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Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

SANTA CRUZ

SMOKED OUT:

An Exploration of Multimodal Documentary

A thesis paper submitted in partial satisfaction

of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

in

DIGITAL ARTS AND NEW MEDIA

by

Carl Erez

June 2023

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2023

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Abstract

Smoked Out:

An Exploration of Multimedia Documentary

by Carl Erez

Towards the end of summer in 2020, the CZU Lightning Complex Fires began, covering vast swaths of both Santa Cruz County and San Mateo County in the state of California and causing long lasting damage. As we approach the three year anniversary of the fire, only a small portion of the homes that were destroyed have been rebuilt. In this thesis, I argue that this issue is impacted by multiple sources, both structural and interpersonal, and thus propose an artistic vision that utilizes multiple forms to contend with this multiplicity. This ultimately resulted in the creation of *Smoked Out: Watching Them Scrape Our Home Away*, a documentary piece composed of three parts: a verbatim theatrical performance composed of interviews with individuals going through the rebuilding process; a mobile game that explores some of the bureaucracy involved; and a forum in which audiences can contend with the issues at play. These are informed by larger traditions of documentary theater, serious games, and Theater of the Oppressed, respectively. While the work did not fully prepare audiences to contend with the systemic issues at play, it otherwise successfully shows the potential for future documentary practice that utilizes multiple mediums in conjunction with one another in order to approach complex issues.

Acknowledgments

There are many individuals without whose support this project would have never gotten off the ground, or would have ended up far worse than it did. In brief, here are some of the many thanks I owe:

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Thank you to my cast and crew, who put in many, many hours and so much hard work to tell this story, and to Princess, whose directing expertise kept us all together.

Thank you to Swan Dive Media for the incredible documentation of the work.

Thank you to Bennett and Colleen, whose proactive support ensured this production had all of the resources it needed.

Thank you to the rest of the DANM cohort, both for the morale support and for helping me to implement things I otherwise would have banged my head into a wall against.

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And, last but not least, thank you to the members of the Santa Cruz Mountain community who put their trust in me to tell their story.

1. Introduction

On August 16, 2020, the Santa Cruz Mountains were struck by thousands of bolts of lightning, starting what would become known as the CZU Lightning Complex Fires. Later in this paper, I will describe in detail an artistic work entitled *Smoked Out: Watching Them Scrape Our Home Away* that sought to contend with these fires, and especially their aftermath, which I will describe briefly here before providing its historical basis and artistic genealogy. *Smoked Out* was a theatrical performance which incorporated game elements. Its first act was a dramatic performance of interview texts with individuals who had attempted to rebuild after the fires, in its second act was a mobile game where audience members had to complete a playful variation on some of the required paperwork, and its third and final act was a forum theater, where some of the more current issues faced by rebuilders were presented and audience members were invited onto the stage to act out potential solutions to those issues.

It would ultimately take 37 days to fight these fires, during which time they would cover 86,509 acres across both Santa Cruz and San Mateo Counties, and destroy 1,490 structures. Luckily, there was only a single fatality.¹ Of those 1,490 structures, 911 were homes.² As I am writing this paper, nearing three years since the

1 CAL FIRE San Mateo-Santa Cruz Unit, "CZU Lightning Complex (Including Warnella Fire)," CAL FIRE, California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, Last Updated 10/21/2022, <https://www.fire.ca.gov/incidents/2020/8/16/czu-lightning-complex-including-warnella-fire/>

2 Grace Stetson, "A tale of two recoveries: Rebuilding frustrates CZU families; officials say they're ahead of the curve," Lookout Santa Cruz, Lookout Santa Cruz, April 6, 2022,

fires, only 25 single family dwelling units from among these have been rebuilt.³ While there is the possibility that this is just the start of a wave of completions, various factors, such as the fact that only 7 of these units have been completed over the past 6 months,⁴ imply to me that there may be more severe underlying issues than me choosing the wrong time to check the relevant source. This is especially troubling because we are fast approaching the end of rebuilders being able to get ongoing financial support in the form of ALE (or, ‘additional living expenses’), which can be used for various purposes, but is especially noteworthy for managing the dual cost of a mortgage and rent on a temporary unit while rebuilding is underway.

In the long term aftermath of the large number of wildfires in California in 2017, California’s Deputy Insurance Commissioner Kenneth Schnoll in 2019 issued a notice that, going forward, those rebuilding would be able to extend that funding to up to 36 months, as long as they were, “acting in good faith and with reasonable diligence encounters a delay or delays in the reconstruction process as a result of circumstances beyond the control of the insured.”⁵ Thus, come August of 2023, those

<https://lookout.co/santacruz/civic-life/story/2022-04-06/czu-rebuilding-progress-frustrates-fire-communities-official-s-say-theyre-ahead-of-curve>

3 County of Santa Cruz Recovery Permit Center, “Recovery Permit Center Dashboard,” Santa Cruz County Fire Recovery, Santa Cruz County Office of Response, Recovery, & Resilience, accessed 5/6/2023, <https://www.co.santa-cruz.ca.us/FireRecovery/RecoveryPermitCenter/RecoveryPermitCenterDashboard.aspx/>. I would also like to note that I previously accessed this page on April 26, 2023, and the number of completed single family houses was 26.

4 “Recovery Permit Center Dashboard.” I recorded 18 completed units when accessing the site on November 1, 2022.

5 California Department of Insurance, *Effective Date of 36 Month Additional Living Expenses Requirement*. Kenneth Schnoll. San Francisco, CA: 2019. <https://www.insurance.ca.gov/0250-insurers/0300-insurers/0200-bulletins/bulletin-notices-commiss-opinion/upload/GeneralCounsel-sLegalOpinionRegardingEffectiveDateOf36MonthAdditionalLivingExpensesRequirement.pdf> (accessed 4/28/2023).

who are still rebuilding will be faced with a large additional financial burden if they have not been able to complete the rebuilding process.

The 36 months of rebuilding have not gone especially smoothly thus far. For one, building costs have sharply increased, likely not being helped by the ongoing Covid 19 pandemic. If a family was not previously over-insured, it is quite likely that they are now massively under-insured for current costs. One rebuilder has described how, “her 700-square-foot home was insured for \$300 per square foot, construction quotes are at minimum \$400 to \$500 per square foot, with some as high as \$700.”⁶ Those numbers were from relatively early in 2022, and so are likely even higher now, as there was an overall increase of 9.3% in the California construction cost index for 2022, with the index trending even higher in early 2023.⁷ Dave Reid, the director for the Santa Cruz County Office of Response, Recovery, & Resilience, has said, “We need to ensure that not only the property owner that is building the home, but all future homeowners of that property are living in a safe and secure home that meets current code standards,”⁸ in regards to this unfairness of costs families have had to deal with. Thus, it is not surprising that the Board of Supervisors for the County also recently adopted a number of updates to the building code,⁹ which has the potential to

6 Grace Stetson, "A tale of two recoveries".

7 California Department of General Services Real Estate Service Division, “DGS California Construction Cost Index CCCI,” DGS, California Department of General Services, Accessed 4/28/2023, <https://www.dgs.ca.gov/RES/Real-Estate-Services-Division-Resources-List-Folder/DGS-California-Construction-Cost-Index-CCCI>

8 Grace Stetson, "A tale of two recoveries."

9 County of Santa Cruz Board of Supervisors, *Regular Meeting Agenda December 6, 2022*. Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors, 2022. http://santacruzcountyca.iqm2.com/citizens/FileOpen.aspx?Type=1&ID=1567&Inline=True&fbclid=IwAR3yJ0zn5duzTQLyj92p-XwG_Pvo-

impose additional costs onto rebuilders. This has not been helped by there being some degree of uncertainty about which aspects of the code a rebuild must be updated to and which parts can be met with an in-kind replacement (i.e. a replacement with construction equivalent to what was previously standing). One example of this is in regards to fire sprinkler water pressure requirements,¹⁰ where rebuilders are being expected to meet the requirements for a new build (and the additional costs and water tanks needed for them) rather than a rebuild. Similar conflicts have occurred in regards to geology and septic requirements.¹¹ Obviously, there is merit to what Reid describes in needing to build both for the present community and also for the health of future communities and the environment that they live in. But, at the same time, there is clearly a large amount of friction between those rebuilding and the county responsible for overseeing this process.

This friction can be most clearly seen in that uncertainty of expectation described above. For example, one rebuilder described to the media how, “[The county geologist] said our geologist didn’t go in depth enough, and they wanted him to create a 100-foot boring on our property, which took months to get someone with the right qualifications... After we submitted the findings, the county asked our geologist to do more — so he ended up quitting on us.”¹² This friction was even

4Wo2mjlmwfl_lv5PR2PL9LLMUTypHk/ (accessed 4/28/2023).

10 Antonia Bradford, "Fire Sprinkler Code is the New Geology for Fire Victims," San Lorenzo Valley Post, San Lorenzo Valley Post, May 22, 2022, <https://slvpost.com/fire-sprinkler-code-is-the-new-geology-for-fire-victims/>.

11 Antonia Bradford, "Fire Sprinkler Code is the New Geology for Fire Victims."

12 Grace Stetson, "A tale of two recoveries."

prone to appearing when the County attempted to reduce requirements, such as with the Atkins Report, a geological survey that was conducted during the summer of 2021. While it was conducted to allow rebuilders to not have to hire a geologist for a full survey of their parcel, it came with the caveat of a requirement for the homeowner to add to their deed, “a signed covenant that acknowledges the geologic hazards on their property have not been investigated,”¹³ a requirement likely to make any future attempt at selling the parcel much more difficult.

These many conflicts and the resulting lack of progress towards rebuilding appear to me to be a manifestation of structural, or systemic, discrimination. Fred Pincus provides a useful definition, stating, “*structural discrimination* refers to the policies of dominant race/ethnic/gender institutions and the behavior of the individuals who implement these policies and control these institutions, which are race/ethnic/gender neutral in intent but which have a differential and/or harmful effect on minority race/ethnic/gender groups.”¹⁴ This is distinct from institutional discrimination, which encompasses policies *intended* to have a differential impact, such as refusing to hire individuals of color for managerial positions. The lack of intent for structural discrimination means that it typically discriminates via a vector that is not explicitly tied to a category of minoritization. For example, a cut to a

13 Grace Stetson, “A clause for concern: CZU victims express fear over verbiage included in proposed geological revision,” Lookout Santa Cruz, Lookout Santa Cruz, September 14, 2021, <https://lookout.co/santacruz/environment/wildfires/story/2021-09-14/czu-fire-victims-santa-cruzgeological-concerns-evaluation-board-of-supervisors>

14 Fred L. Pincus, “Discrimination Comes in Many Forms: Individual, Institutional, and Structural,” *The American Behavioral Scientist* 40, 2 (1996): 186, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764296040002009>

welfare program could likely be class based institutional discrimination depending on its cause, but would certainly be race or ethnicity based structural discrimination, due to the intertwined nature of those factors of minoritization and socioeconomic status.¹⁵ After all, “Well-intentioned people who carry out structurally discriminatory policies still hurt minority groups. Being gender-blind or color-blind is not enough.”¹⁶ This also includes situations where the procedure was designed to have differential impacts but was inscribed with neutral language, so those who have come into the role of implementing the procedure down the line are not consciously acting in a discriminatory way.

The purpose in establishing this differentiation is because they require different solutions. Intentional institutional discrimination requires the reinforcement of preexisting non-discrimination requirements and ensuring they are acted upon in the future. Unintentional structural discrimination requires a change in design such that its potential for creating or reinforcing inequality are revealed and amended such that they better promote equal outcomes.

While I certainly do not have the humanities training to fully confidently determine the root cause of this instance of structural discrimination, from what I can ascertain the main survivors of this system (i.e. those who will rebuild a house, as well as presumably those attempting to build a new house) are those with a large

15 American Psychological Association, “Ethnic and Racial Minorities & Socioeconomic Status,” American Psychological Association, American Psychological Association, created July 2017, <https://www.apa.org/pi/ses/resources/publications/minorities>

16 Fred Pincus, “Discrimination Comes in Many Forms,” 192.

amount of preexisting capital, as they will have the resources to not only handle the costs of living off site but also handle hiring contractors for such an extended period of time.

I do feel the need to add a caveat to this, which is that the problems within this structure appear to be negatively affecting both the rich and those who are not.

According to the Census Bureau, Santa Cruz County had a median household income of \$96,093 from 2017-2021, compared to California's \$84,097, or \$69,021 for the United States as a whole.¹⁷ While I do not know exactly how this statistic relates to those who lost their homes in the fire, I find it probable that those choosing to rebuild rather than taking the insurance money and moving elsewhere likely skew towards higher income brackets, and yet of those choosing to rebuild only 25 of the 237 trying to rebuild¹⁸ have completed the process which, given the higher median income of the area, means that it is rather likely that those of a range of incomes are being held up for extended periods at various parts of this process. Thus, even the group that seems the most likely to suffer the least harm from the current state of affairs appears to be suffering some harm from the system as it currently stands.

With all of this in mind, I feel confident in stating that some of the core issues involved in the slow rebuilding of houses lost during the CZU Lightning Complex are

17 United States Census Bureau, "QuickFacts," United States Census Bureau, United States Census Bureau, accessed 4/29/2023, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/santacruzcountycalifornia/INC110221>

18 At the very least, 237 is the number of single family units somewhere in the permitting process for rebuilding as of writing. County of Santa Cruz Recovery Permit Center, "Recovery Permit Center Dashboard."

structural. The combination of recurring costs (either for insurance before the fires, which to be sufficiently insured would have required a seemingly substantial investment; or for recruiting various contractors and specialists to complete portions of the permitting and then rebuilding) and delay inducing bureaucratic decisions (changes to codes; the Atkins Report being conducted nearly a year after the fire and thus pushing geological decisions until after the completion of the survey; etc.) are a combination which is unlikely to explicitly discriminate, but will certainly have a differential impact based on socioeconomic status, which, as stated previously, are known to be intertwined to other factors of minoritization.¹⁹

Clearly, the issues involved in this rebuilding are highly complicated, dealing with the intersection of the trauma of living through a natural disaster and dealing with a set of bureaucratic structures that are slow to move. And, unfortunately, it is difficult to approach solutions to some of these structural issues because there is some clear, positive purpose being served by a number of them. Environmental health is absolutely something that needs to be considered in how a house is constructed, as is making sure that the roads are wide enough to ensure that emergency services (especially fire fighters) can safely traverse it to do their jobs, and I would not want to indicate otherwise. One of the most frustrating aspects of a structural issue is that there isn't necessarily a 'bad person' to replace to fix it. It doesn't matter how nice the person operating the structure is, as the harm comes from decisions they have been

19 American Psychological Association, "Ethnic and Racial Minorities & Socioeconomic Status."

required to make. If these issues are to be fixed before the next big natural disaster for the area, the relevant structures themselves need to be changed.

Of course, changing structures is hard, because if you change the wrong part of it the situation can worsen. One example of this is the small Indian mongoose, which was introduced to Hawai'i in the 1800s in an attempt to control the rat population and has since caused the extinction of a number of bird, reptile, and amphibian species, while not actually exterminating the rat in question.²⁰

Michael Sellers provides a definition for systems that I feel helps explain why it can be so challenging to fix a broken system.²¹ He says a system is "A set of parts that together form loops of interaction between them to create a persistent 'whole.' The whole has its own properties and behaviors belonging to the group but not to any single part within it."²² Thus, to properly experience the system, one must see it in motion, as the system is defined primarily through the active, looping relationships between its constituent elements. A simple example of this is that of an engine's centrifugal governor, where as the main valve opens, the engine spins faster, causing a pair of weights to spread out, increasing resistance, which leads the valve to start to close, the engine to slow, the weights to come back together, decreasing resistance, allowing the valve to open, and so on, creating a state of stability over time, even as

20 S. Lowe et. al., 100 of the World's Worst Invasive Alien Species: A Selection from the Global Invasive Species Database (New Zealand: The Invasive Species Specialist Group, 2004), 10

21 While Sellers' definition comes from a text focused on game design, he builds it not solely on examples from games, but also from ecological and mechanical systems. Thus, it retains its utility outside of a games context.

22 Michael Sellers, *Advanced Game Design: A Systems Approach* (United States of America: Pearson Education, Inc., 2018), 50.

the individual components continually change.²³ Thus, if we can understand how the system operates in action, we can determine where changes to the system are the most likely to cause the desired positive impacts while at the same time minimizing the scope of negative impacts.

I propose that one way of approaching such a possibility is via a multi-modal approach. Games are a medium defined by rules, and as a result are readily open to the creation of simulations of systems. After all, all you need to make a simulation of a system into a game is to provide a player with a means of interacting with it, whether that be a lever to influence a part of a loop or control over an item that is impacted by the system. Unfortunately, as I will describe later, games can lose sight of the human cost of decisions in the systems they create, favoring highlighting the more concrete impacts rather than those that can be much more difficult to describe, such as those relating to emotions. When dealing with a traumatic event such as the two and a half year aftermath of a natural disaster (to provide a *completely* off the cuff example), those more nebulous elements become important to address well. Live performance, on the other hand, is extremely good at dealing with these types of impacts. The ‘liveness’ of a performance supports the expression of multifaceted emotions, as even the dramatized retelling of a personal story is given weight by the presence of a physical body behind it, and when sharing a space with an audience

²³ Sellers, *Advanced Game Design*, 25.

actors have access to the full range of nonverbal communication to provide additional nuance to the words they are saying.

Smoked Out: Watching Them Scrape Our Home Away was such an attempt to approach the structural issues involved in the post-CZU Lightning Complex rebuilding using both games and live performance. Produced from late 2022 into early 2023, it utilized these concepts (as well as others to be discussed later in this paper) in the creation of a multi-media documentary project about the rebuilding. It utilized documentary verbatim theater,²⁴ a mobile serious game centered around an exercise in completing confusing paperwork, and a forum theater in which audience members took to the stage to discuss systemic changes with a focus on a few bureaucratic issues that were relevant to the rebuilding community as of *Smoked Out's* premiere in March of 2023.

While I do not believe that *Smoked Out* as produced was optimal for promoting effective systemic change, I do find that it succeeded as an artistic confrontation of the complicated combination of issues present in the rebuilding of Santa Cruz County following the CZU Lightning Complex. In this paper, I will establish a genealogy of different art works and genres which helped to shape *Smoked Out*, from the stage to the computer screen, along with various considerations to be made for the utilization of each of these mediums, before delving into the initial design and creative process that resulted in *Smoked Out*.

²⁴ Its script was created from edited down interview transcripts with five individuals who attempted to go through the rebuilding process, as well as some official statements from Santa Cruz County.

2. Performing Current Events

a. Documentary Theater

While the documentary genre of theatrical performance is nearly as old as theatrical performance itself, with Phrynichus' depiction of the Persian War in his work *The Capture of Miletus* in 492 B.C.,²⁵ for the purposes of this paper we are far more interested with some of its more recent developments. Specifically, the work of Erwin Piscator and the Federal Theater Project both had large impacts on what we would now define as 'documentary theater,' and from them, and their direct and spiritual successors, we might explore some of the ways in which contemporary events have been depicted on the stage.

Before we delve into that history, it might be productive to briefly cover what a documentary is. Although he is specifically speaking of filmed documentary, I find that Michael Renov's poetics of documentary are still productive for other mediums for two reasons. The first is that his poetics are not requisite on the medium of cinema, as none of the four tenets demands a specific cinematography or form of montage. They are instead built on intents and uses, which can be present across mediums. The second reason I find these poetics productive is that, to the best of my knowledge, there is no equivalent documentary poetics for either theater or games. Perhaps this demands that I create a poetics of my own for my mediums of choice, but for now his will suffice. He describes them thusly:

25 Attilio Favorini, *Voicings: Ten Plays from the Documentary Theater* (New Jersey: The Ecco Press, 1995), xi.

the four fundamental tendencies or rhetorical/aesthetic functions attributable to documentary practice. These categories are not intended to be exclusive or airtight; the friction, overlaps—even mutual determination—discernible among them testify to the richness and historical variability of nonfiction forms in the visual arts...

1. to record, reveal, or preserve
2. to persuade or promote
3. to analyze or interrogate
4. to express.²⁶

Thus, a work that is attempting to engage with a real event that is defined by these functions, can be considered to be a documentary. While the first, that of creating a record, is certainly the most commonly associated tendency with documentary work, the works that I describe both in this section and in the following ones find a variety of balances between these tendencies. For example, many of the games projects in Section 3 lean away from recording in the interest of providing some degree of player agency. A number of the works in this chapter focus greatly on persuading, such as *The (M)others*, using the documentation of trauma to *persuade* and *promote* action in the audience. This is not a flaw, as Renov has created a set of functions with enough breadth that it is more of a question of ‘to what degree is this category a focus’ rather than it being a question of presence in the work at all.

26 Michael Renov, “Toward a Poetics of Documentary,” in *Theorizing Documentary*, ed. Michael Renov (New York: Routledge, 1993), 21.

In 1926, Bertolt Brecht, “used the term ‘documentary’ for the first time in a theatrical context – the same year John Grierson first applied it to Robert Flaherty’s film, *Moana*”²⁷ specifically when commenting on Piscator’s theatrical practice. While over his career Piscator explored a range of political theaters, not just those which are ‘documentary,’ and many of which he describes in his seminal 1929 work *The Political Theater*, one work of his of especial note was his 1925 collaboration with Felix Gasbarra, *In Spite of Everything!*. This play was a telling of the decade long history of the German Communist Party, with a cast of 200.²⁸ While unfortunately the original text has been lost,²⁹ this work is known to have taken the form of, “a drama based on the principles of news reportage, constructed in an epic succession of tableaux and stations, and designed to promote direct social action. Presented in a revue format and accompanied by music, political cartoons, moving pictures borrowed from government archives, and photographic projections.”³⁰ Even in this early work, it is possible to see the drive to utilize a variety of mediums to instill “a dialectical grasp of reality which implies movement rather than stasis, relationships rather than reism.”³¹ This desire to convey via multiple forms will, unfortunately, be only an occasionally recurring note in this section.

27 Favorini, *Voicings*, xviii. The term ‘documentary’ was first coined in 1926 in a review of the film *Moana*.

28 Favorini, *Voicings*, xviii.

29 Favorini, *Voicings*, 1.

30 Favorini, *Voicings*, xviii-xix.

31 Shiela McAlpine, *Visual Aids in the Productions of the First Piscator-Bühne, 1927-1928* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1990), 40.

An important documentary theater form that began to develop at a similar point in time as Piscator's experiments was that of the 'Living Newspaper.' The form was initially developed by the Blue Blouse, a U.S.S.R. performance troupe, in the 1920s, at first following the post-revolution tradition of having newspapers be read out loud for those who were illiterate, before the Blue Blouse began to experiment with dramatizing the events into short monologues or dialogues.³² Over the following decade, the techniques would spread and continue to adapt, and by the 1930s had arrived in the United States and were adopted by the Federal Theater Project.

