

Haunting as public pedagogy: Creating theatre with ghostly witches as Roe fell

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ABSTRACT

On May 3, 2022, I was visited by three ghosts: the ghosts of witches past, witches present, and witches future - a trinity of temporally separate entities that also transcend temporal boundaries. That is the nature of a ghost, after all - they arrive from other times with “intimations, hints, suggestions, and portents” (Gordon, 1997, p. x). I am Nikki Kendra Davis, and I am a white cis woman, a haunted historian, and a witch. In 2022, I set out to make political theatre with the ghosts of the murdered Pendle Witches to share with the public the “repressed and unresolved social violences” that were making themselves known to me. That is how sociologist Avery Gordon defines being haunted, as “an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known” (1997, p. xvi). Drawing on this conception, I claim that haunting is the public pedagogical method used by ghosts to educate the public about lingering and ongoing social violences in order to prompt the living to work towards social justice (Sandlin, 2011; Desai, 2020). We are all haunted but have been taught to ignore, write off, or fear such experiences. In this article, I will expound upon the ghosts and their hauntings as a form of public pedagogy, demonstrate why theatre - embodied storytelling - is a suitable artform for accessing and activating hauntings, and then reanimate my hauntingly educational interactions with the ghosts of witches past, present, and future through the process of creating a play about witches as Roe v. Wade fell.

KEYWORDS: ghosts, hauntings, public pedagogy, theatre, women

On May 3, 2022, I was visited by three ghosts. They had been haunting me from a distance for the prior seven months. But on that day, as I sat in a plane flying through the air towards England, they overwhelmingly converged, convening with each other and me in the skies. Into my research journal, I poured my haunted soul...

I am traveling to Lancashire in search of The Pendle Witches about whom I will write my next play. Women who practiced magic, blessed the land, healed the sick, delivered babies... Women ultimately murdered for being witches, "soldiers in the Devil's great army"... The murder of these women served as proof that the LAW, the "King's Justice," was in fact justice... Their murder, their inhumane imprisonment, their bodily examinations in search of the Devil's mark, their coerced confessions were offered up to the public as a "look how great and effective and righteous your government and judicial system is" advertisement. I'm getting ahead of myself. Last night, an opinion from the U.S. Supreme Court leaked to the public, a draft but still, that said the court will overturn Roe V. Wade. So, to say I am a bit bursting with rage would make sense. Women, the Law, religion, politics, women who exercise agency, women who choose to live in the margins or who have been marginalized being punished and that punishment somehow proving how "righteous" the law of the land is... It has happened, always.

Those ghosts that haunted me into writing this entry were the ghosts of witches past, witches present, and witches future - a trinity of temporally separate entities that also transcend temporal boundaries. That is the nature of a ghost, after all - they arrive from other times with "intimations, hints, suggestions, and portents" (Gordon, 1997, p. x). I am Nikki Kendra Davis, and I am a white cis woman historian who makes political theatre art with ghosts to share with the public the "repressed and unresolved social violences" that make themselves known to me. That is how sociologist Avery Gordon defines being haunted, as "an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known... producing a something-to-be-done" (1997, p. xvi).

Drawing on this conception, I stake the claim that haunting is the public pedagogical method used by ghosts to educate the public about lingering and ongoing social violences to prompt the living to work towards social justice (Sandlin, 2011; Desai, 2020). We are all haunted but have been taught to ignore, write off, or fear such experiences - the elephants in the room, the embodied knowing, the bad vibes, the educational echoes from other spacetimes. In what follows, I will expound upon the ghosts and their hauntings as a form of public pedagogy, then demonstrate why theatre, embodied storytelling, is a suitable artform for accessing and activating hauntings. I will then reanimate my hauntingly educational interactions with the ghosts of witches past, present, and future through the process of creating a play about witches as Roe v. Wade fell.

