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THEATRICAL INTIMACY: NAVIGATING A NEW NORMAL

by

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B.A. University of California, Irvine, 1985

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts in Musical Theatre  
in the Department of Theatre  
in the College of Arts and Humanities  
at the University of Central Florida  
Orlando, Florida

Spring Term  
2023

Major Professor: Julia Listengarten

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores theatrical intimacy choreography and coordination during current significant social shifts. Covid restrictions, keen awareness of “correctness”, and a desire to “do better” have allowed protective practices like theatrical intimacy to become not only generally accepted but expected in rehearsal spaces. Using techniques such as consent-based spaces, actor disclosures, and common language acquired through training with Chelsea Pace and Laura Rikard, the founders of Theatrical Intimacy Education (TIE), I explore choreographing close relationship moments through high school productions of *Jane Eyre* and *Footloose* presented in 2021-22 at Lake Highland Preparatory in Orlando and with older BFA/MFA student actors in *Indecent*, *Welcome to the Moon*, and *First Date* at the University of Central Florida (UCF). Within these different spaces, questions arose that guided my investigations and process. When is the practice an appropriate tool for establishing personal boundaries and preferences? Moving across the age groups, how does or how should the process change? How can prescribed techniques be modified to assist student actors in storytelling when the technique appears to fall short? How can the practice of theatrical intimacy be adapted to the social distancing and masking requirements caused by Covid? And finally, how does one maneuver within the boundaries established by those creating new standards and popular practices such as “Theatrical Intimacy”? During my process, I rely on training sessions with TIE and on Chelsea Pace’s *Staging Sex*. To assist in storytelling and establish actor process, I adapt methods from *Actioning and How to Do It* by Nick Moseley. As I reflect upon the spaces we create and the work we do in them, I investigate various publications that include the thoughts of Elise Ahenkorah, Holly Derr, Beth Strano, Keith Morant, Michael Roth, and Nina Power. In searching how we might live in

those spaces peaceably and productively, I explore adrienne maree brown's *We Will Not Cancel Us, And Other Dreams of Transformative Justice.*"

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to my kind and supportive family and to my professors at UCF.

Thank you to Earl D Weaver for all his wisdom, and great good humor and to Tara Snyder for her expertise and patience. Thank you also to Vivian Majkowski who artfully drove home the need for process. A special thank you to Dr. Julia Listengarten for being generally fabulous and for opening up my head. Thanks to you all for generously inviting me into your rehearsal spaces.

Special thanks to:

- Lisa Evenson
- Leo Arteche
- Michele Perkins
- Danielle Barnes
- Claudia Lynch
- Michael Wainstein
- Theatre UCF

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In this thesis I hope to relate the beginnings of my work in Theatrical Intimacy. My experiences began in the strange and frightening time of Covid 19 when it was difficult to know when or if theatre would ever be normal again. Theatres did eventually reopen and there seemed to be good work to be done there in establishing spaces for the protection of all theatre participants, particularly actors.

I sought training in theatrical direction/choreography during the theatre lockdowns and all my courses had been virtually offered through Theatrical Intimacy Education (TIE) founded by Chelsea Pace award winner of the Kennedy Center Gold Medallion for her work in "revolutionizing rehearsal rooms and classroom spaces by implementing systems that center the most vulnerable" and Laura Rikard. My courses with TIE included *Best Practices*, *Best Practices for Minors*, and *Intimacy Choreography*.

"Best Practices" was a "consent-based practice that was contextual, circumstantial, and revokable." The course introduced tools for "setting boundaries, desexualizing the process, choreographing intimacy, and documentation." Best practices meant that the process had to work for everyone in the room and were "designed to protect the most vulnerable" ("Best Practices").

"Best Practices for Minors" was a course "designed for those interested in bringing the TIE Best Practices to working with minors" in the hopes of creating "effective strategies for training up the next generations of theatre artists." Best Practices for Minors" emphasized how boundaries were necessary to social and emotional development and stressed the importance of empowering students in the rehearsal space and in their lives ("Best Practice for Minors").

*Intimacy Choreography* introduced us to Chelsea Pace's *Staging Sex*, the first book published on theatrical intimacy procedures. Pace's book had a vocabulary for movement meant to desexualize touch moments on stage. We covered placeholders for discussed audition disclosures, preproduction, a list of questions to ask directors before beginning a project, time expectations, and the different settings we might be working in ("Intimacy Choreography").

