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Staging Relational Ethics: *Salmon Is Everything* as Ritual Performance

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Abstract

This article examines *Salmon Is Everything*, a community-based play developed in response to the 2002 Klamath River fish kill, as an enactment of relational ethics through ritual performance. The study aimed to move beyond readings of the play as environmental protest or trauma narrative by analyzing how it functions as a ceremony that repairs and reconfigures relationships among Indigenous and settler communities, between humans and salmon, and across ecological and cultural divides. Methodologically, the research combined a close textual analysis of the script with testimonies from participants, audience surveys, and accounts of the collaborative creative process. Findings show that the play not only dramatized ecological crisis but also operated ceremonially: it cultivated intercultural empathy, produced spaces for mourning and reconciliation, and embodied Indigenous ethical protocols in both process and performance. Moreover, the project trained students and empowered Indigenous youth, contributing to long-term gains in intercultural collaboration. The conclusion argues that *Salmon Is Everything* demonstrates the potential of theatre to act as a form of ceremony that both embodies and generates relational ethics. By bridging artistic practice, activism, and environmental justice, the play offers a model of performance that transforms ecological devastation into a collective act of healing and ethical renewal.

Keywords Relational ethics · ritual performance · ecodrama · environmental justice · intercultural collaboration

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Introduction

In 2002, a catastrophic fish kill on the Klamath River in northern California and southern Oregon left approximately 34,000 salmon dead. This disaster dealt a profound blow to the Indigenous Yurok, Karuk, Hupa, and Klamath/Modoc communities for whom salmon is a cultural lifeline. The 2002 disaster was not simply a natural event but the consequence of longstanding infrastructural and policy decisions that shaped the river's hydrology. In that summer, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's Klamath Project prioritized irrigation deliveries to agriculture, which significantly curtailed flows downstream. Releases from Iron Gate Dam dropped to nearly 40% below normal levels, creating unusually warm and stagnant conditions in the lower Klamath River (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service & NOAA Fisheries, 2003; California Department of Fish and Game, 2004). When an exceptionally large salmon run entered the river, the fish became overcrowded and highly susceptible to pathogens, which proliferate in warm, low-flow environments. The resulting epidemic suffocated tens of thousands of salmon before they could spawn, illustrating how dam operations and water allocation policies exacerbated ecological vulnerability and precipitated one of the most devastating fish kills in U.S. history (National Research Council, 2004).

In response, theatre artist and scholar Theresa J. May and community collaborators created *Salmon Is Everything* (premiered 2006 and published 2014), a community-based play that dramatized the event and its aftermath. Previous analyses of *Salmon Is Everything* have highlighted its function as a work of environmental justice activism and communal healing– a performative call to action against environmental injustice that channels grief and anger into activism. While these perspectives are valid, this article moves beyond viewing the play solely through the lenses of trauma recovery and eco-political protest. Instead, this study proposes a new focal thesis: *Salmon Is Everything* is an example of staging relational ethics through ritual performance. In other words, the play operates not just as storytelling or advocacy, but as a form of ceremony on stage—one that actively forges human-to-human, human-to-nature, and cross-cultural relationships grounded in an ethics of reciprocity and respect.

This approach recognizes theatre in this context as a ceremonial act that brings people together into a shared space of meaning-making and healing. In Indigenous epistemologies, spoken narrative and ceremony are imbued with world-making power; to tell a story can be to perform a ritual that restores balance. *Salmon Is Everything*, I argue, exemplifies this: it functions as a contemporary ceremony that builds and reflects relational ethics—a moral framework centered on relationships among people, communities, and the more-than-human world. The performance became a ceremonial forum where Native and non-Native neighbors could confront a collective trauma, mourn together, affirm interdependence, and envision a more ethical co-existence with each other and with nature. The stage, in essence, was transformed into a ceremonial space that established and repaired relationships.

To develop the thesis, the article is organized in a logical sequence. First, a theoretical framework is outlined, drawing on Indigenous storytelling traditions, the concept of relational ethics, ecodrama theory, and performative ritual approaches in theatre. This framework situates *Salmon Is Everything* as a ritualized performance emerging from Indigenous knowledge and eco-theatrical practice. Next, key aspects of the play's content and staging are analyzed to show how they enact ceremony and relational ethics—from the use of Native language and ritual symbols to staging choices that blur boundaries between actors, the audience, and the community. Close readings of the play's script, alongside audience and participant testimonies, illustrate how the production cultivated new relationships both between formerly opposed community members and between the community and the natural environment. In addition, the creation process of the play, including the ethical protocols and collaborative methods used by director May and the community, is examined to demonstrate that the making of *Salmon Is Everything* was itself an ethical,

performative process rooted in trust, reciprocity, and cultural respect. Finally, the conclusion reflects on the broader significance of viewing theatre as ceremony and considers the potential of such relational performances to foster healing and environmental justice in other contexts.

This multiplicity of voices and materials aligns with the play's own collaborative spirit. Centering the thesis of *Salmon Is Everything* as a ritual performance of relational ethics offers a deeper understanding of how theatre can function as a ceremony, forging new connections, embodying reciprocal responsibilities, and transforming communities in the process.

Indigenous Storytelling and Relational Ethics

Indigenous storytelling traditions provide a crucial foundation for understanding *Salmon Is Everything* as a ceremony of relational ethics. In many Indigenous worldviews, stories are not merely entertainment; they are carriers of knowledge, values, and relationships. Stories encode teachings about how humans should relate to the land and other living beings, often blurring the boundaries between people and nature. As scholar Brian Noble (2018, p. 269) observes, Indigenous systems of resource management and sustainability are deeply intertwined with narrative, ritual, and ethics: cultural practices for maintaining balance with the environment "become encoded in stories, taboos, ceremonies, art, and ethics" within Indigenous cultures. These narratives transmit a relational ethic—an understanding that the health of the community is inseparable from the health of the land and non-human kin. Rather than a Western paradigm of dominion over nature, Indigenous epistemologies emphasize reciprocal duties: humans must respect and care for their animal and plant relatives, just as those relatives, such as salmon, sustain human life.