To conclude their literary review of public pedagogy, Jennifer A. Sandlin, Michael P. O'Malley, and Jake Budick called for a different type of public pedagogy research:

We are not calling for public pedagogy research that utilizes empirical data as proof toward positivistic truth claims; rather, we argue for research... that draws on psychoanalytical, phenomenological... and poststructural understandings of learning to develop an empiricism that honors the complexity and ambiguity inherent in the mechanisms and processes of public pedagogy. (2011, p. 362)

To answer their call, I argue that the empirical experiences we label “hauntings” - embodied chills, fear, anxiety, emotional overwhelm, déjà vu, bodily dispossession, witnessing apparitions, hearing whispers, intuitive knowing, etc. - are complex, ambiguous, and powerful yet undermined mechanisms of public pedagogy uniquely practiced by ghosts. To frame experiences of haunting as a pedagogical process is to imbue the ghost with agency, conjuring a (no)thing that has and practices a pedagogy. Moving forward, the terms “ghosts” and “hauntings” will be understood in the following way: Following Gordon, I argue that *ghosts* are the cumulative source, the “repressed and unresolved social violences,” and their *hauntings* are the transmission of those ghosts and how they are received / felt / experienced / come-to-be known by the living. When you experience something you might label a *haunting*, ask yourself: Given the context of my current situation and spacetime, what repressed or unresolved social violences are trying to make themselves known to me and why? What concerns for social justice open up when we take our empirically-experienced hauntings seriously?

With his 1993 speech turned 1994 book *Specters of Marx*, Philosopher Jacques Derrida coined *hauntology*, the ghostly disruption of ontology (1994, p. 10). There is not only “to be” or “not to be.” The ghosts’ hauntings experienced by the living are proof of the persistence of the “already” and the “yet-to-come” in our present, a configuration which, with its non-present presence making itself known via haunting, makes a mockery of linear temporalities. This is what happened on May 3, 2022, when the ghosts of witches past, present, and future overwhelmed me all at once. Derrida argues that the living have a responsibility “to learn to live with ghosts, in the upkeep, the conversation, the company, or the companionship” (1994, p. xvii-xviii). Ghosts do not want you to run and hide from or exorcise them. That understanding of ghosts has been perpetuated by hegemony to suffocate the complexity and potentiality of ghosts and hauntings. “Hegemony,” writes Derrida, “organizes the repression and thus the confirmation of a haunting.

Haunting belongs to the structure of every hegemony" (1994, p. 46). It is not a pleasurable experience to be haunted. It can be utterly terrifying, but that is how the ghosts get your attention and make you assume responsibility. They come from other spacetimes to *haunt you into educated action* in your present. This reorientation of haunting as a counter-hegemonic pedagogy (Desai, 2020) makes clear the stakes and importance of what Donna J. Haraway calls, "staying with the trouble" (2016, p. 1) and "making kin with" (2016, p. 2) the ghostliness you encounter.

This project of "staying with" and "making kin" with ghosts also resonates with the work of Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) and his writing on historical materialism (1986). Though Benjamin does not use the word "ghost," his *Theses on the Philosophy of History* is ripe with what scholars deem hauntings (Richter, 2002; Gordon, 1997). Benjamin (1986) writes that for the historical materialist:

thinking involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well. Where thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions... by which it crystallizes into a monad. A historical materialist approaches a historical subject only where he encounters it as a monad" (p. 262-263).

The *monad crystallization* can be understood as a moment in the research process that *the living historian experiences a haunting*. This initiatory moment "pregnant with tensions" (1986, p. 262) - a.k.a full of hauntings - is when the historian becomes entangled with a ghost, the moment they are crystallized into a monad - tied in a knot, if you will - with a repressed and/or unresolved social violence making itself known. This encounter opens up a spacetime, an opportunity to be with, *to stay with and to make kin* with the ghost that initiated the haunted. And an opportunity to let the ghost teach. Instead of encountering a historical subject and placing it in a linear timeline that is detached from now and from the historian, the materialist historian decides to stay with(in) the crystalized monad, the ghostly knot, and see what re(ve)lations might brew there.

We can learn how to more effectively access hauntings by analyzing the contrasts Benjamin makes between the practices of historicism and materialistic historicism: "Historicism gives the 'eternal' image of *the past*" while "historical materialism supplies a unique experience *with the past*" (1986, p. 262) [my emphasis]. This contrast demonstrates a shift from thinking (mind) to acting (body), from distant and detached research to proximate and relational research, and from a pedagogy privileging the historical archive of the past to a pedagogy privileging ghostly haunting (with)in the present.

