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by

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**Freedom from Control**


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# Freedom from Control


by

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## Thesis

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# Dedication

"I wanted to be seen as someone in the process of becoming."

Camas Davis

*"*Directing is great leadership, it's not control, it's responsibility."

Risa Brainin

"We are volcanos."

Ursula K Le Guin

This thesis is dedicated to the shoulders on which I stand.

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"I did it all by myself." (Allison Janney, 2018 Oscar Speech)


I could have never done this by myself, nor would I have ever wanted to.

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everyone around me.

**Abstract**


**Freedom from Control**



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This thesis examines my directing and leaderships tactics during my time as an MFA in Directing candidate at the University of Texas at Austin and while leading three productions: *The Bigot* (William Glick), *Dry Land* (Ruby Rae Spiegel) and *ENRON* (Lucy Prebble). I will chart my evolving leadership practices and discuss how tactics that fit the masculine/feminine, powerful/powerless and control/freedom binaries are from a dated and male-coded hierarchical directing practice. This document envisions a new way of directing that moves from power to authentic authority and from being in control to being in charge.

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# INTRODUCTION

The first time I directed a new play, I kicked the playwright out of rehearsals. I'm not proud of this. I was an undergraduate director with only one credit under my belt and a mammoth pressure to fill the role of "Director." I only knew one way, that the director must always be the only one in control of the room and the idea of more than one person "at the top" sparked a fear that led to the banishment. In an attempt to be perceived as competent, in control and therefore a leader, my only solution was to remove anyone who I felt tested my position. I've spent graduate school challenging every assumption I had about leading, stripping my directing practice to its very core, examining my pre-existing toolkit and creating new habits. In the midst of this intense scrutiny, I started to realize how often my notions of leadership were tied to gender-based assumptions. I'm now aware of how my fear of being perceived as a weak leader is wrapped up in my own misconceptions of female leadership. Deep in my history I started to assume that being a woman had automatically put me into the "not a good leader" camp and therefore I've pushed myself to adopt tactics coded as male in an attempt to be seen as capable and as a "good" director.

This thesis tracks my journey of learning to sit in between the opposite ends of three binaries: control/freedom, powerful/powerless and masculine/feminine. My time in graduate school has been a lesson in how to live in the undefined gray between these extremes and redefine what individual leadership looks and feels like for me. The

structure for this document will be via two different lenses. One is the discussion of my own personal journey while directing three productions as an MFA candidate in the Department of Theatre & Dance. My second lens of inquiry to see what other directors practice, by using informal interviews and research into the leadership tactics of some of the most respected women who are currently in leadership positions in the American Theatre.

Arguably, one can say that since directing became a profession, the majority of high-profile theatre directors in the US has been white men. One can also argue that generally these men are assumed to inherently have power and leadership in the rehearsal room, no matter the actions of the individual. As a young director I understood that I had to use extreme versions of masculine power tactics to be taken seriously. From my interviews and research into the American theatre community and research into women leaders in public positions (such as politics), I have found that I am not unique in these assumptions. Women often adopt these tactics, that might not fit them, in an attempt to be seen as capable because the tactics get the job done and because they "work," they aren't interrogated. I am a member of this cycle, using methods that have been "good enough" for me and not examining them. I cannot break a large scale systematic cycle all at once, especially an ingrained and patriarchal one, but I can illuminate and identify how I've changed my own assumptions about directing, leadership and power and hope that through my own personal work, the system will shift.

In defining my new ways of being an artist and a leader, I will investigate my own journey through directing and discuss how I changed and created new individual directing tactics through these three productions. My process of letting go of my pursuit of masculine coded power tactics includes the definition of the ill-fitting behaviors I used, the incorporation of leadership as a part of my artistic practice and the argument that in theatre, people must be as important as the product. I have learned that a good leader and director is someone who regards leadership as a responsibility, who is comfortable sitting in discomfort and showing their own vulnerability.

**THE GENETIC CODE OF A DIRECTOR**

You cannot talk about the history of American theatre without mentioning the women who helped shape the movement: Helen Hays, Zelda Fichandler, Susan Glaspell, Hallie Flanagan, Eva La Gallienne, Anne Bogart, Nina Moise, Ida Ruth, Cheryl Crawford, Margo Jones, Nina Vance, Margaret Webster, Ellen Stewart, María Irene Fornés and many others. This is a long a rich history, but it makes me wonder about those women who might have been forgotten because they did not fit the mold. In the *Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Directing*, a general overview of the lineage and history of directing and published in 2013, only four women directors (Ariane Mnouchkine, Katie Mitchell, Liz LeCompte and Anna Zubrzycki) are discussed. There are 41 male directors with their own sections in this book. Helen Krich Chinoy wrote in the 1987 introduction to her anthology *Women in American Theatre,* "They [women theatre artists] have tended to commit their energies to the nurturing art rather than to the competitive business of theatre" (xxviii). What we've see throughout history is that the more money and power attached to a show, then fewer women are hired to direct it and this practice is still prevalent today. There is a cultural image of a "prototypically effective leader," as defined by Margarita Mayo in her Harvard Business Review study, that we have been hardwired to follow and this model for a theatre director is a white cis-man, because the role was built by and for white cis-men.

I am in the lucky generation of women directors. I have more access and opportunities for directing and leadership positions than those who came before me. I do not need to fight as hard as they did and I reap the benefits of the work they did towards accessibility and equality.  For example, I do not need to start my own theatre company to make opportunities for myself, whereas Zelda Fichandler said in the *Women in American Theatre* anthology that the women of her generation "started their theatres in order to create places for themselves to direct plays" (206). While it has never been better for women directors than it is right now, the preconceived notions of the traits of a "good" leader, biological or not, run deep and my education before grad school did not emphasize a way of directing that was authentic to me.

This stereotype of a "good" director was enforced during my undergraduate education. While learning about the great male directors, the "history makers," it was subtly suggested that these men were difficult to work with, but because they were revered for being artists, their behavior was accepted and lauded. On the other hand, I was taught that when a woman director portrayed these traits (difficult, demanding, loud, opinionated), she was classified as a "bitch" and "unstable." It was drilled into me that when women use these strategies to communicate their vision, they are met with resistance and slim job prospects. I was also told that to be a great artist, I had to use these traits to achieve my vision. I was stuck between two sets of rules for myself and neither one worked for me. According to feminist philosopher Christine Battersby in her 1990 book, *Gender and Genius*, the "genius" is envisioned as male and male sexual

energy is treated as a key force of creative brilliance, while female sexuality is considered conflicting with artistic practice. I wanted to be a genius, but my takeaway was always that I couldn't be.

Even though I am not the director or the person that I was during my time in undergrad, these old thinking patterns still wormed their way into my practice. In my fight be to be seen as an artist, like many young directors, I would struggle to make sure that my voice was heard, and my presence felt because I assumed that forceful controlling of the room meant "good" leadership. In a personal interview with famed theatre director Leigh Silverman, I found that this thinking was not unique to me, Silverman said; "the thing that was really taught to me was that I would be lucky to get any job at all." Young Hannah believed that "good" directors were harsh, but also loved, and I again found myself stuck in the impossibility of a paradox. In this environment, I decided that I had to earn everyone's trust and I had to prove myself daily as competent enough to win that trust. I built a façade of what I thought directors did to control and I adopted a set of rules for myself: a leader must be strong, must not show weakness, must not cry and must not share anything that the team might perceive as weakness. I wanted to see the actor's vulnerability, but I was repelled by my own. Vulnerability was a courage in others and an inadequacy in me.