A useful concept here is relational ethics, which can be defined as an ethical framework centered on relationships, reciprocity, and responsibility to others, including non-human others. In an Indigenous context, relational ethics manifest a sense of kinship with the natural world and an obligation to maintain respectful, balanced relationships. Environmental scholars increasingly argue that cultivating human–nature relationships is pivotal for sustainability and for repairing human–nature relations (Ives et al., 2018; Stålhammar & Thorén, 2019; Hagen & Gould, 2022; Bogert et al., 2022). Across many Indigenous traditions, ethics is conceived not as an abstract, universal code but as a lived, relational praxis grounded in reciprocal responsibilities to human and more-than-human kin, including family, community, ancestral lands and waters, animals, and spirit beings (Borrows, 2018, pp. 50–52, 68–69; Borrows & Tully, 2018, pp. 16–17; Starblanket & Stark, 2018, pp. 176–177, 191–192). Among the Yurok, Karuk, and Hupa of the Klamath River region and more broadly across the Pacific Northwest, salmon are understood as relatives, a kinship that carries durable obligations of respect, ceremonial reciprocity, and careful stewardship (McCovey, 2014, pp. 93-102; Reid, 2022, para. 1). Each of these communities has historically performed an annual First Salmon Ceremony to honor the salmon's sacrifice and to ensure the cycle of return (O'Hara, 2014, p. 144; Norgaard, 2019). Swezey and Heizer (1977) documented the ritual management of this ceremony in detail: for example, among the Yurok, the rite was conducted in April at Welkwau by a formulist, who released the first salmon caught back into the river and served the second in a ritual meal (Swezey & Heizer, 1977, p. 14). The Karuk and Hupa variants similarly involved community gatherings in which the first salmon was welcomed with prayer and fasting before the fishing season opened (Swezey & Heizer, 1977, p. 19). These ceremonies function as enactments of respect, gratitude, and ethical reciprocity, affirming the interdependence between humans and the more-than-human world.

In the Klamath River context, to say that "salmon is everything" is to recognize salmon's constitutive place in cultural identity, subsistence, and spirituality—indeed, to acknowledge them as kin. *Salmon Is Everything* makes this relational ontology explicit when Yurok/Karuk Julie affirms: "we have maintained a healthy balance with the River and the Salmon and everything else because it's all one body, one family. If

the Salmon die, we break apart; the Salmon make life make sense" (May, 2014c, p. 62). The scene then shifts from affirmation to communal mourning: Rose—Karuk elder and Julie's grandmother—issues a prayerful imperative: "Our life on the River lay rotting. What do we do? We have to get down and pray (May, 2014c, p. 56). Louise, Julie's aunt, carries that grief into normative practice, aligning loss with kinship obligations: "It was like how it feels when you grieve for a family member that has passed on… I cut my hair off to honor the death of my relative, the Salmon" (May, 2014c, p. 56). Across many Indigenous nations, cutting one's hair functions as a sacralized sign of mourning undertaken by close relatives; in the Yurok context, this practice is explicitly documented (Thompson, 1991, pp. 108, 127). By undertaking this mourning rite on behalf of the salmon, Louise signals an ontological commitment to their status as a family. Dramaturgically, the scene translates relational ethics into action: the governing norm is a kinship-based obligation and a practice of reciprocal care toward the salmon, which invites non-Indigenous audiences to reconceptualize salmon not as commodities or resources but as relatives who warrant mourning, respect, and protection.

Indigenous storytelling often operates as a ceremony—an embodied, performative modality that (re)affirms relations and transmits ethical teachings. As LeAnne Howe (1999) theorizes through "tribalography," Native stories generate peoplehood, author tribal worlds, and function as "a living theater connecting everything and everyone" (pp. 118, 124). In this light, *Salmon Is Everything* is a ceremonial narrative that reasserts kinship with salmon and reframes the ecological crisis as a rupture of sacred relations. Within the play's enunciative frame, Indigenous characters act as custodians of relational knowledge, insisting that environmental devastation is inseparable from cultural and ethical injury; the killing of salmon becomes not merely ecological harm, but a breach of obligations owed to kin.

The play's genesis likewise conforms to Indigenous storytelling protocols. Rather than a prescriptive, top-down script authored at a remove, the text emerged dialogically from testimony and oral history in the Klamath Basin. Under Theresa May's facilitation, students collaborated to gather first-person narratives from tribal members, fishers, farmers, and other local residents; much of the dialogue was drawn verbatim from interviews with the Yurok, Karuk, and Hupa people as well as upstream neighbors directly affected by the 2002 fish kill (May, 2014a; Carr, 2015; Kammer, 2015; May & Clifford, 2020). May and Clifford (2020) maintain that storytelling forges relationships, unsettles long-standing ideologies, opens new possibilities, and reshapes the social, political, and ecological contours of our lives (p. 148). Methodologically, this practice aligns with Shawn Wilson's account of relational accountability in Indigenous research—the ethical imperative to represent stories faithfully, acknowledge their communal ownership, and sustain reciprocal relations with participating communities (Wilson, 2008, pp. 100–101). In discourse-analytic terms, the play becomes a polyphonic testimonial assemblage that centers on Indigenous epistemic authority and is continuously guided by tribal elders, cultural advisors, and community members.

A useful analogue is Brian Noble's account of "treaty ecology," in which ceremonial action forges relational treaties among peoples and species (Noble, 2018, pp. 320–321). In the case he recounts, the Ktunaxa and Piikani resolved a territorial hunting conflict two centuries ago by sharing the Blacktail Deer Dance, creating "extended relations through ceremonial-material encounter among persons [and] animal-persons" (Noble, 2018, p. 318). Read through this lens, *Salmon Is Everything* mobilizes performative ritual to convene previously opposed groups around a shared sacred referent, the salmon. The climactic moment, in which Tim, a white farmer representing upstream irrigators, voluntarily agrees to a one-day water shutoff in solidarity with downstream tribal needs, is staged not as a mere policy concession but as a ceremonial gesture of conciliation. Its illocutionary force lies in recognizing tribal relations with salmon; its perlocutionary effect is to reorient relations between settler and Native communities and between humans and salmon toward reciprocity and repair.

One of the central achievements of *Salmon Is Everything* lies in its creation of spaces for intercultural encounter and dialogue. As Theresa May notes in the play's introduction, the project was conceived as a cross-cultural case study that brought disparate voices—Native and non-Native, tribal and settler—onto the same stage (May, 2014b). Elaborating on this framework, May (2014b, pp. 6–7) draws on Iris Marion Young's notion of communicative democracy to argue that disagreement and diversity are not impediments to deliberation but sources of knowledge in their own right. Jean O'Hara (2014) likewise recalls that performances across multiple venues opened opportunities for communities to confront one another's experiences, thereby extending the dialogic process beyond rehearsal and production. Tessa W. Carr (2015) and Miriam Kammer (2015) underscore this cross-cultural dimension, reading the work as a model for how theatre can stage cultural and political conflict to foster mutual understanding. Most explicitly, May and Clifford (2020) maintain that storytelling "can build relationships, intervene in long-standing ideologies, open new possibilities, and reshape the social, political, and ecological landscapes of our lives" (p. 148). Taken together, these perspectives show that *Salmon Is Everything* does not simply dramatize a local environmental crisis; it actively enacts a process of cultural connection that honors difference while cultivating new relations of reciprocity and respect.

