.” I was like “We’re getting ready to sing Amazon Woman.” (laugh) And they were just like, “Really?” And I was so excited about it. It was like, “Yeah, we’re going to sing this thing. And it was written by Maxine Feldman and she was amazing.” And the woman was like “Should we be writing this down?” (laugh) I mean, they had such a good time.

The Opening Ceremonies can be a really powerful experience. As soon as Amazon Women Rise starts, women all around you in the Night Stage bowl stand up, some lift their arms into the air, some sway to the rhythm of the song as they sing in unison. It is the one time at the Festival that everyone comes together as one, both physically and symbolically. Following the lead of thinkers and writers such as Bourdieu (1977) and De Certeau (1984), social performance can be “seen as a practice in which meanings are generated, manipulated, even ironised, within certain limitations. Music and dance... do not simply ‘reflect.’ Rather, they provide the means by which the hierarchies of place are negotiated and transformed” (Stokes, 1991, p. 4). This ritualized performance creates a feeling of connectedness and possibility in a different world for a brief moment or for a week that allows women from different walks of life and multiple identities to come together as one. Music and ritual do not “simply provide a marker in a prestructured social space, but the means by which this space can be transformed” (Stokes, 1991, p. 4). Music is one of the aspects that transforms this space (along with the ritual and symbols) in order to develop a place for women to gather outside of the patriarchal systems of the everyday. According to Stokes, “music is socially meaningful not entirely but largely because it provides means by which people recognize identities and places, and the boundaries which separate them. . . . Music is a way that identities are constructed and mobilized” (1991, p. 5). Amazon Women Rise is a powerful song deeply linked to the ritual of embodied practice and performance that reorients the Festival’s participants into a place built on a shared women-centered history that acknowledges and supports the possibilities present in this world for women. There is power in language and when a
A song like *Amazon Women* is ritualized year after year it becomes an anthem. When the song is sung in unison:

> There is in the singing an experience of simultaneity. At precisely such moments people wholly unknown to each other utter the same verses to the same melody . . . providing the occasions for unisonality, for the echoed physical realization of the imagined community. (Anderson, B., 1983, p. 145)

For the Festival week, this is one of the first times that the community is brought together in unison, building the intention of the Festival and reinforcing the imagination of this utopian place making.

**Closing: Letting Things Go**

Just as the Opening Ceremonies are about bringing women together and creating sense of community and connectedness there is also a need to put closure on the women’s experiences at the Festival. For the festigoers there is the Candlelight Concert on the Sunday evening of the Festival. The singer and director of this production, Ruth Barrett, orchestrates the ceremonial closing of the Festival at the Acoustic stage. The 2011 Festival program reads:

> Lit only by candlelight and torches, the beautifully illuminated Acoustic Stage is the scene of parting gifts of music, song and spoken word offered by a variety of Festival performers. Director Ruth Barrett is a Dianic high priestess, ritualist, and award-winning recording artist of original Goddess songs. Since 1980, Ruth has taught magical and ritual arts nationally, and co-facilitates a national priestess-training program. (p. 23)

For this production, the Acoustic stage is illuminated with fire and is lit in such a way that the audience can admire the often twilight sky overhead. Many of the performers who participated in the Opening Ceremonies make an appearance on the Candlelight Concert’s stage. It is a community event that pulls much of the Festival’s community together to say goodbye until next time, gives thanks to the Land for taking care of us, and wishes everyone safe travels home. For long crew Workers there is a different closing experience that many of us look forward to, the bonfire. As Deluxe shared:

> I love the bonfire. So it’s a closing, and it also is kind of remnants of all of this work that we’ve done and things that um, can’t necessarily go on to be used in the same way anymore. And I think that symbolically, that’s really
important; where it’s a time of change and it’s a moment of realization that we’re not going to be here for much longer, doing the same things anymore and that things are going to change, and also that same thing, we are so lucky to still be here and be with each other. And it’s this big cathartic moment were we throw things and burn them and share in this collective experience, and write things on wood, to either release things that have been on our minds, or um, burn something for somebody that’s not able to be there: um, people who have died; a bad break up, you know, put it into the fire and set it free. Um, and then, um, (laugh) the naked running around the fire is one of my favourites. I absolutely love it. There’s something very old in me that loves to see a bunch of women running naked around the fire. It’s, I don’t know what that is but it seems like that must have been happening for a very long time. Um, and I loved getting to stay up all night and watch the fire, the three years that I did it. That felt very special to be and privileged to be, um, able to take care of that space that was so important for everybody. And, not set the woods on fire. To be trusted to not set the woods on fire. (28, White American, poor, 8 years as a Worker, woman, queer, bisexual, graduate school)

As the different areas are dismantled after the Festival, the LACE crew makes its rounds each day picking up not only the heavy items—lumber, tables, storage shelves—they pick up all of the wooden structures and lumber that is ready for the burn pile. In an area well past the Festival’s Downtown you will find the Festival’s dump. In this area, surrounded by nature walks, you can find the food compost and the roll off, where garbage and certain recyclables are collected, and, at the end of the Festival, the burn pile. The LACE crew prepares the area for the big bonfire. They arrange some of the items in such a way as to create a yearly Festival sculpture. There are usually pieces of overused shelves, signs and, as the picture above shows, pieces of the Opening Ceremonies structures for effect. Once the sculpture is ready the other crews drive out to the dump for the yearly lighting. Once lit the sculpture takes on a life of its own as it burns in the encroaching darkness. The Workers gather around the bonfire adding pieces of plywood, two-by-sixes and any other pieces of wood waiting to find their way into the fire. As shared by the interview participants this occasion is often used as a time to commemorate and burn something for someone whose life was lost over the last year or who could not make it to the bonfire themselves. Workers bring their own wood to write on, maybe something from their workspaces, or find something at the bonfire to write on with a marker. As Teddy noted, there is something significant about burning something at the bonfire:
Oh. For me, the biggest is the bonfire. And um, yeah, that is very important. Our, like here in [my crew], things are quite identical all the time. I don’t know that there’s something as momentous as raising the night stage. You know, we delivered crates. Yay. Um, no there’s nothing as distinctive as that. But the bonfire is very powerful for me. And it’s, for me, even though I sit generally with my crew, it is really more of a solitary thing. It’s me and the fire and I usually, um, think of things that I wish to release into the fire, which has been extremely powerful. One year I did, someone had asked me to write out everything, like, in my life that had ever gone wrong, or anyone that had every hurt me or you know, whatever, just a notation of each. And so I gathered up my papers and I um, reread through it, from the point of view of gratitude. Like, thank you for being in my life, because you taught me to put myself first. Or, you know, things along those lines. Thank you for showing up and teaching me, you know, to value myself more highly. Or, I thought of something for each one. And I had, like, you know, tears of gratitude. And I put the papers in the fire. And when I got home, within two weeks, two ex’s found me, spontaneously apologized. And, my mother started speaking differently about my father. And, I never told her about my forgiveness exercise. (47, white, middle class, 9 years as a Worker, female, lesbian, polyamourous, some college)

For some, the bonfire is like the closing of a year and an opportunity to usher a new year in. It is a time for letting go of old habits, finding forgiveness in one’s heart, and making a resolution for the year ahead—something to achieve between this Festival and the next. It’s a way of saying goodbye to the Festival in a fashion that creates both a sense of
community and a sense of self during the contemplative time sitting by the fire and watching the Festival’s material burn away into the night sky.

While language and a sense of history create a layer of meaning in this space and for this community, there are other dynamic ways that space making takes place at the Festival. This space is not only a location for the creation of history and the production of space, it is a space where social geography is being formed and reformed over time by social activity such as the political tensions that give rise to a space that is geographically contextualized in ongoing ways. As urban geographer Edward Soja stated “social being actively emplaced in space and time in an explicitly historical and geographical contextualization” (1989, p. 11). Feminist political tensions, whether connected to a particular time or to ongoing tensions between different identity groups on and off the Land, are significantly influential factors in the (re)creation of space on the Land.

There are three main areas in and related to the Festival that are imbued with a history of tensions both at the Festival and within feminist movements: the Twilight Zone, the Womyn of Colour Tent and CampTrans. One of the areas, established in the late 1980s, is the Twilight Zone. Also known as “loud and rowdy” camping and is the area of the Land where Bondage and Discipline Sadism and Masochism (BDSM) players often set up their camps and play spaces and where the loud and rowdy crowd parties until the early hours of the morning. This space was created after a controversy that was sparked during the time of the Feminist Sex Wars when political tensions from mainstream feminist movements were embodied and navigated on the Land. Another significant area that was created at the Festival because of tensions on the Land (and in society at large) is the Womyn of Colour tent. The Womyn of Colour Tent is in an area that is designated a women of colour only space to provide women of colour a sanctuary from the dominant white Festival culture. The women who congregate here host workshops, meetings, discussion groups, burlesque performances, a BBQ, and a variety of other social activities. Next to the Womyn of Colour Tent is a space called the WOC Patio (for Womyn of Colour Patio). It is a space intended for any woman to visit, sit down and engage in conversations about race and racism and to learn how to practice anti-racism. These tensions along with what is missing on the Festival map, CampTrans, will be
Memory, Place and Temporality

While memory is preserved in our physical surroundings, there is a relationship between temporality and spatiality. Scholars have attempted to open up discussions around the dynamics and richness of culture making and space. Such scholars have theorized that our relationship to space is never straightforward nor is it unmediated (Crang and Travlou, 2001; Massey, 1994; Rosenberg, 2012, p. 131). Karen Till (2005) writes, in her work on the politics of memory in Berlin, “although places are understood to be materially real and temporally stable, that is, they give a spatial ‘fix’ to time; their meanings are made and remade in the present. Places are not only continuously interpreted; they are haunted by past structures of meaning and material presences from other times and lives” (p. 9). The Festival is a site that, like many women’s spaces, is fraught with conflict, negotiation and evaluation in the present. Many of the spaces and celebrations noted above were the result of an express need and a history of controversy. These conflicts created moments of creativity in this community.

These spaces and the Festival itself are continually negotiated by those who access this space and identify as women (Morris, 1999). As Lisa Vogel notes, “with dialog and trial-and-error, the Michigan Womyn’s festival has stabilized” (quoted in Morris, 2003, p. 18). That said, imaginings and musings of change are echoed in the narratives above just as they are explored in discussions later in this section and the chapters to follow. The Festival has changed, moved, and grown over the last 36 years largely in response to the needs expressed by festiegoers and Workers, and because of a larger community vision. As Ruby noted “I would not still be coming if we didn’t have hot showers.” Memories shared of early difficulties at the Festival are often talked about in terms of solutions and negotiations. Some of the memories shared were about how some women have chosen
not to return to the Festival because of these controversies. Some of these more difficult navigations included discussions about the privileging of particular racial/ethnic forms, public sex practices in communal areas, mosh pits, dildoes and the place of male children (Brown, 2009). As Pumpkin shared:

There were people that, I can remember some folks who got really, really, really, just majorly upset, when Tribe 8 performed on night stage. I mean, it [was] like that torrid, for them. I remember people my age, who were just freaked out by the whole idea that these women were on stage with a dildo. You know? And it’s like, come on, you know, this is Michigan. People do a lot of weird things. (laugh) You know? Just give it, everybody needs a place to be who they want to be. It’s, but it’s okay. You know? And it’s taken, there’s been a lot of places where people have dropped off, like, my friends who couldn’t handle the dildo. The mosh pit, you know, when we first had a mosh pit. [Name] started the mosh pit. You know? I brought [her] to Festival when she was three and a half years old. And she made this presentation to Lisa [Vogel] about how she wanted a mosh pit. And they did it, yeah. I think that was part of, I don’t know if that, that was the same year as Tribe 8, I don’t know if the mosh pit was part of the Tribe 8 experience or not. But it happened at the same time. (57, Caucasian, poor, 25 years as a Worker, 3 to 5 years as a festiegoer, lesbian, female, monogamous, feminist)

Ann Cvetkovich (2003) writes about Tribe 8, a notorious San Francisco dyke punk band, that performed at the 1994 Festival and the controversy that ensued in her book *An Archive of Feelings*. In this work, it becomes clear that the loss of some participants often means the reinvigoration of others. Those who continue to attend have made great strides to devise innovative solutions by creating or allocating dedicated space for specific purposes, minority group needs and identities.

This community of women is inspired by the contributions and perspectives of all involved. This “town” is based on community living principles, common goals and community problem solving models. At the Festival, and throughout the year, women’s perspectives are heard and valued through feedback forms, in community meetings, and through workshops and on-on-one conversations. While the Festival may read as “stable” and “mature,” over the years it has seen change, engaged in negotiation, experienced

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8 I will more thoroughly address the Tribe 8 performance in Chapter Four.
protest, and transformation in terms of practice while, at the same time, the years of repeated activities and ceremonies have solidified some structures through their annual (re)creation. This space is negotiated, temporal and, in some very real ways, predictable.

In the next section, I explore the implications of the political fissures surrounding the creation of memory, feminism and space at the Festival. The three examples I draw on include the S/M controversies of the 1980s, the presence of systemic racism on the Land, the installation of the Womyn of Color Tent, and the current debates surrounding the exclusion of trans women at the Festival. These debates are consistent with debates taking place in North American feminist discourse and those taking place at the Festival.

**The S/M Debates**

The feminist “Sex Wars,” which focussed on women and S/M practices in the 1980s (Duggan & Hunter, 1995) was one of the bigger controversies to have played out on the Land.\(^9\) Just as feminists were navigating the debates around sex and sexuality in mainstream North American feminist discourse, these debates were physically engaged with on the Land. There were those festiegoers and Workers who were opposed to women that engaged in sexual practices that involved the dynamics of power and dominance. These practices were often framed as violence and abuse. On the Land, certain women argued against the idea that S/M practices were consensual acts between consenting adults and were particularly concerned that these practices were taking place in the more public spaces on the Land. Places where anyone, including children, could stumble upon these activities as they were taking place. There were others who supported, recognized and respected women’s right to engage with S/M practices and were concerned about how such practices could safely take place on the Land.

\(^9\) Sadomasochism or S/M is often used to label the debates that took place at the Festival. A more contemporary term is BDSM, an acronym that combines a number of terms under one umbrella. BD stands for bondage and discipline, DS stands for dominance and submission and SM stands for sadism and masochism.
Those women who were sex positive argued that they had the same rights as any woman to explore and practice their sexual preferences even those that fell under the umbrella of BDSM. They further argued that it was anti-feminist for other women to take away their ability to engage in any practices that involved their own bodies whether on or off the Land. These debates mirrored the discussions and debates that were taking place amongst sex positive feminists and anti-S/M feminists. These new sex positive feminists and radicals included people like Pat Califia, Dorothy Allison and Gayle Rubin, and saw the creation of a San Francisco based lesbian feminist BDSM organization called SAMOIS, which in 1981 published a book titled *Coming to Power*, a text that helped shape lesbian BDSM communities. SAMOIS was regularly targeted by organizations such as Women Against Violence in Pornography and Media (WAVPM) one of the early anti-pornography feminist groups who held very strong opinions about S/M and viewed it as ritualized violence against women.

In the introduction to a book edited by a group of anti-S/M advocates titled *Against Sadomasochism* (SAMOIS 1982) the editors wrote:

> The editors and contributors to *Against Sadomasochism* do not dispute sadomasochists’ right to engage in what sexual practices they choose. It is not our wish to limit them by legislative or juridical means. Instead, we believe that the ideological grounds of the defense of sadomasochism are invalid. (p. 7)

The central tenet from which this argument flows stems from the belief that “the psychological reality of ‘consensual’ sadomasochism is so abstracted from the actual social and historical conditions that shape human relationships and erotic desires as to be virtually meaningless” (p. 7). That is to say, lesbian sadomasochism is deeply rooted in patriarchal sexual ideology and is a reflection of the power imbalances embedded in most of our social relations. Lesbians who engage in these practices then are reenacting the patriarchal violence that we inherently learn as part of this culture. By extension,

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10 Sex-positive feminism views sexual freedom as a crucial component to women’s freedom. For more information see Carole S. Vance (Ed.), *Pleasure and Danger: exploring female sexuality.*
rejecting S/M practices will enable sex positive feminists to escape the power dynamics imposed by patriarchal society.

The opposition to S/M at the Festival was spearheaded by a group of lesbian separatists from all over North America and around the world who called themselves the Seps (Kaplan, 1996 p. 123). This is the same group who had over the years been vocally opposed to S/M practices, trans women and the performance of the dyke punk band Tribe 8 in Michigan (Kaplan, 1996, p. 123). While kinky women attended the Festival in its early years, there were as many women as at present and the political stage was not ready for this controversy to come to a head until the late 1980s. According to the Women’s Leather History Project (WLHP), things reached the boiling point in 1989 when the Whip Hedonists Into Pain (WHIPS) protested and engaged in other actions in response to the Festival’s informal policy of prohibiting S/M on the Land. This informal policy was conveyed to the WHIPS because, as Ruby shared:

They were running play parties. And they were running play parties in inappropriate places. And one of the things that they kept doing and I saw it with my own eyes, so I’m, you know, not repeating rumours. They would play consistently, during the Festival, on the Acoustic Stage. After, you know, at night. And you know, kind of, there was a certain amount of looking the other way for a couple of years, or a year anyway. But then, they got really disrespectful about the fact that they were using Festival space. And they would leave a mess. You know, party debris: beer cans and wine bottles and that, but also, like, they would do cuttings on the stage and leave blood, and it was inappropriate. I don’t care that they were doing it, but they were not doing it in a respectful way, in Festival space. So Festival started to put security at the acoustic stage. Said “You can’t do this here anymore. You know, we looked the other way for a while, but you abused the privilege so.” (55, white, working class, 29 years as a Worker, 1 year as a festiegoer, female, lesbian, butch, activist, bachelor’s degree)

In response to the Festival organizers’s decision to take away their after hours play space the group decided to move their play parties to the end of the Workshop Road. As Ruby elaborated:

11 For more information visit the WLHP’s online archives http://www.leatherarchives.org/wlhp/timeline.htm.
So, they came out here and they started using, there was a workshop tent, down old Workshop Road. And again, not the best choice, because, in those days, Jupiter Jump Off was quiet camping. So, they would go down there, and have these huge parties . . . And you know, safe sane and consensual wasn’t really the norm, in those early days. And wild, you know, wild music, loud partying, carrying on noise, plus, you know, play noise and women screaming. And the women who chose to camp down there, you know, kind of the meditation circle crowd, was who camped down there. And all the fairy dancer type “woo-woo” women, and they were mortified. So they complained. So you know, there were like these meetings, and ah, it was like, “You can’t, this is quiet camping. You guys gotta find a space that isn’t, you know, we don’t care that you’re doing it. But you’re disturbing, you know, you’re not being respectful.” And, you know, we’d close [the meeting] and they’d say “Okay, we won’t do it.” And then the next night, they’d be back there again. Well, finally, it reached the point where Lisa made the call to take, it was probably Lisa and Boo, at that point, I would guess, that we had to take that tent down.

By asking the Workers to take the workshop tent down and close off the play and party space of the S/M dykes, another conflict emerged within the Worker community. As the Ruby continues:

And this became a big, kind of “who’s side are you on?” in the Workers community. Because there were, you know, leather dykes in the Workers community, who weren’t necessarily out here partying and sanctioning the loudness. But, you know, that was still their community. And so, it was like, “Okay.” So it was strictly voluntary, if you were willing to be a part of that, taking down that tent. Well, that was the night that it became Vanilla Dykes for Choice, because a bunch of us, said, you know, and there were like, protests. We used to, it was always “We’re going to storm the night stage about this.” Somebody’s going to storm the night stage about that. Well, this was big, and the separatists, lesbian separatist women, who were the, “SM is violence. This is” . . . you know. “It’s women hating and you shouldn’t be allowed to be here. And you’re ruining our Festival.” And it became this big confrontation. And so the night that the decision got made that that tent had to come down, because they wouldn’t stop, Boo and Lisa said, “If you are willing to be a part of this . . . because there was a big protest at Triangle. And so I was doing security, a bunch of us were doing security, trying to keep the two halves from coming to fisticuffs over this, while a few crew people were down there, taking down the tent. It was wild and crazy. It was. Oh, and it was just hateful, evil letters in LC [Lesbian Connections] over the year, and just oh, awful, awful, nasty, nasty stuff. And the next year was the
The next year, the Festival released a statement clarifying its position “claiming that they were not prohibiting S/M activity, but trying to limit the exposure of non-S/M women to activities they might find frightening or objectionable” (WLHP, 2010). As Ruby finishes her story:

And the Festival kept saying it, ‘You know, this is what we will say - ‘ because of course, Boo Price was a lawyer. So everything had to be in, you know, kind of lawyer approved language. ‘The Festival cannot provide you with a space for this activity. What we can tell you, is that there are six hundred and fifty acres here. And you can’t do it in community space. And community space means things like the workshop tent, the Acoustic Stage. But there are six hundred and fifty acres here.’ And basically told them, ‘Go find some place to play, that’s not going to bother other people, and we’ll ignore you.’ And so they organized the Twilight Zone, off season, that year [or over the next few years]… I don’t know what all of the off year negotiations were. I know there was a lot of back and forth between some of those women and the office, just, you know, kind of a ‘Well, what about this?’ ‘Okay, well, what about this?’ and you know. There’ve been a lot of negotiations with the Twilight Zone, over the years. I guess it was probably a year after that, that it actually made it onto the Festival map. (55, white, working class, 29 years as a Worker, 1 year as a festiegoer, female, lesbian, butch, activist, bachelor’s degree)

At the 1990 Festival a group of pro-S/M women hired a plane to disperse flyers across the Festival grounds, unfortunately most of the flyers went into the swamp and surrounding woods, and the general Festival population did not get to read the flyers. In fact because the flyers did not make it onto the Land and into the hands of women, many women “felt uneasy at the sight of an unknown plane flying low overhead” (Kaplan, 1996, p. 124). That year, as Rebecca Dawn Kaplan shared “the S/M women who remained felt increasingly excluded, and some mentioned being urged to camp on the outskirts of the land. Most of the outspoken S/M women chose to avoid the rest of the festival, not attending the large main events and spending time on the outskirts, where clusters of S/M campers were more tolerated” (p. 124). In a letter from Lisa Vogel and Boo Price (1990) in response to the unease at this Festival, they wrote:

In the 15 years that the Michigan Festival has been at the vortex of the diverse international womyn’s community, the gay press in general has
provided little coverage of the event itself or the role it has played in developing and reflecting womyn’s politics and community. Over the last 6 months there has been more coverage in the gay press regarding the “controversy” of S/M sex parties at the Festival than has been written about the event itself in all of its 15 years. (p.14)

In this article Lisa and Boo attempt to dispel some of the misinformation that had been circulating after the 1990 Festival. Some of the clarifying points included a statement that “there were S/M workshops held every day at the Festival, and they were listed within the printed Festival program” and that there was a discussion about S/M within the Festival community facilitated in a way that all could participate as well as safe sex workshops for Workers and festiegoers. All Women are welcome at the Festival and that “there are S/M womyn on staff, both as volunteers and as paid coordinating staff members.” They went on to dismiss the claim that there were “sex police” on the Land. They wrote that if a camper had a specific noise complaint and brought it to the Festival’s staff the Festival’s Security “responds to specific camper complaints by asking womyn to be considerate of their neighbours. If they choose to continue to be loud, they are asked to move into the loud campground. It’s an issue of consideration, and we do not take a position on what type of sex is keeping the neighbourhood up at night.” They also rejected the claim that the Festival would not allow S/M supporters to distribute flyers at the Festival, which then prompted a group of women to hire a plane to drop flyers on the Land as the same flyers were apparently posted in the portable toilets, all over the Land (p. 14). In this letter Lisa and Bo continued on to clarify the policy around S/M practices on the Land and wrote “the single policy the Festival does have that actively affects some members of the S/M community is one that states that community space cannot be used for group sex parties, ‘slave auctions,’ or scenes” (p. 14). Because of legal and liability issues, the Festival refused to designate a specific section of the Land for S/M camping and placed an emphasis on the Festival community’s expectations that the S/M community, like “all members of the community; while we live here for the week we live in consideration of each other and our shared community space” (p. 14). They closed their letter by writing “we do not support the exclusion of S/M womyn, and will actively continue our role in facilitating safe community discussion about S/M in the womyn’s community” (p. 14). Lisa and Boo’s statement went a long way to dispel rumours and misconceptions
amongst the Festival’s population who, over the next few years, found ways to live together as diverse community members at the Festival.

The Twilight Zone or the Zone, also known as the “loud and rowdy” camping area, is where many of the current S/M dykes camp during the Festival. This is where workshops and live demonstrations of S/M practices, sexually explicit burlesque shows and other performances and learning opportunities that are too explicit for the general Festival audience are held. During the week of Festival, all of the organized play parties take place in the Zone.

The first play party I ever went to was a by invitation only party. In order to be invited I had to make my way out to the Zone during non-work time to meet with the party organizers and talk about the party rules and expectations. The night of the party the play space and camp space was transformed into its own area. Natural barriers were created and tarps were used to separate the play space from the rest of the camping area. There were women standing guard at the entrance to ensure that everyone who entered were invited guests and of age to take part in the activities. There have been other spaces turned into play spaces in the Zone and they change almost every year depending on the groups of individuals who inhabit and organize play parties in the area. One of the biggest things that the Zone is known for is its loud rowdiness. There is one big fire pit in this camping area and each night groups of women tend the fire and sit, sing, drum and drink around this circle well into the early hours of each morning. Over the years, these groups of women have found ways to more peacefully coexist on the Land and in the wider North American context.

**Women of Colour**

The Festival and the women’s music industry more generally has been a primarily white phenomenon. As Judith Casselberry remarked in the film *Radial Harmonies* (2002) “the structure that was being built at that time [in the 1970s women’s music scene] was being forged primarily by white women. There wasn’t really a lot of room for women coming from a really different cultural place.” There were real cultural differences that needed to be unearth and examined by the early women’s music pioneers. The women’s music
scene and the women’s music festivals put energy into broadening the scope of the artists they promoted and brought on stage just as they began to more critically look at ways to facilitate the participation of women of colour in these environments. Musicians who are women of colour have become some of the mainstay performers in the Festival’s line up and include such musicians as Toshi Reagon, who is also the daughter of singer, scholar and social activist Bernice Reagon Johnson, drummer and teacher Ubaka Hill, and spoken word artist Staceyann Chin, to name a few. The organizers of the Festival have put great effort into inviting and accepting performers from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, which is apparent when you look at the Festival’s program over the years.