The Federal Theater Project was a 1930's arts initiative in the United States that, by virtue of being one part of the programs of the New Deal, needed to hire a very large number of workers, larger than would normally be used in a theater. Hallie Flanagan, the director of the project, decided on utilizing the 'Living Newspaper' because it could easily utilize a large number of performers.³³ In her introduction to a collection of the project's works, Flanagan describes its wide range of performance sources as pulling from, "Aristophanes, from the *Commedia dell'Arte*, from Shakespearean soliloquy, from the pantomime of Mei Lan Fang. Being a flexible technique and only in its beginning, it still has much to learn from the chorus, the camera, the cartoon."³⁴ Across the lifespan of the Project, a signature style for their living newspaper productions was able to be developed, which included, "quick scene

32 Gary F. Dawson, *Documentary Theater in the United States: An Historical Survey and Analysis of Its Content, Form, and Stagecraft* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1999), 20.

33 Hallie Flanagan, Introduction to *Federal Theater Plays*, edited by Pierre De Rohan (New York: Random House, 1938), vii

34 Hallie Flanagan, Introduction, xi.

and set changes, flexible stage space, using many levels, rolling and hand-carried scenery, and scrimms that established many locations without elaborate constructed sets.”³⁵ Unfortunately, the Federal Theater Project would be shuttered by the Federal Government in 1939, just one year after the publishing of that collection, but not before leaving a lasting impact on the history of American theatrical performance.

A more recent work in which we can see this impact is in *HOUSE/DIVIDED*, a 2011 work created by the Builders Association. As Shannon Jackson and Marianne Weems describe it, “*HOUSE/ DIVIDED* was The Builders’ own documentary response to a twenty-first-century global crisis where the Americanization of markets heightened global risk.”³⁶ This response to the 2008 subprime mortgage loan crisis found itself in the lineage of the Federal Theater Project, specifically their living newspaper play *One Third of a Nation*, and how the Project’s artists had, “used aesthetic skills to gain new perspectives on the ‘abstractions’ of stock market crashes and economic depression, so The Builders found themselves interested in concretising a twenty-first-century financial crisis, showing the ‘effect ... on the people to whom the problem is of great importance.’”³⁷ *HOUSE/ DIVIDED* also incorporated elements of “Steinbeck’s *Grapes of Wrath*,”³⁸ “how much the concepts of a house and domicile had changed from 1993 to the foreclosure meltdown of 2007 to 2009,”³⁹

35 Shannon Jackson and Marianne Weems, *The Builders Association: Performance and Media in Contemporary Theater*, (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2015), 366

36 Jackson and Weems, *Builders Association*, 345.

37 Jackson and Weems, *Builders Association*, 349.

38 Jackson and Weems, *Builders Association*, 350.

39 Jackson and Weems, *Builders Association*, 346.

documentary interviews with both those responsible for foreclosing houses as well as those who had been foreclosed on,⁴⁰ and “transcripts of earnings results conference calls from Bear Stearns, Lehman Brothers, and Goldman Sachs.”⁴¹ Part of what makes this work especially noteworthy is the way in which it was designed such that, “at no point does one component of the show upstage another. As sophisticated as their contributions are individually, they are so artfully interlaced that they are hard to separate.”⁴² Each element of the design, from the text to the lighting to the sound to the cameras to the stock market ticker worked in conjunction with one another to support the same narrative. An anecdote about this that has been related to me by Marianne Weems is how, following one performance, a stock broker who had watched the show came up to her and told her that he had been able to use the projected changes to stock prices along the back walls to follow along with the rest of the narrative. Clearly, if a work is interested in telling the story of a complicated, structural issue, it could do a lot worse than following in *HOUSE/DIVIDED*’s footsteps.

One last note on the ‘living newspaper’ is that Augusto Boal adapted the premise of staging items directly from the news in a similarly wide ranging degrees of engagement as a part of his Theater of the Oppressed, specifically as the first of his

40 Jackson and Weems, *Builders Association*, 352-354.

41 Jackson and Weems, *Builders Association*, 359.

42 Charles Isherwood, “Dispossessed Progeny of Ma and Pa Joad,” *The New York Times*, *The New York Times*, October 25, 2012, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/26/theater/reviews/builders-associations-house-divided-at-bam.html>

techniques for “Theater as Discourse.”⁴³ More details on Boal, and the techniques of the Theater of the Oppressed, can be found in Section IV.

b. Verbatim Theater

There is another subgenre of documentary theater that is important to address, which is that of verbatim theater. While documentary theatrical works regularly used some amount of primary sourced dialogue or monologue, including the ones described in section 2.a, typically that primary language worked in conjunction with additional, non-primary text, such as a pre-scripted scene or other dramatization of the events described. In 1993 Anna Deavere Smith created *Fires in the Mirror*, a documentary play about the Crown Heights Riots of 1991, and in doing so created the first documentary theatrical work, to my knowledge, that utilized only primary texts. Specifically, it is composed entirely from interviews that she conducted with various individuals surrounding the riots, becoming, “a dramatization of reality whose primary purpose is to achieve a historic truth in a living performance using the vernacular speech acts of real people in real situations that satisfies a unity of composition... owing to its exclusive incorporation of primary source material in the form of oral histories”⁴⁴

43 Augusto Boal, *Theater of the Oppressed*, translated by Charles A. and Maria-Odilia Leal McBride (New York: Theater Communications Group, Inc., 1985).

44 Gary F. Dawson, *Documentary Theater in the United States*, 130-131.

There are two other elements that helped to make Smith's work stand out in the genre. The first is her light hand as an editor, leaving in the various 'ums' and 'ahs' that one would expect to find in a normal conversation, but which are typically removed from dramatic texts. This creates that 'vernacular speech' described above, which is "extraordinary because at its heart is precisely that realm of values, intentions and purposes which is often assumed to be the exclusive property of literature."⁴⁵ The other major element of *Fires in the Mirror* is the position of Smith herself as the performer of the work. As originally developed, she was the sole performer, embodying each of the twenty six individuals whose interviews she had included, both African American and Jewish, male and female, highlighting her position as a mixed race woman of color in the creation of this work, as well as the issue of identity that is core to a number of the issues described by the work. By virtue of having been the interviewer as well as the embodier, her performance was able to find, "the details of vocal rhythms and physical mannerisms intrinsic to each person enacted with phenomenal accuracy... the care with which she rendered her subjects allowed us to view them with the same respect she had accorded them."⁴⁶

Given the quality of this production, and the way that it improved upon an already existing tradition, it is unsurprising that there have been many works over the past thirty years that have continued to explore the verbatim space, i.e. utilizing text

45 Stanley E. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?: the Authority of Interpretive Communities*, (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980), 108.

46 Katie Laris, review of *Fires in the Mirror: Crown Heights, Brooklyn and Other Identities* by Anna Deavere Smith, *Theatre Journal* 45, no. 1 (1993): 118–119, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3208595>.

entirely from primary sources, with the default being interviews. Some of the more prominent ones include the Tectonic Theater Project's 2000 work *The Laramie Project*, about the 1998 murder of Matthew Shepard, and which has subsequently received both a sequel and a film adaptation; and Alecky Blythe and Adam Cork's 2011 work *London Road*, which examines the 2006 Ipswich serial murders and subsequent trial, and explores the possibility of creating a verbatim musical. Anna Deavere Smith also continued to explore the genre, such as with *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*, about the 1992 Rodney King Riots; *Let Me Down Easy*, exploring various narratives of resilience and healthcare; and *House Arrest*, exploring the roles of the President of the United States and the press, which also in early iterations explored having a non-documentary narrative involving former felons turned actors⁴⁷ that was ultimately removed in later versions of the piece. With these various pieces, some of the choices Smith made for her works, such as the inclusion of pauses and non-verbal responses, have been either reduced in scope, such as by either reducing or removing their presence, or in some cases amplified, with the expectation of recreating each vocalization as exactly as possible. Verbatim theater has become such a common subgenre that it has even begun to develop its own subgenres, such as headphone verbatim. Caroline Wake describes it as, "In headphone verbatim, the performance displays not only its source material but also the mechanical device needed to record and repeat that material. In both rehearsal and performance, the

47 Gary F. Dawson, *Documentary Theater in the United States*, 140-141.

actors wear headphones, through which they hear the audio script. They then repeat that script as immediately and exactly as possible, including... every stammer, pause, and repetition.”⁴⁸ One of the most notable examples of this style is Lucas Hnath’s 2019 work *Dana H.*, in which the audience listens to the titular individual (Hnath’s mother) recount her experience of being kidnapped and raped multiple times over a number of years, while at the same time viewing an actress embody her during the interview.

There are two specific works that are largely verbatim that I would like to describe in some additional detail, as they in particular served as formal inspirations for *Smoked Out*. The first of these is Nikki Yeboah’s 2018 work *The (M)others*, which she describes as, “a verbatim-theatre performance based on the oral histories of four [San Jose, California area] women who had lost their loved ones to police violence.”⁴⁹ While the performance is generally in line with what one might expect from a verbatim performance, with an actress corresponding to each of the women interviewed, speaking text directly from those interviews, albeit with minor insertions of non-primary text to support a framing narrative of a birthday party for the loved ones who were killed. Included in this frame are also moments of breaking the fourth wall, such as when one of the women asks, “Are there any mothers here tonight? If you could summarize in one or two words what being a mother is like for you what

48 Wake, Caroline. “Headphone Verbatim Theatre: Methods, Histories, Genres, Theories.” *New Theatre Quarterly* 29, no. 4 (2013): 322–323. doi:10.1017/S0266464X13000651.

49 Nikki O. Yeboah, “‘I know how it is when nobody sees you’: oral-history performance methods for staging trauma.” *Text and Performance Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (2020): 131-132. doi:10.1080/10462937.2020.1788133

word would you use?”⁵⁰ These various invitations to directly engage with the performers serve as, “an invitation to step into their world, to join their community, to remember those no longer there to share in the moment” while at the same time leaving space for demarcation, to, “reminds us of our differences. In this moment we are *with* them but *not* them.”⁵¹

The theatrical portion of the work ends similarly, with one of the performers asking the audience to join her in singing “Happy Birthday” for her son, who was killed the day before his birthday. The goal of this is to deny catharsis in the audience.

Why must catharsis be denied? Boal describes how Aristotle’s formulation of tragedy, from where we derive the concept of catharsis, as, “a very powerful purgative system, the objective of which is to eliminate all that is not commonly accepted, including the revolution, before it takes place... to adjust him to what pre-exists... if, on the contrary, we want to stimulate the spectator to transform his society, to engage in revolutionary action, in that case we will have to seek another poetics!”⁵² In order to push for that action, Yeboah made sure to arrange a talkback with the interview subjects after each performance, and described how after the first performance, she saw audience members “grab the buttons and pamphlets that family members had brought, jotting down action items, and calling their own mothers to express their love and appreciation of them,”⁵³ showing the efficacy of this structure.

50 Nikki O. Yeboah, “I know how it is when nobody sees you,” 141.

51 Nikki O. Yeboah, “I know how it is when nobody sees you,” 142.

52 Augusto Boal, *Theater of the Oppressed*, 47.

53 Nikki O. Yeboah, “I know how it is when nobody sees you,” 144.

The other work I would like to highlight is the Builders Association’s 2022 work *I Agree to the Terms*, a performance over Zoom made in collaboration with, “a community of microworkers, or MTurk⁵⁴ workers, who train the algorithms that shape our online experience.”⁵⁵ The piece consisted of three distinct acts. In the first, actors performed monologues of various technologist manifestos describing their hopes for the Internet circa the late 90’s, with a somewhat libertarian bent. This leads into the second act, which comprises the majority of the duration of the piece, wherein the performers interview those Amazon Mechanical Turk workers⁵⁶ live before the audience, asking a variety of questions regarding the nature of their digital labor (which consist of various digital tasks such as “transcribing an invoice, or taking part in a study, or labeling photographs to train an artificial intelligence program”⁵⁷), their protections (or lack thereof) as workers, and the ways in which this work supports them that a more traditional form of work would not, such as remoteness and greater control of schedule. To my understanding, as the Turkers were not trained performers, this portion was outlined but not fully scripted, thus leaving room for the natural language emblematic of verbatim performance, albeit with a degree of separation between lived experience and performed recollection removed.

54 Short for Amazon Mechanical Turk. They also go by ‘Turkers.’

55 Builders Association, “I Agree To The Terms (2022) An online event made in collaboration with MTurk workers,” The Builders Association, Builders Association, accessed May 5, 2023, <https://thebuildersassociation.org/shows/i-agree-to-the-terms/>.

56 In order to avoid having to dedicate more time in this already verbose section to a description of the work and its conditions, please see the article by Newman, below.

57 Andy Newman, “I Found Work on an Amazon Website. I Made 97 Cents an Hour,” *The New York Times*, November 15, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/11/15/nyregion/amazon-mechanical-turk.html/>.

This then leads into the most unique portion of the work, the mobile game. Audience members would be split into breakout rooms with one of the Turkers, at which point they would be given access to a mobile phone browser game designed to be a satirical interpretation of the real Mechanical Turk website. The satire ranges from the terms of service, which take nearly a minute just to scroll through, much less read, and is filled with various Faustian and fey bargains; to the tasks themselves, which interpret the expected labor in an absurd light that in my mind is reminiscent of Vaclav Havel's plays depicting the nonsensical design of bureaucracy.

As Simon Penny describes, by being given the opportunity to play these tasks, "The user is trained in the enaction of behaviors in response to images, and images appear in response to behaviors in the same way that a pilot is trained in a flight simulator. Passive observation may be shown to have some effect on the beliefs or even the actions of an observer, but an enacted training regime must be a more powerful technique."⁵⁸ By playing as mock Turkers in a way where they have to physically enact the work of navigating various user interfaces, making various visual and textual evaluations, and then submitting answers, all while under a high time pressure. Audience members are thus trained by this play in what the experience of being an Turker is like, what decisions they have to make in regards to both managing their time (if you take too long, you won't get the money, in a similar way that if an Turker takes too long, another Turker might be able to take the better paying

58 Simon Penny, "Representation, Enaction, and the Ethics of Simulation," in *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance, and Game*, ed. Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Pat Harrington (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2004), 79-80.

opportunities on the service), and how they have to adapt their workflow to this device, something that they typically carry with them, and what that does to work/life separation. While they are working towards completion of these tasks, one of the Turkers interviewed is present with them providing additional sage advice, further cementing this training.

Audience members earn the imaginary currency of Builders Coin through the completion of these tasks, which, once the show transitions to the third act, are shown to be worth essentially nothing in comparison to the items that can be purchased with the currency, which is a part of how the final portion of the work (which utilizes a text taken from Mark Zuckerberg's descriptions of his virtual reality Metaverse ambitions) highlights the oppressions baked into current conceptions of Web 3.0, with extreme economic and political inequities included in these digital worlds at a systemic level, with the dialogue highlighting how this is typically treated as a selling point rather than an extreme flaw.

c. Considerations

Now that we have some examples of documentary and specifically verbatim theater, it is useful to spend some time evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the genre so that later on we can see to what extent they were planned around in *Smoked Out*, and what additional considerations might be productive to make for future works.

First, why use a primary source rather than a secondary one that can be shaped as desired? To reuse a quote, I feel that Stanley Fish does an excellent job of describing the power of ordinary, rather than stylized, language when he says that it is, “extraordinary because at its heart is precisely that realm of values, intentions and purposes which is often assumed to be the exclusive property of literature.”⁵⁹ In literature, a reader typically has access to highly descriptive narration of the intents and thought processes of characters, which are rarely included in theatrical scripts and may or may not be created as a part of the performance depending on the skill of the performer in question. Thus, for a verbatim text, the small uncertainties that can be found in a repetition, a cut off word, or a strange pause imbue in the language a characterization of its speaker which cannot be found in a more traditional scripting that eschews those elements. The retaining of those indicators of trains of thought helps the text retain a connection to its origin, providing additional insights into how the speaker is approaching the subject of their speech, that by convention a playwright normally expects the performer to devise on their own.

Another consideration for a documentary performance is determining what role the documentary work is taking in its relevant community. One useful role a documentary performance can serve is as an aesthetically focused history. Dawson describes how, “the history found in a documentary play is the oral history of a memory play offered up by the key players in the making of it. The oral history of a

59 Stanley E. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?*, 108.

documentary play is its chief authenticating sign system that confers actuality: proof something actually took place.”⁶⁰ Having such a reference that something did, in fact, take place, can be quite useful. For example, in the context of the CZU Lightning Complex, those rebuilding have been in conflict with the county not just over the process of rebuilding, but also the data around it, with there even being disagreements over the number of single family homes destroyed. Mary Andersen of the San Lorenzo Valley Post reported that, “County staff told the Post that, in order to juke their percentages, they don’t honor the number of 911 families who lost their homes. Rather, a spokesperson in May 2022 asserted that the county’s number is 640.”⁶¹ While obviously an oral history on its own is not sufficient for helping to establish agreement on a contentious issue, it can certainly help be a part of the fabric of narratives surrounding an event helping to maintain its status as something worth consideration, clarity, and discussion around.

With this in mind, we must then consider the question of the veracity of the documentary text (whether it be found primary texts, interview transcriptions, or recordings). In my experience of speaking with others about documentary theater, and especially verbatim theater, I have found that it can be very easy to fall into the trap that, by virtue of the words being spoken by individuals who are otherwise remaining outside of the artistic process, that those words are ‘*more true*’ than the ‘fabricated’

60 Gary F. Dawson, *Documentary Theater in the United States*, xiii.

61 Mary Andersen, “Fire Recovery Challenges Ongoing,” San Lorenzo Valley Post, San Lorenzo Valley Post, 1/18/2023, https://slvpost.com/fire-recovery-update-january-2023/?mibextid=Zxz2cZ&fbclid=IwAR3yCFoGqfOYS0rrNblgT5nzxFrGHbxbwtSPcSIkX_g41wfet9zxJ83FdjM

words of a more traditional stage play. Perhaps I am just reading too much into it, but I especially get this sense when hearing discourse surrounding headphone verbatim, such as when Wake indicates that, “whereas in verbatim theatre ‘the firmest of commitments is... made by the company to the use of vernacular speech’, in headphone verbatim this commitment is extended beyond replicating argot, to include replicating coughs, pauses, hesitations, and repetitions. In the words of Susannah Clapp, headphone verbatim includes ‘sounds that you never normally hear onstage: the barrage of gulps, chewings, sniffs, half-words, and abandoned phrases with which people punctuate their sentences.’”⁶² When approaching this from a critical mindset, as I believe Wake does, I believe that it is clear that this is not entirely a positive. Boal describes how the lexicon of theater is the “*Sum of all imaginable languages: words, colors, forms...*”, with a syntax of “*Dramatic action.*”⁶³ If a theatrical work is to continue to create meaning, it must utilize dramatic action to combine the units of meaning from whatever combination of languages it is choosing to use (e.g. spoken words plus body language plus costuming plus scenic design plus lighting) to create the shared meaning of the languages as a whole. Essentially, when an action is taken, an audience member can take the resulting change in comparison to other simultaneous changes or lack thereof to advance their understanding of the work. A villain letting out a long laugh takes on a different meaning if the hero laughs along with them or quivers in fear, and that meaning will also be shifted if the lights

62 Caroline Wake, “Headphone Verbatim Theatre,” 322.

63 Augusto Boal, *Theater of the Oppressed*, 156.

suddenly go red. Thus, while the inclusion of the vocal tics, repetitions, and pauses of natural speech can support this syntactical process (an ‘um’ while a person describes what they have lost in a natural disaster can be very emotionally charged, for example), a decision to not edit a primary source, especially a spoken one, can lead to a text where this syntactical process becomes bogged down by including a large number of actions which are so minimal that larger meanings in the source become distracted by a lack of succinctness in the original source.

For this reason, I agree with Dawson when he describes how, “Considering the necessary hammering on primary source materials needed to compress the matter effectively into an aesthetic whole, documentary playwrights might be referred to as information millwrights, because more than researched, more than written, more than imagined, a documentary play is manufactured.”⁶⁴ This is not to contradict the values of using such text that I described previously, nor to say that primary sources should be shaped by the playwrights of documentary performances to more fit the form and pacing of a more traditional portion of theatrical scripting, but to say that some amount of editing is useful, and likely necessary, to create a performance that is watchable, and the need for that editing should be acknowledged.

When pretending that the hand of the editor is nonexistent (or virtually so), then one naturally begins to take on the position that what is being presented on stage is, or is close to, ‘objective fact,’ which naturally opens up new avenues of critique.

64 Gary F. Dawson, *Documentary Theater in the United States*, xii.

As an example, Dawson describes when “theater critic Walter Kerr, responding to Donald Freed’s documentary play, *Inquest*, about the Rosenberg 1950s spy-trial, wrote: ‘The Theater of Fact has backfired both ways. No persuasive play has been written because we are meant to take the evening as fact. Fact has been compromised by the normal liberties, and the normal hazards of playmaking.’”⁶⁵ But, by embracing the subjectivity of both the voices behind the primary sources and of the playwright, one can more easily push towards some of the other uses of documentary performance that have been described thus far.

At the same time, that subjectivity deserves to be questioned. While the specifics will obviously vary for any given subject and primary source acquisition process, it can be rather difficult to make sure that all relevant voices are given their due weight. Given that we live in a society with an extremely unequal division of power, some voices become more privileged by the intersection of identities they represent, while others become pushed to the side, requiring a more active approach to speak to. Even a well intentioned work, if it is not made with sufficient consideration, can leave relevant marginalized voices out of the work. While not a verbatim play itself, Jackie Drury’s 2012 work *We Are Proud to Present a Presentation About the Herero of Namibia, Formerly Known as South West Africa, From the German Sudwestafrika, Between the Years 1884 – 1915* highlights this in the context of an imagined verbatim work about that period contrasted with

65 Gary F. Dawson, *Documentary Theater in the United States*, xiii.

documentary portions covering the history directly. While the documentary portions describe the timeline of the genocide of the Herero, the verbatim artists in the dramatic portions are caught up on needing to find primary sources, finding a collection of German love letters that do not reflect the reality of the atrocities committed, but wanting to stick with them as the text for their work due to their historical condition. The characters, of course, do not dedicate much time to examining why the historical record seems to favor the Germans rather than their victims.

One additional consideration that needs to be made, especially when creating documentary performance around a traumatic event, is that of care for the subjects of the work. Trauma implies a deep harm, one that will take time to heal even if the direct source of the harm has been removed. But, even if the source of the harm is resolved, other ongoing actions or crises still have the potential to leave the community's wound open. To pull a random example out of a hat, a natural disaster that causes victims to lose the majority of their possessions, both practical and sentimental, seems likely to be traumatic, but with a clear potential for healing as rebuilding occurs and victims are able to reestablish themselves in new homes. However, if that rebuilding is made extremely difficult and prolonged, then the start of the healing process is continually delayed as the initial wound is not allowed to close.