The intercultural work of the play thus flows into and is authorized by the Indigenous ethics of relationality; it both draws upon and performs. *Salmon Is Everything* draws upon an epistemology in which narrative, ceremony, and ethics are inseparable: stories operate as ceremonial practices that heal ruptures and reconstitute relationships. By reframing the salmon crisis as a drama of kinship and bereavement, a collective family tragedy, the performance invites participants to inhabit an ethic of care premised on reciprocity and interdependence. In doing so, it resists classification as a conventional didactic drama. Instead, the piece can be theorized as a ritualized enactment of Indigenous relational ethics, performing the very values of respect, reciprocity, and responsibility that it seeks to transmit. In this sense, *Salmon Is Everything* should be understood not merely as representation but as a ceremonial practice: a performative space in which ethical principles are embodied, rehearsed, and renewed in the act of storytelling itself.

Ecodrama and Ecological Relationality

Salmon Is Everything is firmly situated within ecodrama (eco-theatre), a performance that treats ecological concerns and human–environment relations as its central problem-space. Reading the play through this lens clarifies how it sutures environmental justice discourse to Indigenous relational thought. Co-creator Theresa J. May, a leading scholar-practitioner, together with Wendy Arons, defines ecodramaturgy as "theater and performance making that puts ecological reciprocity and community at the center of its theatrical and thematic intent" (Arons and May, 2012a, p. 4). For May, ecodramaturgy centers ecological relations and treats the borders between nature/culture and human/nonhuman as permeable, thereby foregrounding human entanglement with the more-than-human world (May, 2021b, p. xiv). It also insists on amplifying the voices of those most impacted by the environmental crisis (May, 2021a, p. 13). May's earlier work anticipates these commitments by theorizing site-responsive performance as a practice of "perceptual reciprocity" among audiences, performers, and nonhuman others, building community through shared space and story (May, 2005, pp. 96–97). *Salmon Is Everything* operationalizes these principles: it stages the 2002 fish kill as an ecological disaster through a community-based narrative that emphasizes interdependence across species and cultures, making clear that environmental destruction concerns not only ecosystems but also damaged relationships and social injustice.

What distinguishes *Salmon Is Everything* is its mobilization of relational storytelling (as discussed above) and ritualized performance (to be examined in the next section) to advance its environmental argument. Whereas early ecodramas were often perceived as didactic protests, constrained by agit-prop conventions

(May, 2005, p. 97), May's approach convenes ceremonial community dialogue rather than delivering a lecture (May, 2022, pp. 3, 10). The EMOS Ecodrama Festival, which May co-founded in 2004 after the 2002 fish kill, explicitly encouraged works that "explore new possibilities of being in relationship with the more-than-human world" (May, 2021b, p. xiv) and that interpret "community" expansively treating land or nonhuman beings as characters and agents in performance (May, 2022, p. 2). The play answers this call by giving voice to the salmon and the river through Indigenous characters while also staging non-Native figures who initially inhabit utilitarian views of nature (a farmer, a scientist). In doing so, the performance humanizes the ecological crisis, clarifying that the Klamath fish kill was not just about fish but about people, relationships, and responsibilities. By dramatizing how the loss of salmon devastated families and communities, it cultivates ecological empathy and teaches that caring for the river and its fish is a shared responsibility rather than the niche concern of a single group.

What this article seeks to bring into focus, however, is not only an explicit discourse of activism and healing but also the performative strategy that underwrites the work: its ceremonial construction of relationships. In *Salmon Is Everything*, ecodrama is not confined to propositional arguments; it is oriented toward reconfiguring relations among participants. As May (2022, p. 1) notes, her eco-activist theatre projects are conceived as "small acts of repair," practices that foreground community engagement, the cultivation of relationships, and resistance to colonial damage. The vocabulary of repair and relationship is, in effect, the vocabulary of ritual: performances operate as interventions in the social fabric, laboring to mend ruptures —whether between communities divided by conflict or between humans and the more-than-human world.

Accordingly, *Salmon Is Everything* can be understood as an ecodramatic ceremony. It exemplifies what Diana Taylor (2003, p. 20) theorizes as the repertoire of cultural memory—embodied acts that transmit knowledge, sustain traditions, and catalyze transformation. In this sense, the play not only preserves the history of the 2002 fish kill and the community's collective response but also activates that memory toward future-oriented action. As Ivan Lacko (2014, p. 21) observes, community-based theatre can function as a cultural archive, recording communal experience while mobilizing it in performance to foster awareness and engagement. Crucially, the piece refuses to reduce environmental justice to a zero-sum conflict between irreconcilable factions; instead, it ritualizes possibilities of conciliation by gathering adversaries around a shared ethic of care for the river. This dramaturgical choice accords with ecodrama's aspiration to expand the very notion of community to include diverse human constituencies as well as the more-than-human world. Ultimately, the narrative posits the protection of salmon as a sacred value capable of uniting former opponents.

Framed within ecodrama, the play's distinctive contribution becomes unmistakable: it fuses Indigenous relational worldviews with community-engaged environmental performance. The work does not merely articulate a relational ethic; it enacts one—functioning as a contemporary ritual that mobilizes narrative, symbol, and collective participation to recalibrate perception and reconfigure lived relationships. As Baz Kershaw (2009, p. 16) argues, performance is best understood ecologically—as an interrelational interdependence of "organisms-in-environments," rather than as isolated events. He further contends that radical performance can affect change, operating as a vector of energy with transformative potential and as a practice that can restitch connections between live events and surrounding life (Kershaw, 2009, pp. 293, 287). In this light, *Salmon Is Everything* enacts precisely such work: by embedding ceremonial practice within the theatrical form, it reorients community relations with the river and the salmon and, by extension, among participants themselves, dramatizing the repair of ecological and social ruptures.