I had trained myself to be a directing robot, a person who didn't need time off, didn't need a life outside of theatre and who could direct without being emotionally

connected to the work. Emotions and rest were regarded as weaknesses and in my brain, weaknesses didn't make a competent leader. I was trying to remove my personhood from the creative practice. I became skilled at "serpentining," meaning trying to control a situation by backing out of it, ignoring it and pretending that I didn't care. "Serpentining" is defined by Brené Brown her book *Daring Greatly*, about vulnerability and leadership as: "We use it to dodge conflict, discomfort, possible confrontation, the potential for shame or hurt, and/or criticism (self or other inflicted)" (165). To be a directing robot, I took on the values that I assumed were prized in masculinity and leadership: autonomy, reason, individuality and competitiveness. I associated womanhood with vulnerability and matters of the "heart" and assumed that to direct, I needed to be solely concerned with the matters of the "head." Control and perfectionism are antithetical to art and I had lost the joy, the mess, the body, the emotions and the art making.

I had created the impossible task of trying to achieve an image of leadership that would never fit me. As a woman, I assumed that I would never reach the level of power that men naturally had and would have to work harder to be seen, heard and obeyed. May Adrales talked about her tactics towards this in her recent interview on the blog, The Interval, as "I would sit on backs of chairs just to make myself bigger and sort of overcompensate, and I was always very loud." There is one obvious answer to my self-exclusion from the identity of director, that at the time there were simply too few options of women directors to study, even ten years ago. The women who were excelling at that time still speak about their insecurity in their positions and the uncharted territory that

they faced in trying to make a new model. Silverman talks about this time and the development of her own voice in these words; "All we want is to be taken seriously and the question of how you do that relates so much to who you are and your culture." There is evidence of a larger issue here, of what society generally accepts as leadership and power and how women have never worn this cultural prototype of leadership well, despite their best attempts. In her memoir, *Dance of the Dissident Daughter*, Sue Monk Kidd begins to parse out how these attempts at male coded leadership can be detrimental to women: "A daughter [of the patriarchy] is a woman who remains internally dependent, who does not shape her identity and direction as a woman but tends to accept the identity and direction projected onto her. She tends to become the image of woman that the cultural father idealizes" (pg. 53).

This traditional definition of "good" leadership immediately places the leader at the top of a hierarchical pyramid and celebrates top down leadership tactics. The definition stems from the centuries we've spent making the workplace a comfortable space for men. I defined "good" leadership for directors as: having all the power, not listening to anyone else's ideas, and controlling all aspects of the process and rehearsal room. My assumption was that if the director does not do these things, someone else will take over the process.

**ILL FITTING TACTICS**

My time in graduate school has been a process of trying on new forms of leadership and finding a director identity that is tied to my own authenticity. This means interrogating every single one of my habits and tactics with the question "does this really work for me?" When I assume that alpha maleness is leadership, I have to work to implement and uphold these patriarchal power tactics, but resistance to them is equally exhausting. Ultimately, working with these tactics has been the easier choice because it's the only thing I've known. Susie Medak, the long-time managing director of Berkeley Repertory Theatre put this problem into these terms: "There are a lot of women who feel that they've had to work so hard to command authority in a rehearsal hall. There is a way that people perceive what authority looks like and because it doesn't look like a woman, women feel that they have to work harder to assume authority."

The first of these ill-fitting habits is the internal monitor I have on myself, the outside eye that's constantly watching me for "good" or "bad" tactics. I am not unique in this; my conversations with other women directors reveal the same tendencies, the self-policing eye that tries to quantify the amount of power that the director has and how it's being received. A director's job is to read the room and affect the psychology of a space, but when the director is mostly focused on them self, it's difficult to be present to the nuances in the room. When I am watching the space for how I'm being perceived and

worrying about my power, my control and my ability to influence, I'm not able to be present to the artistry in the rehearsal.

I am also not present to the creativity in the room when I'm analyzing what I say and how I speak. Scholar and classicist Mary Beard points out in her collection of her recent speeches, *Women and Power,* that it is still the case that when "listeners hear a female voice, they do not hear a voice that connotes authority" (30). In an attempt to make myself an authority figure, I was constantly checking my use of qualifiers, modify my speaking patterns and practice speaking without up-speak. When I try to only use direct statements, I find that I'm without one of my tools for checking in with the actors. Verbally touching base after working with phrases such as "did that work for you?" and "what are you getting out of this?" are good tools in relationship building and welcoming the actor's process. When I assumed that check-ins are a sign of weakness, then I wasn't making space for an individual actor's process, as well as my own. Journalist Ann Friedman writes about this in her think piece for the website The Cut, in which she calls for women to speak in a way that is more authentic to themselves. "When we use words like *so*, *I guess*, *like*, *actually*, and *I mean*, we are sending signals to the listener to help them figure out what's new, what's important, or what's funny. We're connecting with them." In attempts to remove this type of language from my speech patterns, I'm only focusing on the way I'm speaking and how I'm trying to be read as androgynous. In these moments I'm actively trying to compensate for my assumption of a perceived bias against me in the room. Director GT Upchurch recently stated in an interview on *The*

*Interval*, "So, if there's a problem with women using those words, or checking in with other people in the room, I think that's a problem with perception and not necessarily a problem that female directors need to address themselves." When I only focus on how I speak, I am an impersonator of a role that I am not owning as my own.

These external attempts to be taken seriously affect every aspect of how a woman director operates in the room. There is the assumed outfit for a leader (a suit fitted to a man) and many women mention their attempts to use clothing as a tactic towards power. Influential and lauded director Anne Kauffman described her early outfits to The Interval as, "I used to dress like a man and go into a room and sort of de-sex myself so people would see me as an authority figure." In trying to adopt a template of what I thought powerful women should wear, I again was only focused on myself and how I was being perceived, but, as Medak says, it's also important to take your clothing into consideration, "You do have to think about what is the message that you're projecting with what you're wearing. How people perceive you impacts if they believe you." These tactics, voice, clothes and the internal monitor are only surface levels attempts to prove my own authority and ability to lead a room. They are external "fixes" that stifle any internal change.

