School: School of Music and Performing Arts

Researcher: Silva Semerciyan

Project Title: I and the Village

UOA: 33- Music, Drama, Dance, Performing Arts, Film and Screen Studies

300-Word Statement

I and the Village is a practice-based research project initiated by Silva Semerciyan, Drama Lecturer at Bath Spa University. It combined mock verbatim form and the structure of the *Stationendrama* to interrogate constitutional linchpins of America's national/political identity, in particular, the political consensus upholding the second amendment right to keep and bear arms. As outsiders investigate why a teenage girl walked into a church with a gun, the voices of her community weigh in on the possible causes. These 'congregants' become an unreliable chorus, and through them, a collective retelling of the narrative gathers momentum while separately, the teenage girl is deconstructed across her own stations of the cross.

I and the Village is conceived of as a 'Midwestern', embodying some of the dialectical divisions between self and community of the Western while also exploring the ennui of the soulless suburb. Here, the church as community stands in opposition to the 'I' of the story, querying her dissent. Whereas in mid-century plays such as Miller's *All My Sons*, Darwinist individualism is critiqued, in *I and the Village* prioritization of the collective over the individual is problematized. Naturalistic scenes are interspersed with expressionistic ones, echoing Buchner's *Woyceck*, to render the community increasingly suspect. The play's multi-layered, multi perspectival dimensions reflect the influence of post dramatic theatre in fragmenting the reliability of characterisation itself.

With funding from the BBC Performing Arts Fund and Arts Council England, the research culminated in a four week long production of the play at London's Theatre503. The play was subsequently presented at a staged reading in Santa Barbara California in 2019, with the intention of a further production in the 2021/22.