Dawson describes how documentary performances have the potential to support the healing process, but only with sufficient time, stating, “Deburred only slowly by the abrasive action of history, the stories, the messages they convey, make documentary theater a kind of healing theater art.”⁶⁶ While this healing can be on the table, those burrs can be hard to remove, especially if a trauma is still ongoing, as it can be unfortunately easy for works to focus more on the harm than supporting forward progress towards healing. Christina Wilson describes how, “dramatized testimony of suffering may provoke an unintended voyeurism that undermines the goals of the performance,”⁶⁷ thus leading to a situation where the open wound is what audiences become focused on, rather than whatever is holding the wound open. Additionally, there is also a possibility proposed by Allen Feldman, that “linearity... establish[es] the pastness of prior violence,”⁶⁸ which, in conjunction with catharsis, can create a production that highlights a trauma but implies that it has likely reached a state of sufficient resolution, as otherwise how could you have created a play on the subject and rehearsed it? Thus, we need some form of non-cathartic poetics, whether it be that of Brecht, Boal, or another. Yeboah also proposes a new vision of where to push audience members towards emotionally:

Where my reimagining of catharsis differs from Brecht is where it draws from

66 Gary F. Dawson, *Documentary Theater in the United States*, xii.

67 Christina Wilson, “Challenging the ‘Fetish of the Verbatim’: New Aesthetics and Familiar Abuses in Christine Evans’s *Slow Falling Bird*,” in *Imagining Human Rights in Twenty-First-Century Theater: Global Perspectives*, ed. Florian Becker, Paola Hernández, and Brenda Werth (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 122.

68 Allen Feldman, “Memory Theaters, Virtual Witnessing, and the Trauma-Aesthetic,” *Biography* 27, no. 1 (2004): 170. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23540434>.

a Black feminist tradition that does not privilege reason over emotion but rather strives to develop an emotional consciousness of the systems that oppress Black people. By invoking the sounds of childhood and innocence through the singing of a birthday, I aim to nurture an empathetic response to our protagonist (Dionne's) loss. Black feminist writers have historically espoused a critical cultivation of empathy and rage that spills into civil action... For Lorde, there is a utility to emotions, like anger, that are not easily resolved. As the ongoing demonstrations against George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Shaun Reed, and Tony McDade's deaths illustrate; reason alone is not enough. People have a logic consciousness of the system; many of us were already aware of the fact that Black people were disproportionately impacted by police violence but only now are people angry, and only now does change seem possible.⁶⁹

While such an effect is certainly not as easy to produce as catharsis, if a documentary work is supposed to support positive social change, it must be designed to do so, and the catharsis of a happy ending will likely only push it the wrong way.

3. Serious Games

One of the larger subcategories of the medium of games are those called 'serious games.' Definitions for what counts as a 'serious game' have varied widely

69 Nikki O. Yeboah, "I know how it is when nobody sees you," 148-149.

over the past few decades, so I will choose to use the definition provided by Clark Abt when he first coined the term: “*serious games* in the sense that these games have an explicit and carefully thought-out educational purpose and are not intended to be played primarily for amusement.”⁷⁰ I have my own minor quibbles with this definition, such as ‘entertainment’ feeling like the more accurate word over ‘amusement’ (I would not consider most horror games ‘amusing,’ but they are certainly used for ‘entertainment’), and ‘carefully thought-out *persuasive* purpose’ seems more apt, at the very least for my purposes as a number of the games I will discuss below do not seem to hew to standard educational practices, but, in order to not write an additional paper, I will leave it as it is.

While there are certainly serious games that rely heavily on boxed text to describe their subject, becoming, in my view, rather reminiscent of a museum exhibit, there are many that utilize the concept of ‘procedural rhetoric.’ A term coined by Ian Bogost, procedural rhetoric is, “the practice of using processes persuasively, just as verbal rhetoric is the practice of using oratory persuasively and visual rhetoric is the practice of using images persuasively.”⁷¹

A game that uses this form of rhetoric in an extremely concise manner is Gonzalo Frasca’s 2003 work *September 12th*. A game about the United States’ war on terror, Frasca describes its procedure as, “The game models a Middle Eastern town showcasing mostly civilians and some terrorists. The player controls a crosshair with

70 Clark C. Abt, *Serious Games* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc., 1987), 9.

71 Ian Bogost, *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2007), 28.

which it is possible to launch missiles. It is almost impossible to kill the terrorists without generating ‘collateral damage’. Every time that a civilian dies, others will mourn him or her and, suddenly, become terrorists.”⁷² The rhetoric is clear: while modern weapons might be able to blow up terrorists, the damage they cause is going to just make more terrorists out of the non-radicalized citizenry. Thus, to combat terrorism, a technique other than missiles is needed.

If successfully constructed, the benefits are clear: they will, “simulate specific experiences that provide insights into the general relationships that drive those experiences. Gee calls this ‘situated’ or ‘embodied learning’... they offer meaning and experiences of *particular* worlds and *particular* relationships.”⁷³ Frasca offers an embodied experience of facing how the act of destructively murdering terrorists in the War on Terror causes further radicalization. To quote Penny again, “Passive observation may be shown to have some effect on the beliefs or even the actions of an observer, but an enacted training regime must be a more powerful technique.”⁷⁴

However, successful construction is easier said than done, and a failure in design might leave a work creating either an incoherent message, or one opposite of what was intended. For an example of the former, we might look at the Rainforest Foundation UK’s *Raiders of the Lost Bark*, a game about combating the logging

72 Gonzalo Frasca, “Ideological Videogames: Press Left to Dissent,” IGDA, International Game Developers Association. Quoted in Kristin Breivik, “Games Combatting the Dictatorship of Entertainment: A Study of the Newsgaming Phenomenon,” *La Mollieindustria*, Mollieindustria, 2008, 7.

73 Ian Bogost, *Persuasive Games*, 241.

74 Simon Penny, “Representation, Enaction, and the Ethics of Simulation,” 80.

industry. In brief, its mechanics are: “Dodge fast rolling logs, avoid flying chainsaws and leap across burning forests. Outwit Larry the Logger [*sic.*] you have to jump on his head three times to stop him. Unplug the World Bank logging machine and prevent the carve-up of the Congo rainforests. Use Left and Right Arrows to move your Monkey left and right. Use SPACEBAR for jumping in the rainforests.”⁷⁵ From these mechanics, we might infer that the strategies involved in opposing the harm being done by international logging consortiums is highly physical in nature, requiring skill at assessing the speed of chainsaws and the reflexes to physically assault executives. Unfortunately, things are not that simple, and simply dodging chainsaws is unlikely to create the desired changes to the state of affairs, although some small degree of threat assessment and reflexes might be useful at protest actions. This type of incoherence is typical for ‘re-skins,’ games that take the mechanics of an existing game and apply a new set of assets (primarily visual and auditory) to adjust it narratively. In this way, *Raiders of the Lost Bark* takes the sidescrolling platforming mechanics of Nintendo’s 1983 *Super Mario Bros.* but with a veneer of environmental messaging.

For an example of how a game might have an unintended message, we can look at McKinney’s 2011 work *SPENT*.⁷⁶ In *SPENT*, the player plays as a low income resident of Durham, North Carolina (a nonprofit organization in the city, Urban

75 Horse Games, “Raiders of the Lost Bark,” Horse Games, Horse Games, accessed 5/7/2023, http://www.horse-games.org/Raiders_of_the_lost_Bark.html. I would have included the Foundation’s copy of it, but their site appears to have no record of its existence.

76 McKinney, “Spent,” Play Spent, McKinney, accessed 5/7/2023, <https://playspent.org/html/>.

Ministries of Durham, commissioned it), and must try to navigate living one month with a budget of \$1000 dollars. The game presents the player with a number of difficult decisions that they must make, such as how far from their work do they want to live, what groceries to buy, what quality of health insurance to get, etc., with the player being given ~2-4 options that they can click on, with the occasional more complex choice. In regards to these, the game provides clear feedback, immediately showing how each of these decisions impacts your remaining supply of money, and how your options get more and more restricted as your use up your budget. While it does a good job of conveying the costs and decisions a person might need to make in such a situation, it is primarily focused on the quantifiable costs of living on a low income without having the tools to address the less quantifiable aspects of life, such as emotions and social pressure. For example, at one point the game might offer the choice between helping a neighbor move out for \$50, or watching your child's recital. While the social implications seem relatively clear (the money is useful, but your kid will be unhappy), the game does not have sufficient procedures to show these trade-offs. If you don't attend the recital, it will never be mentioned again.⁷⁷ Thus, in this game, there is usually a 'correct' choice. Living fifty miles away from your job costs far less than living just one, but the game only comments on how transportation costs reduce the amount of savings from the former, not acknowledging the additional wear of having to drive an additional hundred miles per day, or how your schedule must be

⁷⁷ There do appear to be one or two decisions that show some of their longer term impact, such as having a friend move in causing some distress a week or so later, but there appear to be very few of these.

adjusted to account for that travel time. In this framework it is clearly better to stay home rather than spend \$30 for a babysitter to spend a night out with your friends, but the social consequence of distancing yourself from your friends (both from them and from you not being able to socialize with others outside of work) never comes up.

The game also only asks you to make it through thirty days without running out of money, and thus any consequence that would come after those thirty days loses narrative weight. The game ends with the message “You made it through the month with \$__ (But rent’s due tomorrow)” which does somewhat convey its message of the difficulties of living with a low income, but at the same time indicates that these issues are finite, that one just needs to ‘get through the month,’ when in fact a person will have to face similar issues every single month. Between these, it seems just as likely for a person to come away with the impression that ‘These decisions are hard, but I was able to find the right path through, so clearly a real poor person should be able to as well’ as compared to ‘There are a lot of factors that I hadn’t considered that might make it especially difficult to escape poverty.’ While there are a range of variations on the latter that seem like the desired aesthetic response, I find it difficult to imagine that the former is a response that the creators would have desired, but nevertheless seems very much in the realm of possibility.

Creators must also consider the way in which games can “cultivate higher-order thinking skills.”⁷⁸ If a player is given the information needed to assess the

78 Ian Bogost, *Persuasive Games*, 240.

positive and negative outcomes of their actions, they can more accurately strategize around future decisions. In the case of *Spent*, they can see what the previous prompt cost them, how much money remains in their bank account, and how long they have until their next paycheck, and can then decide which option of the ones presented is the most likely to get them through the month (in this case, typically the free one with implied social consequences). While it is possible for this adjustment in order of engagement to build a similar evaluative skill that can be applied in other contexts, it is also possible that, “what the game really teaches is *how to play the game*.”⁷⁹ This is where a non-cathartic poetics, like the one Boal proposed previously, could be useful, as by promoting critical engagement, designers can better support players in engaging with the procedural rhetoric in play.

With these potential strengths and weaknesses in mind, we can now look into the realm of documentary games. Unlike theater, where ‘playing pretend’ is an expected part of the medium, video games are rooted in simulation, and, as Tracy Fullerton describes, can therefore strive for, “‘believability’ ... the possibility of simulations which not only visually model, but behaviorally model aspects of history so that they may constitute ‘evidence’ by that same ‘social, semiotic process’ that gives us the concept of the documentary image.”⁸⁰ If works are striving for the believability to be considered as evidence, then presumably the moment being

79 Ian Bogost, *Persuasive Games*, 241.

80 Tracy Fullerton, "Documentary games: Putting the player in the path of history," in *Playing the past: History and nostalgia in video games*, ed. Zack Whalen and Laurie Taylor (Tennessee: Vanderbilt University Press, 2008): 219.

documented should be represented as accurately as possible. This is how you can get a game like Traffic Games' 2004 work *JFK: Reloaded*, in which you simulate Lee Harvey Oswald's assassination of John F. Kennedy, earning points depending on how closely your attempt matches up with the Warren Commission's findings. The player's agency during gameplay is restricted, as possibilities that do not line up with the historical record (such as those frequented by conspiracy theorists) are not represented in the simulation, thus reducing the indeterminacy of the depiction of the events within caused by the actions available to the player.

Fullerton argues for a wider range of possibility than that of exacting simulation, stating, "This issue of indeterminacy, or uncertainty, would then seem to be a key formal element of games that fights against the ability to create historically specific game scenarios. That conclusion assumes, however, that the purpose of a documentary genre of games would be to dramatize a single historic narrative - an accepted truth - rather than to allow players to explore and engage with a specific moment in time."⁸¹ With this wider view, games can be considered documentary as long as they are engaging directly with specific historical moments, in the same way that a performance like *HOUSE/DIVIDED* can be considered documentary despite not consisting entirely of primary sources.

From this, we can perceive a wide range of games to be documentary games, positioned somewhere between the poles of minimal agency, being a more exacting

81 Tracy Fullerton, "Documentary Games," 234.

simulation, to greater agency, being more interested in exploration. As I already have an example of the former in *JFK: Reloaded*, I will offer an example of the latter in C-Level's 2003 work *Waco Resurrected*, a local multi-player game in which, "the player dons a plastic David Koresh mask and enters a 3D re-creation of the Waco compound of the Branch Davidians. Once inside the compound, players must defend themselves against rival Koreshes (other players) and government agents while maintaining the loyalty of their followers."⁸² Obviously, this takes a step away from the historical record, as there was only one David Koresh, but allows for its audience to explore this complicated moment in U.S. history, seeing the internal dynamics of a cult contrasted against an external force attempting to break it apart.

With this more abstracted form of documentary game in mind, some other more abstract documentary games deserve to be mentioned. One that comes to mind is Peter Brinson and Kurosh ValaNejad's 2011 work *The Cat and the Coup*, a game in which the player is walked through the last years of Mohammed Mossadegh's life as the last Prime Minister of Iran before the 1953 US and UK backed coup. What makes this game so interesting is that the player is only given indirect agency in the narrative as they take on the role of Mossadegh's cat in a metaphor for how the CIA only acted indirectly in its actions to push him out of his position. Through seemingly minor actions such as spilling ink, "Like a sly cat, the player manipulates the situations

82 Tracy Fullerton, "Documentary Games," 231.

without Mossadegh's knowledge,"⁸³ creating webs of metaphor about Mossadegh's uncertainty as to his belligerents or their precise actions against him.

We might also look at the small genre of 'diary' games, in which a player experiences a ludic perspective of the designer's lived experience. The most famous of these is Mattie Brice's 2012 work *Mainichi*, where the player plays through a brief recreation of Brice's lived experience as a trans woman of color, preparing themselves for seeing a friend in public only to be publicly misgendered and then verbally attacked by a random person on the street, with the end of the game bringing the player back to the start as this was a day just like any other day. Another standout from the same year is Anna Anthropy's *Dys4ia*, which is similarly about her experience as a trans woman, albeit with more explicit narration, and explores a number of concerns, ranging from gender expression to medical issues. Each of these utilizes a number of small mini-games, such as dragging around a small magnifying glass to identify which health clinics will not discriminate against the narrator for being trans, to convey the relevant issue through a small moment of play.

While not a 'diary' game, Mollieindustria's 2011 work *Phone Story* has a very similar mechanical base as *Dys4ia*, but instead uses the various minigames to highlight four stages of a mobile phone's life cycle, from resource harvesting in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to assembly in China to the rabid enthusiasm of

83 Peter Brinson and Kurosh ValaNejad. "Subjective documentary: the Cat and the Coup," (Paper presented at *International Conference on the Foundations of Digital Games*, Raleigh, NC, May 2012), 247.

purchasers in an unspecified nation and finally to recycling in Ghana or Pakistan.⁸⁴ These minigames focus on the abuse of workers and disregard for the environment, with the player preventing workers from rest, catching those attempting to commit suicide from overwork, throwing the phones at customers, and sorting different electronic components, all while listening to commentary about these issues from a narrator.

The last two games that I will mention here are A. M. Darke's works *In Passing* and *In Passing v.2*, as they are perhaps the only examples of a 'verbatim' game. In these VR games, players walk through somewhat abstracted spaces (a street and courtyard, respectively), along which are a number of 3D human avatars. Each of these avatars is associated with, "videos from men, women, and non-binary people narrating their personal experience moving through public space. Each video is cropped to reveal only the mouth,"⁸⁵ which is superimposed on their corresponding avatar. This near separation of speaker and their outward presentation highlights what Darke describes as, "perceptions of identity, self-identifications, and the rift which often exists between the two."⁸⁶ The second expands this metaphor by placing the speakers on pedestals and giving the player cookies for listening to their stories, representing the liberal tendency to idealize those with minority identities and then expect rewards for listening without taking action. While less procedure focused than

84 Mollieindustria, *Phone Story*, Mollieindustria, Android, 2012.

85 A. M. Darke, "In Passing," PRETTYDARKE, accessed 5/8/2023, <https://prettydarke.cool/portfolio/in-passing/>.

86 A. M. Darke, "In Passing."

many of the games previously covered in this section, from these we have an example of what a game more focused on conveying primary text with a lesser degree of player interaction might look like.

4. Theater of the Oppressed

While up to this point I have primarily been discussing games in terms of video games, games can also exist outside of the digital, and in fact there is a theatrical tradition build upon games known as Theater of the Oppressed (TO). Augusto Boal, a famed Brazilian director, was exiled from Brazil by its reigning military junta in 1971, and began developing the techniques of the style shortly thereafter during his time in exile in Argentina, although he would continue to develop them and various successor styles for the rest of his life. The operating poetics of this new style of theater are as follows:

the spectator delegates no power to the character (or actor) either to act or to think in his place; on the contrary, he himself assumes the protagonic role, changes the dramatic action, tries out solutions, discusses plans for change – in short, trains himself for real action. In this case, perhaps the theater is not revolutionary in itself, but it is surely a rehearsal for the revolution. The liberated spectator, as a whole person, launches into action. No matter that the action is fictional; what matters is that it is action!⁸⁷

87 Augusto Boal, *Theater of the Oppressed*, 122.

Of course, this is only possible if the spectator is capable of conversing in the language of theater. As most individuals are not trained theater practitioners, the Theater of the Oppressed traditionally consists of four phases worked out over multiple hours, if not days, helping participants to build a theatrical vocabulary. As was mentioned previously, this lexicon can consist of all possible languages, but for these purposes would consist primarily of physical movements, spoken words, and costumes/props strung together via dramatic action.

The first phase is ‘knowing the body,’ in which participants push their body past their normal means of expression, such as with ridiculous walks or copycat exercises. While many of the ones Boal proposes are similarly physical in nature, there is also value in supporting explorations of what is vocally possible through repetitions and copying of non-word sounds like exhalations, sighs, and vowels.⁸⁸

The second phase is ‘making the body expressive,’ wherein participants begin to utilize the lexicon of dramatic action. They might be asked to mimic animals and find a different participant portraying the same animal, create machines for arbitrary purposes across multiple bodies, or put on their impression of an individual with power, such as a landlord or police officer. By being given the opportunity to both practice speaking through theater (although primarily through movement and perhaps a little bit of speech) and seeing their peers speak through theater, participants are

88 Augusto Boal, *Theater of the Oppressed*, 126-130.

able to start to develop a syntactical understanding of the language from that previously established vocabulary.⁸⁹

The third phase is ‘theater as language,’ and transitions participants into active engagement with the work of others, rather than primarily focusing on how one’s self expresses. The two primary components of this phase are ‘image’ and ‘forum’ theater.⁹⁰ In the former, groups of participants form images of current oppressions, and those outside the group are asked to physically shape them to form images of what fixing the oppression would look like. If a participant is not satisfied with another’s image of how to improve the state of affairs, they are encouraged to reshape the image, and across these different versions participants are able to have a discussion through physical form.

This is typically followed by forum theater, which adds explicit narrative and the rest of the theatrical lexicon back in. A group of actors perform a short play (ten to fifteen minutes) depicting an oppression. After finishing watching this performance, participants are asked if they were satisfied with the performed resolution. If not, they are asked for better ones, but these better solutions are not to just be offered with words, but via dramatic action, with participants replacing actors before reenacting scenes with the altered dramatic action to show how they believe that the situation could be improved. Similarly, by having multiple participants present multiple

89 Augusto Boal, *Theater of the Oppressed*, 130-131.

90 In *Theater of the Oppressed*, Boal also includes ‘simultaneous dramaturgy,’ forum theater without having audience members take the stage themselves, but in later writings such as *Rainbow of Desire* he discusses generally phasing that out, as the practice of getting on the stage and conveying ideas directly, rather than through an intermediary, was more productive.

solutions, a group dialogue is formed, as participants discuss the tradeoffs of different solutions, and over iterations the group is able to both practice what different solutions might look like, and collectively form consensus over what solutions seem to be the most effective.⁹¹

It is important to note that not all subjects are suitable for discussion via forum theater. This is frequently referred to as ‘*oppression* or *aggression*.’ Aggressions are conflicts that have come to a physical confrontation. If you are being mugged, you may have the strength to fight back or the speed to run away, but there isn’t realistically a range of options to attempt. While an aggression is one form of oppression, it typically comes after other harms, such as threats, derision, or discrimination, to which there are multiple possible solutions.⁹² The goal of the forum is to explore the possibilities of liberation so that they become a rehearsed possible future, whereas a self-defense workshop is designed to support overcoming aggressions. The community might use the forum to come to the conclusion that they need a self-defense workshop, but that work is best left up to a different form of pedagogy.

In a similar vein, as the forum is to be a rehearsal for future action, allowing participants who do not directly experience an oppression to stand up and take the corresponding role should be approached with caution. Boal writes, “If a spect-actor who is not experiencing the same oppression wants to replace the oppressed

91 Augusto Boal, *Theater of the Oppressed*, 135-142.

92 Augusto Boal, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, Third Edition, translated by Adrian Jackson (New York: Routledge, 2022), 254.

protagonist, we manifestly fall into the theatre of advice: one person showing another what to do.”⁹³ Similarly, participants should rarely be allowed to take the roles of oppressors, because in real life the oppressed are not so easily able to slip into the shoes of their oppressors. These solutions, requiring fundamental changes in the opposition or other narrative fiat (‘the bank forgives your debt!’), are generally considered ‘magic’ solutions, and a given forum must not accidentally slide towards expecting magic solutions to fix their issues, because that is hardly something that can be rehearsed for.

Thus, in order to support this process, and to help lead participants through it, TO work makes use of a role referred to as the ‘Joker.’ While the Joker takes on various expectations that one might have for a moderator or workshop leader (helping to determine exercises and topics of discussion), in this work the Joker is also tasked with adjusting the process to the community. If they are already familiar with the work or don’t need to be warmed up to jump into the action, then the first two stages can easily be reduced, or potentially even skipped. If a community disagrees with the Joker about what is ‘magic,’ stating that the unexpected course of action is possible and perhaps necessary, then the Joker now has a new focus to help the group with. They are not there as a leader, but as someone outside the community who can support them in their discoveries, and to question what might otherwise feel set in stone.

93 Augusto Boal, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, 269.

The fourth phase is ‘theater as discourse,’ and can either be done in conjunction with the previous three phases or fully separated from the rest of the process. There are a range of techniques (seven are listed in *Theater of the Oppressed*).⁹⁴ Some of these can only really be done with the former, such as ‘invisible’ theater, in which performers perform an oppression incognito in order to spark conversations outside of theatrical contexts,⁹⁵ while others are more designed around going through the full process. Some of these also serve as starting points for larger discussions of media and signification, such as with the ‘photo-romance,’ a breakdown of a specific style of Brazilian romance fiction; or ‘masks and rituals,’ where the group examines the common associations and power relations between occupations (or in other hierarchies), before breaking it down into its component pieces and exploring what different constructions might look like.⁹⁶ Boal also includes the previously mentioned newspaper theater as an easily approachable form of theater as discourse.