Even if I don't adhere to these tactics, society still dictates that I must internally monitor my emotions. Vulnerability in a leader is still perceived as a weakness, no matter the gender. I've led rehearsal rooms with the fear that if I showed any crack in my armor

and exposed vulnerability, then the cast would not trust me and would possibly use my emotions against me. Famed theatre and TV director Liesl Tommy talked about her own masking of emotions on The Interval; "No matter what you're feeling in that room, you just never show any anxiety." Emotional accessibility can be a shame trigger for directors and leaders. To appear strong, leaders must keep a cool distance from their employees and followers to continue the façade of prestige and power. If you're too relatable, you're unprofessional, according to Brown: "In the ivory tower [academia] we're taught to wear the pedantic label like a suit of armor" (12).  In an attempt to hold onto my façade in the room, I kept myself at a distance, becoming a directing robot to enforce my vision and keep myself "safe."  Monk Kidd claims that this way of working is antithetical to women's natural authority "Running the show is hardly female authority. To stand firm with power and dignity has little to do with ordering people around, constantly uncorking a lot of strong opinions and judgments, controlling things or spouting off when someone pushes your button" (246).

In a society that continues to deem emotional women as "hysterical," this removal of a director's emotional accessibility is a tactic that continues to perpetuate the image of a strong, emotionless man as the most effective leader. Women have the added pressure to be caregivers in the rooms, the "mother" who nurtures the cast. There is a dichotomy that women directors must choose in a patriarchal rehearsal room, where love and anger cannot coexist. Therefore, when she expresses anger, she is a "bitch," she's expected to portray love, but too much of that also means that she is "indecisive and weak." In

*Double Bind*, a recent collection of essays on women and their relationship to ambition,

Julie Holland writes about this in the start-up sector as, "Bitchy, bossy, strident, shrew…

If you look at women's employment reviews, certain words show up repeatedly, like

bossy, abrasive, strident, aggressive. This is when women lead; words like emotional and

irrational are used when they object" (219). Women directors are trapped in a similar

double bind and in an attempt to remove myself from these feminine definitions

(indecisive and the emotional care taker), I also adopted the masculine double bind.


The double bind is defined by Brown as "a situation in which options are very

limited and all of them expose us to penalty, censure or deprivation" (88). I'm stuck

between the cultural rules for women and the accepted cultural markers of a leader. My

definition of my own double bind, the conflicting messages and rules that I get from

different directors and mentors for how I should present in the rehearsal room boils down

to this list:

> Never cry.
> Never yell, show anger or frustration.
> Always show that you are calm, especially in tech.
> Never show anything but calm, especially in tech. Internalize all pressure you might feel.
> Make sure you're taller than everyone else by sitting on the backs of chairs, sitting on tables and standing. Don't sit on the floor.
> Wear heels.
> Don't wear heels.
> Wear skirts to highlight your femininity.
> Wear pants and hide your body.
> Be in control in tech, make sure you know how to talk to the technicians.
> Don't say sorry.
> Don't use qualifiers.
> Always look good and never let them see you sweat.

Be the loudest in the room, everyone must be listening to you at all times.
Don't be crazy. Be stable.
Don't hurt anyone's feelings, but also say what's on your mind.

The double bind rules are not unique to women; Brown also defines the masculine version through these statements: "I am not allowed to be afraid. I am not allowed to show fear. I am not allowed to be vulnerable" (97). These are sets of rules that are impossible to adhere to, but yet are seen as the only options when trying to be perceived as powerful. For a long time, I tried to adhere to the rules of both lists, I was mimicking how I thought successful leaders should present emotionally in the room, and I was attempting to be perceived in the way that I thought women should be as well. This led to a huge amount of rules for me to follow and none of the free aspects that men inherently have. Josie Rourke, the artistic director of Donmar Warehouse talked to The Interval about how "We are not celebrated for being wild, or erratic, or eccentric, or offbeat, or challenging in the way that perhaps men are." Under these limitations, I spent more time worrying about how I was being obeyed in the rehearsal room and if I had lost power, instead of living in the creative moment. Emotionless and nice was safe, but I was creatively stifled. Many women directors talk about this, Liesl Tommy said to The Interval; "I swallowed all of my feelings for the good of the room. I know so many Tony-winning [male] directors who freak the fuck out during tech, who are shouting, being abusive, and they work all the time—*all the time.*" I was stuck in a cycle where I couldn't develop my own rehearsal room culture and directing language, because I was worried that every wrong step might have been my last. I did not challenge the system because it

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seemed to "work" for me, I didn't know any other way and the risk of changing my process might cost me my future jobs. When I spoke to Leigh Silverman, she described being stuck in this system as "I had to fight really hard when I was younger for authority. It's so hard to be the youngest person in the room and be in control of the room and make the decisions…I was so afraid that if that person didn't like me or if someone said something bad about me then I wouldn't get another job."

Over the last three years in graduate school, I've realized that vulnerability and humility are pillars in my own directing philosophy and practice. I've been able to see that there are other options than the culturally defined script for directors that was written by men. When rehearsal rooms and production teams only know to accept one form of leadership, a woman director can be stuck fighting an uphill battle of trying to prove herself while also building a creative and collaborative environment. In an attempt to look, speak and lead in certain ways, I've been scrambling to wear an ill-fitting form of leadership of which I am just now realizing the barriers. Now I have begun to experiment with what my true authority looks like in creative practices, one that is removed from of the masculine/feminine, powerful/powerless and freedom/control binaries.

**OLD HABITS DIE HARD: DIRECTING *THE BIGOT***


When I directed *The Bigot* by William Glick as part of the 2017 University of
Texas at Austin's New Theatre (UTNT), I was hitting the limits of my old way of
thinking. The deep-rooted habits and directing tactics mentioned above were no longer
working for me and I was at a loss for what to try or how to work. I was stuck between
wanting to be liked and wanting to control and it was at this time that I felt the least
confident in the rehearsal room. *The Bigot* is a play about Simon Levinson and his
relationship with his conservative father. When Simon accuses his father of bigotry, he
must confront his own challenges and prejudices. It asks us to explore the gains and
losses of societal progression. I spent much of the rehearsal process attempting to prove
that I was competent, and I felt as though I could barely operate under the "be the best"
pressure that I had placed on myself. I was constantly afraid that I would lose the space I
had carved out for myself. In a play that required so much of the actor's vulnerability, I
was afraid to match it. My attempts at perfectionism and being a "directing robot" had
left me lost; without the joy, the mess, the body and the emotions that were required for
*The Bigot*.


When I saw power as a finite commodity, I was constantly worried that if
someone else took it, I would never get it back. I've been writing daily morning pages for
five years now and I wrote in this journal at the time, "It's hard to direct this play, I do
feel like I'm his [William's] puppet sometimes. I feel stuck and I'm trying to find my

own voice in this. I'm directing to please him, and I need to let it be bigger than that."
This was easier said than done for me. To prove that I was in charge, I set daily goals for
the rehearsals and mistakenly assumed that these goals were at the end of a straight path
that I could barrel through. If we achieved our goals for the day, it was a successful one
and if we got side tracked or started to meander, it was wasted. What resulted was a
disjointed room, a "right and wrong" environment and a desire to get to the end. While it
was by no means a bad process, it also never flourished. This is the point where I could
see the limits of my old ways of working. Proving myself meant that everything had to be
perfect and the actors took on this ideal as well, not letting themselves even try to fail in
the rehearsal room.