Theatre as Ceremony: Ritual Performance in *Salmon Is Everything*

Treating a play as a ceremony means organizing its events, gestures, and audience address so that attending the performance approximates participation in a communal rite. *Salmon Is Everything* makes this intention legible from its first moment. The play opens with Procession, as actors enter through the audience and proclaim identities in a call-and-response roll call of the Klamath Basin's social mosaic— "I am Karuk," "I am a farmer," "I am a biologist," "I am Yurok …" (May, 2014c, p. 32-33). The sequence functions as an invocation: like a ceremony that assembles those present by naming lineages or directions, the production breaks the fourth wall and acknowledges the collective in the room. By emerging from among spectators, the actors symbolically collapse the performer–audience divide and, in effect, position the community as addressing the salmon—recognizing their suffering, sharing in it, and pledging to act. The procession thus operates as a rite of inclusion and recognition, crucial to a story about bridging divides, and it invites spectators to shift from passive observation to witnessing and participation.

Elsewhere, the play adopts the content and cadence of mourning rites. In the scene discussed earlier, the Native characters collectively process grief for the salmon. The dialogue explicitly calls for prayer and ceremonial practice: "We have to get down and pray," Rose insists while the stage directions specify culturally particular forms (e.g., cutting hair), actions that on stage would carry the gravitas of ritual observance (May, 2014c, p. 56). One can envision the actor portraying Louise solemnly cutting a lock of hair, a potent ceremonial gesture likely to draw a reverent hush. As Louise explains, "When you have a funeral there's an event; there's a grieving time. Elders have never heard about anything like this fish kill in our legends or stories" (May, 2014c, p. 56). In response to the unprecedented scale of loss, the production deliberately assumes the role of the missing funerary observance: the play itself becomes that needed event, the unprecedented ceremony to cope with an unprecedented loss. In effect, the stage is transformed into a civic-sacred gathering place—a figurative longhouse—where communal pain is openly named and held, and where many experienced the event as a memorial service.

A further ritual vector is the narrative's turn to reviving the First Salmon Ceremony. At a climactic juncture, Julie proposes, "Why don't we try to bring the First Salmon Ceremony back and use it as healing?" (May, 2014c, p. 57). This suggestion marks a dramaturgical pivot from conflict and sorrow toward ceremonial renewal. Subsequent scenes articulate a resolve to reclaim ceremonies and sacred practices as means of restoring balance, culminating in a multilingual choral refrain— "Sacred is …"—in Yurok, Hupa, Karuk, and other Indigenous languages, until only the Indigenous words remain audible. The effect is incantatory and prayer-like: a liturgical soundscape that recenters the frame within Indigenous epistemologies and draws the audience into a pan-tribal act of invocation. Heard this way, the repeated phrase names the sanctity of the river, salmon, and interdependence. At this point, the performance exceeds representation; it functions as liturgy.

Read through Victor Turner's lens, *Salmon Is Everything* maps cleanly onto the four-phase "social drama": the 2002 fish kill functions as the breach; increasingly adversarial stakeholder disputes mark the crisis; the collaborative making and public staging of the play operate as the redressive rite; and the result is at least a partial reintegration, evidenced by emergent cross-cultural understanding and a shared resolve to care for the river (Turner, 1987, pp. 69-73). Turner also theorizes "communitas"—an egalitarian, intensified "I–Thou" solidarity that can arise in liminal[1] ritual, which offers a useful frame for the affective convergence repeat-

[1] *Salmon Is Everything* articulates a liminal "threshold dramaturgy": it convenes the community (Procession), processes loss through ritual gestures (acts of mourning and the revival of the First Salmon Ceremony), opens an interstitial forum for public deliberation (Town Hall), and seals the gathering with a shared affirmation of sacredness ("Sacred is…"). Through this weave, Turner's concepts of liminality and communitas—the suspension of ordinary roles, the intensification of relational closeness, and a temporary sense of unity—become legible across the play's formal design and ethical commitments alike.

edly reported around the production (Turner, 2011, pp. 131–133). Practically, the tour's community venues—the Hoopa Valley High School theatre, a performance on the Yurok Reservation, and Orleans Elementary School in Karuk country—together with the dialogue following performances, loosened conventional theatrical hierarchies and extended deliberation beyond the stage (O'Hara, 2014, pp. 144–147). This ceremonial logic is mirrored inside the script: Scene 12 ("Town Hall") is explicitly designed either as a single public meeting or as interludes that frame the entire production (May, 2014c, p. 30), and its staging directions present the event as a difficult public forum with citizens' statements (May, 2014c, pp. 60–61).

Additionally, the integration of culturally significant objects and practices intensifies the work's ritual valence. Karuk artist and elder Kathleen (Kathy) McCovey, who collaborated on the project and performed the role of Rose, links ceremonial making to kinship and ancestral instruction; in the script, Rose shows a Brush Dance skirt and narrates how she and her grandfather took the deer and how she later fashioned the skirt to honor him (May, 2014c, pp. 58). In Theresa May's essay "The Education of an Artist," protocols are made explicit: ceremonial items are "living regalia," and "only the woman who dances in it can touch it"—a principle that the production translated directly into stage action (May, 2014c, pp. 137–138). The same ethic is reiterated paratextually: the printed program note instructs audiences that baskets, regalia, and cradleboards are not "props" but cultural objects to be handled only by designated actors (May, 2014c, p. 31). The acknowledgments extend "special thanks to the Grandmothers" who "loaned regalia and cultural objects," signaling elders' authority and oversight (May, 2014c, p. viii).

Equally integral to the production's ritual frame are its musical, choreographic, and scenographic choices. Although the script is predominantly verbal, it signals dance most directly in "Hip-Hop" (Scene 13) and in the closing sequence from "Captain Jack's Stronghold" through "Ultimate Title" to "Sacred Is" (Scenes 18–20), which together carry the work into an incantatory register (May, 2014c, pp. 69–70, 80–87). At "Captain Jack's Stronghold[2]," the stage directions ask that the Lava Beds terrain be "suggested in light or images," and in "Ultimate Title," Klamath elder Phillip appears "in a pool of light … carrying a traditional cradleboard"—design choices that isolate ritual action and charge it affectively (May, 2014c, p. 82). Touring productions also extended the sensorium through multimedia. As Suzanne M. Burcell (2014, p. 20) recounts, an Orleans-based group contributed underwater salmon footage, whose pairing with the "naturally musical sounds of flowing water" moved spectators "beyond just seeing and hearing the play" into a visceral encounter with its core message. Taken together, these decisions instantiate what Richard Schechner (2013) theorizes as ritual "time/space" and the dynamics of "transportations" and "transformations": the mundane stage is transfigured into a special world in which objects, bodies, and relations are reconfigured (Schechner, 2013, pp. 71–73).