I wish we were acutely attuned to hauntings but, alas, hegemony's disregard and erasure of such ways of somatic and intuitive knowing have made hauntings an inaccessible form of pedagogy. To bridge the gap between the ghosts' hauntings and the unattuned living I use a more accessible pedagogical tool: theatre, "an art that enacts the paradox of physical embodiment" (Luckhurst and Morin, 2014, p. 3). That paradox is the doubling effect that occurs when an actor embodies a character/another being, and it becomes evident that they are not autonomously themselves anymore, nor do they fully become the other. In that liminal space of acting, the actor is not-not themselves and not-not the other (Schechner, 2000), and this paradox shared through theatrical storytelling (Machado de Oliveira, 2021) can expose the inherent porosity of our beings and that we are never really autonomous, never not affected by and (re)entangling with others (da Silva, 2016). Every interaction with a ghostly other is a monad crystalizing, an open door appearing, but we will only notice the door if we are attuned enough to stay with the trouble. Actors are uniquely trained to embody, to be possessed by, to stay and make kin with an other. Then in performance, an actor makes present and legible to audiences the ghostly matters they embody, and actors together, ensembles of the living, can bring to life entire (ghost) stories from other spacetimes. This makes theatre a potentially effective conduit for translating hauntings that are coming from the shadow realm with urgent teachings.

Take, for example, the musical *Hamilton* (2015), a story of America's revolution and birth as a country. From the stage, the bodies of the founding fathers move and breathe in the same spacetime as you, the audience member, whose body sits, breathes, and experiences their performances. The actors dance, rap, sing, and educate you not from white bodies with powdery white wigs but *from Brown and Black and Asian bodies*. As these actors of color embody these white men, their performances invoke the ghosts of racial injustice and white supremacy, ghosts which have haunted this country from its founding to this moment in which it is now acceptable and exciting, yet still a bit unsettling - or *haunting* - to experience people of color playing the founding fathers.

As a white American theatergoer, how does it feel experiencing a Black George Washington? How does your white body feel receiving this early American history through rap and hip-hop music? As a Black American theatre goer, how does it feel to be represented in the founding of this country, to have this piece of theatre show that you too built, fought, and bled for this country? But also, how does it feel seeing people of color telling the stories of white men, most of whom owned slaves? Art educator and activist Dipti Desai writes, "Because invisibility is political in that it is an active form of erasure, to make visible

that which dominant institutions render invisible is an activist strategy that is inherently pedagogical” (2020, p. 15). In *Hamilton* (2015), the American exceptionalist, whitewashed narrative of the county’s founding is ruptured by the bodies of people of color making themselves visible in performance. Their visibility on stage begs the haunting question, “where do people who look like me fit into the myths of and erasures made by American hegemony?” This politicizing piece of theatre makes the ghosts of American racism and white supremacy more present and their educational hauntings more deeply felt by actors and audiences alike.

Having laid the foundation of hauntings as ghostly public pedagogy and theatre as a potential translator of hauntings, it is time to (re)summon *the ghost of witches past, present, and future*, to trace and analyze what I was able to learn from their hauntings and *why* such teachings were so important to glean in our current spacetime.

“Unfortunately, the witch herself—poor and illiterate—did not leave us her story... today we know the witch only through the eyes of her persecutors” (Ehrenreich and English, 1973). *And through hauntings from her ghost...*

a ghost story in five acts

characters:

ghost of witches PAST

ghost of witches PRESENT

ghost of witches Future

ME THEN, me in a speculative, real-time conversation with the ghosts from 2021-2023

Me Recorded, quotes from my research journal kept from 2022-2023

[bracketed stage directions will help guide the tale]

ACT I: “Haunted Initiation” (November 2021)

PAST: *For years, theatre performer Cassandra Gress had been haunted by the ghosts of the Pendle Witches, eight women and two of their sons hanged for witchcraft in Lancaster, England in 1612. I had brought this story of the Device and Whittle families to Cas-*

sandra by way of the historical fiction novel *Daughters of the Witching Hill* by Mary Sharratt (2011). Cassandra yearned to share this story with the public through theatre.

PRESENT: *Once Nikki Kendra Davis formulated her feminist, political praxis for making theatre through and with hauntings, I partnered with the PAST to bring these two women together.*

[ME THEN experiences a haunting initiation. Once introduced to the Pendle Witches and Cas, ME THEN gets "taken up" by the ghosts (Povinelli, 2011, p. 6-7), quickly becoming obsessed, consumed, devoted to the witches and this project.]