As before, I spent much of my time internally focused on power and making sure
I had the "upper hand." Any wrong direction I tried out was immediately fixed by a
choice that was "good enough." While the "good enough" choices worked, I did not
allow us time to sit in the wrong and illuminate any other possibilities in the script. I put
pressure on myself to get it right, ideally the first time, to be powerful and also make sure
that everyone was happy. I had lost myself in an attempt to be what my younger self
thought a director was "supposed to be." The drive towards "perfect" had once again
gotten in the way of the messiness of my humanity and art making. As Brown points out
in *Daring Greatly,* "Art, among all the other tidy categories, most closely resembles what
it is like to be human. To be alive. It is our nature to be imperfect. To have uncategorized
feelings and emotions. To make or do things that don't sometimes necessarily make

sense. Art is all just perfectly imperfect" (136). In an attempt to be tidy and perfect, I was thinking solely with my head and not directing with my body.

I don't believe that the drive to get it right and be perfect is a pressure that only women directors feel. This pressure exists for all directors and the litmus test for us is the ability to work despite this pressure. The pressure that is more unique to women directors is the "one shot" mentality. Either consciously or subconsciously, we are told that we have one chance to prove ourselves. May Adrales mentions in her interview with *The Interval,* "You feel like you just have one chance. I definitely feel that." In *The Bigot*, if I didn't get it right with William, I thought I would never work with him again. I had to make myself crucial enough to his process to make sure that he could never work without me again. My ego was loud with the pressure to hold ground and impress. Women have to carve out a space for themselves in the room, if they do not claim that space, there is a fear that they may be looked over or ignored. Medak told me that in her early days of leading LORT that "I had to find a way to make myself distinctive. To make sure that I was in the room, that I was perceived as being an indispensable part of the team…. I hosted all of the social events. I found for me that it was a terrifically effective way of making sure that nobody could ignore me."

Under my constant pressure to be amazing and revolutionary while directing *The Bigot*, I learned that it's really hard to break old habits and make new ones when the stakes feel insurmountably high. I'd fallen back on all my old tactics that were "good

enough," and sacrificed any real change for the instant gratification of being told I was good. It's easier for me to follow the "tried and true" path and to overlook the flaws of that system and what *The Bigot* taught me is that this leaves me dissatisfied with my work. Towards the end of the rehearsal process I reflected in my journal that "This has been a really hard process and I'm not sure it's been enjoyable." To break this cycle for myself has meant identifying and trusting the authority that I already possess.

**LEADING WITH VULNERABILITY**

The root of the word vulnerability is derived from the Latin *vulnerare*, meaning "to wound." The definition of vulnerability includes "capable of being wounded" and "open to attack or damage." Merriam-Webster defines weakness as the inability to withstand attack or wounding. From a language perspective, it's clear to me that weakness and vulnerability are different concepts and Brown argues that "weakness often stems from a lack of vulnerability- when we don't acknowledge how and where we're tender, we're more at risk of being hurt" (39). When I allow myself to be capable of being wounded and show that it's a possibility to my collaborators, I'm more present and I put more of myself in the work. When I let my guard down, I'm modeling that this is a process in which I will not knowingly wound collaborators and that I expect the same from them. It levels the playing field and Brown, who illuminates much about this concept says: "To feel is to be vulnerable. To believe vulnerability is weakness is to believe that feeling is weakness" (33).

What being vulnerable means to me is that I have to practice authenticity, be present in the rehearsal room and work to make the rehearsal room safe for all. Presence in the process means that I am in the moment, able to listen to my collaborators and not responding with fight/flight reactions. Authenticity to me means that I listen closely to my instincts and I speak honestly to my collaborators about my feelings about the work. This doesn't mean that I tell them all my feelings at all moments, but I also never lie. It

takes work for me to be present and authentic to the moment and also to my emotions and I've found that it's a muscle that must be worked daily. The ability to remove myself from my head, to direct from a place of emotional exposure, risk-taking and listening to the room means that I am internally more focused on the room and directing with my entire body. It's the first step in letting go of the need to control the room. Medak uses vulnerability as management tool; "I find vulnerability extremely useful. It's about how you manage process, how you manage people…. Being honest and truthful is just doing your job."

As I've been morphing my own definition of a director and letting go of some of the inherited social constructs of "good" leadership, I've learned that it takes work to change a cycle. This has been an uphill battle, full of missteps and mistakes in front of others, as designers and actors learn how to adapt to my changing process. I have to name my new values to the team and practice accountability in working towards those values. Vulnerability and humility have become pillars of my directing practice. I'm not unique, there are many currently working directors who define their directing philosophy on these terms. Ariane Mnouchkin, a director who consistently breaks the cycle of how theatre is made, calls herself a guide in the *Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Directing*, "She likens herself to football fans at a match who support, incite and spur on their team; the less a director says the better because directors who impose their ideas on actors are usually anxious, in a hurry or narcissistic" (101). Director and teacher Risa Brainin stated her philosophy to me as "I have a collaborative room and some actors mistake that for

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weakness…. Ultimately you have to lead, but you can give every single person ownership of what you're doing. You can let everybody feel like they contributed."

In my conversation with renown director Leah Gardiner, she said that her training and practice hinged on being "smart enough to say, 'I don't know.'" This is a widely used tactic that in my experience also takes practice and time. The notion that the director needs to know all the answers now feels dated, but it is still destructive. A director who puts pressure on themselves to have all the answers sets up an environment where it's implied that some people know less than and therefore are less than. When "I don't know" comes from an honest place, I'm able to be an experimenter in the room and forms the room as a team that is solving the play together. This means trusting my collaborators and my place as one of them. This is a move towards more authentic power for me, power that is shared. I must be honest, present, a member of the team and also a leader. I must also know how my emotions and words affect the space. There is an assumption that vulnerability means sharing all feelings without a filter; this word vomit is where the fear of vulnerability comes from. For directors to use vulnerability as an asset, it must be seen as crucial and not at the opposite end of the emotionless spectrum.

I have found that being in the in between does not come easy. This kind of vulnerability is a practice that must be worked as a muscle. To let myself expose my own learning and work to be an equal in the room is not something that happens overnight. Letting go of needing to be liked has been the hardest muscle for me to work. As

Chimananda Ngozi Adichie says in *Dear Ijeawele, or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions*, "We have a world full of women who are unable to exhale fully because they have for so long been conditioned to fold themselves into shapes to make themselves likeable" (37). What I've learned is that when I'm more worried about being liked and wanting everyone to have a good time, I don't challenge myself to make artistic choices past "good enough." An old way of thinking for me is to believe that a smooth process is a successful one and that when I'm the "smallest headache," I'm the best collaborator. What I've found over my time in school is that this is a detriment to myself, to the art and to the team.

