

Northwestern College, Iowa

**NWCommons**

---

Faculty Tenure Papers

---

Fall 2019

***The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime: A Tenure Project***

Drew Schmidt

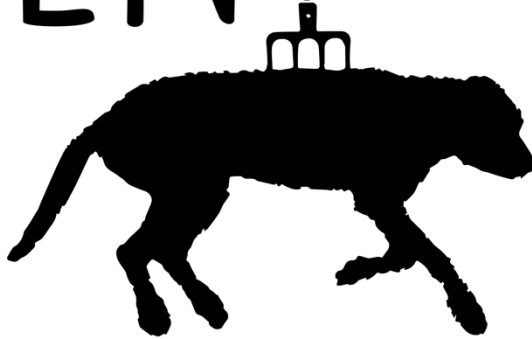
Follow this and additional works at: <https://nwcommons.nwciowa.edu/tenurepapers>



Part of the Theatre and Performance Studies Commons

---

THE  
CURIOUS  
INCIDENT  
OF THE  
DOG IN THE  
NIGHTTIME



A TENURE PROJECT BY DREW SCHMIDT  
FALL 2019

NORTHWESTERN  
COLLEGE

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

PROLOGUE	1
CHAPTER 2 : CHRIST AND THE ARTS	2
CHAPTER 3 : CHRIST AND THE THEATRE	5
CHAPTER 5 : CHRIST AND THE CURIOUS INCIDENT	7
CHAPTER 7 : ENSEMBLE ARTS	9
CHAPTER 11 : DIRECTING	11
CHAPTER 13 : SET DESIGN	12
CHAPTER 17 : COSTUME DESIGN	14
CHAPTER 23 : PROJECTION DESIGN	15
CHAPTER 31 : LIGHTING DESIGN	17
CHAPTER 37 : SOUND DESIGN	18
CHAPTER 41 : ACTING	19
CHAPTER 43 : BEYOND THE EXPERIENCE	20
CHAPTER 47 : CONCLUSION	21
BIBLIOGRAPHY	23

# PROLOGUE

---

I would like to set the stage for you, lay a foundation for what you're about to read. I trust that it will help give you a framework for understanding my vision; but moreover, I hope that it might lay a similar foundation for faculty who come after me, allowing them to think outside the bounds of what's been done and imagine what could be.

- 1) I believe the best dissemination of this particular project is by way of presentation, not reading. The rich usage of interactive media can help understanding in a way that the written word simply cannot. However; I know that this paper is vital for the FSC (Faculty Status Committee) and is also ideal for archival purposes.

In an effort to lean into both, I will write this paper with the presentation as a primary goal. It will have the style, the cadence, the meter, and the structure of a speech. It will use repetition to help auditory understanding and because the spoken word is processed differently (you can't go back and re-listen to a line in a speech), it will unpack ideas slowly and carefully, not to simplify, but to illuminate.

- 2) At Northwestern, the idea of faith integration is always at the forefront of our minds, as it should be, our mission states that goal clearly ...

***Northwestern College is a Christian academic community engaging students in courageous and faithful learning and living that empowers them to follow Christ and pursue God's redeeming work in the world.***

I've always battled with the idea of integration. To suggest that we can append faith to our classroom with an opening prayer is absurd. Even to sprinkle theological thoughts from our discipline into our lectures and discussions seems to be an afterthought. Wouldn't it be better if faithful ideas and conversations sprang up from a well of the constant presence of the Holy Spirit, that what happens in the classroom is an overflowing and outpouring of the sanctification happening in our own hearts and in our own disciplines? So I say "Why integrate something that is already fused together?"

But then I heard our previous VPAA, Dr. Mark Husbands, articulate it a different way. Allow me to distill that conversation here.

Faith and learning are woven together in a beautiful tapestry as we love God with all of our hearts and our minds and our souls and our strength. But at the fall, these things were torn apart, frayed, damaged; threads of the sacred and secular hanging, no longer bound. The joy of our work as Christian academics is to weave back together that which should never have been ripped apart.

- 3) What makes an endeavor theological in nature versus ethical, moral, religious? I would suggest that the answer lies in the first steps and the end goal. Who is the primary agent at work in this conversation? Is it me, my discipline, my technique? Or is it Christ? Rather than asking what my discipline can teach me about God, let me ask what the character of God can teach me about my discipline. Rather than trying to understand the grand mystery of the One who created the universe, the One who is, was, and ever will be through the very small lens of my craft; let us look at our disciplines from the firm foundation and the infinite lens of our great and gracious God.

To that end, I begin this presentation not with “Because Theatre” but instead, “Because God”.

## CHAPTER 2 : CHRIST AND THE ARTS

---

Because God.

Because *our* God is the God of yesterday, today, and tomorrow,  
The God of Adam,  
The God of Noah,  
Of Abraham,  
Isaac,  
Jacob,  
Joseph,  
The God of Moses, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Deborah,  
The God of Paul and Peter,  
The God of Saint Augustine,  
The God of Luther and Calvin,  
The God of Bonhoffer,  
The God of Tubman, Parks, Held-Evens, MLK, Lewis, Barth, and more,  
The God of your faith and mine,  
The God of those who have come before us and those who will come after.

Because *our* God.

Because our God is kind,  
Because our God is just,  
Because our God is loving and gracious and merciful,  
Because our God is all these things and more for all of creation and throughout time, my only response as an artist, as a teacher, as a father, as a friend is to speak His justice and goodness and love into all of creation.

What a gift.

What a responsibility.

What a privilege it is to come alongside Jesus who stood up in the synagogue in Nazareth ...

<sup>16</sup> [... and when] He stood up to read, <sup>17</sup> and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

<sup>18</sup> “The Spirit of the Lord is on me,  
because he has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners  
and recovery of sight for the blind,  
to set the oppressed free,

<sup>19</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

<sup>20</sup> Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. <sup>21</sup> He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

#### Luke 4: 16-20 | Isaiah 61:1-2 (NRSV)

The Spirit of the Lord is upon us, because he has anointed us. We are called as men and women of faith to be reflections of Christ; I have to believe that this calling includes proclaiming good news to the poor, freedom, and sight through whatever gifts and passions with which we’ve been entrusted. I have to believe that we ought be against oppression and should seek the year of the Lord. I have to believe that to seek Christ is to seek these things and that in turn we get to be a part of the fulfillment of Isaiah.

I’ve heard people speak against this view claiming that it misses Christ’s call to be “fishers of men”, the call for evangelism. In Matthew Jesus declared that we “[should] not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” (Matthew 10:28) But I would argue that both justice and evangelism are eschatological in nature, both seek out the Reign of God; one in this life and one in the next. Which one is Christ’s true call? The answer is “yes!” Justo González articulates this balance beautifully as he closes his book Mañana.