As Pearl highlighted:

I can remember this one year, [name] and I were sitting in the middle of the Belly Bowl and it was like the first year. And I guess there was just a lot of like, women of colour performers that year. And it was a significant, like, Chicago, but like, half of everybody brown here, was from Chicago . . . And I can remember [name] and I sitting in the Belly Bowl, going “What happened?” “I don’t know but I hope they keep doing it.” (38 year old, worked 15 years, Galz, working class, some college, African American, female, femme, queer, type one diabetes)

The Festival also tries to draw out this diversity in the photos it uses on the website, in the promotional posters and in the program. As Deluxe shared when talking about the presence and representation of women of colour at the Festival:

I think that’s also very important, in terms of like, representing in the media, on like, all of the memorabilia and the programs and workshops and musical artists, I feel like it’s extremely diverse and really tries and that’s obviously an important value of this place. (28, White American, poor, 8 years as a Worker, woman, queer, bisexual, graduate school)

Alongside the expressed efforts put into inviting racially and ethnically diverse musical acts, performers, workshop facilitators and Workers, to help facilitate the Festival’s space for women of colour there is a Women of Color tent. This space was established to give women of color their own space to socialize, talk politics, debrief around issues of racism and to simply rejuvenate while on the Land.
While the Festival organizers put energy and effort into planning a Festival experience that is racially and ethnically diverse, the Festival still attracts a predominantly white audience (Morris, 1999, p. 153). It should not come as a surprise that racism is an ongoing struggle within this community. There is a history that informs this practice, as Faderman notes:

The grievances lesbian separatists had toward the larger movements were analogous to the grievances lesbians of color had toward white lesbian-feminists. Although radical doctrine enthusiastically encouraged the inclusion of lesbians of color in the lesbian-feminist movement, few participated. They too felt that their interests had been overlooked and it was not to their advantage to try to integrate into a predominantly white movement. (Faderman, 1991, p. 240)

While white women might come to the Festival and have a radical transformative experience, women of colour report that they have faced stereotypes similar to those they encounter in their everyday lives. As Pearl noted:

The first year I ever came to Festival, this is me, never having camped. This is me never, being twenty three. I came to the Festival and there used to be these workshops that would happen. It used to be Thursday, I think. It was the Thursday before Fest, and there would just be this workshop about like, ageism or something. Every year was something different. And
for this, that particular year, there was a workshop on racism. And I went to where, I mean, I identify as a woman of colour. I went to the sober support tent, which used to be, well, there’s nothing there anymore... My point being, so we went to the tent and everybody who identified as a woman of colour who went to the thing, went to this meeting. We were, you know, trying to talk about how it felt to be like a woman of colour on this Land, and stuff. And we were in this tent and we discussed how people who did not identify as women of colour who were attending, were in the Belly Bowl, and that they could get coffee and tea or whatever. And we were kind of sequestered in this other space. And it just felt more like, like kind of an afterthought, or kind of, that we were being treated in a second-class way, because we were like, you know, and it had rained. And so it was, I’m trying to remember; there were a couple of different dynamics. But so everybody, I remember it as being everybody, I don’t know this to be a fact. But I’m pretty sure that everybody decided who was, in the women of colour workshop about racism, to get up and go to the Belly Bowl and get something, like tea or coffee or a bagel or whatever. And we all did. And I can remember it seemed like, like we had heard talking, before we got there. And then it was like, complete silence. Like, I mean, I don’t know what they were talking about before I got there. But I just found it really interesting. (38, African American, working class, 15 years as a Worker, female, femme, queer, type one diabetes, some college)

Another important story to share, one that I have witnessed performed on the Land many times can be teased out of the next narrative. In this narrative Pearl recounts an experience she had that embodies a form of education and space taking that is possible and necessary to engage in while on the Land:

Another year that I was here, like over the years there had been this one recurring, and it was really kind of, I felt like it was kind of specific to long crew. Because there were only a couple, there was like, there were like three African American women. I feel like, at that time, who were long crew, year after year after year. There was me on Galz, [name] on Belly Bowl and [name] on [crew]. I feel like [name] came for a couple of years, but she wasn’t here for all of this. Anyway, and in the course of the community meeting, as a topic one year, there was a discussion about, I think that [name] brought it up, asking or saying to everybody “Look, it is not okay for you to not know my name. I mean, you can say, I don’t know your name. What’s your name? But to just presume that because I’m brown, and I’m here, that I am [name] who works at the Belly Bowl, is not okay.” And I can remember just, more than once, people saying “Oh, they’re just being overly dramatic. That probably doesn’t happen.” Or, I can just remember feeling really unheard; feeling like this was not something that would ever change here. And that it seemed like regular practice to look at people who you think are your friends, or who you
think you know, see you year after year after year, and for them not to even know your name. Or not to even, or to think that you are interchangeable, with like, two and three other people. So, I can remember thinking after that meeting that I was, my plan was to get up the next morning and pack and leave. Because I couldn’t stay here anymore. And I talked and I just, I don’t know, I came out and I went through the Belly Bowl, and there was [name], who works on Main Kitchen. And she, and I can remember her starting out, like, you know, saying “If I have ever called a name that was not yours, I really apologize for that.” And I remember thinking, “Okay, you, we have never had a conversation.” And so I’m like “This is the reason, I’m gonna pack my stuff and go.” But we had like, a twenty minute conversation where she really looked at me. And we talked about, like different things that we had in common. And I can remember walking away from that conversation, thinking “Okay, well maybe I can do. Maybe I can continue to stay. Maybe it’s not . . .” and that like, was the real turning point for me.

I remember when this happened. After each meal, once short crew arrives, we hold nightly announcements in the Belly Bowl. This is the time when crews can update each other on what is happening in different areas of the Worker community. It is a time when campfire meetings and story time can be announced along with softball games and general announcements. This one evening, three women stood up and called us all out on the practice of miss naming, in this instance, African American women, and named this behaviour for what it is racism. For me, this was a very powerful moment and I remember feeling conflicted. I was excited to have the chance to be so clearly called out for the racism that was taking place just as I was sad to realize that it was happening and was having direct impact on my friends and fellow Workers. It also struck me as a white woman that women of colour, again, had to educate the white women around them about the systemic racism we were performing. A similar stance was taken a few years ago during the Workers’ No Talent Show, a night of no talent fun that happens in the Worker community the Sunday before the front gates open and the Festival officially begins. A group of Asian American women got up on stage to introduce themselves and through their performance brought to light the racism inherent in not being able to distinguish one woman from the others. Their performance was an educational opportunity for all of the Workers present to come face to face with the systemic racism lurking within this radical space. Racism is part of the mess that we all bring with us to the Land. What is
interesting and productive about this space is that it gives women the opportunity to voice their experiences and to call their sisters out on their racist actions. While we are all here in the hopes of building a utopic environment, we bring unseen systemic biases like racism with us into the environment. Space is created and held to allow us to engage with our own experiences and the impact that we might have on the women around us. As shared by Pumpkin:

And it, there’s so many different things, ah, so many different types of people here, that there’s always been clashes. A couple of years, we had, pre-Fest, they’d have community meetings, where we’d all get together, what was it, one year it was learning about racism. And like I said earlier, I feel like I have a different take on racism, from my background. And somebody told me, in this meeting, I couldn’t possibly know what it was like to be a minority, because I was white. And you know, I felt like I did in fact, know what it was like to be a minority, even though I was white. So, some of that stuff, and I got to see a lot of people who actually were very racist, who didn’t understand that their take on being black in America, was somewhat condescending and somewhat inaccurate. And just because they grew up poor and white, in Indiana, Northern Kentucky, Ohio, West Virginia, I mean, it’s sort of that layer of states right above the Mason Dixon line, they didn’t understand that being poor white trash, is not the same as being black . . . And the Women of Colour tent, grew out of some of those conversations. Because there were very few black women who wanted to come here, because this was seen as sort of being, you know, kind of exclusively white thing. [The Festival producers] really went out of her way, to make the Festival accessible to black and minority women. The Women of Colour tent was one of the ways that that happened. (57, Caucasian, poor, 25 years as s Worker, 3 to 5 years as a festiegoer, lesbian, female, monogamous, feminist)

The struggle around racism and others isms at the Festival is an ongoing process. It is something that women of colour face day in and day out both on and off the Festival Land and it is something that white women only have to experience as isolated incidents. Both Bonnie Morrison (1999, p. 156) and Bernice Reagon Johnson (1983, p. 12) equate white women’s experiences of racism to single crisis oriented occurrences. As Reagon Johnson states:

These festival weekends are places of crises and you can do wonderful things in a crisis. I remember when I got to Michigan one year and they were talking about how these women during this thunderstorm held down the stage, right? And it was lightning, and they thought “We’re Big Amazons,” right? That’s crisis and it ain’t that important what you do in a crisis. You go beyond yourself anyway, and you talk about it for years. In
fact, that’s all you pay attention to: when that great day happen. You go wishing everyday was like that. (1983, p. 12)

For those who do not experience racism on a daily basis, it is a privilege to think that it is something that hits the Festival once and a while. It is something quite different to recognize and acknowledge the systemic nature of racism and, as white women and feminists, recognize our role in the power structure. As many women of colour and white theorists have written (hooks, 1984; Martin, 2003; Morrison, 1999; Reagon Johnson, 1983; Rubenstein, 2001) white feminists are attached to the creation of “safe spaces.” This luxury is a distraction from progress as change happens when we are uncomfortable. As bell hooks wrote in 1984:

The fierce negative disagreements that have taken place in feminist circles have led many feminist activists to shun group or individual interaction where there is likely to be disagreement which leads to confrontation. Safety and support have been redefined to mean hanging out in groups where the participants are alike and share similar values . . . . Solidarity is not the same as support. (pp. 63-64)

The Festival has attempted to bridge this gap and has initiated learning opportunities for all women around race and racism. There have been community workshops for Workers and each year there are workshops on anti-racism and anti-oppression within the broader Festival programming. There is also the Women of Color tent and the Women of Color Living Room.
The Women of Color Patio is a space supported by two to three Workers who are available to the Festival community to host conversations about racism and antiracism as they unfold both on and off the Land. However, that space too faces its controversies. As Bo noted:

You know, it's funny, I see that stuff a lot more visible in outside pressure. You know? Like there was a movement this year on Facebook and in some other places, to question the need of the Women of Color tent, seeing that as an apartheid-like, freakish – I'm not sure what the deal there is. I don't know. I still think we need safe space. I still think the experience of Women of Color at festival is different than the experience of, you know, what might be seen as the majority white culture at festival. I love that we have that space. Um, I think a lot of the structures we have in place to try to acknowledge diversity have been around a long time. And that there's not a whole, not necessarily a lot of new stuff. But I will say that the, like, the number of performers of colour, I feel like, over the years has gotten higher. Yeah. And I appreciate that a lot, yeah. (43 year old, 16 Festivals (15 worked), 27 first time, Gal Diner, working class, white, woman, dyke, femme, Mom)

The hope is that these spaces and facilitated dialogues will provide Festival participants, including festigoers, Workers, performers and workshop facilitators, the tools to begin to understand the roots of racism and become innovators for social change both inside and outside the Festival.
Camp Trans: Pushing Boundaries

There are physical boundaries set up around the Land. Along the main county road, there are wire mesh fences that delineate the private and public land, and around the core Festival area there are the natural boundaries of the state forest and the swamps. One of the biggest boundaries is simply known by word of mouth. During the “off” Festival season, the Land is designated as an animal sanctuary. All of the Festival’s gates are left open or put away in storage and local people use the roadways through the Land as thoroughfares the access the state forest, which is a well-known recreational. If you were to go for a walk on the Land in the months leading up to the arrival of the long crew Workers you might run into motorcycles, quads, and other motorized outback vehicles. The locals are aware of the cyclical nature of the Festival. They know when people start moving back onto the Land and stop using the roads until the Land is open again. Word of mouth and the intention of the Festival is one of the biggest and strongest physical boundary markers that it has. An example of this is at the Night Stage, spaces are delineated with stakes, binder twine (the kind used to hold bales of hay together), and flagging tape. These temporary dividers are knee to mid hip high and though you can walk over them women at the Festival respect them as physical boundaries. Another, and more controversial boundary marker is the “womyn-born-womyn” intention of the Festival. Let us explore this facet of space making a bit more deeply.

Who qualifies as a man and who as a woman? Women-only spaces have a particular history among lesbian feminists. Lesbian feminists tend to organize spaces that are for lesbians and, not surprisingly, lesbians have been at the forefront of the tensions around whether trans women are “real” women. These debates have a history that stretches back into the early 1970s with the rise of women-only spaces. The first documented polarization of Male to Female (MtF) transsexual exclusion from lesbian rights organizations took place in 1973 when the lesbian rights organization, Daughters of Bilitis, was unsettled by questions about their vice president’s gender. Beth Elliott, a MtF transsexual was expelled for not being a “woman.” That same year, Elliott, who was also a musician, was performing at the West Coast Lesbian Conference and was shouted off stage by the audience. After this incident, Robin Morgan, a feminist leader and one of the
keynotes at the conference, denounced Elliott and accused male-bodied transsexuals of “leaching off women” (Grishick and Green, p. 137). This fracturing continues amongst feminists and lesbians. In 1977, Olivia Records, a collective that was formed to record, sell and promote women’s music, hired Sandy Stone a MtF transsexual. Some protested this hiring because Stone did not fit their ideals of what it means to be a woman. Then in 1979, Janice Raymond’s book _The Transsexual Empire_ was published and only added to the already heated debates, as it was a book written from a feminist separatist perspective that was clearly anti-transsexual.

Drawing out this history is important so that it should not come as a surprise that the Festival has been and continues to be one of the most contentious women-only spaces within this history. The Festival is open to “women who were born as women, who have lived their entire experience as women, and who identify as women” (statement by Lisa Vogel in 2006). This intention has created a tension, albeit a murky one, that divides who a woman can be considered to be within this space. I say that this intention is murky because there is no “panty check” at the gates and the Festival has a long history of being dedicated to creating a safe space that is an alternative to the sexism, homophobia, misogyny and heterosexism felt outside the Festival. It is open and attempts to celebrate all women with a wide range of gender presentations including bearded women, butch women, androgynous women, femme women and women who generally do not fit the heteronormative gender mould. In 1991, Nancy Jean Burkholder, a transsexual woman, was asked to leave the Festival after she came out as a trans woman at the Festival. Because of the Festival’s “don’t ask don’t tell” policy as long as you do not talk about being transgendered you can attend. In response to this ousting Camp Trans, a protest and educational space was established across the road from the Festival’s front gates in 1995. Camp Trans offers protesters a space to camp, congregate, hold workshops, discussions, and protest the Festival. At the 2006 Festival, an openly transgendered woman bought a ticket at the front gate. Many of the people organizing for trans inclusion thought this was a success and they called for an end to the Festival’s exclusionary “policy.” However, the next day Lisa Vogel issued a statement reaffirming the “womyn-born-womyn” intention of the Festival and stated that any trans women attending the Festival were not respecting
the policy. The following is an excerpt from the press release issued on August 22, 2006 in Hart, Michigan:

Press Release – (August 22, 2006 Hart, Michigan) – Seeking to address information distributed by Camp Trans organizers, Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival founder and producer Lisa Vogel released the following: Since 1976, the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival has been created by and for womyn-born womyn, that is, womyn who were born as and have lived their entire life experience as womyn. Despite claims to the contrary by Camp Trans organizers, the Festival remains a rare and precious space intended for womyn-born womyn.

As feminists, we call upon the trans women’s community to help us maintain womyn only space, including spaces created by and for womyn-born womyn. As sisters in struggle, we call upon the trans women’s community to meditate upon, recognize and respect the differences in our shared experiences and our group identities even as we stand shoulder to shoulder as women, and as members of the greater queer community. We once again ask the trans women’s community to recognize that the need for a separate womyn-born womyn space does not stand at odds with recognizing the larger and beautiful diversity of our shared community. (Vogel, 2006).

This tension and divide still exists at the Festival. Since 2010, there has been active, visible and vocal support for welcoming trans women to the Festival spearheaded by a loosely organized group of Workers and festiegoers called Trans Women Belong Here. This group seeks to welcome all women to the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival and actively supports the attendance of trans women by raising funds for trans women to attend and by providing space at the Festival for trans women to connect with one and other and their supporters. This move has elicited backlash and counter protest from other women, which we will explore in a later chapter. In 2011, I had the opportunity to run a focus group session with a number of Camp Trans activists. They shared with me the importance of Camp Trans and its special location next to the Festival, close to the Front Gates.

CJ: Why is it important to hold Camp Trans right outside of the Festival boundaries?

Laurie: Because I mean, for a long time, they were vocal about a policy against trans women going in and that was the only way we could really be, like, do activist stuff related to it. I think right now, it’s important, we’ve been talking about the future, like, even if, even if trans women can go in and be out, ah, I still think it’s important for there to be kind of a safe space outside of Fest, for
them to go to . . . there’s a lot of transphobic people inside the Fest. (Woman, bisexual, white, Massachusetts)

Jordan: Well, I would want to add first that I that it’s the historical significance. In a lot of ways, what happened in 1991 when Nancy Jean Burkholder was expelled from Mich Fest, in some ways, that kind of was the spark that kind of led to there being a trans movement, I think, in a lot of ways. In some ways, um, no, I’m repeating myself from today’s earlier meeting, but in some ways, this is kind of our Stonewall. Of course, Stonewall was (laugh) was supposed to have been our Stonewall too but um, I think it’s very significant. I um, I, this is only my second year here; I went last year. And I’d always wanted to come here, because I was just so, I thought that was the fact that there was actually people that came and protested this expulsion, of a trans woman, to me, as far as I know, that’s like, one of the first times that trans people have gathered and organized and said, and stood up for themselves and affirmed their dignity as human beings, and that, I think that’s the significance of the geography of having this so close, you know. (Woman, transwoman, lesbian, Scottish, Irish and English decent, Minnesota)

Jessie: It’s significant in terms of reminding people it’s still an issue, that even though they don’t turn away trans women, we certainly aren’t welcome either. There’s, I think it’s like an official intention, for it to be a womyn born womyn space. Um, ah, that’s, you know, the Mich Fest organizers policy. (Genderqueer, trans, woman, queer, white)

Nat: I think another thing about this space is like, it’s been in this, I mean, it’s been in other spaces but basically in this space, in terms of like this square mile or whatever, and I think that for a lot of people who definitely come to be involved for the Mich Fest type stuff, I think also come because they’re trans and they want to be around other trans people, and specifically not just other trans people, they’re trans people who are queer. And um, so I think that for a lot of people, like myself included and a lot of other people, like, this is sort of a place that we would consider, a place that we sort of, in some ways, grew up. And so, just like, the space itself is, like, because of, definitely because of Mich Fest next door, but also because of the history in this space and memories and like, um, just the fact that this is the space where it’s happened, it’s like, that’s important, just as Camp Trans history is like, Camp Trans is its own event. (genderqueer leaning, femme or androgynous, pansexual, white, Illinois)

Alex: It’s like this is our space. We know this space. We’ve been here for a while. (Woman, transwoman, genderqueerish, pansexual, white, Minnesota)

Rudy: Yeah, it’s nice to like, it’s a spot in Michigan, but like, I don’t know, I’ll always know how to get here. I’m like, I think going somewhere else would be a different event. Which wouldn’t necessarily be a bad event, but it wouldn’t be the same thing. (Missing identification information)
Because of history, memories and the importance of making space specifically for a population of women who are marginalized by general society and by the women’s movement more specifically, this space is seen as an important community building aspect of the Festival. This space is significant because of its history within trans political organizing, as it has served as a space for people from across the trans spectrum and their allies to connect with community in a woodland setting. Following this line of thought one participant stated, “I think setting up a trans safe area [in the Festival] would be especially good” (Camp Trans Focus Group). That said, there is still express interest in keeping Camp Trans alive as the Festival continues to admit trans women as festiegoers. The links between the Camp Trans community and the Festival community is strong. Individuals who attend the Festival and Camp Trans, on some level, are looking to find a place of belonging. While walking the “liminal space between Camp Trans and the Festival” Bo shared this story:

Um, let’s see. Let’s see if I can count backwards; seven years, eight years, nine years, probably nine years ago, um, I was lovers with a trans guy, who’s one of the organizers of Camp Trans. And I spent a lot of time moving back and forth between those two spaces, and a lot of time on the road, the liminal space between Camp Trans and the festival. And I was really struck by the way that people on both sides of that road, talked about their experience in the same way, this like, painful, wanting to find a place of belonging kind of way. And, ah, then that topic came up, the, you know, Camp Trans came up in a community meeting. And I stood up in the community meeting and talked about that experience, in front of the whole community, which was terrifying. Which was terrifying. And I, um, but I just felt like, the folks that felt the strongest on both sides of the road, had so, had so many clear alliances; so many similarities that they just weren’t able to see, that I wanted to speak to that. And try to think of myself as being a bit of a bridge across the road. Um, but I was worried that it meant that I wouldn’t get asked back. And then the next day, Lisa, producer of the festival, who I did not know at all at that point. It was like my fifth or sixth year here, and I’m quiet, came up to me, and sat down with me. And I’m like “Oh my god, I’m in so much trouble.” And she was like, “I just wanted to really thank you for sharing your experience of that. I’m sure that was really scary. And I just want you to know that I really appreciated it, and I think it was a great thing for women to hear. (43, white, working class, 14 years as a Worker, 1 year as a festiegoer, woman, dyke, femme, Mom, graduate school)

Throughout my interviews the people I met expressed similar feelings of longing for access to the Festival. The Festival has become a place where many women find new
ways of loving themselves in the body they were born with. Camp Trans, like the Festival, offers trans women and other trans identified individuals, the space to explore comfort to varying degrees in their own bodies. During the Camp Trans focus group, participants shared stories about what it was like to swim naked with other trans identified people. They talked about how it was empowering and freeing in many of the same ways that Festival Workers expressed freedoms in their own bodies, by going topless while working or when in the communal shower areas, while on the Land. There is something important about having the space to feel these kinds of freedoms, which we will explore further in the next chapter.

The very nature of a separatist space is situated upon an understanding of who belongs and who does not belong in those spaces. The conversations above, whether the S/M debates or the exclusion of trans women from the Festival, are two very clear political divisions that came up around who can come onto the Land and who the Land has been developed for and even who a woman can and should be. The power of a separatist space might be located in its exclusionary nature just as its political divisions are fuelled by who is and who is not allowed in the space(s). The border wars will continue to push and pull on this issue, which is inherently relevant to the persistence of the Festival and feminism more generally.

As we have explored in this section, place making happens via embodied and political engagement through conversations, protests, consciousness raising and by identifying the needs of a particular segment of the populations. Some space grew out of the Festival’s needs, such as the stages and the Main Kitchen, while other spaces, such as the Twilight Zone and Camp Trans arose out of community need, controversy, or protest. The discussions around making place for diverse communities are ongoing. These spaces are physically enacted and brought into fruition through the work undertaken by the Workers who build each area up every year and by the women who embody the spaces into being.
Discussion

The Festival can be understood as an amalgamation of multiple spaces that are both contradictory and contested. The Festival is like home and unhomely, it is religious and a party, it is isolated and permeable, is a place of visibility and invisibility.

This chapter has explored the significance of space and culture making practices at the Festival. Through exploration of the physical space and its history, the controversies that have created boundaries and division on the Land, the building up of the Festival through signs, through music, and through ritual have, cumulatively, created a space for life to be performed and lived differently through space. Ritualized performances and the physical moulding of space create feelings of connectedness and possibility for those who work the Festival. Even though the women who congregate at the Festival each year come from different walks of life, they come together to celebrate a week of segregation, of possibilities and of living life according to a different rhythm, one centered on an idealized matriarchy, even if it is only for one week a year. As Alix Dobkin is noted as saying earlier in this chapter, the Festival and women’s music more generally was created because it was needed for survival purposes (as cited in Mosbacher, 2002). The performances that are created and recreated year after year have brought this space into being (Gregson & Rose, 2000, p. 441). Memory is unearthed in material culture—embodied repetitions of acts—by a number of acts ranging from carving out and creating physical boundaries on the Land to singing Amazon Women Rise in the Night Stage bowl with other women. These performances carry out “cultural practices—memory—thoroughly” (Thrift and Dewsbury, 2000, p. 420). As we have explored, the signs, the space layout, the political controversies that helped form the space and the ways in which the space is recreated year after year in ritualized ways are significant aspects of feminist culture making. These are ritualized behaviours through cultural practices and the adornment of space through past and present feminist controversies. Feminist memory has physically shaped this space and continues to do so in the present.
Chapter Four. Embodying the Body: The Making of Queer Worlds

Image 14 Building the Night Stage (2011)
Setting the Stage

I took my shirt off for the first time today. The temperature was nearing 100°F. I’m not really sure what that means in Canadian terms. All I know is that it’s hot and muggy and the sweat keeps dripping from my brow into my eyes. It felt nice to be topless again. As soon as my shirt was off so were the shirts of others. I don’t know who did it first, all I know is that there’s a line up for sunscreen application and I’m going to need some help covering my back so that my skin does not burn. That’s all I need on my first day on the job, a big ol’ sunburn so I can’t take my shirt off again until sometime next week. No thank you! I haven’t been going to the gym to work on my back muscles for nothing. I think I run into the same thing every year when my shirt comes off. It’s a mix of relief and anxiety. I grew up with so much body shame. I remember the summer when I went from a tomboy running around in cut off jean shorts and nothing else—no shoes, no shirt—and turned into an awkward tween whose body was about to give me away as being different from all my guy friends and take all sorts of, what I considered to be, freedoms away from me. I remember that shift so well. It started about the same time that I could no longer invite my best friend, a boy, over for sleepovers. Neither one of us could understand why we couldn’t do what we’d done together for years. It was also the time when my Mom started putting pamphlets that she surely picked up at the local drug store on my bed about puberty. I remember being so fascinated by the body changes that were starting to take hold in my body just as I was upset that the changes I was experiencing were not the same changes that all my guy friends were starting to experience. My young self did not want to be burdened with breasts that would only attract attention from my guy friends or a period that would slow me down once a month. That summer I became so ashamed of my body that I wore jeans and long sleeve shirts all summer long. Even on the hottest and muggiest days. Since I could no longer walk around topless there was obviously something wrong with me and my body. There were so many rules around what I could and couldn’t do and all of my friendships started to change or end because of our genders and the gendered expectations put on us. Every summer, when I first take my shirt off at the Festival, I swear I can feel something inside me heal a little more, grow
stronger and more confident. My female body is no longer the source of so much shame, embarrassment or limitation that it used to because of this place.

Introduction

If you’re a woman, if you’re a person of color, if you’re gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, if you’re a person of size, a person of intelligence, a person of integrity, then you’re considered a minority in this world. It’s really hard to find messages of self-love and support anywhere. If you don’t have self-esteem, you will hesitate to do anything in your life. You will hesitate to report a rape, to vote, to defend yourself when you are discriminated against. You will hesitate to dream. For us to have self-esteem is truly an act of revolution, and our revolution is long overdue.  

- Margaret Cho (Provenza & Dion, 2010)

[The Festival] definitely fills me up in a way that I don’t get the rest of the time. I get to let certain parts of my personality out, and guards down. But . . . it’s imperfect here too.

- Interview with Deluxe

Through the narratives of those I interviewed I came to realize that their relationships and understandings of the Festival were vast and complex. In fact, each story, at times, contradicts another. Some see the Festival as an escape from the outside world. Others see the space as a political configuration of community that could blossom into political action and personal agency in their everyday lives. Some see their participation at the Festival to be individual and self-fashioned (a place of reflection and self-growth). Others expressed their interest in connecting with others like themselves while others see it as a place of learning, play and expression. Many, although not all, express the feeling of safety while on the Land. While all different and/or linked, these perspectives offer insight into the imagined and physical Festival space and the complex importance of participation.

I contend that the Festival affords Workers an opportunity to explore and push past the physical and cultural boundaries that are overlaid onto them by virtue of living in a patriarchal society. Within this chapter, I investigate some of the political aspects of “alternative” embodied practices by unpacking the narratives shared with me by
individuals as active queer world makers. I then examine how these Workers engage in the Festival’s work and life practices as a way to engage with their world differently by actively participating in an intentional queer feminist community.

**Our Bodies Ourselves**

One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.  
- Simone de Beauvoir

As Tina Kazan notes in her article concerned with bodies in the classroom “our bodies are rhetorical— they enact and carry meaning” (2005, p. 393). Our bodies carry meaning and can be read and understood through the ways that we carry ourselves, the postures we take in contextualized situations, how we read body language and how others understand, interpret and view our bodies and body language. Bodies, then “are always embodied in a particular situation, giving further credence to the idea that there is no ‘essential’ body” (Kazan, 2005, p. 393). As theorist N. Katherine Hayles (1999) explains, embodiment “is contextual, enmeshed within the specifics of place, time, physiology, and culture” (p. 166). Susan Bordo (1993) suggests that the body, how we dress, what we eat, and all the rituals that we engage in daily, are all products of our culture. In this way, our bodies themselves are cultural mediums.

Our bodies can be read like roadmaps and used to understand culture and the hierarchies that are inscribed by the concrete movement and language of the body. The body is not only a text from which meaning and culture can be understood it is also a platform from which, according to philosophers such as Foucault and anthropologists such as Pierre Bourdieu, people can be socially controlled. In this regard, we are talking about the small ways in which the body is regulated, through rules (such as table manners and toilet habits) and other trivial routines and practices that are culturally inscribed. This is what Foucault termed the “docile body.” A “docile body” is controlled and regulated by one’s culture (Foucault, 1979, p. 135-69). In Foucault’s genealogical works (*The History of Sexuality* and *Discipline and Punish*) he draws out the importance of practice over belief. Regulation happens not necessarily through ideology but through the organization of
time, space, the movement of our bodies, how we conduct our daily lives and how we are shaped by the historical forms of gender (what it means and looks like to be masculine or feminine), desire, and selfhood. As Susan Bordo (1993) notes, “women, as study after study shows, are spending more time on the management and discipline of our bodies than we have in a long, long time” (p. 309). Women’s bodies become “docile bodies” which are subject to external pressures such as dieting, makeup, dress, and the management of body hair on a daily basis. Inherent in this construct is a feeling that women can never feel good enough in their bodies.

Drawing on Foucault, Sandra Lee Bartky (1988) explores the myriad ways that women are told that their bodies are not good enough. In this work, she examines the disciplinary practices that produce the body that is recognized as being feminine. She argues, “we are born male or female, but not masculine or feminine. Femininity is an artifice, an achievement, a mode of enacting and reenacting received gender norms which surface as so many styles of the flesh” (p. 95). Bartky continues, “there are significant gender differences in gesture, posture, movement, and general bodily comportment: women are more restricted than men in their manner of movement and in their lived spatiality” (p. 97). Women inhabit space in ways that restrict their bodies, confine movement and expression and does not allow women to realize their potential. Women are expected to protect their bodies from the male gaze, are encouraged to avoid eye contact and cast their eyes down and are expected to take up less space in life with their bodies. For example, women are expected to cross their legs, fold their hands in their laps, sit in a way that their toes are pointed straight ahead or to the side. All of these postures are implicitly taught to women so that they take up less space and are less threatening to men (Bartky, 1988, p. 97).