Because of my study in the area of theatrical intimacy and my hopes of exploring the practice in my thesis, I was invited to collaborate on intimacy choreography at UCF with their productions of *Welcome to the Moon* by John Patrick Shanley, the musical *First Date*, and on Paula Vogel's *Indecent*. I relate here my experiences in helping to establish a consent-based rehearsal space, boundary practice, and choreography. I also explore auditions disclosures and their implementation in my high school productions of *Jane Eyre* and *Footloose*.

My guiding thoughts for this thesis began with my first exposure to intimacy choreography and continued to formulate as I worked. Were there improvements to be made on our better practices and best efforts? How could I implement these improvements in my own rehearsal room? Were we truly including everyone in protective practices? Could grace and the sharing of power create the spaces we seek? How could the spaces we create be of service to what we seek to create there?

In rehearsals with students and in my research, I have relied heavily on *Staging Sex*. In her book, Pace offers templates in disclosure forms, argues that old approaches don't work, and suggests how new approaches can make it, in Pace's words, "less weird" ("Best Practices"). In her book she discusses the three big ideas, "creating a culture of consent, desexualizing the process, and choreographing it" (Pace vii). Throughout this process I have been encouraged by the works of adrienne maree brown.

In *We Will Not Cancel Us: And Other Dreams of Transformative Justice*, brown's thoughts on principled struggle where "we are struggling for the sake of something larger than ourselves and are honest and direct with each other while holding compassion" have been inspirational (brown 21). She invites us to "get excellent at being in conflict, which is a healthy, natural part of being human and biodiverse" (brown 9). She shares that it is inevitable that we will disagree but asks that we consider responding "not with rejection, exile, or public shaming, but with clear naming of harm, education around intention, impact, and pattern breaking; satisfying apologies and consequences; new agreements and trustworthy boundaries; and lifelong healing resources for all involved" (brown 11). She has visions not of a "tiny utopia behind miles of barbed wire...but a vast sanctuary where our experiences, as humans who have experienced and caused harm, are met with centered, grounded invitations to grow" (brown 11). brown is leading us towards productive communities where participants are bound to each other by the necessity of our being human. I'll return to her often.

"Untitled Poem by Beth Strano" is presented here and suggests how we might enter the spaces we share. Her words on brave spaces have been a touchstone for those who seek to create spaces we can manage with respect and with care. Her words have been a springboard for those exploring newer and expanded spaces like those presented by Elise Ahankara in her essay, "Safe and Brave Spaces Don't Work, and What You Can Do Instead" (Ahankara 2020). Ahankara presents brave spaces as inequitable for those required to daily be braver than others and offers an alternative with spaces in which we can be accountable. "Don't Dismiss Safe Spaces" by Michael Roth for the *New York Times* inspired thoughts about saving the best of each space so that we are not throwing out the baby with the bathwater.

There have been several articles and essays that have helped me clarify ideas and formulate thoughts around the challenges we face in art, as artists, and in intimacy work. In her article “How Cancel Culture Made Us Forget the Art of Interpretation”, author Nina Power presents us with our fear and its effect on self-expression. In “Quality in Art and the Artist’s Ego” Keith Morant helps to explain that success in art relies on artists to deeply communicate past what lies at the surface. I have relied on articles by Bonnie Stiernberg for *Inside Hook* and Olivia Truffaut-Wong for *The Cut* to illustrate how the push to bring intimacy direction into mainstream theatrical settings is still an ongoing effort.

In my case for the importance of process and sharing process, I turn to *Actioning -and How to Do It* by Nick Mosley. This psycho-physical technique is just one way to get an actor out of their head and into their work. I feel this technique was an effective tool for distracting actors from their apprehensions around accidentally crossing boundaries in our established space.

In this thesis, I focus on audition disclosure templates offered through Chicago Theatre Standard (CTS) that have been adopted by many educational and professional theatre venues. I present adapting this form to a more transparent and descriptive disclosure like those found through Theatrical Intimacy Education (TIE) may assist participants in making more fully informed decisions when determining their preferences around the material before they commit to a production. I also present disclosures for high school plays and musicals that I have adapted from TIE templates. I explore how preferences stated in disclosure forms can change throughout the rehearsal process and speak to my solutions or work-arounds to accommodate the preference changes that occurred in my high school rehearsals. I present a costume disclosure based on TIE templates and speak to the challenges that arose in this area.

I also reflect on my first attempts at boundary work and supporting better rehearsal spaces with *Welcome to the Moon* and *First Date* at UCF. I examine the possible shortcomings when training for a physically based practice online. In this chapter, I look at areas of intimacy direction where I would need to grow and discovered where the protection suggested through training groups was not equitable for all in the room.