I now start each process by honestly and authentically naming for the team what the play will cost me and what risks I'm going to be taking in my personal work. For my recent production of *ENRON*, I gave the entire team a list of my vision and values for the process. A risk for me in the process is to show more of myself to the team, to let them see me as a human and not a "directing robot." I'm drawn to directing work that scares me and approaching it in an easy way is antithetical to risk taking. To offer up my own risks is to ask the collaborators to meet me with theirs, a step in building a safe rehearsal room. A safe rehearsal room results in dangerous choices in performance because the team is willing to work with rigor inside safety. I cannot lead with the goal of showing my power and control, but rather I show that I am one of many, open to listening, to be vulnerable, to be wounded, to make mistakes and to be wrong, all tenements in risk taking. I count this humility as an asset, it's an investment in avoiding resentment for me

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and it's towards the health of my collaborators. In Mayo's Harvard Business Review

study on humble leaders, she illuminates her findings as:

> Humble leaders improve the performance of a company in the long run because
> they create more collaborative environments. They have a balanced view of
> themselves – both their virtues and shortcomings – and a strong appreciation of
> others' strengths and contributions, while being open to new ideas and feedback.
> These "unsung heroes" help their believers to build their self-esteem, go beyond
> their expectations, and create a community that channels individual efforts into an
> organized group that works for the good of the collective.

This takes a lot more work for me, it requires me to think about how I activate the team,

how I project confidence in my decisions, but also show that I am flexible enough to be

wrong. My goal for productions now is to make shows where everyone else looks good

and processes that thrive in living in the undefined gray of binaries.


I've only discussed process up to this point because I believe process has equal

weight with product. My time in graduate school has taught me that when I invest in the

process, I'm investing in the performance.  I find that when I'm solely focused on the end

goal, I'm not rigorous in my own work and I direct poorly. Brown says of society in

*Daring Greatly* that; "We're desperate for real revolution [in leaders] and that requires a

different type of courage and creativity…. Most people and most organizations can't

stand the uncertainty and the risk of real innovation. Learning and creating are inherently

vulnerable" (186). The art of directing is the process and theatrical innovation comes

from the collaborations, not solely the director's ideas. To only speak of what goes on

behind rehearsal doors as "magic" is to avoid any self-reflection. I want to be assessed

and hired for how I lead a team and how I cultivate rehearsal rooms. I want other

directors to open up about process, ask each other about "how the sausage gets made"

and I want to open rehearsal rooms in order to enhance the tactics that directors use for

trust and communication.

**DIRECTING *DRY LAND***

I began to experiment with vulnerability and openness in process as I directed Ruby Rae Spiegel's play *Dry Land* in the Fall of 2016. This is a small show; all of my focus had to be on the actors and the deep character work. It was made even more intimate by producing it in an actual locker room. *Dry Land* is a show about two high school girls in their swim team locker room and the lengths that they go through to complete an abortion themselves. In the show I track the emotional peaks and valleys of a fragile high school friendship, how these two young women try to ask each other for help, but they're not socialized to be able to and they each have a deep, unspoken fear of being left behind. When I chose the play, I had no idea how much of my heart it would require.

It's a political and vulnerable act to make a play about a DIY abortion in Texas with college aged actors. I knew that I had to make the rehearsal environment feel safe for the actors so that they could take the risks that the characters required. The play asked the actors to put themselves on the line and I had to match their risk taking. I could not hide behind the script, theory, clever blocking-or even a desk. This was a project driven by me; I had to start by telling the team the clear "whys" behind my choosing of the piece and how much this play would cost me. It was nerve wracking and brought up much of my fear of oversharing and making myself the center of the rehearsal room. Brown eloquently writes about this as; "We love seeing raw truth and openness in other people,

but we're afraid to let them see it in us. We're afraid that our truth isn't enough- that what we have to offer isn't enough without bells and whistles, without editing, and impressing" (41). *Dry Land* required me to share my past with the actors, my own experience through 10 years on swim teams, my constant feeling of "otherness" in middle and high school, without making the rehearsals a drama therapy session. As I reflected in my journal at the time, "That three person scene is tougher than I thought it would be… the isolation, how the trio changes, the attack on Ester. It dredges up all of those old feelings, being the odd one out, wanting to fit in and not being a part of it…This is a tough little play." What happened when I spoke to the actors about the "whys" was actually productive. When I mentioned my own bullying, the actors were able to connect their own experiences to the characters and infuse the performances. When what I feared the most (showing I was human) was laid on the table, the actors meet me there and ran with it towards the show.

This was a small cast in a small room; at most there were 5 of us in rehearsals and I had to be an active member of the team. I led and joined the actors in a daily 30 minute physical warm up because it was important for me to be one among them. This workout helped us to learn to listen to one another's breath and through sweating together, we could also start to breathe together. It was a way to be an active member of the ensemble, not a leader who dictates the terms of engagement and then doesn't participate. The play required the actors to be aware of each other at all times and to constantly engage in physical and active listening. Working out as a warm-up let them build trust between

each other and helped us all to enter the play. In shedding the outside world through the ritual of sweat, we could all be present in the work at hand. This

allowed the characters to act in vulnerable and dangerous ways with one another. The entire process was built on a foundation of rigor, safety and risk.

In taking on the required risks of the play in a safe rehearsal room, I had to define the difference between comfort and safety and state for all of us that rehearsals didn't have to feel good all the time. I consider comfort to be a part of feeling safe, as in, one can be comfortable and also know that you aren't in a safe enough environment to really expose yourself. Comfort and feeling good all the time is antithetical to risky art making. It's vulnerable to ask an actor for more, to challenge them to make a deeper and riskier choice, especially with young actors in the beginning of their training. They put trust in me to be the outside eye and in maintaining that trust, I asked them to also trust that I believed that they could do deeper, more specific and thoughtful work. To be present with the actors and to portray this difficult situation, we had to all trust that we would take care of each other and allow each other to be human with one another, as using Brown's statement of; "Vulnerability is the core, the heart, the center, of meaningful human experiences" (12).

When I ask the entire team to be vulnerable and take risks, I also have to take care of how I treat them and show them that I will never intentionally harm them emotionally. The easiest way to unintentionally wound someone is through shaming them, which also

kills all future possible vulnerability. It's a tactic that I'm not proud to say I've used in the past. I've thought of shaming as a helpful way to get actors to work harder, using such methods as calling someone out in front of the team in an attempt to get them to change, shutting down an idea before it is even attempted, using only criticism to get the actors where I need them to be and laughing at the failure of others and their choices in the room. What Brown has taught me is that, "If we want to reignite innovation and passion, we have to re-humanize work. When shame becomes a management style, engagement dies. When failure is not an option we can forget about learning, creativity and innovation" (13). These shame tactics placed me back at the top of a hierarchical pyramid, where I held the power to harm others over the powerless. Brown also says that "We live in a world where most people still subscribe to the belief that shame is a good tool for keeping people in line. Not only is this wrong, but it's dangerous... Researchers don't find shame correlated with positive outcomes at all- there is not data to support that shame is a helpful compass for good behavior" (72). Shame is antithetical to the creative process; an actor who is afraid of being shamed will only present safe choices, similar to when I'm afraid of being shamed for my choices.

*Dry Land* became a rehearsal room where I could practice "shame resilience," as coined by Brené Brown. I define it for me as the ability to practice and expand how I experience shame, to be able to sit in the discomfort of shame, the "fight or flight" moment and to let my values guide my reaction, not my fear.