Bartky writes extensively about the ways in which women’s bodies are regulated and controlled through minor movements and actions on a daily basis. Does this boil down to a sexual difference? No, but these disciplinary practices “are part of the process by which the ideal body of femininity—and hence the feminine body—subject—is constructed; in doing this, they produce a ‘practiced and subjected’ body, i.e., a body on which an inferior status has been inscribed” (Bartky, 1988, p. 100). This critical engagement with
femininity does not seem to escape the gaze of women from diverse backgrounds, regardless of race or class. Women in our society are subjected to these feminine ideals and the means by which they obtain them differs. Within the patriarchal regime that makes up North American culture, women must make themselves:

object and prey for the man: it is for him that these eyes are limpid pools, this cheek baby-smooth. In contemporary patriarchal culture, a panoptical male connoisseur resides within the consciousness of most women: they stand perpetually before his gaze and under his judgment. Woman lives her body as seen by another, by an anonymous patriarchal Other. (Bartkey, 1988, p. 101)

This gaze may be particularly hurtful to lesbian and queer women who do not meet these ideals and who face pressure from people in their lives to conform. Women whose bodies and bodily representations do not fit the mould often face ridicule about their hairstyle, their weight, their body hair (including their facial hair), and their style of dress.

The Festival allows women time and space to develop more “authentic” and empowering relationships with their bodies. There is more room for experimentation but who can experiment and how this experimentation can be enacted is dictated by society and cultural practices. In many ways, the Festival opens space for women to experience their world in both positive and productive ways. In ways that are framed within a utopian discourse at the Festival. What are the assumptions and pieces that seep into this “utopic” vision? Can we really disengage from hetero-patriarchal notions of gender when we attempt to leave larger patriarchal society to create something more “utopic?” How do we value or de-value different gender presentations and embodiments, and what are the mechanisms behind these evaluations? This section explores the facets of embodiment and performance theory discusses they play out at the Festival.

“Safe Space”: Walking in the Woods Alone Late at Night

There is something to be said about walking alone at night without fear. Without fear that someone is going to grab you in the dark and do inexplicably awful things to you. The Land is one of the only places that I feel comfortable walking alone at night. Some nights I like see if I can walk through the woods to my tent without a flashlight. Darkness in this context actually gives me a sense of safety at times. Some nights I might skirt the
periphery of a party or dance or concert to see if I know anyone in the crowd. To gauge how social I feel and if I want to join in or sit back and watch. It is nice to have the option. Safety here means different things to different people.

The notion of separatist safe spaces came about with the rise of identity politics in North America in the 1960s and 70s. Women’s separatism was one of the radical forms of feminism that came about at this time and included the black power movement and consciousness-raising feminist women only spaces. In these spaces, women gathered to share their experiences with each other as women living in a patriarchal society. These spaces allowed women opportunities to share stories and to discover common experiences as a way to organize for social and political change. Separatism during the second wave of feminism took a variety of forms, from consciousness-raising groups to intentional communities that practiced separatism on a daily basis by living and working on women only lands. Spaces like those created at the Festival provide women, like Tallulah, a place where she can trust people. Here she shares:

I also trust here, more than I do in the world. I trust. You can’t, in the real world, or the outside world, or off the Land, leave your laptop, your wallet, with thousands of dollars in it, and your car keys in the middle of a field and come back three days later and find that. You genuinely, and trust, when someone says something, that they’re telling the truth. Um, you trust that your coworkers are doing their job and if they’re gone for a minute, it’s because they’re taking care of something and coming back. In the outside world, people are divisive, and they lie. And I’m not saying none of that ever happens here, but ninety eight percent of the time, you can trust what a woman is saying to you is the truth, and you can trust your space and your body and your belongings. Yeah, trust. (33, Native American and Caucasian, working class, 10 years as a Worker, queer, lesbian, dyke, femme, cisgendered female, some college)

The collective who started the Festival had originally envisioned it as a place that would be open to men, however, once it was decided that the attendees would be camping and living together for the entire festival the group was split on the question of hosting a women-only event. While some organizers wanted to have a festival that was open to everyone the more vocal and involved organizers insisted that the Festival be women-only. As Boo Price stated in an interview with Bonnie Morris, when the internal conflict arose around hosting a male inclusive or women-only event, “it can be mixed if it’s one
day. If it’s over the weekend and people are going to be sleeping out, it has to be women only, or we won’t be there” (as cited in Morris, 1999, p. 33). The collective members who were most vocal moved forward to produce a women only event and those who wanted it to be mixed left.

Narratives shared with me during my research noted the significance of the Festival as a safe space that allowed for certain freedoms unavailable to these individuals when they are not at the Festival. The sense of safety was noted in the ways that people dressed, the degrees to which someone might walk around unclothed and the playfulness attached to these “freedoms.” As Tallulah noted:

I definitely dress more scantily clad here than I do other places. I feel very safe here. But you know, there are just some things, like it would attract too much attention I think, unwanted attention in the outside world . . . . From men. Yeah. I don’t ever feel aggressive threatened or catcalled, or in danger, for anything here. I could walk completely naked or I could be covered head to toe. Whereas if I were to do that in the world, I wouldn’t make it down a street, without being put in an uncomfortable situation. (33, Native American and Caucasian, working class, 10 years as a Worker, queer, lesbian, dyke, femme, cisgendered female, some college)

In their discussion about how women feel disempowered and limited in patriarchal space, feminist geographers Liz Bondi and Joyce Davidson (2005) claim:

One explanation for this constricted sense of spatiality relates to women’s heightened awareness of embodiment, associated with a sense of being the object of other people’s (potentially evaluative) gaze that creates and strengthens the notion that space is not our own. (2005, p. 21)

That is to say, that heteronormative culture places a lot of pressure on how a woman should look and behave and some women find themselves constantly aware of and uncomfortable in their bodies. Being objectified and not feeling safe in everyday places makes women feel like space does not belong to them. The Festival attempts to provide women with an opportunity to explore how they move in their bodies and what they might do differently because of the possibilities that are available to them while they are at the Festival. As Dottie stated:

Um, pieces that, things that remind me of here. Hmm. (laugh) Um, okay, well, first of all, any time I see anybody wearing anything that absolutely doesn’t match ever, (laugh) and is ridiculous, like, if I see some woman walking down the street and I know she has just like, the biggest, she’s got
the biggest smile on her face, but she's wearing some ridiculousness, that doesn't make any sense at all, it reminds me of here ... . This is one of the only places where you can get away with wearing underwear as an outfit. 
(33, Caucasian, half Jewish, lower middle class, 5 years as a Worker, 7 years as a festiegoer, queer, femme, fag hag, high school)

Being in this space, free from men allows women to perform in ways that are empowering and self-fulfilling. Instead of being second class citizens in a world that privileges men, women are equal and have the opportunity to celebrate their experiences and be in an environment that allows them to perform their personal narratives, their vulnerabilities, their strengths—through their bodies.

_I hope that Demming, one of our accessible Shuttle buses, doesn’t come along anytime soon. The Night Stage is aglow with stage lights, the music is moving through us, and the Night Stage bowl is full of moving bodies dancing around to Men12. This is one of two Night Stage performances that I was really looking forward to catch this year. Oh well, what can you do as the crew Coordinator when a crewmember has to leave the Land to take care of family business. I don’t mind working though, especially when I get to catch bits and pieces of the concert. The next song comes on and the group starts singing “Take your shirt off.” JD Sampson, a well-known feminist artist and musician takes their shirt off mid-way through the song. This is a powerful act for me to witness as someone whose identity and gender presentation does not meet the norm of what it means to be a woman in our society._

Being able to work and play with no shirt on at the Festival is one of the things that is celebrated by many. It is a freedom that many of us are not able to participate in when we are not at the Festival in our everyday lives. As Dottie so eloquently puts it:

_I don’t usually get to have my boobs out, all the time. (laugh) In regular life. So I try to do that. Cause that’s very special here; that we can do that; that we can be free, completely free and completely naked and completely like, proud of our bodies and whatever. And have fun with it too. (33,

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12 A Brooklyn based art/performance group that speaks/sings on such issues as trans awareness, sexual compromise, wartime politics and liberty through stage shows and lyrics.
Even I have enjoyed my own time with my shirt off, feeling the sun and light summer breeze on my skin as I build a stage or drive a tractor. I look forward to taking my shirt off to work every year. I can feel my skin tingle as the temperature rises in anticipation. My spine lengthens and strengthens the first time I take my shirt off and I feel the sun hit my skin and invite others to see me. It’s like I’m finally able to let go of all the crap that’s put on me in the outside world. I get to be me, in my skin, feel sexy, cared for and wanted by people I actually want that kind of attention from. I feel safe here with my shirt off. No one is going to objectify me in a non-consensual way or at least in a way that I can’t easily manage. I look forward to this feeling each year. It’s a freedom I crave at home in my yard, at my friends’ houses, when I’m working on a community project. Once you feel this freedom, it’s hard to go back.

Women at the Festival build the physical spaces that allow their values and memories to integrate in the Worker community. While it is a temporary space, the Workers, producers, festiegoers and performers bring this space, this place, into being. As Jonathan Z. Smith (1987) writes “it is the relationship to the human body, and our experience of it, that orients us in space, that confers meaning to place. Human beings are not placed, they bring place into being” (p. 26-28). In creating this space through their philosophies and bodies these women are creating something that lives outside of the hetero-patriarchy that they inhabit the rest of the year. Once the Workers begin to build this space, and transform it into the Festival, they create a place where the norms shift and new ones come into being. The women who participate find new ways to move and be in their bodies. They are able to shed a layer of “skin” and experience different levels of dress and undress. They are able to make space to play and experiment and let their guards down. There is a collective memory attached to the Festival that the Land belongs to women and on this Land, women can be “safe.”

When men come onto the Land women always escort them. Pre and post Festival, women on crew escort transport truck drivers and the “tent guys” on the Land. They will work with these men to help them accomplish their jobs and when they drive them in they honk.
their car horns to let all the Workers know that there are “men on the Land.” Once the men are on the Land and working the Festival’s crews let everyone know that there are men working in particular areas by putting up the sign of a red t-shirt that is screwed to a stake and, most times, leaning up against a chair that’s placed in the walkway. This sign is used to let everyone who is walking into the area know that there are “men on the Land” and that they are expected to put their shirts on. Women are asked to put their shirts on for the safety of all the women on the Land, for the comfort of the men who are coming onto the Land and for the protection of the Festival as it is the law in the State of Michigan that women wear a shirt in outdoor spaces. During the Festival, the only men who come onto the Land are the “Pumper Truck guys” who drive in to clean out the Porta Potties. This crew of men works alongside the Sano Crew, a Festival Crew, to clean out the porta potties each night after the Night Stage concerts. The Sano Crew works with the Porta Potty cleaning crew to navigate the busy Festival roadway and Porta Potty areas to make sure that everyone feels as comfortable as possible and that everything runs smoothly. Because of all of these added precautions, the Festival feels like a safe place for many.

As Ann Cvetkovich (2003) states the Festival is a place “where the concept of safe space is integral to the notion of ‘womyn’s land’ as a sanctuary” (p. 83). These feelings of safety are due to their experience of being in a women-only space. Being here allows women the chance to walk alone at night without the fear of being verbally or physically assaulted by men. Kya Ogyn (2003) recounts her first experience at the Festival as a festiegoer in an article she wrote for On Our Backs. In this passage, she describes walking alone on a pathway at the Festival late one evening:

Part way I heard behind me the footsteps of someone walking quickly. I gripped my flashlight and started to turn to see who was coming when I realized that whoever it was, she was a womon. I remember feeling an incredible sense of relief and relaxation but even more than that, I was surprised. I was surprised because I had not known that I was frightened. I had lived both in cities and in the country and I was used to being out at night on my own, going where I wanted, and I would have said I was careful but certainly not afraid. I think my fear and the reason for it were so constant that I could not be aware of it until it was removed. (Ogyn, 2003)
It is telling that Ogyn was not aware of feeling safety on the Land and unsafe in her everyday life until she was confronted with it at the Festival. The Festival is known for providing women with this type of space. It is a defining characteristic and it is important to explore why women at the Festival feel this sense of safety. It seems to be because of the absence of men on the Land with the absence of harassment and sexual assault. Many feminists have explored the ways in which heteronormative patriarchal space is not safe for women (see Bondi and Davidson 2005, Landes, 1995). When women disengage from those types of spaces and exclude men from participating, it is logical to assume that women should be able to shake the fears that have arisen due to sexism, heterosexism and patriarchy. Here, on the Land, you might do something differently, something you wouldn’t dare to do in your everyday life, as Vanna stated:

Well, like you might walk to the shower in your underwear. Which is walking through an area that is public. You’re basically walking through a public dining hall for instance. (36, Caucasian, blue collar, 29 years as a Worker, female, bisexual, lesbian, mother, Master’s degree)

Since the 1970s, there has been a growing body of research compiled by feminist researchers on intimate violence within heterosexual relationships (Browne, 1987; Koss et al, 1994; McKenna & Hamelin, 2002). Within these communities, there is a well-accepted understanding of violence within heterosexual relationships based on male privilege and power in hetero-normative society. This analysis does not easily translate into an analysis of violence within lesbian relationships and this examination of violence is not often the focus of investigation within relationships on the Land. Since the mid-1980s there has been increased interest in exploring violence within lesbian communities (Kaschak, 2001; Lie & Gentlewarrier, 1991; Ristock, 2002). As Ellyn Kaschak (2001) notes,

Lesbian relationships are directly influenced by other societal power inequities that impact all citizens, including sexism, and those based in class, race, ethnic, and economic inequality, as well as interpersonal differences in power. (2001, p. 4)

Therefore, while violence within lesbian relationships may be, in some senses, invisible on the Land, it appears that the absence of men at the Festival is one argument that can be used to partially explain this atmosphere of safety. The creation of women only space and the ongoing shaping of guidelines around how the Festival community should operate are
two other components that can help us understand the notion of safety on the Land. As noted above, women participate in the patriarchal society outside of the Festival, so being a woman does not automatically make a person nonviolent; we all bring layers of normative society with us onto the Land. Although women might be nonviolent in theory when it comes to conscious practice it takes time to engage with one’s own homophobia, heterosexism, racism, and so on, to coexist consciously and peacefully with others.

Let us take another look at Ann Cvetkovich’s (2002) notion of “safe space.” At the Festival, safe space is an “integral notion of ‘womyn’s land’ as a sanctuary” and is also a “highly contested and constantly negotiated terrain ‘on the land’, emerging around debates” (p. 87) such as separate spaces for women of colour, BDSM space, and the involvement and location of boy children on the Land, to name a few. As I explored in the previous chapter, these tensions spurred on the creation of new specifically designated spaces on the Land just as it continues to push further dialogue and change within the Festival’s community. Cvetkovich (2002) urges us to consider the power behind the notion of safe spaces,

in its double status as the name for both a space free of conflict and a space in which conflict and anger can emerge as a necessary component of psychic resolution. The controversies at the Michigan festival, which is dedicated to being a concrete staging ground for the meaning of safe space, indicate the unpredictable effects of the coexistence of conflict and safety. Even a question such as “Do I feel safe? can be hard to answer.” (p. 87)

The idea then is that the debates and tensions that arise both at the Festival and outside the Festival, and the pain and struggle that arises when safe spaces are constituted “should be considered signs of success rather than failure” (Cvetkovich, 2002, p .87). These struggles are key aspects of transformation and change and this is a major piece of feminist analysis, which I explore further in the next section of this dissertation.

**Butch Is As Butch Does: The Embodiment of Female Masculinity**

The embodiment of butch identities emerged from the narratives of my dissertation as a of the persistent point of discussion point. There were conversations around the celebration of butch and more masculine identities just as there were about divisions in
the butch and femme identities of the Worker culture. This next section explores some of these narratives as they relate to gendered and sexed embodiment and place making at the Festival.

Gail Rubin (1992) has noted that the term “butch” is one of the few words that can be used to refer to a spectrum of masculine gendered performance and, in her words, “carries a heavy, undifferentiated load” (p. 468). There is a rich and growing history attached to being butch in lesbian subcultures. Over the last sixty-five years both butch and femme identity markers have experienced varying degrees of recognition and dismissal within lesbian and lesbian feminist communities. Looking back at the 1950s and 1960s there are numerous books written by feminists (Faderman, 1991; Kennedy, 1993) that explore the lives of lesbian and butch/femme identities throughout the twentieth century. Young working-class lesbians largely took up butch or femme roles within this time period. As part of her research, Lillian Faderman (1991) interviewed women who were butch identified at this time. A woman that she interviewed for her research observed, “the problem was that the only models we had for our relationships were those of the traditional female-male [roles] and we were too busy trying to survive in a hostile world to have time to create new roles for ourselves” (as cited in Faderman, p. 167). In this way, butch and femme identities could be understood as a reproduction and embodiment of heterosexual norms as there were no comparable “homosexual” role models to draw upon at the time. Butch and femme roles came to have deeply meaningful significance within the young working-class lesbian subcultures in the United States. These roles operated as an indicator of membership and within these social dynamics created a sense of belonging and visibility for these young women. As Faderman notes, “only those who understood the roles and the rules attendant upon them really belonged” (1991, p. 167). Those who did not “pick” a clear role found it difficult to find a place within this subculture as “the possibility of recognizing one another was essential for the building of a distinct culture and identity” (Kennedy and Davis, 1993, p 153).

Lesbian historians, such as Joan Nestle and Judy Grahn, suggest that butch and femme roles of the 1950s and 60s were not imitations of heterosexual constructs but were unique characteristics associated with these women and their culture. Instead of being
based on the social and sexual models that these women grew up with, they were based on the “innate natural drives” of these women (p. 29). Grahn argues that butches were not reproducing male behaviour but were instead attempting to indicate, “here is another way of being a woman,” and that what they had access to in lesbian subcultures was space to learn how to “imitate dykes, not men” (1984, p. 30-31). These women, then, chose to be butch because of “their desire to be free from the awful limitations of femaleness” (Faderman, 1991, p. 172). They were fully aware that men had all the status and power in society and determined that one way for them to obtain a semblance of status and power was to emulate those who had it.

The 1960s and 1970s were defined by a lesbian feminist subculture that adhered to a politic of unisex dress and appearance. As Jill Dolan (1990) noted:

The sexual lesbian who engaged in butch behavior as a subcultural resistance to the dominant culture’s gender and sexual ideology was silenced by feminism, her transgressive sexual desire “femininized” through the woman-identification that neatly elided active sexuality as a precondition for lesbianism. (Dolan, 1990, p. 49)

While this elision was expected in the “popular” lesbian feminist subculture at that time, butch and femme identities never lost their grounding in working-class lesbian subculture. For an example of the persistence of butch identity over time, let us look to Lily Burana’s interview with Lynn Breedlove, the head of the dyke punk band Tribe 8, in an article titled “Combat Boots and Helium Heels” (1994). In this article, Breedlove talks about what it means to draw on butch and a more masculine gender identity:

As a child, if you look around and see that all the people who are having fun and who have all the power are boys, you want to be a boy. So you try to imitate them in every way, even though you learn to hate them cuz they never accept you as one of them. But you try to do everything they do—piss standing up. Play football, fuck but not get fucked, or whatever it is. So I guess when you grow up you’re still in that mode. (as cited in Burana, pp. 215-16)

There is an ongoing and persistent butch identity, one that survived the lesbian feminist uprising of the 1970s still present today (Coyote & Sharman, 2011; Nestle, 1992).

Butch and femme are two of many identities that are embodied, performed and celebrated on the Land. Within the Worker community, as some of those interviewed shared when
they answered a question about what their experiences were with political strife on the Land, a number of interviewees shared stories of their experience as it relates to a divide between butches and femmes within the Worker community. As Harriet stated:

The first thing that came to my mind, is the butches and femmes kind of deal and how sexism kind of wheedles its way in. That’s the biggest thing I think I’ve experienced, like, personally. You know? And it’s a’ big deal to me. You know? Like, it’s kind of cutting, like a knife. Really, when it feels as though women on this Land don’t think that I am, I’m not capable or I can’t do something because of the way that I look or the way that I dress. It’s petty. It feels so intense here . . . Like, here, here we feel that here? You know? Like, it just seems even more painful. But I think that’s, I think there’s a lot of that, just, you know, from what I see, about who works in what areas. You know, like more femmes working in Galz, and more butches working in carpentry and LACE. You know? It’s upsetting, but it’s also kind of understandable, if that’s the way a lot of, like social systems work. You know? It’s like, it’s a lot of, it’s the language of us. It’s not that, we’re not going to come to the Land and totally drop what we’ve grown up with or learned, or— So I get it. You know? But I can get really snarky, I think because it affects me so personally if someone were to, or does, or has said something to me in the past, I get pretty snarky about it. (28, white, middle class, 7 years as a Worker, 2 years as a Crafts Women, female, lesbian and high school)

Another way in which a butch-femme divide presents on the Land is related to who embodies leadership roles on the crews. As Bo noted:

In the moment, one of the things on the top of my mind would be the ongoing struggle for, maybe not parity, maybe not diversity, but maybe a broad range of what leadership looks like here. You know? A woman on my crew pointed out to me the leadership disparity in people who present at traditionally feminine versus people who present as more masculine. And it was interesting; it wasn’t something that I’d given a whole lot of thought to. It makes me want to re-examine some of my more romantic leanings about enjoying the fact that there’s a lot more butch women than fem women here. (laugh) You know? Like, what that means about how we pass on skills, and how we mentor and lead. (43, white, working class, 14 years as a Worker, 1 year as a festiegoer, woman, dyke, femme, Mom, graduate school)

Butch and femme identities and roles have been a source of controversy within the feminist and lesbian feminist movements since the 1970s. The premise on which this controversy rests is one that considers masculinity and males as the source of violence, sexual assault, and exploitation and the butch and femme constructs, well the butch
construct more specifically, as an identity that has been scorned because of its perceived imitation of the heteronormative patriarchal system of gender (Kennedy & Davis, 1993, pp. 152-153). That said, some feminist historians (Simone de Beauvoir, 1953; Joan Nestle, 1981; Madeline Davis and Elizabeth L. Kennedy, 1993) argue that while “butch-fem culture unquestionably drew on elements of the patriarchal gender system . . . it also transformed them” (Kennedy & Davis, 1993, p. 153). Simplistically put, the crux of this transformation rests on the notion that butch women were masculine and not men.

Femme women were attracted to these butches and this visual image—of butch and femme couples—developed a cultural recognition for lesbian women at the time. The possibility of this visual identification meant that a distinct culture and identity could be built and solidified (Kennedy & Davis, p. 153). These arguments, framed by historians writing in the 1990s and 2000s still underpin the arguments woven into some lesbian feminist analysis of butch and queer masculine identities.

Both butch and femme are embodied identities that can be seen as subject positions. Contemporary feminist and queer theory discourses have allowed for a shift in gaze that problematizes the status of these identities and open up possibilities for theorists to explore the ways that identities are theorized as shifting, contingent and positioned by discursive structures instead of as having fixed individual characteristics. These discourses have established butch and femme identities as being both structured by and moving outside of normative heterosexuality (Halberstam, 1998). Poststructuralists and queer theorists have opened up new space to explore gender, sexual identity, and how they relate to heterosexuality (Butler, 1990; Case, 1993). Instead of seeing these identities as imitations, butch and femme identities have been reclaimed and theorized as queer, transgressive, and as examples of gender embodied and performed.

While butch and femme identities may offer forms of transgressive gender performances, they may also frame dominant discursive formations. Of the narratives shared by primarily femme identified Workers about the butch and femme division of work at the Festival an interesting theme came to light: butch women were most often seen as taking on the leadership roles and were more often part of the physical hard labour force on
crews such as LACE and Carpentry, while femme identified women were on child care and kitchen crews. As Tallulah shared:

Personally, I have strife with other women when it comes to you know, butch/femme capabilities and being a pink collar Worker, being a childcare Worker on the Land for a long time, when that work wasn’t valued as equal to say a LACE or a CARPS crew. You know? They’re hammering all day, All you’re doing is playing with children . . . . You know? That kind of divisive conversation happened a lot on the Land. You know, I think we all kind of dealt with it by speaking up in community meetings, which is the place where I’ve always seen the most change . . . . And just like in the real world, we all bring in everything that comes with us; we bring it here. (33, Native American and Caucasian, working class, 10 years as a Worker, queer, lesbian, dyke, femme, cisgendered female, some college)

By alluding to the “real world” and how “we all bring in everything that comes with us; we bring it here,” this interviewee speaks to the idea that while we are attempting to create a safe space based on utopic feminist values we are never the less socialized beings from an already established culture. Even when we attempt to disrupt and displace the power relations we grew up in (such as racism, sexism, classism, etc), they follow us wherever we go. The Festival offers Workers and festigoers opportunities, through workshops and community meetings, to critically engage with unrecognized behaviours and the privileges and assumptions that influence all of our lives, both on and off the Land.

In contrast to some of these narratives, I would like to draw on an excerpt shared at Ann Cvetkovich and Selena Wahn’s roundtable discussion with Workers at the Festival. SW, one of the roundtable participants, is quoted as saying:

I just want to clarify something— the crews don’t pan out such that people who work in the Belly Bowl or who cook are the femmes and the people who do physical labor are butches. The crews are all mixed. Also, I can’t support the terms butch and femme as the only ones used to account for all the varieties and calibrations of dyke masculinities and femininities. (as cited in Cvetkovich and Wahn, 2006, p. 138)

It is true that the crews generally do not work out such that women who are perceived of as femme work as cooks and child care providers and that butches do all the physical labour. On the contrary, it is just as likely to see a woman who is femme identified
driving a tent stake into the ground with a sledgehammer as it is to see a butch identified women cooking up a storm in Galz. What I think is particularly interesting about the narratives shared is the deeper and, most likely, systemic ways in which gender is performed on crews and the ways in which some women’s experiences or gender presentations might inhibit the skills they learn and positions they are mentored into. That said, we all bring our own experiences and backgrounds with us to the Festival. Although we might like to, we cannot just check our “baggage” at the front gate. As Harriet stated:

I just notice things like getting called “baby” or “honey” or asking if I need help. That’s kind of like, really hurtful. And, but it’s funny, because I don’t mind being called baby or honey, like, it’s not, it's like I get that that is coming from a good place and it's coming from a sweet and loving places and honestly, it's like, it’s mostly about reaching out and helping, (laugh) your sisters. You know? Like, I ask people if they need help. But for some reason I, I take it personally. And I can’t help but think, ‘Oh, there’s some shit attached to that. That’s like, I get talked to like I’m a toddler. Or that, especially because I don’t know much about carpentry. You know? Ah, so asking for help is kind of hard, because it’s like I’m admitting, (laugh) like, I’m femme. I don’t know. You know? I'm kind of the same, I'm getting caught up in the same stuff, you know? (28, white, middle class, 7 years as a Worker, 2 years as a Crafts Women, female, lesbian and high school)

I think that BA, another one of Cvetkovich and Wahn’s roundtable discussion participants, framed it well when she said:

Women-only space is another issue. Here’s a group of women who are committed to exploring every facet of what it could possibly mean to be a woman in all of its glory and all of its negativity, in all of its butchness and maleness and arrogance and femmeness and high heels and lipstick and all of its androgyny, in its communism and bourgie-ness. It’s about looking at what it means to be a woman. (as cited in Cvetkovich and Wahn, 2006, p. 147)

The Festival is a place that opens up space for women to explore what it can possibly mean to be a woman. To push boundaries and tease out the harder edges of the identities and roles they are playing. I think what is important to remember is that the community does open up space for these experiences and observations to be shared and many of the Workers look for ways to critically engage with their own behaviours, assumptions and privileges both in and outside of this place.
Celebration of Butch: Let’s Strut!

The Festival is a place that celebrates bearded women, women of all sizes, women of different abilities, women of different colours, women who dress in loincloths, sarongs, three-piece suits, sailor uniforms, leather, ballroom gowns and more. Different opportunities arise during the week of the Festival to celebrate the diversity of the different communities of women who gather on the Land. During Opening Ceremonies women from all over the world welcome the entire audience in different languages, including sign language. There is the Femme Parade, the Butch Strut, and the Gaia Girl Parade. There are parties during the Festival such as the Uniform Party and before and after the Festival there may be themed crew parties. One of my favourite parties is the post-Festival LACE Crew party. LACE holds an annual theme party and the theme is never determined until after the Festival. One year the crew decided to throw a super hero themed party, another year the crew built a runway that allowed individuals to strut their stuff and perform their character’s persona. That year, one person dressed up as a daredevil and performed a daredevil feat and another came on stage as a bear who mauled their trainer. These events allow individuals to dress up and play in a myriad of different ways.

One of the Festival’s now firmly established identity based celebrations is the Butch Strut. On the day of the Butch Strut in 2011, all of the butches who joined the Strut met at Triangle to show off their outfits, some of which were conceptualized months before the day, flirt with others, get a shoe shine before the strut began, and to put the finishing touches on their outfits. There is a celebratory atmosphere with music playing and lots of smiles and laughter. Before the Strut commenced one young butch sang a re-written version of the United States national anthem, which was simultaneously interpreted in sign language.