ME THEN: *It's Autumn 2021, and Cas and I have hit it off! We've drawn up a two-year project timeline, and I'm feeling this passionate, dutiful need to bring this story to the stage. But I'm also feeling... perplexed? I cannot articulate a substantial answer to the important question: "why this story now?" Why bother telling a story of the past if it doesn't have something urgent to teach us now? Without a solid why, historical theatre might regurgitate hegemony's simplified, self-aggrandizing past for entertainment.*

PAST: *That kind of art stifles the ghosts' teachings, maintains the status quo and creates more ghosts in the process (Desai, 2017; Gordon, 1997).*

ME THEN: Spectators must not be "allowed to submit to an experience uncritically," wrote playwright Bertolt Brecht in his essay *Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Instruction* (1977, p. 71). "Alienation... is necessary to all understanding" (1977, p. 71).

Future: *We cannot recognize the "laws of cause and effect" when we only engage with the familiar (Brecht, 1977, p.71). We must look to the unfamiliar. Seek out experiences of alienation - haunting experiences - to learn how to change cycles of violence.*

ME THEN: So, what haunting experiences am I trying to share by staging this particularly unfamiliar history here now?

PAST: Go start in the archive.

PAST/PRESENT/Future: We'll accompany you.

ACT II: "Haunted Research" (Late 2021 - Early 2022)

[ME THEN starts conducting traditional historical research on the European Witch Hunts. All the while, these ghosts of witches whisper the following hauntings making ME THEN feel and acknowledge the personal and present resonances of this history.]

PAST: "The Burning Times." "The Witch Craze." "The Women's Holocaust." "The Dark Ages when women were burned at the stake." These are a few ways the PRESENT re-members and the Future will continue to re-member this PAST. If the Future re-members at all.

PRESENT: The majority of witch hunts happened NOT during the so-called "Dark Ages" but during the heights of the so-called "Renaissance." Hegemony doesn't want you to know that (Federici, 2014).

PAST: The mass murder of witches was happening alongside the Renaissance, the founding of universities, and the Scientific Revolution - projects of power and capital accumulation. The witch hunts were a systematic element of Europe's transition from communal feudalism to privatized capitalism and colonial imperialism. This transition involved the Transatlantic Slave Trade, the invasion of the Americas, and the reshaping of the European workforce which necessitated "a massive, internationally organized, legally approved, religiously blessed assault on [women's] bodies" (Federici, 2018, p. 31) to pave "the way [for] the confinement of women in Europe to unpaid domestic labor" (Federici, 2018, p. 47). The ghosts of all these events intertwine with me, the ghost of witches PAST.

Future: In the wake of transitions to capitalism will always be oppressed women, murdered women, and more ghosts (Moghadam, 2014, p. 58).

PRESENT: The murder toll of the European Witch Hunts is unknown. But focusing on that number obscures the fact that the number of life-altering accusations would have been much higher and that most of the accused and murdered were women (Barstow, 1988, p. 7).

Future: And many of those women were witches, in one way or another.

PRESENT: Well, most women are.

ME THEN: Wait, what do you mean?

Future: Well, the meaning of the word "'woman'... has been [continuously] produced and consumed both by power and resistance to it," (Park, 2017) [emphasis added]. Similarly, "witch" is a double-sided coin constructed by power on one side and reclaimed by the resistance on the other.

PAST: A non-insignificant number of women accused and/or killed as witches were once called cunning women, wise women, healers, or midwives (Ehrenreich and English, 1973; Horsley and Horsley, 1987; Barstow, 1988; Federici 2004). For centuries prior, a community's women were the holders of medicinal knowledge, practitioners of health care for their communities, deliverers of babies, hospicers of the sick, rulers of their own reproductive lives, and helpers of their women kin in all matters of the body and soul (Ehrenreich and English, 1973).

PRESENT: As feminist, Marxist, and deeply haunted philosopher Silvia Federici writes, "At the stakes not only were the bodies of the 'witches' destroyed, so was a whole world of social relations that had been the basis of women's social power and a vast body of knowledge that women had transmitted... over the generations" (2018, p. 33).

ME THEN: Wow... destroyed women's knowledge and relationships...

Me Recorded: (May 4, 2022) Whatever they were in life, [in pop culture and in the archive] they [get] reduced to either soldiers of the Devil, murderers,

harmers, or they [get] reduced to tragic and helpless scapegoats, both of which ignore... the complexity and agency of their lives.