*At the very heart of evangelism stands the good news that through the sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God’s reign is coming and is now open to us. By the power and presence of the Spirit, we can live now as citizens of the coming city, as subjects of the One whose Reign will have no end. But our witness to the good news is credible only insofar as we too live as those who believe the message and are willing to stake our lives on it. To love the neighbor, to do justice, to announce peace, to care for the widow and the orphan – all these are not things we do beyond or apart from proclaiming the good news. They are a necessary part of the good news. Evangelism must be grounded on the spirituality of the Reign of God or it is not the good news of Jesus Christ.*

#### Justo L. González | Mañana p167

I believe that we as artists have the unique job of leaning into both these callings. We get to point to the way the world is and the way the world should be by holding up a mirror to society and to ourselves; allowing us to reflect on who we truly are and who we truly ought to be. We share the gospel and a message of justice at the same time. Some use paint, others poems; some use music

to move the heart, and I, as a theatre artist, use story to reach the soul. The use of story to move isn't unique to Christendom, it's a deeply human truth. In her famous TED Talk, *The Danger of a Single Story*, Chimamanda Adichie paints the need for story beautifully.

*The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story.*

*The consequence of the single story is this: It robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar.*

**Adichie Chimamanda | *The Danger of a Single Story***

In order to seek God's justice in this world, we have to tell not just a story, but the many stories of His many people; making real women and men as beautiful and as complex as they truly are, helping us love one another as He loves us.

Artist and theologian Makoto Fujimura, in his seminal book Culture Care calls artists the modern-day prophets, proclaiming God's truth and beauty to the world under the calling and authority of Christ. He goes on to suggest that artists can be the ones who break the strongholds of fear, of disunity, of blame, and of hatred. Artists can be the ones who move culture toward wholeness.

*Artists and their friends (hopefully including their friends in the churches) may now be uniquely positioned to break the malaise of the current polarization and develop a truly prophetic stance toward culture. It will require acting not just for shock and self-aggrandizement but for cultivation and common flourishing. Artists can become known instead as "citizen artists" who lead society with their imagination and their work*

**Makoto Fujimura | Culture Care p41**

But why? What is the Character of God that makes this a deep human and spiritual truth? Why is it that the arts can do this in a way that nothing else really can? Because God is an artist. Because the Holy Spirit is the ever-present author of beauty and creativity. Going back to Makoto Fujimura's Culture Care:

*As an artist and a Christian, I find the source and goal of beauty, of [creative] thinking, and of responsible action in the biblical understanding of what our lives are for. We find our creative identity in God. [Creative] moments can be assumed simply because God is the great Artist, and we are God's artists, called to steward the creation entrusted to our care. The good news of the Bible is that in Christ we are journeying toward ultimate wholeness, integration, and well-being. We are becoming more fully what we were made to be, to the benefit of all creation.*

**Makoto Fujimura | Culture Care p27**

The love for and need to be creative is part of who we've been made to be. But we as a society and as individuals fight this. We are prone to view people and projects as having worth or value only if they are immediately useful to the whole, or truthfully, to me and my interests. The arts don't bring more money to our schools, so we cut them. Our artist alumni don't feed starving children with their poetry, so we don't celebrate their work. The arts aren't necessary for human survival, so they're viewed as superfluous and expendable. But isn't that really an exercise in missing the point? Beauty is extraneous. Beauty is unnecessary. But beauty is what makes it all worth it. Going back again to Makoto Fujimura.

*A Christian understanding of beauty begins with the recognition that God does not need us, or the creation. Beauty is a gratuitous gift of the creator God; it finds its source and its purpose in God's character. God, out of his gratuitous love, created a world he did not need because he is an artist. Beauty itself is not, in this sense, necessary.... But even if we would agree that beauty is not necessary to our daily survival, it is still necessary for our flourishing. Our sense of beauty and our creativity are central to what it means to be made in the image of a creative God. The satisfaction in beauty we feel is connected deeply with our reflection of God's character to create and value gratuity. It is part of our human nature. This is why our soul hungers for beauty.*

**Makoto Fujimura | Culture Care p51**

Our need for the arts rests entirely in who God is and who we are to God. The arts remind us that God is a God of beauty. The arts help ask hard questions so that Christ can ascribe meaning to our lives. The arts are a gratuitously generous gift of grace that the Holy Spirit can use to call us out of the muck and the mire of life and death and point us heavenward.

## CHAPTER 3 : CHRIST AND THE THEATRE

---

Because God embedded His truth and beauty into all of creation and because God regularly uses story to help illuminate His character, it's no surprise that we love story; and we've loved it throughout all cultures and all time. But there's an argument, a disagreement between what's artful and what's appropriate.

Theatre is viewed by many Christian circles as hopeless, unable or unworthy to be saved; that the stories and storytellers are depraved. That view isn't completely off base, the theatre is a very welcoming place and in turn attracts some of the most interesting people. I often hear students identify the theatre as a safe haven in the vicious world of high school (maybe the church has something to learn here, to welcome and embrace rather than condemn and judge).

The view of depravity isn't completely off base; theatre will often infuse shock and surprise in order to make the experience more interesting, in order to attract an audience. In this play, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime*, the adapter Simon Stephens infused a large amount of swearing that didn't exist in the original book. It doesn't tell the story better; it just makes the play more "edgy".



So what do we do as Christians? We turn our backs, abandon the whole thing and develop our own brand with our own people. We give up. This isn't unique to the theatre, it's true across all the arts. Christianity's response has been to create a sub-culture; Christian theatre, Christian movies, Christian music. The tragedy lies in this, that these expressions often prize overtly Christian content over quality artistry.

I have to suggest that the abandonment and rejection of an entire discipline is the antithesis of God as Artist as well as the redemptive and restorative nature of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We shouldn't splinter and cloister ourselves into Christian business, Christian athletics, Christian science, Christian education; because all the Earth is the Lord's and can be used to point to His glory. John Calvin articulates this beautifully.

*Therefore, in reading profane authors, the admirable light of truth displayed in them should remind us, that the human mind, however much fallen and perverted from its original integrity, is still adorned and invested with admirable gifts from its Creator. If we reflect that the Spirit of God is the only fountain of truth, we will be careful, as we would avoid offering insult to him, not to reject or condemn truth wherever it appears. In despising the gifts, we insult the Giver.*

**John Calvin | Institutes of the Christian Religion II.15**

The arts are able to abstractly straddle the gap between what is and what's to come. The arts can carefully identify and extract God's light from even the darkest of nights. The arts can recognize the groaning, the expectation, the pain of this present world and give voice to the decay and give hope for freedom. And in giving voice we can together, artist and audience, step through the difficult places in order to seek something better. Both the art and the artist can be sanctified, can be made holy; but that can only happen if we're honest about the way the world is and the way the world was meant to be.

That journey might be difficult. Artful story should move us beyond our boundaries, it should cause an amount of discomfort. I heard it once said that the arts should make "the strange familiar and the familiar strange," meaning that good art should bridge the gap between what we consider in and out, comfortable and uncomfortable, sacred and secular.

So we should tell stories that are artistically excellent and answer the deep seeded need for story. We should tell stories that are honest and true to the whole of the lived human experience but also point to the hope that finds fullness and completion in Christ.