And how proudly she stands with a beer in one hand
Leather no braw and blue jeans
Combat boots as she leans
Into the wall of the bar
She did not come here in a car
But on a red and black Harley
She’s a butch not girly
She’s checking out the scene
All you kings and those queens
Well she buys a drink for the girls
She lights up the smoker
Well she came here alone
But she’ll be taking someone home

- Butch Anthem, author unknown

After the song, the Strut started and was led by a line of drummers who set the rhythm of the Strut down Lois Lane, through Downtown and into the Main Kitchen. All along the route there are women lined up to cheer the butches on, ask for kisses and flirt. These women make space to celebrate their identities, feel sexy in their own skin, and play with the many ways that butch as an identity can be embodied. Represented in the Strut were “sissy butches,” leather dykes, topless dykes, women dressed as firefighters, wrestlers in spandex, butches in suits, all celebrating what it means to be butch to them. The Butch Strut and the Femme Parade are performative. They are places where women have the chance to play with their gender identities or make use of the time to try on a new identity. They are also created spaces developed to debunk patriarchal beauty standards and celebrate diverse sexualities and attractions.

These cultural events are fun, solidify identity, develop a sense of belonging and give women a place to celebrate and redefine what bodies can do and can look like. In the Butch Strut there were mobile young women strutting beside women using motorized wheelchairs. All of these women were not only pushing the boundaries of North American beauty standards they were also serving as role models for others.

One of the pieces of butch identity that I would like to highlight is that while not all butch identified individuals necessarily identify with masculinity there is a persistent relation between their gender performance and larger, cultural scripts of gender. As Judith Butler (1990) wrote in:

The “I” who would oppose its construction is always in some sense drawing from the construction to articulate its opposition, further, the “I” draws what is called its agency in part through being implicated in the very relations of power that it seeks to oppose. To be implicated in the
relations of power, indeed, enabled by the relations of power that “I” opposes is not, as a consequence, to be reducible to their existing forms. (p. 123)

Much like drag kings performing masculine gender roles on stage; the butches who participate in the Butch Strut are doing much the same. In many ways, these butches are drawing attention to the ironies of social sexual performances. Much like the drag kings found in the cities, in rural Michigan, the Butch Strut gives these women a chance to try on new and personify their existing butch/masculine personas. They offer parodies of lesbian signifying systems, interact with an audience of admirers along Lois Lane who have the opportunity to witness their performances, and engage with “lesbian drag in its proximity to larger technologies of heterosexuality” (Case, 1993; Dolan, 1988; Noble, 2006, p. 59).

**Troubling Gender: Gender Trouble**

One of the positive aspects of creating a women only space and the sense of “safe space” and acceptance that goes with it is also one of its challenges. This challenge is the boundary making, questioning and exclusion of others. As we explored earlier, narratives were shared about feelings of safety, celebration and acceptance. What follows are the more difficult narratives that speak to the experience of feeling “unsafe,” unwelcome and un-wanted on the Land.

The following letter was published in the US based *Lesbian Connections* magazine:

> From Lesbian Connections (Jan/Feb 2013): My baby is so butch . . . . How butch? So butch that every year at the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival she is harassed by our sisters, and she is not the only one.

> The current fest environment is hostile for any womon who does not fit into a neat gender stereotype. What is it about our culture that makes it okay to pass judgment on our sisters? My baby bleeds for festival, and she needs festival every bit as much as you do. The world is an unsafe place for butch womyn, (all womyn for that matter), and festival is the one place where she used to be able to go and not have her sex (because this isn’t about gender) questioned.”

> My baby is a beautiful bearded cunted creature. She’s never taken “T” (not that it’s any of your business), and she’s spent a lifetime avoiding doctors who want to “fix” her “hormonal imbalance.” There is nothing
wrong with her, but there is something significantly wrong with the way she (and womyn like her) are treated at fest.

It is heartbreaking to watch both sides of the argument take aim: Trans Women Belong Here supporters are upset when she says she believes in womyn-only space, and then she is made to feel unwelcome in it by our sisters who have a narrow definition of what a womon is and can be.

While it was nice this year to not have anyone yell “man on the land” at her—she was still harassed in crafts, on the road, at night stage, and even at our own campsite (by a photographer who wouldn’t take no for an answer when my baby said that she didn’t want to be on a “wanted” poster. Her trying to guilt trip of “Don’t you trust your sisters?” was ironic considering the hostility and loathing that our “sisters” often display).

Womyn come in all shapes and sizes. I urge the sisters who have forgotten that simple fact to smile before you scowl, and if you have a question, step forward and ask.

Give a sister a chance—wouldn’t you want the same?

- J.A, Marcellus, MI

The roots of the experiences noted in this letter are in relation to the readability of bodies and how they embody what it means to be a woman on the Land. While the Festival sets out to celebrate the diversity that women bring to the Land not all aspects of a women’s identities may be celebrated especially if she falls outside of what a women is expected to look like, walk like, sound like and act like. What is happening in these moments of mis-readability, I argue, can be understood within the context of what Jack Halberstam (1998) termed “Butch/FTM Border Wars.”

Masculinity has a history of being the primary signifier of lesbian desire and embodiment since the mid-1990s. According to Halberstam (1998), “the places where the divisions between butch and FTM become blurry has everything to do with embodiment” (p. 300). The rise of the transgender movement and identities has made room for people to self-select the degree to which they want to be involved with the medical system, through hormone replacement therapy and surgery. Some who take hormones might not take on transgender identifications while someone who self-identifies as transgender might not take hormones or pursue surgeries. In this

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13 FtM or female-to-male is a term used by a transgender or transsexual person who was assigned female at birth but identifies as a man.
way “the labels butch and transsexual mark yet another gender fiction, the fiction of clear distinctions between categories” (Halberstam, 1998, p. 300). This, I argue, has created “gender trouble” within the Festival’s community. Some bodies are policed and patrolled while others go unseen. Some transsexual bodies might present as gender ambiguous, while some butches might pass as men, and there might be others who do not fit the butch and transsexual moulds at all.

In her essay on the wide range of butchness in society, Gayle Rubin (1992) states “butches vary in how they relate to their female bodies” (p. 470). She goes on to write “forms of masculinity are molded by experiences and expectations of class, race, ethnicity, religion, occupation, age, subculture, and individual personality” (p. 470). The tension between butches and FTM’s, which she terms “frontier fears,” are quite similar to Halberstam’s “border wars,” and notes that the borders between these identifications are permeable in part because “no system of classification can successfully catalogue or explain the infinite vagaries of human diversity” (p. 473). From this perspective, this diversity (in sexuality, gender and in other identities) is not only political in nature it is the logical response to the wide breadth of genders and masculinities that we produce.

The Wanted: Invisible Women/Females of Uncommon Beauty14 project was spearheaded by Andi Roberts, a photographer, who was inspired to pull together a collection of images of women at the Festival. The focus of the project is to bring attention to women who were assigned female at birth, identify as women, and often feel invisible in society as women due to the “border wars” noted above. The original project invited women to send photographs to Roberts who in turn made posters with their photos. They look like this:

14 The only information that I could find about this project online is available here https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vbOwOnVkmG0&list=UUWcy8O3rIYcBHKbEFzsUJ_Q&index=1. Retrieved December 30, 2012.
Each poster reads:

**WANTED**

Womyn like ________, (pictured above) who have been disappeared by assumptions. Womyn who were born and assigned female, but who present in ways the world determines as masculine/not womanly. Womyn who are assumed to be transmen, when they do not identify as men/transmen. Womyn who expand the possibilities of what it means to be born and assigned female. (Andi Roberts, Dec 14, 2012)

You are wanted. You are loved. And we want you to know it.

In 2011, the posters were displayed in the Over 40s Tent and in a few other areas around the Festival. They were used to raise awareness about the invisibility of “masculine” looking women and how they are often miss-read at the Festival and in society more generally. However, even with a project like this taking place women are still confronted and questioned about their presence and participation at the Festival. Deluxe shares a particular story that illustrates this misreading of bodies:
I’ve had people come up to me crying, because someone called them out, on their gender expression and invalidated their right to be here. And, when you feel such ownership and ties to this space, that’s really traumatic. . . anytime anyone yells at me, or reprimands me, it makes me cry, let alone someone invalidating my right to be here, and my ownership of this space as well. So, you know, having a friend come up to me crying about that, was stressful. You know? Also I was having a conversation with someone else who lives in a big urban space, um, with a lot of crime and is pretty masculine, but has been coming here for a long time. Probably identifies more with being male than female, but doesn’t go by masculine pronouns or something. And she was talking about how she feels so much more guarded and less safe here, in this safe space, because she feels like she’s being judged by her gender. Um, and that’s such a huge thing here, a safe space. And, the fact that she fears more for her personal, she has to set up firmer personal boundaries than she does in this urban city, with a lot of crime. She’s just like, “I don’t feel safe here. I feel like I’m constantly guarding myself.” (28, White American, poor, 8 years as a Worker, woman, queer, bisexual, graduate school)

In her book *Gender in Real Time* (2002) Kath Weston discusses performing gender and, at one point turns her attention to the significance and understanding of gender ambiguous bodies and states:

> Bodies that appear ambiguous, the sites and occasions on which meanings begin to fray, the “obvious” response to uncertainty (violence? Fascination? Malaise?), the materials used in the scramble to arrive at a comfortably gendered interpretation, the scrambling itself: All turn out to be historically and culturally informed. (p. 57)

As the narratives in this research convey, the discomfort of gender ambiguous bodies can be unleashed in a myriad of ways, from questioning one’s belonging to utterances of rude remarks and hearing people yell “man on the land.” None of these narratives speak of physical violence but they do speak of the psychological effect, and some could argue the violence one feels when you are told that you do not belong in a place that was supposedly built for you to inhabit, enjoy and feel safe. When one’s gender presentation is performed outside of how the women at the Festival have learned to recognize one as belonging there are considerable psychological implications. When these interruptions of acceptence occur, they open up space to engage with such questions as: What does it mean to be a womyn at the Festival? What bodies can inhabit that place? What does it mean to perform women at this time and in this place? These are interesting questions to
continue to explore and prod in order to gain a firmer understanding of feminist and queer place making.

**The Symbolic Penis**

Over the last few decades, since the mid-1960s, there have been many shifts in the categorical spaces of identity and these discourses have mapped how gendered embodiment relates to our understandings of gender, sexual politics and semiotics. Noble’s (2008) article, “Refusing to Make Sense,” helps to unearth some of the complexities that have crop up in women only and lesbian spaces with the rise of the transgender and transsexual body. The spaces marked lesbian and women only have become complicated. What was once considered an easy division based on female versus male bodies has become a difficult, if not almost impossible to ascertain due to the introduction of medical technologies, such as surgeries and hormone therapy, and the increasing awareness of transgender and transsexual bodies and identifications.

Penises, whether attached to bodies or detachable (dildos and other sex toys) are fodder for debates, controversies, tensions and conversation around inclusion and safe space at the Festival. This section explores boy children on the Land, sex educational workshops, and the experiences of trans bodies as they relate to the Festival. These pages briefly introduce some of the complex and ongoing conversations that have and continue to take place at and around the Festival.

**Brother Sun: What to do with the Boy Children**

One of the earliest issues of contention faced by the Festival collective was whether to invite men to participate in the Festival or not. This particular topic was discussed in an earlier section of this dissertation so I do not dive into it again here. Instead, I begin by looking at the ways that spaces and camping areas have been created at the Festival for boy children and their mothers. Brother Sun, the camp for boy children, has been located in a couple of different spots on the Land over the years. Years ago, it was located past what we now call the Dump and was difficult to get to especially when the weather was wet. Because of this, the Festival moved the Brother Sun camp to a much more accessible
location on the Land, in an RV camping section, outside of the Downtown area. From the Festival’s website:

The Brother Sun Camp is a special campground for young boys and their mothers in its own section of the Festival property. This gives the boys a feeling of having a fun and special place of their own, while also maintaining the all-womyn environment of the main Festival areas. *It is required that sons five years of age and older enroll in Brother Sun and that they not travel into the general Festival grounds with you.* It is up to you as mothers in our community to actively support the age guidelines and definitions of the different childcare areas. (Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival, 2013)

At one time, the Brother Sun camp was a twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week summer camp for boy children. Due to a number of Festival changes, the camp now runs more like a childcare service. It is open during the day and into the evenings to allow the children’s mothers the opportunity to attend workshops, concerts and other social events. Festival staff plan and host day camp activities with the children, and presenters are invited to visit Brother Sun to run workshops and activities with the boys. Before the age of five, boy children are invited to attend Sprouts, the childcare program for both boy and girl children under the age of five. From the Festival’s website:

*We feel it’s also important to discuss different views within the Festival community about the presence of young male children. It is important to respect all of our different opinions. It is also important for us to provide all-female space and time for our daughters. We provide quality care for our youngest sons within the all-female Festival because these boys are too young to be cared for away from the main Festival areas at Brother Sun Camp.* (Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival, 2013)

At the first Festival, there were no limits placed on the presence of boy children. The Festival’s organizers felt that women could self-regulate and do what was best for themselves and their children. This, however, sparked controversy amongst the women attending the Festival. There were those who felt that in order for the space to be truly a women’s only space that no boy children should be allowed and there were those who were just not comfortable being at the Festival in the presence of boys who these women felt were too old to attend and, therefore, felt troubled around them. Luckily, for the mothers present, those opposed to the presence of boy children were in the minority.
In preparation for the third Festival, an age limit was placed on the attendance of boy children. Organizers decided that boy children who were six years of age and younger would be allowed to attend the Festival. This made some women very upset. In a letter published in *Lesbian Connections*, one woman wrote:

> We cannot support a philosophy which expects us to turn away from our children. Matriarchy is based on Mother right, the right of womyn to raise children as we see fit in a society we have created. We find it hard to accept that having chosen to devote a good deal of our time and energy to changing herstory by the guiding and molding of the next generation, we should now be penalized for having children of the wrong age and sex. (Anonymous, 1977, p. 10)

After a number of years struggling with the issue of providing quality child care for the boy children, the Festival established the Brother Sun Boys Camp in 1982. The camp was set up close enough to the Festival’s Downtown that mothers and women wishing to visit or do a work shift at Brother Sun could walk there and those who did not wish to interact with the older boys would not have to. For years, Brother Sun limited the age of boys who could attend to between three and ten years of age. However, in the late 1990’s the entry age was raised to four years old and has been that way since. Since this time there have been a few other changes, in the mid 2000’s Brother Sun went from being a camp staffed by Workers twenty four hours a day for the entire Festival to a day and early evening camp where parents are expected to make their way back to Brother Sun for bedtime. While there is still heartache expressed by parents who have to choose to leave their sons at home once they turn eleven or not attend at all, and heartache on the part of the boys as they move out of their Festival years, this solution seems to have evolved over the years into an organized compromise.

### Dildos and Other Phallic Objects

“Dildos and other phallic objects” seemed like a simple phrase to begin a conversation that covers the range of topics that rise on the Land. Some of the topics I am going to touch on in this section include sex toys, showering on the Land, and the exclusion and inclusion of transgender and transsexual bodies.
Thinking about phallic objects on the Land brings me back to the Festival’s twenty-fifth anniversary when sex educator Tristan Taramino was running workshops on female ejaculation, G-spot stimulation, and more. One afternoon, after my driving shift, I went into the Worker’s shower area to clean up after two four hour shifts driving two different tractor routes. My body was covered in a nice mix of road dust, sweat, and diesel fumes. Not the nicest of things. That afternoon, Tristan was in the showers with an industrial sized bucket full of bleach, water and silicone dildos. She was taking care of her workshop props by sterilizing them after her last workshop. In that moment she was sharing with all of us (those of us in the shower are a) how she had attempted to wash her props in a secluded washing area after her workshop and was both shamed and harassed for cleaning them by the women who were in proximity to witness her at the spigot. Because of these encounters she recounted, in New York City’s Village Voice (2000) that “As a femme s/m dyke, I didn’t always feel safe” (Taramino, 2013). The reason for the harassment was twofold, first Tristan was pushing the boundaries of the women present in terms of her workshop content, and second she was washing her dildos, which some consider as phallic male objects, in a public space. Taramino’s feelings of not “always feeling safe” arose in this incident because women harassed and shamed her for washing the sex toys that she had used for demonstration purposes in her workshops. These same sex toys could have been purchased from any of the sex toy companies selling their wares in the Festival crafts area. In these areas, sex toys in various shapes and sizes from dolphin shaped dildos to “realistic” looking silicone toys are on display for anyone walking by to see. What better way to sell your wares? I wonder if these same women harass and shame the sex toy vendors in the crafts area.

I myself have also been under the eyes of scrutiny when it comes to phallic objects at the Festival. One year I was nominated to represent the Carpentry crew in the Worker’s “M. Workerville” competition. This competition was set up to be a fun and playful event that would allow crews to nominate a contestant who would then compete for the M. Workerville title and then be expected to represent the Worker community during the week of Festival to build stronger relations between the Worker and festi-goer
communities. As “M. Carp,” my title for the evening, I dressed up in my finest leathers and “packed” for the evening. Even though I wasn’t awarded the title “M. Workerville” I had a fun night. The next morning, as I was crewing up with my short crew one of my longtime friends and crewmates, who happened to be someone I looked up to, chastised me in front of my whole crew for “packing” the night before. She was emotional and made me feel small, hurt and unsafe. To keep a long story short, after she cooled down, we had a chance to reconnect and talk about what was going on for both of us. In the end, we agreed to disagree. In that moment, I had the opportunity to hear about what it was like for her at my age, being closeted, not being able to openly express her sexuality for fear of retribution, and what a dildo represented to her. For her, male genitalia, or in this case the reproduction of male genitalia in the form of a silicone toy, symbolises oppression, violence, and power.

In 1994, Tribe 8, a dyke punk band from San Francisco, played on the Night Stage at the Festival for the very first time. In the Festival’s program Tribe 8 was described as “San Francisco’s own all-dyke, all-out, in-your-face, blade-brandishing, gang-castrating, dildo swingin’, bullshit detecting, aurally pornographic, Neanderthal-pervert band of patriarchy-smashing snatchlickers” (1994, p. 32) thereby setting the stage for some hot debate in the Festival community. The source of the criticism and unrest was rooted in the belief that Tribe 8 promoted violence against women and protesters were active leading up to the show and during the performance. There are two key moments in this stage performance that are useful to note. The first, took place during the song “Femme Bitch Top” where a backup singer lightly whipped lead singer Lynn Breedlove and, secondly, in the song “Frat Pig” a song about the fantasy of taking revenge on a man through group castration. In the performance of this song, Breedlove cuts off her strap-on dildo with a big knife that she had been brandishing throughout the show. Tribe 8 not

\[15\] I wore a silicone dildo under my clothing.
only brought its edgy performance techniques to the Festival’s stage the group helped inspire the Festival’s first mosh pit.\textsuperscript{16}

For the band members the cutting of the dildo is an act against perpetrators of (personal) violence and violence against women by men in society more generally. After the performance, the Over 40s tent hosted a workshop for Tribe 8 band members to have a conversation with the Festival community. In the workshop, many of the band’s members identified themselves as survivors of sexual abuse. In the conversation, Lynn Breedlove shared: “The effigy is a ritual. I don’t actually go out and cut off penises. I put on a dildo, I cut if off—it makes me feel better when I’m disillusioned. When I’m jumping around, singing, dancing, I don’t have to go so far as to actually cut off a human penis. I haven’t yet!” (as cited in Morris, 1999, p. 278). In response to the dialogue, one workshop participant remarked, “What you have dared to do in the show, with this ritual enactment, is what a lot of women are really afraid to let themselves feel.” (as cited in Morris, 1999, p. 279). Through punk music and stage performance, the group members shared that the forum allows them to express their pain and unleash their aggression. As Cvetkovich writes:

\begin{quote}
Her performance offers further evidence of the complexity and variety of lesbian dildo use, especially since she cuts off a dildo that she herself is wearing. The violence of castration is thus directed as much at herself as it is externally, refusing any simple division between the subject and object of violence. Breedlove, though, emerges triumphant from the aggressive act of castration, holding the severed dildo aloft as if to suggest that castration is survivable, at least for those who don’t have real penises. (2003, p. 86)
\end{quote}

The performance is the vehicle through which Breedlove breaks down the interplay between reality and representation. This approach toys with both the physical and the cultural significance of the object and the act. The physical engagement of cutting the dildo is significant because of the cultural meaning of the act. For the performers and the

\textsuperscript{16} For a more in depth exploration of Tribe 8’s performance read Ann Cvetkovich’s book \textit{An Archive of Feelings} (2003).
audience members, healing happens when sexual violence is made explicit through the embodiment of the physical act as it relates to the cultural meanings.

“I’m Trans All That”

A pink moon is out tonight
And my heart is folding over
Because I think she liked me
And I might have had her
But he’s got a real one
And mine’s from the store

Why is it so lonely
In-between a boy and a girl
They’re so glued down
In this world
And what it means

I’m trans all of that
I’m trans all of that
Gender I’m a bender
Bi bye girl


Here on the gender borders at the close of the twentieth century, with the faltering of phallocratic hegemony and the bumptious appearance of heteroglossic origin accounts, we find the epistemologies of white male medical practice, the rage of radical feminist theories and the chaos of lived gendered experience meeting on the battlefield of the transsexual body: a hotly contested site of cultural inscription, a meaning machine for the production of ideal type.

- Sandy Stone “The Empire strikes back: A posttranssexual Manifesto”

The “womyn-born-womyn” intention/policy came about as a reaction to the exclusion of Nancy Burkholder in 1991. After successfully attending the Festival as a festiegoer in 1990, Burkholder returned in 1991 and was asked by another festiegoer about whether

she was transsexual or not. After sharing her transsexual history, she was approached by the Festival staff and asked to leave the Land. After two years of attempts by Burkholder and others to educate the Festival community about trans and gender related issues Camp Trans was established as a protest space outside of the Festival’s gates in 1994. In 2006 a trans woman purchased tickets at the front gate of the Festival and attended the Festival as an out trans woman. This move was seen to be a great success by Camp Tran organizers until Lisa Vogel released a press release stating:

From its inception the Festival has been home to womyn who could be considered gender outlaws, either because of their sexual orientation (lesbian, bisexual, polyamorous, etc.) or their gender presentation (butch, bearded, androgynous, femme—and everything in between). Many womyn producing and attending the Michigan Festival are gender variant womyn. Many of the younger womyn consider themselves differently gendered, many of the older womyn consider themselves butch womyn, and the dialogue is alive and well on the Land as our generational mix continues to inform our ongoing understanding about gender identity and the range of what it means to be female. Michigan provides one of the safest places on the planet for womyn who live and present themselves to the world in the broadest range of gender expression. As Festival organizers, we refuse to question anyone’s gender. We instead ask that woman-born womyn be respected as a valid gender identity, and that the broad queer and gender-diverse communities respect our commitment to one week each year for womyn-born womyn to gather. (Vogel, 2006)

In this statement, the experience of growing up as a girl is the defining characteristic of the category womyn-born-womyn (Serano, 2007, p. 241). Camp Trans participants and trans women are being asked to respect women who have “the experience of being born and living their life as womyn,” Vogel is using sex assignment at birth as the defining factor of one’s social experience and as the pivotal location from which women are admitted into the Festival. Trans women then are “not natives to an originary femaleness but latecomers, aliens, and thus not bona fide women” (Prosser, 1998, p. 171). As we’ve witnessed recently in the public news media, there is a particular obsession with the genitalia of trans women. In an early January 2014 television episode Katie Couric, an

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18 Visit http://thisonetimeattranscamp.wordpress.com/camp-trans-history/ for more information about the history of Camp Trans.
American journalist, interviewed Carmen Carrera and Laverne Cox, both high profile out trans women. In the interview, Couric could not stop herself from asking both Carrera and Cox about their private parts. After a little discussion Cox took the stage when she said, “by focusing on bodies we don’t focus on the lived realities of that oppression and that discrimination” (as cited in Mey, 2014). Within general discourse, there is a preoccupation with genitalia and this focus on genitalia and one’s physical transition objectifies trans women and distracts from the real social issues at hand. Trans women and their allies encourage us to think past feminist theories of gender based socialization to question the widely held belief that one is made into the gender that they are assigned at birth. While many trans women consider themselves to have been born women their histories are often unintelligible within the Festival’s feminist framework and, therefore, fall outside the margins of the Festival’s intention. As we see in the excerpt of another portion of the press release below, Vogel is acknowledging that trans women are women while at the same time is reifying the boundary markers that are the significance of “womyn born womyn” as “a valid and honorable gender identity.”

Another point of examination in Vogel’s statement is around its emphasis on “the experience” of “womyn” in the singular tense. In this portion of the statement it reads:

I would love for you and the other organizers of Camp Trans to find the place in your hearts and politics to support and honor space for womyn. I ask that you respect that womon born womon is a valid and honorable gender identity. I also ask that you respect that womyn born womyn deeply need our space—as do all communities who create space together . . . If a trans woman purchased a ticket, it represents nothing more than that womon choosing to disrespect the stated intention of this Festival. (Vogel, 2006)

In this statement, there is an assumption that women have similar stories and shared experiences that hold this community together. It is true that an individual’s bodily experience is central to how one understands and experiences the world. People interact with the world with and through their bodies. However, we cannot ignore the differences in embodiment, as doing so creates a false universal experience that would create opportunities to ignore and delegitimize individual accounts of bodily experiences. The conditions that impact our embodiment are influenced and organized by gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality and other social identities, which when meshed together, result
in a complex web of different possibilities, lived experiences, and limitations on individual bodily practices.

A common fear expressed in relation to the issue of the Festival’s policy to only allow womyn-born-womyn intention is that a transgender women who has either chosen not to undergo sex reassignment surgery or who does not have the financial means to afford the costly surgery will run around the Land without any clothes on. An often-misunderstood event took place in the summer of 1999 when activist and Florida police officer, Tony Barreto-Neto, a post-operative transsexual man, took a shower in one of the Festival’s shower areas. After the incident, Barreto-Neto issued a statement:

Statement from Tony Barreto-Neto, Camp Trans FTM or . . . THE SHOWERING PENIS S-P-E-A-K-S!!! (Written in August 1999)
They met me with, “We have had very disturbing news that since ‘you people’ have come onto the land that several transexuals are going around showing their penises to the womyn.” My mouth literally dropped in amazement as I remembered my shower. I explained that no men were over there showing their penises, that it was only me in the shower at the Twilight Zone Area taking a shower. I also told them that, before disrobing, I asked every woman there if they would mind if I had a shower. It was really a hygienic thing and it had been days since I had had one (me who takes at least two showers a day on a cool day), but that if it was a problem, well, I would just go off by myself and pout. All of the womyn there, bar none, agreed with the one who said, “No problem. We saw you yesterday walking around without a shirt on and think your body is just fine.” I said, “But you know I have to take my pants off and I, uh, do you know, I have an outy and all.” Again, the consensus was, “Go ahead, don’t be silly. Take a shower.” I proceeded to the shower area wearing my shorts and went into the one with the curtains, but, as my luck would have it, after taking off my shorts, I couldn’t figure out how to turn on the water. To make a long story short, a woman did it for me. The water was freezing, so the womyn in the shower next to me, after trying to throw warm water around the curtain, said, “Come on over here where it’s warm.” I did and now the world thinks I walked around with a hard-on the whole time I was there. I was told that a man was seen taking a shower in the Twilight Zone, showing off his erection to the womyn there . . . They said that it wasn’t me, that many men were walking around exposing themselves. Well, I knew who I came with and knew this wasn’t true. The crux of their policy, which was designed to exclude transgender women from the festival, went from ‘womyn-born-womyn-only’ to ‘no-penis-on-the-land.’ This presented difficulties for me because the skin of
my forearm was re-arranged on my female-born body to make a penis. I mentioned to them that I wished my boss and most of the men I worked with thought of my private parts as being as much of a penis as they did. They were not amused. (Barreto-Neto, 1999)

The “gender trouble” that arose here, in some ways, is about the difficult embodied space that trans men encounter when they enter the Land. Trans activists and scholars like Tony Barreto-Neto and J. Bobby Noble, have shared stores about what it is like to grow up in lesbian and dyke culture and be actively involved in feminist practices and feminist advocacy, yet how their bodies and experiences can become invisible in feminist spaces. According to Noble, trans not only trouble gender they create a “category [of] trouble that has the potential to reconfigure not just gender but embodiment itself” (2007, p. 169). In Noble’s autoethnographic account, trans is marked as descriptive because it highlights those that live in contradiction to gendered and sexed bodies by taking advantage of medical technologies to rejoin the disjuncture of body and self. In a more radical sense, trans is a refusal to engage with the medical and psychological systems to which the body has historically been subjected (Noble, 2007, p. 170). It is within these embodied spaces that gender and sex become complex especially in light of lived histories, experiences and intersecting identities.

One of the other issues to do with Barreto-Neto’s experience arise from the fact that the Twilight Zone Showers are situated along the main walking path between the Twilight Zone and the rest of the Festival. While he may have asked everyone nearby if it was okay for him to take a shower, other women would have been walking through the area and would not have been part of the initial conversation. It is a small community, and stories can spread and become distorted quickly.