PAST: Yes, binary thinking always births erasure and more ghosts... This shift from (wise) woman to witch systematically began in the late 15th century with the publication and distribution of religious, state, and judiciously sanctioned texts instructing the "learned public" -

PRESENT: also known as wealthy and powerful men.

PAST: - on the dangers that witches pose to men, on how to identify a witch, how to torture her to confess, and how to punish her. Most of the crimes were of a sexual/reproductive nature: castration of men, making men lust insatiably after them, birth control, infanticide, and abortion (Ehrenreich and English, 1973). The *Malleus Maleficarum*, the Hammer of Witches, written in 1486 by two German Catholic clergymen started the trend (Horsley and Horsley, 1987). Copycats of the *Malleus* called "demonologies" spread the "good word" throughout Europe that women and their sexuality -

PRESENT: "sexuality" meaning their sexuality yes, but this also encompassed their reproductive agency, freedom to move and assemble, to freely manage their reproductive lives, etc. all of this got sexualized (Barstow, 1988, p. 8).

PAST: - women's sexuality could be used as "instruments of the Devil" against men and had to be stopped "to protect the cohesiveness of the Church as a patriarchal, masculine clan" (Federici, 2018, p. 29).

[Through these hauntings, ME THEN begins connecting the archive to the present. ME THEN thinks of the bounty hunter bill passed the prior year in Texas targeting women seeking abortions and those who aid them (Feuer, 2021). The #MeToo movement that got ME THEN involved in politics feels like important connective tissue here as well (Khoma-mi, 2017).]

PRESENT: *Sound familiar?*

ME THEN (in early 2022): Yes, disturbingly so. Donald Trump is no longer president -

Future: *[screams at an indiscernible frequency from 2024...]*

PRESENT: - but the fact that he was elected tells us a lot about how women are viewed and treated in this country in your lifetime. Though feminist movements over the last century in the United States have organized, fought, and won many legislative battles - for the vote, for economic freedoms, for birth control and abortion -

Future: *[discernable grumblings from June 2022...]*

PRESENT: - for safety in the workplace, etc. Misogyny runs deep, and with the election of Trump in 2016, permission was granted for it to rise up from those depths (Dignam and Rohlinger, 2019). Trump became the avatar of masculine anti-establishment, evangelical (somehow) patriotism while Hilary Clinton became "the avatar of a feminist, anti-male establishment" (Dignam and Rohlinger, 2019, p. 603), aka a modern-day witch.

ME THEN: But wait... during the European Witch Hunts, witches were threatening to the establishment, not a part of it.

Future: "Witch" is wielded to demonize women, re-shaped to fit the political needs of the wielder.

PRESENT: In the case of Trump and his 2016 politics, the witches are feminist women who want to rule over men by way of the establishment.

PAST: Texts that guided the Witch Hunts told men that women who deviated "in appearance, behavior, or social status from the expected code for a woman" threatened "the stability and invincibility of the prevailing order," so in "men's view" it appeared

likely that women were plotting against "male control of [women's] lives and society" (Horsley and Horsley, 1987, p. 15).

PRESENT: While Trump, who brags about sexually assaulting women, made it clear to proudly misogynistic, ardently anti-feminist men that Hillary Clinton would "exacerbate the war on men," which these men took as permission, even encouragement, to sexually assault women to maintain their "alpha" identities (Dignam and Rohlinger, 2019, p. 600).

PAST: So, again, to maintain "male control of [women's] lives and society" (Horsley and Horsley, 1987, p. 15).

PRESENT: Precisely.

[As archival research wraps up and these ghostly revelations surge exponentially, ME THEN experiences anxiety, waves of nausea, and nightmares.]

ME THEN: I think I'm going to be sick...

PAST/PRESENT/Future: Stay with us. We got you.

ACT III: "Embodied Research" (May 2022)

ME THEN: It's May 3, 2022, and up here in the skies, I am being overwhelmingly haunted from all temporal fronts.

PAST: The ghosts of the Pendle Witches await your arrival in their homeland.

PRESENT: This leaked Supreme Court draft opinion means *Roe v. Wade* will be overturned. It is not a matter of if, but when.

Future: Women will be increasingly economically oppressed, physically assaulted, alienated from their bodies, made to suffer physically/emotionally, and many will die (*Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization, Dissent, 2022*).

ME THEN: I will pour my rage and fear into the immediate task at hand: accessing the hauntings of the Pendle Witches to make a political(izing), educational piece of theatre.