Shame resilience is a strategy for practicing connection- our connection with ourselves and our connections with the people we care about. But [shame] resilience requires cognition, or thinking, and that's where shame has a huge advantage. When shame descends, we almost always are hijacked by the limbic system. In other words, the prefrontal cortex, where we do all of our thinking and analyzing and strategizing, gives way to that primitive fight or flight part of our brain (76.).

To be able to practice shame resilience in the rehearsal room, I must be connected with myself and my body. I have to recognize what the "fight or flight" moment feels like for me, my heart rate increases and my brain wants to give an answer, no matter what, or avoid all conflict. Shame resilience gives me the tools to be able to navigate these moments without acting out against my collaborators or resorting to old tactics to make me feel "comfortable" and disconnected. *Dry Land* was a way for me to emphasize the importance of process and to practice using authority as a verb that contains vulnerability and connection. I led the room in a way that made me part of the team, rather than on the outside.

# LEADERSHIP AS AN ART FORM: *ENRON*

My new definition of a leader is someone who is able to hold space, be able to run a team, be flexible, be able to listen, be respected, be trusted and hold the vision of the show. These are the values I discovered while directing Lucy Prebble's *ENRON* in the Spring of 2018. *ENRON* follows the rise and fall of the Houston based energy company. It's presented as an epic myth and takes us through the twists and turns of capitalism, the glamour of greed and the toxic adrenaline of success. With a production team of over 150 people, this process required me to be in charge, rather in control. When I pitched the show in the Fall of 2016, I had no idea just how it would morph and solidify my directing values.

This production of *ENRON* was a big, unwieldy show that required many moving parts and spectacle. In the design process, I learned I needed to be clear and concise about my vision, to activate the other collaborators towards that vision and then be flexible enough to listen to the team when the vision needed to change. I had to listen to my collaborators' dreams for the Brockett Theatre, for how the banking concepts would be turned into vaudevillian tropes and for how to frame the audience engagement. Silverman spoke to me about this type of engagement as; "The most important job is to have a vision and then lead towards that vision. If you're feeling nervous or scared, how you manage your feelings and the personalities is defining and important in terms of the kind

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of director that you are." *ENRON* energized all of my communication skills; I had to listen to everyone, hold on tightly to my own dreams and let go lightly when there was a better idea on the table. Sometimes I didn't agree or understand an idea, but if the collaborator was enthusiastic about it, I learned that the thing I needed to say was "I trust you." I couldn't always get everything I wanted exactly in the way I wanted it, but the collaboration was better than that.   To help with the process of communicating with the designers and making sure that we lived in the same world, I asked one of the co-dramaturgs, Christine Gwillim, to be present in all design meetings. She was able to serve as my outside eye and she helped me in assessing best practices for how to work with the varying personalities. It's rare for directors to get notes about their style of leadership during a process, but Christine was crucial to helping me hone and change my leadership tactics with this design team. The hierarchy of "director has all the answers and is infallible" was immediately flattened through me asking for help from a collaborator.

This work of opening up my directing process to others for feedback was also incredibly necessary when planning for the casting concept for the show. I cast an ensemble of all women and non-binary actors as these majority male characters. During the pitching session, I made an unplanned and not thought out statement about casting trans-actors in the ensemble. With the guiding of the dramaturgs, I soon learned how much work would be required of me in seeking out community partnerships so we could to follow through on these statements. With Christine, Kara Mavers (co-dramaturg), Bex Orton (Community Engagement) and Jess O'Rear (Artistic Engagement Strategist), I

learned how to be rigorous with my language and specific with my vision for these actors

who were off the gender binary. When I admitted to the team that I needed help, they

were able to rally, teach and push me towards a more specific reason for the "why"

behind casting these actors. This became a process where my job was to activate, clarify,

listen, correct my mistakes and show that mistake-making was okay. While this approach

increased the number of meetings I had tenfold, it also moved the show from "mine" to

"ours." I followed Risa Brainin's model of "I always use "we" and not "I." It always feels

like it's a team and it's never my vision. Making everyone in the room feel like they're

part of it, that they're a co-creator of the work." *ENRON* made me finally feel like I had

achieved this in a non-devised process. This show was a lesson in me saying over and

over again, "I trust you," to the actors, designers, dramaturgs and choreographer. My role

was not one of micro-managing (there were simply too many people and too many parts),

but of keeping a keen eye out for those moments when someone may have been on a

different page. My role was guide, cheerleader and final editor for *ENRON* and its

massive company.

I named for the designers, dramaturgs and actors what I was working on in my

process. This allowed the entire process to be adaptable to the people in the room and

their needs. There was an early moment in rehearsals when I realized that Sam

Olayiwola, the choreographer, and I were not on the same page for how the movement

would be created. In the past, this realization would have sent me into a tail spin of trying

to assert my power and trying to show others that I knew what was going on. I went

home after the tough rehearsal and realized that Sam was looking to me to set the blocking before he choreographed the piece, whereas I was assuming that he would shape the whole moment. As I wrote in my journal that night "Today is a revelation, not a setback." I came into rehearsal the next day with a clear plan and after touching base with Sam, we were able to shift our process to one where I sketched blocking with the actors, Sam then added dance and we could collaborate on the final look. It wasn't what I planned, but changing the plan led to a trust that the assumed rules for engagement could change at any time.

Changing on the fly like this can be a discomfort for me. I often try to make rules, or make the guidelines "work," instead of stretching them to fit the needs of the room. It was crucial to sit in this discomfort in *ENRON*, although I feared leaving the old system of working, where I wanted to control and micro-manage every decision. There is still a residue of that system in my rehearsals as I lay down new habits, there might always be, but in *ENRON*, I actively practiced sitting in this discomfort and pausing to recognize when the fight/flight response wanted to run the show. I was actively changing my own leadership tactics and engaging in learning about what actually worked for me in the moment, as Brown states; "If leaders expect real learning, critical thinking and change, then discomfort should be normalized" (198). The fight or flight moments are when I have to implement shame resilience, show my collaborators that I am in the process of learning and trust that this work costs me something. Being a better collaborator requires a pause and a breath.

*ENRON* taught me that while it's hard to show active learning in front of a company, it's also necessary for a flattened hierarchy. We set up an environment where we would only use character names and pronouns in the rehearsal room, but there were a few moments when I didn't use that language. I either was corrected by someone else, or corrected myself, apologized and moved on. When I correct my mistakes and move on, I invite the team to also make mistakes, to actively learn alongside me and to approach the show as something new. Brown illuminates the importance of this as; "Leaders need to cultivate the courage to be uncomfortable and to teach the people around us how to accept discomfort as a part of growth" (199). Admitting I'm wrong is a risk; it still brings up that old fear that I might lose the trust of the room and that someone might try to take over my position. I've found through admitting fault and then moving on, I was able to set aside my ego and not worry about what my level of power was. I invited the entire company to put aside their own egos, to match the risk taking in the room and to experiment with how far they could do with the design and characters. It often resulted in creative chaos, a likely result of 30+ people in the rehearsal room, but because the focus of the room was pointed towards a clear and shared vision, all chaos was towards the work. I regarded *the people* as higher than *the product*. While we had some "too many cooks in the kitchen" moments, I found this process the easiest to navigate getting notes from many different people. With the amount of complicated aspects of this production, I had to practice humility when asking to be shown things I couldn't visualize and seek notes from others on my direction. I have never gotten so many notes from collaborators.