With the inception of the “womyn-born-womyn” intention there has been closer attention paid to physical bodies and how bodies are gendered on the Land. It is not surprising that this is the case as it is through the body that one’s transsexualness can be measured against surgical and hormonal interventions (Boyd, 2006, p. 428). While there is no “panty check” at the Front Gate a general “don’t ask don’t tell” policy is in effect. It is assumed that a woman wishing to purchase a ticket, online or at the gate, is a “womyn-born-womyn.” On the sixth day of the 1994 Festival, after a week of protest both inside
and outside the gates, a group of protestors marched to the front gate and “challenged the festival’s entrance policy with a variety of differently sexed and gendered bodies, [after which] the producers agreed to allow transsexuals to enter the festival but still under the rubric of “womyn-born-womyn” (Boyd, 2006, p. 429). The protestors saw this decision as a victory because admittance to the Festival was based on self-definition. However, the Festival continually affirms the boundaries of “womyn-born-womyn” and questions of “morphology continued to plague the policing of borders” (Boyd, 2006, p. 429) as so many aspects of trans bodies and the spectrums of gender and sex under which they fall remain unclear. While one may choose to enter a gender-defined social space in good faith, the border is never far for those who reside in bodies that do not fit within the expectations of women only space. Nor does it give space to those women’s stories, memories and histories that do not align with what it means to have grown up as a girl/woman in society. During the focus group session at Camp Trans a number of participants spoke to these fears:

Laurie: Like, okay, like, I feel like if I can’t be naked like everybody else on the Land, why would I want to be there? Like, I’m only allowed to come if I’m ashamed of my body and cover it up. That seems very redundant. And that’s always one of the things that the pro-policy people say, is that there’s some myth, definitely a myth about a trans woman getting on the Land and running around with her penis, whatever, and the words that second wave feminist use to describe penises are always hilarious. There’s a lot of flappy, and um, (laugh) there’s like flopping around and . . . (Woman, bisexual, white, Massachusetts)

Jordan: It’s also, well, you were talking about that incident and the language that people use to talk about like, penises and also like, being able to be naked on the Land, when it’s like, it’s weird that they’re like a space that’s supposed to be so body positive and they get so so negative about bodies that don’t look like theirs. (Woman, transwoman, lesbian, Scottish, Irish and English decent, Minnesota)

Jessie: Yeah, totally. (Genderqueer, trans, woman, queer, white)

Laurie: Yeah, it’s like the idea that there’s all sorts of women, and women come in all shapes and sizes. I don’t know if they use that phrase. But I mean . . .

Nat: They might as well. (Genderqueer leaning, femme or androgynous, pansexual, white, Illinois)

Laurie: They might as well. And they celebrate all of this variation, except for one thing that’s to be ashamed of.
The elimination of the phallus does not address the root problem of power and privilege that only seems to appear in relation to the display of a phallic object. It is about the relation that a narrative has to the imagery. The Festival situates women’s inclusion alongside a certain kind of narrative that allows for women to express themselves, and makes room for “solving” the problems of embodiment and the expressions of gender and sexuality within certain parameters. What Camp Trans participants are calling for is a shift in the Festival’s idea of what women’s bodies and women’s memories and histories can be.

Even if gender is fluid and self-determined, from the Festival organizers’ perspective the articulation of gender is what defines the community. In Wiegman’s book on the lesbian postmodern she notes that “the difference between lesbian and trans is the difference between deploying identity categories strategically, at best, (‘lesbian’), and perhaps simply refusing their ground (coherently gendered bodies upon which those desires depend)” (2012, p.3). The social meanings of bodies, the social meaning inscribed on the lesbian body can only be adopted by trans people “if they can fix themselves in time and space as one gender or another” (Boyd, p. 429). As Boyd remarks:

> Despite mutating morphology, or the potentially revolutionary transformation of the body in response to oppressive gender constructs, the ability to articulate oneself intelligibly as one gender or another remains central to the function of community, social identity, political formation, and ultimately the forging of a relationship to the state in the name of separatism or civil rights protection. (Boyd, p. 429)

That is to say, “there is no innocent way to wear [a] category” (Weigman, 2012, p. 3). There is a pressing need for trans identified people to join the gender game in order to survive. Bobby Noble (2006) uses Stuart Hall’s observation that, “almost every fixed inventory will betray us” (as cited in Noble, p. 171) to emphasize that using normative gender binaries to define the trans body will lead to failure.

**Women’s Space: Boundary Making**

What I find challenging is the focus on body difference as a basis of exclusion. The practice of focusing on body differences goes alongside such practices as essentialism and homogenization. The difficulty, as I see it, is that the basic premise of the Festival
space is to be a women only space where women can celebrate their diversity, their different forms of embodiment, learn new skills, camp in the woods and enjoy music together as a community based on a feminist politics grounded in the gender binary system. There seems to be growing awareness about how this approach is not working for some and is, on many levels, hurtful and potentially damaging to a large number of women. In this context, the Festival continues to essentialize female and male identities and bodies just as gender is continually essentialized and reified in mainstream culture.

There is a normalization that happens at the Festival, just as it happens in the world outside where you must perform your gender in particular ways and you must physically look the part. While there is a lot of room for play and celebration, as I explored earlier in this chapter, there are also fine lines that cannot be crossed or you are questioned about your presence and belonging on the Land. By creating the Festival, a lesbian feminist separatist space, there are going to be clear physical and philosophical boundaries drawn on and around the Land. These boundaries are linked into the politics of lesbian feminist separatism and has become a space where (some) women can escape the heteropatriarchy for a few weeks each year to create their own societies. Mary Bryson, Lori MacIntosh, Sharalyn Jordan and Hui-Ling Lin (2006) and Sue-Ellen Case (1996) have written about the significance of belonging and “un/belonging” (Bryson, et al., 2006). By defining who belongs, the group embarks on a process of exclusion that enables its members to work out who they are. By creating a community based on the exclusion of half the population (men) there is bound to be some policing and the development of clear ideas of who a women can (or cannot) be and what she can (or cannot) look like. As Davis so aptly wrote “difference is treated as essential for understanding embodiment—individual interactions with their bodies and through their bodies with the world around them” (1997, p. 9).

Queer and feminist theorists, such as Gayle Rubin and Judith Butler, seem to be driving political and theoretical debates that question the gender binary system. These feminists are pushing our understanding of what constitutes a woman in society and, through discourse, have opened up new possibilities in gender representation and identification that are not necessarily attached to our sex at birth and the gender presentations we are
expected to enact and perform. As Judith Butler (1999) asks in her book *Gender Trouble* “it is no longer clear that feminist theory ought to try to settle the questions of primary identity in order to get on with the task of politics. Instead, we ought to ask, what political possibilities are the consequence of a radical critique of the categories of identity” (p. xxix)? These theoretical discourses are mirrored in embodied practice. In many ways, and as reflected in the evolution of narratives and embodied experiences shared within these very pages, we can almost see how theory, embodied experiences, and social spaces have been mapped onto the world around us.

As we move towards the conclusion of this chapter, let us look at Denise Riley’s (1998) *Am I That Name? Feminism and The Category of Women* (1998). In her book, Riley calls for feminists to refuse its essentialist and categorical foundations. Instead, she urges feminists to think about how feminism can find new possibility in instability and uncertainty as stubborn epistemology and politics. Riley goes on to ask, why feminists should fix their politics to an ahistorical basis of gender in light of the fictions of the identities that surround us, such as gender, race, sexuality, class, ethnicity. All of these identities are historically specific and deeply linked with other categories such as capitalism, economics, the body, and power. A political strategy that is based on fixity as opposed to flexibility may not be able to sustain itself over time.

**Discussion**

In, “Throwing Like a Girl,” Irish Marion Young (1990) explores the phenomenology of the feminine body within its movement, spatiality and comportment and demonstrates how impossible it is for women in Western society to use their body in full free form. There are restrictions and expectations placed on how a woman can move and in which contexts. The Festival was developed and continues to operate, for many of the women who attend, as a place that allows women the opportunity to move in and through their bodies in free and open engagement with the world around them. The Festival makes space for Workers and festivalgoers to act as “secret agents” (Smith, D., 1990, p. 81) who are working “behind the gendered discourses of femininity” (Smith, D. 1990, p. 82). D. Smith (1990) writes:
when women confront cultural discourses which instruct them that their bodies are inferior, a gap is created between the body as deficient and the body as an object to be remedied. Dissatisfaction becomes an active process, whereby women engage with their bodies as an object of work, for “doing femininity.” (p. 46)

Through this dissertation and by providing the space and support systems to enable this creativity, empowerment and self-affirmations many women experience a new kind of “freedom.” But what happens when someone does not fit the mould? What if they push too many of the boundaries to a point where they fall outside of the embodiment line?

Feminists like Judith Butler and Elizabeth Grosz have pushed theoretical thinking about the politics of the body by engaging and embracing queer theory as it entwines with feminist body theory. Their perspectives offer “a way of celebrating a politics of creative subversion without retreating to identity politics or the tactics of collective rebellion which belonged to body/politics in the 1970s” (Davis, 1997, p. 13). What has become clear for me in this chapter is that one of the difficulties with theory is that it sometimes does not translate easily into practice. Through embodiment and the embodied performance of gender, we are re-enacting already established repetitions of acts. Both femininity and masculinity can be seen as socially constructed through an ongoing process of inscription on the body. These bodies are marked by how one moves in and through them such as by how we walk, speak, our posture, and so on. These identities are performed acts of signifying systems that acquire their ability through stylized repetitions. While theorists like Judith Butler problematize the distinctions between “sex” and “gender,” in practice, within a world where men are still given the power in society and women are sexualized and demeaned in mainstream culture, where women still need to live their lives “in the close,” where women are still living in fear from gender based oppression and violence, the boundaries of what it means to be a women in a women’s only space such as the Festival may take time before real change occurs. To quote again from the Festival’s program: “Of course we don’t always understand one another, but with a little effort we will come to realize that living our diversity includes bumping up against [our] differences, and constantly expanding what we consider ‘our’ culture and our community” (Festival Program, 2010, p. 1). I am going to hang onto this sentiment
and hold on for hope. Hope that the Festival community can find ways to heal, grow and open up to more diversity of what it means to be a woman.
Chapter Five. From Theory to Practice: Timing Feminism & Feminist Time

Image 16 Earthquake Volunteers (2011)
Setting the Stage

Over the course of my own personal history with the Festival, I have experienced the Festival community’s struggle with different crises. While I was not a Worker in the early 1990s during the exclusion of Nancy Jean Burkholder and the rise of CampTrans, the tension of these events has always been part of my Festival experience as have other ongoing tensions, many of which preceded my arrival. I was on the Land the year that a tragic van accident took place claiming the life of one of my fellow Workers sister while the others in the van were severely injured, both physically and emotionally. Linked to this tragedy was the financial strain placed on the Festival by legal action from those involved in the accident and the ensuing court battle. There has also been, and continues to be, an economic depression in North America which happened at a time when the festigoer population began to dwindle. Let’s also throw into the mix the focused attention of US fundamental religious right groups in the early 2000s, which had implications for how sex and sexuality was workshopped at the Festival. Through this strife and these struggles, the Festival persists and it is this persistence that I explore in this chapter.

One of the things I have learned from working at the Festival is how to walk my feminist talk. While I learned about feminism through books in the first few years of my undergraduate studies, my lived embodiment of feminist practices did not flourish until I started working at the Festival in my early 20s. Being part of this community inspired me to seek out ways to embody and actively engage with feminist practices in my day-to-day life. It was through working and living with a diverse group of women, from different cultural, racial, sexual, and socioeconomic backgrounds, that my own personal possibilities busted wide open, re-shaped and continue to be pushed and shoved to new horizons of possibilities. I learned hands on about critical thinking by attending and participating in community meetings. I learned through one on one conversation with my co-workers and friends. And, I witnessed personal change and hurt in real concrete ways through the friendships and working relationships I have built over the years. But, what happens when the lessons you’ve learned turn around and place you at odds with the Festival that helped you get to the place you are, personally and politically? What happens when you start seeing the fissures in the utopic vision that is being presented to
you? What are the narratives that drive this space, what power do they hold, and what is lost when you fall out of line? These are real questions that I intend to explore both as an academic and as a Festival Worker who cannot return until certain change is achieved.

Introduction

History may be a compilation of lies; nevertheless, it contains a few truths, and they are the only guides we have for the future.
- Emma Goldman (The Traffic in Women, 1911)

You may forget but let me tell you this: someone in some future time will think of us
- Sappho, (The Art of Loving Women, 1958)

The past itself, as historical change continues to accelerate, has become the most surreal of subjects—making it possible . . . to see a new beauty in what is vanishing.
- Susan Sontag (Melancholy Objects, 1973)

In the introduction to Against the Romance of Community Miranda Joseph (2002) draws on a quote from Michel Foucault’s “Questions of Method” in which he states:

To give some assistance in wearing away certain self-evidences and commonplaces . . . ; to bring it about, together with many others, that certain phrases can no longer be spoken so lightly, certain acts no longer, or at least no longer so unhesitatingly, performed (as cited in Joseph, 2002, p. vii).

This excerpt is emblematic of Joseph’s project, she is looking to problematize identity-based community making as it relates to capitalism and, more generally, modernity. Like Joseph, this chapter sets out to explore the discourses surrounding community building at the Festival and how this embodiment and performance of utopic vision making has created a complex relationship between the Festival and the Workers who attend.

Many, if not all, of my interview participants shared some idealized view of the Festival, and the community as a utopian state. The narratives and stories shared with me were
often framed as transformative, utopic, life changing, or empowering. This chapter does not attempt to set these stories up to be viewed as inauthentic or false but rather it seeks to draw on them to investigate the complex resistance to and complicity with the overarching frame of the Festival. As Joseph (2002) stated in her book, and a comment that I would like to emphasize here, “I fully recognize that for most people attachments to particular communities of belonging and activism run deep; they are our sites of hope in a difficult world” (p. ix). By fixing on the positive aspects of our communities, we risk becoming unable to see the ways in which we might disrupt the domination and power dynamics within any given community. The practice of critically engaging with a community is an important form of participation. Like Joseph, in this work I am attempting to develop a critical engagement from the inside and rather than making a denouncement from the outside.

The Creation of a Feminist Utopia

As I explored in Chapter 3, all places can be seen as imagined. They are social constructs that have developed and been shaped through history while being embodied and performed through memory and meaning. As suggested, these imagined communities should be deconstructed so that the power that is involved in these creations can be unearthed and revealed. What affective draws pervade the imagining of the Festival’s community? Let’s examine how this community was formed out of the interconnected spaces that already always existed. While doing this I pay particular attention to how spaces and places are made, imagined, contested and enforced.

The Festival represents a radical transformation that took place in the mid to late 1970s as a reaction to the 1960s and 70s feminist movements, which included a disassociation from dominant models of subject formation. The Festival was a reaction to the North American heteronormative state, an alternative to the lack of support for women in the music industry, and a feminist separatist space that rejected what mainstream North American culture told women they could and should be and do. Feminist thinkers like Moira Gatens and Genevieve Lloyd (1999) and Rosie Braidotti (2011) contend that in order for these sorts of transformations and transformative places to take place and exist
this movement needs to stem from “collective imaginings” and there needs to be a shared
desire for the particular transformation to be achieved (Braidotti, 2011, p. 79). As we
explored earlier in this dissertation, at the time that the Festival producers began to
imagine the Festival there were countless other women-only spaces coming into being in
North America, from women-only bookstores, to feminist presses, magazines and record
labels. There was a larger social impetus creating a momentum from which the Festival
and other women-only festivals were conceived, built up and sustained.

Feminist theory, according to Rosi Braidotti (2011) “is based on a radical disengagement
from the dominant institutions and representations of femininity and masculinity,
[enabling it] to enter the process of becoming-minoritarian or of transforming gender” (p.
xx). In a similar fashion, the Festival created space for feminism to combine “critique
with creation in the quest for alternative ways of embodying and experiencing our
sexualized selves” (Braidotti, 2011, pp. 79-80). The Festival was envisioned as a space in
which women would have the opportunity to embody alternative ways of experiencing
gendered and sexualized selves. As June Millington states

  the Festival(s) are a place where women, mostly lesbians but not all, come
together to hear the music but also come together to be with each other.
Not only to check each other out but to check their own realities and to
expand. (as cited in Mosbacher, 2002)

Feelings about community are deeply linked to physical movements and cultural
memory. Some academics claim that “cultural recall is not merely something of which
you happen to be a bearer but something that you actually perform, even if, in many
instances, such acts are not consciously and willfully contrived” (Bal, 1999, p. vii). In
this way, memory is something that is both active and situated in the present. Cultural
memory can be located within literary texts, body movements, theater productions, and
art, to name a few. Physical “acts of memory are performed by individuals in a cultural
framework that encourages these acts” (Bal, 1999, p. xiii).

Fiona Buckland’s “theater of memory” connects people to the space, to the past, to others
and, within the feminist temporality of the Festival looks towards a future of hope and
social change. The central piece of the “everyday theater of memory,” located in the
community is found in spaces like the Festival’s wood chip paths, in the fields and in the
woods. Buckland (2012) demonstrates how memories of the past shape movements for both the group and the individual over time (p. 18). According to Muñoz (2009), memory is constructed and always political. It is through remembering and the ritualized telling of these remembrances through such mediums as performance, film, writing, music and visual culture that potential world making is possible. Memory, and the ways in which it is enacted through the body and represented through archives (Taylor, 2003) hold crucial implications for understanding feminist memory, feminist temporality, and feminist world making. It is the performance of memory and its link to the past, to space, to others and to future possibilities that frames this dissertation research.

Memory and embodied feminist practice is present at the Festival. In a myriad of ways, by simply being at the Festival one is performing and participating in embodied feminist practices. As Bo expressed when speaking about how the Festival is feminist:

I think there’s a lot of different angles that you can approach this on. I think for many women, Festival is an explicitly feminist experience. I think a lot of the ways that we do things are consciously feminist. I think for some of the women that attend Festival, it’s a great beer drinking party with a lot of dykes in it. And that is not necessarily a feminist analysis, but even if they don’t have that analysis, having this experience is a feminist experience for them. And I think that even the places where we fail to walk our feminist talk, that fact that we are still in and struggling with things like consensus based decision making and how we balance enough hierarchy to get things done, with enough, um, community consensus building to feel like everyone is a part of it. I think that that process is explicitly feminist. (43, white, working class, 14 years as a Worker, 1 year as a festiegoer, woman, dyke, femme, Mom, graduate school)

While someone might attend because they see it as a big “beer drinking party,” simply by being at the Festival—walking on the trails, living amidst the ferns, the women centered signs, the community agreements, the daily rhythms—their experiences are infused by feminist practices because of how the Festival’s routine is structured and iterated. As Cvetkovich and Wahng’s roundtable participant stated:

Our work is holistic. It isn’t that you work separately and then you come together and see people. . . . It’s all connected. And there’s the sense of working toward something bigger than yourself. You are never just filling the coffee, you’re never just hammering something. This hammer is the thing that’s going to make this other thing go up. (as cited in Cvetkovich & Wahng, 2001, p. 136)
Even the beer-drinking lesbians are contributing to the building and shaping of the Festival and the experience of being at the Festival. This layering of experiences makes it into something bigger, interconnected and linked.

Within the Worker community, work is the central tenet linking membership and cultural transmission. Images of feminist empowerment populate the narratives shared by those I interviewed. One of the more physically engaged events that happens each year during long crew is the raising of the Night Stage. As a community, the Workers come together to raise the stage. This particular coming together of crews and the symbolism attached to raising the Night Stage is a significant one for the Worker community. It signals, for many long crew Workers, the true beginning of the Festival and is the first time, during their four weeks together, that they work as one to pull a physical structure together. Each crew participates in the work of assembling the lumber to build the Night Stage. The LACE crew bring the lumber; the Carpentry crew builds the frames; the Galz crew cooks, and so on. This is one time when every crew has the opportunity to put their energy and strength into one act, the raising of the stage. When asked about a cultural practice that she looks forward to participating in each year at the Festival, Demming shared that, for her, the raising of the stage was an important point for her each year. She shared:

Close to my heart has always been raising the stage. As, in Festival years, as a younger attendee, I always made sure that I got to see them raising the stage. . . . And then, particularly around the raising of the stage, one of our daughters was on Carps crew and got to do it for many, many years. And in fact, is on the cover of Snappy’s book, as an eleven year old, moving the stage. Those rituals, those traditions, hearten me. And again, it goes back to what do I think about through the rest of the year. Those are the vignettes that I call to mind.

When I asked her “why do you think they reverberate for you?” She answered:

Strength. You look at those vignettes and some of them are in photograph form. Some of them are only in our minds, and we are totally counter to what multiple societies have told us that as women we can or cannot do. And I look at those visions in my brain or in photos and say “You’re wrong. We can. We did. And we still do. (59, Caucasian, working class/blue collar, 34 years as a Worker, female, queer, feminist, post grad)
What is striking about the narrative and photo above is that because of the strength of many the job of carrying a very heavy frame of wood is made easy. Each woman is playing her part in carrying some of the load, listening for directions and lifting the frame for transport. When they do this lifting and carrying, they do so as a community of Workers performing their roles together. What is powerful about the photograph, the stories and the Festival itself is that women build the Festival from the ground up year after year. It is empowering to be at the Festival and to engage in this work especially in a world that tells us that women cannot do the heavy lifting, cannot run theaters, cannot be successful musicians, cannot be strong, independent and world making. In reference to the stage raising Dottie stated:

I like to raise the stages. I like to be part of that, um, as many stages as I possibly can. And I do that year after year after year. Ah, well, that and tossing firewood, are two things that I try to do, every year. Because to me, it symbolizes us, those stages are fucking heavy, right? And it symbolizes our strength as a whole, and how we can all kind of like, work together towards a goal, putting those stages together. And again, with the tossing of the firewood, it's like, working smarter not harder, like, and adding a little bit of fun; a little bit of rhythm to it. You know? Like, none of us have to work quite as hard, because we all just do a little bit. (33, Caucasian, half Jewish, lower middle class, 5 years as a Worker, 7 years as a festiegoer, queer, femme, fag hag, high school)
While the Festival’s Workers may be responding to the needs of the Festival, by getting jobs done it also equips women with new skills and understandings that they can take back to their own lives and workplaces. One of Cvetkovich and Wahng’s roundtable participants shared:

As Workers, the only thing we know for sure is that there is a verb. We just know that there’s something that needs to be done. And we have to do it. It’s a community completely predicated on acting for a month. It could be performing, or witnessing that performance, or participating in a workshop, or doing your task. (as cited in Cvetkovich & Wahng, 2001, p. 139)

Work then is a full time job for those who join the Worker crews each year. When a need arises and something has to be done women often eagerly jump up and lend a hand. As Dottie stated earlier it’s about working “smarter and not harder.” Women find ways to work together to make jobs easier on everyone’s bodies. If the ice chest needs to be moved a group of women will assemble to move it. More bodies equals more distribution of weight and less stress on any one person. Even when there are more people than the job requires sometimes having an audience witnessing the job being done is encouraging. Spectators often offer words of encouragement, which lightens the mood and makes the job that much easier to perform.

The utopic embodied performance of work demonstrates the possibility of physicality for women in the deep body connection of doing hard physical labour, for the connectedness and doing work differently and collaboratively. It is a way of engaging in life, work and community in alternative ways than are typically represented and embodied in mainstream society. Work at the Festival can be sexy for many of these women as they engage in and through their bodies differently than they do in their day-to-day lives. It also offers a powerful connection for women who do not find support and recognition in mainstream society as it celebrates women’s strengths and accomplishments. Doing men’s work in an environment where all work being performed is women’s work, where every woman’s time, energy and dedication is cherished, recognized, celebrated and supported is central to the Festival. Everyone is expected to have a strong work ethic, one that builds and runs a Festival and the community that is attached to it. As a Tallulah shared:
I think you have every dichotomy of being of spirit, represented in a woman’s body. I think it proves that not only are we equal but diverse and that being born into a female body does not in any way assign a role of how you live your life or the skills you’re capable to contribute or you know, the range of emotions. There’s absolutely every level of range of skill and education and experience and emotion and gender, in this place represented, all in very unique and beautiful female bodies. It’s incredible. I think we prove that women can do anything when we put this on. (33, Native American and Caucasian, working class, 10 years as a Worker, queer, lesbian, dyke, femme, cisgendered female, some college)

There is a realization that you can perform, work and live differently on women’s land. You can engage in work with intentionality, with personal linkages and connections with others, and engage in work that is both understood and felt as a contribution to building and running a women’s music festival. Ruby returns to the Festival year after year because it is a place where she learned that women can be more than society tells them they can be. For Ruby, the Festival is feminist because:

To me, it means that women can do and be anything that they want. But it’s, you know, it manifests very differently than that. It’s about, cause I very much learned that here; that I did not have to buy into the gender normative stereotypes, of our society. And, that I could be a woman and I could be an auto mechanic. And I could be butch and I could be all of those things, and it didn’t matter. And it didn’t make me not a woman. (55, white, working class, 29 years as a Worker, 1 year as a festiegoer, female, lesbian, butch, activist, bachelor’s degree)

For many of these women, their experiences at the Festival have empowered them to live their daily lives differently. Some have followed new life paths inspired by the support and experiences they have had at the Festival. To be a butch woman and an auto mechanic in mainstream society was, and still is in many places, subversive. What can happen for some is radical transformation. Harriet expressed in her interview that because of the significance of the work that is done at the Festival and the ways that the Festival has brings feminist ideals into being:

I think that we approach our daily living from a different, and like, a radically different way. The way we cook our food, and the way we build and the way we interact with each other, I think it just feels so different. I can’t quite put my finger on what the difference is. Um, but it seems like this place was rooted from some, like, people that wanted to see a radical change in their community. You know? And so they broke free from what
Women who wanted to create change and develop a place for women to live differently for one week each year built this Festival. In the beginning, they were attempting to create a feminist alternative outside of the patriarchy for women to explore their own identities and sexualities and find empowerment with each other. For many this experience and hope continues today. All of this was based on a feminist separatist approach that grew out of the 1960s and 1970s that women actively brought into physical being. What they have accomplished over the last 36 years has been the creation of a space that resonates with memory through daily practices. Sometimes, as Workers, you might not be able to pin down what make these interactions and practices feel different but it is rooted in the past and these acts are significant and are often just a small piece of a bigger whole.

The physicality of the work performed at the Festival is immense. Some women come to the Festival trained as carpenters, plumbers, electricians and cooks while many have no experience. Part of the Festival’s philosophy is to train and mentor women into positions. To be a part of the Carpentry crew you do not necessarily need to know how to use a hammer or build a frame, those are all skills that you can learn while engaging in the work and women are happy to mentor, train and support learning. As Demming noted:

Twenty five, thirty years ago, I realized that what we were doing here, particularly as Workers, but more generically as a community as a whole, with the shows etc, that we were teaching women new ways to live; new ways to move through the world. And one of the things I looked at, was things that we instituted here, as Workers, as Festie attendees, as women here, in a community for a week, that we would then take back home, or the things that I focused on, as an example, was ASL [American Sign Language] interpreting. And, it was brought to my attention by being here, that we needed to have that. Because we did it here. And we have a vital active deaf community here. And I think I’m not alone in that I brought that knowledge back to my home community. And from this we do nothing that is not ASL interpreted. And I learned that here. So that kind of community building, that kind of knowledge, is what I gain from this every year. (59, Caucasian, working class/blue collar, 34 years as a Worker, female, queer, feminist, post grad)
The Festival is a celebration of being a woman in the world, of learning new ways to work in the world, and to learn new skills, such as ASL interpreting, and bringing these skills to one’s home community. In many ways, the interview participants expressed the political nature of being involved in the Festival’s creation. As Bo articulated:

I would just, you know, want to reiterate that I think who and how and what we love is inherently political; being here and doing what we do is inherently political. And I think that’s important. (43, white, working class, 14 years as a Worker, 1 year as a festiegoer, woman, dyke, femme, Mom, graduate school)

This grouping of Workers creates a community that, while not bound by geography, is pulled together by identity politics, performance and a shared sense of purpose. It is a space that has survived decades of liberation movements, of identity politics, of S/M political struggles, threats from the religious right, tensions around transsexual inclusion/exclusion, and the “post-modern” examination of language and texts, to name a few. There are ongoing struggles and divisive debates specifically around issues of inclusion and exclusion and the political structure of the Festival. As we have examined above, identity-based social movements invoke utopic notions of community to mobilize and validate their cause within and to a broader public. A significant quality of this utopian space comes from women finding power to move in and through their bodies through physical work, and having this experience or “learning” transmit and influence change in their daily lives. Feminism, as a large multi-streamed political movement founded on the idea of working towards something that holds the potential of change making. It is the utopic realization that something in the here and now does not work and that a possible future build through critical engagement and social change that is a fruitful area of study. Particularly when there is no one possible future perfect and the road towards change is fraught with tensions, debates and critical analysis that often do not call for one utopic vision.