Taken as a whole, the dramaturgical arc of *Salmon Is Everything* is patterned as a healing rite oriented toward the restoration of relations. The early scenes stage a field of chaos, anger, and misrecognition—effectively a spiritual disequilibrium within the community. Through practices of testimonial witnessing across differences (for example, Native characters hearing a farmer's anxieties, and a farmer's daughter attending to elders' grief), the dramatic action turns toward transformation. The culminating cooperative gesture—the voluntary day-long water shut-off and the pledge to collaborate—functions as the ritual resolution, analogous to the moment in the ceremony when reconciliation or blessing is achieved; it affirms a shared sacred value in the salmon and the river rather than a merely instrumental environmental good. Notably, the play closes not with a juridical or administrative decree but with a consensus achieved affectively and

[2] *Captain Jack's Stronghold* refers to a fortified lava-flow landscape within the Lava Beds National Monument, central to the 1872–73 Modoc War and associated with the Modoc leader Kintpuash ("Captain Jack"). The volume explicitly locates Scene 18 in this place and elsewhere summarizes the episode of General Canby's death near the Stronghold, underscoring the site's historical and spiritual significance.

ethically through a ceremony-like participation. In this sense, the work mobilizes ritual at multiple levels. In content, it depicts ceremonial obligations and kinship with more-than-human relatives; in form, it employs inclusive staging, choral utterance, and the use of cultural objects to create a collective, reverential frame; and in process, it draws on the guidance and participation of community cultural bearers. The event thus exceeds the conventional artist–audience transaction: it approaches the texture of a community healing rite, something like a contemporary potlatch of stories, in which gifts of testimony and truth are exchanged to re-bind relationships.

The participants themselves attest to this efficacy. Karuk artist and elder Kathleen McCovey, who advised the production and portrayed Rose, reflects that

> being involved in the development and performance of *Salmon Is Everything* allowed her to speak from the heart in a new way, and to understand that [she] can help write the history of the Karuk people. [She] learned that when a story is presented in a way that affects all of the senses—using visual images, body language, and relationships—it can be a potent tool for communicating what tribal people on the Klamath River need the world to know and understand. (McCovey, 2014, p. 93)

This testimony underscores the play's ceremonial force: multisensory, relational performance becomes a vehicle for ethical connection and, ultimately, transformation.

Having articulated how *Salmon Is Everything* operates textually and theatrically as a ritual practice, the following section turns to its reception. What evidence do the audience and community responses offer that this theatrical ceremony in fact cultivated relational ethics in practice?

Audience Reception and Relational Impact

One way to gauge whether *Salmon Is Everything* successfully enacted relational ethics is to look at how audiences and community members responded. If the play indeed functioned as a ceremony that brought people together and fostered empathy, we would expect to see feedback emphasizing increased understanding, compassion, and dialogue across differences. Extensive qualitative and quantitative data were gathered from the audiences, as the play's development was accompanied by interviews, surveys, and talk-back sessions, particularly documented in Adriana R Guzman's (2012) study. These responses provide rich insight into the play's impact on perceptions and relationships in the community.

According to the audience surveys, *Salmon Is Everything* was overwhelmingly seen as important in that it served as a significant medium for raising awareness and promoting understanding regarding complex issues. In post-performance questionnaires conducted across multiple showings in 2006 and 2011, the primary reasons cited by audience members for the play's importance included: "Raises awareness, increases education and understanding" (42% of respondents) and "Theatre is an important medium [for these issues]" (33%). Furthermore, some audience members indicated that the play "creates dialogue" (8%) and "presents all sides of the issue" (8%) (Guzman, 2012, p.54). These statistics demonstrate that spectators did not perceive the play as a mere one-sided polemic; instead, they appreciated its role in educating them about various perspectives and facilitating discussions. Here, the phrase "presents all sides" is particularly noteworthy, as the audience members recognized that *Salmon Is Everything* made a concerted effort to incorporate the viewpoints of tribal communities, farmers, government scientists, and other stakeholders in a balanced manner. This fair and inclusive approach to storytelling likely enhanced viewers' openness to considering perspectives different from their own, which is a fundamental element of relational ethics.

When asked about their knowledge and perspectives on the Klamath crisis after seeing the performance, the audience members reported significant changes in their perceptions. Many expressed an increased awareness of diverse cultures and perspectives. In one set of interviews, 36% of the participants indicated that after viewing *Salmon Is Everything*, they felt "more educated or aware of another's perspective/culture," which included insights into Native culture as well as the experiences of farmers (Guzman, 2012, p. 55). This exemplifies a tangible outcome of relational learning, as individuals emerged with empathy for those on the opposing side of a previously polarized conflict. Furthermore, 27% stated they had "gained a more positive outlook" regarding the potential for resolving the crisis after attending the play (Guzman, 2012, p. 55). This suggests that the performance instilled a sense of hope regarding the possibility of cooperation, which was likely fostered by witnessing the characters discover common ground and the supportive atmosphere of the event. An additional 18% noted that the play prompted them to "realize the more human side of the issue," progressing beyond abstract policy discussions to engage with the genuine human emotions and narratives involved (Guzman, 2012, p. 55). This highlights the principles of relational ethics, as the audience members began to perceive opponents not as nameless adversaries but as relatable individuals. One audience member succinctly articulated that the performance facilitated an appreciation for "another's perspective/culture," with some specifically acknowledging enhanced knowledge of Native culture (18%) and others regarding farmer/rancher culture (18%), depending on their prior understanding (Guzman, 2012, pp. 55-56).

The play not only bridged understanding between cultural groups but also connected people more deeply to the natural world. A particularly telling finding is that those audience members who already felt a strong connection to the Klamath River (often Indigenous people or locals) tended to express a strong sense of responsibility towards it, whereas some newcomers who did not have a personal connection remained less engaged (Guzman, 2012, pp. 59-60)- This suggests that emotional connection, which the play aimed to foster, is a precursor to ethical responsibility. As Guzman concludes, "these reports suggest that the connection between people and their sense of place may be a stronger indicator of feeling a connection (and therefore a responsibility towards) something than knowledge alone" (2012, p. 112). This is a robust validation of the play's strategy. By forging a sense of relational bond between the audience and the river/salmon through identifying with the characters' love for the salmon, the play can instill a stronger environmental ethic than just presenting facts would. Some audience members who initially "knew very little about the river" admitted they still did not feel very connected after the play, indicating that a single experience may not convert everyone (Guzman, 2012, p. 112). However, others said the play inspired them to learn more and that they realized how much the issue "affects people" (Guzman, 2012, p. 54). A few even stated that prior to the play, they had no opinion, but afterwards they felt compelled to care and perhaps get involved. This is evidence of the ceremonial performance generating a new relationship where none existed, creating stakeholders out of previously indifferent spectators by bringing them into the circle of empathy.