In this thesis I reflect on the spaces we seek to create and how even the naming of spaces is beyond consensus. I present the ideas from several architects of modern spaces and wonder if we might be able to find a common starting point.

Finally, I examine movement elements themselves and my experience with *Indecent* at UCF. Again, I question my lack of exposure to the physical elements in course work offered in my intimacy training. I also explore the difficulties our spaces can create and pose that the work our spaces are created to facilitate should be duly considered.

Throughout my research I examine how I might implement and adapt the protective inclinations behind theatrical intimacy work that have the potential to empower spaces and the people in them.

## CHAPTER TWO: DISCLOSURE FORMS AND SHARING POWER

As a performer, I'd thought that exploring text in its entirety could be a helpful tool for an actor if they wanted to be able tell a story more fully, but I rarely relied on having full scripts, and 95% of the time entire scripts were not made available to me. For television and film in the 1990s and early 2000s, there was seldom a character description, and never did I see a disclosure of what a character was required to perform.

For minor roles, you had to piece together meaning you could infer from the bits of script that you were given the night before. If I was going to get a script at all, it wouldn't be until after I got a part and unaware of what story was being told until a table read. It would have been nice to have had some buy in or agreement surrounding the content I was going to engage in for potentially millions of people.

Overall, the industry was a loose one. You were lucky to be called in and you were considered very lucky if you got the job. At the beginning of my career, I remember asking a director why I was moving stage left at a particular moment and they said it was because I wanted to get paid. I asked very few questions after that. I can't remember asking any more questions at all. That was the power structure set up by those who had it and I played into it nicely for them. Now as an educator working with young performers my responsibility to them had to be greater than it had been to myself.

First contact with performers is often through the audition process, but in an educational setting it is more likely that I would have them in class first. In class I could supply them with the material to explore and attempt to train them to think critically about what they were reading so they could discover content and form ideas and opinions around it. Exploring the material together meant actively engaging and making discoveries. Time and again this discovery would

not happen if they were left to work on their own. My experience with them started to make the audition process clearer to me.

Students would come into auditions having not read the play. They had not patched together outcomes based on the sides they had in their hands nor dissected the material to see how they might feel performing it. It is their responsibility to read the play and determine their feelings around sensitive content, but inevitably students would find themselves up against material they weren't comfortable with after they had been cast. Why didn't they read the play and if they had read it why didn't they form any ideas around it? If they had read the play and had an objection about content or a question about how a moment might play out, why didn't they say? If I couldn't do this as an adult professional, how could they be expected to?

Leading students through material so they evaluate content and their comfort around it could become habit if we approached every project that way. If every time material was evaluated students felt confident that their opinions around the material would be valued, they might begin to share feelings more freely, more openly, and more often. Could advocating for yourself also become a habit? Process, method, and standards can be initiated, and they can become custom if they are repeatedly implemented. In 2015, Lori Myers and Laura T. Fisher, in collaboration with a group of Chicago theatre artists, created Chicago Theatre Standards to guide theatre companies "to nurture communication, safety, respect, and accountability for all participants at all levels of theatrical production" (Fisher 3). "Whether a college, a for-profit acting school, high school theatre club or other learning environment, these standards can help emerging artists learn what is expected of them, and what they can expect from potential environments they may engage in" (Fisher. revised 12-11-17, 5).



The CTS document seeks to “create awareness and systems that respect and protect the human in the art...to foster awareness of what artists should expect, and what companies to strive to provide in their spaces” (Fisher 3). The mission of Chicago Theatre Standards is to “create spaces free of harassment, whether it be sexual, or based in race, gender, religion, ethnic origin, color, or ability...in nurturing environments that allow us to challenge ourselves, our audiences, and our communities...” (Fisher 4). The adoption of the CTS guidelines in many companies is an attempt at making a new culture of care, communication, and consent a habit. These are tools that can effectively establish shared power in our rehearsal rooms.

Disclosures to facilitate the communication necessary for participants to make conscious choices concerning content are an important part of the CTS guidelines and are strongly suggested throughout the theatre process to “assist prospective participants to make informed decisions when accepting auditions and offers, and (to) know what to expect before they walk into the room for the first time. Disclosures also help the producer assemble willing, able, and informed participants” (Fisher 6). CTS suggests disclosing high risk elements such as: sexual content, fights/violence, nudity, the nature of specialized movement (i.e., weapons, physical combat, sexual violence, tumbling, aerial acrobatics, dance, yoga, etc.) and acknowledging that concepts may change. Disclosures should inform prospective participants of all culturally charged violence, accents, or dialects to underscore a cultural representation, culturally charged narratives and language, as well as theatre conditions that may be unsafe (i.e., no indoor drinking fountains, outdoor summer programs, etc.) (Fisher 25).