Future: *You can't control what is happening, what is coming.*

ME THEN: I will dive deep into what I can control - conducting embodied research onsite, knowing that my artwork(ing) matters.

Future: *As they say, I am not set in stone. Your "art can not only challenge [and] destabilize... the status quo... but also open up a space for radical alternatives and different futures" (Schuermans et al., 2012). I know the hauntings are overwhelming right now. But, please,*

PAST/**PRESENT**/**Future**: *keep going...*

[In England, ME THEN experiences a poetic whirlwind of hauntings emanating from the lands which bore witness to the witch hunts. ME THEN follows where the ghosts lead.]

ME THEN: I first visit Lancaster, north of Pendle, where the witches had been imprisoned, tried, and murdered. I make paper dolls of the women. I use them here to invoke their ghosts.

PAST: *I am so much more than the violence to which I was subjected.*

ME THEN: I sense their disdainful hauntings.

Me Recorded: (May 5, 2022) [The ghosts] don't want me to be here... or rather they don't want me accessing them here.

ME THEN: I leave Lancaster and take the dolls home to Pendle.

PAST: *Life was not easy. But, my god, these lush green hills and singing streams, the fresh air, and wide-open space...*

ME THEN: I meditate upon these lands. I walk dozens of miles, paths they tread in life. I do channeled-writing exercises, attuning to my hauntings and then seeing what scripts emerge.

PRESENT: *Seek to read "the emptiness or, conversely, the apparent fullness of the absence of the past" in this spacetime you occupy (Blanco and Peeren, 399).*

ME THEN: I listen to the wind, converse with trees, and question the shadows to access the hauntings. Monads crystalize. I am woven into haunted tapestries with the ghosts of the Pendle Witches, and there I stay with the trouble and make kin. I daydream about what their communal lives would have ideally looked like, which I am realizing align with my dreams for myself and the women of my spacetime.

PRESENT: *"Dreaming [is] an active and necessary part of shaping our political imagination" (Desai, 2017, p. 139).*

Future: *"Harness the power of dreaming to propose and enact viable alternatives" (Desai, 2017, p. 141).*

ACT IV: "Hauntings Hit Home" (June 2022)

ME THEN: It is June 24, 2022. And it is official.

PRESENT: *The U.S. Supreme Court Justices dissenting to the Dobb decision write*

Yesterday, the Constitution guaranteed that a woman confronted with an unplanned pregnancy could... make her own decision about whether to bear a child, with all the life-transforming consequences that action involves... As of today, this Court holds, a State can always force a woman to give birth... Perhaps, in the wake of today's decision, a state law will criminalize the woman's conduct too, incarcerating or fining her for daring to seek or obtain an abortion... one result of today's decision is certain: the curtailment of women's rights, and of their

status as free and equal citizens (Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization Dissent, 2022, p. 3-4).

Me Recorded: (June 27, 2022) It has happened. It seems mad, wild, archaic, criminal, backwards. "How could America do such a thing?" "How could they make decisions about women's rights in 2022 based on decisions made by wealthy white men hundreds of years ago?" "It's unbelievable!" But if you are educated on the matter... [and] haunted enough... you know that none of this is unbelievable... It is a stunning design.

PRESENT: *Five decades in the making.*

Me Recorded: (June 27, 2022, cont.) An apparition came to us from archaic pasts, adjacent presents, foreboding futures. Of bloody clothes hangers, of secret journeys across state lines and down back alleys, of all the obscure(d) deaths... our bodies are the agenda - a political battlefield where the theocratic, misogynistic conservatives will always win and our autonomy will always lose. Because the now-victors, THEY made the rules!

PRESENT: *We did change the rules with Roe V. Wade. That was a win.*

Future: *Yes, she knows. But she needs to rage, to mourn.*

PAST: *"There can be no doubt that the witchhunt destroyed the methods that women had used to control procreation, by indicting them as diabolical devices, and institutionalized the state's control over the female body" (Federici, 2004, p. 184).*

[ME THEN takes a few weeks away from the ghosts to cry and regroup.]