While the rehearsal of revolution can prove liberatory, creators must be careful in how they approach the work, especially if they are new to TO. When the participants are exploring potential solutions, “solutions [they] find may not be politically progressive and may reinforce as many traditional power structures as they

94 Augusto Boal, *Theater of the Oppressed*, 126; 143-154.

95 I have some ethical qualms related to this technique, but as *Smoked Out* was never considered to utilize Invisible Theater, and in the interest of space, I will leave it at that.

96 Augusto Boal, *Theater of the Oppressed*, 147-149; 154.

disrupt.”⁹⁷ Thus, it can be difficult to find the right balance of challenging participants’ assumptions of harmful social norms while at the same time maintaining their trust. Similarly, while TO is relatively robust in supporting the voices of minority members among participants, there remains the concern that letting something prejudicial slide will make someone else uncomfortable to participate. These concerns unfortunately do not have easy answers, because sometimes it might be right to allow something non-progressive through to support the community in addressing it. Boal describes an instance of such an event occurring during a forum in Sweden, when the audience let a male participant take the role of a female character to describe his social expectations of how women should act, which led to a fruitful set of theatrical discussions of gender that would not have happened if Boal had stopped him.⁹⁸ As a starting point, the general recommendation is openness about these concerns and discussion with participants over how to address them.

Although they were created after the initial formulation of TO, there are two other techniques related to the canon that are worth mentioning. The first of these is ‘legislative theater,’ an adaptation of forum theater for constructing legal proposals developed by Boal during his time as a vereador (city council member) of Rio de Janeiro. While there are a variety of additional structures included in the legislative theater that are not present in the broader Theater of the Oppressed, two that I feel are

97 Dani Snyder-Young, “Rehearsals for Revolution? Theatre of the Oppressed, Dominant Discourses, and Democratic Tensions,” in *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance* 16, no. 1 (February 1, 2011): 41. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569783.2011.541600>.

98 Augusto Boal, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, 269-270.

worthy of especial note. One is the ‘interactive mailing list,’ a process by which the organizing group will, “send out thousands of letters to our mailing list, soliciting opinions on laws to be voted on... making the citizens feel more personally involved and less excluded from our politics: they are an integral part of it.”⁹⁹ This mailing list would consist of both interested citizens as well as related organizations, with various subgroups for mailing based on particular interests. The relevant subset would be consulted not only before a legislative forum, but after as well, so all stakeholders participating in the process would be kept up to date about what was currently being planned and what still needed determination, even if a session could not be attended. The other major change was the addition of a legal expert to the forum, a, “legislative assessor who... will not necessarily be the coordinator of the session, but must be present to clarify the legal niceties relating to the theme.”¹⁰⁰ With the presence of this assessor, important legal considerations could be clarified (‘what requirements does the existing law have?’, ‘Are there any statutes related to this that we aren’t aware of?’), and, at the end of a session, the version of the law that consensus was reached on could be drafted with the appropriate legal language to go out to the mailing list and, eventually, be brought before the city council for adoption. While not all of the laws developed through this process were passed, thirteen were during Boal’s time as on the Rio de Janeiro city council.¹⁰¹

99 Augusto Boal, *Legislative Theater: Using performance to make politics*, translated by Adrian Jackson (New York: Routledge, 1998), 93.

100 Augusto Boal, *Legislative Theater*, 90-91.

101 Augusto Boal, *Legislative Theater*, 102-104.

While a bit more recent and not coming directly from Boal, the last form I will mention here is that of ‘videogames of the oppressed,’ an adaptation of this theory to the genre of game design proposed by Gonzalo Frasca. For this style, internal game processes are the primary focus of the work, with the participants in the forum utilizing, “well-known videogames as templates for creating simulations.”¹⁰² Groups of participants would start with an issue of discussion, and then create small games to express their view on that issue, similarly to how Anthropy uses combinations of a few mechanics and a visual and narrative overlay to create meaning in *Dys4ia*. Depending on the richness of the tools or the programmatic skill of the participants, they might also be able to interact on a structural level, fundamentally changing the rules of the simulation as a part of this communication. If there is already a base to work with (Frasca uses *The Sims* as an example), then participants might instead focus on just a small module of change, such as editing a character. Frasca separates these two, but I imagine that a successful implementation of this form would benefit from supporting participants in both large and small scale changes in the work.

Over a duration of a week or more, participants continue to play what each other have created and then either make edits to what they have played or take the time to create a larger playable response. Due to the lack of liveness and reduced degree of bodily enactment, Frasca states that, “The goal is not to find a ‘correct’ simulation of the problem, but to achieve a good discussion about the

102 Gonzalo Frasca. "Videogames of the oppressed: Videogames as a means for critical thinking and debate," Master's thesis, School of Literature, communication, and culture, Georgia Institute of Technology, 2001.

problem. This discussion is mainly done through the process design.”¹⁰³ This focus on process is why I have included Frasca’s proposal, as I find that the canonical practices of Theater of the Oppressed do not necessarily contain the strongest tools for addressing the role of processes in structural oppressions.

5. Constructing the Initial Plan

Now that I have finished establishing the artistic genealogy of *Smoked Out*, as well as various considerations for the styles that it would be pulling from, it is finally time to discuss the work in question. In the spring of 2022, I began to hear a bit of news regarding the slowness of the rebuilding process. This was rather a shock to me, as I had been an enumerator of the U. S. Census in 2020 during the fires, and as an enumerator I was on a few different days tasked with going into areas on the same day that people were allowed to return home from evacuation, and thus encountered individuals and families who had only just learned if their home still existed. The damage from the fires was extremely present throughout my work, and in 2023 can still be seen while driving along many of the major thoroughfares in the Santa Cruz Mountains. Having seen the damage and the turmoil, I found it disquieting that the rebuilding was going so poorly, and, after various discussions about the feasibility of the work, decided to engage with this situation with the skills at my disposal.

103 Gonzalo Frasca, “Videogames of the oppressed,” 98.

Going into the work, I could tell that artistically engaging with this issue would not be easy. Through reasoning similar to what can be found in Section 1, I anticipated that this project would be required to deal with structural issues. Thus, some form of game exploring these structures, where the player would explore this piece of bureaucracy, find ways in which the bureaucracy was designed to impede progress, and try to fix them seemed like an interesting avenue to explore. However, I felt that this would be doing a disservice to the rebuilders. This was not just an instance of bureaucracy failing, but also of how that failing was preventing a community from healing after a traumatic event.

For this reason, I felt that it was important to include some element of performance. By providing a body in a space, rather than just some text to read (as would likely have been the case in the project described above), the trauma would be given a degree of immediacy. Audience members would be forced to confront this emblem of how this pain has been ongoing, the feeling, in the words of one of the rebuilders, that, “there just is a series of moments where you keep thinking, I keep thinking this can't get worse than this and then it does. This can't get worse than this. And then it does.”¹⁰⁴ But, at the same time, this documentary work would likely get extremely emotional, and I did want to make a work that would support the exploration of the systemic aspect of this issue, a task that would likely be difficult in a documentary framework. These were, after all, structures that moved at a glacial

¹⁰⁴ See Appendix A, page 133.

pace, and, as Sellers explains, “describing how loops and systems function together is difficult in part because language is linear,”¹⁰⁵ so we must see it in action to see the extent of it. Therefore, it seemed natural to create a work combining both performance and gameplay to not accidentally remove an important aspect of the issue.

This combination would ultimately prove fruitful after conducting the interviews, as the rebuilders had similarly been forced to deal with both personal and structural issues. The former came not only in the form of processing grief, but also in interacting with a community who largely felt sympathy, having similarly been forced to evacuate, and realizing the potential harm of the loss, but who seemingly had a difficult time expressing true empathy, such as by offering help to move items (of which few to none remained), or complaining about the minor inconveniences resulting from the damage to utilities (I was told by a rebuilder during an invited rehearsal that many who had moved back in to non-destroyed houses had issues of food going bad because the refrigerators did not have power). The structural issues came from inefficient and contradictory bureaucratic processes, the time they cost, and how that made interactions with other institutions additionally burdensome, such as by having to prove forward progress for insurance, or to balance the different loans available.

105 Michael Sellers, *Advanced Game Design*, 23.

This combination of personal and structural issue was also visible through the mediatized nature of the process. Facebook would be a primary nexus of community building, which inherently tangled the personal with the professional, creating a feed that would randomly go between professional advice to personal bonding to requests for recommendations for contractors. Someone rebuilding would be forced to rapidly switch between masks, as a person experiencing grief, as a person needing to document their life to receive support, as a person who needs various entities, from contractors to government agents, to move forward with highly technical matters: they had to practice speaking in very different parlances, sometimes one right after another. By creating a work exploring multiple mediums, some of this code switching could be more formally included, rather than just having it be a motif in one medium.

There is still the question, however, of what the overall goal of the project was to be. Was this primarily to leave a record, to preserve a moment of history? Peter Gelblum's 2022 work *The CZU Fire In Their Own Words – Fighting Fires, Losing Homes, and Rebuilding Community* (a film adaptation of a verbatim theater script about the fires themselves, with focus primarily being on the fires rather than the rebuilding, but which had not been previously performed) seemingly already did this, collecting a range of stories about life during the fires. But, especially as the issue is *still* ongoing, such an approach seems rather foolhardy, and would likely, "establish the pastness of prior violence"¹⁰⁶ in a way that was simply false.

106 Allen Feldman, "Memory Theaters, Virtual Witnessing, and the Trauma-Aesthetic," 170.

Two of Renov's other functions of documentary seemed far more productive for an ongoing issue. *Expressing* the harm of the issue and its seeming unending nature seemed vital, as did *persuading* audience members to engage with this systemic issue *as* a systemic issue, so that it can be meaningfully fixed. The latter speaks not just to the CZU rebuilding, but to the fact that if these various systemic issues are not dealt with, or are only fixed by changing whose name it is on the placards for a department, then they will rear their heads again the next time a large natural disaster hits. If the rain at the start of this year causing an emergency declaration¹⁰⁷ is at all a sign of things to come, this systemic issue causing further pain down the line seems more like an inevitability rather than a possibility, that is unless meaningful change is enacted.

If my goal is to lean more towards those two functions, the question remains how can I structure the work for that end. For the former, that seems relatively easy, as the performance and game components should be doing that work as it stands. For the latter, it seemed a bit less certain. Thus, I looked to the two works that most closely aligned with that combination: *I Agree to the Terms* and *The (M)others*. In addition to combining documentary performance with audience participation, both works also included a question and answer section with a number of their subjects. For the first, this was right before and during the period where audience members

107 PK Hattis, "Santa Cruz County declares local disaster in response to storm: Estimates \$10 million in storm damages already," *The Mercury News*, Mercury News, 1/4/2023, <https://www.mercurynews.com/2023/01/04/santa-cruz-county-declares-local-disaster-in-response-to-storm/>.

were experiencing the simulation of the MTurk system, while for the second it was after the end of the documentary section. While I could certainly see the appeal of doing a Q+A, in my experience of both works this solidified the veracity of the work but did not seem to be a complete call to action. People were now equipped to put human faces to the relevant issues, but there was only a limited push for action, as neither show attempted to work with the audience to explore what moving forward looked like. This is not a critique of either of these two pieces, as that is not what either set out to do to the best of my knowledge, but it left me a clear space to explore. This is where the TO work comes in, to serve as that exploration of what action might look like, to make the change that is clearly needed seem less daunting.

Before delving into some more of the specific decisions regarding each of these sections of the final performance, I feel it is important to establish some of the decisions and information that served to identify the boundaries of the work.

First, I knew that *Smoked Out* was going to be created in an academic context. As I was already being somewhat ambitious in project scope, being able to fully take advantage of the resources of the program that I was creating the project in had a range of incentives, from access to a performance space and technical support, to being able to recruit a cast and designers from amongst the undergraduate student body so I would not have to also dedicate time to creating a casting process for an unknown pool of performers, which would not only take considerable time but could potentially be fruitless as well. I bring this up because in ideal circumstances, TO work

is produced primarily within the community in question itself. But, if I am going to use undergraduate actors and designers, then I will likely not be able to use individuals who are rebuilding for those roles, and would need to plan for using a University of California, Santa Cruz space so that the cast and crew could have ease of access to it for rehearsing and designing, which somewhat precludes using a space more embedded within the community, at the very least so I don't need to have my lighting and media designers design for a space they might not know the full capabilities of.

My decision to not directly speak to any Santa Cruz County officials about this project also stems from this positioning within UCSC. As a community outsider, who was going to be creating work that would be largely outside of the community, the more involved the County became the more I believe it would appear that I was just an outsider attempting to act as a mediator between two rivals. Given that I do not have a prior body of experience as a documentarian, I believe that this would have been rather likely to either push away community members, fearing that I would favor the appeal to authority of the County and its deep knowledge of the procedures in play, or would place expectations on my work as a tool that I would have neither the experience nor the time to ensure that I handled with the requisite care. So, in order to make sure that neither of these would be an issue, I decided that I would keep what would become *Smoked Out* as separate from additional institutional influence as I could.

For this same reason, some of the focus on bureaucracy would need to see a slight generalization. With the production being produced within a university, it was likely that a reasonable portion of the audience would consist of students or other individuals connected to the university, rather than with the issue of the rebuilding. As it would turn out, the vast majority of audience members, from what I could tell while house managing, came from the university rather than the county at large. As such, while the goal would still be to interrogate the bureaucratic practices of Santa Cruz County, leaving some space within the forum for applicability to other instances of bureaucratic neglect could be a potential avenue for helping those portions of the audience engage with the work more.

I mentioned in Section 2 the importance of understanding the biases in which stories end up being told. Knowing that I would be primarily working by myself (outside of the rehearsal period), and that I would have less than a year to make the work, there were a number of groups that I preemptively chose to not include in the research phase, but whose input would have been valuable had I access to more work-hours to collect information and edit it into the script.

One of these groups of stakeholders is the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band. While I have not seen mention of them or their work in restoring traditional land stewardship practices in regards to the rebuilding, their work is certainly relevant to the process of rebuilding, and I dearly wish that I had been able to include their perspective. Similarly, while I was able to speak to a number of homeowners who lost their houses

in the fire, I left the stories of those who were renting the home they lost out of this iteration of the work, but I imagine that they have faced a number of similar issues to those who owned their homes. The last major group of stakeholders that I chose to not include was the contractors who have been an active part of this rebuilding, although I am sure many would have had useful input on the project, especially the gameplay. I also elected to not include primary sources from Parks Services and Sheriffs, because while they are connected to the issues present in the work, they have a little more distance from it, and so including them could have easily served more as a distraction than as a useful additional source of information.

It is also important to discuss the emotional aesthetic that I hoped to create with this piece. While it would have been easy to make *Smoked Out* ‘heart-wrenching,’ having the work revel in the sadness of loss and an uncaring bureaucracy, that would likely not have been the most productive for pushing towards change. Yeboah writes that, “Black feminist writers have historically espoused a critical cultivation of empathy and rage that spills into civil action... For Lorde, there is a utility to emotions, like anger, that are not easily resolved.”¹⁰⁸ By aesthetically pushing towards an emotional response in that direction, audience members will not only have an argument for change based in logos (as argued by the primary text of the piece), but an emotional drive to want to see that change enacted.

108 Nikki O. Yeboah, “I know how it is when nobody sees you,” 148-149.

In addition to this anger, I was also interested in the use of joy for this purpose. To paraphrase my co-director, Princess Kannah, “If you know what brings you joy, and you don’t have it now, then you have something to push towards.” To accompany this, Quy Nguyen Huy describes how, “a feeling of elation permits the rapid generation of multiple images so that the associative process is richer; a happy person indulges more often in creative and exploratory behavior. In contrast, sadness slows image evocation... Emotional playfulness induces a state of relative emotional equanimity to juggle tensions between foolishness and cold rationality.”¹⁰⁹ Given the exploratory intent of forum theater, creating a joyful space would support the explorations of possibilities for systemic change, which would likely entail moments of foolishness (‘OH, that’s why that rule exists’) as well as rationality (‘Is anyone harmed by this change?’). At the same time, joy is an energetic emotion, so it would not fully leave behind the need for action that anger imbues, and thus was to be an aesthetic goal of the production.

With this outline in mind, it is time to discuss the creative process of this work, and how each of these portions was ultimately implemented.

6. Act I

With a plan for what the show would look like, it came time to create the script. During the spring of 2022 I began to collect various news articles surrounding

¹⁰⁹ Quy Nguyen Huy, “Emotional Capability, Emotional Intelligence, and Radical Change,” in *The Academy of Management Review* 24, No. 2 (Apr., 1999), 340.

the rebuilding, along with a number of official statements related to the rebuilding as a whole. Some of this can be seen in the citations for this paper and in the script of the play, but I do not think it would be productive to provide a giant list of urls when much of the rest of the information is relatively easy to find.

The hunt for interviews began shortly after this research phase. Of course, as someone who had not conducted this type of work before, I was not entirely sure where to start. Luckily for me, over the summer there were two events that I was able to attend that put me on the right track.

The first of these was a screening of Gelblum's *The CZU Fire In Their Own Words*. After the screening of the film, something rather interesting happened. While the audience seemed to generally appreciate this documentary about the events of the fires, during the talkback afterwards there seemed to be two primary chains of conversation that people wanted to engage with more than the film. The first was helping one another with rebuilding logistics, and I distinctly recall one person offering the use of their truck for transporting goods up some of the smaller roads, and some others discussing how to chain together a few drop off spots to get materials into the mountains with this kind offer for use of a truck. The second was frustration, verging on anger, about the slowness of the county in regards to the various steps of the rebuilding. This latter being a subject people at the talkback wanted to talk about, despite not being especially present in the film itself, convinced me that I was on the right track with my project. I connected with Gelblum after the screening, but

unfortunately we were never able to arrange a proper meeting to discuss documentation of the rebuilding and connecting with the community writ large.

The other event was the barbeque for the two year anniversary of the fires. To the best of my knowledge, this was partially a fundraiser for various support funds, as well as a community gathering and a call for support in rebuilding, including a sign up sheet for ways people could support in barn raising. At this event was a small documentary exhibit created by Antonia Bradford, where she collected a few dozen statements regarding people's experiences with rebuilding, which she then assembled into a cloud of small recollections connected via twine and ribbon across the interior of a pagoda at the site of the event. After seeing this, I reached out to her, and while we ultimately were not able to arrange a meeting, we were able to discuss the proposed work, and she invited me into the Facebook group of those going through rebuilding, for which she was a moderator.

Shortly thereafter, I made a post announcing who I was and what I was hoping to do so I would not seem like an entirely unexpected presence. A few days later, I followed that up with a secondary post with a Google Form for recruitment. While the survey was relatively standard (and which is included in Appendix B), in retrospect I regret not asking for the names of respondents. This is because out of my nine respondents, only six provided me with an email or phone number, with the other three stating that I should just reach out to them via Facebook messenger. Because I did not get other identifying information from them, this meant that they

were unexpectedly unreachable. I ultimately continued with the six I knew how to contact, and was able to schedule interviews with five of them, the last never responding to my follow up messages. These five would ultimately go on to each be represented by a character in Act I.

While I wish I could say that I had a robust interview procedure going into each of these five interviews, I unfortunately did not. I did have a series of questions I would ask, which have been included in Appendix B, but I was not the most consistent in following them, nor would I always ask all of them, or ask them in the same way. In future work involving interviews, I would want to rectify this. While I would describe the project, involving how I was planning on using their interviews, to the subjects, in the future I would also ideally add some additional language as a part of the introduction section that would be an explicit confirmation about the use of their language, so that I would not have a concern about needing to do so at a later point. While I feel satisfied with word choice in my planned questions in regards to neutrality, the word ‘impactful’ proved to not be useful, and so a different, more specific word would have been an improvement. With all of this in mind I do believe that overall the interviews were successful, and thus I had a large pool of primary source materials from which to construct the script.

Now, with interview transcripts in hand, I came to the crossroads of what style of documentary performance was this to be? Verbatim theater, as previously described, had its obvious strengths. I would only be editing and positioning text, and

not having to write new text as well. It would have the power of ordinary language, the breaks and pauses of speech that give actors so much to work with, and would reduce the distance between this production and the rebuilders caused by its institutional positioning by not providing a layer of abstraction to their stories.

With that being said, I did consider writing something more akin to a living newspaper, where I would use the collected news reports along with major themes in the interviews to create a dramatized version of the narrative. While this would have a bit more distance from the subjects compared to using the text verbatim, it would have had one major strength: if there were issues with the interviews, I would no longer be reliant on them. Issues could have ranged from being unable to arrange a sufficient number of interviews (I can easily imagine a world in which no one responded to the Google Form posted to Facebook), or an interview subject deciding to recall their interview (while not the most common in documentary work, definitely not unheard of), or the interviews going poorly due to my lack of previous experience with interviewing for documentary work. As it was, I was certainly not the most professional interviewer, with some of my follow up questions erring a little too close to being a leading question for my taste, or being more haphazard in some of my interviews compared to others.

I also briefly considered other political theater frameworks, albeit less documentary forms, such as Brechtian Epic Theater or the agitprop style of actos, both for similar reasons as my consideration about creating a living newspaper, and

also so that I could focus more freely on structural issues, but ultimately decided against it. This was due in part to not wanting to create a work about a community that were not connected at all to the creation of it, but also because I felt that *The CZU Fire In Their Own Words* was so focused on the fire itself that there was a gap in documentary around the years since the fire. Thus, while preservation was not where I would weigh *Smoked Out* the most heavily in regards to Renov's functions of documentary, it was concerned with that to at least a small degree.

Ultimately, I opted for constructing a verbatim script, as that way the work would retain the strongest connection with the interview subjects that were otherwise rather separated from the process of creating the work itself. With the interviews successfully completed, I felt fully confident in being able to construct a verbatim script from them. To do this, I performed a thematic analysis, finding common moments and experiences across the interviews. Something that I found extremely interesting was how, with only a few exceptions, the vast majority of the specifics of the experience of interacting with these systems were unique between subjects. Each of them had a few issues that were their primary focus, such as needing to repeatedly reapply for permits or finding difficulties with getting funding as certain overlaps were not allowed. But, despite those different specifics, commonalities still appeared. 4Leaf, the company tasked with handling some of the rebuilding paperwork, were appreciated for their hard work, but were clearly understaffed, leading to delays. A lack of clarity would similarly lead to delays, or would lead to people holding back to

let other people deal with the work of clarifying what was actually required. Dealing with new living situations, both right after the fire and in the intervening years, provided an additional layer of stress. The larger mountain community was appreciated, but could be a source of frustration at the same time. While some of these might have found their way into a non-verbatim play, some were the kind of community issue that rarely receives written record, especially those last two, and so I am glad that I chose to go with a verbatim approach for this act. This allowed for some of the complexity of the feelings surrounding the rebuilding to be more apparent, because before the interviews I had only heard praise for the fire fighters, but in the interviews a mixture of respect and resentment became more apparent. They had been brave to fight the fires, but any respect was tied up in the fact that the firefighters did not save *their* house, even if others on the same street had been. Across the five, there was a similar mixture of opinion when examining most issues, with some expressing frustration or anger and others potentially not even seeing it as an issue.

