

Summer 8-7-2020

The Collaborators Draw the Circle

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The Collaborators Draw the Circles

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans in
partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts
in
Film and Theatre
Theatre Directing

by

Gary Karl Lengel

B.S. Nova University, 1992

August, 2020

DEDICATION

To my mother and father, Jane and Richard Lengel, who kept the light on and the music playing; to my wife Ann, who has been alongside every step of the way since we found each other in 1977, and our daughters, Jessica and Gretchen, who shared many of these experiences in the wings. Finally, an appreciation to David Hoover, who kept opening the windows when the doors were shut.

FOREWORD

Acknowledging a certain personal irony in the metaphor of circle, this journey serves to synthesize five decades of professional experience with the culmination of a degree in Theatre Directing. The gentle, inclusive seduction of the theatre's story circle, as it has aged from the urges at a primitive campfire to its modern stage complexities, is an intoxicating dance of the literary to the dramatic. In the 1990s, while standing backstage producing a business theatre event, I smiled as my befuddled client, a mid-level corporate executive, humbly apologized for his irate and ill-timed tantrum just prior to the show's start: "I don't know how you guys do it, but, criminy, if our company could do what you just did we'd be blockbusters!" What the cast, tech crew and some support personnel and I had done was our jobs: ignore the dabblers and take the scrappy, cheesy remnants of content we'd been rehearsing ten days and turn the disastrous dress rehearsal we'd suffered through into something inspirational to his sales force. Next. As the show is developed from writer to director and from creatives to audience, all know it must open: most of the people mentioned in this paper would willingly have spent innumerable hours finetuning the lights, the acoustics, the wall color, the *moment*. More than likely, the time spent would continue to improve it, but, at some point, you've got to let it go: what happens in that moment is why we do it.

As I seek this degree in my late 60s, I admit that I've carried some baggage across the rutted routes that have gotten me here; it is impossible to ignore experience, especially that reinforced by repetition: if I mention an anecdotal incident, it is probably representative and exemplary of some relational behavior in at least two or three other shows. My professional experience includes 30 years under the similar titles of production manager, stage manager, production stage manager in various theatre and opera productions, and as an event stage

manager and producer in business theatre for the Walt Disney Company in Florida and Paris; my training and education includes theatre studies at Fairmont State College (FSC) in West Virginia, a B.S. in Professional Management, from Nova University in Florida, and 12 hours in Non-Profit Organization Management at the University of Central Florida in Orlando. I have worked in many broad capacities in theatre, janitorial to producer, and in every environment from site-specific through fixed 4000-seat Orpheum, Saenger and Fox theatres, arenas indoors and outdoors, productions monied and throw-together. I have swung across Studio 54 on a rope and hawked video cameras in a storefront on 34th St. in Manhattan, all in the name of sustaining my *art*. I have said “GO!” to actors, musicians, automobiles, turntables, helicopters - real and scenic - alligators, money drops from the ceiling, and cats in the aisles - real cats, not just Sir Andrew Lloyd Webber’s costumed felines. I have worked with visionaries, geniuses, sadomasochists and circus hucksters, and little has changed over the decades: my enduring naivete and curiosity has enjoyed and benefited from this wonderful ride and has blessed my baggage with a wealth of mixed impressions that will continue to influence my directing experience moving forward. A *curriculum vitae* is attached in Appendix A for a descriptive reference and timeline of the serendipitous journey.

My research includes readings of several professional and academic sources on influential historical and contemporary directing and acting techniques; I intend to briefly document the rise of the contemporary director from the 19th century to the present, focusing randomly on multiple experiences in my professional career that have characterized the celebrated practitioners Konstantin Stanislavski, Berthold Brecht, Elia Kazan, Peter Brook, Nicholas Hytner and Moises Kaufman. In discussions of the various contributors, I will relate several personal experiences that can provide insight to a collaborative process; specifically, I

will provide observations of my thesis role as Don Butler in UNO's 2019 fall production of *The Unmentionables* and its relation to the various collaborative processes of theatrical production. This thesis role and all of the other projects mentioned included producers, directors, managers, designers, technicians and performers. Audience sizes varied from 20 to several thousand. Most of the productions were performed in proscenium, thrust or arena, and some in multiple settings; the thesis role was performed on a thrust deck. Budgets ranged from several hundred dollars to a few million, and collaborating participants from less than ten to more than a couple of hundred. Regardless of scope, they were all ensembles of engaged collaborators who were passionately committed to creating and sustaining live performance.

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ABSTRACT

The mystical appeal of a circle reverberates throughout the practice of theatre: from the story circles of our ancestors echoing through the caves and across the ancient savannahs to the modern-day arena palaces that allow playwrights, directors, actors, producers, designers, craftspeople, and, ultimately audiences, to engage and embrace our retold truths, we face each other in circles. This writing references academic instruction and professional experiences in live theatre, documenting various appearances of the circle metaphor as the rehearsal core drives through the production process. It is an endorsement of the circle's power to the initial table read and beyond: this focus highlights the *production core*, that combination of director, stage manager and actor that circles the playwright's initial spark, and, through the daily rehearsal process, stimulates the concentric circles of the producing staff, designers, and, ultimately, the audience.

Keywords: Theatre Production; Circle; Stage Management; Theatre Directors; Actors; Playwrights; Theatre Production Process

THE CIRCLE

In 2005, in the second year toward my UNO Theatre Directing M.F.A., I had begun a directing practicum of Nicky Silver's *Fat Men in Skirts*, and concurrently and independently of the degree, I was at Southern Rep Theatre downtown directing tech rehearsals of Elizabeth Dewberry's gothic and quirky *Flesh and Blood* for a professional mounting for the local theatre group Krewe des Sept Productions. In my mid 50s at the time, my plan had been to coalesce three decades of stage management and acting experience into a formal degree that would shape a mid-life career as a theatre director. I had acquired an experiential background in what I had observed in my teens as a methodical approach toward the qualities of a mature director: appreciate and absorb the actor's skill set and the stage manager's immediate access to the production process.

The final full week of August, 2005, I had completed the read-through of *Fat Men in Skirts* and begun the previews for *Flesh and Blood*. On Saturday the 28th, I canceled our afternoon rehearsal of *Fat Men in Skirts* and the evening production of *Flesh and Blood* to allow both companies' members to escape the wrath of an impending hurricane named Katrina, a circle of wind, rain and chaos that was rapidly approaching the coast of Louisiana. My family and I hunkered down in the city, enduring the storm's hit on Monday and, on Tuesday the 30th fled the aftermath of flood that began to consume New Orleans. Following a brief stay in Texas with family, we relocated to Florida, unable to wait for the recovery, and my career path jumped tracks to maintain personal stability; for over a decade, I stumbled aimlessly through sales and development work, quietly rueful that my life-long dream had been derailed by an angry atmospheric circle of nature. A la Kurt Vonnegut, "so it goes..."

In 2018, employment offered an opportunity to relocate back to New Orleans and a restart to the degree; in my late 60s, I am coming back to that youthful aspiration with an ironic recognition of the metaphor of *circles* in my life. It is with great humility that I submit that *the concentric rings rippling from the ancient gatherings around the campfire, into the promise of the first full reading of a script out loud, to the powerful seduction of the arena audience's embrace: all combine to make the circle a supreme geometric form in theatrical production.* I frame my personal, academic and professional deductions that the production process excels best when it actively considers, includes and reveres the collaborative nature of the circle.

This observation is not just an abstract legend; it is grounded in the hard logic of mathematics: Paul Calter states for *Geometry In Art and Architecture* that the circle “is the ultimate geometric symbol...a symbol of democracy and the preferred shape for an assembly of equals; the council circle, the campfire circle, and King Arthur's round table” (*Geometry*). During my nascent and impressionable political awakening in the 1960s, the North Vietnamese held up peace talks to end U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia for months as they demanded a round table for the discussion that might remove the decades-long western intervention of colonialism (Michaels): the irony of a circle to equalize the lines of history as drawn by war is not lost on any experienced practitioner of the theatre.

So, my theatre begins in circles: its spaces, its vision, its process; its successive, inner circles of sharing a narrative, adding elements and its completion with an audience; its relentless questioning of moral clarity and my serendipitous spin through its myriad of applications. It starts with a circle.

Through these five decades of participation at amateur, academic and professional levels, and across multiple media, I have been reminded, almost daily, the art of performance is

collaborative: I have grown to respect the metaphoric geometry of the variety of shapes that come together in the theatrical collage. Continually, *ensemble* and its numerous synonyms, have prompted me to envision the various production processes in the metaphor of circle. It is primitive in origin: Jonathon Gottschall prefaces *The Storytelling Animal* with the observation that primates “thronged around hearth fires” to trade stories (viii). While my community and high school theatre exposure to the art form was in traditional proscenium settings, I first recognized the allure of the circle performing in a “golden rectangle” arena configuration under a tent in a summer series at Fairmont State College in the late 1960s.

The arenas of the ancients had begun to reappear in the mid 20th century as practitioners of political and social theatre sought intimacy with the audience (Todd et al. 25) and producers relished the maximized profit of audience capacity (*Concerts*). In the mid 1970s, as I was considering the professional possibilities of a theatrical career, generally on the indoor thrust stage at FSC, I had developed a keen appreciation for the setting of the circle, full and partial: the intimacy of rehearsals from the initial communities of cast expanding to include the broader communities of audience. Concurrently, Michael Bennett’s profound tribute to dancers, *A Chorus Line*, a game-changer for the American professional theatre, began as a workshop “in a circle with each dancer stating their name, where they were born and why they started dancing. As the evening continued, the stories grew and encompassed everything from childhood traumas, insecurities, sexuality and more” (*Behind the Line*). The illustrative testament of that January 1975 workshop has transfixed my observation of the power of the circle in the production of story: the core elements of playwright, director and performers faced one another to germinate that bare-bones but evocatively successful musical.

In 1979, I had relocated to New York from my hinterland beginnings in theatre, and I first stage managed professionally in a brief stint for the National Theatre of the Deaf's Little Theatre of the Deaf's (NTD) series of signed and simultaneously-voiced stories in improvised outdoor settings in Central Park. Similar to Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop in England in the 1930s (An Introduction), NTD's small ensemble would arrive at a scheduled location with several colorful pole banners, a trunk of hand props, establish a central playing area and draw an audience of 30-40 for half-hour retellings of standard fables. NTD's and Littlewood's approach, of course, derived from the *commedia dell'arte*, a street performance form that had paralleled Chinese and African storytellers who entertained and regaled their cultures for centuries in elevated storytelling (Kuritz).

On a 65-acre spread just north of Manhattan in the early 1980s, as a performer in two summer seasons of The New York Renaissance Festival, I improvised dialogues with other actors and audience participating in an immersive experience set in 16th century England. Similar to the NTD performances, the actors would generate a circle of attention and perform fifteen-minute sequences, the audience coming and going as it chose. By 1985, my immersion in the arena experience had moved indoors to the LaMama Annex Theatre: I assistant stage managed a remount of Meredith Monk's *Quarry*, a multimedia performance art opera that recounts a child's World War II nightmare. The space contributed significantly to the dramatic context as the choreography threaded the cast through the raw space only feet from the audience.

Monk's production mirrored Peter Brook's adaptive interest in immersive performance at Paris' Theatres des Bouffes du Nord and around the world as his company strove to shatter the proscenium barrier of the "two-room" theatre (Todd 33). Jean-Guy Lecat, Brook's designer, observed that theatre space "has a twofold function: to accommodate and to relate. A too

accommodating ‘stage space’ risks cramping the performance, instead of projecting it toward the audience, as happens in circular places” (103).