Miranda Joseph (2002) suggests that performance’s temporality is not one of simple presence but instead of futurity. In Joseph’s work, we see that performance can offer us a seed of potential that is shared with the audience and witnesses and that its real power is in its ability to inspire a way of knowing and recognition among audience members and witnesses that encourages feelings of belonging, especially for those who are in the
minority. A performance of work and community at the Festival disrupts normative orientations of gender, sexuality and work and queers it. Cvetkovich and Wahng’s (2001) article introduces the notion that the Festival is “viewed as a space outside of space” (p. 139) and that for the Workers involved, the Festival becomes a space of experimentation, one where people can play with aspects of sex and sexuality in a “safe space” outside of heteronormative time. Cvetkovich and Wahng’s (2001) roundtable discussion unearthed “a sense of preciousness of Michigan as a place that you have to experience in a body, sensory way, and over the years, over time” (p. 149-150) in order to fully understand the Festival. This repetition and ritualization of participation is part of the embodied utopic practice of performance that occurs within this space. As one participant in the roundtable discussion noted:

Hets [heterosexuals] get to act it [erotic desires] out every day on the streets in every place they live. They act out the rituals of their erotic desire for each other. We’re just starting to be able to do that in the world at large. But Michigan is a remarkable place in the sense that initially it was a chickfest. It still is, and it always has been, deeply about being able to realize desires as lesbians through some notion of community. (as cited in Cvetkovich & Wahng, 2001, p. 139)

Almost every activity at the Festival is ritualized—whether it is having a meal together, participating in the raising of the Night Stage, mowing the parking lot, or very consciously, as at the Opening Night Ceremony, singing the Amazon Women Rise anthem with the mass of women who congregate in the Night Stage Bowl. The Festival is held in its own space and creates its own sense of time—“Michigan Time”—that does not operate like the time we experience outside of the Festival.

Field Notes July 17, 2011

Today really felt like I experienced a number of days in one. It probably takes me a month to do as much socializing as I do here in a day. That’s one of the things that blows me away about being here. We’re just all together all the time and sometimes what we do in a day would, in the world outside of here, take weeks or months to happen. It’s like there is more time here. There is more time to make those deeper connections with other people and it all happens in a few days/weeks. We make these connections through work, play and down time. To be here is to already have some similar identities or experiences as others (be it lesbian, queer, feminist, women) who are here for similar reasons (to build a festival, to participate in history making, to re-
connect with chosen family, to make new friends, lovers, acquaintances, etc.), and to make these working, living, playing connections is strong and unique. The relationships are built differently and feel stronger because of the intimacy of it all here (the emotional, physical and as the two interrelate with one and other). It grows stronger over the years, through time.

Utopia can be seen as a temporal coordinate (Munoz, 2009) and according to Bloch (1995), utopia is a time and place that is not-yet-here. Bloch contends that utopia is a critique of the here and now and that there is something missing in the here and now. The “should be” of utopia is linked to hope, a stance against how things are and will be. Utopian practices suggest a new modality of doing and being that are different and inspiring but it is always in process, something that you are always working toward. The materials captured in the narratives above are embedded in the past—not a nostalgic past but a past that helps us feel a certain structure of feelings, a circuit of queer belonging. As I revisit and read each narrative, as a reader and a Festival Worker, I can see myself in that job, picking up a hammer or screwing the dance floor stage down. It is work that gets done whether I’m there or not but part of me is always longing for that work, for that community, for that Land, for those embodied experiences.

Through the narratives shared with me, we witness women involved in work that they do not necessarily do in mainstream culture. There is very little documentation of women engaged in hard manual labour, outside of the Second World War and “Rosie the Riveter,” and the Festival provides women with the space to learn, grow and find new ways to engage with work and community. But, the feminism that is embodied at the Festival has deep links to a time past. As Deluxe eloquently describes:

The feminism here, is a different kind than I had experienced before, because it has all of this, um, lesbian separatism history. And then also, it’s a different era, of feminism, that I don’t interact with that much or I didn’t interact with much, back at home. So a lot of people were extremely political, growing up, in all of these different ways, in terms of like,

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19 In World War II American women entered the workforce in unprecedented numbers. “Rosie the Riveter” was the center figure in an advertisement campaign to bring women into the workforce. Retrieved September 12, 2013 from http://www.pophistorydig.com/?p=877.
vegetarianism and anti-war, and nuclear disarmament and all of these really large political ways and campaigns: world, national, apartheid, you know, huge campaigns that was very much tied into a feminist ethic. And I think that’s changing a bit. But it was really nice to hang out with, especially the women that I was hanging out with, at the very beginning, a lot of these older dykes who have been here for a really long time. (28, White American, poor, 8 years as a Worker, woman, queer, bisexual, grad school)

There is a definite air of utopian possibility within the sentiments shared above. These feelings and experiences drive a certain kind of self-empowerment that for some is only accomplished in this space. These experiences certainly resonate strongly with the women who have been part of the Festival’s community since the 1970s and influence the experiences and expectations of those women who arrived over the last few decades. As Deluxe observed, these experiences and possibilities are linked to a feminism that has passed. A feminism deeply influenced and driven by political experiences that might not be the lived realities of women from younger generations. How does this utopian realm of possibilities translate for those who grew up with different lived experiences? Does this utopian vision still work for most? What does it mean to perform through a lens of feminism past?

**Feminism(s), Temporality and Social Change**

As Tristan Taramino (2000) remarked in an article she wrote in response to her experiences as a workshop facilitator at the Festival in 2000, “(f)or utopia to work, it’s gotta work for all of us” (p. xx). From the narratives shared in Chapter 4 from Workers such as Tallulah Dottie, one could think that the Festival is an idyllic place for all women. Sadly, as discussed in the previous chapter, this is not the case, women who do not physically read as being a woman at the Festival may be challenged, and women who have or are in the process of transitioning from male to female are asked not to attend. Feminism as a broad theoretical construct is constantly revisiting the questions: Who are we missing? Whose experiences are not being heard? Who does not have access to what in society? What are the larger intersectional barriers faced by women in society that subsequently affects their ability to participate in the Festival? While these questions are constantly being asked at the Festival and in feminist discourse more general, the
Festival’s community often find it difficult to critically engage with these questions especially when these questions and the bodies and experiences of those under question are difficult for these women to address or see. It is by investigating these “imperfections” that we can begin to better understand the power dynamics of the Festival, the feminisms that inform the embodied practices and political debates that take place on and off the Land, and get a sense of the temporality that is played out in feminist discourse in general.

Many of my interview participants expressed difficulty reconciling the beauty of being part of this community and the empowerment that they experienced on the Land with the moments in which their utopic visions were not met. As Rosita noted:

> This community is so much closer to ideal than any other community I’ve been part of. But it’s interesting to see the way that we’re still struggling. Um, be it through the trans issues, or, and I know, I understand completely, why we clean out performer camping every year. But there’s still the weird hierarchy that goes on, and you’d think, in this ideal community that we created, that there wouldn’t be a hierarchy of performers and then Workers and then festiegoers, but there’s, you know “We have our space.” And it’s, so, um, sometimes I’m confronted with that a little more than I want to be. But mostly, it really is, it’s immensely important. Hearing women laughing and chainsaws and drills and birdsong and wind, all in, you know, a twenty yard radius, it’s phenomenal. And, where else are you going to get that? (22, white, lower middle class, 9 years as a Worker, 8 years as a festiegoer, queer, female, nerdy, pansexual, college)

While the Festival community is the closest to an ideal community that Rosita has ever experienced it holds tensions within it borders. Some tensions are situated within the constructs of the Festival itself such as feelings that there is a hierarchy in the community and the larger social issues that transcend the Festival’s borders, such as the exclusion of trans women. In this narrative we can see how there is an ability to dismiss the tensions within the community in favour of the individual good of experiencing the utopian vision and feelings of personal empowerment. On the topic of whether the Festival is feminist, Demming stated:

> I am two sided about that, because of my history. On the stronger hand, absolutely, because what we do here, is bring women from all walks of life, all cultures, all backgrounds and give them the power to create themselves and to learn new skills. And to be empowered. So absolutely, I
think this is feminism, in action. On the other hand, we’re missing so many women. We don’t have the ability to reach a lot of the women who would so benefit from this. And I think that’s more lack of resources, rather than lack of impetus. You know? We would love to do it. (59, Caucasian, working class/blue collar, 34 years as a Worker, female, queer, feminist, post grad)

While there is a diversity of women who attend the Festival each year, there is a longing to include more women in the Festival, be they women who are experiencing economic hardships or women who cannot take a week off from their lives each year to attend. There were also shared sentiments about a loss of younger generations of women. Are young women not attending because of the explicit exclusion of trans women from the Festival? Are more young women less likely to identify as “women”? Are they not seeking out this kind of community building because they are making these kinds of connections at home? All of these questions have been asked in various ways over the years at the post-Festival community meeting. There is a lot of speculation as to why the festiegoers attendance rates have declined over the years. These are question that are worth exploring but fall outside the scope of this dissertation.

One of the other themes that came up in the interviews was an expectation that the community members are going to take care of each other. Some of the stories shared were indicative of this community support, where community members banded together to raise funds for tuition, housing costs, health care costs and offered women places to stay in times of need. However, this support is not felt or experienced by everyone. As Ruby put it:

> I do think that one of the things that happens here, under that, sort of, expectation. I guess or that sort of assumption that we’re going to take care of each other and ourselves and that this is this nurturing place, is that there are, there’s so many different ways that people have needs and they don’t get all met here. And women do get hurt here, physically and spiritually and emotionally. And bad things happen here. And we get this kind of utopian blinder on, that “Oh, it’s perfect here.” And while it’s a darn sight more perfect than most any place else I’ve ever been in the world, it isn’t perfect. And there are problems here. And one of my wishes and hopes it that we, and sometimes we do, sometimes we deal with them pretty head on. And sometimes we don’t. But it’s a place where we could, you know, these are not unique issues, to the place certainly. But how we, as a community, choose to or not to, (laugh) in some cases, deal with
The utopian world making is a social mechanism that works for many of the women at the Festival most, if not all, of the time. When your experience is one that embodies the empowerment model articulated above it becomes difficult to explore the possibility of experiences outside of one’s own. Even for those who experience dissonances outside of the utopian ideal their narratives are quickly replaced with the utopian narrative. Hence the presence of, as Ruby articulated, “utopian blinders.”

Women’s and queer liberation has been explored in other dissertations on the Festival (Barber, 2011; Higgins, 2008; Karels, 2008; Kendall, 2006), however this focus on liberation often ignores the consequences and deep impact experienced by populations in which there are “struggles to undo any form of phobic exclusion” (Wiegman, 2012, p. 92). These exclusions “can never be made immune . . . to the desire for accessing traditional forms and formulas of normative US life or to reinterpretation, if not reinvention, by the conservative forces that cede political ground to minoritized existence in the process” (Wiegman, 2012, p. 92). Some of the concrete ways in which the utopian world-making practices of the Festival are questioned are when experiences of racism and transmisogyny take center stage in conversation and within a person’s embodied experience on and off the Land.

**When Fissures Appear: What Happened in 2011**

The Festival is a place that is founded on and politically positioned as an exclusionary deployment of identity based utopic place-making practices. The argument for this exclusion is based on the belief that women who are born and labeled female at birth, who are raised as girls in patriarchal society and who live their lives as women face particular dynamics of subordination, power and oppression in society. The argument continues that because of this fundamental gendered socialization women deserve to spend a week in seclusion with other women every summer where they can find solace, celebrate their strengths and accomplishments, and rejuvenate for the coming year. The Festival is a place that was created by women for women and which allows (some)
women freedom from patriarchal constraints once every year. This belief is based on a bi-gendered notion of gender significations in society. You are either a woman or a man and there is generally little room to acknowledge much else.

Field Notes August 16, 2011

Tonight was the community meeting. We talked at length about the women-born-women and Trans Women Belong Here campaigns. A Worker asked, “Why are so many Workers wearing these t-shirts? Do women know what they are signing onto as Workers for a festival that holds a women-born-women policy? By agreeing to work you are agreeing to support the Festival’s intention.” Many Workers responded in a discussion. Some of the key points raised included that no speech should be squelched, that this community taught them to think critically for themselves, that Workers should not support a “side” while working, and that women can hold very different perspectives than their neighbours, friends and chosen family and still love and respect them. There should be room for difference and different points of view on the Land and within the Worker community. As one Worker stated “I didn’t sign onto a party line.”

There is a missed opportunity for the Festival to reinvigorate itself by including more women into its horizon of possibility. On an ongoing basis the Festival’s intention is reaffirmed and works to silence (and exclude) transgender people, transsexual people and a large number of queer and allied women who might attend and support the Festival if it were more flexible regarding the dynamism of gender and gender expression. At that moment of the community meeting, it became apparent to me that the Festival was excluding individuals to its own detriment. By not allowing all women to attend and add their creative energy and feminist practices and voices to the already diverse mix present they were reaffirming a narrow definition of who can be considered a woman at the Festival thereby alienating Festival allies and the feminist community in general. Despite my own worries, the Festival persists and continues to provide a separatist space for “womyn-born-womyn.”

Vivian Namaste’s book Invisible Lives (2000) explores the work of Marjorie Garber in order to investigate how transvestites in academic writing are often reduced to the performances they engage in and little else (p. 14). Namaste argues that Garber’s work should be turned on its head to suggest that the “crisis of elsewhere” is the crisis of the
possibility of transvestite identity. That the “crisis of elsewhere is always-already a crisis of here” (Namaste, 2000, p. 14). One example of this crisis is manifest in the absence of trans women in the discussions at the Festival around the exclusion of some (trans) women. As I’ve witnessed in online forums and as happened on the Land, opportunities to discuss the tension caused by this policy served to open up the field for transphobia, transmisogyny and hate speech. On the Land, there is little to no representation of trans women in these “discussions” and it falls to allies to step up, take up space and be vocal in their support. The year that my field research took place, the tensions between those who support participation of trans women at the Festival and those who are fervent supporters of the womyn-born-womyn intention had reached a new visible height on the Land. As Bo stated:

Um, it’s hard to not talk about political strife here and not think about the current conflict over trans women inclusion, especially this year when it’s been so very visible. Um, and my own internal process about whether I was willing to wear a t-shirt or a button that said “Trans women belong here.” Um, and whether that would be appropriate on my work shift or not, and you know, kind of all of that stuff. (43, white, working class, 14 years as a Worker, 1 year as a festiegoer, woman, dyke, femme, Mom, graduate school)

This tension has continued at the Festival since 1991 and the expulsion of Nancy J. Burkholder under the suspicion of being a transsexual. Since the 1992 Festival, workshops, roundtable discussions, demonstrations, and other events have attempted to raise awareness about Camp Trans and the transphobic nature of excluding trans women from the Festival. Throughout the year bulletin boards, blogs and other social media sites endeavour to encourage dialogue. Photos taken the year I was on the Land collecting data for this research (below) demonstrate the visible show of support for two sides of the debate: the Womyn Born Womyn (WBW) intention supporters and the Trans Womyn Belong Here (TWBH) supporters. In 2011, these two groups took up a lot of visible space on the Land.
The WBW group claimed the colour red for their messaging so it was assumed that if you were wearing red supported the WBW Festival intention. They threw red fabric in trees, hung homemade t-shirts on clotheslines, and made patches, stickers and flyers, which
were posted in Porta Potties around the Land. The TWBH group distributed flyers that outlined the “guiding principles” of being an ally to trans women at the Festival, sold t-shirts on a sliding scale to interested participants, handed out buttons, offered white flags for people to hang by their campsites and set up meet-ups and workshops to raise awareness about the work they are doing and how to be an ally. They even set up a TWBH living room in the general camping area for people to simply hang out and find resources. These, however, are only two perspectives of a much more complex and nuanced discussion that was happening on and off the Land.

The womyn-born-womyn intention is linked to the 1970s lesbian feminist separatist movement. It was an ideology based on the male/female divide. This cultural history informs how women move on the Land and how narrative are formed and shared on the Land. These notions of women’s empowerment, moving lumber, building stages, running concerts, is happening in the present at a time when more and more women are finding work in trades and “non-traditional” women’s arenas, though their numbers are still underrepresented in male dominated fields (Burke & Mattis, 2007; Eisenberg, 1998; Fielden, Davidson, Gale & Davey, 2000).

Social relations are inscribed within the Festival’s social structure. The mechanisms through which these narratives are produced and circulated include the Festival website, stories shared by Workers, festiegoers, and performers, feminist and LGB newsletters and websites, as well as the Festival’s promotional materials and imagined community. Demming has been part of the Festival’s Worker community almost since its inception. As someone who identified as an “old school feminist” she shared:

Being feminist, old school, and “‘m speaking from old school right now, women (spells) w-o-m-e-n; w-o-m-y-n, you know, all the different variations, and the transgender issue, probably about twenty years ago, really caused, in my observation, a, not a rift, but a division in philosophy, on how we perceive who we are as women. I don’t feel that rift. I am very clear that if you are a woman, and you identify as a woman, and you want to be here, for women’s culture, you’re a woman. (59, Caucasian, working class/blue collar, 34 years as a Worker, female, queer, feminist, post grad)

There is a lot of disagreement around the women-born-women only intention of the Festival. Some Workers, regardless of age, are in support of the intention while others
advocate for a Festival that is inclusive of all women. Many of the Workers I spoke to noted that their love of the Festival and their hope for change in the intention was complicated. Deluxe articulates this personal tension:

I know that the Festival has a reputation for, depending on your side, being transphobic, or just not trans inclusive... I’ve had a lot of conversations about this this year. You can either just avoid the subject, um, or you can make it a point to represent your opinion. And my opinion is that I think that this space for women is so important and valuable to all, to me. And I think all women should be able to access it, um, and that includes trans women; that includes people that live out in the world as women, and are female identified. And I’m very privileged to be a ciswoman, and I’ve not had to work for that... And I tell people how much I love it, and how important it is to me, and how radical of a place it is, and how many trans people are here. And how I’ve never seen so many different, you know, forms of, so many different blends of masculinity and femininity. Like, and it’s a women’s space, and um, that doesn’t mean it’s not radical. (28, White American, poor, 8 years as a Worker, woman, queer, bisexual, grad school)

For others learning and becoming aware of trans experiences grew out of their experience working at the Festival. As Pearl remarks:

I just, I’ve had a lot of, I can remember before the first time I came to the Festival, I had really no concept of trans issues at all... But, I feel like over the years, my thoughts and feelings on stuff has become more nuanced. I mean, one, I just know more people who have felt the need to transition. I don’t know. I mean, it’s, and yeah, that’s just how I’ve come to think about different complicated issues. And I still think it’s really complex and nuanced. And I still think that it’s, you know, and I feel like I’m still evolving thoughts and feelings, or how I communicate it, specifically when I talk to other people. But mostly what I get when I’m out on the street is “Oh, well, at Festival, you know, there are panty checks. And you know, there are no transgender there.” And I’m like, “Okay, there are transgender here. Now I understand that you, what you heard, but I’m just telling you what I know.” And that doesn’t mean that every, I mean, that the policy doesn’t have an effect, I’m just saying. (laugh) there are trans women every year. There are trans women here. You can say it, and people have different t-shirts. And I’m like, “Okay, trans women aren’t here.” But they’re here. And I’m not saying that, that doesn’t mean that we don’t need to make a conscious discussion around making the policy make more sense. (38, African American, working class, 15 years as a Worker, female, femme, queer, type one diabetes, some college)
An interesting point raised by both Pearl’s and Deluxe’s narratives is that trans women are and have been present at the Festival now and over the years and that “different blends of masculinity and femininity” are embodied, expressed and present on the Land. While these different physical embodiments and expressions are visible and in a way celebrated, the line drawn by the Festival’s reinforcement of the womyn-born-womyn only policy erases the trans body and does not allow trans histories to be shared, acknowledged or even seen. There is an erasure of bodies, identities and experiences.

I also know the on the ground reality of being at the Festival. I, like Rocky below, first discovered the words transgender and transsexual while at the Festival. During the first few years, I was oblivious to the politics and lived realities of trans women. I was blown away by the gender expression and possibilities available to me just by virtue of being part of this community. Rocky is a fine storyteller so I will let her words illustrate some of the experiences we shared:

I don’t know, I didn’t even know about the whole trans issue here. When I hit here, I was so enamored of the place. And I was dealing with so much other stuff, like holy cow, I mean, we were, my ex-girlfriend and I, the gal that came here with me my very first time. We got out of the car, we walked in the parking lot and the very first person we saw was [name], who was very excited to see Tennessee plates on the car. And she was Tennessean at the time and “Oh hi, there’s two more Tennesseans here.” I was like “No, actually, I’m from [name].” She’s like “Well, you don’t count then.” And I’m, all I can do is stare at this goatee she’s got. I’m like, “What’s going on?” And I had lived, I’ve lived in big cities. I haven’t spent my entire life in (small town). You know, I lived in northern California. And then I started thinking “Well huh, I wonder if every person I saw in California that I perceived as male really was”. And that got me to thinking and all that’s swimming through my head while I’m trying to introduce myself to this lady. And we walk about twenty more feet and then we see another woman walking towards us, she’s got a goatee and she’s not wearing a shirt. I mean, by the time we got to the office to sign in, I had scrape marks under my chin. I was like, “Wha?” My jaw was just hanging open. (laugh) And [name] leans over, my ex-girlfriend, she leans over and she’s like, “Okay, before you say anything. Yes, she’s a woman; yes she has a goatee. And she’s not wearing a shirt. Let’s go sign in.” (laugh) So, I mean, I, I was dealing with so much other things, when I first came, the first few years I came here; I wasn’t even clicking on the whole trans thing, until people started speaking about “Oh, the trans women belong here.” (39, Cherokee/Irish, blue collar, 10 years as a Worker, female, lesbian, bachelor’s degree and some college)
The Festival can be a place of learning for those who attend. And, this learning can seem endless. Some come into an understanding of the world they live in while others experience a queering of possibilities by physically engaging and experiencing this community first hand. Some learn new skills or come to a broader understanding of identities. Others learn how to camp in the woods for a week and some learn which bourbons taste better. Although these possibilities are available to some the preciousness of these experiences only reinforces the boundaries between those who are excluded. Let me share a story from my field notes:

**Field Notes, August 2, 2011**

I had an interesting conversation with a fellow Worker today about my dissertation and the exclusion of trans women from the Festival. We were talking about the social change that has happened over the last 30 years for gender nonconforming people, transgendered identified people and transsexuals and access to surgery and hormone therapy. As someone who has been working the Festival since the late 1970s she has deep appreciation for the Festival’s womyn-born-womyn intention. She shared with me that the Festival was set up to be a place where women could learn new skills. At the Festival(s) women can be stage hands, can work the lights and the sound systems however, at the time the Festival began, women did not have access to trade schools or on-the-job work experience. She shared with me a story of when the first trans woman wanted to work the Festival. She said that this woman had been formally trained in a trade school in a theater department before she transitioned and that if she worked the Festival that she would be taking the place of some woman who did not have access to this formal training and that the Festival could provide her with those on the job skills. She shared with me that in those early days, trans women (pre-transition) had access to and actively used their male privilege to get the jobs and the training they wanted in the world and that young women who did not have these options needed a place to learn. Through this conversation, I realized that some women do not understand that the experiences of trans women are real and tangible. That trans women who had the “privilege” of graduating from a trade school probably lost their theater job when they transitioned. The reality for trans women today is that many of them are coming out as youth and are beginning hormone replacement therapy much earlier in their lives. The social dynamics are changing and the Festival’s feminist context is not keeping up with our current lived reality. There needs to be an analysis that is rooted in the everyday experiences of the social world around us.

Elements of what it means to be a woman are regulated at the Festival. There is a very particular context in which this narrative takes shape and a good case study to draw from
is the ongoing tensions surrounding the exclusion of trans women at the Festival and the continual reaffirmation of the “womyn-born-womyn” only intention. Trans women and men are tolerated at the Festival as long as they abide by the implicit rules of circulation (Namaste, 2000, p. 11), they are implicitly encouraged to not share their histories of transition and, especially for trans women, anything about their lives and bodies pre-transition. A story that was shared with me at the Festival, taken from my field notes, was when a fellow Worker participated in a workshop that allowed participants the opportunity to explore their early life experiences of sex and sexuality. This Worker expressed the discomfort she experienced after hearing about a woman’s experience of sexual arousal in her pre-transitioned body. While this story did not end with this woman with a trans history being asked to leave the Land, many out trans women are relegated to experiencing the Festival on the outskirts of the Festival’s Land, in CampTrans.

By relegating trans women to a space outside of the Land and by intentionally excluding this group of women from the Festival, reinforces the idea that trans women are outsiders, are aliens and are not subjects alongside the women who build and run the Festival. This exclusion reinforces larger social framing that considers trans women as non-women. The Festival’s visioning of utopic place making falls short for these women as it does not include all women. It defines and sets up boarders, both physical and social, as to who is a woman, who is allowed to enter through the Front Gates and who can be part of this Festival and its community making. Thos moves to reaffirm essentialist notions of sex, gender and gender identity, which have been the central focus of many feminist discourses over the last five decades (and have included the works of Judith Butler, Betty Friedan, Tori Moi, Luce Irigaray, and Susan Bordo, to name a few). In this way, some might read the Festival’s exclusion of trans women to mean that trans women are not women and that by excluding trans women they are positioning trans women’s identities as abnormal thereby reinforcing the normalcy of women who were born and raised as women. In these ways, the Festival is erasing trans women through the process of drawing boundaries around who’s lived experience is counted/valid/relevant in this space.
By excluding trans women some of the unfortunate developments of this framework of thinking are: that it this argument can be deployed in a violence against trans women way, that it creates boundaries and divisions around who a woman is and can be, and that it prevents the more recent developments of feminist, queer and trans politics from taking shape on the Land and may have reverberations in both North America and around the globe. By erasing and excluding the real, lived and experienced identity and embodiment of trans women ignores the depth and breadth of women’s experiences within a patriarchal society. Sexism is deeply entrenched in our psyches and lived realities, as women we experience the sting of sexism and power inequities and those who are at the margins of what is allowed for women to do and be in society is particularly precarious for those who live and embody those margins, be they the experiences of femme identified women who are mechanics, or butches trying to access women’s washrooms, or trans women who are questioned, bullied and face violence because of their precarious gender expression.

The Festival is a particular site of discourse making, one that has power to define and restrict the performances and the subject formation that happens within its border. Social “subjects are constituted in and through social institutions and the language employed by these administrative bodies” (Namasta, 2000, p. 16). The language reflected in the narratives above demonstrate how certain kinds of utopic narratives shape the Festival community and help to reinforce the borders and boundaries that are constructed there. The notion of “womyn-born-womyn” grew out of the Festival’s own narrative and history though, as we have explored in the previous chapter, transmisogyny and the exclusion of trans women from women’s spaces has taken place, at least through historical records, since the 1970’s. This construction of knowledge has become part of the Festival’s memory making practices.

As I explored earlier, physical “acts of memory are performed by individuals in a cultural framework that encourages these acts” (Bal, 1999, p. xiii). The physical everyday performances of culture and the discourse that shapes the narratives expressed at the Festival work to reinforce and encourage the exclusion of trans histories, experiences (unless these women are closeted) and some bodies (those who do not pass as “women”
at the Festival). The Festival, in this way creates a social institution that produces subjects and constructs knowledge that move to exclude and invalidate the existence of some women. The only women who can properly perform “woman” are those who were labeled female at birth, who were raised as girls and live their lives as women. This argument is dated and has passed its point of relevance within current feminist and queer debates surrounding sex, gender and gender identity.

**Discussion**

Although the Festival is continually embroiled in controversies, women from a diverse range of intersecting identities continue to return to the Festival every year. Bonnie Morris (1999) writes:

> Festivals incite controversy because everyone wants to return annually to their own magic . . . what sound engineer Karen Kane calls “the bubble.” We expect the perfect spiritual buzz, the perfect women-only version of our imagined ideal, served up and lived over and over each festival season. Since personal visions of utopia differ, we do indeed wind up with both lesbian gospel choirs and lesbian Shabbat rituals on the land, with women burning sage and women demanding smoke-free space. It is not always possible to prevent one person’s spiritual high from spilling over into another’s view. (p. 175)

The Festival’s aim is to build an inclusive and welcoming environment for all women who attend. The Workers work tirelessly to create this atmosphere. The controversies that arise on the Land most often stem from the “baggage” that Workers, festiegoers and performers bring from their home communities. For some, the controversies and political engagement may be just as moving as the music, the workshops, or the movies are for others. As Morris (1999) explains, despite these controversies and tensions “women return again and again each summer, declaring that festival time is sacred” (p. 11). For almost 37 years, the Festival has shaped the lives, political consciousness, and personal transformations of the women who attend. In many ways, while the Festival is intended to be a safe space for women it also pushes the boundaries of comfort, and offers new experiences and friendships to women of different ages, gender expressions, abilities, and race. It is a space that allows women the chance to unpack the “baggage” they bring with them from patriarchal society in a setting that allows the sharing of diverse viewpoints.
and input at community meetings, in workshops, and in conversations around the campfire or outside a tent. In many ways, the Festival does not always create a utopic experience for all women all time. What makes the Festival community thrive are all the women who gather and are determined to create an embodied model of lived feminist utopia in a place where the diversity of bodies, abilities, political beliefs, communities, and traditions are celebrated.