There were a few moments that felt the most relevant to focus on in the construction of the script. These included the time surrounding the fire and evacuation, dealing with institutions responsible for resources such as insurance companies and FEMA, interacting with the community, and the various hurdles related to rebuilding that had to have been dealt with. While not as broadly experienced, the mention of exploitation from private companies that a few of them

spoke about was worth including to highlight the role of capitalism in this process outside of the insurance companies. My outline ordered them similarly, creating a history of the fire and the start of the rebuilding before making a small diversion to speak of the community before returning to the bureaucracy. Many of them also spoke about the grief of their loss and the value, both sentimental and practical, of what had been lost. Rather than including that theme as a discrete section, I chose to spread those moments across the latter half of the act to help reinforce the emotional cost on the subjects, thus showing following complications as a source of interference in the healing process. This highlights how, as one of the interview subjects describes, “I’m just ready to move on. I’m ready for the next chapter. And to just have this be a historical event for us, something that happened in our life and have it stop being a current event in our lives,”¹¹⁰ by establishing relatively simple desires for security contrasted with roadblocks that continue to appear in the way.

With the information having been broken down and the major subjects having been selected, it was time to compose the script. This went extremely smoothly, and I only had to make a few shifts of monologues here and there, and only delete a few sections of text to keep the script for Act I to a reasonable length.

Each interview subject became a unique character (A, B, C, D, and E, in the order of being interviewed), and they were accompanied by a sixth character, Zeus, who I will describe shortly.

110 See Appendix A, page 159.

An early decision in this process of formatting the script was the extent to which the characters would be sharing the scenes. In *Fires in the Mirror*, each character would be on the stage by themselves, as a solo performer would have a difficult time embodying multiple characters at once. Their descriptions of their experiences become somewhat more abstracted from one another, as they are separated spatially and temporally. In contrast to this, *The (M)others* interweaves the text from the characters, allowing all of them to share the space and time for an expression of greater unity of experience. For *Smoked Out*, I styled it in the direction of the latter, with all five of them on stage at any given point, both to maintain a sense of community through their shared presence while also highlighting the differences in experience by being able to jump between them more seamlessly. It should be noted that the lack of true dialogue between the characters¹¹¹ meant that that sense of community would not be directly present in the text itself. If I had been seeking to contrast their experiences, a more discrete approach would have been useful, as the breaks between soliloquys would have provided more of an opportunity to reflect on the contrasts between them.

The largest adjustment from the interviews I made was splitting A's story of fighting the county over housing across half of a decade into a few small segments, which I spread across the various scenes. The other major sign of my hand is in the form of Zeus, a capricious ruler and god of lightning. After finding the official

111 As the interviews had all been performed separately, and so to have their lines directly respond to one another would just be a quirk of the language rather than an intentional choice on the interviewee's part.

statements regarding the approval of the Atkins report and the required covenant to take advantage of it, I knew that that text needed to be included, and decided that including a personification of the county would be productive for this end. It was natural to give this character a line describing some of the raw details of the fire, which ended up being pulled from a news report rather than an official county statement. There was a natural break between C's first line, describing the process of evacuation, and the next few describing life while evacuated, and so it was easy enough to include a second press release and scene break.

The most unusual piece of text in the script is Zeus' monologue describing the '80% rule.' This came from looking into the costs of house replacement, and the rule was mentioned in a post to the rebuilder Facebook Group. I took some language from an online source that described how the rule worked and made some minor adjustments to make the language flow better when read out loud, and assigned it to Zeus because it was not only not something described by a rebuilder, but was also a description of how the current structures are designed to support residents to a lesser degree whenever possible.

In regards to 'ums,' pauses, repetitions and the like, I initially attempted to keep them in the script to the greatest extent possible (to the point of reviewing the audio on selected portions of the text and re-adding those elements back in to the transcript), but after reading some of the text out loud I began to realize that for this work the number of those vocal tics was severe enough that it could lead to the show

grinding to a halt if the actor wasn't careful with their pacing. I still did my best to include some of these elements, just to a far smaller degree than my initial draft, and a good number of those repetitions and pauses are still present in the script. Here is a side by side comparison of the fully detailed original transcript compared to the final text for the very first line of the show:

E (Transcript)	E (Final Text)
Uhhm, So I I think a week before or whatever the night of the actual lightning storm that started the fires, um, part of what's in just interesting in my journey is that my husband wakes me up in the middle of the night and it's like, you've gotta come see this. This is so, spectacular. And. We s- we just stood on our deck in the middle of the night and watched this lightning storm that was so dramatic, umm, you know not even realizing of course what	I think a week before or whatever the night of the actual lightning storm that started the fires ... my husband wakes me up in the middle of the night and it's like, you've gotta come see this. This is so spectacular. And we just stood on our deck in the middle of the night and watched this lightning storm that was so dramatic, you know, not even realizing of course what was to come from it.

was to come from it.

I similarly chose to keep an instance of B being unsure about how to pronounce a word, both because it was a part of that conversation, but also because I felt it highlighted the way in which these people have had the expectation of expertise placed upon them, having to learn all of these terms and processes that are beyond their realm of experience but still being expected to be highly familiar with all of the data as a part of maintaining communication with contractors and when being an intermediary between the insurance agencies and the county.

With script in hand, it came time for the creation of the performance of it. While the full cast and crew for this production can be found elsewhere, I will mention two in particular who I made many of the following decisions in conjunction with. Princess Kannah was my co-director, with her taking more of an emphasis on working with the actors while I had more of an emphasis with our designers. When referring to 'we' in the context of directing, I am referring to her and myself, as we worked together to evaluate many of the directing decisions. The other is Justin Hammer, my media designer, with whom I worked closely on the use of cameras and projection in the performance. In those contexts, 'we' will instead refer to Justin and myself.

When Princess and I were beginning to stage the text, we knew that we did not have a scenic designer, and thus wanted to keep the staging relatively uncomplicated.

To this end, we adopted a visual aesthetic similar to that of Anna Deavere Smith in her early work, with actors wearing black with a single distinguishing clothing item. While Smith would usually have a rack with the costume pieces for each character noticeably nearby, we only had five characters, and thus chose to not give them any costume changes outside of donning a hard hat. That increase in number of performers also pushed us towards utilizing some form of furniture to provide non-active speakers with a space that they could remain on stage at while not drawing too much attention to themselves. To this end, we chose to give each performer a rolling chair, which would still provide a relatively clean slate to work with blocking-wise, but would allow us to shift the weight of the scene to different portions of the stage as the play progressed. As a part of the media design, we also needed white flooring to be used as a ground projection surface, which provided two unanticipated bonuses. The first was that it made the rolling of the chairs quiet, which allowed for chair movement during lines. The second was that it allowed us to have a larger scenic shift. When C mentions moving into a trailer on their property early in scene 5, we had the actors begin to roll up that flooring (Figure 1). This combined both a practical



Figure 1: Actors begin to roll up the rubber flooring.

measure (we needed to remove that flooring for the staging of Act III) with a more thematic action. As I will describe in a little bit in the context of media, one of the meanings ascribed to the floor was that of a blueprint of a house, marking it as a sign of a successful rebuilding. By removing the floor, the actors are tearing apart that blueprint, preventing this not unrealistic hope for the future from coming to pass.

At a few different points throughout the act, we had the actors move their chairs into different formations, ranging from a speaker panel to a tight cluster to rows that you might find at the DMV. While I do not feel confident that the last one as

designed was clearly legible, the others were, and were used in conjunction with the projections and cameras to highlight different relationships between the actors as the subjects of conversation shifted.

While these could be seen from the ground level, they were clearer when looked at from above. Thus, we made use of a camera positioned over the audience to get a wider perspective on the performance, offering the audience an understanding of the current actions rooted in these spatial relationships. We also had a pair of overhead projectors that could cover the flooring. The images we chose for the floor were primarily geographical in bent, including a map of CAL FIRE stations in the county, a map of Bonny Doon, and the aforementioned blueprints of a house. Each of the times we used the overhead camera, we made sure that we were utilizing the floor projectors, and so actively engaged those connections. The first instance was when various characters were discussing their hearing of news related to the fire while evacuated, to which we connected the map of CAL FIRE stations, and positioned the actors in a scatter across the map, highlighting their physical disconnection from one another while still hanging on the every word of this government agency that was spread thin as it stood (Figure 2). We next used the overhead camera in conjunction with the blueprint floor, allowing E to explore their “dream design” that will never ultimately be realized during the performance. The last use of this camera was for a longer period, starting early in scene 4. At this point, the chairs form a small cluster near the center of the stage, with the current speaker standing off to the side in front



Figure 2: Actors positioned on a map of CalFire stations.

of this group, and the floor shows a community map of Bonny Doon. This communicates the potential sense of isolation even within these smaller communities, as those not rebuilding have had such a wildly different experience, and how the rebuilders have thus bonded into a relatively small but tight knit community, both online and in person. When we hear about those whose homes survived having their homes scrubbed clean, the actors reposition from the cluster in the center to the corners of the stage, all pointed towards the center, which is where the speaker would then occupy. This was accompanied by the map being wiped into a clean white state. These decisions exacerbate the isolation at the start of this portion, with each actor now cut off from the rest of the group, with additional pressure on the current



Figure 3: Isolation after a cleaning of the slate.

speaker, as now they are being examined on all sides (Figure 3). Everyone *else* has been able to wipe their hands of this natural disaster, can't you move on and stop making a fuss?

The feed from this camera was projected on a large canvas behind the actors, which was used as a tool for providing reference imagery. For example, the various maps and blueprints that were projected onto the floor were presented on this screen first, giving it a more easily legible meaning as a map before becoming a part of the terrain (Figure 4). This canvas was also used to provide audience members with specific imagery of the wildfire, showing photographs of a wide range of how much damage was incurred, helping to ground the various testimonies of how random seeming the fire was in its damage.

Additionally, the canvas was established as the instrument by which institutions communicated from the start of the performance, even before the actors



Figure 5: Zeus speaks.

the same actors as B and E, with Zeus' lines being partially shared, partially split between the two. Again, this was partially practical, as it helped the two actors in their synchronicity, but also somewhat resonant, creating a persona that was in reality a number of individual agents with a shared intent, with the specific bits of enactment of that intent being split between those agents. The two actors each stood in front of a camera, and their feeds were conjoined into a larger, partially monstrous whole (Figure 5). However, I wanted to highlight that this seemingly insurmountable, monstrous institution was in fact nothing but the product of regular people, and therefore changeable, and so a la *The Wizard of Oz* I wished to reveal the man behind the curtain. Initially I had planned to have the two actors situated behind the audience during these portions, so they would hear both the human voices and the louder boom over the speakers at the same time, but this ran aground on the ordering of the lines, and would have required more extensive waiting periods between them, so we went with an alternative arrangement, where the cameras were in front of the audience but to the sides of the stage. This likely also made that relationship clearer than my initial

plan, as it allowed for the perception of all three characters (B, E, and Zeus) at the same time.

While the canvas was used less as the performance progressed, it was used during Act II as a reference for how to access the game, and it was also used to convey some basic information about the current scene during the forum theater, thus maintaining that institutional edge throughout the work.

One last aspect that was extremely important to the creation of Act I was the use of ‘joy infused theater,’ or JIT, a practice that is currently in development by Princess Kannah as a part of her research. In brief, JIT is a series of practices to support the generation of a collaborative, community driven space in which all members of the theatrical production retain agency in the process. A part of this is pushing back against trauma based acting processes, where actors are encouraged to ‘re-live’ past traumatic experiences to depict the corresponding emotions on the stage, and instead focusing on what brings a character joy, and what actions they need to take in order to reach that joyous state. In addition to re-orienting approaches to character, JIT also puts a strong focus on boundary setting and safety tools, to ensure that performers are provided the space to say no, and to create without fear of accidental self harm. These techniques were incredibly useful for the creation of *Smoked Out*, as it provided a more comfortable space for the actors to approach a text which described a great deal of trauma.

I feel confident in stating this because, as a whole, our cast not only became tightly knit, but also at numerous points were willing to offer their thoughts on the design of the blocking and use of themselves both as the speaker and in the background. While there was one larger interpersonal conflict that occurred, we were able to resolve it without too many complications, and those performers seemed to be on much better terms with one another within the week. However, this communal comfort was not entirely present within the performance itself, with the characters seemingly just coming onto the stage one at a time without even acknowledging the presence of one another, which hardly communicates the importance of community in these narratives. While we tried using some active listening exercises to attempt to rectify this, we did not appear to make meaningful progress, and so opted for a more severe decision. This was to allow the actors to speak extemporaneously when responding to other actors, or to add snippets of new language during transitions between speakers. We had already been somewhat pushing for the former, just with vocalizations of support and agreement rather than words. While I do still wish we had been better able to maintain the text as a verbatim item, as it was created from the words of the individuals' whose stories we were telling, by becoming more permissive, we did support them in better performing the dynamics of a tightly knit community, with them all quipping, nodding sagely, and the like in response to one another. This also had the added benefit of supporting the aesthetic intent to create a more joyous space, as it showed these characters finding small opportunities for joy

even when the majority of their experiences seemed extremely bleak. Perhaps there were better ways to have achieved both of these effects, but at the very least for *Smoked Out* I believe that these benefits outweighed the cost to the primacy of the language.

7. Act II

While I knew broadly the goals of Act II going into the research and interview phase, I also knew that I did not want to determine too many of the specifics in advance. That way, if the interviews pushed me in a direction that was different than my current plans, I would not have to combat the sunk cost fallacy, and I felt confident enough (perhaps too much so) in my ability to develop this portion of the project on a quick timetable. Therefore, after the interviews, it came time to settle on what *specifically* the game was going to do. There were two main options I saw before me.

Option one was to have this be a tool for audience members to explore what changes to the bureaucratic system might entail. In this version, they must therefore take on the role of a county official, and would be responsible for checking the submissions of clearance and permitting paperwork for individuals attempting to rebuild. It is easy to imagine the use of small, mechanically simple tasks to simulate this double checking of what the rebuilder submitted. There were two variations on this which would highlight the systemic nature of the problem in different ways. One

would make this a multiplayer game, where at the start players would be sorted into different groups, perhaps three because there were three pre-clearances¹¹² needed before being able to apply for a building permit. For each group, there would be a pile of submissions to check, and as they confirmed them the ‘rebuilder’ would be passed to the next group. Once a ‘rebuilder’ had passed through all three groups, they would be moved out of the system. At the end of the time period, the audience would be able to see how many of the forms successfully got to the end, thus evaluating their performance. This could all be either physical or digital, with the digital version likely using the canvas to project a map over time of how the various ‘rebuilders’ moved through the process, and would have an easy time re-inserting them into the system if the audience members caught an error in the paperwork. This variation would have the strength of highlighting where some of the bureaucratic slowness comes from and which parts of the process seemed to cause the most severe bottlenecks, but the quality of that information would be based on how successfully I managed to simulate the internals of the county. Thus, if I was working with the county far more, this could have potentially been useful as an exercise in determining which internal policies needed adjustment, or where more hires were needed. But, since I was working separately from that institution, those would be somewhat unlikely, and those are not the behaviors that audience members would be able to productively

112 County of Santa Cruz Recovery Permit Center, “Step 4: Pre-Application Clearances,” Santa Cruz County Fire Recovery, Santa Cruz County Office of Response, Recovery, & Resilience, accessed 5/13/2023, <https://www.co.santa-cruz.ca.us/FireRecovery/RecoveryPermitCenter/Step4Pre-ApplicationClearances.aspx/>.

adjust in the forum theater section, and so this concept was likely not the ideal version of a game for Act II.

The other variation on this first option would focus more explicitly on the regulations on how this process was to operate, utilizing a set of relevant county and state statutes regarding speed of processing, sharing of information, simulation of potential impacts, and other similar logistical requirements. The player would be able to see a simulation of this process, and then make adjustments to those statutes. With each iteration of adjustments, a player would be able to see how the different requirements affect one another, and could start working towards changes that would improve the flow of the simulated system. Through this process, players would be able to engage with the systemic issue *as as a systemic issue*, and would be given the opportunity to observe what a procedural change entails, and how it can cause rippling changes. However, just like the first variation, the development of such a game would benefit massively from communication with the institution in question. This version also would have had two additional complications. One is its onboarding process. The game, as described, is utilizing a somewhat complicated internal model, and is expecting the player to not only be able to grasp the shape of that model (in order that they can understand the impacts of what they have changed), but to comprehend it sufficiently to begin using it as an experimental tool. With a group of players of likely highly different skill levels,¹¹³ both at just being technologically

¹¹³ I imagine that an arbitrary UCSC student, adult from the Santa Cruz Mountains, and affiliate of DANM would have vastly different expertise when it comes to what is being asked of them.

literate enough to follow along in addition to the desired systemic engagement, it would take an extended period to successfully design the UI/UX to be both easily legible while also having sufficient depth of simulation capability that it would be useful for looking for potential solutions. Doing this successfully would be likely to take an extended period of time for development and testing, which, as a solo developer with somewhere between four and five months at most, seemed unlikely. The other complication for this variation is how it would slot into this performance. While a well designed game can get players making active choices quickly, getting a grasp of how the loops of this bureaucratic process interact with one another would not be the fastest of processes. In an ideal world, players would have an extended period to experiment with it, and to discuss the observed results of various adjustments, slowly working towards some degree of consensus. But, this was to be a part of a live performance. While the first act could likely get a good portion of the audience actively engaged, asking them to use a separate digital interface for an extended period could easily lead to that engagement reducing, either as players became distracted by other stimuli or chose to disconnect from the game, whether it be for having a difficult time engaging with its procedural rhetoric or not liking the interface. A shorter game period would combat this, as audience members would have less time to disengage, and those that still did would not have to wait for an extended period to wait until the performance moved onto the third act, which could be a sufficient motivator to re-engage. This option could be a very useful tool, but perhaps

more for a workshop than a live performance, as discussed in my conclusion.

The second option for the game's purpose would be to instead focus on representing some of the experiences discussed by the interview subjects, creating an embodied experience to accompany the empathetic one of the previous act. This implies a game where the player takes the role of a rebuilder, rather than a bureaucrat, and would get to see what dealing with this bureaucracy feels like first hand. While this would likely result in a more difficult time having players engage at a systemic level, as there was a limited time budget to work with and both would require some amount of on-boarding, it could continue to support the emotional aesthetic goal of anger and joy to support active engagement during the forum theater. This option is ultimately what I decided to implement.

For a brief period of time, I entertained the possibility of a physical game, rather than a digital one. This would be reminiscent of Richard Schechner's game *Village*, in which players work together with performers to construct a model village, "But build it large – say, each house about three feet high."¹¹⁴ Once the audience has begun to play out the joys of daily rituals and the like in this village, a number of actors dressed as soldiers arrive, breaking the village apart. It would be easy to imagine a variation on this, where the village is knocked over by an actor personifying fire, and then other performers taking the role of bureaucrats enter and

114 Richard Schechner, *Public Domain* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1969), 204.

enforce various requirements as players attempt to rebuild what they had constructed. While I believe that this would create a great amount of emotional investment in the players, I worried that this would indicate that the solution to the dilemma of the bureaucracy would be to ignore and work around the bureaucrats, which in real life comes with the possibility of arrest and criminal charges.

Instead, I opted for a mobile game. In some ways, this would resemble the initial idea that I presented for the first option for this act, except from the rebuild side, rather than the

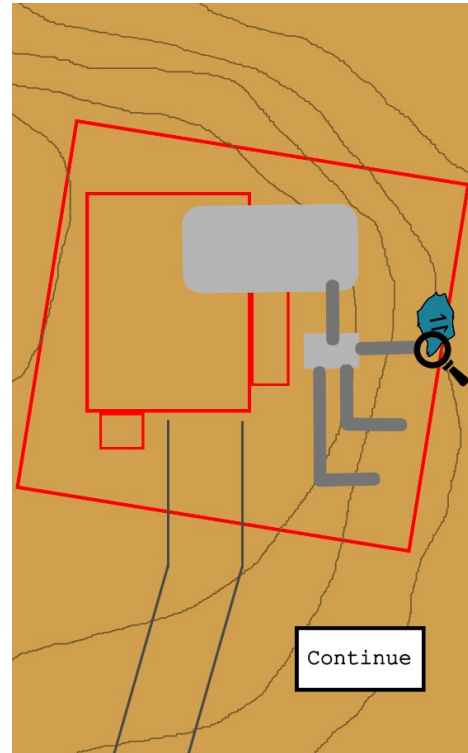


Figure 6: In one minigame, the player is tasked with finding all of the potential debris flow hazards on their property.

county's, and single player, rather than multiplayer. Players would design a home, see it destroyed, and then attempt to complete the three pre-clearances, as well as the prior requirement for debris removal. These would involve a small mini-game (such as using a magnifying glass to find geological hazards, or lowering the sensor of a water testing device into a bore hole) (Figure 6) followed by a small portion of paperwork, where they would need to move information from their report to the form provided. This latter portion was somewhat inspired by Lucas Pope's 2013 work *Papers, Please*, in which a player is tasked with managing a Soviet Bloc border

crossing, checking various forms for inconsistencies from prospective entrants of the country. Players would similarly need to translate from common language descriptor to form item name in order to correctly associate the information. Some would be relatively obvious, such as with contractors and who was signing the report, while others were not, such as ‘Vegetative Fire Factor,’ a component of geological hazard review (Figure 7).

Geology Report
Our boring depth of 100ft revealed a 0.6% chance of Slope Failure given severe conditions, and an annual Sediment Yield of 1.01yd³ from nearby sources. Vegetative cover has a 72% degree of non-recovery.
ORE, ON THE ROCKS

Geology Hazard Assessment
Geologist:
Sediment Yield:
Boring Depth (min 100ft):
Fire Factor:

Figure 7: An example of paperwork without a clear answer.

As I knew that I would have a more difficult time providing a systemic focus, I chose to ground this in a specific experience discussed by the various interview subjects: a sense of frustration at a lack of clarity in regards to what was required, which was exasperated by these requirements changing on multiple occasions.¹¹⁵ The debris removal served as a relatively simple tutorial, providing a simple mini-game in which the player only had to drag a bulldozer over the burnt ruins of the house that they had designed, followed by a relatively simple form to complete. The remaining pre-clearances could be completed in any order. Each of them included some form of opaque requirement or

¹¹⁵ Also emblematic of lived experience. Solar panel requirements changed between me writing the script and the start of rehearsals.

requirement change. The ‘Environmental Health’ pre-clearance included two subtasks, for example, just as how that single item in fact requires both water and septic quality verification.¹¹⁶ The water verification would require a second submission with a greater depth checked, and the septic would require a second check if not wanting to upgrade to a new system, as one interview subject recounted being pushed towards upgrading their septic despite their old system not being damaged. The ‘Geological Health’ pre-clearance required two submissions with various changes in requirements, before the player’s geologist ‘quits’¹¹⁷ and they suddenly have to do the work themselves, as per the Atkins report. The ‘Fire Access’ could in fact not even be completed by the player, although the reason is never made clear, eventually being resolved by their County Service Area, a semi-private yet government operated entity used by Santa Cruz County to handle funding of various road works, among other interests. Players would also be somewhat in conflict with their mobile device itself, as the finicky nature of touch screens meant that the text they were dragging to the form might be dropped, needing to be hunted for on the screen. They also did not have much time to do all of this, with approximately seven minutes to complete the tasks, and only a few audience members succeeded at all of them every night.