In 1986, I stage managed a summer stock production of *A Chorus Line* at the North Shore Music Theatre (NSMT), an 1800-seat arena house in Beverly, Massachusetts. Circular performance spaces had become popular in the 1950s as summer stock “tents” had expanded into hard-walled permanent structures for year-round operation (“History”). The crew and I had joked that we should rename the production *A Chorus Line, Line, Line, Line* as it had to play to four sides of the circle. I watched as the dancer Paul San Marco’s ten-minute monologue unfolded on the arena stage: as written, the actor playing the role stood alone, just off-center in the circle, surrounded by 1800 pairs of eyes, increasingly glistening with tears. As Paul’s story of a young, gay Hispanic dancer - shared in the play only with the director Zach - revealed the bullying and abuse of family, friends and his heritage’s macho culture, I began to connect the dots of the tears to the lines of the circle: a whirlpool of empathy swirled the stage as the audience absorbed his very private moment, publicly shared with the opposing onlookers across their view. In its simple physical reality, I believe the circle is *always* an opportunity for *shared humanity*: we must face one another as we look into a circle, and, by doing so, absorb the reflection back into ourselves.

These increasingly intense personal exposures to arena settings awakened an observation that theatre practitioners seemed actively engaging in an escape from Brook’s “two-room” box that had served as my most common experience; if the presentation form could not project into a full circle, it seemed that many modern practitioners attempted at least to engage the audience in some hybrid of a thrust format. Over the initial three decades of my life experience in live theatre, I have developed a personal preference for the arena: as a performer, it has been the

most satisfying, as a director, the most invigorating, and, as a stage manager, the most challenging. I believe it is also the most conducive setting to begin a production: in the round, surrounded by empty seats climbing away from the stage into the promising darkness of full houses. Not unlike our primitive ancestors, we begin in an intimate circle as we take the word from the page and give it a beating heart.

THE PRODUCTION CORE

It is my observation that most theatrical endeavors tend to begin with a *story* for which a producer is willing to physically subsidize a *place* and an *environment* for a *teller* to present to the *listener*; the production collaboration exists as the director provides the vision to bridge the *story* to the *listener*. Peter Brook builds this bridge for the process in his formula *theatre = R r a* or, repetition of rehearsal, representation of performance, and assistance of an audience (Brook 137). As I imagine Brook's "bridge" in a line from the playwright's conception through the audience's completion, then I contend that producers, designers and promotional personnel may come and go, but the 20-30 units of this rehearsal part of the process are populated by a consistent *community core*, or circle, of the director's vision, which informs the external producing and design staffs, the stage manager's recording, which informs the occasionally-present design and technical staff, and the actor's realization, which ultimately informs the audience. This process typically unfolds in a standardized formula: prolific designer Arden Fingerhut, writing in *Theatre: Choice in Action*, concisely states that "an average rehearsal in a professional theater in the United States is from three to four weeks of work. A week ... is six days long : work days are usually eight hours long" (253). This general standard is echoed in Elia Kazan's professional formula, established in the commercial heyday of 20th century

Broadway theatre, of four weeks from the first rehearsal to an expectant audience in the theatre (Jones 139).

Moises Kaufman confirms the standard as the process rehearses “for three to four weeks, and then, after what is typically one week of technical rehearsals and a few previews, the play opens to the public” (Kaufman 19).

Folklore holds that first impressions are critical: I contend that the first rehearsal, not unusually a *table read*, should be set at a *round* table, large enough to include all immediate participants. This provides an intimacy for the *production core*, which is the focus of my experience in the art form’s industry and the domain of my thesis; it will explore what each collaborator can bring to the larger circle of community and specifically how the director maximizes the collaboration in the circle of a first rehearsal through the additional emanations of the vision.

THE TABLE READ

Early in the 20th century, Jacques Copeau, French director and founder of the Theatre de Vieux Colombier, argued that “the director should first call together his actors around a table and not on a stage” (Chinoy 27). Prominent Broadway impresario David Belasco would “...after a few moments spent in general conversation [with the actors] invite them to accompany me to the reading room, where they find a long, well-lighted table surrounded by comfortable chairs“ (130).

Not all producing companies use the table read at a first rehearsal, some arguing that it is a waste of valuable time. Chuck Smith, the celebrated Resident Director of Chicago’s Goodman Theatre says "I read the play on its feet and work with the play on its feet, work out the play on its feet" (“Goodman”). While there is no denying Smith’s urgency against the paucity of time as

an excuse to push the rehearsal process as quickly as possible, Nicholas Hytner, for 13 years the Artistic Director of London's National Theatre, feels strongly enough about the opportunity to develop the company's community during the table read to the extent that he included "every department in the National: stage crew, lighting, props, costume, front of house, marketing" (Hytner 12). Echoing Hytner's endorsement, many companies use the first day of rehearsal as a social event: it is an opportunity to excite all contributors. Peter Brook, celebrating the power of the theater's energy, states "the focus of a large group of people creates a unique intensity" (Brook 99).

Fingerhut concludes that, while "there are many other ways to begin the process ... the read-through is most common" (Fingerhut 263). While this read-through should be attended by as much of the production's full complement as possible, it is the essential core of the director, the actor, and stage manager that will shape the transition. The circle begins with the draw of a story.

THE PLAYWRIGHT

"The fiction that artistic labor happens in isolation, and that artistic accomplishment is exclusively the provenance of individual talents, is politically charged, and, in my case at least, repudiated by the facts" Tony Kushner (The Theatre Team 91).

A COLLABORATOR STARTS the CIRCLE'S FIRE

Kindling the hearth, the playwright brings the story to start the circle: it might be brand new, a retelling, a reinterpretation or a translation: the story begins as a question seeking answers or as answers seeking a challenge. Despite Kushner's humility, the playwright is revered for his reticent presence, a literary dreamer at the mercy of errant egos and exploding sandbags: *Festival d'Avignon's* Jean Vilar acknowledged that the "creator in theatre is the playwright, in so far as he provides the essential element...after each performance we still feel ourselves to be his debtors" (Chinoy 270). In the metaphor of a campfire circle, the playwright brings the spark that starts the story's fire.

Western theatre's story form is broadly defined as tragedy or comedy. In *Great Directors at Work*, author David Richard Jones determines that classic tragedy "derives from Aristotle's preference, in Poetics 11... in which recognition, the intellectual or psychological crisis, coincides with the sudden reversal of circumstances" (Jones 188). In Christopher Booker's *The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories*, the British author suggests comedy has five subplots: *overcoming the monster, rags to riches, the quest, voyage and return, and rebirth*; in his review of *The Seven Basic Plots*, New York Times cultural writer Michiko Kakutani revealed that these subplots "represent variations on Freud's family romance -- the process whereby a young person

comes to terms with parental authority, ventures out into the wider world, faces assorted tests and eventually achieves independence” (Kakutani).

Ancient theatre existed for centuries as a retelling of these traditional frameworks: in my research and observation, Greek poiesis, Roman adaptations and pageants and Christian mystery and morality plays all served to remind largely illiterate populations of certain communal obligations as the gods wrote the rules and mortals toed the line. Most of these presentations were driven by a poet who served as a focal point of the creative effort as writer/producer/manager/director/performer. Even as the printing press and the Renaissance loosened the ancient and medieval institutional controls, the stories continued to adhere to pre-existing classical themes and moral parables. As the elemental complexity of productions in 16th century Italy grew and generated task delegation in the crafts, the Elizabethan theatre writer’s work as a *dramatist* began to isolate the playwright as a powerful creative entity; a century ago, in in *The Artist of the Theater*, impresario and taskmaster Edward Gordon Craig, raised the Bard’s word as hallowed when he declared that “the greatest offense an actor can give to a dramatist is to cut out words or lines in his play... It is an offense to poach on what is the sole property of the playwright” (Chinoy 151); Jean Vilar singled out the Elizabethan era’s producing companies as “above all, playwrights’ theaters. And what playwrights! Every age goes to them for its profit” (269). In *Balancing Acts* Nicholas Hytner positions William Shakespeare as “an actor who provides for other actors myriad ways of telling his stories and of being his characters” (174). Shakespeare’s work remains a revered testament to the power of text.

As the production process began to benefit from the contributions of scenic design in the 17th century, the playwright was able to call upon scenic artists to build lavish collaborations; by the mid 19th century, thanks to the ensuing development of elaborate and fantastic

environments, *spectacle* flourished to such an extent that Craig, Charles Kean and David Belasco were incorporating scene machinery within a proscenium structure (Stagecraft), allowing the playwright to direct her stories toward character complexity, and further delineating the separation between the literal text and the dramatic presentation. Even as naturalism took hold in the late 19th century, challenging a diminishing respect for text after two rollicking centuries of accumulated spectacle, the reverence for the playwright strengthened, Chinoy noting that “intense respect for the playwright’s text prevented both dramatists [Otto] Brahm and [André] Antoine from using it merely as a stimulus for their directorial imagination...they did not feel free to deviate from the dramatist’s instructions” (Bradby 31); in the 1930s, Theatre Company’s John Goorney, a co-founder with Joan Littlewood, wrote that Shakespeare’s text was “still sharp enough to provoke thought, to extend man’s awareness of his problems, and to strengthen his belief in his kind” (Bradby 36).

Stanislavski’s exploration of Anton Chekhov’s work intensified reverence for the text even as he worked to pass “from the literary to the artistic and unite the inner line of the play [so that] everything became comprehensible” (Jones 73). The director Harold Clurman, reinforcing the delineation, remarked that “Chekhov’s answers to questions about his plays were so cryptic that it was practically impossible for his colleagues to act on his advice. His was not an isolated case” (Chinoy 272). Through most of the early 20th century, the American playwright’s position as a writer continued to separate from the production process, and to validate a unique position of strength: a director with a sensual mastery of envisioning the text and generating an engaging result. In Clurman’s heyday of 1930s The Group Theatre the political nature of the labor movement, arising from the abuses of 19th century industrial mechanization, had given the various incremental collaborators a stronger voice in the production process; unions formed and

exercised regulatory and contractual power over considerable populations of artists and craftsmen (Actors' Equity Association). As the world struggled to recover from the Depression, theatre writing reflected the broader literary canon: individualism and independent thought. Directors showed eagerness to confront the playwright as the sacred source of text. Harold Clurman opines that "a play in the theater is something radically different from a play on the page. The dramatist expresses himself mainly through words, the director through action which involves people amid the paraphernalia of the stage" (Chinoy 272). In Europe, state-subsidized and freed from the constraint of the "demonic commercial competitiveness" (274) of theatre in the United States, Berthold Brecht initiated his *modellbook* production, which, similar to Stanislavski's detail of Chekhov, chronicled specific notation for production and subsequent reproduction of his works. When Elia Kazan directed Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* in 1947, he revised substantially "[as] a director making these changes is like a gardener cleaning the soil: he turns everything over but aside from removing extraneous objects he changes nothing" (Jones 183).

As such, the actor became another prominent contributor to the story process. As early as The Group Theatre's work in the 1930s, Clurman observed "actors whose intuitive insights not only generate new qualities in a part or in a play but ...serve the playwright with creative ideas which finally become incorporated into the actual text of the play" and French director Jean Vilar wrote that "the opinion of an actor rehearsing a part is of fundamental importance" (Chinoy 273).

By the 1960s, Lloyd Richards, attempting to instill discipline at the National Playwrights Conference at the Eugene O'Neill Center, reinforced the commercial theatre's alienation of the playwright from the production process, going so far as to put up a sign in 1971 "forbidding

actors to talk to playwrights during the rehearsal period” (Isaac 25). Richards felt strongly enough about the discipline to declaim: that “the director should be stronger. The rule is that the playwright is not allowed to talk to an actor. He should communicate all of his complaints to the director. The kingpin is the director. I won't even come in and talk to the playwright or director until the play is over” (25).