Participants have the right to refuse to participate in any elements that were not disclosed at the auditions. In the sample disclosure CTS provides, there are elements, but no descriptors (Figure 1). A CTS disclosure has a box to check for nudity and one for sexual content but there is

no context or specificity disclosed around these moments nor does it state what characters are involved. There is no description at all. How could preferences be determined? There is no way to know what these moments might mean. If a script is available, participants are relied upon to identify and interpret where these moments might be. If the elements checked are part of the vision specific to that production, they may never find them. When would there be an opportunity for agreement? CTS disclosures do not implicitly require consent, so it is unclear when consent would be addressed. It is likely participants will see how it plays out and hope for the best. Partnering in agreement and consent remains as difficult as it ever was. Where is the power? The power continues to remain with those who have the information.

Chelsea Pace, co-founder of Theatrical Intimacy Education (TIE) and author of *Staging Sex* recommends that audition disclosures include plot outlines and a clear presentation of potentially sensitive elements for each character. Pace also includes space in each disclosure element for actor preferences. In TIE disclosures there is an area for participants to request more information if they need clarification. A casting team would see the request in writing and would be the ones to initiate a discussion to address concerns. An actor or crew member would have to be brave enough to state their preferences and ask a question on a piece of paper, but not have to be brave enough to approach the power in the room and potentially receive a reproach for having a question.

With more information presented from both sides of the table, the casting team can navigate around preferences and cast those in roles who are willing and able to work within the production requirements that have been fully disclosed at or before auditioning. With full and detailed disclosures that include descriptions of specific moments of sensitive material, which

character performs the moment, and in what context, participants can take part in a process that is transparent and relies on their preferences and consent.

**Sample Audition Disclosure Form**

---

- This theatre has adopted The **Chicago Theatre Standards**, which seeks to foster an environment of communication, safety, respect, accountability, and the health, safety, and well-being of institutions and its participants. We hope the following disclosures help you make an informed choice should you be offered a role in this production.
- All theatres that abide by The Chicago Theatre Standards make the following audition commitments to you:
  - You will not be asked to audition more than 3 times for this production without compensation
  - You will not be kept at any audition more than 3 hours, or past 11pm.
  - You will not be asked to disrobe or perform any intimate contact or violence as a part of your audition.

**PRODUCTION SCHEDULE**  
First day of rehearsal: \_\_\_\_\_  
Range of rehearsal hours: \_\_\_\_\_  
Tech begins: \_\_\_\_\_  
First preview: \_\_\_\_\_  
Opening: \_\_\_\_\_  
Closing: \_\_\_\_\_  
Days/times of planned performances: \_\_\_\_\_  
Performance venue: \_\_\_\_\_

**DISCLOSURES (check all that apply):**

- There is a possibility that the production will be extended through \_\_\_\_\_.
- Costumes will be supplied by the producer.
- Actors will be expected to help build and strike the set.
- There will be understudies for this production.
- There will be pay for this production in the amount of \_\_\_\_\_.
- This production contains sexual content.
- This production contains nudity.
- This production contains violence.
  - If yes, a fight choreographer will be on staff for this production.
- This production contains culturally sensitive content.
- This production is accessible to actors who use a mobility device.
- This production will have a nontraditional audience seating arrangement.
- There are \_\_\_\_\_ previews planned for this production.

**Further Disclosures:**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*The Chicago Theatre Standards welcomes feedback at [help@notinourhouse.org](mailto:help@notinourhouse.org) at [NotInOurHouse.org](http://NotInOurHouse.org). Please fill out an anonymous e-comment card at [NotInOurHouse.org](http://NotInOurHouse.org) and let us know any questions or suggestions you have regarding this disclosure form, or any experience you have relative to the CTS. We respect your anonymity. Thank you!*

Rev 12-11-17 27

Figure 1: Chicago Theatre Standards Revision 12-11-17

## ***Jane Eyre* Disclosure**

The first audition disclosure I adapted from TIE was for *Jane Eyre*. The potentially sensitive material was described, and it was notated which characters were involved. That all physical elements would be choreographed was also noted. The language in the disclosure was “de-loaded” or desexualized (Pace 11) and broken down into its simplest physical elements (“Best Practices”). I never mentioned the words sex, sexual or theatrical intimacy so as not to trigger students or parents.