# CHAPTER 5 : CHRIST AND THE CURIOUS INCIDENT

---

Because God loves all of His children, He calls those who have a platform to give voice to the voiceless, attention to the forgotten, understanding to the misunderstood. I love theatre because it asks us to engage in new lives and new disciplines as we prepare for every single production. As a theologically minded theatre artist, that means I get to explore the lives and passions of other people in the context of Christ as we speak up for and speak alongside others.

I fell in love with the story of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime* a few years ago, both reading the book by Mark Haddon and the stage adaptation by Simon Stephens. It's the story of Christopher Boone, a math loving 15 year old autistic boy who travels from his home in Swindon, England to London to uncover the truth of his family.

The play is spectacle. It's big and loud and fancy which stirred up my designer soul. But what I find truly intriguing is the way that the story paints the autistic experience. It crafts an image of sensory overload in order to help build empathy and understanding. I love this play because I can utilize my unique skills as a visual and auditory designer to help the audience share in an experience; one that's not unique to Christopher himself or this play itself, but instead speaks for a large group of people, their friends, and their families.

I once had a student who told me he was on the autistic spectrum. Through conversation he gave me the gift of illumination. He said that his autistic experience was like this: Imagine you're in a room surrounded by one-hundred television sets; and I am on one of those sets, speaking to you. You're happy to give me every ounce of attention; but here's the problem, all of the other TVs in the room are playing a different channel, each of them at full volume, each of them demanding your attention. How well now are you able to focus in on me, my idiosyncratic body language, and my nuanced words? It would be great if we could turn down everything else, but you can't. No wonder I perceive you as distant, aloof, disconnected.

While that image is powerful, it's even more paramount that we tell this story from a Christian perspective and through the lens of Christ. It's imperative that we rest on a foundation of theological thought and are certain of why this story has value to God Himself.

Benjamin Conner from Western Theological Seminary names the clear and present problem in telling a story of intellectual disabilities and the hopeful solution. He says:

*Because people with disabilities are viewed as and treated as somehow less than fully human; we must speak God's truth of righteousness and justice.*

*[I have to recognize that] my personhood, my value, my worth, my ability to image God; is measured according to the person of Christ ... just like everyone else*

**Benjamin Conner | Disabling Mission, Enabling Witness p33,p141**

This play is a story of a human experience, one that differs from many of ours, and to share it for the sake of understanding and empathy is to lean into the God of Justice, to lean into the Kingdom, to lean into Christ's calling in our lives as artists; not because the main character of Christopher is less than, but because the act of doing so reflects the person of Jesus. Imago Dei.

Our goal is to help illuminate diversity for the sake of understanding and empathy as a toning of our hearts and a widening of our world view, our lens, so that we can learn to see one another as God sees us and to love one another as Christ loves us. In this we find unity, we find value in one another's unique imaging of Jesus.

Returning to the work of Conner, I wanted to share an illustration that absolutely struck me. Conner talks about the distinction between the physical state of being deaf and the Deaf community. In that conversation he says this:

*I had an interesting conversation with a Deaf friend recently. We were imagining what life will be like in glory. ... When the discussion turned to deafness, my friend communicated to me, "I may be able to hear in heaven, but you will certainly be Deaf." By this he meant there is an embodied and relational element to Deaf communication that he wishes for me to experience as much as I wish him to hear the chirping of the birds, rustling of reeds, or the words of the psalms. He hopes that I, though hearing, can be Deaf to the ways of God in the world.*

**Benjamin Conner | Disabling Mission, Enabling Witness p65**

I hope that through this play, you might see God in a new way; not out of pity but grounded in Christ. We hope that you may better know God through the lens of another.

We *all* find value and worth not because of who we are or what we've done but quite simply because we are measured according to the person of Christ; and in that, we find solidarity, a unity that bridges the gap between the Autistic, the Deaf, the Jew, the Gentile, you, me, and the God who loves us beyond measure. The many ways people embody and reflect their relationship with the Creator paints a beautiful mosaic; one that is better with diversity.

Our hope and goal in this production is to add Christopher's story to that mosaic, not necessarily as a follower of Christ, but certainly as a creation of God.

# CHAPTER 7 : ENSEMBLE ARTS

---

Because God made us to function in community, giving us unique gifts and talents and passions, but one Spirit; we ought examine the way we work alongside one another.

*<sup>12</sup> For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. <sup>13</sup> For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, [actor or director, designer or crew member]—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. <sup>14</sup> Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many.*

## 1 Corinthians 12:12-14 (NRSV)

Paul goes on to unpack this allegory, articulating the absurdity of one part declaring itself more or less important than another; then draws us into a deeper place and lays a richer foundation, that love is what drives this true community.

What happens when one artist is for another artist is that we share in one another's celebrations and shortcomings. Our unity means that your joy is my joy and my pain is your pain. I rejoice with you that you got the acting role I wanted, and you mourn with me as my hopes were differed. Then we both commit ourselves to the excellent telling of this story no matter our role. We commit ourselves to one another's artistic journeys.

What happens when we create art as one unified ensemble is that creative artistry is multiplied. Our collective creativity breeds better ideas. I no longer work in a state of scarcity, I live in a place of abundance. If you, as an actor, have an idea for me, the sound designer, perhaps a sound effect that would help make this moment better, love tells me to listen. My worth and value isn't challenged by someone encroaching on my role, my identity rests firmly on my imaging of Christ. Instead of guarding roles, we gather ideas; *my* job is not to be the only voice in my design, it is to discern which ideas are best for this collaborative endeavor.

---

A typical production process in the theatre weaves together the creative journeys of technicians, designers, and actors; but at the end of the day, the actors are typically considered to be the chief story tellers as the ones who deliver the lines. Designers and technicians simply build a world in which to tell that story. But if we believe in the ideal of ensemble, that any artist at any point could carry the mantle of the story, is it possible that dynamic design could inform acting rather the other way around? Is it possible to allow design to have the loudest voice? And moreover, is it possible to do this without the spectacle of design becoming distracting or self-indulgent?

This project is my practical response to that question, declaring: *Yes, any artist in an ensemble can be the primary story-telling, the loudest voice, as long as the story calls for that shift of focus and as long as the artist serves the whole.*

This challenge is what attracted me *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime*; that several times throughout the play, Christopher's experience could be best told through design elements. A few years ago I went to see the original production by The National Theatre in London. It was a powerful experience, very well produced, but I often found myself waiting for the next trick. I was anticipating the next cool piece of spectacle they would unveil. Lights shot out from everywhere. Props came out of the floor. Stairs came out of the wall. The spectacle often became a distraction; design for design's sake, pointing to itself rather than to the story.