Simultaneously, Peter Brook had begun advocating for a dominant directorial authority, even in the revered text of the classics, as “after all, the texts do not get burned - each person can do what he thinks necessary with a text and still no one suffers. What is interesting is the result” (Brook 82); he would begin searching for text that was free from language “just as exacting for the author, as a language of words” (44). In the 1970s, Brook’s revolutionary Centre for International Theatre Research (CITC) at Theatre des Bouffes du Nord in Paris, would seek inspirational projects that sought to release theatre from its textual limitations, practically eliminating the need for the traditional isolated “playwright”. Like-minded artists, including renowned performance artist Meredith Monk, pursued similar approaches, relying on improvisation to generate visual impressions and aural machination to engage and transform audiences (Smithner).

Brook’s success, and the successes of those who mirrored his radical approaches, were made possible by the overwhelming popularity of the commercial theatre. Buoyed by growing post-war audiences attending profitable seasons of traditional and musical productions, Western theatre was generating Neil Simon comedies, Kander and Ebb musicals and productions of centuries-old classics at multiple houses in major urban centers. Summer stock and dinner theatres substantially increased the union payrolls of actors, and playwright degrees at major

universities multiplied as an industry of theatrical apostles explored a variety of dramatic presentation forms (AEA).

Many playwrights now openly acknowledge that a play's transformation to performance is a collaborative effort, Edward Albee stating that the playwriting process "must be filtered through others"; Nicholas Hytner recalls a Harold Pinter note about a forgetful actor: "he's a fucking fine actor, ' said Harold about the actor who had just ruined an otherwise excellent production. 'It's a fucking hard job acting. I've done it. Fucking hard. Tell him if he can't remember the line to make it up. He knows what he's doing. Tell him to make it up'" (Hytner 114).

Audacious as he was with text revision, Peter Brook warned in *The Empty Space* that "if one has a knife in one hand one needs a stethoscope in the other" (Brook 88), and he was known to demand adherence to the final production script once the text was established. When Nicholas Hytner took over the National Theatre in London in 2003, he quickly built a reputation as an exemplary collaborator as "British audiences don't expect a facsimile of the original production, but they won't go with a director beyond the point where they lose sight of the playwright...they usually smell a rat if the play is nothing more than a vehicle for the director's imagination. They prefer the director's imagination to reveal the play, rather than the other way around" (Hytner 194).

CONCLUSIONS

However the story comes to the circle, whether through a lone, toiling artist, or as a collaborative ensemble development, the devil is in the details: a playwright must present the story with such definition that a director can competently begin that creative dance toward production, a dance that must sustain beyond the playwright's and the director's presence. The

director must be able to complete the translation in a set period of time, must assure the gathered contributors that the story is of interest to an audience, and must project to all the confidence that the effort is important to a broader audience. In my experience, if the playwright cannot spark this initial relationship, the story's production will have a troubled development: I stage managed Mad Cow Theatre's production of *Animal Crackers* in Orlando in 2015, and a poorly-written script resulted in the waste of two weeks as the director rewrote and then reinstated the original material per the Marx Brothers estate. One weak link need not completely cripple the final result and a well-framed and engaging argument in a well-written language treatment and delivered by committed actors will generally compel an audience's repeated willingness to encircle and embrace.

THE UNMENTIONABLES

Bruce Norris, the Pulitzer Prize winning playwright for his commercially-successful 2010 play *Clybourne Park*, wrote *The Unmentionables* for the Steppenwolf Theatre Company of Chicago, where it was produced in 2006 (*The Unmentionables*). The play, an "incisive comic commentary" (*The Unmentionables* - Variety), examines contemporary American colonialism as the three misguided viewpoints of religion, money and celebrity collide in their ongoing attempts to improve an African nation and its social and political realities. Since 2006, Norris' script has enjoyed several professional mountings across the country, along with a host of academic and semi-professional productions. UNO Director David Hoover had been interested in a production of the script and realized that vision when he assigned it to the calendar as my thesis role toward my degree in the fall of 2019, casting my wife Ann Casey and a strong cast of age-appropriate graduate and undergraduate actors in the complementary roles.

I was only vaguely familiar with Norris as a playwright and researched his work prior to rehearsals, as I have routinely done with any position in which I have taken in theatrical endeavors. I was impressed with his background as an actor and his first writing *The Actor Retires*, an effort that chronicled the wearisome task of auditioning. As I read the script for *The Unmentionables* the first several times, I noticed Norris' affinity for alliteration, a technique that I rely upon for character cadence and line memorization. Norris also uses a peculiarity in contemporary American conversation - interruption and overtopping, and his writing places monologues, particularly in the case of my wife's role, to pace the exposition and action in balanced or interruptive tempos, dependent upon the story's shifts.

Colonialism as a subject matter is not new to the stage: empire's overreach was questioned as early as Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, which, according to some sources, may have drawn from Michael Lord des Montaigne's essay *Des Cannibales* (Montaigne). In her essay *Shakespeare on Global Colonialism*, which explores the various sources of *The Tempest*, Katherine Frank considers that "when Shakespeare chose to include the scenes where Caliban is offered liquor by the Europeans and the ways in which Miranda and Prospero feel they should be thanked for coming to the island and 'teaching' Caliban, he is making a statement about the so-called explorations/discoveries that were taking place all over the world at the time. If Shakespeare were trying to paint the Europeans as blameless, just as much of history has, he would not have included these disturbing scenes" (Shakespeare on Global). As Britain succeeded Spain as the dominant colonialist empire in the 17th and 18th centuries, literature and plays assured the English populace that proper moral values were upheld. In plays from John Dryden's *The Conquest of Granada* (1672) through Richard Sheridan's *School for Scandal* (1777), imperialists were cast in a positive light as upholding "virtues that give English identity

credibility—honesty, frugality, generosity, industry, justice, an appropriate balance between individual liberty and community service” (*The Good Imperialists* 13).

In the 20th century, “confrontation between colonialist Europe and incomprehensible, angry Africa was not only one of [Jean] Genet’s best subjects, but a variation on one of [Peter] Brook’s favorite thematic situations” (Jones 223). English playwright Caryl Churchill delighted in skewering colonialism in her 1979 play *Cloud 9*, and American religious idealism was musicalized in the recent *The Book of Mormon*. Bruce Norris is simply one in a long line of writers who explored the complications of the beneficent white colonialist who aspired to improve the developing world.

Norris was not present for the table read, rehearsals or, so far as I know, any of the performances, but his presence was felt as we built his arguments and resolutions through the production process. There were no formal reviews of the production, but among friends and acquaintances who witnessed the show word-of-mouth was complimentary, most acknowledging that they enjoyed the multiple journeys traveled by the characters, and many recognized the broader colonialism arguments. Some felt that the climax may have been somewhat contrived, but few remarks were negative or unpleasant to this actor’s ear. The UNO departmental postproduction critique was also generally appreciative of Norris’ contribution, only some remarking upon difficulty in understanding the multiple dialects required to suggest the play’s geography.

The use of the dialects introduces an interesting challenge to any playwright, translator or storyteller: how does a story cross cultures, languages and borders? If Booker’s *seven basic plots* are universal, it would seem to our theatrical advantage to present as many variants as possible to keep the seats filled. How the playwright consults, navigates and records those variants may

require a sensitivity to its subject that is unconventional in the artist's work within her own culture, borders and language. The exercise is a reminder that the art of theatre has long existed beyond our Western tradition: the playwright, when carefully scripting, has an expanding treasure trove of people, places and plots to mingle.

THE DIRECTOR

“The written play is not the goal of the theater – only the beginning. If the play at the end is not something beyond what it was at the beginning, there is very little point in the process of transposing it from the book to the stage; very little point, that is, to the whole art of the theater” Harold Clurman (Chinoy 278).

A COLLABORATOR FASHIONS the CIRCLE

In three decades as a professional stage manager, I have had the great opportunity to assist and observe some remarkable directors: Fred Ebb, George C. Wolfe, Martin Charnin, John Caird and Julie Taymor were among some of the memorable names; others less well-known were certainly as capable if not as celebrated. By far my favorite singular recollection of the *power* of a director was a small circle generated by the director Nicholas Hytner in 1993 while I was employed on the Broadway production of *Miss Saigon*. In my recollection, Hytner had seen the prior evening’s performance and management had called the five principals in for an afternoon brush-up rehearsal. The session began in the audience section between the front row and the orchestra pit, where the conductor was positioned to cue the rehearsal pianist. The actors stood in that small circle with Hytner as he gave them notes: quietly, succinctly, and with occasional pearls of humor. His command of the language displayed remarkable efficiency: no hems or haws, but direct, concise tweaks meant to stimulate the performers and their approaches to their craft. It was a deeply moving moment as the actors hung on every syllable, grateful for an intellectual and graceful commentary and such gentle guidance in the art of performance.

Hytner’s genteel approach to notes is not unusual among the thousands of men and women who have chosen to lead as a director. Under a successive variety of titles from medieval *superintendents* to Max Reinhardt’s *regisseurs* to Meyerhold’s *stage managers*, the director’s

job,” according to Tyrone Guthrie, has been to “first of all, decide what it is all about” (Chinoy 245). In the century that the position has grown as the central guiding vision of theatrical production, a corresponding multitude of personalities have exhibited a multitude of models to consider. When the German Duke Georg II Saxe-Meiningen began to wrestle production control from Charles Kean and others, who had long driven the personality focus of the long-established actor-manager system of the 19th century (Jones 41), Saxe-Meiningen was interested in “seizing on the idea that all effects of the production should be subordinated to a single unifying artistic aim, with particular emphasis on the visual aspects of his productions” (Bradby 4). Democratic idealism, industrialization, and decades of nationalistic wars in Europe had loosened a growing audience of commoners now interested in more spectacle, and producers found themselves relying on larger teams and ensembles of unique talents. While the label *director* did not officially register until the middle of the 20th century (4), the early visionaries, from Edward Gordon Craig through Konstantin Stanislavski, strove to exercise complete control over every detail of performance, from the actor’s movements through the design elements. Craig, in *The Artist of the Theater* affirms that “until discipline is understood in a theater to be willing and reliant obedience to the director ...no supreme achievement can be accomplished” (Chinoy 158).

As technology offered more refined nuance in production, these 19th century practitioners encouraged playwrights to offer increasingly more challenging scripts to advance the complexities of live storytelling, and, “by the end of the century, the artistic challenge to the old system was even more formidable. Revolutions were taking place in the theatrical test - about what could be discussed or shown on stage, about the critical relation of theater to society, about the importance of ensemble performance and unified production, and about realism and

abstractionism, and about the shape, size, and function of the theater buildings past, present, and future” (Jones 13).

In the summer of 1898, Konstantin Stanislavski isolated himself in a tower in the Ukraine to build his historic *mise en scene* notes detailing in over 500 particulate instructions his eventual direction of Anton Chekov’s *The Seagull*, from line readings to blocking to design elements. His literary partner, Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko, had persuaded Chekov to allow a new production of the script by The Moscow Art Theatre. It was not easy: two years earlier, Chekov had been embarrassed by a St. Petersburg debut of *The Seagull*, and the playwright was fearful of a Moscow showing that might repeat the failure (16). When it premiered in December of 1898, meticulously constructed through 26 rehearsals over several weeks, the production established Chekov and Stanislavsky as visionaries of the modern realism theatre movement and set a new course for drama and directors in the early 20th century (6).

Brecht, initially mirrored Stanislavski’s dominance over the production; using his *modellbook*, he sought to control not only the current production of his works, but both his and others’ recreations (67).