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This speaking up and asking for help was something I would have never done in the past for fear of not being seen as an expert in all areas.

I spent much of the 18-month *ENRON* pre-production and rehearsal period naming the risks that I was taking in our process and inviting others to join me. Naming these risks looked like telling everyone involved that this was the biggest cast I'd ever worked with, the largest production, the shortest rehearsal room and the first time working with so closely with a choreographer. There were also risks that we were taking in the show with the casting, the presentation of the actors and the references to UT's relationship to Enron. In naming that we were all doing something new on the first day of rehearsals (the two first rehearsal speeches are included in the appendix), I named my fears and then moved on from them. As Josie Rourke, the artistic director of Donmar Warehouse stated to *The Interval*:

> The thing I am always challenging myself to do as a director is to walk off the edge of the diving board, to allow myself to jump in without quite knowing…..There's more of a spirit of exploration where I don't try and solve things as much as I try and experience the problem and tease it apart, that you embrace something that isn't working and take that as an opportunity to find out what you might spin out of that.

What Rourke highlights for me is the importance of doing the work despite the fear of not knowing the outcome. *ENRON* could have fallen flat. It was huge, with many moving parts and it could have stupendously failed; the entire team knew that. I activated myself and the team to operate despite that fear, we constantly dove into the risks. I implemented a new practice for *ENRON* where I wrote out my vision and values for the show and

distributed these to the entire team (this document is also included in the appendix). I found in being open with the team and naming my values provided a short cut in the process of trying to prove my competence and worth to the room. The playing field was leveled, the team had a common vocabulary for the work, I wasn't the "directing robot" at the front of the room, and we were all willing to dive in head first. The results were astonishing, the show was built on collaborative ownership and shared vision was a common and spoken goal. The road map for the show was not a mystery for the team, it was a journey that we were going to find together. This work is harder than approaching the play as "director as expert," it requires more of me and takes more time, but I think that's what it means to put my guts into the work. The results in *ENRON* have proven to me that this is the way forward for my directing practice. As Brown says, "When you shut down vulnerability, you shut down authenticity……You have to create a vision and live up to that vision. There's no vision without vulnerability" (208).

# TRANSFORMING POWER AND CONTROL

*"You just meet so many people who have no idea what it is to be the boss and what it is to be responsible for fellow human beings.....It's your job as a leader to create a micro civil society that is going to encourage people to flourish." (Liesl Tommy on The Interval)*

The cultural scripts for directors were conceived, defined and taught by white cis-men. Until fairly recently, these scripts have told us that a leader should look and speak a certain way and that emotions in the public sphere are a weakness. In my exploration of what true and personal authority might look like for me in the collaborative process. I've refined my directing goals and the language that perpetuates this ideal.

One of these actions is removing the word "power" from my definition of leadership. When I only focus on holding power over others, poet and essayist Adrienne Rich defines this as "the powerful is permitted a kind of short cut through the complexity of human personality. He does not have to enter intuitively into the souls of the powerless." (65). When one person is named the most "powerful" in a room it leads to an environment where a group is defined as the powerless. This control and dominion keeps most people (the actors) down and a select few up. Mary Beard describes power as an object of possession "that only the few - mostly men - can own or wield. On those terms, women as a gender - not as some individuals - are by definition excluded from it.

You cannot easily fit women into a structure that is already coded as male, you have to change the structure" (86). The narrow vision of what power and the powerful looks like had at one time stifled my artistic practice.

When the idea of power as a finite possession is taken off the table, it opens the door for me to experiment with a flattened hierarchy in the process and to practice authority in the room as a verb. Sue Monk Kidd makes the argument that this way of operating is inherently feminine; "The kind of power women need is not ruthless, controlling, self-serving, dominion-seeking power- power without benefit of love…What we need is a potent, forceful power, yes, but one that is also compassionate, the enables others as well" (231). As I show my full humanity in the rehearsal room, I also recognize the humanity of everyone else. When I enter the room with a responsibility to the collaborators, I'm transforming and sharing the power, making a room that does not use the powerful/powerless binary. When I practice authority as an attribute and a verb, I can then question authority and how it's measured at every moment, allowing it to be something that is flexible. Mary Beard sums up all of my questioning of leadership models as; "If women are not perceived to be fully within the structures of power, surely it is power that we need to redefine rather than women?" (83)

# CONCLUSION

*"...understanding that there are other leadership styles that are no less strong and that result in excellence that don't involve bullying and don't involve talking over people." (Lear DeBessonet for The Interval)*

We are in a societal moment of recognizing the toxicity of top down, hierarchical leadership and power tactics, in and out of the entertainment world. My inquiry in this thesis is meant to define and offer a new way forward for a directing practice that attempts to break itself of tactics that once merely "worked" for me and were never interrogated. In reframing my process as a flattened hierarchy with the tenants of respect, risk and rigor, I now know that when I trust myself and the process I lead, the production will be successful. My definition of success has changed, I came to grad school wanting to be the best and to be the youngest woman director to win a Tony award. Now success for me points towards activating the rehearsal room, the collaboration and the community. I've accepted that my former ways of thinking about leadership and directing were detrimental to my work and my presence in the room. To go through this process in graduate school, I first had to define the masculine/feminine, powerful/powerless and control/freedom binaries and then recognize that this pattern of thinking kept me from exploring tactics that felt authentic to me. In learning to sit in the grey between these binaries, I've embraced that discomfort, fear and vulnerability are crucial parts of collaboration and my authentic authority.

When I am not burdened with trying to prove myself in the rehearsal room, I can turn my ambition and drive towards the process and orient my goals towards the collective. For many years I thought that the director must place his or herself outside of the team, that if any collaborator got too close, it would ruin the process. I now actively practice the inverse, because when I am one of the pack, in a flattened pyramid, I am able to make work that costs me something. The cost of being part of the pack is the emotional work that it takes me to connect to everyone in the room. I cannot hold myself above and removed from the team, I must engage with them as people and show them my full humanity. I've found that this creates an authority that is rooted in collective freedom, I am given authority by the team because a leader is necessary, not because I've "earned" it. This authority does not come from top down leadership practices, but through fulfilling my collaborator's needs and flexibly changing according to those needs. Respect, flexibility, vulnerability and discomfort are all muscles I work in my directing practice and I make the choice daily to be present to my collaborators and myself.

# Appendix A: *ENRON* Speeches

**ENRON First Read Thru Speech- December 13th, 2017.**

What we're getting today is a sneak peek of what's to come. A moment to be in the room together, to begin our collaboration and to all point forward towards Jan. I'm not going to say much, because I'll spend a lot of time talking with you all in a month, but, I do have just a couple of words to share.