From the perspective of the actors and the creative team, similar themes emerge. In interviews with cast members, some of whom were students or community members, Native and non-Native, one of the common reflections was that the play was about reconciliation and healing of relationships. When asked what they thought *Salmon Is Everything* is about, one group of interviewees responded that it is about "promoting understanding and the healing of relationships among conflicting communities" (20% of respondents to that question) (Guzman, 2012, p. 59). Others said it is about bringing "all sides of the issue" together and "bringing the whole community together" (Guzman, 2012, p. 96). This is striking: the people involved in making the play see its core message not just as salmon are important but as community reconciliation. In fact, "reconciliation, healing and acknowledgement of the crisis" was explicitly mentioned by 10% of these

interviewees as a key theme (Guzman, 2012, p. 59). These are essentially ritual outcomes – reconciliation and healing are what one hopes for from a peace-making ceremony.

Furthermore, the cast/creators observed personal transformations. Theresa May (2007, p. 159) recounts that Lauren, a non-Native student actor, recounted how participating in the play and interacting closely with tribal members shattered her stereotypes and gave her a profound appreciation for Indigenous spirituality and struggles. Kathleen McCovey, another Native student who performed the Karuk elder Rose in the play, found that it empowered her voice. She realized theatre could be a platform to share her community's story, and that realization instilled pride and confidence (McCovey, 2014, pp. 93-102). These individual changes multiplied across the ensemble, creating a network of new relationships: Native and non-Native students at Humboldt State University, for example, forged strong bonds and empathy through months of collaboration. Many collaborators described the process as a "healing journey" for themselves—they had to confront their own emotions (grief, anger, and guilt) and, in doing so, found support in one another. Several moments in rehearsal served as mini rituals of healing: such as group circles where they would share personal stories related to the theme, or when community members would cry together upon hearing someone's testimony read aloud in the script for the first time (O'Hara, 2014, p. 143; McCovey, 2014, pp. 95, 98, 99). These instances reinforced trust and understanding, which then carried into performances and out to audiences. As Adrianna R. Guzman concludes, depending on the data of her research,

> *Salmon is Everything* illustrates its potential for effectiveness as a tool for personal or social change through its process and its resulting performances. The stories about the creation of the play and the words of all those I surveyed and interviewed all showed examples of how *Salmon is Everything* increases education [and] awareness, healing and compassion, increased dialogue and activism. The characteristics of the play (e.g. collaboration and participation) allowed for these transformative outcomes to occur throughout the play's process. These elements provide a good environment for representing community, building community, encouraging community activism and therefore increasing its efficacy as a tool for personal and social change. (2012, p. 115)

The effect of *Salmon Is Everything* in the broader community also hints at relational shifts. In essence, the play became a community asset or offering—much like a ceremonial gift—that they wanted to give to others for education and bridge-building. As noted earlier, the production team did take the play on a local tour to various community venues, reaching tribal audiences that rarely attend mainstream theatre and conversely bringing tribal voices to non-Native local audiences who rarely, if ever, hear directly from their Indigenous neighbors. Each of these events served as a node for relationship-building. For example, one performance held at the Yurok Tribal Office in Klamath, CA, drew people from all over the basin—including federal and state agency officials, ranchers, fishermen, environmentalists, and multiple tribes—effectively replicating the intended dialogue in real life (May, 2014a, pp. 123-124). At that event, after watching the play, many of those stakeholders sat together and talked; the play "created another workshop" for communication among people who normally would not meet in the same room (O'Hara, 2014, pp. 145-146). This is a concrete example of relational ethics being enacted: the art facilitated respectful encounters and potentially laid the groundwork for more cooperative relationships regarding the Klamath issues.

Salmon Is Everything's performative ritual approach bore fruit in measurable ways. It increased intercultural empathy and knowledge, fostered dialogue and even alliance-building, and inspired personal and collective reflection on responsibility. Attendees did not just watch a play; many described experiencing a shared journey or feeling part of something communal. They reported a palpable sense of healing and compassion—one evaluation of surveys noted that "most stated how the play affected them in some way" and

that this illustrated the play's "ability to educate" and provide a space for healing and compassion" (Guzman. 2012, p. 113, 98). Meanwhile, the facilitators observed transformations that hint at Turner's "communitas": people uniting in hope that "cooperation, dialogue, healing and compassion" could prevail (Guzman, 2012, p. 114). In essence, the audience reception data confirms that the play succeeded as a kind of modern ceremony: it educated minds, touched hearts, and brought people together into a temporary community of shared ethical concerns. By the play's end, spectators were not just informed but also emotionally invested, and many were motivated to carry the conversation forward, much as participants leaving a ceremony might carry its blessings and lessons into daily life (Guzman, 2012, p. 111).

Beyond the immediate responses of audiences, the longer-term reverberations of *Salmon Is Everything* can be glimpsed in the broader policy and community landscape of the Klamath Basin. The play's resonance did not end with its performances; rather, it helped shape a climate of awareness and dialogue that extended into regional debates over ecological restoration. Since 2002, the Klamath Basin has indeed seen significant movement toward dam removals and ecosystem restoration—progress achieved through many converging efforts (Kimbrough, 2024). Nevertheless, it is plausible that the public awareness and empathy cultivated by projects like *Salmon Is Everything* contributed to a more conducive climate for these changes by building grassroots support for dam removal over the years. At the very least, the project succeeded in training a generation of students and community members in intercultural collaboration and empowered Indigenous youth to use their voices in advocacy.

In an interview with Rolando Hernandez for *OPB*, Grand Ronde elder Marta Clifford explained that the play "really changed [her] life" (Hernandez, 2021). In subsequent years, she and director Theresa May continued their partnership by co-teaching Native theatre courses and even helping to launch a new Indigenous theater company in Eugene, reflecting the production's lasting impact on community leadership (Hernandez, 2021). This kind of sustained intercultural engagement yields long-term gains for relational ethics in the region, illustrating how community-based arts can foster enduring social and environmental change.