How then do we ensure that our work doesn't point to ourselves? I have to suggest that the answer lies in making sure we have something bigger, greater to point to. We're of course not the first to tackle this question; there are many who have successfully balanced bold design with strong acting. One of the more famous theatre artists of our era would be Julie Taymor, director of *The Lion King*. She describes her process this way:

*I start with the notion of the ideograph. An ideograph is like a brush painting, a Japanese brush painting. Three strokes, you get the whole bamboo forest. I go to the concept of "The Lion King" and I say, "What is the essence of it? What is the abstraction? If I were to reduce this entire story into one image, what would it be?" The circle. The circle. It's so obvious. The circle of life. The circle of Mufasa's mask. The circle that, when we come to Act II and there's a drought, how do you express drought? It's a circle of silk on the floor that disappears into the hole in the stage floor. The circle of life comes in the wheels of the gazelles that leap.*

**Julie Taymor | TED2011**

For Taymor there's an image, an idea that supersedes the script and informs the action, the design, and the artistic choices we make; an abstraction that guides the expression. But we as Christian theatre artists point to a Storyteller that is infinitely larger than even those abstractions.

God created us such that story rings true in our souls. No wonder Jesus used story again and again to disciple and to teach. No wonder so much of scripture is crafted as a grand narrative. Because the author of all creation built a love for story in us. We need not be overtly Christian in the content of our stories, we need simply adopt a posture that points beyond the heart of the story and straight to the heart of God.

What happens when we approach our artform as an ensemble, as artists with a proper posture, as a *beloved* community, is that rather than drawing focus and attention and glory to any individual artist, our work points to something greater; not just to the story that supersedes each artist, but in a unified voice to the one true King who is the author of the grand narrative of humanity.

---

Let's move now out of the theoretical and into the practical; breaking down the individual areas of theatre. Because each one is its own unique discipline, I could talk at length about the choices we've made; but I'll instead try to exercise restraint and articulate a broad representation of ideas. My hope is that in watching the production you'll recognize echoes of what is shared here resonating throughout.

# CHAPTER 11 : DIRECTING

---

Because God is loving, gracious, merciful, and just, but allows pain, and suffering, and injustice in the world; it was important tell a true story of pain and of hope. There are many ways to bring that into this story, but also several ways to do the telling a disservice. Returning to the work of Benjamin Conner, he warns against five marginalizing approaches to intellectual disabilities (Conner 105-107).

1. Homogenizing – Grouping people into a singular experience.
2. Colonizing – Institutionalizing, hospitalizing, or incarcerating individuals.
3. Demonizing – Identifying the intellectually disabled as threats and potential criminals.
4. Pluralizing – Belittling the lived experience by connecting on a superficial level.
5. Romanticizing – Warming our own hearts with stories of overcoming.

That last one is a dangerous one. It would be easy to say, “Look how Christopher has overcome adversity!” and then feel as though we’ve been let off the hook, free from social action and responsibility. Or perhaps we might leave the theatre now believing that our lives really aren’t as bad as we think they are, “my situation is rough, but at least I’m not Christopher.” It would be easy to be moved to pity rather than empathy, action, and love. But it is important to declare that “divine agency, not human is at the center of our capacity to participate in the image of God to bear witness” (Conner 122). It is important to declare that in Christ there is more that unifies us than divides, to view disability through the lens of diversity, not deficiency (Conner 117). The overarching direction of our production is connection, not observation; unity, not distance.

Conner goes on to offer a better model of response, one of self-advocacy. He calls those of us who have a voice and a position of influence to be facilitators;

■ *A facilitator, [an advisor without intellectual disabilities], who helps break down complicated information, but who ideally leaves the decision making to the advocate.*

## **Benjamin Conner | Disabling Mission, Enabling Witness p107**

The play consists of 11 actors but dozens of characters; most of whom are then split among the ensemble members. Throughout the production the ensemble members encourage Christopher, cheer him on, respond to what’s happening on stage, even if they’re not in the middle of the action. The recognition by the cast that we are currently in a play begs the question, “Who are these people? Are they actors or are they characters?” The direction we’ve decided to take is that these people on stage are all Christopher’s friends, people in his life, retelling his story; and the act of reliving his adventure is a way to help him process what has happened and give him the power and the freedom to be his own advocate. Each character is a good facilitator in Christopher’s life, a model of faithful interaction for the audience.

# CHAPTER 13 : SET DESIGN

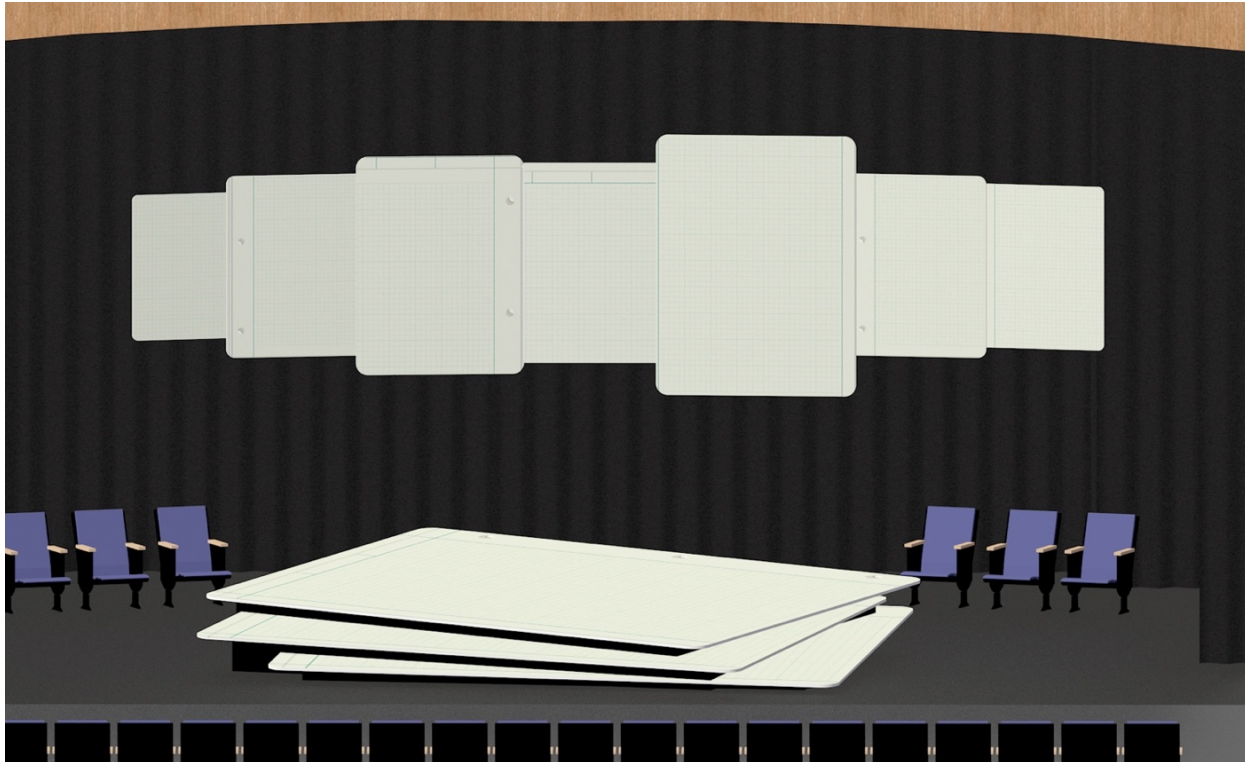
---

Because God is a God of unity, a good ensemble designer will serve other design elements and other artists. My hope is that the scenic design both makes an artistic statement and lends itself well to the other areas. In the conception process I had three main areas of focus.