But, as the role of the modern director has grown, this control has not always exhibited autocratic characteristics: French director Louis Jouvet promoted a softer touch, which meant “nourishing, sustaining and revitalizing the actors, encouraging and satisfying them and finding their proper theatrical diet; it means bringing forth and raising that family-formed according to a different formula for each new play – which we call a theater company“ (228). Renowned British director Joan Littlewood “was always the main source of energy behind the group, [but] Theater Workshop was not set up as her company but as a workers cooperative in which all drew the same salary, and all had an equal voice in decision-making” (Bradby 28).

Sir Nicholas Robert Hytner was Artistic Director of The National Theatre of Great Britain from 2003 to 2015. Exposed to theatre in early life and trained initially in opera, Hytner rose to prominence as a stage director when Cameron MacKintosh selected him to direct *Miss Saigon* (Hytner 229). His tenure at The National Theatre was marked by successful experiments in developing new audiences as he expanded subject material and reduced access prices. While his priorities were traditionally administrative and he delegated much of the directing load to guests, he exerted considerable effort in encouraging established and novice playwrights. Many of the plays presented at the National during his 12 year term were written as commissions, frequently incorporating the actors in improvisational settings that allowed the playwright to experiment: “several of the best jokes in *The Wind in the Willows* emerged in rehearsal. Most playwrights genuinely admire actors for their ability to take dialog that looks heavy on the page and make it fly. Allen [Bennett] is one of the few who occasionally allows actors to write lines for him : if an idea works, he'll take it.” (118). By the time the plays reached the “first rehearsal”, the script was often “premiered” before the friendly audience of *The National Theatre* staff prior to its four to five-week production process. This nurturing approach to contemporary play development is a rare luxury, as, in my experience, most commercial theatre is savagely driven by predetermined economies of time and budget.

My observation of Hytner’s approach during that afternoon rehearsal session and in subsequent readings has led me to believe that, while a forceful director may successfully wield authority through a tyrannical display of power, that force can be just as easily and effectively applied in a velvet glove: regardless of how it is delivered, the director’s authority must be clear, concise and, if ever brutal, only so much as it might serve to be inspirationally transformative.

The clearest initial opportunity to this approach is the first read, when the director must entertain to educate, engage and excite the attending circles of collaborators: the first rehearsal is the director's single most powerful moment to exercise the authority to focus the evolution of the literary to the dramatic. The director must then guide the production core: my experience in this argument is founded in three off-campus, unofficial practicums undertaken during the two decades that have lapsed toward completion of the degree.

MY COLLABORATIONS

In the last 17 years, I have directed three shows: Neil LaBute's *The Mercy Seat*, self-produced at New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts (NOCCA) in New Orleans in 2003, Elizabeth Dewberry's *Flesh and Blood*, produced by Krewe des Sept at Southern Rep Theatre in 2005, and Yasmina Reza's *Art*, produced by TY5 Productions in Florida in 2016. All three events are from contemporary scripts and there are considerable similarities in the scale of the productions.

In my observation of working directors and in this personal experience, I'd agree with the anecdotal adage that casting is the bulk of the work: it is difficult to realize the vision if its primary components are unable or unwilling to fit. Peter Brook became famous for responding "I don't know" after "he walked into the first rehearsal of his first big production, the Stratford's *Loves Labors Lost*, carrying the carefully prepared regiebuch associated with tyrannical directors. When he saw that his visualizations did not match the flesh and blood in the room, Brook closed his book and began to experiment" (Jones, 204). I was fortunate to have a variety of casting situations, and was able to learn from each: in some cases, the show was precast, in others, I had input and final decision. *The Mercy Seat* offered great satisfaction, as a small cast (my choices) in a simple setting raged through the compelling subject; during *Flesh and Blood*, marshaling egos, time and budget against an impending major catastrophe was a

profound learning experience; and, in *Art*, mileage, limited resources and waffling actor commitment shaped the lessons. The additional work as a professional stage manager, charged with maintaining accurate representation of the director's vision, has only served to reinforce these lessons. Observing parallel circumstances in the two decades of professional management work that preceded these exercises have confirmed that protecting a vision against the tender egos of the creative class is best served with subtle deftness rather than superior dominance.

THE MERCY SEAT

Of the three productions, Neil LaBute's *The Mercy Seat* was the only play of my choice, in that I brought the script to the attention of the two actors. LaBute's acidic and bitter assessments of human relationships had attracted me since I had retired from corporate management in the late 1990s. In his 1999 movie *In the Company of Men*, LaBute recounts a cruel tale of two young corporate co-workers who maliciously manipulate a deaf female co-worker in a scheme to avenge their personal failures with women in general. In *The Mercy Seat*, a family man (Ben), having skipped out of his corporate office in the World Trade Center early on the morning of September 11, 2001, sits in his lover's (Abby) lower Manhattan apartment and ignores his cell phone's persistent ringing as his wife attempts to reach him. The dramatic tension arises in the question "Will Ben answer the phone and reassure his wife that he is alive and will be home, or will he capitalize on the opportunity and start a new life with Abby? Will Abby go along?" The economy of a two-person cast offered a credible proposition for a debut directorial effort, and casting was easy as two prominent New Orleans actors, Ashley Nolan and Ryan Rillete consented to play the lovers. Three weeks of rehearsals were held at the Southern Rep production space in Canal Place before we moved the props and costumes to the Nims Black Box space at NOCCA for tech/dress rehearsals and a three-week performance run. Our small

ensemble spent a considerable amount of time encircled in script analysis and talking about the beats, relationships and the physicality of the situation: our greatest challenge was to overcome the incredulity of the circumstances, resolved by finessing some minor technical complications and relying upon LaBute's comfortable intimacy between the two characters, who slowly and nastily destroy their relationship as the morning plays out. It was a wrenchingly beautiful sight.

The sound and video issues were resolved by designer Jason Knobloch. In most productions of *The Mercy Seat*, a television set sat down center facing upstage as the duet exchanged barbs and watched the CNN footage unfold during the morning. As I chose to produce in the round, three-quarters of the audience had at least peripheral view of the actual footage of the destruction of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon; it was an uncomfortable and impactful stressor as the micro-cruelty of the couple's declining relationship played out against the macro-cruelty of the external world. Knobloch successfully met these challenges by producing a carefully timed videotape loop of media coverage that the actors used as a contributing player and a measure of pace.

Overall, it was a modern textbook case for directing: professional actors handling well written material with ample time, and exemplary rehearsal and performance accommodations, complemented by accomplished designers. It did not play to large audiences, as NOCCA was a relatively new and unknown space, and there were a considerable number of productions competing for the theatre-going audience at the same time. Most of those who did see it were complimentary and the reviews were flattering. For a debut production it was rewarding: I directed for thrust seating, but the unavailable side mirrored a traditional proscenium perspective.

FLESH AND BLOOD

Elizabeth Dewberry's *Flesh and Blood* features a cast of four. Krewe des Sept was an actors' collective established in New Orleans in the early 2000s, and local actor-producer Jerry Lee Leighton had proposed the script to the group, pre-casting himself as the lone male and local comedienne Sandy Bravender as the character of his mother-in-law; Bravender also served as the production's bank. The roles of the two sisters were filled by Angie Joachim (the son's wife) and Aimee Hayes (the son's sister-in-law). Dewberry's dramatic tension played out in the sibling rivalry of the two sisters, opposites in character, as they played for the affections of their mother and, in the resolution, the sole male in the story.

We rehearsed four weeks, starting with a table read that demonstrated the assembly's appreciation for Dewberry's comedy and promised an impressive early fall offering to local audiences. It also allowed me to establish the vision and a modicum of discipline suggestions. We spent no further rehearsal time at the table; like Nicholas Hytner, "I like them to inhabit it physically. I don't like a rehearsal studio to feel like a seminar room" (Hytner 191). In my observation, a comedy, even with a dark ending, requires an immediate comfort level with its physicality and it is beneficial to work the actors on their feet as quickly as possible.

As a director in rehearsal, my greatest challenge was encouraging Ms. Bravender to stay on script. As she had seeded most of the production budget, and assured us that her audience would fill the houses for a standard three-week run, she challenged me repeatedly, claiming that she didn't need to know the exact words as long as she delivered the punch line. Mr. Leighton was unhelpful as Ms. Bravender's friend, which left a situation pitting the professional approaches of Ms. Joachim and Ms. Hayes against the self-centered motives of Ms. Bravender.

Technical challenges included food preparation as one of the sisters actually assembles a potato salad, and a picnic scene which requires the actors to eat a fried chicken dinner only feet from the front row of the audience. The first two dress rehearsals and first preview performance were complicated and messy, but, by the second preview, most of the food timing issues had been resolved, and even Ms. Bravender's line challenges had been overcome with some grudging compromises between the two of us: "the important thing is gathering together the different pieces and welding many disparate elements into one complete unity, which is never, of course, fully achieved in artistic matters" Tyrone Guthrie (Chinoy 245). Personally, I cannot overstate Guthrie's clarity regarding occasional compromise on vision; ideally, all collaborators can contribute appropriately.

The climactic unraveling of this dark comedy requires an onstage knife stabbing, accomplished in the complex L-shaped setting of Southern Rep's theatre in Canal Place by securing a blood bag to the sister-in-law's back, which burst as she fell against a refrigerator center-stage and slid down to the floor as the lights dimmed down to a glow on the refrigerator. The crimson trail, smeared against the white porcelain of the refrigerator, jolted the audience tone, and the effect was chilling and successful: my practical vision was realized as the cast delivered the comedic content (as written, for the most part) while building the necessary tension toward the dark resolution: it completely surprised the audience. Local newspaper *Gambit* critic Dalt Wonk, attending early at the second preview on August 29, 2005 in order to make a press deadline that would appear prior to the second week's run, pulled me aside, stunned by the comedic build to the play's dark ending, and assured a glowing review. On August 30, 2005, the city of New Orleans ordered a mandatory evacuation as Hurricane Katrina barreled down on the area. Next.

ART

It was 2016 when I was able to return to directing. Overwhelmed by personal issues, I jumped career tracks and worked in development, promoting and presenting on behalf of two stage gear companies until I recognized my rapidly deepening lack of interest in sales. My return to theatre came following a brief acting appearance in *Inherit the Wind* for a semi-professional company in central Florida. It had been over ten years since any prior onstage work, so the return to acting (and my age) served to remind me of the value of repetition, particularly of scenes and builds to inhabit a character's natural language process and physical delivery. It would help with my next directing project as a fellow actor (Terence Van Auken) in the production approached me, indicating his interest in establishing a producing company; following several planning sessions, we decided upon a production of Yasmina Reza's *Art*, which I agreed to direct.

TY5 Productions did not have a space, so we borrowed a dance studio in Port Orange, Florida, and settled in for rehearsals. The community theatre production had been precast, featuring Van Auken as Marc, Spencer E. Meehl as Serge and, one week into rehearsals, Daniel Blazi as Yvan. I began the three-week rehearsal process with individual sessions with each actor to initiate a sense of independence in each of their build approaches and supplant some distance challenges and a shortened rehearsal schedule. I did not focus on Reza's philosophy in these early table sessions so much as Elia Kazan's endorsement of Stanislavski's "given circumstances" (Jones 141), and, as early rehearsals unfolded, frequent repetition of dialogue builds to support line memorization. *Art* is an easy script to break into French scenes, and we maximized the compact rehearsal schedule to strengthen relationships, develop the physical

comedy and pace the dramatic tension as the story questioned “how much truth and honesty human beings can stand?” (Billington).