The first item listed was a physical altercation between John Reed and Jane; *John Reed simulates throwing a book at Jane. Jane jumps on John’s back and simulates pulling his hair.* Another item was an onstage costume change and described as *Jane changes on stage approximately 3 times revealing period undergarments consisting of a linen camisole and long underskirt.* Non-violent touch was listed *stylized physical and/or imagined contact signifying romance or love- there are two kisses between Jane and Rochester written into Jane Eyre. It is likely these will be struck. John and Jane embrace 3 times and hold hands.* Themes of death, violence, abandonment, mental health, and love were listed, and complete character descriptions were available on a separate document.

Due to Covid 19, it was unclear at the time of casting as to whether actors would be masked. The disclosure stated the kisses, but it was also shared that there was a good possibility that the kisses wouldn’t happen. When we came closer to performance, another consent form was presented to the students and asked what their preference was around the wearing of masks. Students were supplied with all the information we had and were updated as circumstances changed due to the pandemic. It was disclosed that information could change because of the pandemic.

No student auditioning for *Jane Eyre* expressed a preference around witnessing any of the sensitive material listed on the disclosure form. Each potentially sensitive moment had been fully identified by character, content, and context. If an actor expressed discomfort witnessing any potentially sensitive material, they would have been staged to accommodate this preference, or removed from the scene. If a personal boundary or preference changed during rehearsal, a work around would be initiated. It would be within the production's rights to recast if a complete moment couldn't be found with a work around especially now that the disclosed information had been so fully identified in an audition disclosure, but for my students I would always supply a work around. With complete disclosures, it felt like we all had a clear idea of what was going on and that was shared power for everyone in the room.

For *Jane Eyre*, there would be a separate disclosure for costume preferences. The costume disclosures for *Jane Eyre* and *Footloose* were identical and both documents described what students should be prepared for as they participated in the costuming process as well what tools were at their disposal.

The costumers were asked to use "instructional touch" which was, "asking before touching you, specificity about the contact, and for what purpose. If you are uncomfortable, your costume supervisor will offer a workaround. Use 'BUTTON'"; a self-care word we established in our boundary work to stop all activity so that we could take care of actor needs (TIE 2021). Students were informed in the disclosure and again verbally how the practice worked and how this would apply to taking measurements as well the fitting and draping of garments.

Students indicated their preferences around traditional or non-traditional gender representation as it pertained to clothing, i.e., preferred wearing pants rather than skirts, etc. The costumer was also made aware of clothing preferences students had communicated in the

audition disclosures. I was not asking for gender assignment only comfort level and preference. The wording here was my imperfect best attempt at neutrality. “Traditional” was used without judgement as “what was typically seen in the past.” When I reached out to my school’s DIE representative, she expressed concern around the word traditional but didn’t offer another solution. I would have to take language corrections as they came. For the first time at my school, students were able to dress the way they wanted and if they chose to, were able to express that they wanted to dress that way.

What was not included in the disclosure I created was whether they preferred male roles or female roles. Many students offered this information unsolicited as a write in. They felt free to let me know I had made a mistake or forgotten something important. That was self-advocacy and a good sign that their stated preferences on the rest of the disclosure were accurate.

There were students who commented that they would play any gender, but the write-ins didn’t specify how they preferred to dress. Would that mean they would dress in the traditionally assigned costume of that gender? There were many roles that could be portrayed as gender neutral and in whatever clothing they preferred. It would take more questions and discussion. The challenge was getting the information and honoring student preferences without having them feel like they had to proclaim something. If I had included more opportunities in the disclosure perhaps there could be room for personal choice if a student chose to share. I really did want them to have an equal share of the power.

## *Jane Eyre* Audition Disclosure

**This disclosure is to begin establishing appropriate and changeable boundaries for each actor in the rehearsal space**

Name (Printed) \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*Jane Eyre* involves themes that may be sensitive for some actors. *Jane Eyre* also has a number of choreographed physical elements.

Physical elements for *Jane Eyre* include:

- A physical argument or altercation
  - John Reed simulates throwing a book at Jane. Jane jumps on John's back and simulates pulling his hair
- Onstage costume change
  - Jane changes on stage approximately 3 times revealing period undergarments consisting of a linen camisole and long underskirt
- non-violent and stylized physical and/or imagined contact signifying romance or love
  - There are two kisses between Jane and Rochester written into *Jane Eyre*. It is likely these will be struck.
  - John and Jane embrace 3 times and hold hands.