1. The play is a retelling of Christopher's story written down in his notebook, a book that becomes central to the play's action. I wanted to keep this image front and center, that this is a story once written, being retold.
2. Because the actors are a group of Christopher's friends helping him put on a play, I wanted to create a stage on the stage; to parse out a "sacred space" where the majority of the action could take place.
3. Projections will play an integral role in the story telling, so the set needed to serve as a quality projection surface; meaning a light color that would allow the video to be sharp and vibrant. But it's equally important that a set artistically stands on its own, that if there were never any projections, that the scenic choices are still strong.

The final design landed as a series of three pieces of notebook paper (dot graph paper to be exact, a type of paper that comes out of the math world). These would be raised above the stage on three different levels in order to give a variety of heights, steps, places to sit, and places to hide. These platforms would then be raked, tilted, so that we could project on the floor and all the audience members would still be able to see the content being projected.

Because we also wanted to project content behind the action, we created a backdrop of more paper. This backdrop would also serve an artistic purpose; to complete the visual composition and give depth to the space.



*CAD Rendering of the Scenic Design*

To supplement the space with visual variety and to help define abstracted locations, we also created a series of small white boxes that could be used as chairs, tables, counters, and more. These would also be painted a light color so that they could become projection surfaces and so they would blend into the world of the stage.

Finally, we placed chairs in the background for the ensemble members who are currently not part of the story; signifying the ever-present support of Christopher's community.

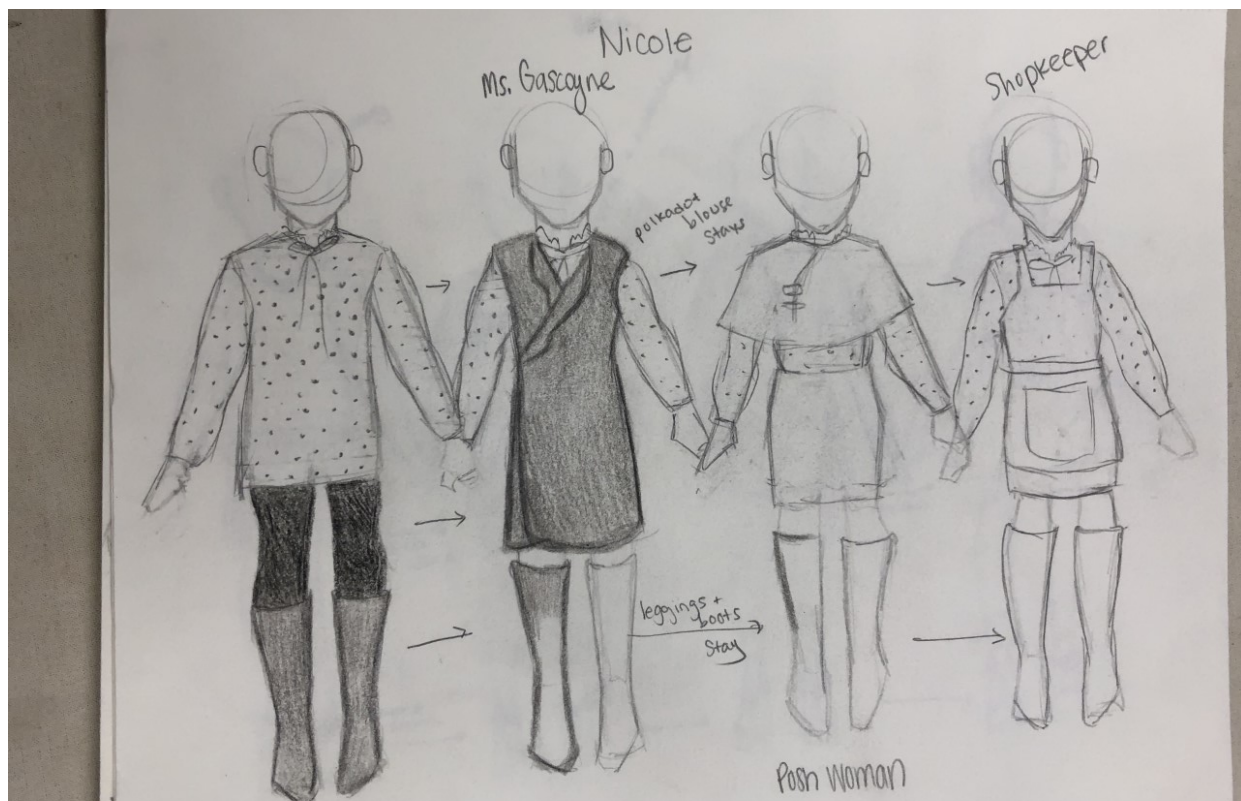


# CHAPTER 17 : COSTUME DESIGN

Because God created us with different gifts and talents, it's a good and beautiful expression of Christ's body to gather others to work alongside you. I cannot do the area of costume design justice; so I asked my colleague, Amber Huizinga, to design costumes for this show.

There are several creative design choices made in her work, but perhaps the most intriguing concept is her vision for the ensemble members. In order to echo Christopher's tendency to fixate on a singular aspect of a person or a situation; Amber chose to dress all the ensemble members in simple blacks, whites, and grays. This would become their base costume. It wouldn't be boring; it simply wouldn't stand out. When it was time for an ensemble member to become a character, that actor would add on bold and loud accessories; a jacket, a scarf, a hat, a yellow reflective police vest. These additions would help the actors become a brand-new character while openly admitting that they aren't actually that character. To take it a step further, no actor should ever go fully off stage to find their accessories, neither should they have to go offstage to change in or out of those added costume pieces. There's no reason to hide the mechanics of the play.

Below are some of the costume changes (designed and rendered by Amber's student assistant, Rachel Smart) that highlight how just a few pieces could be added or altered to help an actor become several different characters.