These various minor conflicts worked together to create what I have frequently referred to as a ‘productive frustration.’ Each failure, whether it be from a player’s mistake or from the game changing the requirements, contributes towards a

116 County of Santa Cruz Recovery Permit Center, “Step 4: Pre-Application Clearances.”

117 To replicate an account reported in Grace Stetson, "A tale of two recoveries."

sense of anger. I posit that these contribute towards anger, rather than shame, because the game indicates a reason for the failure, but uses vague language to do so, thus placing the blame on the game for not being clear in its meaning rather than a player having failed to understand a task correctly. However, as I stated earlier, I wanted an ultimately joyous experience, rather than an anger inducing one, and didn't want the audience members to be angry when going into the forum theater for fear of that souring their interactions with the

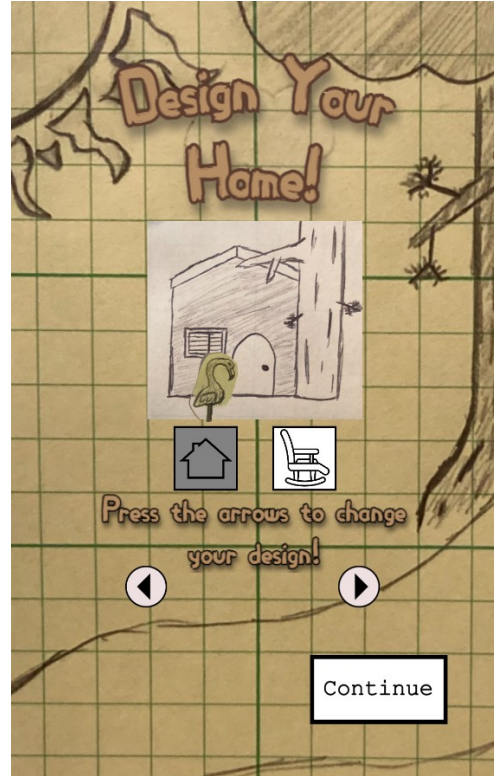


Figure 8: The screen where you get to design your house right before it burns down.

performers, so this anger needed to be mitigated somewhat. To do this, I made sure that the game included a number of humorous elements, primarily through incongruity. For example, the art style transitioned from a sunny, almost children's style of drawing for the initial house designing (Figure 8) followed by a realistic fire to destroy it and then assets that looked like they were assembled in MS Paint for the rest of the game. As well, the majority of the contractors had names resembling puns, such as 'Poo It or Lose It' for the septic quality contractor, which contrasted greatly with the otherwise dry and technical language. The music, initially game show like

but over time becoming more distorted, also plays in this space of incongruity. You are just doing paperwork, but it is being treated as a game show? These incongruities served to deflate some of the tension caused by the frequent failures, which is why I refer to the aesthetic response as ‘frustration’ rather than ‘anger.’

In addition to providing this concrete experience to connect with what had been described in Act I, I had an additional reason for wanting audience members to engage with this game. As described previously, I estimated that a sizable portion of my audience would be from outside the rebuilding community, and so would not be as familiar with the systems being referenced in this game. But I still wanted them to engage with the explorations of systemic change in Act III, and so I needed to give them a reference point for what they were being asked to change. My goal for this reference point would be an assumed previous bad experience interfacing with bureaucracy, where a request that they felt was easy was rejected with arcane reasoning at best.¹¹⁸ Thus, by keeping the visual assets and language slightly vague, players might subconsciously connect their time playing the game to these prior experiences. To the best of my knowledge, this appeared to work, as after separate performances two peers told me it reminded them of a college admissions preparatory workshop and healthcare bureaucracy issues, respectively. However, there is certainly an argument that this would have been further emphasized by using assets that more closely resembled the relevant forms from the real world, as there are certainly

¹¹⁸ I felt confident in arbitrary audience members having such an experience because both civic and corporate bodies frequently have convoluted routines in place, leading to such experiences both as a citizen and employee/consumer.

common styles for paperwork, and using one could have further cemented the connection.

While the first design intent did require an audience member to actually play the game, this second intent supported audience members merely looking over the shoulder of a fellow and engaging in conversation, as in many situations people turn to friends, family, and colleagues to get help in completing paperwork, and so an active viewer could still somewhat experience that aesthetic goal. While this latter category might not receive the full embodied experience, they were still actively engaging in the process depicted. What I do not believe was productive for getting audience members to be ready to discuss poorly designed bureaucracy were those choosing to perform unrelated activities, such as checking their emails. Luckily, I only saw a handful at most of this last group, so I feel confident in stating that Act II, in general, succeeded in engaging audience members with its message.

8. Act III

While at the start of rehearsals I had written some of the text that would create the short forum play at the heart of the act's forum theater, I left it purposefully unfinished, choosing to wait an additional few weeks to see if there were any major developments related to rebuilding to include to ensure the relevancy of the issues discussed. At earlier stages in development, I had wanted this portion of the performance to not just be forum theater, but legislative theater, and it was during

those weeks that I also searched for the legal advocate to be able to pursue such a goal, even if I would not have had the larger structures, such as the mailing list, in place for it to be at its most effective. Unfortunately, it was not to be. The Santa Cruz County Lawyer Referral Service told me that, as I did not have a case going to court, that they would not help me. Other inquiries turned me towards either the Santa Cruz County Office of Response, Recovery, & Resilience, or to the County Supervisor. As mentioned previously, I was not interested in reaching out to either of these two for their institutional presence, and so I decided to move away from a legislative theater where a proposal might be drafted to be submitted to the County.

Luckily, I was at least able to receive some confirmation of what the most current issues were for rebuilders in the form of a report by the San Lorenzo Valley Post. Mary Andersen described how, “Insurance issues plague most fire victims. Construction costs have skyrocketed beyond what homeowners anticipated when securing their policies... Some have run out of Additional Living Expense (ALE) insurance coverage and others will run out at the end of three years... Some are facing homelessness... - PG&E repair delays - Big Basin Water infrastructure repair delays - Conflicting solar permit requirements - Fire victims intimidated into signing deeds against their properties - Rebuilds continue to be treated as new builds.”¹¹⁹ While I did not include all of these in the forum play, I made sure to include most.

119 Mary Andersen, “Fire Recovery Challenges Ongoing.”

The intent for how the act would go was this: the Joker would introduce the audience to the concept of forum theater as well as walking the audience through a game. I presented a number of game options to the cast, and they selected a ball game, where audience members would pantomime having a ball for some sport of their choice (tennis, baseball, basketball, bowling, etc.), and they would exchange it with another person in the room. After making a few swaps, the Joker would ask them to get their original ball back, which would usually result in a hectic asking of questions and quick pass backs. The cast made a wise choice with this game because not only did it not require audience members to move laterally, thus sparing the time of getting all of them onto the stage and into the aisles, but also could serve as either ‘Knowing the Body’ or ‘Making the Body Expressive’ phases of TO work, depending on whether a participant was more focusing on their own ball¹²⁰ or focusing on both theirs and who they were swapping it with. While there would have been benefits to having a longer warm-up section, even just the one seemed sufficient for getting audience members ready to participate in the forum.

The warm-up and introduction were followed by a performance of the forum play, as described below. The Joker then asked the members of the audience to speak with their neighbors about where there appeared to be issues, briefly bringing those back into the group, and then diving into the exploration component of the forum.

120 I would usually start with a bowling ball, but many participants were so focused on their baseballs/basketballs that it was inadvertently converted into one

The first scene focused on ALE and requirements regarding forward progress (namely, if a builder stops making forward progress, they might need to restart the whole process), the second focused on PG&E repairs being slow as well as solar requirements, and the final focused on rebuilds being treated as new builds and a lack of internal county communication that had been discussed during interviews. Between the second and final, I added a third scene, in which the protagonist discussed the stress of the situation and how they were considering cashing out and moving away to a friend who did not lose their home. Each scene was structured similarly, with the protagonist, Morgan, interacting with a representative for the institutional opponent, such as their insurance adjuster when running into ALE issues, or for the third scene a community representative in the form of a friend who did not lose their house in the fires.

While for the third scene I wanted to provide an opportunity to open discussion around community support, for the other three I still hoped to have audiences be able to engage with what systemic change might look like. For this to work, though, audience members would need sufficient information to be able to get a solid understanding of what the problems were. Both the first and last definitely had these: in the first, it was clearly oppressive that the protagonist might lose access to funding because their paperwork had halted, and this was exacerbated by the insurance adjuster not being aware of the situation at all; in the latter, the need for the protagonist to resubmit paperwork that was dropped off at the wrong office was

clearly an issue that needed resolving. This, while seemingly easy to resolve, had an extra catch: while Santa Cruz County has a digital repository of submitted files that any Department could access, the physical forms themselves could not just be grabbed from down the hall due to privacy protections, and so solutions would need to navigate this distinction.

Now, as systemic change is difficult, as previously discussed, some amount of support to help the audience would be useful, especially for those who are not familiar with the issues, such as student audience members. For the last scene, part of this was done during Act I, with the character D in particular discussing the failures of record management at a basic level, for which many solutions are possible and can be relatively succinctly proposed. On a few occasions between previews and the official shows, audience members proposed a version of the digital database that allowed for a person to double check if their files were actually there, a nice concrete solution. The description of the procedure for the insurance adjuster in Act III similarly proved sufficiently detailed, presenting opportunities related to timing and how in touch the protagonist and adjuster were, and which were similarly seized upon by audience members (Figure 9). However, many of the other issues outside of the third scene proved harder for audience members to engage with. Prior experience with bureaucracy invoked by the mobile game or mentioned in Act I only had so much bearing on power requirements and inconsistency in rebuild expectations. Audience



Figure 9: An audience member discusses ALE and forward progress with the adjuster.

members tried to engage with many of these, but found it difficult to know where to begin, and did not gain much ground when engaging with them.

I must note here that, just because little headway was made towards actionable legal revision, that does not mean that this work was a failure. In fact, audience members attempting to engage with such a complicated issue that many had only been introduced to less than an hour beforehand means that this work was successful, and shows promise for future work proving even more successful.

That being said, analyzing the work with such a perspective has proven to be extremely difficult. This is, perhaps, because this third act follows a very different set of aesthetic principles than the preceding two, which creates a great amount of tension in the work. For each of the first two acts, different iterations of the work are directly comparable with each other, and thus can be aesthetically evaluated in

relation to one another. For example, for the verbatim performance one could examine the timing of projection cues or the pacing of the monologues between different performances, and for each aspect the more critically well formed or aesthetically pleasing performance could be determined, either by using the guidelines of Renov's documentary poetics or via a different metric. Similarly, different published versions of the mobile game could be compared by the quality of their visual assets, or the responsiveness of the UI. But, such a framework will not provide useful information about a TO session.

This is because the goal of TO is to work with the participants to explore potential options and outcomes for a given facet of an issue. However, during the work, it might turn out that the facet that is initially planned to be explored might not be the one that is the most useful to focus on, and being open to shifting that focus as needed is an important aspect of TO. After all, a community is not going to be able to explore solutions to gender based discrimination if they are not even share a common understanding of how that discrimination manifests, or where. One group might be more engaged in exploring how it manifests in the workplace, while another might be more engaged in how it manifests at home, while a third might be more engaged in breaking down the stereotypes present in their social milieu, all depending on what the group believes will be the most useful for them to examine in their time together. This openness to shifting to better support the needs and desires of the community means that TO frequently takes the form of workshops or slow iterations of multiple

iterations of the work, rather than a short (~45 minute) session directly following more traditional theatrical and ludic practices. Thus, my critical explorations of the first two acts push me towards the wrong mindset for examining the successes of this third act, as I should be looking primarily towards what was learned from the process of doing, rather than if my mechanical skills in theatrical production and game design and development lived up to the original artistic intent.

The first of these lessons is in how the forum actors could have been better prepared to explore possible systemic changes with audience members by informing the actors about subjects beyond the scope of the characters they were to play in the forum theater. The preparation they received primarily came in the form of dramaturgy workshops, of which the show's dramaturg, Sara Sotelo, and I held two to three each for the insurance adjuster, PG&E representative, and bureaucrat, and the protagonist shared one with the insurance adjuster about ALE and what forward progress, or a lack of it, entails, and a second with the bureaucrat about the various forms of paperwork discussed in that scene. Notably, we did not ask the Joker to attend these, but in retrospect it would have been extremely productive to have had the Joker be familiar with the information, even if they are not as specialized as the rest of the cast, as it would have helped them not only know which of their castmates was the expert in a given subject, but would have also helped with identifying which solutions were 'magic' or not. This extends to the other forum actors, as they could similarly call upon a castmate with more expertise in a subject if needed.

The second major lesson is in understanding differences in performer skill sets, and to not assume that a performer has a set of skills that they do not in fact have. The Joker was not provided much training in how to lead a group discussion, because, as a person actively engaged in pedagogy and surrounded by peers who also engage in pedagogy professionally, it did not occur to me that an undergraduate student would not have anywhere near the same degree of experience with running a discussion. Additional training and practice on performing important parts of this work such as fielding questions, determining when a scene should end,¹²¹ and how to transition from one audience member to the next would have not only supported the performance, but would have also made this part of the show less stressful for the Joker, with the caveat that the degree of need for this training is directly related to the prior experience of the Joker.

With these first two lessons in mind, some adjustments to the forum were included in order to support engaging with the issues as systemic. Audience members were asked to describe a change in procedure when they were selecting which portion of the forum play they wanted to adjust. This would have helped with keeping the scenes focused and importantly would have given the forum actors the context needed to simulate what changes might entail. They would have then been able to adjust their script to line up with that new rule, and positive and negative impacts on the actions in their scenes could be explored more easily as a result. For this, a division of

¹²¹ We did establish a number of safety signals to end a scene early if an actor was not feeling safe, which luckily did not need to be used.

responsibilities is very useful, as the better the Joker can delegate other tasks, such as making sure the correct scene is set with actors in place, to the rest of the cast, the more that they will be able to focus on this aspect of managing the discussion.

This was accompanied by a change from the norm of TO where audience members were to be permitted to take on any of the roles, rather than only that of the protagonist. If audience members were portraying institutional figures, then they would need to abide by the rules, and the protagonist would hold them accountable to them. Thus, these problems would not be solvable just by putting a nicer person behind the desk, but would require changing the rules themselves. In retrospect I have realized that this would provide a great amount of value to having the protagonist's actor present for the range of dramaturgy workshops, because for the protagonist's actor to best succeed at this, they would also need to be greatly familiar with all of the rules in play, rather than just some subsets of them.

This leads into the last important lesson about how to better support the forum actors in preparing to work with audiences on exploring systemic changes, which is that the actors need opportunities to practice simulating what changes might look like. For *Smoked Out*, my dramaturg and I primarily focused on making sure that they had processed the rules relevant to their expertise, which, while important, in retrospect would have benefited with having practices of how the other rules react when one is changed.

Unfortunately, these realizations about how the preparation process could have been improved were only realized during the course of the performances. During rehearsals and the few invited run-throughs, the actors had generally been extremely kind and, while not always, would help the practice audiences advance towards solutions at least some of the time. Perhaps it would not have been the best version possible, but plenty was still going right. But, once the shows were ‘for real,’ this changed. The performers focused a lot more on being entertaining. The script for the forum play included a number of humorous moments to maintain that atmosphere of joy, and so the actors built off of them, creating much more expanded versions of some of them, especially in regards to the protagonist’s pet cat that is mentioned in the first scene. This was likely also exacerbated by the concession to include the extemporaneous dialogue during Act I. To their credit, the various scenes, and the time with the audience, were very fun. But, as a part of pushing themselves to be fun before the ‘real’ audience, the exploratory potential of the forum became somewhat unfocused. The protagonist would not hold audience members accountable to the rules that remained unchanged, while the rest of the performers would shut down most rule changes rather than explore their impacts, or what ways they could be adjusted to work better. Thus, the forum was still useful as a source of humor and additional context surrounding the issues covered, but was not proving as effective at supporting the exploration of structural change.

With that being said, audience members were clearly interested in looking for solutions, but had difficulty engaging in exploring what they might look like. For example, on the first night, an audience member approached the PG&E scene and had an extended conversation with the representative about why he was responsible for issues on PG&E's end, and another similarly asked the Bureaucrat for support in resolving their paperwork issues then and there, but other than receiving more information about the issues made no progress towards finding solutions. This came to a head during the second performance, which concluded when an audience member asked, "Can we change the law?" to which the Joker responded, "No," and ended the forum shortly thereafter.

After this performance, Princess and I spoke with the actors to determine where these changes were coming from and what we could do to support them in getting back closer to a more audience driven form. From this we learned about the anxieties that the actors were having around some of the structure, especially what to do when they were asked about something in another actor's specialty. We let them know that they were absolutely allowed to call on another member of the ensemble if needed, clarified the utility of asking for a specific proposal, and scheduled a meeting with the actors and the dramaturg before the final show to go over some of the laws that they didn't feel confident about, especially what the privacy one actually entailed.

This resulted in a final night that resulted more directly in discussions about the structural issues and what changes might look like. Three of the six audience members to come up had concrete proposals, a fourth was able to discuss financial support with the PG&E representative while repairs continued to be underway, a fifth attempted to grab the physical forms from down the hall and had an actual conversation about why the requirements prevent that, and although the sixth wasn't as invested in systemic change, they did engage with the protagonist about what the logistics of rebuilding looked like going forward.

Ultimately, the forum was a success. For the first two nights, by providing additional information about the bureaucratic hurdles and maintaining an atmosphere of joy, it still promoted further examinations of systemic issues, especially those related to the post-CZU rebuilding, even if there was not as much opportunity to practice change. The third night furthered this by providing some of that opportunity, and it is easy to see how the lessons from developing this version can be used to improve future iterations even further.

9. Conclusion

Ultimately, I am satisfied with *Smoked Out* as an artistic response to the post-CZU rebuilding. In a relatively short time span, it set out to cover a very complicated issue, one rooted in trauma and structural failures that have continued to cause harm years after the initial natural disaster. This was an event where personal mixed with

professional, where those rebuilding would rapidly have to switch between being a person who just lost nearly everything they owned to being a person who was expected to have expertise in bureaucratic policy to make sure that they were not falling behind schedule, and to insure that they had enough funds to rebuild at all, given the rapid rise in construction costs. Between all of these, it was only natural to tell this story through multiple mediums in order to highlight this nexus of personal pain and harmful structures.

As this performance was being created outside of the community of rebuilders, its documentary component was created in the form of a verbatim theater piece. This retained not only a strong connection to them and the issues that they felt were most important over the past two and a half years, but also revealed them to be just people, with a wide range of problems, uncertainties, and perspectives on these events. But, despite these differences in lived experience, their individual hardships resonated with one another to show the presence of larger issues. The use of media, such as a camera that reduced them to just dots on a map and an overpowering composite character representing their structural oppressors further highlighted them, in preparation for more direct engagement later in the show.

This was followed by a mobile phone game where audience members were tasked with overcoming some of these structural issues, with a focus on repeated changes in requirements and a lack of clarity that together reveal a bureaucratic process that is not interested in getting individuals through its requirements. This

game, in conjunction with the previous performance, worked together to create a sense of frustration, an anger that progress is being stymied, but at the same time maintaining the presence of joy to remind what has been lost, and where it can be found.

These culminated in a forum theater, where the audience was invited to propose changes to the rules in play in order to explore possibilities of how the current slate of issues could be improved upon. While audiences may not have been given the optimal tools to explore these possibilities, there was still a drive in them to further discuss these issues, and ultimately some structural changes were explored. Even this small, initial exploration is important, because unless these issues are fixed at a structural level, the next natural disaster will cause a very similar harm, even if a nicer person is behind the county desk.

In speaking with the interview subjects who were able to attend the performances, they were very satisfied with the resulting work and how it depicted their struggles. They were especially fond of the mobile game, as they were able to see some of the frustration that they had been experiencing among the other audience members around them. Two of them were also able to take to the stage during the forum theater, one appreciating the futility of how just asking for change, rather than demanding it, results in the same problem continuing to crop up, while the other appreciated the opportunity to express their righteous indignation to an institutional representative without being penalized for doing so. Between this stamp of approval

from those who were kind enough to let me tell their stories, and the seeming success of the different parts maintaining audience engagement around such a complicated issue, I feel confident in stating that *Smoked Out* succeeded as a documentary of this event. However, due to its difficulties preparing audiences to successfully explore systemic changes, its primary functions as a documentary, using Renov's poetics, would primarily be to record and express, with persuading and interrogating present to a lesser degree.

When imagining what future iterations of this work might look like, and how they could develop from the work done here, there are a few possibilities that seem clearest to me. For works that are similarly constrained in regards to time, where a more traditional theatrical pacing and structure would make the best use of the resources the production has access to, I would begin with re-examining what purpose can best be served by Act III. While in this project I had hoped to provide an opportunity to provide a rehearsal for systemic change involving simulating what such changes might look like, providing enough time and resources for audiences to engage with that in the duration of a theatrical show is quite difficult, although perhaps more possible if the work is able to reduce the documentary portion for an audience that is already intimately familiar with the issues at play, and has the forum focus on a more specific facet of the issue than a range of current ongoing struggles.

However, I can also imagine a future development of this work that is better equipped to push towards systemic change without such reduction in scope. This

version would not be a standalone artistic project, but would instead be one part of a larger series of workshops. A sample schedule might look something like: live performance Friday evening to kick off the weekend; various workshops and focus groups on Saturday to explore the different facets in greater detail, allowing all those participating to fully build a mental model of the system, and to start approaching which parts of the system are causing the most harm; and Sunday being spent proposing changes, simulating them using a legislative theater (with legal assessor), and ultimately drafting up one or more pieces of legislation to push towards a resolution of the discussed issues. Such a version could potentially benefit from multiple games, such as by having a more emotion focused game to lead into an initial forum theater which would be used as an opportunity to set some initial interests of exploration prior to the start of the first full day's work. That full day would then benefit from additional games that allow a greater degree of systemic simulation, such as the second proposed game in Section 7.