The simple set, props and costuming meant we were able to readily confront the challenges of 50 hours of rehearsal and the complexity of the central prop - the piece of art that Marc destroys in the play’s resolution. Performed in proscenium at the long end of a dance studio, it was easy to isolate the Brechtian “alienation” of direct address, wherein the “actions are presented as proceeding, ineluctably, according to laws of nature, from the character of those who perform them” (Chinoy 238), by the actor stepping downstage into pools of simple studio lights. We used a basic unit set, addressing the moves between apartments by changing out the paintings between scenes, and a simple note in the program indicating time passages and space shifts.

The greatest performance challenge was Mr. Blazi’s difficulty with Yvan’s mid-show entrance monologue, despite our rehearsal drills and opting for an intermission designed as a break in the 90-minute play to allow him to prepare for the piece. On the opening night, he entered and began the monologue, then stopped, looked at the audience and blurted, as he exited, “I’ll be right back”. Upon his return, he stumbled through the monologue, apologizing profusely to all of us after the performance. By the closing night a couple of weeks later, he had settled into the role and delivered an hysterical performance of Yvan’s complicated self-assessment. In a professional production, he probably would have been fired, but, in the circumstance of community theatre, we work with what we have on hand.

CONCLUSIONS

Harold Clurman urged at this section's opening that the directing process is a waste if it does not *transpose* the literary to the dramatic; Peter Brook seeks to make theatre as essential as *eating* and *sex*: the director must fashion the initial circle from the playwright to increasingly generate more collaborative circles that will pull in an enraptured audience. All the collaborators must not only see and hear the vision, but deliver it in all five human senses. If Clurman's advice can lead to Brook's *essence*, the director has succeeded.

With humility then, I return to Guthrie's advice and accept that, while a significant portion of the director's job is casting, a moderate amount of accommodation to the "many disparate elements" will temper a successful career handsomely. In the form of Nicholas Hytner and my personal experience as a director and observation as a stage manager, I will actively seek to don the velvet glove in marshaling the splendid acting and design resources that can fall into the director's original vision: theatre is, after all, a collaboration, and the final contributor, the audience, is guided to some conclusions, but is also left to its own devices. Individuals exit every live performance with a myriad of experiences mixing into their perceptions, and these reflections bring the playwright's intent full circle. The director must transpose so that the audience can transcend.

THE PRODUCING TEAM

Just as the writer is the initiator of the play, the producer is the initiator of the production (Fingerhut 229).

In the circle metaphor of the production process I've visited two collaborators who generate the central creative throughput: the playwright, who provides the literal content for the initial circle, and the director, who translates it to a dramatic state. Management must become a part of the process: if there is no physical allowance for the audience to willingly engage, then isn't theatre merely self-gratification?

A COLLABORATOR CLEARS THE CIRCLE

Providing space around a primitive campfire might have meant clearing the brush and rolling some extra rocks into the periphery, both actions meant to *anticipate the production process and the audience*. Over the centuries, these actions escalated to practical applications of performance space to feature the production and architectural applications to accommodate an audience. As the *space* requirements grew, the *time* to provide and sustain them accelerated, and cost became an increasingly important factor. The evolving complexity of the production process also meant that the valuable resource of people's time was growing, necessitating some management science to nurture and maintain the development of theatre. Producers need stage managers.

STAGE MANAGER

“As the play draws nearer to opening night, one may say that it passes out of the hands of the director into those of the stage manager, somewhat in the same way that it has passed out of the playwright's hands into those of the director and his actors“ Jacques Copeau (Chinoy 219).

In my personal experience, a contemporary producer may function as an individual (commercial theatre), an institution (academic theatre), a business organization (community theatre), or an amalgam of these possibilities. Dependent upon the source of the funding, managing the process might require a variety of additional positions including artistic and production managers and directors: few of these positions are expected to attend the daily rehearsal sessions. Regarding the ever-present stage manager however, even as “Actors' Equity Association...represents more than 51,000 professional Actors and Stage Managers nationwide” (Actors’ Equity Association [AEA]) I suggest from experience that the position is more clearly defined by its *management* skill set than its *creative* applications. For the purpose of this thesis and the observations in my personal experience, and despite the commercial theatre’s practice grouping the job within the creative process, I suggest that a contemporary stage manager’s rehearsal role is primarily tied to *space* and *time* resources and the structural discipline and maintenance of the production’s dramatic and technical elements; these functions are creative only in the sense that some circumstances may require innovative approaches to the science of management.

In performance, the stage manager’s role expands in capacity to include the prominence of quality control, the arbiter of all that is recorded. In his excellent study on stage management leadership protocol, Gregory Kordsmeier encourages non-theatre leadership positions to observe the transition as the director (hopefully) bestows creative jurisdiction on the stage manager.

Citing the fragility of numerous egos and the qualities of effective collaborators in that handoff, Kordsmeier’s essay *The Importance of Seeming Earnest*, details the stage manager as a crux of collaboration, always focused on the good of the overall production: “Stage managers adopt an emotional ideology that causes them to judge all of their actions through the prism of how well they serve as caretakers for the show” (Kordsmeier 79). I must acknowledge that this

neutrality and singularity of purpose had guided me professionally on numerous occasions prior to discovering Kordsmeier's work. Stage management has historically dealt with juggling the backstage to keep the onstage juggling.

Jacques Copeau, who founded the French Theatre du Vieux-Colombier, relied heavily upon the actor Louis Jouvet as a *staging collaborator*, particularly in his talents assisting the technical elements of production. As the profession of director grew in prominence in the 19th and 20th centuries, so too did the separate recognition of the stage manager: "The director refines the show with the actors, design team, and technicians, and then usually moves on to the next project. The stage manager runs the actual production from opening night until it closes" (Tips for New Directors).

The essential functions of stage managers have existed since the acknowledgement of theatre as a formal practice: someone must sustain the production's concept in its recreation to assure the work of art is consistent as new audiences witness the subsequent performances. From remounting the traditional scripts of the ancient festivals and passion plays, to assisting the Elizabethan actors with props and costume changes, to maintaining Brecht's *modellbooks* all required a manager faithful to the original. It is my observation that, as the labor movement defined and demanded clearer task delineation in the early 20th century, the art and science shades of the traditional director's domain customized into creative and management tasks, formally defining the new position, especially in the commercial theatre (AEA). The stage manager became a correlating position to the actor, essentially as a protector of the actor's function to work freed of the encumbrance of technical coordination. In the modern theatre, and across community, academic and professional production, "the stage manager is responsible for the overall organization of everything that pertains to rehearsal and performance, including

making sure that everything needed for the performance is where it should be at all times” (Fingerhut 255). In addition to the all-important prompt book, which serves as a basic record of the blocking and lighting and scenic cue placement, the stage manager coordinates the technical crew’s backstage choreography to facilitate the production, keeps the daily rehearsal and performance records, which can serve as payroll and legal documents, and, perhaps most critically, the formal communications hub of the production in rehearsal and performance. Roy Harris, a contemporary Broadway stage manager, notes that “one of the most important things for any stage manager is the dissemination of information. The forms this information takes are our contact sheets, rehearsal schedules, performance schedules (more often in not-for-profit situations), rehearsal reports, and performance reports. It is important that everybody knows what is going on” (Fingerhut 256).

Harris adds that stage managers must learn “to deal with people” and that “...if you make a mistake with an actor early on, it takes a long time to rectify it. You must take eccentricities into account whenever you work with anyone” (256). In my experience, this may be the singular nugget of wisdom a professional stage manager might impart to anyone aspiring to work professionally in the capacity. I can personally attest to the extraordinary value of my B.S. in Professional Management as an asset in a stage management career. In his comprehensive text *Essentials of Stage Management*, British stage manager Peter Maccoy devotes a lengthy chapter to “Leadership”, explaining:

Stage management involves the application of management techniques such as communication, time management, group dynamics, interpersonal relationships, leadership skills and so on, within the context of the theatre environment. These

techniques are informed by a detailed understanding of the creative process, together with text analysis and background research (Maccoy 10).

It is no longer sufficient for the stage manager to understand only the creative and technical processes: one must study and apply the science of leadership to work as a functional and successful stage manager in contemporary theatre. Anecdotally, I believe that six classes in financial and leadership topics in Not For Profit Management M.A. program at the University of Central Florida in 2008-09 will complement earlier studies and career experience.

MY COLLABORATIONS

In addition to theatrical stage management, my skill set, as detailed in the CV (Appendix A) has allowed parallel management positions in related industries and formats. The crossover has encouraged additional perspective to the various circles that emanate from the production core of the vision of a director, the recording of a stage manager and the realization of an actor.

THE UNMENTIONABLES

In my observation of the various management functions on *The Unmentionables*, I can attest consistency with the standard academic model in the United States: the institution secures funding from the University's overall budget and serves as Managing Director, while faculty function as the Artistic Director, overseeing the budgets and selecting the scripts and accomplishing its mission based upon the needs and resources of the attendant student body (Fingerhut 243). The production followed customary academic format: production manager and technical director positions were served by faculty supervising students in the shop and run crew positions of a technical crew. The stage management staff was students, guided by the director and the technical staff.

In short, calibrated against my experiences in the professional theatre, I found the academic model is, again, as per its mission, and, to its favor, focused on the instruction of

theatrical practice and less concerned with audience attendance and financial success. The production core, as I have detailed previously in personal and research examples, existed and functioned successfully for *The Unmentionables*.

THE ACTOR

A COLLABORATOR ANIMATES THE CIRCLE

A successful production comes about only when every artist - director, actor, designers stage managers, et al, completely and harmoniously carry out their respective roles (The Theatre Team 91).

Just as the playwright's word is transposed to the visual by a director it must be animated by the actor. The metaphoric campfire circle has expanded and generates detailed characters who come and go from beyond the story's glow, bringing sensual components that shift and turn the transposition. These exhilarating animations are flights of freedom entrusted to the actors by all the collaborators; beware the wasteful and selfish actor who chooses a flight of fancy instead. It is no secret to frequent contributors to the art form, and there are innumerable stories to support the truth that, some actors, handed this freedom, fancy to ignore the weeks of rehearsal and paraphrase text and direction (either through memorization shortfall or intentional reworking) as they derail the production toward audience reaction and personal gratification. It is this threshold that determines whether the art form remains an ensemble effort delivering the core and collaborative circles, or is distilled to the reverse distraction of egocentric masturbation. It is this threshold that producers, playwrights, directors, stage managers, critics and audiences worldwide anticipate warily, acknowledging that a disciplined actor, working *with* rather than *against* the ensemble, is a glorious sight to behold. It is crossing this threshold that Craig, Stanislavski, Brecht, Littlewood, Clurman, Kazan, Brook, Hytner and the hundreds of others have discouraged the choice of self-gratification as the actor is freed from the limitations of constraint. It is an unpleasant challenge when an actor approaches the threshold with great promise, only to cross the threshold failing to channel the collaborative creativity of rehearsal

into the mature maintenance of performance. In my experience, it is a finely-tuned skill requiring conscious and continuous application.

The immediacy of live acting is a demanding effort, but it is supported by a circle of collaborators who trust the actor to honor their contributions. Unless the audience has accepted that it is attending an improvisational event that exists only to be driven by the reactive direction of the audience, a traditional performance is a contract between its creative collaborators to translate the word to a live retelling, and to consistently repeat that construction to successive audiences: this requires discipline. The process begins in exploration, but the actor must deliver consistency in result.

For the actor approaching a role, Stanislavski, illustrating the method that revolutionized theatre in the early 20th century, used the metaphor of the circle as he passed his finger around the rim of a tea glass:

Here is a circle. In the center is the super-objective. It is the circle of your life – the role. Life begins here and death. You take this section of life (indicating part of the circle). You know the past; you have prospects for the future. You must find your way to the super-objective. You know it is somewhere around here (points to the center of the glass). You proceed from here, from your simple action. You know that the super-objective is somewhere up there in the airless space. Presently you pass around the circle and determine the center. In the final analysis you must explore what constitutes the center, the essence, the soul of your role (Chinoy 117).