Rendering by Rachel Smart

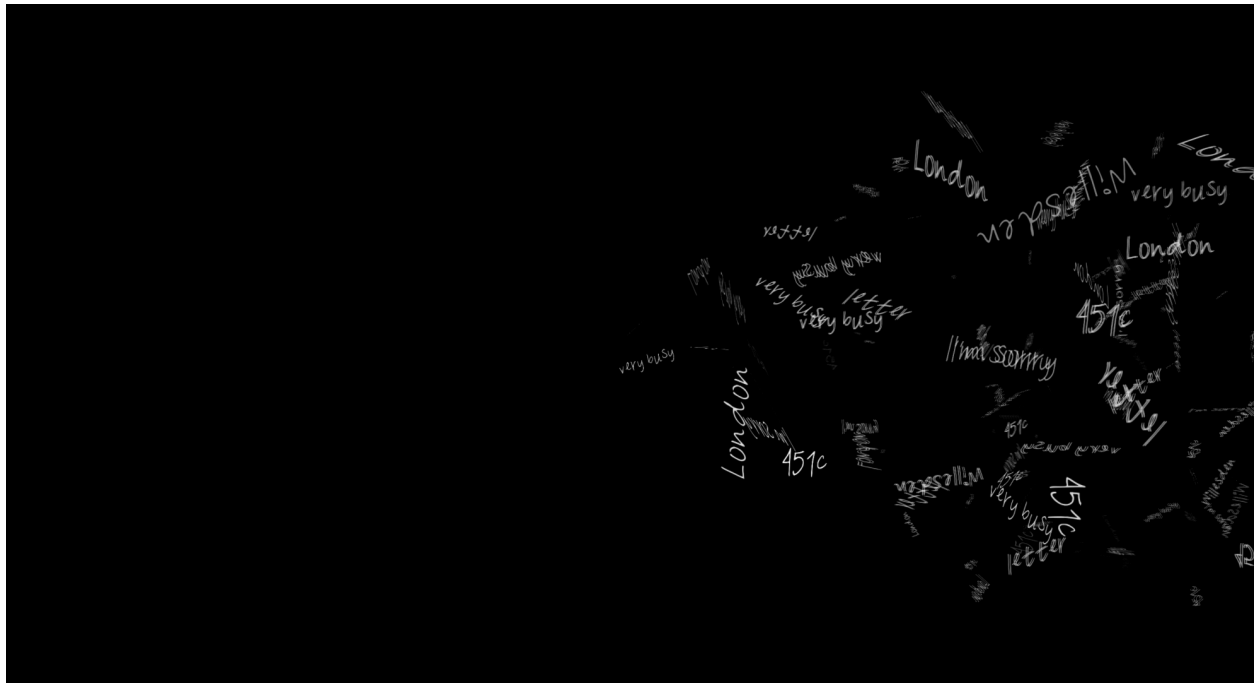
# CHAPTER 23 : PROJECTION DESIGN

---

Because God made us visual beings, able to digest complex ideas in order to ascribe meaning, we as artists can use abstract visuals to foster real emotion.

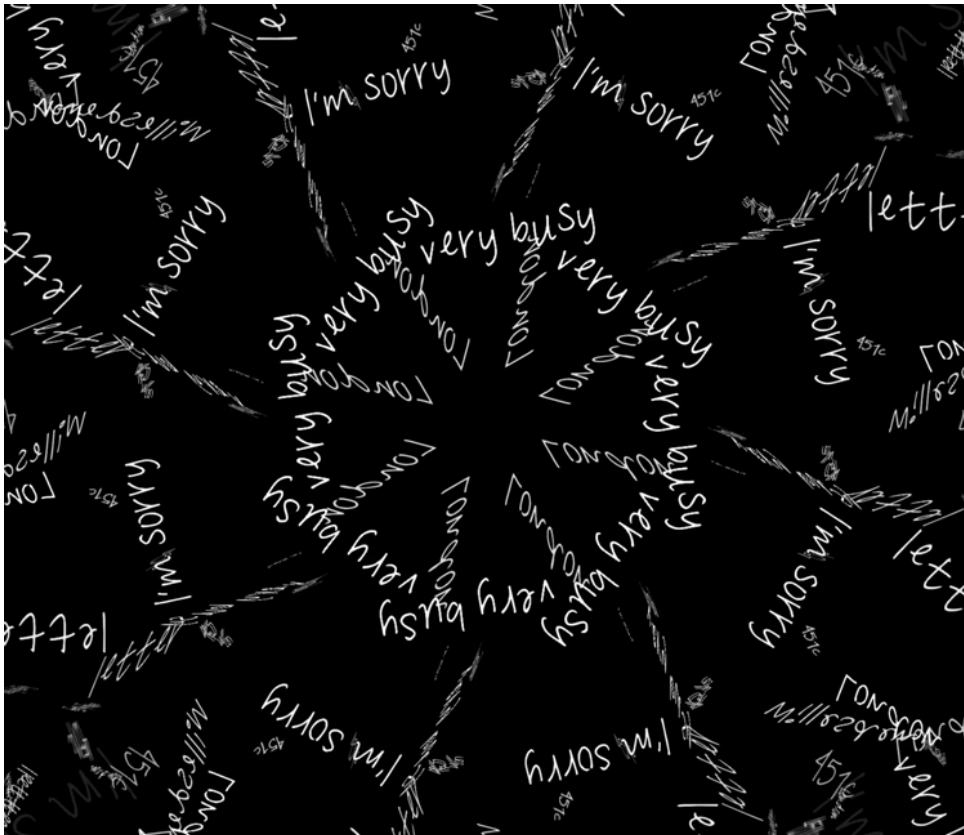
Projection design is the youngest of all design elements and has only been prevalent in theatrical productions for the last decade. We as projection designers are still exploring how we fit in the theatre. Even still, there's a lot to be said about best practices and common pitfalls; but allow me to condense most of it into this one idea. *A projection design only belongs if it has an integral and unique voice; meaning it should tell the story in a way that no actor or designer could and if you were to remove the design, the entire experience would unravel.* The unique voice projections play in this production, in tandem with sound design, is to create a window into Christopher's sensory experience.

One of my favorite examples of this that highlights the beauty of the creative process is what I call "The Letter Wormhole". As Christopher discovers a series of letters from his mother, hidden away, he becomes increasingly distraught over their existence. I wanted to convey that growing distress by projecting parts of the letter, washing the words over him. To do so I created a video of words and phrases from his mother's letter that would react to and fall with virtual gravity.



*Screen Shot of the Cue's Video*

To then move this into a video that would surround and overwhelm Christopher, I duplicated and rotated the video eight times. I knew there would be a sense of repetition, but I wanted to see how it looked before committing more time to the video. The result wasn't just a simple duplication, it was a beautiful pattern, a mathematical fractal. It was marvelous. It was an accident (which is more common in the design process than you would think). But it rang true, it felt right.



*Screen Shot of the Cue's Video*

During rehearsals, a few of the actors gathered with the Mathematics Department Senior Seminar who had read the book by Mark Haddon for class (the original book on which this play is based). It was a wonderful conversation, a fascinating opportunity to hear their unique perspective as mathematicians on Christopher and Christopher's experience. Our time together directly informed the nuanced choices made by the actor playing Christopher, but a comment that really stuck with me was this; that one of their jobs as Christian mathematicians is to find patterns in chaos and in that beauty, they point to God. The accident rang true, I believe, because it pointed beyond itself to the Spirit of Beauty that connects even math and theatre.

In creating the sense of being overwhelmed, it was important to avoid portraying Christopher's lived experience as fundamentally bad, wrong, or damaged; which would be the logical conclusion when faced with this degree of chaos. We as an audience would be moved to pity. Instead I hope that lifting beauty from the chaos shows us a different and diverse experience, bringing a sense of awe, and moving us to a place of understanding and a posture of empathy.