We're getting a lot of really unique and rare chances with this production. Not only the chance to play with raptors, listen to sweet 90s music, have our own Y2K party; some of us get the chance to be conjoined twins, learn ventriloquism. I guarantee that everyone in this room is getting the chance to do something they haven't before. Inside all of that spectacle is a great human tragedy. None of these characters are heroes and none of them are villains. They are people who get swept up into a fast paced, opulent bubble and make risky choices.

It's a risky play and it's a risky production and we get to walk, head first, into this risk. We're going to:

Subvert the binary between perception and reality - of the characters, of the actors, of the American Dream and the reality this company and the perception that this play leans into.

Critique and interrupt the assumed relationship between unearned power, the performance of toxic masculinity and our capitalistic definition of what success looks like.

For those of you who know me, the process is just as important as the product. In the spirit of opening conversations and taking risks, I'm sharing a paper with you that tells you all what I'm working on in this production, through my vision for the show and my values for our process.

We're all students here, we're all working on something and I'm sharing this with you now, instead of in Jan, because it's my hope that you'll spend the break thinking about what you want to work on in this show. This document will change, and it's my hope that it serves as a compass for us through this rehearsal and show process.

### *ENRON* Vision and Values Statement

*This is an invitation, a meeting point for all of us in rehearsals and meetings. Things will change.*
*I invite you all to meet me here.*

**Vision for the show:**
- A show that is rigorous, specific, FUN, dangerous and heart breaking. These characters are not heroes, but they're also not villains. They are people who made a series of choices that led to their downfall.
- Performances that tilt forward, move quickly and are always only one step ahead of the audience.
- An audience that leaves with questions about their role in capitalism and their trust in corporations.
- We are interrupting the narrative of power holders. We are distributing power from people of a particular identity. This may awaken opposition and disagreement. This is a good thing.

**Values for the process:**
- A process that is rigorous in the work, inclusivity and mindfulness.
- Language, names and pronouns are important. We see, respect and listen to each other, if we make mistakes, we correct each other and move on. A repeated mistake without active learning is a disrespect.
- We will not make assumptions about gender, sexuality or expression. When in doubt, ask, but don't expect an answer.
- A rehearsal room where it's safe to be uncomfortable or in conflict. Good art doesn't come from everyone feeling good all the time. Difficulty is part of the process.
- A room that lives in ritual. The entrances and exits to the rehearsal room are important. While you may not be able to divorce yourself from your outside life, you can also use it in your rehearsal work.
- We are always learning, all the time, in front of many people. We support others in their process, we learn with them, we aid in their process.
- Less talking, more action. Show me what you mean, don't ask permission, don't apologize for trying something.
- Trust is not earned. We enter the room with trust and we must work to maintain it. Trust in your collaborators, trust in the play and trust me.
- Make the best use of time. Be ready to work at the time rehearsal starts. If you need a warm up, do it before we start.

- Let me be a catalyst and engage with me as active agents. You must be present to be willing to respond to the ensemble.
- I don't have to have the best idea, I only need to identify it.
- No single artist is taking credit for this show. This is a thing we are building together, each with our own expertise. Together we make greater art and there will come a time when I use my skills to make the final decisions. Trust me in the decision making, even if it doesn't feel "good."
- I reserve the right to change my mind.
- Match the risks that you see your collaborators taking. If we are to empower our audience, we must ourselves risk vulnerability.

We will use stereotypes to our advantage. We will take them and hold them to the fire. Stereotypes are inherited, and we will recognize their history and transform it. Think of a stereotype as a three-dimensional container. It is our job to fill it with specificity and wakefulness. When we do not do this, this is when stereotypes become dangerous.

*ENRON* **First Official Rehearsal Speech- January 17ᵗʰ, 2018.**

Thank you everyone for being here.

Thank you design team
Thank your production team
Thank you actors
This is a huge team to amass in a room together and it's such a beautiful reminder that plays are built with people.

For some of us, this is the beginning and for others, we're now finally at the middle, the most important part of this process. The designers have been working for over a year on what they're about to show you. We're in that special moment where everything finally starts to come together, where we get to take this production from paper and concepts and discussions and put it all into the space, to let it breath, and come alive with you.

I was just reading an article about how the majority of our generation in major capitalist economies today believe that big businesses are basically corrupt.
What happened to Enron doesn't surprise me, because in our lifetimes we've lived through several of these "too big to fail" business collapses.
While I love the things that capitalism has done for me, at my gut level, I know that there's something fundamentally flawed about a system that turns nature and humans into dollar signs. There's a constant pressure to get bigger each year, to have the most growth, to be the most successful and to be recognized for having the best and the most. This idea of success has become tied to our idea of happiness.

So, we're going to go back in time, to one of the beginnings of this culture. Enron was the canary in the coal mine that was never heeded and this production serves as a reminder to us and our audiences about what happens when the drive to the best undercuts humans.  In the shiny, glitzy worry-free world of capitalism and extreme wealth, profit trumps everything else. We're going to live in the shininess, the fun of the chase for more- more recognition, more money, more followers and then we're going to pop the bubble and watch it all disintegrate. Inside all of that spectacle is a great human tragedy of this play, that they made a mistake and tried to cover it up. None of these characters are heroes and none of them are villains. They are real people who get swept up into a fast-paced, opulent bubble and make risky choices that lead to their downfall.

Presenting this play today, with you all is to examine the mythology of the company collapse and the chilling realization that the lessons of fraud and backroom secrets haven't been learned. This is a world where appearance has little to do with reality. With you all in these roles, we get to examine another layer of this culture, the question of what traits our society deems "successful" and how those fit onto men who are high on

toxic masculinity. We're interrupting the relationship between unearned power and the performance of toxic masculinity for successful "manhood."

This production offers a commentary on a system and on ideas that no longer work. With every turn in the news cycle, this production becomes more and more relevant. We are often the ones who are affected by capitalism and by toxic masculinity, we're often the cleaner-uppers and we're putting you at the center of this play to give power to those who don't usually have it.

I've said it before and I'll say it again. We're all taking a lot of risks, but I believe that every piece of art, especially today, needs to have risk attached to it. We're all doing something new with this show and taking a risk in our own work and collectively we're presenting something that this audience has never seen before.
We're not giving the audience any answers about how to solve these problems, but we're extending the conversations we'll have in here to the audience and asking them to leave the show questioning their role in personal and corporate success.

There are a couple of mantras from this era and from ENRON that I want us to use to our advantage:
Nobody can fail and
big risk equals big reward
Always ask Why. If you don't understand something, just ask. We're here to figure this out together and there is a huge amount of support around this production.

We're in a time when artistic processes are being exposed and as we can see, there are some incredibly unhealthy systems and traditions in our industry. This process is a chance for this entire team to try out some new ways of rehearsing and to experiment with what a healthy and inclusive process looks like. To this end, this is an open rehearsal space and we'll be following and adding to the vision and values that you all got over break.

Inside this shifting in rehearsal tactics, we will work hard. This room is for work and rigor. I'm going to challenge you and I guarantee that you're going to challenge me. That collaboration is the beauty of building this play together. And I have to tell you, I'm literally jumping out of my skin to make this play with all of you.

I'm going to pass this to our design team, so they can show you what they've all built and dreamed for you to fill with your talent and hard work.

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