In rehearsal, Julian Beck of The Living Theatre expected the actor to, like an explorer, “go out and discover something and come back and report on what he discovers” (Jones 215). In the middle of the 20th century, Jerzy Grotowski “insisted upon a deductive approach – a

practical and moral ethic of the *via negativa* (or way of negation), characteristic of oriental theater practitioners and martial artists” (Bradby 124). A few years later, Peter Brook would write that, when the actor:

sees himself in relation to the wholeness of the play he will see that not only is too much characterizing often opposed to the play’s needs, but also that many unnecessary characteristics can actually work against him and make his own appearance less striking. He will then see the character he is playing more impartially; he will look to its sympathetic or unsympathetic features from a different viewpoint, and in the end, will make different decisions from those he made when he thought identifying with the character was all that mattered (Brook 76).

Nicholas Hytner, explaining the challenge of acting classical text, opines “an actor must think, breathe and feel through long, sinuous paragraphs. ...and all this as you let them see who you are, see the workings of your heart, your world and the part you play in it (Hytner 81).

Whatever the method applied through the rehearsal, the actor’s goal crossing the threshold to the audience must be to deliver the text as the playwright intended, the director envisioned and all the collaborators have fashioned it. Actress Kathleen Butler urges “in the dynamics of the theater, each actor should maintain his individuality; yet the actor must serve the production as a whole” (The Theatre Team 135).

THE UNMENTIONABLES

My personal approach to role development begins with the text. Recently, a young theatre student at a seminar in stage management asked me how I started in the profession. I was a teen in the 1960s, when the world was on fire: civil rights, an unpopular war, drug experimentation and popular music were radically shaking up the norm, and theatre was my safe place. An avid reader, line memorization came easily and I found the power of speaking

text to an audience hypnotic and powerful, but not just any text: I was drawn to the text that challenged assumptions and questioned authority. The theatre was brimming with voices that were incited, excited and impassioned about changing the world. It was an easy choice.

Political involvement was the question of the moment among American intellectuals and artists, and a critical position was forming around the example of Brecht and the proposition that revolutionary didacticism was important in contemporary drama (Jones 243).

Without knowing much about political theatre, I was encircling a half century of acting approaches that had deep roots in the secular break from institutional theatre four centuries earlier as *commedia dell'arte* succeeded church pageantry (*History of Theatre*) in the village square. Elizabethan theatre cloaked its resistance to the monarchy in sordid and comic retellings of histories and foreign fables. Through the 18th and 19th century, theatre, exemplified by Klinger and Beaumarchais, was used to mock the corruption of money and political power, and, in the early decades of the 20th century, Berthold Brecht, Joan Littlewood, Jean Vilar and Clifford Odets were among the western theatre practitioners who embodied a political voice, and encouraged actors to voice social activism (Kuritz). As Peter Brook echoed Brecht in 1964's *The Empty Space*, "the actor in a community that supports a theater must be as much involved in the outside world as in his own craft" (Brook 76).

The first step in my process, usually begun prior to an audition, is investigating the playwright, the contemporary circumstances in which the play was written, the historical and geographical context of the play's subject matter, of the play's initial production and a survey of subsequent productions.

Once cast, text is my applied beginning: I agree with actress Kathleen Butler that one should “try to memorize the lines by rote before beginning rehearsal - it is pure drudgery...” (The Theatre Team 132) but it removes the greatest obstacle to the quick freedom for good work. Memorize the script verbatim; research words and phrases, pronunciations and context, their grammar and etymology. I use the playwright’s alliteration, repetition, rhythm and setting, breaking down the story into French scenes and beats, practicing in regular morning sessions, page by page. I allocate quantity against the time available, targeting the second or third week of rehearsal as my completion date. I come to the first table read knowledgeable of the character’s external dimensions and prepared to offer some glimpse of character. I like best when the read is configured in a circle or oval rather than a square or rectangle, as it allows eye contact and observation of the ensemble; I believe any reading around a single rectangular table is a waste of time as eye contact is critical from day one in establishing onstage relationships. If table work continues for a few days, I rework assigned sections for the day’s rehearsal, again prepared to contribute further dives into character.

Director David Hoover used the initial table read very effectively. While it included only the cast and the stage manager, and was held at a rectangular table, the cast was small enough that my preferences for eye contact and intimacy were accomplished. As I have stated before, the director, stage manager and full cast is the essential core of the rehearsal process: anything less is a faltering initiation into the work of the rehearsal weeks. David discussed the schedule, emphatically discouraged any further conflicts, sketched the technical elements, and explored the playwright’s intentions; he additionally summarized Norris’ perspective as an examination of Western colonialism’s misguided intervention into third world cultures, whether masked in religious, financial or celebrity power, and inevitably doomed to failure. The subject is not new:

as I detailed in the section on the playwright, centuries of material have ridiculed the failures of empire assimilation and cultural proselytizing. In my early research, I stumbled across a review of Ariane Mnouchkine's *Norodom Sihanouk* which stuck with me through the evolution of my character, especially as it relates to the character's perceived personal political preference: "It is both the product of, and an opiate for, the liberal minded Europeans feeling of guilt over a small and distant country of which he knows next to nothing, and which his political and military representatives help to destroy" (Bradby 110).

As the text is blocked, I add the blocking to my pre-rehearsal morning sessions to assist memorization. Only when I am able to approach the rehearsal without my book in hand do I consider myself ready to actively begin the freedom of acting; everything prior to this moment is necessary exploration of detail, personally relished but always anticipatory of the coming flight.

[Paul] Scofield, when I first knew him as a very young actor, had a strange characteristic: verse hampered him, but he would make unforgettable verse out of lines of prose. It was as though the act of speaking a word sent through him vibrations that echoed back meanings far more complex than his rational thinking could bind: he would pronounce a word like 'night' and then he would be compelled to pause: listening with all his being to the amazing impulses stirring in some mysterious inner chamber, he would experience the wonder of discovery at the moment when it happened (Brook 111).

As an undergraduate theatre student at Fairmont State College in the early 1970s, I was instructed to deliver the lines "off the tips of the fingers": B.J. O'Dell was our coach for forensics competitions, where we used the text exclusively - no sets, no eye contact, no costumes, no props and no movement - just straightforward word value, drawing generally from playwrights including Maxwell Andersen, Robert Bolt and James Goldman. It was a rewarding

discovery when I first came across Peter Brook's appreciation of Scofield, recalling the multiple instances that Ms. O'Dell had us work and rework each word, sounding it out for its values, calibrating and acknowledging its differences in inflections, placement and tempo - recognizing syllabic emphasis and using it all to performance advantage. At times the exercises seemed tedious, but, as I have applied those early lessons throughout the years of my onstage experience, I have grown to appreciate the phrase "off the tips of the fingers": the words do the work if you just give them their due. The playwright may not be God, but trusting in the literary discipline will only serve to accelerate your journey. Once I have afforded her that commitment, I can begin the great pleasure of acting.

I prefer to think of my physical technique as a blend of acquired approaches. I have adopted a Grotowski sensibility that "all emotions are linked with certain kinds of muscular activity or physical configurations" (Bradby 123); personally, trusting the text has unfailingly summoned a complementing physicality. "Acting begins with a tiny inner movement so slight that it is almost completely invisible" (Brook 109), and, as my "inner moment" is drawn from the text, I prefer a rehearsal period that, during the blocking phase, builds organically with repetition toward the physicality, and smooths trouble scenes by working through French scenes repeatedly in one session. Coupled with my personal morning exercises, this technique has been most successful in my approach to memorization while approaching the arc of the story's continuity. I like to think of myself as a director's actor, open to suggestion and redirection from the director and ensemble throughout the discovery process. I agree with actress Kathleen Butler:

Don't be defensive! ... Listen to what the director has to say, ask him to clarify if you don't understand, make a note of it in your script, try it the next day: and if there is

still a problem, discuss it during rehearsal or privately. If you can't finally do what he asks, come up with something better (The Theatre Team 135).

Nicholas Hytner acknowledges a director can use several different effective approaches to text analysis - "some start with it, some end with it" - and I agree with him (Hytner 191): some text reveals itself immediately, some must be drawn from the vowels and the consonants as the process evolves. I also have found that repetition is the best discovery process, as, in the abbreviated schedule of four weeks of rehearsal, too much exploration results in "a frustrating directionless, and an excessive psychotherapeutic focus; it's results are not shows but ideas" (Jones 215).

Once the production has entered tech/dress rehearsals, I use the offstage time to focus on the next entrance and its action; I do not like to engage in social chatter, even in a comedy, in order to maintain the preceding exit's state of mind and to distill objectives upon the next entrance. In my recent return to acting, I have found a troubling tendency among many contemporary performers' offstage access to cell phones: I like to stay *in the room* even when I am only adjacent to it. While I have occasionally exercised this practice to excess (in a production of MacLeish's *J.B.* at Fairmont State, I exited Act I and immediately found a corner where I curled into a ball and remained until the "Places" call for Act II), my process has always focused on continuity. This observation is drawn from the reality that the anxiety of stage performance makes many actors nervous, and as psychologist Lydia Dashman aptly notes "some people babble out of nerves, attempting to self-soothe while chattering" (Dishman). I believe this anxiety extends to the cell phone compulsion, reflecting a need to be stimulated continuously. If any phrase describes my *method* it is *to stay in the room*. Storytelling is built on the careful construction of bridging the consistent sequence of a journey: I contend that repeated

and unrelated exit ramps reflect a culture that, over my lifetime, has embraced commercial broadcast's cheapening and weakening of the narrative process in daily barrages of television and electronic screen messaging abuses. As such, my rigid backstage method does not preclude running a sequence or two of lines with another actor that might benefit an upcoming scene. Generally, however, I check my props for the next appearance and then isolate myself somewhere close to the upcoming stage entrance. I follow this practice through to the final performance. It may seem selfish and antisocial, but I have never regretted it as an actor. In my experience, this process, at its best, allows me the freedom to deliver a natural performance: my character always enters coming from somewhere and, intent on a Stanislavski objective in the onstage setting, is *in the room* and accordingly *in the moment*.

In the case of *The Unmentionables*, I enjoyed the overlapping conversation technique discussed earlier, wherein the dialogue occurs simultaneously between several characters, intermingling and overtopping, especially toward some climactic peak. It is reflective of contemporary society, and, while I despise it in real-life conversation as rude and ineffective, it is an important acknowledgement of contemporary speech patterns. Increasingly, modern playwrights are incorporating the technique, and the better ones use it rhythmically to drive the script's tempo, and direction for the show's pace or "the rate at which characters move and events transpire" (Jones 139).

CONCLUSIONS

The production core is engaged: the director has established the vision, and the actor has breathed life into the words. The stage manager assumes the transposition, and opens the circle to the supporting, collaborative circles of design and the final complement of the audience, and the playwright's work leads to the magic moment this committed group of collaborators have circled as important. It is why we do it.

THE DESIGNER

A COLLABORATOR DRESSES the CIRCLE

Unlike the easel painter, in two dimensions, or the sculptor in three, the designer thinks in terms of the fourth dimension, the passage of time – not the stage picture, but the stage moving picture (Brook 102).