In *Transforming Legal Education*, Paul Maharg describes a difficult challenge that interdisciplinary education must overcome, such as in the context of medical training, where, “the role of doctrinal or domain knowledge is an essential pre-requisite to the learning of clinical skills and that attempting to teach both at the same time causes cognitive overload in students.”¹²² This concern for overloading the audience is an important one to keep in mind for future iterations of this work. If

¹²² Paul Maharg, *Transforming Legal Education: Learning and Teaching the Law in the Early Twenty-first Century* (Cornwall: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), 41.

trying to educate audience members not only in a legal framework, but also a highly theatricalized oral history and a small game engine, even with multiple days it is easy to imagine participants being completely overwhelmed and disengaging from the process. Hopefully future iterations will be able to find the optimal ratios of each of these to support participants in developing a highly complex view of the subject issue, rather than being a hindrance to their engagement, although I do believe the ratio in *Smoked Out* worked well in the realized performance.

Lastly, while for this project I opted to use the forum in lieu of a Q+A with the interview subjects, wanting to focus on embodied change rather than just deeper discussion of the issue, I do believe that there is value in including such a Q+A, both for further grounding the documentary work but also to ensure a range of dialogical forms, to support the participants in engaging with whichever form they are most capable in. The more that people engage with these sorts of structural problems as being more than just the work of a bad actor, the better equipped they will be push for longer lasting positive changes, and, perhaps, one day a truly equitable society.

Appendix A: Script

Smoked Out:

Watching Them Scrape Our Home Away

Composed by Carl Erez

Cast

A

B

C

D

E

ZEUS - Santa Cruz County

JOKER

MORGAN

INSURANCE ADJUSTER

CIVILIAN

POWER REP

FRIEND

BUREAUCRAT

A should be performed by an individual of color.

The words of Act 1 are primarily taken from a combination of interviews and publicly available texts.

B and E should share the role of ZEUS. Left column Zeus lines are spoken by B, right column Zeus lines are spoken by E, and the remainder are spoken by both. Characters from Acts I and II should be doubled with characters from Act III. The recommended doublings are: A/MORGAN; B/ZEUS/JOKER; C/INSURANCE ADJUSTER/CIVILIAN/FRIEND; D/POWER REP; E/ZEUS/BUREAUCRAT

The space should be outfitted with easy to access WiFi for the audience so they can easily take part in Act II. As well, some means for the audience to charge their phones should be provided, whether it be mobile charging banks or a small table near the entrance with a good extension cord and a lot of different cables.

The program should include information on how to access the WiFi, and should also include both a QR code and a written out link to access the mobile game for Act II. Players should be able to play the home designing portion of the game before the start of the show, but will be missing access to the main part (whether this will be a server side action or via a code is TBD).

ACT I: Restart

Scene 1: Evacuation

ENTER ALL.

E

I think a week before or whatever the night of the actual lightning storm that started the fires ... my husband wakes me up in the middle of the night and it's like, you've gotta come see this. This is so spectacular. And we just stood on our deck in the middle of the night and watched this lightning storm that was so dramatic, you know, not even realizing of course what was to come from it.

C

Well we were here on the property in Bonnie Doon and the lightning struck on a Sunday night. And on Tuesday we started getting a lot of smoke and we knew that the fires, we heard that the fires were all the way up in San Mateo. And, um, by Tuesday night, which was the 16th, lightning was on the 14th. And by the night of the 16th

it was very, very smokey and hard to breathe, and we had lots of fans going in the house. And at 11 o'clock we got a call to prepare to evacuate and by one o'clock in the morning, cuz we have two horses, by one o'clock in the morning, it was like raining ash and it was pitch dark out because of the smoke and all... We had a friend come up with their trailer to trailer the horses out of here in the pitch dark with the smoke and the ash. And they were pretty wild. My son's really good with them. So he got 'em in the trailer and we left. We had had to evacuate for the Lockheed fire a few years ago. We kind of knew what we needed to grab. So we had the cat carriers ready, we had the dog ready, we had their food, we grabbed ourselves some clothes and we thought similar to the Lockheed fire, we'll evacuate, they'll put the fire out it's way up in San Mateo. It's up in San Gregorio. We'll be back in the house in a few days. So when we left at two or three o'clock in the morning to take the horses down to the coast, get 'em out of the smoke and us out of the smoke.

That's what that was on our mind. We've done this before. We'll go away. We'll come back.

ZEUS¹²³

August 26, 2020:

The fire overnight
grew to 80,137
acres across San
Mateo and Santa
Cruz counties

with containment at 19 percent. A total of 11 structures in San Mateo County and 538 structures in Santa Cruz County have been destroyed.

One fatality has
been reported.

Mandatory evacuation orders remain in effect as the fire continues to threaten an additional 24,000 structures.

Access to the
evacuation zone
remains restricted.

¹²³<https://www.smcgov.org/ceo/news/aug-26-2020-czu-lightning-complex-what-you-need-know-0>

County officials are working with numerous agencies to develop a repopulation plan that will allow residents to return to their homes and property safely. There is currently no timeline for re-entry.

Scene 2: Life Away

D

So the fire, we were evacuated if I remember correctly, on the 18th of August. We believe that our home burned down on the 20th or 21st. There's no way for us to know for sure... We spent almost a full week not knowing if our home was still standing or not. So that was kind of brutal to be perfectly honest. Um, lots of rollercoaster emotions that week, um, from Facebook posts and people texting everyone and our, um, our neighborhood group of "The whole neighborhood's gone," "No, the fire's not here," "Only one house is lost," "40 houses are gone." Um, you know the information coming in was not reliable and everyone,

it's all knee jerk reaction, right, you know when everyone's like in the thick of things like that.

C

So we were staying in a friend's condominium for a couple days that happened to be empty in Santa Cruz. And then our neighbor, who doesn't even live next door, he has a house he's building next door; on the 19th, he called us and told us our house was gone. So it happened pretty quickly. And then for the duration until they actually, so we couldn't get back up here. For Donna it was like a month or six weeks before they even opened the roads to let us come back up. Us and everyone else that chose to evacuate, they wouldn't let us back in. So we didn't know what was going on. The folks that did stay to fight fires they were running out of, there was no electricity. So they were running out of a lot of supplies and they were meeting people at these roadblocks to exchange food so that they could stay up here. Cuz once you get beyond the roadblock, they

wouldn't let you back in there. It was, I mean there were just so many instances of these guys called renegades that fought a lot of fires. They did. They saved a lot of houses. From what we understand from a lot of folks now, there were backfires that were lit to try to control the fires once they got here. There was CalFire and other entities from all around California, never really came to this part of Bonnie Doon to fight the fires.

E

My husband went up and at that point there was low fire on parts of our property, nothing dramatic... CalFire was in the area and my husband said, "Hey, our house is up there and there's fire." And CalFire was like, "Hey, we didn't even know there was a house up there."

C

There is, they were putting out spot fires wherever they were. We've heard that they were spread out all over California. So they didn't fight the fire in Bonnie Doon

very well at all. There was never a fire truck on our road, which is really kind of freaky.

ZEUS¹²⁴

UPDATE September 22, 2020: After 37 days, Cal Fire announced that the devastating CZU Lightning Complex is 100 percent contained. The fires burned 86,509 acres in Santa Cruz and San Mateo Counties.

925 homes were destroyed in the fire, with the threat of flames evacuating more than 70,000 people.

Road closures remain.

D

We were under evacuation orders for, I believe it was four weeks. So it was a full month before we were able to go back and access our property, which had its own

¹²⁴<https://kion546.com/news/2020/08/18/full-containment-reached-for-the-czu-lightning-complex-fires-burn-86509-acres/>

set of stressful stuff... We got confirmation from our neighbors that they were letting people in to our specific spot. So we dropped everything and went out there in our work clothes and saw it and it was surreal... You really can't, there was really no evidence of the fire up to the point of our neighborhood. It looked very normal. And then you turned onto our street and the fire only came down halfway on our street... I mean ash and smokey, but otherwise intact. And as you turned the corner, it was just this decimated pile of ash. It went from green and houses standing to nothing in two feet.

A

What shocked me was not my home, my structures, but it was the trees, I was flabbergasted because it looked like every tree was dead.

D

We had a firearm safe in the home and it was obviously no longer secure it was just sitting out in the open. And

so we had to file a police report with the sheriff's department in order for them to go up to the property and determine if the safe was secure or not. Which we found out once we got up there that the safe not only was indistinguishable, you could not tell it was a safe anymore.

C

You're supposed to keep your taxes, keep your records, keep your receipts for so long. It's all gone. I don't have to deal with the IRS on any back taxes. They're like, okay, go ahead, ask me. I have nothing.

E

I couldn't go to the property for a long time, I, I just, I just couldn't deal with it. The smell and the burnt trees and the burned house and, um, just dealing with the loss of everything. Um, dealing with, I was the custodian of my entire family before me's, personal records and history and it's just gone.

Scene 3: Insurance

A

So at post great recession... I'm moving to a piece of land in Santa Cruz that I had found. Took me nine months to find the land that we live on, lived on. And I use the word own, but that's the word the county uses. But obviously I don't own that land. I mean, I'm just a human passing through. It took us three years to get a building permit. We had to submit four times... Two years of trying to get, you know, I never even got the foundation put in. *[Laugh.]* It was like, I'm five years into this, I'm miserable... Finally we just looked at each other and we said, I hope it's okay if I curse. We just said fuck it. And I let the permit expire and I was so much happier. I got my tiny houses... we'll save again and we will have to actually start this process... So I'm, we're evacuated and I go to Kaiser, they have this whole big center set up there and I'm, my, my fear, and this is where you talk about systemic oppression comes in. I was shocked that FEMA didn't care whether I had a building permit. I thought all of the entities that

were gonna help us, were gonna say you don't have a building permit so you don't count. That's how brainwashed [*laugh*] I was by this county process.

B

I don't know how much is coming of it, but I had this insurance California Fair plan, which is considered the insurance of last resort, which is pretty much the only insurance that's gonna be available to anyone in the forest after this. Um. Honestly, it doesn't sound to me from what I hear, that my benefits from Cal Fair plan were much worse [*laugh*] than people with, you know, traditional insurance plans. Maybe some higher, um, payouts but not a whole lot.

D

What is the 80% rule?

ZEUS¹²⁵

What is the 80% rule for home insurance?

The 80% rule means that an insurer will only fully cover the cost of damage to a house if the owner has purchased insurance coverage equal to at least 80% of the house's total replacement value. If the coverage is less, the insurance company will only pay a proportionate amount. Capital improvements and inflation *do* affect the value of a property and the 80%.

For example,

John owns a
house with a
replacement cost
of \$500,000, and
his insurance
covers \$395,000.

An unanticipated
flood causes

125 Adapted from text found from Albert Phung, "How Does the 80% Rule for Home Insurance Work?," Investopedia, Dotdash Meredith, Updated 8/1/2021, <https://www.investopedia.com/ask/answers/06/80percentrule.asp>

\$250,000 in
damage to John's
house.

You might assume
that, since
\$250,000 is less
than \$395,000, the
insurance
company should
fully reimburse
John.

But, because 80%
of 500,000 is
400,000, they will
only pay for the
proportion of the
minimum
coverage of the
purchased
insurance, or

395k/400k, aka

98.75%.

Thus, the

insurance would

pay \$246,875,

and John would have to foot the remaining \$3,125.

D

The insurance company was a whole other kind of issue, was that they, which actually we filed a complaint with the state commissioner of insurance about it. And they're investigating Farmers at this point, because Farmers did not write. When we bought our house in 2018... So at the time of the fire, we had only owned our house for two years. So when we bought our home in 2018, the policy that Farmers wrote was not adequate. And at the time we just didn't know that. It wasn't unfortunately until after the fire and kinda getting into things that we realized, Farmers wrote us a policy where we were underinsured the very first day we owned our house. They handed us the keys and we

were immediately underinsured. In talking to a mortgage lender, they don't even understand how our loan got funded. They were like, I've never seen a mortgage company fund a loan when the insurance does not cover the value of the home. I don't know how you got, managed to get through and I don't know, I'm not involved in that. So ultimately Farmers came back and said, well you guys are supposed to update your policy. And I was like, yeah, but we haven't, I mean, this is not a case of us owning the house for 5, 10, 20 years and never increasing our coverage. We've only owned the house for 24 months. And when I look at the policy on day one, it was already inadequate. So, that's not an issue of us not updating the policy. That's an issue of you guys not writing an adequate policy to begin with.

A

So I show up at Kaiser and it's like, okay, FEMA gives me my identification number. The SBA was willing to give me a loan and the county, um, the EPA, like the people who clean up and scrape your parcel after the

fire, they were like, well of course you, you qualify for this. Right? All I had to show was the utility bill... And it was like, you mean I count in terms of all these other entities? But somehow, in all of that drama, because we were living in this gray area, I thought, well that's it. I, I'm gonna be responsible for cleaning it all up. I'm not gonna qualify for any help at all because I didn't have a building permit. And so I can't really express that's how deeply, how intrinsic, this absolutely broken, oppressive small scale local system is.

B

So the big thing hanging over my head, is just, the financial burden, right? Because I'm uh, it took everything that I could in order to buy that property. And I'm a self-employed single mom. You know, my business was already highly affected by, uh, Covid quarantine and then the fire it, it was devastating. And and now part of the reason I'm not in a big hurry to rebuild, I wanna rebuild, I'm doing, getting everything I

can, but I I just don't see myself being able to get the approval, the funding. So I'm working as much as I can and there's not a lot of construction loans available. Knowing now with the interest rates the way they are and stuff, it just looks, you know, like I don't know when my insurance money that's paying my rent runs out. You're gonna have to decide soon. You know, can I rebuild or do I have to sell? So yeah, that's basically where I'm at. It would be nice if there was truly some more support. Don't get me started about FEMA, and *[laugh]*. You know, supposedly there's these loans that the SBA loans through FEMA, but they're like, *[sigh]* impossible. I gave up on them a long time ago. *[laugh]* They, they just, they give you the run around about paperwork and they say no in every turn and you just have to fight and fight and fight and fight and fight. And they'll find every reason to turn you down. And and then they don't even give you that much anyways. They wanna, you know, maybe \$200,000 at the most. And you know, that's only like after whatever your insurance will give. And your insurance might only

give 200,000. And if your insurance gives 200,000, then FEMA's not gonna give you that 200,000 cuz you're getting it from your insurance. It's, just it's so convoluted and so ridiculous. It's, just it's, it's, it's impossible.

E

So at the beginning, honestly it seemed like it was going great. We met with an architect. So this is literally going back two years now because we had been with this guy so early but with the contract, my husband kind of had a, um, dream design he had drawn out and got the architect and, um, kinda started going then through the phases of, the architect draws it and then goes to the structural engineer and the soils engineer goes out and takes samples. His initial bid to us was 1.2 million to do everything, the utilities, the septic, the water, um, build a whatever square foot house, wraparound deck for you know close to what we got from our insurance and that would include his fees, permit fees. So as it turns out, *[laugh]* that's not even

close to the truth. At that point the contractor provides a detailed estimate based on the plan that actually wound up being permitted. So the plan at that, so his bid at that time that excluded, uh my husband's; husband's an electrician, so he said he would do the electricity and some other things. So the plan went from, the contractor doing a hundred percent of everything. We just walk in the door and it's all beautiful, to not doing anything on the inside, not doing septic, not doing water, not doing power. And that bid was \$700,000 more than his original bid. And we're like what, *[laugh]* how how how can that be? We know Covid, we know shit's stuck at sea but come on man. So we've subsequently got bids from I think three other contractors, um, and even our lowest bid that we've gotten again for a house that there's nothing on the inside is still over \$200,000 more than what we have.

A

Okay, A, B, C, D, I can follow this. This is not the county. They finally get it. They certainly are not going

to make things this cra- they're not gonna be crazy because there's a thousand house, there's a thousand homes anywhere from what, two to 3000 displaced people. I mean come on. So I have the meeting, I had a meeting with the 4Leaf people and I started to put together what the pre-clearance was and to understand the process and there were a lot of other things that were also happening. And part of it was just my grief. I couldn't go back home and be on that land. It took 18 months before I could be there without just falling apart. It is hard to explain the scope of the loss. It's the, it's not just a house. It's like home is a place in us. It represents our safety, our stability. It's a psychological anchor.

E

I think it's, there just is a series of moments where you keep thinking, I keep thinking this can't get worse than this and then it does. This can't get worse than this. And then it does, you know, just feeling... My husband thinks the fire is one of the best things that has ever

happened to him, umm because he gets to build a house and he gets to do all these things.

Scene 4: Community Differences

D

I don't see myself as a victim. I know a lot of the folks that lost their homes in the fire do see themselves as a victim. And the only reason I say I don't is because it wasn't an intentional act. It wasn't malicious, it wasn't targeted. It's just something that happened and it's sad and unfortunate, but it wasn't something directed at me. So that's the only reason why I don't really see myself as a victim.

C

So for now, I mean even after the fire, we're really conscious of anything that we want to buy and to not just buy to be buying something. That it has to have, like I've told my son, is this something that you want for the next five years? Is this something you're gonna

use in the next five years? Because if it is, then let's do it. If this is just a frivolous buy because it's spur the moment or you feel a need to replace something that you lost, then you really think about it. I've become very much of a minimalist, so. It's like, it's stuff just doesn't mean, I mean my family stuff, of course meant a lot and it's gone, but other stuff...

B

I think that that in a way the fire, has brought our community together much more. The neighbors that didn't lose their home have, you know, a lot of them have been really supportive. Um, those of us who lost our homes, we may have never met if it weren't for it. And you know, we're at least morally supportive and pretty open about sharing information I think.

A

The day my house burned down, I was in a meditation from my hotel on Zoom. And this was before people knew the fate of their houses cuz ours burned early.

There were 70 people on that call. It was like *[laugh]* in the middle of all that. Everybody was tuned in from Zoom. So that was, I mean that's a lot of love. If it hadn't have been for those people, I wouldn't, would've probably left... But the community of people and the friends we have and the connections we have, they're priceless.

C

So when I listened to people talk about the insurance company came in and took all of their couches, their chairs, their clothes, they had cleaning people come in and clean out all the smoke. They had their walls repainted, they had their carpets shampooed, whatever they needed to do so their house didn't smell like smoke anymore. And then they moved back in. Their clothes all went to the dry cleaners or to a laundry. That's, that's way different than not having any of that. So I don't have a lot of sympathy for them. *[laugh]* It's like, okay, so you had to get your clothes cleaned. What was it? Somebody said, I mean this was way back right after

the fire and we got to come back up here. And when she came back and I finally got to see her again, she said, "My house just smelled smoke." And I'm like, you have a house.

D

I know a lot of people the first several months had so many people who are like, it's just a house. It's just stuff. At least you're safe. And I remember telling my mom, you know, those things are true and I'm grateful and I'm grateful for the fact that we're safe and we got all of our animals out and et cetera. I was like, it's not just a house. And it's not just stuff. It is and it isn't. Like, it's easy to say that and those statements are true, but until you watch your home burn to the ground and literally everything you own in the world with it, there's just no feeling like that. To know that everything we own is in one duffle bag now. And while we're moving into our rental, a neighbor who did not lose her home in the fire was like, "well, let me know if you need help moving." And I know that it was a genuine, well-

intended offer, but I remember thinking, what the fuck do you think that we're moving?

E

When you see the signs along the road that say thank you firefighters, those are hard to see because the firefighters said, fuck you, we're not gonna fight your fire.

C

I don't know if it equates to, like if you've. For me, I've already lost my mom and dad, but when you lose somebody and there's a death, that's part of what this is really like. Except that the death is all of our belongings in our home. And we do grieve, especially we'll do something. Go "Well, what happened to that? Oh yeah, that's right." *[Laugh.]* So it really is a grieving of great loss and everybody does it differently.

D

I think just people don't think about it cause it's not happening to them. People are, and I don't wanna say people are selfish, but they're like very self-centered and that's just human nature. Unless it's impacting them directly, it's hard for them to get it. But I remember telling my mom, God, if one more person tells me it's just a house and it's just stuff I'm gonna scream. I was like, please. It's those things. It's like when people die and they say they're in a better place. Yeah, probably, hopefully, maybe. But it doesn't take the pain away. It doesn't make it any better or any easier.

Scene 5: Starting to rebuild

C

We bought these two trailers over a year ago and moved up here last October. So we'd been in this trailer for over a year. But when we did it, we didn't think we'd still be in a trailer a year from then. We thought we'd move into the trailer in October. We'd start building

through the spring. We'd move into our new house in the summer.

A

So fast forward to the not too distant past as we're trying to get our legs under us. This was a year after the first time or I can't remember, it was sometime after the first time, maybe 18 months. And I said, oh we wanna start this process. And she puts our information in and she says, oh no, you don't have a house so there's no assessor's information so if you wanna build you've gotta start, you know, have to get in the line everybody else is getting in. And I said, well wasn't what they told me when I went to Kaiser Center right after the fire. I said that wasn't what I was told in a meeting over a year ago. I said, I've been operating under this assumption that we would get it together and we would start this process. And she was like, Nope, nope, you're a new construction.

C

4Leaf was supposed to come in to help facilitate all the burn survivors. Everyone I've talked to says it just doesn't seem so at all. They're there, they're doing their jobs. They're not really pushing us through or facilitating it. We're still having to get permits. We're still having to get water tested. Everything. I mean, we've been living here for, well we've lived here 35 years, and we've been drinking the water for 35 years. But now they want it tested and they want the well tested, our water tested. Now we have to have two 5,000 gallon tanks instead of one.

B

It's definitely a long haul kind of a process and I've just been trying to take everything step by step. It's very overwhelming and I don't have the time and energy to be one of the fighters that are leading the way and clearing the path. So I appreciate them. *[Laugh.]*

A

The reason the permit is important is it goes back to what I said about that sense of psychological stability. If I'm living on a parcel of land and at any time somebody could decide, oh I'm gonna turn you in for living there. It could be red tagged they could cut off your electricity. The psychological stability that we all need in order to be generative human beings, comes from a sense or a sense of home... I also wanna say there's another wrinkle to this because there's like four black people who live in unincorporated Santa Cruz County or it's that I know what it's like to feel like the man can come and put you out.

D

We had been in contact with a contractor named Homebound. And we were working through the process of getting a contract together with them to build, to rebuild our home. And they were actually on the site with us that day that the property got cleared of debris doing a site visit for us, of getting a layout of the

property, how flat was it, the buildability of it essentially. And then we signed on with them officially in March. We hit the ground running, we got the house designed, went through architecture, picked out all our furnishings, paint colors, tile, you name it, we had it down to the trim. Everything was done and picked out. And then the Atkins report happened.

ZEUS¹²⁶

Santa Cruz County Code Chapter 16.10 requires that geotechnical reports prepared for development projects in geologically hazardous areas must be found to conform to County report guidelines. Pursuant to County Board of Supervisors direction to streamline the rebuilding process for homes destroyed by the CZU Complex Wildfire,

an administrative
review procedure

126 Carolyn Burke, "County review of geotechnical reports for properties within identified CZU Debris Flow Hazard Areas," email message to CZU Property Owners and Geotechnical Engineers of Record Subject, February 4, 2022, from <https://www.co.santa-cruz.ca.us/portals/0/County/FireRecovery/pdfs/CZU%20County%20Review%20Process%20for%20Geotechnical%20Reports%20in%20Debris%20Flow%20Hazard%20Areas.pdf>

to determine
compliance

with the
provisions of
County Code
Chapter 16.10

is being implemented for the review of rebuild projects
that meet both the following criteria:

- Project is located
within a
designated debris
flow hazard area,
as depicted on the
County of Santa
Cruz Geographic
Information
System layer
“CZU Potential
Debris Flow
Hazard Areas”,
and;

- The Geologic Hazard Clearance issued by County geologic staff for the proposed project scope indicates no geology report is required to address any geologic hazards on the site, provided that any identified debris flow hazard is addressed by the project engineer of record.