# CHAPTER 31 : LIGHTING DESIGN

---

Because God doesn't always call us to lead in every situation, it's important to know when to be a servant, a support to someone else. In an ensemble art such as theatre we can easily slip on the desire to make our art matter, to make a statement, to be heard; but occasionally the best thing we can do is to be quiet and let our fellow artists carry the mantle of story-telling.

In this production, because there are so many bold choices in other design areas, it was important to make the lighting design simple and subtle. The most difficult part of this particular design is the interaction with the projection design. The problem with projecting on the floor is that if we want to see the actors, we'll need to light them; but light tends to wash out and to overwhelm projections. A few years ago, a student and I did some research into best practices for utilizing the floor as a projection surface and found that tightly focused areas of light in combination with lighting from the side would allow us to keep light off the floor, but still light the actor; a technique that comes from the world of performance dance.



*Photo by Drew Schmidt*

In the photo above, our 2015 production of *Macbeth*, we signified the undercurrent of evil using projections. Here Lady Macbeth is making the choice to seek death and power rather than life and goodness. We successfully lit the actress in a compelling way while also allowing her to walk over and even interact with the projections beneath her.

In addition to serving the projections, the lighting design continues to also serve subtle functions of focus, movement, and of course, illumination. We want to see the actors after all.

# CHAPTER 37 : SOUND DESIGN

Because God created us to be aural and emotional beings, we ought to lean into sound effects and music to help craft an experience. But because these two elements are so powerful, it's important to avoid the fabrication of an unwarranted and undeserved emotional climax, to do so would be self-serving and self-indulgent.

Throughout the production we utilize music to help drive and define emotion; either helping the audience respond to what has happened or prepare them for what is about to come. But what's unique to this story is the building experience of sensory overload and the feeling that rings out after the fact. Two particular moments in which this is highlighted are what I like to call the "sign tornadoes". As Christopher walks into the entrance of the train station he is consumed and affronted by all the various signs and advertisements. It's entirely too much for him to handle, too busy for him to focus on the task at hand; very similar to the description of the student in the room of one hundred TVs.

To give you a sense of the starting place, here is the original script for one of those scenes.

66 The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time

**Voice Four** Fuller's  
**Voice Five** easyCar.com  
**Voice Two** The Mad Bishop  
**Voice Three** And Bear Public House  
**Voice Four** Fuller's London Pride  
**Voice One** Dixons  
**Voice Three** Paddington Bear at Paddington Station  
**Voice Five** Tickets  
**Voice One** Taxis  
**Voice Two** First Aid  
**Voice Four** Eastbourne Terrace  
**Voice Two** Way Out  
**Voice One** Praed Street  
**Voice Five** The Lawn  
**Voice Three** Q Here Please  
**Voice Four** Upper Crust  
**Voice One** Sainsbury's  
**Voice Five** Local information  
**Voice Three** Great Western First  
**Voice One** Position Closed  
**Voice Two** Closed  
**Voice Four** Position Closed  
**Voice Three** Sock Shop  
**Voice Four** Fast Ticket Point  
**Voice Five** Millie's Cookies

Part Two 67

**Voice One** Coffee  
**Voice Two** Fergie to Stay at Manchester United  
**Voice Three** Freshly Baked Cookies and Muffins  
**Voice Two** Cold Drinks  
**Voice Four** Penalty Fares  
**Voice One** Warning  
**Voice Three** Savoury Pastries  
**Voice Four** Platform 14  
**Voice Five** Burger King  
**Voice Two** Fresh Filled  
**Voice Three** The Reef Café Bar  
**Voice Four** Business travel  
**Voice One** Special Edition  
**Voice Two** Top 75 Albums  
**Voice Five** Evening Standard  
*As the chorus becomes more cacophonous Christopher finds it more difficult to continue to walk. Christopher stops. Rests his head against a box. Puts his hands over his ears. A Station Guard approaches him.*  
**Station Guard** You look lost.  
**Christopher** *pulls out his Swiss Army knife.*  
*The Station Guard backs away.*  
**Station Guard** Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa.  
**Christopher** *carries on.*  
**Christopher** Left, right, left, right, left, right, left, right.  
*He makes his hand into a telescope to limit his field of vision.*

The lines are meant to be delivered in rapid succession, but in order to amplify the fast pace experience into an overwhelming sensibility we took the signs and phrases out of the script, recorded the actors announcing the pieces, then overlapped and layered them into surround sound. Looking at the script it would have been simple to deliver one line after the other, but because this portion of the story is less about the words written down and more about the experience at hand, it was imperative that we craft a sense of overlapping chaos.

In addition, we also layered into the sound effect reverberation in the voices, distant echoes, and the sounds of a train station (It was important to ground the experience in the real world by layering a bed of environmental sound effects to help define the location).

If you're interested in hearing what the final product sounded like, [here's a link](#) to a simplified version that can be played on your computer. The full experience in the actual space with a large speaker system and in context with the play, actors, and projections will certainly be an affront to the audience's senses.

## CHAPTER 41 : ACTING

---

Because God created us to be complex creatures, it's imperative that as actors we portray human subtleties and nuances without being reductionist or overt (with that said, choices need to be loud enough or large enough to be perceived on stage by audience members in the back row).

The obvious example of this difficult balance in this production is the characterization of Christopher. Maverick, the actor portraying Christopher and I spent significant time playing with various verbal and physical characterizations. It was important for us not to create an archetype or a stereotype out of Christopher. We didn't want him to feel other or different, we didn't want him to feel strange or foreign; instead our goal was to portray him very much like you and me. On the other hand, it was also important to be true to the lived autistic experience, to pick up on the subtle characterizations and characteristics of an autistic fifteen-year-old boy.

Throughout the process we played with hand movements, eye contact, vocal inflection, excitability, postures, and more. All this to portray the character of Christopher truthfully; but the overwhelming sense we wanted to create was love; that this boy is worth connecting with emotionally and worth loving.

## CHAPTER 43 : BEYOND THE EXPERIENCE

---

Because God's stories extend well beyond the story telling space, permeating all of life, we wanted to bridge the empathetic gap into the lobby, helping the audience bridge their experience with other disciplines and other experiences. We sought out several relationships, connections with library book clubs, conversations with other departments, talks with other institutions. A successful connection needs to be one that is mutually beneficial and that can be executed excellently and purposefully. Of all the avenues we explored two panned out.

The first was with the Math department. The connection is loose, simply that the character of Christopher loves mathematics. We wanted to serve our audience, which are mostly men and women of faith, by giving the math department seniors a venue in which to discuss their integration of faith and learning. At the time of writing we're still in discussion, but we intend on crafting a series of lobby posters that articulate various mathematical theologies. This might include the theology of infinity, patterns in chaos, the discoverability of mathematics, and more. Our students will then come alongside the mathematics students to help craft their displays in an approachable and aesthetically pleasing way for all audience members.