Brook's "fourth dimension" in *The Empty Space* acknowledges the theatrical designers' particularity as an artist; Brecht affirmed that "they should, together with the art of acting, promote the common task each in his own way. Their intercourse with each other consists in reciprocal alienation" (Chinoy 66). Design has accompanied the art of performance from the beginning, accelerating in its importance and application throughout the successive waves of the collaborative process. Brook has stated that the relationship with the designer begins even before the first table read as "practical considerations of building and dressmaking force the designer to have his work cut and dried before the first rehearsal" (100). Kevin Rigdon, the original resident set designer for the *Steppenwolf Theatre* in Chicago and University of Houston's Head of Graduate Design, confirms that "most designers prefer to have their first meetings with the director and playwright alone, not with others" (The Theatre Team 111), where he might ask "why did you choose this particular play?" (120). This early resolution allows the designer to come to the table read with a head start on a concept that supports the director's vision and provides the cast with critical guidance in the collaboration.

THE UNMENTIONABLES

As is apparent in the preceding paragraphs, technology has become increasingly relevant to the producing world of live performance; simultaneously, it has become a subject and a key player in the dramatic narrative. Sarah Ruhl's *Dead Man's Cell Phone* easily comes to mind as a titular

reference, Neil LaBute's *The Mercy Seat*, mentioned earlier in this text, and my thesis role in *The Unmentionables* used a cell phone conversation, not to mention some quirky plot shifts. Director David Hoover and the tech staff decided early not to try to locate the onstage rings at each phone, choosing instead to source the numerous rings through an upstage speaker instead.

Costumes were contemporary and designer Tony French assembled a complementary array of colors and styles, including military dress. As an actor, I was comfortable and had no problems with my occasional shifts in a unit costume: there were pockets - lots of pockets, for hand props and backups, always a blessing for the live performer.

The set, from my perspective as an actor, was a successful "playground" as it provided low-profile solutions to the challenges of the text, and the design distributed multiple suitable provisions for free movement and placement in the appropriate acting areas. It was fun chasing the "decapitated head" prop into the audience at one performance to retrieve it for the climactic scene.

For the most part, the choreography of the cell phone ringing seemed hitch less, and the lighting was appreciatively unnoticeable, as the action always played in a well-lit interior that needed little attention.

THE AUDIENCE

A COLLABORATOR COMPLEMENTS THE CIRCLE

One night in an English provincial town Stoke-on-Trent, I saw a production of *Pygmalion* staged in a theater-in-the-round the combination of lively actors, lively building, lively audience, brought out the most sparkling elements of the play: it went marvelously. The audience participated fully. The performance was triumphantly complete (Brook 129).

In addition to North Shore, The Palace in New York and the other theatres mentioned in this thesis, I've toured across the U.S. and Canada, and played a few international spaces, been in the audience in a host of theatrical events, and witnessed some live performances completely devoid of any traditional theatrical setting. I've fallen back on a lot of Peter Brook as references, and it is not accidental - as Brook associate Declan Donellan observed "a piece of theater changes completely according to the space it's in – a fact to which I have become increasingly sensitive, having spent most of the last 20 years on tour" (Todd 31). *Cats* was probably my least favorite experience, for more reasons than my distaste and distrust of the material. But on opening night at the now demolished Aladdin Performing Arts Center in Las Vegas in 1997, I begrudgingly witnessed its appeal. The Aladdin stage was a clumsy configuration for traditional theatre: its proscenium box was far from the audience as a huge thrust jutted into the audience in a sweeping arc that allowed for variety acts to mount full-size bandstands with room downstage for dance acts to sweep across the view. As we loaded into the non-traditional environment, and marked through the pre-opening adjustments, I was amused to see the scenery disappear far upstage into the proscenium background and watch as the cast struggled to adjust to the expanse. As the performance began for a room full of over a thousand Japanese tourists, most of whom

did not speak English, I watched the magic of theatre work. The cast was challenged and passionate about overcoming the space's proportion and the audience, energized by the visual aspects and the music, was absorbed and deeply appreciative - unusually quiet until given the opportunity to express their gratitude. I never saw the show the same way after that, even as the cast, returning to more traditional theatres, settled back into their jaded and corrupt abuses of the questionable material.

The Theatre des Bouffes du Nord was Brook's and Donellan and company's home. Most of the work that originated there for 15 years toured a variety of theatres and non-traditional spaces around the world: productions of *Timon of Athens*, *The Conference of the Birds*, *The Tragedy of Carmen*, *The Mahabharata*, and *The Tempest*, among others, played indoor warehouses, boathouses, theatres and outdoor quarries and amphitheatres. Donellan remarked in *The Open Circle*, a comprehensive recounting of the International Centre for Theatre Research's (CITC) work, that it was always "a refreshing and renewing experience to return to the Bouffes, which has come to feel like a home to me. It has first and foremost, the humanity of proportion, creating an intimacy among the audience and between audience and performers" (Todd 29). The Bouffes du Nord was a reclaimed space in Paris that had been built in the 19th century to present opera. When Brook's company rescued it in 1973, it had decayed to such a state of disrepair from misuse that it was destined for demolition. CITC reconfigured the space, jutting a circle from the proscenium apron into the orchestra section - a design that mirrored the ancient Greek and Roman amphitheatres and the Elizabethan outdoor theatres. Keeping the proscenium space bare and in a partial (but safe) rawness, Brook reduced the seating capacity by a third, cutting out the top tier of two balconies, perfecting a circular performance area surrounded by audience. Acoustics were imperfect - the dome over the orchestra section could create an echo for the

performers outside of a smaller inner circle of the thrust, but they adjusted and found the sweet spots that allowed them to amplify the vocal intimacy to match the visual warmth; actor Yoshi Oida revealed that “you have to charm with your being in order to charm with the play” (Todd 28). The color scheme of the walls tended toward a warm russet and the scene designer Chloe Obolensky consistently used it to the company’s favor. The person most responsible for technical execution at the Bouffes and on tour, Jean Guy-Leclat, appreciated the primitive space for its potential:

It’s as if we found the natural form of the theater, reverting to the Elizabethan circle, and the former stage has become a kind of background. This move has been helped by the fact that we’ve never developed a need for stage machinery, for hanging things from the ceiling, which would be impossible in the Bouffes. Instead everything is built up from the floor (Todd 29).

If the collaborators draw a circle, and that circle tells a dramatic truth, the circle will draw its final collaboration in the form of an audience. That audience will draw a question from that circle, and the process will begin again, as it should. Next.

THE UNMENTIONABLES

The audiences for *The Unmentionables* were small and tended to ignore the thrust seating, clustering instead in the customary safety of the “two room” configuration downstage; it is difficult to ascertain whether we achieved any sort of success with the effect of immersion. In the post-analysis offered by the UNO Theatre Department, most of the audience’s remarks that reflected on the play seemed concerned with the fate of the character Etienne. From their perception, the play was primarily his journey: Norris used direct address to realize his humanity from the beginning - a shared admonishment for the audience wasting its time in this experience.

Many of the comments were concerned with whether Etienne is alive at the conclusion. My questioning to my known audience attendees revealed that most people recognized the three contrasting approaches of colonialism to third world problems, and the individual realizations of their common folly. Many agreed with reviews that I had researched: the denouement was contrived, but generally satisfying.

CONCLUSIONS

This journey has been arduous and addictive: when I began several months ago, I did not know where it would end, and recall laughing giddily when I read in one advice column on thesis writing that I would not end up where I expected to, but, hopefully, in some new place that I had not expected. I have ended up exactly where I started: the campfire, but it is an expansively different and richer place. Through this process, I have clarified a personal path toward directing that will serve my future well; if others benefit in the telling, that's *lagniappe*.

What we most admire about storytelling is its power to gather and compel its listeners, hopefully to some course of action that might further our capacity to, through the strength of community, elevate us above our shortcomings: for the religious, it was devised to raise us closer to our gods, for the secular, it is meant to raise us closer to our humanity. Peter Brook, in an illustrious decades-long pursuit of dramatic truth, began his career in the confining “two room” structure, and, through the experiments with *Theatre of Cruelty* to shock his audiences, and the carpets of his African research, returned to the warmth exemplified in the structure at Theatre du Bouffes, with its sod floors and open fires: he returned to the campfire. In writing this thesis, I have been associating the literal truths of research and reference material to the dramatic past of my experience in order to realign the ancient amphitheaters and Elizabethan circles and arena theatres with my personal discovery that our best storytelling is initiated, generated from and engaged in the metaphor and the geometric truth of circle. In the decade or so of natural life that I have left to exercise this knowledge, I will confine my efforts to projects that reinforce this truth. I will not succeed every time I endeavor to do so, but, unlike my youthful self that assumed every journey ended with an answer, will embrace the question that I am left with as I circle toward the end of the journey: “What’s next, then?”

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APPENDIX A

(GARY) KARL LENGEL

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Inspirational leadership in the entertainment industry requires setting and achieving goals on personal and team-player platforms, involving contact, staffing, management, and reporting duties. The immediate and spontaneous nature of the industry requires a professional's ability to *construct* informed and relevant decisions quickly, engage and adjust effective *planning* and *action*, while retaining adherence to fundamental *strategic vision*. Critical skills include the abilities to communicate, and to recognize, evaluate, and energize talent.

In a 45-year **live performance** career, I have **created, produced, marketed, sold, directed, managed** and **performed a broad variety of creative projects**.

SOFTWARE Microsoft Office Word Excel Powerpoint Mac Suite Google Docs Filemaker Pro Quicken Pro Tools Sales force Adobe Audition MediaTouch	2018-20	All Things Considered Host/Reporter, WWNO, New Orleans <u>The Work of Art</u> , Fridays, 4:44PM Newscasts Southeast Louisiana, M-F, 2:04 PM New Orleans M-F, 3:04, 4:04, 5:04, 6:04 Features Morning Edition Host as requested Digital Platform Programming
	2018	Stage Manager, Orlando Shakespeare Theatre, Orlando, FL <u>Shakespeare in Love</u> , <u>Twelfth Night</u>
	2016-17	Production Stage Manager, Mad Cow Theatre, Orlando, FL <u>1776</u> , <u>Picasso at the Lapin Agile</u> , <u>Animal Crackers</u> , <u>Fences</u> , Director, <u>Art</u>, Thank You 5 Productions, Port Orange, FL
	2013-14	Business Development, Senovva, Inc., San Francisco Initiate and encourage productive relationships for a company steeped in agile innovations, orchestrated solutions, and driven production.
EDUCATION and REFERENCES follow.	2012-13	Management Consultant, Le Petit Theatre, New Orleans Announcer, WWNO, New Orleans

APPENDIX A

(GARY) KARL LENGEL

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY 2000-2012

2007-12 Sales Executive, LMG, Inc., Orlando

Research and relationships at a provider of show technology services - audio, video and lighting gear and techs delivering content in permanent settings (videoconferencing), temporary locations (events and exhibits) and touring venues (concerts).

2003-05 Announcer/Producer, WWNO, New Orleans

The local anchor for the National Public Radio afternoon news program All Things Considered and produced Crescent City, a monthly live-to-tape variety show, and a monthly series on live theatre in New Orleans.

2002-04 Adjunct Faculty, Tulane University and NOCCA

New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts, Guest Instructor, Stage Management
Tulane University Department of Theatre and Dance, Stage Management and Production Management

2004-05 Producer/Director, Independent, New Orleans

Flesh and Blood, a play by Elizabeth Dewberry, Southern Repertory Theatre
The Mercy Seat, a play by Neil LaBute, at NOCCA/Riverfront Nims Black Box Theatre

2000-03 Managing Director, Dog & Pony Theatre Company, New Orleans

Day-to-day business operation (financial records, scheduling, and marketing) of a not-for-profit theatre company with an annual budget of \$150,000

2000-05 Production Stage Manager, New Orleans, (AEA NOLA and LOA)

A Christmas Carol, Cherries Jubilee, Anything Goes, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Five Guys Named Moe for various theatres and Suddenly Last Summer and The Rose Tattoo for the Tennessee Williams/New Orleans Literary Festival

2002-04 Event Stage Manager

Astrazeneca, Ritz-Carlton, New Orleans, Sales Meeting, KLH Productions, '04
GMAC Mortgage, Convention Center, New Orleans, 5 Star Productions, '04
Winter Olympics, Salt Lake City, Torch Relay Ceremony, Me3 Productions, '02

2000-01 IT, National Performance Network, New Orleans

I was employed In August, 2000, on a contract basis as support to MK Wegmann and the National Performance Network. In August, 2001, I focused on maintaining the communications structure and supporting databases.