Ethical Collaboration and Performative Process

The relational ethic at the core of *Salmon Is Everything* was not only depicted in the story and felt by the audiences; it was embodied in the very process of creating and producing the play. From the outset, Theresa May approached the project with an ethic of collaboration, respect, and community consent that mirrors Indigenous protocols and community-based theatre principles. Examining the process reveals that the making of *Salmon Is Everything* was itself a performative act of ethical relationship-building—a sort of extended ceremony of its own, involving students, faculty, tribal members, and local people working together over several years.

One of May's first steps was to reach out to the Native community and other stakeholders before any script was written (May, 2014a, 105). In late 2003, shortly after the fish kill, May, then a professor at Humboldt State University, attended public meetings about the Klamath crisis and realized that while many scientists and officials were talking, the voices of the Indigenous people who were spiritually and culturally devastated were not being heard (May, 2014b, p. 5). Suzanne Burcell (2014), the director of the Indian Teacher and Educational Personnel Program at Humboldt State and a primary collaborator and adviser throughout the project, set an ethical tone when she said "[t]his was their story—no one could tell it better …" (2014, p. 21). With this in mind, Theresa May sought permission, input, and partnership from Indigenous representatives early on. After positive feedback and genuine interest from these parties, a decision was made to pursue what became the Klamath Theatre Project as a collaborative venture between the theatre program and the Native communities (May 2014b, p. 7).

An initial community meeting was held in the Klamath area to listen to tribal community members' concerns, ideas, and willingness to engage in a theatre project. elders and culture bearers, and several expressed both a need for their story to be heard and cautious hope that a play could help (May, 2014a, p. 104). Importantly, this meeting was not to extract stories immediately, but to establish trust and demonstrate that the theatre-makers were there to *listen* and learn. May noted that building trust was slow and required humility—for instance, understanding to respect "Indian time," meaning the project had to proceed at the community's pace, not on an externally imposed deadline (May, 2014a, pp. 105-108). This sensitivity to cultural protocol, such as not rushing elders, holding meetings in community spaces, sharing food, and Native students bringing their kids to the meetings and rehearsals, was part of the ethical approach.

With community blessing, May incorporated the project into her theatre courses. Over multiple semesters, students (both Native and non-Native) conducted interviews across the Klamath basin: they spoke with tribal fishermen, elders, healers, as well as non-tribal farmers, fish biologists, agency officials, and other residents. Indigenous students often interviewed their own relatives or community members, which meant cultural protocols such as showing respect, reciprocal sharing, and offering gifts or thanks were followed in gathering these stories. The ethical stance was to let people tell their own stories in their own words. Many first-person narratives collected with permission became the backbone of the script (McCovey, 2014, p. 98). In fact, two individuals are explicitly credited in the published play because their words animate certain characters*:* Barry McCovey Jr. and Becky Hatfield Hyde are cited in the text of the play where their words animate the characters of Tim, Alice, and Will (May, 2014c, p. viii). Citing them in the text is a way of giving authorship credit and honoring their intellectual property—an ethical practice in documentary theatre and Indigenous storytelling alike, where acknowledging the source of a story is a sign of respect and honesty.

The script development proceeded through public readings and workshops that invited community feedback at every stage (May, 2014a, p. 117). Early drafts were read at community centers and even at tribal gatherings. May made it clear from the beginning that they (the writers) wanted to "hear their thoughts about the direction the play was taking, and so that they (the community) could help [them] (the writers) hear what stories were beginning to emerge, and what stories and voices were still missing." [She] stressed that this was a work-in-progress, a living document that would be shaped by what they offered in the discussion that followed" (May, 2014a, p. 117). Toward the end of the second year, Theresa May believed that the perspectives of most stakeholders—tribal peoples, farmers, ranchers, environmentalists, government agencies, and the news media—had been captured, and she wondered whether anyone else should be included. Suzanne Burcell (2014) suggested that the fish be considered. May reacted with surprise, after which Burcell explained that despite the extensive discussion about the fish, their own point of view had been overlooked (Burcell, 2014, p.20). This was how the Native conception of community was conceived by integrating film footage into the production, "which provided unforgettable imagery of underwater life … with the naturally musical sounds of flowing water" (Burcell, 2014, p. 20). This iterative, dialogic process ensured that the community truly owned the play. In other words, the script was co-written in practice, even if May and a few others were penning the lines, because the content was continuously shaped by those whose lives it depicted. Jan Cohen-Cruz's (2005) principle of reciprocity in community-based performance—that the community should see its input materially affect the outcome—was clearly upheld here.

Alongside the script work, the production team made sure to involve community members in the casting and performance. The premiere at Humboldt State University in 2006 featured a mixed cast of university students and community members, including Native actors playing Native roles, which was culturally vital (May, 2014a, p. 134). Some tribal participants had never acted before but were supported through the process —a process which itself was healing and empowering for them (May, 2014a, p. 135). As Kathleen McCovey described, being invited to read and eventually perform allowed her to "speak from the heart" and realize

her voice could help write her people's history (2014, p. 93). There were also cultural advisors and language coaches present as the play uses Yurok, Karuk, and Hupa words in parts. For instance, Julian Lang (Karuk) and others contributed to translating lines and ensuring accurate pronunciation, as acknowledged in the book credits (May, 2014b, p. viii). This is part of the ethical protocol: if you are going to use the Indigenous language or ceremony in a performance, you must involve knowledge keepers to guide you.

Throughout rehearsals, relationships were foregrounded over efficiency. The director, Theresa J. May, and the cast often held circles to discuss how scenes related to their own experiences, allowing personal feelings to be aired (O'Hara, 2014, p. 143). During one rehearsal, Kathy McCovey shared with the cast the story behind her ceremonial skirt: how she made it with her grandfather and why it was so meaningful (May, 2014a, p. 129). The script at that point had included a fictional anecdote, but upon hearing Kathleen McCovey's real story, the team decided essentially to let her story be in the play (May, 2014a, p. 137). This kind of flexibility —privileging real personal truth over a made-up line—is an ethical artistic choice that values authenticity and the contributor's voice. It also meant that Kathleen McCovey performed that monologue as the Karuk elder Rose with full emotional truth, as it was hers, creating a powerful moment on stage and a respectful representation.