One of the aims of the Festival and the aim of feminism has been to “bring into positive representation that femininity which phallogocentrism had coded negatively and thus do justice to all that women, in their great diversity, are capable of becoming” (Braidotti, 2011, p. 81). Feminism has given women hope and infused a sense of possibility for change on all social levels; from the lived, everyday embodied experience to the big systemic shifts that are needed to sustain social changes. As Rosi Braidotti (2011) writes “implicit in this project is the aim to infuse into our dead-serious, death-bound culture a joyful sense of possibility, to restore dignity to the pursuit of happiness in a collective and not individualistic manner and to cultivate an often gratuitous gesture of hope for the future” (2011, p. 81). The Festival constitutes a way in which this future hope is made into a present embodied possibility for women engaged in the Festival’s work. Part of this work is to return every year to ensure its futurity.

Utopia and hope in this context are associated with the formation of a better world and the creation of the possibilities of other ways of being and other futures. The Festival offers women an embodied experience of possibility because of the community that is created there, the hopes that inspire change, and the possibility of feminist social change in the real world because of the lessons learned in this space. Feminist separatist spaces, like the Festival, provide women with a potential space to experiment, to build confidence, and skills. The narratives in this chapter help us understand the temporality of the Festival, the way in which the past acted in the service of mapping a future, and the Festival itself as a place of possibility and transformation. Heteronormative culture makes queers think that both the past and the future do not belong to them. These narratives remind us that we have a past and a future and opens up room for us to imagine beyond simply surviving the present and to instead imagine a hopeful future. This mapping of
hope and affect brings me back to the Festival where I rehearsed and planned a future self, one that is not quite here but always in process, always emerging and becoming.

While the Festival may be perceived as a utopic space that holds hope and potential as some interview participants noted, this space is not perfect and, in fact, what complicates this space are the feminisms at work on the Land. Over time, there are many documented incidents of politically fuelled feminist tensions on the Land. What shifts these spaces and feminism *out of time* and place is the fact that there is no right answer and no singular feminism or feminist perspective. I argue that part of what complicates yet reinforces the utopian place making nature of the Festival and feminisms hope for a more socially just future is that there is no one perfect future. The success of the Festival derives from the fact that it has been the home of difficult conversations and dialogue around very sensitive issues over the years and continues this tradition to this day. This Festival, in some ways, is a holder of space for conversations. There are workshops, ongoing online conversations and debates, and academics are invited to study the culture and community and publish articles and books on their findings. Part of the future perfection of this space is its imperfectness. As Kavka (2002) most eloquently points out feminism “can be best thought of as multiple practices that share historical links to an umbrella term” (p. 32). As Drucilla Cornell (1995) has written, “feminists are continually calling on all of us to re-imagine our forms of life” (p. 79). Other feminists have pursued related lines of thought and argued that “we need to be pragmatic” (Bordo, 1993, p. 185) if we want to “project utopian hopes, envision emancipatory alternatives, and infuse all our work with a normative critique of domination and injustice” (Bordo, 2993, p. 185). I would push us to be more than pragmatic yet remain deeply critical of any utopian practice we hope to embody and push forward into practice. But, what happens when political struggle and moments of dissonance are ignored, washed over, erased within the normative discourse of the Festival? Let’s look to Robyn Wiegman’s writing in *Object Lessons* (2013) where she writes:

> The central issue for thinking about political struggle is not, then, located in the determinacies of what changes and what seemingly remains the same but in grasping the challenge of the fact that nothing is static or, from a different direction, that transformation is all there is. From this perspective, continuity is the effect of change, not its subordination or
eradication, and being other than what it once was is the persistent, not exceptional, condition of everything engaged by identity knowledges. (p. 93)

While this model might be obvious its message can become buried and forgotten when critical practice (such seen in Wiegman’s Women’s Studies focus) remains entrenched in an apparatus that reproduces its own narrative of authority as the means of doing politically transgressive work. From this, we can extrapolate that the failure of transformation lies in the Festival’s inability to move away from traditional understandings of gender and its own idealized political foundations in a time when feminism is exploring gender possibilities in new and creative ways. The field of imagery that surrounds the Festival is the same symbolism and rhetoric that serves as its own disciplinary point. The utopian narrative serves as a powerful voice and creates moments of “freedom” and change for some while it also disallows other possibilities, identities and expressions of gender. It is both the engine behind its own critical power and the source from which it draws its analytical force.
Chapter Six. Closing: See you in August!

Image 20 See you in August (2013)
Setting the Stage

Dog tired and wobbly legged I am packing up my camp area as quickly as I can. This task always takes me longer to do than I think it will. My tent is full of unpacked clothes, my bed needs to be pulled apart into its components—blankets, foam, plywood with milk crates to keep it all off the ground—and somehow I have to fit this all into two duffle bags and Worker Storage. Once I clear everything out of the tent, I have to sweep it clean. I use a handful of Bracken Ferns. Three or four of them together make an excellent broom. Once the overhead tarp has been taken down and my tent collapsed there is always a little drying to be done—condensation, dew, left over rain accumulation—all things attached to living next to a swamp for a month and being in the Mid-West during August, the time of year for spectacular thunder and lightning rainstorms. Sometimes I just take my extra shower towels and wipe everything down so my things don’t become infested with mould over the winter while in Worker Storage. Today I’m working hard to get everything packed up and put away so I can get ready for tonight’s end of crew bonfire. We’ve been pulling boards and plywood off of the stages all week and throwing the “dead wood” in the burn pile. It’s one of my most favourite parts of my personal Festival experience. It’s where I get to say goodbye to the Land and this community and let things go from the past year as I look forward to the year ahead. In many ways, this is my New Year’s Eve party.

One of my crewmates had to leave early so she gave me a piece of two-by-six with a message scrawled on it with and asked of me to throw it into the fire for her. While she couldn’t be here she still wanted the chance to put something out there, burn an intention or just let something go. I don’t know what the message says because, as much as I’d like to read it, the words are not mine to read. I’ve been thinking about what I want to let go of this year, what intention I want to throw into the fire. As I pack up my tent, I find myself meditating on my Festival experience, on my last year and what’s to come. Part of what I experience here is an unfolding of my own cyclical nature. Every year there are so many different experiences that seem to take shape and yet there are others that stay the same. Just as I’m ready to feed the flames and watch the fire burn. I’m looking forward to heading home. I miss my dog, my wife, my life. I’m ready to sleep for a week and fall
back into a bed in a room with four walls and a ceiling. Let the letting go begin. I’m ready for a reset as I set my mind to imagining what my new year will hold and what next year’s Festival will bring. Let’s go!

Discussion

If we do not figure out who we came from and where we come from we are orphans.

- Ferron (An interview with G. Shaprio, 2008)

Feminist knowledge is an interactive process that brings out aspects of our existence, especially our own implication with power, that we had not noticed before.

- Rosie Braidotti (2011, p. 16)

Let me remind you that a few hundred queers gathered in unlicensed warehouses, for orgies or for organizing, is still considered a disruption. Let me remind you queer roots reach deep. Never forget the graves of our foremamas and papas, like our animal passion, are rooted underground.

- Amber Dawn (2014)

In my experience, Rita Mae Brown’s poem “Army of Lovers” is frequently quoted by the Workers and other Festival community members to describe the community that forms on the Land and at the Festival. One line, “An army of lovers will never be defeated” (1971, p. 77) is particular popular. The original “army of lovers” refers to The Sacred Band of Thebes in ancient Greece. The Sacred Band was made up of men who loved men and they were one of the most fearless bands of warriors of the time. Drawing on this history, the Workers and community members of the Festival have laid claim to the powerful nature of community, developing strong bonds with others, and the power of same sex love. It is through this love and generous support for one another that each woman can not only survive but also thrive.

Often times, when I’m at my lowest, I draw on the friendships and loverships that I’ve developed over the years at the Festival and with my Festival family. By drawing on those connections, through my imagination and by actively connecting with others, I often find a way out of those harder times. The individuals from this community of women are often the ones who have stepped up to support me when things have gone off
the rails in my life. I’ve been lucky to be able to do the same for some of them. Sometimes this takes the shape of a financial contribution when someone is facing costly medical bills, sometimes it’s a phone call, or a visit. Sometimes it’s about showing up when someone’s relationship breaks up and they need help packing boxes or a shoulder to cry on. Even when those relationships are kilometers and continents apart, there is a sense of knowing each other differently because of the time we’ve spent together on the Land. There is something about the way we live and work together that creates strong bonds that persist over time and distance. These women have been and are part of my “army of lovers.”

This community is made up of “an army of lovers” who persist to “never be defeated” in the face of much adversity and social and cultural change. As this dissertation has explored, the Festival has encountered many debates, tensions, celebrations and transformations over the years, most of which are complex and nuanced. Kath Browne (2009) argues that the Festival creates a space that fosters what she has termed “productive tensions” (p. 542) According to Browne, these tensions are necessary for the constructive growth of lesbian, queer and feminist communities and identities (2009). When we look at the tensions that have arisen in and around the Festival, we can see how, spatially, these tensions have been navigated. For example, in the number of times the Festival has sought to address the inclusion of boy children, the allocation of space for S/M dykes to camp and host parties, and the creation of a Womyn of Color tent, have all resulted in the creation of space for these diverse populations of women and their particular needs. However, the productive tensions surrounding the exclusion of trans women has resulted in the relegation of a space outside the Festival’s gates on a plot of land where they organize and situate themselves as a protest to their exclusion. Is this truly an example of productive tensions or are they only productive when change is seen on the Land? This question draws me back to the writing of Robyn Wiegman (2012), which I discussed in the previous chapter. In her book, Object Lessons, Wiegman (2012) argues that:

The central issue for thinking about political struggle is not, then, located in the determinacies of what changes and what seemingly remains the same but in grasping the challenge of the fact that nothing is static or, from a different direction, that transformation is all there is. From this
perspective, continuity is the effect of change, not its subordination or eradication, and being other than what it once was is the persistent, not exceptional, condition of everything engaged by identity knowledge. (p. 93)

I want to draw attention to the idea that “from this perspective, continuity is the effect of change . . . and being other than what it once was is the persistent . . . condition of everything engaged by identity knowledge.” With this in mind and thinking about specific identity based knowledges, the Festival may in fact be situated out of time if not, out of date relative to the larger feminist discourses. Lisa Vogel’s observation that “with dialog and trial-and-error, the Michigan Womyn’s festival has stabilized” (as cited in Morris 2003, p. 18) may point to the crux of the difficult place in which the Festival finds itself, at least in my mind. It is no longer collectively run; instead, it is run by We Want The Music Company, a for-profit group that is directed by a small group of women who are employed by the company at the head of which is Lisa Vogel.20 The Festival may have become stable but its ability to move through political and identity-based tensions, especially tensions that are centered on gender (such as whether a woman is defined by her biology) has in some ways hindered the political edginess that had once defined the community that congregates on this Land. According to the Festival’s website, the Festival was:

First conceived in the hot feminist politics of the mid-70s, consciously developed through four decades of female ingenuity, feminist process, queer sensibility and dyke vision, the Festival has become an enduring and

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20 I am not in any way suggesting that Lisa Vogel should bear the burden of this situation. While she holds a position of power in this organization, she continues to engage in discussion and dialogue, and is in many ways bound to a past commitment still strongly held onto by the women who formed the Festival community since its inception. That said, this dynamic within its placement in neoliberal capitalist politics should be critically examined. Miranda Joseph’s (2002) Against the Romance of Community is an insightful work that explores what happens when identity-based community-building grass roots organizations become deeply embedded in a capitalist framework. Although Joseph (2002) uses terms like community to invoke notions of identity, relationality, values and relationships that seem to be at odds with capitalism she observes they can evolve over time to encompass the very things that the original structure was created to move against. Chapter five of Joseph’s book offers an in depth analysis and discussion of this topic.
beloved incarnation of women’s imagination and spirit. (Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival, 2012)

As I have explored throughout this dissertation, the Festival is politically edgy for many women in many different and transformative ways just as it is limiting or even prohibitive for others. A seemingly a false dichotomy has unfolded throughout these pages. Each chapter begins with a hopeful lens, to draw out the ways in which the women who build, perform and attend the Festival create it and then imagine and act out an embodied culture of women. I then discuss how, within this embodied culture, women can find images of themselves, go topless in crowds of people, feel the freedom of walking alone at night, learn new trades, and play in new ways. Each chapter also looks at the Festival from a different perspective and examines the times when some women were asked not to attend, when physical and social borders were raised over disputes about what defines the woman permitted on the Land, when borders are policed, and when not all bodies or expressions of identity are seen and celebrated.

As Henri Lefebvre (1991) states “[social] space is a [social] product . . . the space thus produced also serves as a tool of thought and of action . . . in addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control, and hence of domination, of power” (p. 26). The Festival has not escaped the social trappings that are inherent in the creation of any social space. While the Festival attempts to critically engage with problematic power dynamics, domination and forces of control present in mainstream North American society, it successfully creates its own community and culture based on radical lesbian feminist politics that derive from the 1970s. Within its own structures and practices, however, it also (re)creates its own dynamics of power and control. While the Festival provides a radical lesbian feminist space where women can live their lives differently for up to one month each year, obvious practices of social control remain in play. I have explored how forms of control have manifested in the physical boundaries that are present on the Land and within the language and discourse that surround the Festival whether through written text on the Festival’s website or in the ways that the Festival is talked about by those who attend. The most explicit forms of policing and control found on the Land are expressed in relation to bodies and gender identities, which should not come as a surprise given that
the Festival itself was founded on the basis of gender equity, gender exclusion and separatism based on birth sex.

**Feminist Waves: Looking Back/Looking Forward**

In her work on the politics of memory in Berlin, Karen Till (2005) writes

> although places are understood to be materially real and temporally stable, that is, they give a spatial ‘fix’ to time; their meanings are made and remade in the present. Places are not only continuously interpreted; they are haunted by past structures of meaning and material presences from other times and lives. (p. 9)

The Festival has an enduring relationship to a very particular lesbian feminist past and to the performances that have sustained it and are reinvigorated through the embodied and transmitted memories that have developed over time. These memories are attached to this place, the people who continually return and the ways in which these memories are transmitted to others. Fiona Buckland (2002) developed the notion of a “theater of memory” wherein the enactment of memory through body and space where the past is restored and reinterpreted through movement allows us to see how past experience as expressed through memories shape an individual’s and a group’s movements. It is a space where performance materializes into what she refers to as “queer lifeworlds” (2002, p. 2). This theater of memory connects people to the past, to spaces and to others. According to Jose Muñoz (2009), memory is constructed and always political. It is through remembering and the ritualized telling of these remembrances through such mediums as performance, film, writing, music and visual culture that potential world making is possible. Memory and the ways in which it is enacted through the body and represented through archives (Taylor, 2003) hold crucial implications for understanding queer memory and queer world making. As I have explored, the Festival is a place that houses and manifests a particular form of community remembering through embodied practice. In previous chapters, I examined how memory, remembering, and feminist cultural markers are physically build into the environment and how bodies physically build and perform that space into being. Bodies are themselves vessels of memory as memory is transmitted and passed along through the body and archived within the recreation of this Festival each and every year.
As mentioned above, Buckland’s (2002) work investigates the role that the theater of memory has in the creation and materialization of lifeworlds over time and in space. For Buckland,

the disparity between history, as it is discursively inscribed, and memory, as the bodies that bear the consequences both of its inscription and its remembrance embody and perform it, has tremendous implications for the cognitive and physical construction of queer lifeworlds. (2002, p. 21)

Buckland’s notion of the “theater of memory” is predicated on the thought that the body itself is a theater of memory (2002, p. 18). She outlines two prominent aspects of the theater of memory. First, the theater of memory is a performance between the one remembering and the audience. Second, there is an everyday theater of memory that can be located within neighbourhoods, at concerts, and in dance clubs where “memories of past experiences [would have] shaped both the individual and the group’s movements, and their performance [would have] materialized [into] queer lifeworlds” (2002, p. 18).

These theaters of memory create a sense of self that centralizes being queer. The embodied performance of the participants within the theaters of memory connects the participants to the past, to places and to others. These connections are critical ways in which queer lifeworlds materialize in the face of heteronormative public culture. This form of queer world making is active, conscious and deliberate in the ways in which it fashions the self and the environment within which it is situated. This fashioning is achieved through the physical, embodied social practices of navigating through and creating space within the city and country.

In Buckland’s (2002) book, she examines the dance space occupied and created by gay male culture to investigate and develop her “theater of memory.” Much like Buckland’s work, this dissertation has explored the implication of memory through both narrative and embodied performance through movement. These environments are not fixed and static but dynamic and responsive to the changing demands of the present to reinterpret and restore the past through acts of performances. In these theaters of memory, the past is performed—reinterpreted and restored—through being retold by narrative and by movement. (Buckland, 2002, p. 177)
This retelling is not bound by the past but can create and occupy space for change, movement and reinterpretation in the present.

The Festival’s space is not only delineated by signs, binder twine, wooden stakes, circus tents and community but also through music—a background aspect of this dissertation although a deep part of this festival. It is, after all a music festival. Music often holds the key to our memories. It is an element that fluxes between being in time and out of time. In fact, according to Buckland (2002), it is “always in flux, creating its own dimensions moment by moment” (p. 176). Music is able to give a moment a definite form by “turning it and all the desires it contained into an artifact that held and sustained a memory of the abandoned moment” (Buckland, 2002, p. 176). Through this, a layering of both past and present experiences takes place that blurs the distinction between what is reality and fantasy, what is present and absent, and what is actual and ideal. However, there is more available at the Festival, mixed in with memory and embodied performance is a lesbian feminist futuristic hope for change—a new future full of possibilities for women, a future of hope that appears to be linked to the lesbian feminism of the 1970s. As such, the promise of becoming in and through the body is the articulation of what was once and what might yet be to come. Workers are physically connected to a continuum of memory that expands back in past to the women who came before, which in turn, connects to the present in a way that reaches and extends into the future.

In her book, *Time binds*, Elizabeth Freeman (2010) characterizes queer time as a “hiccup in sequential time” that “has the capacity to connect a group of people beyond monogamous, enduring couplehood” (p.3). Queer time is political work for Freeman. It denotes a separation between capitalism and the modern world. It is a temporality that works at a slower pace, and, key to Freeman’s work, it works differently on bodies. A key concept of Freeman’s is what she terms “temporal drag” (2010, p, 62). She uses this construct to examine “the specters of feminism” (2010, p, 59). To begin her discussion, Freeman draws on a quote from Meryl Altman’s “Teaching 70s Feminism” that goes “every wave has its undertow” (as cited in Freeman, 2010, p. 59). In reference to the construct of feminist waves of thinking, from the first wave of feminism to the second, third and fourth waves, Freeman draws on the imagery of a wave in water. Much like an
ocean wave, the water on top is pushed forward toward the shore while the bottom of the wave pulls the water back out to sea, which is where it came from in the first place. The water continues to cycle forward and back, recirculating and remixing in this ongoing process. Feminism and feminist waves are, from this perspective, aptly described by the idea of a physical ocean wave. Not just in the typical ways in which feminist waves are described, as generations of women making change over time one wave after another, but for the temporal effect that allows for the movement forward toward social change, and then drawing back to a past and history that came before. Here not only is our feminism “haunted” by the past that our bodies carry but by the “ghosts” of bygone embodied movements.

The Festival is a dynamic experience of radical lesbian feminism. It was established in the mid-1970s with a very particular view and purpose infused by the political movements of that time. Over the ensuing decades the communities of women who gathered at the Festival moved through the time of ACT UP, Queer Nation, iterations of butch/femme identity, the S/M and pro-sex lesbian subcultures of the late 1980s and 1990s and then into and through the postmodern identity politics of the 1990s and 2000s. As I have explored in previous chapters, the Festival has experienced shifts and tensions to do with some of the key feminist and queer political influences over the years. However, what has remained fixed throughout the years is the definition of what it means to be a woman and who can be considered a woman at the Festival. These notions harken back to a political framework of the past, to the 1970s through the active creation of lesbian separatist space and place that was intended to expand the opportunities available to women by establishing women only space. Freedman’s (2010) work explores the means by which queer time can “fold subjects into structure[s] of belonging and duration” (p. xi). The Festival is a space that brings time and history into being. There are opportunities to embody the physical work that has been done for decades and feel a link through story and physical embodiment to a feminist history and past that is almost relived in the present.

Freedman (2010) coins the term “temporal drag” explaining that:
the word “drag” has with retrogression, delay, and the pull of the past on
the present. This kind of drag, an under discussed corollary to the queenier
kind celebrated in an early 1990s queer studies influenced by
deconstruction, suggests a bind for lesbians committed to feminism: the
gravitational pull that “lesbian,” and even more so “lesbian feminist,”
sometimes seems to exert on “queer.” (p. 62)

As Freedman (2010) continues, “even to entertain lesbian feminist ideas seems to
somehow inexorably hearken back to essentialized bodies, normative visions of women’s
sexuality, and single-issue identity politics that excluded people of color, the working
class, and the transgendered” (p. 62). At the time the term lesbian feminism emerged the
movement was seen as radical and transformative, while now the same identity might
send shivers down the spine of those queer activists who work diligently to separate
themselves from the feminists who came before them. However, for others, there is a
strong draw to much that was initiated by the lesbian feminists of the 1970s. More than a
mere nostalgic draw, many of the very relevant social issues that appeared in the feminist
consciousness of that time continue to this day (for example concepts such as equal pay
for equal work, access to abortions, childcare and so on).

Feminism is not dead and gone. It is present today and has a diverse and complicated
history and attachment to its past and future. Queer theorists have critically engaged with
theories to do with gender and transformation, and this focus has led to a great deal of
hope for future change. Unfortunately, this focus has resulted in less critical attention on
feminism and lesbianism. Freedman describes an attachment to feminism as “less about
group identity than about time” (2010, p.62), which leads me to wonder about the work
of Shulamith Firestone, a feminist revolutionary in the 1960s and 1970s. Not only was
she at the epicenter of radical feminist organizing in New York in the 1970s, she wrote
*The dialectic of sex* (1970) a body of work that critically engaged with the concept of
gender from a radical feminist perspective. In the first chapter of her book Firestone
(1970) wrote “the end goal of feminist revolution must be, unlike that of the first feminist
movement, not just the elimination of male privilege but of the sex distinction itself:
genital difference between human beings would no longer matter culturally” (p. 19).
Firestone died in August 2012 at the age of sixty-seven. Sadly, she was not able to see
this end goal achieved and I wonder if it ever will be. I see Firestone’s work as a key
building block for current feminist and queer theorists, especially those who explore the root systems that created this “dialectic of sex” and the harmful repercussions of a gender based class system. Reproductive functions and capacities are at the root of Firestone’s argument. She writes that while men and women are physically different, this physical difference is not at the heart of the problem. What is at the heart is each binary gender’s ability to reproduce the next generation (1970 p. 35). Current queer theory draws on this tradition and complicates it further by questioning the very essence of biological determinism and gendered socialization to ask what is gender and what does gender and a person’s physical or biological attributes have to do with it.

**On Feminism: So, are we at the “End”?**

This project has catalogued the array of interpretations of what it means to be in a time of postfeminism and has explored a site (the Festival) where lesbian feminism and other forms of feminism are embodied, reinterpreted and retold. Within these pages, I have ventured to explore arguments that speak to the generational divide and I have attempted to understand the notion of feminism within its own temporality, which by its very nature situates it out of time. From these explorations, I posit that the “post” in postfeminism is a reference to the self-critical, ever reflexive and ethical comprehension of feminism. Feminism, which is comprised of diverse understandings of what it means to employ feminist practices, continually engages with social justice and social change, while making advances and retreats outside of conventional history. Feminism is a broad concept and should not be understood from within a linear comprehension of time because the advances made cannot be neatly placed on a timeline. As such, progressive goals, such as empowerment and equality, are abstract concepts of social justice for women. These conceptual goals are difficult to mark on a historical timeline because they are always moving and always being conceived and re-conceived within a critical reflexive discourse. These goals are, therefore, always being written and re-written by feminists based on social dynamics (race, class, sexual orientation, gender identity, etc) and their relations and intersections. Feminists should never agree on what feminism and feminist practices look like or how feminism and feminist pursuits should be undertaken. Feminism has always thrived on and continues to grow because of its internal struggles
and the discussions, tensions, disagreements and personal experiences that take place within the discourse. Within the space of critical engagement, feminism has developed new ways to move forward while also sharpening its theories and reworking its tactics. Feminism, then, is *out of time* as much as it is a utopian manifesto—a promise for the future—and part of past and current struggles. What also places it *out of time* is its relation to and disavowal of patriarchal time.

As I explored in the first chapter of this dissertation, I am drawn to Angela McRobbie (2009) and Griselda Pollock’s (2007) arguments. They suggest that feminism is not confined in or by time, that the linear narrative does not fit ever-evolving feminist practice(s), and that there may be more to understanding feminism than by confining it to the concepts of feminist “waves.” I suggest instead that one ought to explore an alternate understanding of feminism within, or should I say *out of time*. Feminism persists because it allows space for women to critically engage with the world and to live in their world(s) differently. Gender is a central tenet driving this community; however, as I have explored in this dissertation, gender identity, race, class, disability and the intersections of all possible identities inspire conversations, prompt discussions and, at times, create change. It is in the hope for change in the future that the Festival’s community finds and constructs place. The Festival is a relief for some, a place to move, grow and access different learning experiences typically unavailable to many women in mainstream society. For many, the Festival is about exploring and attempting to live life differently in a way that affirms ones abilities, supports ones dreams and gives space for play. The Festival can also be understood as a space of futurity, just as it is a space that is integrally linked to the past along a continuum of time. The feminist practices within the Festival are about hope for a utopic future that might never come about but where those hopes and dreams can materialize in bits and pieces in ways that might impact and inform how we live our lives when we are not on the Land.

Although the Festival was based on a utopic notion of the future, it was also a practical lesbian feminist radical realization of the now. In the early 1970s, women, particularly lesbians, were eager for change and because change could not happen soon enough they decided to create their own spaces to live the change they wanted to see. The experience
of women in the music industry, while still gendered, has changed in the last 35 years. The Festival has “survived” these changes for many reasons including the dedication of the We Want the Music Company (WWTMC) crew that runs it all year, the the Workers and festiegoers who return year after year, and the performers who want to perform in women only spaces (to name a few). The industries that initially did not welcome women—lighting technicians, stage managers, carpenters, electricians—have come to employ more women; however, there is still a differential in pay, women still face harassment on the job and large numbers of women are still not drawn to these trades. There are reasons why these women seek out a yearly intentional community. Why they seek a reprieve from the blatant and systematic systems of oppression within general society. As Rocky stated, “this is my church. You know? It’s where I come to get baptized every year.” When asked to elaborate what she meant in this statement, Rocky shared:

Oh, that was better than baptism. I was just resurrected. I just felt born again anew. It’s kind of like that. You know? That’s the whole theory, I guess, behind baptism, is you know, you are submerged in the water, you come up; you’re reborn, through the water. You’re re-birthed. And that’s the way it is here, every time. And most of the time, I kind of get teary eyed at the front and just [makes sniffling noises] and you know. It’s, yeah, I can’t imagine not coming here. It’s a total recharge. (39, Cherokee/Irish, blue collar, 10 years as a Worker, female, lesbian, bachelor’s degree and some college)

Though slow to change, political discussions and difference of opinions are encouraged and celebrated just as they are frowned upon and quashed. This is one of the magical and difficult things about the Festival. It teaches and has taught many of us to be opinionated, to express our unrest and to work for change. The Festival is, in some ways, open to long-standing conversations, tensions and debates. Each voice is heard. There is space for discussion, whether during Festival workshops, at Worker community meetings, around a table in the Belly Bowl, on a stage, under a tent or while working your shift. However, this question remains unanswered: how can a community of women who are denied access through the Festival’s gates engage in the “debates” on whether trans women should be included in the Festival when that population is not present for these conversations and “debates?” How can it be called a debate when this kind of exclusion erases the voices of the women who should be involved in this “conversation?”
Towards the end of Angela McRobbie’s (2009) book, *The Aftermath of Feminism*, she introduces readers to the idea that there is a need for a critical exploration of the limitations of the “waves model of feminism” (p. 154). For McRobbie, this representation of feminism supports the “linear narrative of generationally-led progress” (p. 156) by creating visible “waves” (p. 156) that allow for pinpointed, time related conceptions of the feminist movement(s). This formulation restrains the possibility of writing a complex ancestry of feminism(s) and, instead, allows for the more generalized historical representation of feminism with “beginnings and endings . . . which remain suspicious of theory and . . . [are] tied to simplistic ideas and Western-dominated kinship metaphors about mothers and daughters” (p. 154). As such, the kinship metaphors hinder activists because the notion of feminist waves obstructs the development of new ideas and innovative practices. The idea of obstruction in turn suggests that change might not be possible until the old generation, the old guard, dies out. Drawing on McRobbie and Pollock (2007), it is my argument that feminism is not confined in or by time, that the linear narrative does not fit ever evolving feminist practice(s) and that there may be more to understanding feminism(s) than by confining them to the concept of feminist “waves” and instead to explore an alternate understanding of feminism within, or should I say out of time.