The second lobby experience is a collaboration with an honors student, inspired by a discussion with the psychology department. There is a test, an initial gauge as to whether or not a person is possibly on the autistic spectrum. In this test a person is shown a series of eyes and four corresponding emotions. The subject is then asked to select which of the four emotions is being portrayed in the image. This is repeated several times and the accuracy of emotional detection is tallied and computed.

We decided to administer this test in virtual reality, placing the subject in a classroom among other students (which is really just a video recorded with a 360-degree camera). The first five questions would be normal, typical, as expected; but throughout the matriculation through the remainder of the questions we would create an experience of sensory overload. This would occur through ambient sounds turned up in volume, colors bleeding from one object to another, amplified brightness of lights, and the idiosyncratic behaviors of neighbors being exaggerated. Our hypothesis is that the viewer's ability to accurately assess the emotional nuance of a set of eyes will decline in direct correlation with the experience of sensory overload. At the end of the exam, the teacher in the virtual classroom will come up to the viewer asking, "What's the matter, are you okay?" The goal is less about psychology and science and more about understanding and empathy by way of a palpable experience.

As an educator it's especially exciting to watch a student explore and balance questions of theatrical experience, computer programming, best practices in statistical research, and the general well-being of our subjects while in virtual reality. Not only does our honors student need to research all these areas, but he will also have to gather students from several different disciplines to help complete the project. This is truly an interdisciplinary endeavor.

# CHAPTER 47 : CONCLUSION

---

We could continue to unpack the practice and technique of each of these areas of theatre, but here, for this paper, I believe the *why* is more important than the *how*, that the spiritual foundation is more important than the theatrical execution. So let me leave you with this last thought, idea, concept; that all this work, all this time, all this money, all this production is more than simply entertainment. For many of us this art is our calling, our mission, our service to our communities and is vital for the wellbeing and health of our culture.

Because God calls us to love Him with all of our hearts and our minds and our souls and our strength, as women and men of faith we need to seek not just to physical and social survival but also emotional and spiritual flourishing. Artists help lead that charge, fostering a vibrant culture. Christian artists recognize that Christ is the completion and the fulfillment of all good art and science and literature and education. This is a truth, baked into our souls, noted by artists and theologians across the ages; for example, the great American poet T.S. Eliot.

*If we take culture seriously, we see that a people does not need merely enough to eat ... but a proper and particular cuisine ... Culture may even be described simply as that which makes life worth living.*

**T.S. Eliot | *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*  
Culture Care pg 42**

There is a sense that the arts have been under siege for the last few decades. Arts are often the first thing to be cut in schools, they're often seen as pretentious and unneeded in culture, but we need to recognize that this viewpoint comes from a place of scarcity, that there isn't enough; enough time, money, energy, interest. This is to our own peril as a society; that in a time of pervasive pragmatism and social fragmentation, we would sideline the very people who remind us that there is more that unites than divides. The arts are a pursuit of ideologies that moves our imaginations to seek the Kingdom of Heaven. We, as a society, need artists to help us move from a place of paralyzing scarcity to a place of gratuitous generosity. Makoto Fujimura says it beautifully.

*When we "win" culture war battles by demonizing the other side, the resulting paralysis and disappointments lead to the expanse of fissures rather than the soil of abundance. Having deep convictions about the world is important; but the problem is in assuming that there is a zero-sum environment in which someone wins and someone loses. Cultural estuaries thrive on diversity. Therefore, convictions resulting in sharp disagreements are not the problem. Seeing an environment of severely limited resources, in fear believing that the soil of culture can no longer be a place of abundance, and being trapped in that fear is the problem.*



*A healthy and thriving culture is impossible without the participation of artists and other leaders who are educated intellectually, trained experientially, formed spiritually, and growing morally. Beauty is both a goal and a catalyst for each of these elements.*

**Makoto Fujimura | Culture Care p129, 48**

What Christ has done for us is to make a way for us to move out of a place of fear and into a place of love; love for ourselves, love for the other, and most certainly a love for God Himself. The gift of the arts is one that can move all of humanity deeper into that place of grace.

Are you a creative? Then create in a way that calls all of humanity deeper into a place of love, for Christ's namesake. Are you a consumer? Then support the arts in a loud and informed voice. Are you indifferent? Then go experience, reflect, and be moved; remembering that it is not the artist or even the art that is calling and drawing you, it is the Holy Spirit, the author and giver of life that is widening your heart and ushering in the reign of God into your life. This is everything that we as a Christian academic institution long to do; to grow our students, staff, and faculty into faithful and courageous pursuers of Christ's Kingdom in the world.

All this because God first loved us, as a generous, gratuitous, overwhelming outpouring of His love.

All this, because God.

# BIBLIOGRAPHY

---

In hope that this may be a resource to others, I will include here not only the sources referenced in the paper but also the resources that inspired this project.

Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. "The Danger of a Single Story." *TED*, [https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda\\_adichie\\_the\\_danger\\_of\\_a\\_single\\_story?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?language=en).

Begley, Sarah. "Julie Taymor's Creative Process: The Lion King." *Time*, <https://time.com/4065287/julie-taymor-creative-process/>.

Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Hendrickson Publishers, 2007.

Conner, Benjamin T. *Disabling Mission, Enabling Witness: Exploring Missiology through the Lens of Disability Studies*. InterVarsity Press, 2018.

Crouch, Andy. *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling*. InterVarsity Press, 2013.

Fujimura, Makoto. *Culture Care: Reconnecting with Beauty for Our Common Life*. InterVarsity Press, 2017.

González, Justo L. *Manana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective*. Abingdon Press, 1992.

Nellhaus, Tobin, et al. "Modes of Media in Digital Performance." *HowlRound Theatre Commons*, <https://howlround.com/modes-media-digital-performance>.

Pierce, Jerald Raymond. "Hearing the Difference." *American Theatre*, 1 July 2019, <https://www.americanteatre.org/2019/07/02/hearing-the-difference/>.

Lee, Ashley. "Projection Design Is Reinventing Theater, and Not Just Broadway. National Tours Too." *Los Angeles Times*, 5 Oct. 2019, <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/story/2019-10-05/projection-design-theater-national-tours?fbclid=IwAR0copTw0Ud3zDp-8RAAtK8uxH3ilYhka9JLIP3qz5QgVgFkUU79kS7vr-3g>.

Root, Andrew. *Faith Formation in a Secular Age: Responding to the Church's Obsession with Youthfulness*. Baker Publishing Group, 2017.

Taymor, Julie. "Spider-Man, The Lion King and Life on the Creative Edge." *TED*, [https://www.ted.com/talks/julie\\_taymor\\_spider\\_man\\_the\\_lion\\_king\\_and\\_life\\_on\\_the\\_creative\\_edge?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/julie_taymor_spider_man_the_lion_king_and_life_on_the_creative_edge?language=en).

Wolterstorff, Nicholas. *Art Rethought: The Social Practices of Art*. Oxford University Press, 2017.