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APPENDIX A

(GARY) KARL LENGEL

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY 1990 - 2000

A Production Stage Manager is generally responsible for maintenance of creative, design and technical elements of a theatrical production. Script (program), schedule (relative to public performance) and budget (as determined by the business management) are fundamental guiding documents.

A Production Stage Manager interfaces with all levels of show hierarchy, including producer, directors, designers, business management, public relations and media, promoters, union reps, talent and technical staff.

DISNEY BUSINESS

Sample Client List
 ACORD
 Advantis
 Booz, Allen & Hamilton
 Birra Moretti
 Eastman Kodak
 Electronics Boutique
 EMC
 MasterCard Int'l
 Nestle
 Norwest Financial
 Sun Microsystems
 Warner-Lambert

While in NYC, Disney contracted my services as Stage Manager for the second workshop of Disney's Broadway inaugural production of Beauty and the Beast.

DISNEY RESORTS

Sample Event List
 WDW Dolphin Hotel
 Grand Opening
 Westinghouse
 Disney Licensing
 Beneficial Finance
 Special Event 8

1999 - 2000 Production Stage Manager, Minnelli on Minnelli, New York
 Liza Minnelli's tribute to her father's film career. Production included a six-week dance/music rehearsal and a two-week technical rehearsal. Following a celebrated opening and one month run at the Palace Theatre in New York in December, 1999, the show moved on to additional performances in San Francisco and Washington, DC.

1998 Production Stage Manager, North Shore Music Theatre, Beverly, MA
Annie Hair

1996 - 1999 Production Stage Manager, National Broadway Tours
 Responsible for the day-to-day production management, including personnel scheduling, technical and talent, for the touring shows Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat, Cats and Bring in 'da Noise, Bring in 'da Funk. These tours played multiple and split-week engagements in major and smaller markets throughout the United States and Canada.

1994 - 1996 Producer, Disney Business Productions, The Walt Disney Company, Orlando, Florida
 Asked to return to the Disney company to help establish this business unit, I was promoted to Producer and, through **RFPs**, identified, cultivated and delivered clients seeking the "Disney creative" to enhance business meetings for conferences, conventions and "industrial theatre" presentations in domestic and international environments. Project budget parameters varied from \$20,000 to \$1,000,000.

International work included producing a pyrotechnics show in Cartagena, Columbia, and producing a multimedia meeting in English, Spanish and Portuguese for MasterCard International's South American clientele. Successful long-term relationships included the Electronics Boutique meeting, for which Disney retained my services as **Show Director** through October, 2000.

Client list appears at the left.

1993 - 1994 Stage Manager, Miss Saigon, New York
 I assisted the Production Stage Manager in day-to-day production management, including personnel scheduling, technical and talent, for the Broadway production.

1990 - 1993 Stage Manager, The Walt Disney Company, Orlando, Florida
 Seeking to develop skills as a stage manager for business theatre, I joined the Resort Entertainment Production staff and facilitated Disney internal meetings and external clients' events utilizing the "Disney magic" for business meetings. Budget parameters ranged from several thousand dollars to \$500,000.

Event list appears at the left.

This position included a four-month stint in France, as part of a 400-person delegation from the U.S. Disney organization selected to assist with the opening of the EuroDisney attraction outside Paris, France in April, 1992.

1989 - 1990 Stage Manager, Les Miserables, National Broadway Tour
 I assisted the Production Stage Manager in day-to-day production management, including personnel scheduling, technical and talent, for the first road tour of this remarkably successful Broadway show.

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APPENDIX A

(GARY) KARL LENGEL

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY 1980 - 1990

MUSICALS
Hello, Dolly!
The Music Man
Oklahoma!
The King and I
A Chorus Line
Jesus Christ Superstar
My One and Only
Pirates of Penzance
Dames at Sea
Evita
The Desert Song
THEATRE
Brighton Beach
Memoirs
Run for Your Wife
A Midsummer Night's Dream
Romeo and Juliet
Taming of the Shrew
CONCERTS
 Joan Rivers
 Dionne Warwick
 Johnny Mathis
 Lillianne Montevacchi
 Mel Torme
 Barbara Cook
 Robert Guillaume
 Loretta Lynn
 Rita Coolidge
 Paul Anka
 Wayne Newton
 Jay Leno
 Debbie Reynolds
 Mitzi Gaynor
 Tony Bennett

Moving shows across markets reinforced a comprehensive understanding of the presenter-performer relationship – and an uncanny capability to approach the challenge of **conflict resolution** with a determinedly open-minded view.

From 1979 through 1981, I lived in NYC, working a variety of diverse “temp” jobs. I studied Shakespeare in Michael Moriarty’s “Potter’s Field”, performed in the Renaissance Festival two years, and attended Fordham College at Lincoln Center.

1985 - 1989 Production Manager, The North Shore Music Theatre, Beverly, MA
 In 1985, I was hired as the **Resident Stage Manager** for Actors Equity Association productions at the Music Theatre. Duties included production and maintenance of four, two-week touring summer stock circuit shows for this 1800-seat arena theatre.

In 1986, I was *asked to return* full-time as **Production Manager**, a position that encompassed the AEA Resident Stage Manager duties and added responsibility for hiring technical theatre staff and interns to operate a two-month Shakespeare series and a five-month season of touring shows and celebrity concerts.

By 1987, budget parameters tripled to \$100,000+, and the season expanded to eight months.

In 1988, I designed a grant program called Technical Artistry in the Performing Arts (TAPA), which was funded by the State of Massachusetts. Using the Pyramus and Thisbe playlet from Shakespeare’s **A Midsummer Nights Dream**, the 12-week program stepped 40 students through technical theatre production, culminating in a videotaped session using the theatre.

In 1989, the theatre began a \$1,000,000 renovation, and I interfaced with the Boston architectural firm, planning to expand the production support areas (backstage, dressing rooms and scenery shops).

Representative shows and celebrity concerts appear at the left.

1985 – 1986 Assistant Stage Manager, Meredith Monk
 “Quarry” with **Ping Chong**, La Mama, New York
 “The Games”, New York, Los Angeles and San Francisco

Road Manager for Cab Calloway
 A two-month tour with a 20-piece band and five-member ensemble of singers and dancers.

1984 Stage Manager/Tech Staff, An Evening Dinner Theatre, Elmsford, New York
Kismet, Hollywood/Ukraine, Cabaret, Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat

1981 - 1985 Stage Manager, Annie, National Broadway and Stock Tours
 1981-83 National Bus & Truck, Assistant Stage Manager and Stage Manager
 1984 Summer Stock (w/Martha Raye), Stage Manager
 1985 National Tour, Production Manager

1979 - 1980 Marketing Survey, Various Companies, New York
 Consensus, New York Times/CBS, Market Probe International
*Most of this work involved either telephone marketing surveys, codifying participant surveys, or, in the case of the CBS/NYTimes, gathering political survey data nightly during the Iran hostage crisis and the 1980 Presidential campaign. **Communication** skills were strengthened as the samples were small, and it was critical to reduce error margin by completing as much of the population as possible.*

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APPENDIX A

(GARY) KARL LENGEL

THEATRE/BROADCAST RESUME

DIRECTOR

<u>Art</u>	Thank You 5 Productions, '16
<u>Flesh and Blood</u>	Southern Repertory Theatre, '05
<u>The Mercy Seat</u>	NOCCA Riverfront Theatre, '03

ACTOR

Stage, Representative Roles

<u>The Unmentionables</u>	Don Butler	UNO Theatre, '19
<u>Pygmalion</u>	Higgins	Mad Cow Theatre, '16
<u>Inherit the Wind</u>	Drummond	Athens Theatre, '16
<u>Our Country's Good</u>	Philip/Ketch	UNO Theatre, '05
<u>The Goat, or Who Is Sylvia?</u>	Ross	Southern Rep Theatre, '04
<u>Macbeth</u>	Duncan	Shakespeare Festival at Tulane, '04
<u>Richard III</u>	Edward IV	Shakespeare Festival at Tulane, '04
<u>A Midsummer Night's Dream</u>	Peter Quince	Shakespeare Festival at Tulane, '03
<u>A House Not Meant To Stand</u> (Tennessee Williams)	Dr. Crane	Shakespeare Festival at Tulane, '03
<u>Mr. & Mrs. Hollywood</u>	Alex	Southern Rep, New Orleans, '03
<u>Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde</u>	Oscar Wilde	CAC, New Orleans, '02
<u>Measure for Measure</u>	Escalus	Shakespeare Festival at Tulane, '02
<u>Love's Labors Lost</u>	Ferdinand	Shakespeare Festival at Tulane, '02
<u>King Lear</u>	Edmund	City Park, New Orleans, '00
<u>Exposition Boulevard</u> , (now <u>A Louisiana Gentleman</u>)	Blaise	Southern Rep, New Orleans, '98

Film, Recent Representative Work

"Love & Suicide"	Doctor	Kaye Productions, '04
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Commercials, Recent Representative Work

"Harrah's"	Principal	Peter Mayer, New Orleans
"Harrah's"	Extra	Peter Mayer, New Orleans
"LA Workmen's CC"	Principal	Peter Mayer, New Orleans
"Palace Casino"	Principal	Casanova Productions, New Orleans

ANNOUNCER

Current, Announcer/Producer, WWNO, New Orleans
2012, Fill Announcer, WWNO, New Orleans
1998-2005, Announcer/Producer, WWNO, New Orleans
1981, Morning Show Host, WTFM, New York

This was a brief, on-air shift for a major-market FM station, adult contemporary format, while a theatre student at Fordham College at Lincoln Center.

1970 - 1981, Broadcast Announcer

1970 - 76	WMMN Fairmont, WV	Announcer and News Director (1974 - 76), 5000 Watt AM
1977	WNEU Wheeling, WV	AM Drive Shift Announcer
1978, 1981	WRNO New Orleans, LA	Overnight Shift Announcer

EDUCATION

1970 -1974	Theatre Studies, Fairmont State College, Fairmont WV
1980 -1981	Playwright Studies, Fordham College at Lincoln Center, New York, NY
1990 -1992	B.S., Professional Management, Nova University, Ft. Lauderdale, FL
2004 -2005	M.F.A. Performance Program, Directing Studies, (2020) University of New Orleans
2007 -2009	Non Profit Management, (incomplete) University of Central Florida, Orlando

REFERENCES

Broadcast, David Srebnik 202 529 1215	Producer	SiriusXM
Development, Robyn Baker 407 340 4421	Owner	Baker Creative
Theatre, Patrick Gendusa 212 399 3242	Theatre Chair	Loyola University

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VITA

Karl Lengel was born in Norfolk, VA and grew up in Texas, Virginia and West Virginia. He has worked primarily as a stage manager and actor throughout the United States, and as announcer in West Virginia, Pennsylvania, New York and New Orleans. In addition to theatre studies at UNO and Fairmont State College in West Virginia, he has a B.S. in Professional Management from Nova University, and an extensive background in nonprofit management. Along his career path over five decades, he has also produced and directed commercial and business theatre shows. He is married to the performer Ann Casey and lives in New Orleans.