The feminism that individuals bring to their feminist and political practices is largely influenced by their personal background and identity. As I have explored throughout this dissertation, concepts of sex, gender and gender identity are still contentious issues for women at the Festival as much as they are contentions for feminists in society at large. When it comes to the issue of inclusion or exclusion of trans women, we can begin to see how complex and nuanced this tension is for those involved. Various lived experiences informed the interview participants’ perspectives of these tensions. For some, their position was really clear, for others it presented a political rift that caused them to continually move and change their own arguments and perspectives. Age and where one is situated on the linear genealogical perspective do not necessarily dictate where one’s feminism lands on the spectrum between trans inclusion and trans exclusion. With this in mind, we can argue that feminism should be understood as being *out of time* and not necessarily *out of date*. What I mean by this is that if we were to rely solely on a
generational model to understand feminism then we could assume that “all” women under the age of X argue for the inclusion of trans women at the Festival, whereas “all” women over the age of X argue on for the exclusion of trans women. This argument is flawed to the core as every individual’s values are dependent on a complex web of experiences, identities and beliefs that are echoed in the stories shared by those who participated in this body of work.

Elizabeth Freedman (2010) encourages us to move past the generational thinking that often encompasses an understanding of feminism(s) as waves. This model should be abandoned as it relies on the family as the metaphor for feminism and feminist thought which posits it as something that is inherited and passed on by one generation to the next. That said, the notion of generations is also linked “by political work or even mass entertainment” and “acknowledges the ability of various technologies and cultural industries to produce shared subjectivities that go beyond family” (Freedman, 2010, p. 65). The word generations aptly denotes the idea and concept of replication and reproductive thinking and should not necessarily be thrown out. As Freeman notes “even the “waves” that periodize feminism are not the still enveloping waters dear to maternalist rhetoric but are rather forces affected by gravity, which pull backward even as they seem to follow on one another” (2010, p. 65). Temporal drag is less about “the psychic time of the individual than in the movement time of collective political fantasy” (p. 65).

Another feature of feminism’s and the Festival’s (lesbian feminist) placement out of time can be drawn out by acknowledging that both feminist theorizing and the Festival itself takes place outside of heteronormative time. As Ruby noted:

I think Festival shows us in a tiny way, for a short period of time, what the world could and would be like if women really ran the show. And what it’s like to step outside of patriarchy. And it’s the only place I think that most of us can find to do that. We can have pretty non-patriarchal lives out there in many ways. But we still live in the patriarchy. We still have to function in the patriarchy. Here, we don’t. And it’s one of the things that’s the most fascinating and precious to me about this place. It’s the absence of patriarchy, what could be. (55, white, working class, 29 years as a Worker, 1 year as a festiegoer, female, lesbian, butch, activist, bachelor’s degree)
Because of this placement *out of time*, an alterity is created, a community that is run outside of dominant social norms and which creates new social norms, expectations and opportunities for women (Warner, 2005, p. 95). Within these spaces, women are able to create their own sense of temporality through the ways they engage with discourses and bodies that move in different directions, and through alternative practices. There are distinct moments and rhythms from which distance in time can be measured. For example, some pieces of the Festival experience can be understood and analyzed through a linear understanding of time, such as the Festival’s program which is marked with linearly arranged dates and times. However, there are also Festival rhythms that are timeless because they are performed and carried out in a similar way and at a similar time every year. These more timeless embodied performances are linked to the embodied rhythms and practices at the Festival. Embodied enactments like those shared by the interview participants in Chapter 4, from the raising of the night stage to the opening of the front gate at the beginning of the Festival, mark moments in a rhythm that is ongoing and repetitive from year to year. While the Workera seem drawn back to this place to embody their roles, if they do not return someone else will step in and carry on the task that they would otherwise have performed. There is *out of time-ness* to these performances in that they are connected to the performances of others who came before in the creation of this temporal place that embodies a certain kind of utopic dream for very particular kinds of women.

Homi Bhabha (1989) points to the difficulty inherent in any utopian project:

> The troublesome connection between claims to purity and utopian teleology in describing how... [we] came to the realization that: the only place in the world to speak from was at a point whereby contradiction, antagonism, the hybridities of cultural influence, the boundaries of nations, were not sublated into some utopian sense of liberation or return. The place to speak from was through those incommensurable contradictions within which people survive, are politically active, and change. (p. 67)

Again, the only sure place to begin the work of critical engagement is from the place where “incommensurable contradictions” exist. Within the spaces where “people survive, are politically active, and change.” The Festival as an example of feminism in action, presents us with a force that makes us engage with the idea that the feminism(s) of the
1970s, in some way, resonates with the feminism(s) we are experiencing today. Particular social problems persist for women today—poverty, low wages, childcare issues, unwanted pregnancy, violence and other social problems—as they did in an earlier historical time. The ways in which the Festival legitimizes and offers some women a breather, a place of empowerment and reprieve from the world are ways that are still very much needed today. What is missing is a Festival community that is open, supportive and accepting of all women—one that continually strives to challenge itself, to critically engage with its own practices and continues to invoke social change within some of the more difficult and systemic oppressions that continue to (re)surface at the Festival. It is a space, after all, that does not escape the systemic oppressions faced by feminist, queer and contemporary communities in North American society.

Those of us who participate in the Festival bring our own “baggage” with us when we enter the Festival’s front gates. Delaying engagement over contentious issues, such as the evolution of the concepts of gender within postmodern theory, action and practice, continues to be a challenge faced by the Festival and those who attend. It is often within this realm of discomfort between lesbian feminists and queer politics that is felt and held within the generational model of feminist waves as examples of how the women who came into the feminist politics of the 1970s are out of date. What remains critical for me within this work is to remember that it is more about the kind of feminism an individual feminist comes in contact with than the time and date a person comes into their feminist practice. For example, I might have come into my feminism through the Riot grrl movement of the 1990s (Darms, 2013; Rosenberg & Garofalo, 1998), but someone else might have come into their feminist consciousness in their first Women’s Studies class, or at home growing up with a feminist mother. All of these lived experiences, complicated by the intersectionality of identities, inform who we are, how we approach situations and the feminist theories and practices we engage in throughout our daily lives.

**The Affective Draw: The Past/Present/Future Draw of Women**

Looking at the concept of women from the perspective developed by Robyn Wiegman (2012) in her book *Object Lessons*, I find myself wondering about the affective draw of
distinct understandings of what it means to be a woman, the draw of the Festival itself and the draw of the particular social justice framework as it has played out in this dissertation. As I explored in previous chapters, the concept of what it means to be a woman is animated into an object. Through the practice of embodiment, creation and narrative, the concept of woman, as it is used by the Festival, generates notions of optimism, hope and boundaries within its community. There is something about the need to return to and be at the Festival that is an interesting line of through to follow.

While Wiegman investigates a number of identity-based issues in her book, I am particularly drawn to her understanding and critique of the term women within Women’s Studies programs in the United States. In her critique, the word woman is considered a contested term across time. There is a particular historicity attached to the understanding of what it means to be a woman in the field of Women’s Studies and, I argue, at the Festival. In her research, Wiegman attempts to describe the force behind the idea “that identity knowledges are bound to much more than what we use them to know—in order to license attention to the impulses that keep us enthralled to them” (2012, p. 21).

Wiegman (2012) contemplates what it means to speak from within identity knowledges and practices to consider “the different temporalities within which identity knowledges speak, not simply to the disciplines but to one another and to the public sphere in which their claims to do justice are routinely aimed” (p. 27). Each political project is incommensurable with the other. There is simply no way to compare each project and perspective in order to determine which is more accurate or “right.”

Within the chapters of this dissertation, I explored a number of different concepts as they are attached to an understanding of what it means to be a woman at the Festival. In Chapter 3, I investigated the creation of space and the connection to place making as they pertain to being a woman at the Festival. In Chapter 4, I explored the empowering model

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21 Drawing on Wiegman (2012), “by object, I mean to designate targets of study that reflect a seemingly material existence in the world (as in people, goods, laws, books, or films) and those that do not reveal such materiality in any immediately graspmable way (as in discourse, ideology, history, personhood, the unconscious, and desire itself)” (p. 20).
of what it means for women to move through the world differently, to take up and use space differently in the Festival’s context and how bodies are policed and regulated on the Land. In Chapter 5, I explored the great possibilities that are created, for some, at the Festival while others are made invisible, erased or are not accepted. For many of those represented within the narratives of this dissertation, there is a hope that is embodied and performed within the Festival’s topic narrative. However, like all utopias the question remains a utopia for whom? The women who are most marginalized in society, trans women, are continually denied access to queer and radical women’s communities. Plus, while there have been vocal tensions pertaining to the Festival about the exclusion of trans women from a myriad of different perspectives, there appears to be little if any traction in creating any lasting change. I wonder if some of the barriers to the full inclusion of all women are linked to an attachment to a past as experienced through recreated moments involving embodied memory and performance of a place and time that was largely unaware of trans women’s experiences. Perhaps it is also an attachment to something that, in its present form, will never fully achieve its goal, which is to be a radical place in which all women can embody feminist change free from patriarchal influence.

In the first chapter of her book, Robyn Wiegman (2012) explores the discourse surrounding the concept and use of the term women in Women’s Studies programs in order to shed light on current debates within the academic field. Within this section, Wiegman states “one identity object of study—women—whose well-rehearsed failure to remain conceptually coherent and universally referential for all women within the field domain of Women’s Studies” (p. 38) is the legacy attached to the use, study and deployment of that term. Thought this exploration Wiegman explains the turn to gender and the move away from Women’s Studies to Gender Studies which was done in order to build a more inclusive field of feminist study. That is, a field of study that includes the

22 Julia Serano’s newest book Excluded (2013) is an account of how feminist and queer movements can be more inclusive. To begin, trans women must be involved in the conversations about their bodies and their in/exclusion in these spaces.
study of men, masculinities, trans and intersex identities and queer sexualities. Wiegman (2012) also addresses the longstanding critique of the category *women* and its complicity with universalizing norms (pp. 54-55). It has become almost commonplace that:

*Women* is the scene of exclusion, if not a real or symbolic figure of political and epistemological violence . . . . So convinced are we now of the category of *women*’s inability to remain conceptually coherent and politically progressive that pinpoint toward it as a contemporary form of political belief risks being allied with those bourgeois feminist discourses still awaiting their own intersectional poststructuralist, and postnationality self-critique. (p. 55)

Wiegman (2012) documents the critical complication of the use of the term “women.” She describes that as the discourse surrounding women and Women’s Studies unfolded it became increasingly apparent, over time and through academic work, that woman and women within the field tended to universalize the representation of women and women’s experiences. Drawing on Leona Auslander’s research, Weigman (2012) observes:

As research was done on the past and present of women’s lives, as attempts were made to theorize women’s domination, as scholars expanded their reach across the globe, it became clear that the category of “woman,” or even of “women” in the plural, obscured important differences. (p. 62)

The category “woman” obscured any understanding of women as it was unable to account for the complex identities and historical situations that women encounter when becoming legible as legitimate social beings.

There are unique temporalities at play when a contested object holds the key to certain ideals and hopes for social change. Drawing inspiration from Mary Bryson and Lori MacIntosh’s (2010) article “Can we Play Fun Gay,” in which they explored what it means to find “a trajectory onward in the eddies of those overlapping and disjunctive temporalities” (p. 119) engaged in by queer youth in online spaces I can draw a line between the temporalities navigated by queer youth and the women who attend the Festival. The Festival community constitutes a space that is imagined into practice through the recreation and embodiment of memory (by what is “remembered” by those involved) and, like some historical accounts, is subject to “the melancholic labour of forgetting and unforgetting” (Bryson & MacIntosh, p. 119). This practice, according to
Bryson and MacIntosh “provide[s] a strategy that queers normative temporalities” (p. 119). Using this strategy of queering normative temporalities, a certain imagined community is constituted and created that still draws on the weakness of any identity based political engagement. This weakness occurs when the rational for exclusion is unmov ing through time. That is, in how the community defines who is and who is not allowed to become a member of that community. Therein lays both the strength and the weakness of a project based on identity politics—even one based on the notion of radical social change. At a certain point, the rational from which the exclusion is based remains the same while the social and cultural landscape around it moves and shifts. The community, then becomes stable and loses its radical edge.

Those who are deeply attached to the Festival, to lesbian feminist politics, and to the way things have been seem afraid of change. Their attachment may be less about the radical nature of feminism and feminist change and more about finding a place, belonging and family. Beneath the narratives shared by the Workers about work, performance, memory and hope are stories about the community and the Festival as home. The repeating themes of community and the Festival as home deserve more attention. The Festival as initially intended as a space built by and for women to celebrate women’s music and lesbian feminist politics and to provide a forum where women could work towards radical transformation. The Festival then, this home for many, should not be seen as:

a comfortable, stable, inherited and familiar space but instead as an imaginative, politically charged space in which the familiarity and sense of affection and commitment lay in shared collective analysis of social injustice, as well as a vision of radical transformation. Political solidarity and a sense of family could be melded together imaginatively to create a strategic space. (Mohanty, 2003, p. 128)

While the original intention behind the creation of the Festival was to invigorate politically active space it has developed into a comfortable and stable space for many of the Workers who attend.

Those who participated in this project shared wonderful descriptions of why they (hope to) return to the Festival every summer. Here are a couple of excerpts:
Bo: Oh, the women. Are we supposed to say the music? I always say that I work at ah, at a girl festival that just happens to have nice entertainment. . . . It’s the community, it’s my ties that I’ve built up over fifteen years, with what’s really become my family, that keeps me coming back year after years. I can’t really imagine my life without it. (43 year old, 16 Festivals (15 worked), 27 first time, Galz Diner, working class, white, woman, dyke, femme, Mom)

Tallulah: The community, the love, the experience of being fully empowered on this little piece of Land in a way that I’m not in the outside world. And really, the women that are here. (33 year old, 10 years working at Festival, working class, some college, Native American and Caucasian, pass as Caucasian, queer, lesbian, dyke, femme identified, cisgendered female)

Dottie: What keeps me coming back is family; it’s a good meeting place for me to spend time with my feminist mom, my feminist family and a place where we can really truly just all be ourselves and appreciate what it’s like to be around a bunch of other feminists, however that takes place. (33 years old, 7 years as a Festie, 5 years as a Worker, lower middle class, high school, Caucasian, half Jewish, queer, femme, fag hag)

Belonging is an important subject for many. Notions of “un/belonging” (Bryson, 2006, p, 803) seep into our psyches early in our social development and are often deeply entrenched within our conception of home. Feminist scholars such as Roberta Rubenstein (2001), Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1998) and Biddy Martin (2003) have explored the concept of home in terms of being inherently full of contradictions. They frequently comment on the inherent ambiguity of the term and how it promulgates inequality and the patriarchal colonization and oppression of women. These oppressive systems are in high contrast to the idealized notion of home as a loving and safe space. If you are a lesbian or queer identified woman who has experienced displacement from your birth home and have a lived experience that is situated outside the heteropatriarchal norm, the notion of home may be fraught with feelings of loss, longing and nostalgia (Newton, 1993).

Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1998) asks,

What is home? The place I was born? Where I grew up? Where my parents live? Where I live and work as an adult? Where I locate my community, my people? Who are “my people?” Is home a geographical space, a historical space, an emotional sensory space?” (1998, p. 487)

The concept of home as a safe and loving space, according to Mohanty, is socially constructed and a product of “the exclusion of specific histories of oppression and resistance, and the repression of differences even within oneself” (2003, p. 136). “Home”
is probably one of the most emotionally complex and deeply resonating concepts in our vocabulary. It is a word that is attached to some of the most affective and uncertain elements of our early emotional and physical experiences. It is both a geographical location and an emotional space.

Women’s separatist spaces were created to allow women, particularly lesbians, the space to develop communities that were not linked to the patriarchal system but were a refuge from and a place to grow past gender-based oppression. This goal was and still is powerful. As Marilyn Frye (1983) writes in her essay “On separatism and power”:

Feminist separation is, of course, separation of various sorts of modes from men and from institutions, relationships, roles and activities which are male-defined, male-dominated and operating for the benefit of males and the maintenance of male privilege—this separation being initiated or maintained, at will, by women. (Masculinist separatism is the partial segregation of women from men and male domains at the will of men. This difference is crucial.) (p. 96)

Making space and creating community differently continues to be an important feminist project. Bernice Reagon Johnson shared her thoughts on these ideas in a talk she gave at the 1981 West Coast Women’s Music Festival in Yosemite National Forest, California. In this talk, Reagon Johnson discussed coalition politics at the turn of the century. To Reagon Johnson, the relation of coalition to home is a central analogy with the two ideas being in opposition. Her concern is that home is often confused with coalition, which for feminists is an urgent issue to be addressed. Reagon Johnson criticizes the idea of enforcing “women-only” or “Woman-identified” spaces that use an “in-house” or insider understanding of what it means to be a woman to define who the space is intended. The sameness attached to the word woman allows women to identify with one another is not her central concern. Instead, she turns her critical gaze to the exclusions that result from normative definitions of women that are used to contextualize and create space. In this context, it is the exercise of exclusion that is used to create a legitimate inside and an illegitimate outside through the legitimization of identity that is most significant to her. She is critical of the exertion of exclusion that is used when coalition or unity is misunderstood to be home. This exertion is utilized, in these instances, to dictate a sense of solidarity or sisterhood. According to Reagon Johnson, this happens when a group
takes on “a word like ‘women’ and us[es] it as a code” (1983, p. 360). Recognizing the limitations of narrow identity politics, Reagon Johnson notes that once you open the door and let others in “the room don’t feel like the room no more. And it ain’t home no more” (p. 359). This analysis can be drawn upon to understand the implications of the Festival’s exclusionary practices and how, through decades of stability this community, this home, has potentially become less about building a radical community and more about building a family, a home.

Mohanty wrote that “the experience of being a woman can create an illusory unity, for it is not the experience of being woman, but the meanings attached to gender, race, class, and age at various historical moments that is of strategic significance” (2003, p. 118). That is to say, it is the perspective one can use to frame and interpret our experiences as they are tied to gender, race, sexual orientation, and class that is significant. Reagon Johnson articulates the political underpinnings that define and inform our experiences. She examines potential divisions and difference within collectives and individuals and develops a useful critique of totalizing theories and history. She also offers us a way of thinking to “interrogate totalizing notions of difference and the identification of exclusive spaces as homes” (Mohanty, 2003, p. 119).

Some people think of home as a safe space, but based on the analysis presented in this dissertation, I argue that there are no safe spaces—safer spaces perhaps but no true safe spaces, at least not for everyone all the times. Home then can be unsafe even dangerous. The idea of home holds expectation of intimacy that lead to more permeable personal boundaries. As gloria anzaldúa (2002) explains in her edited book, this bridge we call home, “staying at ‘home’ and not venturing out from our own group comes from woundedness, and stagnates our growth” (p. 3). Depending on the response, conflict can be the power behind transformation and change. Instead of fleeing from conflict, confronting it and diving into its depths enables us to build understanding and find avenues for change. As anzaldúa (2002) continues:

   It’s about doing away with demarcations like “ours” and “theirs.” It’s about honoring people’s otherness in ways that allow us to be changed by embracing that otherness rather than punishing others for having a different view, belief system, skin color, or spiritual practice. Diversity of
perspectives expands and alters the dialogue, not in an add on fashion but through a multiplicity that’s transformational. (2002, p. 4)

Wiegman (2012) argues that a critical limitation of an analysis of women such as the women that attend the Festival is in the “universalizing use of women” (p. 62). Echoing the observations of other feminists Wiegman (2012) explains:

[T]he field narrative takes a shortcut to the future, condemning the category in order to keep open the possibility that critical practice can be free from the historical and social weight that attends it and that a relation of justice can (still) be achieved. . . The rhetorical force of “the category obscured” thus displaces a range of critical difficulties onto the faulty complicity of the category itself, In this, the progress narrative’s turn against the referential sign of women can offer the field a phantasmatic leap beyond what the category’s failure is thought to mean: feminist complicity with racism, heterosexism, universalism, and exclusion. (p. 63)

I think that Brenna Bhandar and Denise Ferreira da Silva (2013) provide us with a timely analysis of white feminism. They explain: “White feminists speak of second-wave feminism as if it were the only ‘feminism’ and use the pronoun ‘we’ when lamenting the failures of their struggle. Let us just say there is no such thing as a ‘feminism’” (Bhandar & de Silva, 2013). There are many kinds of feminism, for instance, “Black and Third World feminists have identified and exposed” (Bhandar & de Silva, 2013) many of the same issues that Fraser and Wiegman identified “since very early in the trajectory of feminism” (Bhandar & de Silva, 2013). For decades, Black and Third World feminists have been urging White feminists to move away from universalisms that assume sameness and thereby erase the experiences of other women. These same feminists have not only critically engaged with the concept they have offered concrete recommendations that, if acted upon, would help the feminist movement build and grow. Bhandar and de Silva’s work is meant to shatter “the limited and exclusionary nature of the conceptual frameworks developed by White feminists in the English speaking world” (Bhandar & de Silva, 2013). Even though critical work continues to engage with certain areas of feminism (particularly White second-wave feminism) it nevertheless fails to account for race, histories of colonialism and the experiences of women outside North America. Bhandar and da Silva conclude their response to White feminists with the criticism “Time’s up!” (2013). Indeed, there is no excuse for the persistent erasure of non-White and non-First World feminists.
Final Words, For Now . . .

My last night on the Land in 2011 was spent next to the bonfire in my car. I was one of the last ones up; although a crewmate tended the fire well into the wee hours of the morning. It was pre-dawn when I awoke. To the West, the close to full moon was beginning its descent while in the East the sun was beginning to touch the sky. Standing there, with the car behind me and the bonfire’s glowing red embers almost under my feet, tears came to my eyes. It was an eventful Festival, one where I worked long crew, was the Coordinator for my short crew and held interviews with Workers from the Festival and Camp Trans participants. I also somehow managed to write a book full of field notes and observations while still managing to eke out a little time to enjoy the Festival and be with friends. I knew that this would be my last Festival for a few years—which only compounded my tearing eyes—and that I was about to get back in my car and drive off the Land on my journey West back to my regular day in day out life. I still hang on to that moment. Sitting in this chair writing, I can still feel the cool morning mist gathering around my legs and the warmth of those embers beneath my outstretched hands as I tried to draw in every last bit of the Festival in that moment. Those embodied memories stick with me and come up to grab hold of me when I least expect it. Sometimes it’s in how the air hits my face in my early morning mountain dog walks or it’s in the way the sun hits my skin on a hot summer day. All of these sensations, and more, bring me back to the Festival and the long years I spent there building and disassembling that space and that community. I owe much to this community of women and while I might not physically return, my memories will keep drawing me back.

This dissertation has attempted to add another piece to “the jigsaw puzzle of queer” and feminist “history in the making” (Halberstam 2005, p. 170). Within these pages, I have explored feminism and notions of postfeminism in the making. I have examined a number of aspects of feminism from the theoretical discussions to the embodied practices as they overlay the Festival, and as a lesbian feminist practice. In drawing on the work of Robyn Wiegman and Elizabeth Freeman, I offer a bridge to understanding attachments to the past (especially for those of us privileged enough to find comfort and a home in spaces like the Festival) and a disruption of our own comfort and complacency with the
goal of encouraging a critical re-evaluation of our environments. I particularly want others to question who can be part of our communities and who cannot, and the types of discourse we create to justify our community formations. Feminism, I argue, should always be situated out of time; in fact, that is how future worlds are created. It is only through the evaluation of our past as we work in and critically engage with the present that we can begin to make changes to a world that is more socially just. With this in mind, I think it is important to give space to the words of Bernice Reagon Jonson (1983) who said:

Most of us think that the space we live in is the most important space there is, and that the condition we find ourselves in is the condition that must be changed or else. That is only partially the case. If you analyze the situation properly, you will know that there might be a few things you can do in your personal, individual interest so that you can experience and enjoy change. But most of the things that you do, if you do them right, are for people who live long after you are forgotten. That will happen if you give it away . . . . The only way you can take yourself seriously is if you can throw yourself into the next period beyond your little meager human-body-mouth-talking all the time. (p. 365)

At the Festival, memory is acted out physically. In some respects, while at the Festival, women are living the lives that they cannot live outside Festival’s physical boundaries at this time in history. However, this weight can be a productive pull backwards to both put pressure on the present and to reimagine the future. Within many feminist analyses and embodied in the Festival itself, is the desire for a present world system in which (we) Workers can live and flourish. We are attached to the world and the worlds that we imagine. It is imperative to remember that in the present, feminism and other projects for social justice will always be unfinished.
Chapter Seven. Postscript: June 2013

Image 21 Cross Town Tractor Driver: A Self Portrait (2011)
In the summer of 2013, I intended to return to work the Festival as Coordinator of the Shuttle Crew. I was honoured that Lisa Vogel had invited me to lead the crew again that year. I was looking forward to visiting old friends, spending time on the Land, sleeping in my tent, and taking a break from my daily life. In late March, a US activist named Red Durkin began a petition on Change.org asking all performers, artists and attendees to actively boycott the Festival until the organizers welcome all self-identified women. This online petition sparked much heated debate, controversy and quite hurtful posts in various online spaces. Due to the pressure of the online petition and the very active arguments circulation in virtual spaces, Lisa Vogel released a statement reaffirming the Festival’s “womyn-born womyn only” intention. In a letter to the Festival community and society more broadly, she wrote:

The Festival, for a single precious week, is intended for womyn who at birth were deemed female, who were raised as girls, and who identify as womyn. I believe that womyn-born womyn (WBW) is a lived experience that constitutes its own distinct gender identity.

As we struggle around the question of inclusion of transwomyn at the festival, we use the word intention very deliberately. Michigan holds this particular lived experience of womanhood as honorable, meaningful, unique and rich. Our intention has always been coupled with the radical commitment to never question any womon’s gender. We ask the greater community to respect this intention, and to value the complexity and validity of every gender identity, including that of WBW. The onus is on each individual to choose whether or how to respect that intention.

(2013)

Hearing this intention being rearticulated after years of what I considered silence, I decided that those of us who support the inclusion of trans women were never really going to influence change at the Festival. As someone who is attempting to be an ally of trans women I decided that I could no longer work at the Festival. Here is the letter that I sent Lisa and the WWTMC office in June 2013:

Dear Lisa,

I am writing this letter with a heavy heart. After struggling with this decision I have decided that I cannot attend this year’s Festival. There has been too much hurt, misunderstanding and hatred circulating around the Festival over the last few months and, since the reaffirmation of the Festival’s intention, I feel like there is no longer space for my voice on the Land or in the Festival’s community.
Thanks to having had the chance to “grow up” at the Festival, throughout my 20s and 30s, my feminist analysis has blossomed and grown over the years. Being part of this community helped me find both a kind of peace with my own body and inspired me to do more work in my home communities with a considerable focus on building inclusive and welcoming environments for all women. At the Festival I became inspired to do some serious work around my own personal power and privilege in society. Because of this, and what I have learned both at the Festival and in my home communities, I believe that trans women are part of our community and should be welcomed onto the Land and offered a space to find solace and support while there. I believe that women who are born women are born into a privilege within the gender spectrum of our society and that, much like women’s access to men’s only space, I feel that it is unethical to disallow the women who are most oppressed in our society—trans women—access to this space. Because of what I believe to be true and the work that I have done and continue to do in my home communities I can’t step up this year and visually support the Festival with my physical presence.

Up until now I have been able to rationalize attending and working the Festival because I saw it as a place that encouraged discussion, where I could agree to disagree with the womyn I love, and a place where I could learn and grown (and play) with those I love. I am extremely privileged to have had the chance to be a part of this phenomenal community of womyn. My life has been deeply moved and influenced in ways that I would not have had the opportunity to explore because of “growing up” with you all.

Though I knew how to use a hammer and drive a tractor before I ever stepped on that Land I had never known what it was like to be so in love with my body and myself before or what it was like to grow deep long lasting connections with womyn from around the world and across age spans. This creation of yours is a powerful thing. As much as I can’t currently step up to support this amazing festival I do still hold hope for change.

As for Shuttle crew, [name] and [name] are a strong leadership team who will easily keep the crew on track, if you so choose to invite them both to step up. I’m sorry that I didn’t come to this decision sooner but it’s been a heartbreaking process for me and, sometimes, these decisions take the longest for me to move through.

With love and deep respect,
CJ
Works Cited