Collaboration extended to shared decision-making about sensitive content. For example, the inclusion of ceremonial elements such as the final chant of "Sacred is..." in Native languages, or mentioning specific sacred sites, was discussed with tribal partners (May, 2007, p. 154; May, 2014a, p. 139-140). In one footnote, the script references a real figure, Agnes Baker Pilgrim (Takelma elder), who in real life was involved in reviving a salmon ceremony in 1994. Including a real name in a fictionalized play could be delicate, but it was done in a footnote with context, likely after obtaining approval, to connect the play's message to the actual cultural resurgence happening concurrently (May, 2014c, p. 57). By blending documentation with narrative in this careful way, the creators showed respect for their real-world counterparts and avoided misrepresentation.

The ethic of the process was perhaps best summed up by two models of community theatre by Adrianna Guzman: "One model sees community theatre as a collaborative creative process, owned by all those who participate, striving to give voice to different perspectives... The second model [is theatre about communities made by outsiders]" (Guzman, 2012, p. 38). *Salmon Is Everything* clearly followed the first model, a collaborative piece that represents community, not one that appropriates community stories for someone else's agenda. The project was collaborative from the start, and as a result, the community felt a sense of ownership (May, 2014a, p. 136-137). This had practical ethical outcomes: for instance, when touring the play to different locations, tribal communities welcomed it because they trusted it was *their* story being told right. As noted earlier, people requested additional performances, which signals broad community consent and approval (Burcell, 2014, p. 22).

Another ethical dimension was the democratization of the creative process in line with Augusto Boal's (1979/2008) Theatre of the Oppressed techniques. While *Salmon Is Everything* was a scripted play (not an improvised forum theatre), its development had elements of Boal's methodology: Interviewees became like "spect-actors" in that their testimonies shaped the drama, and public readings allowed audiences to essentially rehearse solutions and voice their thoughts, influencing the next iteration. Boal (1979/2008, p. xxi) insisted that theatre should transform spectators into active participants in their own story. Here, the Klamath River community was not a passive subject; they were the co-authors and co-directors of the narrative of their crisis and recovery. This not only made the content more resonant, but it was an ethical stance of sharing power—a conscious counter to the disempowerment they often experienced in political arenas.

The collaborative process in Guzman's study demonstrated significant therapeutic effects in real time. According to Guzman (2012), "*Salmon Is Everything*'s collaborative process allowed for greater dialogue" (pp. 53, 60-61), which fostered not only deeper interpersonal connections but also provided a platform for healing through the interview and rehearsal stages. Guzman (2012) emphasized that "critical reflection on one's own stories opened the door for listening and trying to understand someone else's stories" (p. 119), thereby creating a transformative experience throughout the research process as participants sought out and shared their narratives. This multifaceted engagement ultimately enriched the participants' journeys, leading to profound insights and emotional healing. For example, the young Yurok participant, Lauren, had negative stereotypes of government agencies and the Upper Klamath people. However, when she "attend[ed] a Klamath River Stakeholder workshop, sponsored by the Klamath agriculturalists and held in the upper Klamath Basin," she ended up meeting agency officials and upstream folks, breaking down her preconceptions (May, 2007, p. 159). Thus, the playmaking became a microcosm of what it hoped to achieve in the community at large: building bridges and compassion.

In conclusion, the making of *Salmon Is Everything* constituted an ethical performance in its own right—an enactment of relational ethics. The process honored Indigenous protocols of storytelling (listening, reciprocity, giving credit), adhered to community-based theatre ethics (collaboration, mutual respect, empowerment), and treated all participants with dignity and care. It not only yielded a powerful play but also performed the very values of respect, reciprocity, and relationship that the play's message advocated. The work functioned as a ceremony offstage before it ever became a ceremony onstage. This consonance of means and ends—a play about building bridges that was created by building bridges—greatly enhances the integrity and impact of the work. It demonstrates that, for art addressing Indigenous subjects and communal trauma, how one creates is as important as what one creates. In the case of *Salmon Is Everything*, the creators and the community together established an ethical space (Ermine, 2007, p. 193) in which a new shared story could emerge—one that all participants could take pride in and learn from.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that *Salmon Is Everything* is more than a theatrical narrative; it stands as a model for ethical, Indigenous-centered, relational ecology in practice. Drawing on deeply rooted Indigenous perspectives and a collaborative creative process, the play exemplifies how art can translate ecological values into lived practice. It extends beyond symbolic representation into actionable intercultural praxis, actively engaging diverse communities in environmental stewardship and dialogue. As a result, *Salmon Is Everything* serves as a paradigm of performance that bridges narrative and action, demonstrating how theater can embody the principles of environmental ethics and intercultural reciprocity.

Indeed, the play functions as both artistic activism and environmental education. Its community-based development and performance not only raised public awareness about the Klamath River crisis but also actively involved tribal and non-tribal participants in shared storytelling and reflection, thus serving as a powerful pedagogical tool. The intercultural dialogue fostered by the play also carried a profound healing dimension, helping to mend strained relationships by providing a space for mutual understanding and by re-centering Indigenous knowledge in the narrative of environmental stewardship. Through this bridging of activism, education, and communal healing, the play demonstrates the unique capacity of performance not just to depict an environmental crisis but also to intervene in it, nurturing both awareness and restoration.

This interdisciplinary inquiry significantly enriches both ecocriticism and performance studies. For ecocriticism, the case of *Salmon Is Everything* offers a concrete example of how environmental storytelling in theater can move beyond abstract representation toward embodied ethical action. It does so in particular by centering Indigenous relational epistemologies that are often marginalized in mainstream environmental

discourse. For performance studies, this analysis reveals that community-engaged drama can function as more than a cultural expression—it becomes an intercultural intervention with tangible social and ecological outcomes. By bringing these critical lenses together, the article presents a novel framework for understanding performance as a catalyst for ecological insight and change, underscoring its original contribution to both fields.

Salmon Is Everything stands not only as a compelling piece of theatre but also as a living testament to the power of collaborative storytelling in advancing environmental justice and cultural healing. The play's capacity to bridge activism, education, and healing—highlighted throughout this article—illustrates how performance can transform awareness into action and bring communities together in pursuit of ecological restoration. Revisiting the play's titular assertion that "salmon is everything" serves as a reminder that a people, a river, and a keystone species share an inextricably entwined fate; meaningful change emerges from honoring these relationships and responsibilities. Ultimately, the case of *Salmon Is Everything* affirms that performance, when grounded in ethical relationality and intercultural collaboration, can be a vital force for ecological justice and collective renewal.

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