Resolution:¹²⁷ Direct County staff not to consider certain provisions of SCCC Chapter 16.10 in their review of building permit requirements related to rebuilding in the CZU Fire burn area.

Immediate relief from the County requirements of SCCC 16.10 would be realized through adoption of such a resolution...

The resolution would apply only to the owners at the time of the fire,

to “in kind” replacement of permitted or legally non-conforming structures

127 County of Santa Cruz Board of Supervisors, “Agenda Item DOC-2021-784,” County of Santa Cruz, Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors, Updated 9/14/2021, http://santacruzcountyca.iqm2.com/Citizens/Detail_LegiFile.aspx?Frame=&MeetingID=1880&MediaPosition=12477.615&ID=11302&CssClass=

(structures built
prior to 1986)
and would require a legal document to be recorded on
title; a covenant that includes
assumption of
risk,
indemnification of
the County
and agreement to evacuate if an evacuation is ordered.

D

The county issued, not really issued I guess, but they
ordered this Atkins report, which was a, called it a GHA
I think it's a geological hazard assessment, I think is
what it stands for. And that's of all the land that burned
basically to assess its stability in the event of a huge
storm like mudslides and stuff like that, which is not a
bad idea. Like, I don't wanna say that that was a bad
idea for them to do. It was a little frustrating for them to
wait almost a full year after the fire to do that
assessment because it put everyone building at a

complete standstill. Cuz then all the geotechnical stuff had to wait until that assessment was complete before the geological engineers and civil engineers could actually figure out how to build the foundations. And was there mitigation that had to happen or stuff like that? They couldn't do anything until they had the findings.

C

It's November a year later and we've just, we got our permits on Halloween. Except then I'm down in the county building in the basement getting my two permits and the woman says, "Oh, you know, it's after October 15th. Now you have to get a winter grading permit." That has happened all the time with us. We kind of move forward and then we get stopped. The previous thing was because we had a house here and we had a cabin down there where our nephew is living. Then even then, because we had two residences, we are allowed to rebuild two residences. So previous to them saying, ""Oh you need a winter grading permit," they

said, "Oh, you have two residences now you have to have two addresses." There's another process. You have to apply for it. They have to do all their paperwork. Then they approve it and then you get, so there was another period of time waiting for two addresses.

D

They said, "Oh well our records show that you have a one bedroom, one bath, so that's what you can build." And I said, well, our house has been a two bedroom since like 1971, so I don't know how your records could possibly show that it's a one bedroom. And then it came out that in fact what really had happened was that the planning department had lost our records and there was no record of any permits because there was no file, there was just no, it wasn't, literally an empty manila folder is what our file was. And within the county, the departments do not talk to one another. So when an update happens with the planning department or with EHS or with the assessor's office, that information just stays within that one department and no one talks to

anyone else. So the left hand doesn't talk to the right hand. So EHS and planning is telling us, no, you can only build a one bedroom, one bath. And I'm like, well we're paying taxes on a two bedroom house, so if you're not gonna let us rebuild a two bedroom house, I wanna refund on my taxes. And then all of a sudden it was, "Oh, we found something that said that you had a two bedroom." I'm like, oh, convenient. But we had to go back, we had to go down there and for hours go back and forth to different departments and try to figure it out. So I, I think on a county level, they need to have better communication amongst the departments so that everyone has the same information on record. Because we had a new septic system put in the nineties at our home and the septic system was put in for our two bedroom house. So EHS knew it was a two bedroom. And so I'm like, well, and the Assessor's office knew it was a two bedroom, so why doesn't planning? And they said, "Oh, well we don't share information." *[Laugh]* Like that's crazy. And then they said it's, it's not the county's responsibility to maintain their records. And I

thought, if it's, what? Whose responsibility is it then?
And they said it's the homeowners. And I said, well we
can maintain the records from the time that we've
owned the home, but we weren't even alive in 1971
when the second bedroom was added. How on earth can
we maintain that record. That is your responsibility.

C

And sometimes it's so frustrating. Like all of a sudden
you need a winter grading permit. But if the county
hadn't been stalling for so long, we would've probably
had construction a year ago.

E

Well the state implemented their new, um, you know
your property's roads have to be wider and they have to
be graveled and they have to be this, you know, which
is expensive. You know, there's just been so much
unanticipated stuff. I don't think we can begin to rebuild
what we had. Like many, we were underinsured given,

um, what costs are now and the unexpected costs that we've had to do.

C

It's like, how did they get a permit when I can't get one?

We have electricity. They don't even have electricity.

How can they be starting to rebuild? So there's no rhyme or reason to it.

D

When we actually got the report to our actual property it turns out the debris flow really only impacted a very small portion of our property and not the portion that the house was on and the debris flow was less than a foot potential. So it was low. But because we had anything on our property, we suddenly had to do all this land, land mitigation. And then we ran into issues because the land above the acorns is owned partially by Big Basin and water company and partially by Santa Cruz County. And so we went back to them and said, cause the county wanted us to basically waive all

liability or waive the county of liability in the event of a mudslide. And we basically said, no, we're not gonna do that because if a mudslide happens, it's coming from your land before it gets to us. And so we asked them, what are you guys gonna do to mitigate your own land to reduce the risk to us? And they said they weren't gonna do anything, but they still wanted us to waive liability for them that and take responsibility.

B

Yeah. Also you gotta watch out for call 'em like ambulance chasers, fire truck chasers I suppose.

[Laugh] Yeah, there was this company called Homebound, which was born out of the Santa Rosa fires. And they initially, like called everyone and were like, oh, we're gonna help everyone through the process and we're gonna help people rebuild and stuff. And, *[sigh]* they they wanted to kinda streamline the process and they made it sound really good, but I I don't know, I didn't feel good about it in my gut or initially. So I didn't initially work with them. And, um, then when it

came to the portion of my uh, pre-clearances, I had to get a topoga-, topographical survey and, um, they had, um, I don't know, maybe a retainer on one of the main companies in the area that did it. And so, it was hard to get that done without going through them. And they wanted to do, wanted to charge people a 10% premium on top of what it normally would cost to do the three pre-clearance things. And, and so I just wanted them to do that one part and I never gave 'em my direct permission to to get it done. And they went and did it and of course sent me a bill that was a little bit bigger than it needed to be. *[Laugh]* And and then they tried to charge me for the other portions, like the septic and stuff too and so I had to go back and forth with them and, you know I didn't work with them very much or for very long and, um, people that went further with them got screwed out of a lot of money.

D

Topography was done, the septic system got inspected, it passed with flying colors, no damage, which was

amazing. We got the mitigation, figured out what needed to happen in the foundation to meet the county's requirements. Architecture was pushing forward. Lots of delays for a variety of reasons. And then in June of this year, Homebound, our builder, backed out of our contract, as we were just a couple of weeks away from submitting for permits. They said that they financially could not support building in Santa Cruz County anymore which was a little hilly. Basically what ended up happening with them was they received about 150 million in venture capitalist funds to develop, do land development in Austin, Texas area. And they did not get as much business from the CZU fire, I think, as they anticipated. And so they basically decided they were just gonna walk away from all the homeowners they had contracted with, which was really frustrating because we had spent a year and a half you know doing all this stuff, paying for all these reports, designing our house of every detail that we wanted in it only for them to say, eh, sorry, we just don't feel like building your house anymore. And then unfortunately with the

interest rate hikes and just the cost of goods in general, we couldn't find a contractor who could come in at the same price point that Homebound had. And so then became a point of, we could no longer afford to rebuild. We didn't have enough insurance money.

A

Why do you have to be wealthy to live someplace beautiful? Why can't poor people live in a forest or, or next *[laugh]*, next to wealthy people, *[laugh]* and the county?

C

There's a lot of code upgrades involved in the rebuild and - which is fortunate I know there's good reasons for 'em. The fortunate part is that one of the code upgrades is we need to have solar now and we didn't have solar before cuz we had too many trees. Now we don't have the trees. We can do the code upgrade and our insurance has to pay for it. So there's a few silver linings in there somewhere.

A

It just felt like I was, since I moved here, that asset, just trying to get a legally permitted structure that I can call home has been the source of so much stress, tears, nausea, staying up late, vomiting over something as simple as, something that can be as simple as a house that is not as complex, doesn't have to be as complex as they make it. Um, I get it size, there's seismic laws, geology, there is sensitivity to the environment and being in a watershed and I'm, I'm not coming in and wanting to take a, a shit in Fall Creek, right? *[Laugh.]*

E

And then the other complication of course is our insurance company, State Farm, who again today I received a 30 day notice to vacate because we're not making progress. Um. Uh *[sigh]*, it's just, we have no allies. It's, it's, you know, this was nobody's fault. And, and there's really no advocates with power to help you through the process on any level it seems.

A

What I realized when I got into the process myself and tried to help others is that it's a terrain. It's a whole new terrain of grief. It's a different neighborhood and it's the individual loss, it's the impact of climate change. This is gonna happen to more and more people. It will happen here again, by the way. So I've had to update my thinking. So fire is another neighbor like water and air and earth and he's gonna roll through again. And so I'm going to make and have been making very assertive decisions about what parts of my home he's welcome to. *[Laugh.]* And then I wouldn't show you, like, my closet. And then it's like, well, what parts of my home I'm gonna keep safe by being very firewise and building a defensible space and also building a structure that's not wood *[laugh]* and things like that. So I'm thinking about those things and just thinking of fire as another, a neighbor who is going to roll through again.

D

I'm just ready to move on. I'm ready for the next chapter. And to just have this be a historical event for us, something that happened in our life and have it stop being a current event in our lives, you know, we're two and a half years past the fire and it's still very much still a current event for us and we're ready for it to not be a current event. We just kinda, we wanna just move along with our lives and just get going.

ZEUS

This is all a bunch of self imposed nonsense.

If people just paid
attention to the
requirements,

then people would
have finished all
of this a long time
ago.

Here, let us show you.

[End of Act I.]

ACT II: Replay

Scene 1: Mobiles Out

The house lights are raised. One or two cast members may move over to whatever charging facilities will be provided for the audience to use. They are now BUREAUCRAT's assistants for the remainder of the act.

BUREAUCRAT

I know this will sound a little weird, but in a second I am going to ask everyone to take out your phones. But FIRST, let me give you a few instructions.

[BUREAUCRAT takes out a copy of the program.]

In case you missed it earlier, on the back of your program is a QR code, with the link written below if it's easier for you to type out.

[The back of the program is projected so the entire audience can see it.]

At this website, we have a fun little game where you can get all three pre-clearances in a completely timely manner. If you are having trouble with the site, just raise your hand, and one of us will be over to help you

as soon as possible. If your battery is low, we have a few charging packs to help you out.

[Remove this line if gameplay gating is server-side.]

The code to continue past home designing is [THIS PERFORMANCE'S CODE].

Now, get to work.

[Help people play the game for 14 minutes, adjusted as needed based on playtesting. When it is time to return to BUREAUCRAT, slightly dim the house lights, and refocus on the stage while keeping the audience visible. At this point, if there are preparations that need to be made for Act III, do them. Maybe one of the performers is doing this rather than helping the audience if needed.]

Alright, if I could have everyone's attention PLEASE.

Thank you. Could I have people raise their hands if they completed at least one preclearance?

[Wait.]

Now, keep your hand raised if you got at least two of them done?

[Wait.]

And now, keep your hand raised if you completed all three?

[Wait.]

Hmm, not quite as many as I had hoped. Clearly you lot are pretty terrible at following instructions. Luckily, we have a specialist who I'm sure can get everyone in tip top shape.

[End of Act II.]

ACT III: Redesign

Scene 0: Tentative Q+A

If a Q+A happens with some of the interview subjects, it will happen here.

Scene 1: Forum Preparation

The house lights stay raised. While the lighting should keep focus on the main stage area, it should be safe for audience members to move around.

JOKER

Welcome, everyone, to Act III! In a little bit, we will be putting on what is known as a forum theater, but before

we get into that, we need to get everyone out of that
"I'm watching a play" feeling.

[The JOKER leads two small warmups.]

Great! Now that we've got our blood pumping, let's
return to the main show for tonight. Forum theater
behaves a little differently from other types of shows.
While you're watching this next section, keep an eye
out for the parts where you think something needs to
change.

[End scene.]

Scene 2: Insurance Expectations

*MORGAN's rented apartment. MORGAN enters, notices something
that was knocked over by their cat, and walks over to pick it up.*

MORGAN

*[Smiles.] Silly cat. [MORGAN's phone rings before
they reach it. MORGAN answers.] Hello?*

INSURANCE ADJUSTER

[Enters on side of stage, speaking over phone.

Chipper.] Good morning! Is this Morgan that I am speaking to?

MORGAN

That's me. *[Beat.]* Who is this?

INSURANCE ADJUSTER

I'm Sid, and I'm your new insurance adjuster.

MORGAN

Why do I have a new-

INSURANCE ADJUSTER

I'm calling because I was looking at your file, and it looks like your most recent progress update was back in November. Now, as I'm sure you are aware, you need to send us regular updates of meaningful progress to

continue to get financial support for your rent. Could you tell me what updates you have had since then?

MORGAN

Well, as I'm sure you can see in my file, we had finally gotten all of our septic issues resolved in September after caving on the stupid "upgraded" system. Then we were finalizing the building plans, I signed off on them after Thanksgiving, which is what I think you've got. Well, it turns out by that point I suddenly needed my Winter grading, so that took a few weeks to get it in, but then the county decided to adopt the new Construction Code, so my contractor decided to hold off on submitting it until he knew if any changes would be needed, and so I've been trying to get that submitted for a permit, but we still don't know if we'll need to make road changes, and PGnE just never responds to trying to get information about power permitting since they haven't fixed the lines yet and so I haven't been able to even get the damn permit yet, especially with all

the rain at the start of the year causing its own bit of damage that still needs to be accounted for.

INSURANCE ADJUSTER

I'm sorry to hear, but we need to see forward progress to keep paying your rent, and it sounds like you are just dragging this out by still not having submitted your permit.

MORGAN

But that's the thing, I-

INSURANCE ADJUSTER

I am going to be generous and give you a few more weeks, but if you can't move forward then I think we might have to close your case. Buh bye! [*Hangs up, then exits.*]

MORGAN

But I, oh GOD DAMNIT. *[Sits.]* Fuck. What am I even supposed to...? *[Stands up, and begins to move towards the exit.]* Fuck.

[Exits. End scene.]

Scene 3: Power Lines

MORGAN enters the PG&E Service Center, carrying their house's building plans. POWER REP is seated behind the front desk, and is in a muted, but friendly, conversation, with CIVILIAN. MORGAN gets in line, then waits patiently. Dialogue in parenthesis is not spoken.

CIVILIAN

Wa wah wa wa, wa wa wa wah wa wa wa. *(So then I was like, there's no way your dog can catch a ball while doing a backflip.)*

POWER REP

Mm, mhm? *(And, could it?)*

CIVILIAN

Wa wah wah wa, wa wa wa wa, wa wah, wa wa, wa
wah wah wah. *(I threw the ball and, I kid you not, it did
one flip, caught it, and then flipped around a second
time.)*

POWER REP

Mm mm. *(No way.)*

CIVILIAN

Wa wah, wa wa wa wah. *(I'm serious, that's what really
happened.)*

MORGAN

[Coughs somewhat quietly.]

CIVILIAN

[Glares at Morgan.] Thank you for all the help! *[Exits.]*

POWER REP

Next in line.

MORGAN

Hi, I'm trying to do the permitting on my rebuild, and I have some questions about when you all are planning on finishing the repairs for the cables on my street.

POWER REP

You lost your house in the fire? I'm so sorry for your loss.

MORGAN

Thank you?

POWER REP

[Pulls up some information on their computer.] Let's see... Looking at your street, it looks like we will begin installing the new underground system in August.

MORGAN

August? How much can I even build without access to the cables? Also, wait, underground?

POWER REP

It's to keep them safer. Your contractor should have already reached out to us about all of this.

MORGAN

Well, part of the issue about that is we are having trouble getting a determination on if we need to include solar or not.

POWER REP

Could I take a look at those? [*MORGAN passes the plans.*] It looks like here, [*Points.*] you have a note saying you will have 85 square feet of unshaded roof space. That means you won't be exempt. The maximum for exemption is 80. You'll need to find someone to install the panels and hook them up to our lines before you can get final approval to move in.

MORGAN

But I thought you said you weren't starting on those until August?

POWER REP

If you haven't started construction yet, I don't think that will be your biggest concern.

[They both exit. End scene.]

Scene 4: Coffee Break

MORGAN and FRIEND are sitting at Morgan's home talking over drinks.

FRIEND

Damn, that really sucks. They should totally be fixing those sooner. I mean, if no one's been living there, it should be really easy to schedule a fix.

MORGAN

Right? It's not like anyone is going to file a noise complaint.

FRIEND

Finally having access to solar must be a nice silver lining though.

MORGAN

I mean, yeah, and I know it's important, it's just that it's another 14,000 on top of everything else when I'm already low on funds, and I've been filling out the paperwork for the remaining charities but it's all just so exhausting and so bleak. I'm wondering if I should just try to convince my insurance to let me cash out and move somewhere saner.

[They both exit. End scene.]

Scene 5: The County

MORGAN enters the County office. BUREAUCRAT is seated behind the front desk.

MORGAN

Hello, I'm here about the update to the fire code? Will I actually be responsible for paying for the road

requirements if it's too small right now, because I thought that was dealt with a long time ago?

BUREAUCRAT

That's really more of a CSA issue, but you shouldn't if you are rebuilding.

MORGAN

What's a CSA?

BUREAUCRAT

A County Service Area, basically a small association for various public services. Your road probably has one for maintenance, so costs for updating to match the new statewide code would be divided among all members of the CSA. You are rebuilding, correct?

MORGAN

Yes, which is why I was so worried about having to suddenly meet a new requirement.

BUREAUCRAT

Only new builds will have to deal with this update. As a rebuild, nothing has changed.

MORGAN

But I've been told that about other things, and then later on had to change plans to meet the new rules anyway.

BUREAUCRAT

The County has been fairly consistent in treating rebuilds as rebuilds.

MORGAN

But I had to include those new sprinkler rules, and those were new. I'm not even sure if I'll be able to get clearance for that rule since Big Basin Water still hasn't fixed my area's water.

BUREAUCRAT

I'm sorry, but if your home will not have sufficient water capacity based on what Big Basin Water can provide, you will need to go with a tank based solution.

MORGAN

So that entire part of my plan is going to need to be redesigned? How am I supposed to show forward progress then?

BUREAUCRAT

I'm sorry, but that's not really my department.

MORGAN

Then whose is it?

BUREAUCRAT

Again, not my department.

MORGAN

What about about my permits? I submitted some a few weeks ago, do you know when I will find out if they have been accepted?

BUREAUCRAT

Did you? I'm not seeing them listed in your file.

MORGAN

Yes, I dropped off like three things just down the hall. I remember coming in here to ask for directions because I couldn't find the right room.

BUREAUCRAT

Oh, I see. We don't actually share files between departments, so I'm afraid I'm going to have to ask you to submit a fresh copy to me, and then I can try to get back to you within ten business days after that.

MORGAN

But couldn't you just get them from down the hall?

BUREAUCRAT

Also, with that flooding earlier this year, your old foundation likely needs to be replaced. Could you be a dear and bring this to your contractor?

MORGAN

GOD DAMNIT!

[MORGAN throws their papers up in the air. End scene.]

Scene 6: The Forum

The house lights are raised slightly. While the lighting should keep focus on the main stage area, it should be safe for audience members to move around.

JOKER

Well, wasn't that quite the experience. Now, can everyone think of a moment where some part of the

system seemed to be causing more harm than good? I'll give you a minute, talk with the person next to you and see if you can brainstorm any ideas. *[Waits for 1 minute.]* Let's hear some thoughts. *[Calls on members of the audience, pulls the essence out of each of their arguments.]* Now, obviously, it can be really hard to fix these kinds of issues without legislation. So, as we go through that again scene by scene, people will come up, propose a change in procedure to fix a problem, and then will work with the actors to act out the consequences of those changes in procedure. And be warned, our actors will not be pushovers. Who has a moment that they want to explore first?

[The ensemble works with the audience to choose specific moments, and what the consequences of changes in procedure might result in. If pro bono lawyers are present, if they have specific input it will be incorporated. Otherwise, after a number of options have been explored, the major procedural changes that the audience wants are collated, and if lawyers are present compiled into something that can

be submitted to the county. Once time runs out, or the discussion concludes, the JOKER ends the show by saying:]

JOKER

Thank you everyone for your contributions tonight.

Some issues are insurmountable alone, but by working together, we can make a world that gives us the support we need.

[End of show.]

Appendix B: Interview Documents

Interview Interest Form:

CZU Interview Interest

<https://docs.google.com/forms/u/0/d/1aHKufaxCJDKzFbzcMFEwUI2...>

CZU Interview Interest

Hello! I'm Carl, a performance artist and current MFA candidate in Digital Arts and New Media at UCSC, and I am interested in creating a documentary performance about the rebuilding process for a couple of reasons. First, I was a census worker during the fire, so I saw first hand the damage it did. Second, while many of the policies surrounding rebuilding would seemingly make the community more disaster resistant, they come at a great economic cost to those trying to rebuild. With these interviews, I am hoping to create a piece that can both bring awareness of this situation and explore how such a situation came to be to a wider audience. If this is something that you are interested in, I would love to hear what you have to say.

* Indicates required question

1. Are you interested in answering a few questions about your experience relating to the post-CZU rebuilding process? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes Skip to question 2
 No Skip to section 3 (Conclusion)

CZU Interview Interest

2. Did you lose your home in the fire?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
 No
 Other: _____

3. Are you attempting to rebuild your residence?

4. At what point in the rebuilding process are you?

5. What has been the most difficult part of the process for you?

6. In what ways has the Santa Cruz County been involved in the process? How has this impacted your recovery?

7. Would you be interested in a more detailed interview? If so, how would you prefer to be contacted?

8. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Conclusion

Thank you for your time, I hope you have a wonderful rest of your day.

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Interview Outline:

- Introductions
 - Who am I?
 - What is this project?
 - May I record this conversation?
- Past
 - What was your experience with the CZU Lightning Complex Fires?
 - How far into rebuilding are you?
 - What moments of the process felt most impactful to you?
 - How has Santa Cruz County impacted this?
 - Were expectations changed? Were reasons given why?
- Present
 - What current struggles are you facing?
- Future
 - Do you anticipate finishing rebuilding?
 - What do you imagine will be the future of the community of survivors?
 - What could be done to help those who are struggling now?
 - What changes need to be made before the next fire?

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