ME THEN: When you receive hauntings, "an open door comes alive and stops us in our tracks," writes Avery Gordon, and inside that door "is a flood of tears and consolation" (1997, p. 127). Post-Dobbs, when Cas and I resume work on the play, we indeed find both

tears and consolation. Gordon calls this particular consolation "the Utopian: the apperception of the fundamental difference between the world we have now and the world we could have instead" (1997, p. 127).
Future: *Seek utopic existence. Keep going.*

**ACT V: "Haunted/ing Theatre" (Autumn 2022 -
Spring 2023)**

ME THEN: It's August 2022, and a title has emerged: *Women Who Know: A Witch Play*. So much of the cycles of violence against women deemed (explicitly and implicitly) witches involved the erasure or extraction of knowledge shared amongst women. As 16th century ordinances began restricting midwives and women healers activities (Horsley and Horsley, 1987, p. 10) and as the male, University-trained, medical profession emerged (with the patronage of the ruling classes) (Ehrenreich and English, 1973), women must have experienced their shared knowledge and practices increasingly denigrated and vilified. For many, practicing healing and midwifery were sources of income in the early capitalist landscape -

PAST: *These practices had never before been monetized...*

ME THEN: - so the legal and societal restrictions on such practices made women more reliant on men for survival (Federici, 2018, pp. 27-28).

PAST: *And as generation after generation lost access to this knowledge, as women-who-knew educating women-to-know became more dangerous -*

PRESENT: *Women gradually did not know what they did not know anymore.*

Future: *They didn't know how to dream about knowing. They didn't know how to want to know.*

PAST: *And so I haunt on, trying to teach women that there was once and still could be another way of being. I haunt them into dreaming (Desai, 2017).*

ME THEN: As we write, we decide that one of the Pendle women admits to having an abortion. The play takes place in an afterlife Feminine Utopia or "FemUtop" which is being threatened by lingering ghosts of/from the patriarchal world of the living. These hauntings prompt the dead Pendle women to reflect upon and understand their lived lives more holistically. Structurally, the scenes oscillate between re-embodied scenes from their lives and these gatherings in the residually haunted FemUtop where they reconvene in death to debate, storytell, heal, and re-imagine their lives and legacies. Fern Redfearn -

PAST: *Who was approximately 40-years-old when she was hanged alongside her mother, Anne, for witchcraft -*

ME THEN: - in the midst of an argument in the FemUtop, proclaims for the first time in her (lived and after) life, "I had an abortion." In one of the Spring 2023 workshops of the play, a reader asks what is the point of Fern sharing this information. Because there is no historical evidence that the real Fern had an abortion, why did we choose to include it in our version of the Pendle Witch story?

[ME THEN is struck by that all important question - *why?*]

PAST: *What story about us needs to be told?*

PRESENT: *And why that story now?*

ME THEN: I stare at my computer screen... How should I edit the scene? What is my *why*, and how can I make it clear in the text?

PAST: *It has happened, always...*

PRESENT: *Safe to share...*

Future: *A duty to share...*

ME THEN: and I write -

FERN: You don't have all the details about that winter... you couldn't understand what it was like for us. How bad it got.

ANNE: You don't owe her anything. You don't have to -

FERN: But I do, Mom. Owe it. To all of us. Whatever we have to share that could help us we owe it to each other to speak aloud. Plus, I want to. Because it's not dangerous here. I had an abortion, yes (Davis and Gress, 2023).

This admission becomes a turning point in the FemUtop. Heated debates and accusations against each other begin to transform into empathetic inquiries and cumulative storytelling. They realize that while they were pointing fingers and crying "witch," the powerful men kept on winning. Why did we decide to have Fern share her abortion story? Because when women share what they know with other women, when we share personal experiences that we have been taught not to speak of, we find deep bonds that can alter worlds or birth new ones.

END of ghost story.

The ghosts haunted Cas and I into creating *Women Who Know*. We brought their hauntings to other women through intimate workshop readings and then in performance to hundreds of people in November 2023 at the Abbey Theater of Dublin, Ohio. The historical archive had been a necessary pedagogical tool in this process, but what we learned from the ghosts was far more valuable. We were haunted. We stayed with and embodied those hauntings which manifested as shock, rage, fear, and yearning for community, knowledge, and justice. Those empirical bodily experiences fueled our creative process, our why, and, ultimately, our ability to make sense of and work through our current moment as Roe fell. *Women Who Know: A Witch Play* is about women called witches who know/knew things you no longer know but should dream of knowing and how these ghosts of witches past hold secrets to unlocking present and future feminine joys, bonds, ways.

Future: "Because until we embrace the cunning ways of witches, a Feminine Utopia will only be possible in death" (Davis and Gress, 2023).

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