Themes for *Jane Eyre* include:

- Death, violence, abandonment, mental health, and love

(Pace. TIE. 2020. Adapted by Cortelyou. 2021)

Figure 2: *Jane Eyre* Disclosure Page 1

Please indicate your preferences for working on productions with the following material:

### Physical Contact

Note: All physical contact will be choreographed.

	Yes	No	More information needed
Kissing? <i>*Highly likely Covid 19 will prevent this</i>			
Performing or witnessing non-romantic physical contact with others?			
Performing or witnessing theatrically stylized physical and/or imagined contact signifying romance or love.			

### Violence

Note: All violence will be choreographed.

	Yes	No	More information needed
Performing or witnessing simulated acts of violence.			

### Costuming

Note: All onstage costume changes will be choreographed.

Performing or witnessing onstage costume changes?			
---	--	--	--

(Pace. TIE. 2020. Adapted by Cortelyou. 2021)

Figure 3: *Jane Eyre* Disclosure Page 2



Other Content

	Yes	No	More information needed
Performing or witnessing profanity?			
Performing or witnessing derogatory language?			
Witnessing or performing themes of death, violence, abandonment, mental health, or love?			

Rehearsal Schedule

	Yes	No	More information needed
There are up to 10 lunch rehearsals scheduled for a few characters. Are you available to rehearse during lunch?			
If you are sick you should not come to rehearsal, but it is vital that you are at each scheduled rehearsal if you are able. <b><i>If you are not at a scheduled rehearsal it is likely that you will not be worked into that scene.</i></b> Please check that you understand the rehearsal policy.			
I have seen the rehearsal schedule and am aware of the requirements.			
<i>Jane Eyre</i> is an ensemble production and together we will be devising many elements of the show. Is being a member of a creative ensemble interesting to you?			

Comments and conflicts:

(Pace. TIE. 2020. Adapted by Cortelyou. 2021)

Figure 4: *Jane Eyre* Disclosure Page 3

### ***Footloose* Disclosure**

*Footloose* was a production with more sensitive and complex material. This disclosure would be expanded to include the thematically challenging elements as well as those that students had included on their own: availability for roles of either gender or gender identification.

It would be stated that all physical elements would be choreographed, and there was a more thorough character breakdown for each character for those involved in the sensitive material. Language to describe physical and thematic elements were again broken down into simple desexualized language, and it was indicated that “Reverend Shaw Moore” typically a male role, could be portrayed as either male or female.

The disclosure made students aware of which characters had been divorced, used mild curse words, and spoke about religion. It was disclosed that there was kissing between the characters identified and how much kissing there would be. The disclosure identified two characters who objectified other characters and that there was an assault on one character by another in the form of a slap.

The disclosure for *Footloose* (and *Jane Eyre* to an extent) was also used to establish production boundaries around rehearsal schedules, traditional musical casting format where there would be some students asked to play ensemble roles, ensemble spirit, and inclusivity. Covid 19 guidelines were clearly stated. Themes were listed as ones surrounding death, violence, physical relationships, religion, abandonment, and substance abuse. Students were asked to state their preferences for witnessing or participating in the material as well as the production requirements and were given an opportunity to ask for clarification or more information if they needed it.

There was a rehearsal when there was an exception to material that had been disclosed but not identified as being a potential issue for the actors involved. The disclosure had stated that

*Chuck Cranston was a bully, and he alludes to Ariel being promiscuous in a musical number. It was shared that Chuck attempts to physically assault Ariel on stage and it is implied that he and his friends beat up another character offstage. Included in the disclosure was a kiss between Ariel and Chuck. It is disclosed that Ariel participates in a musical number that implies she has had a physical relationship with Chuck and that she kisses Chuck. By not indicating in the space provided on the disclosure that she had any questions or concerns about the material listed, the actor playing Ariel essentially agreed to take part in the moments. With all the supplied information, what she couldn't yet know is how the choreographer would stage the number and how much touch would be involved. Words like alludes and implied share nothing about what the touch moments might look like and that wasn't good enough.*

The song text alluded to a physical relationship but it's impossible to list elements that hadn't yet been created. Before choreography even began, the actor playing Ariel was having reservations about what could be asked of her, so perhaps the disclosure had an essence of what might be expected. Did the "de-loaded" or desexualized language (Pace 11) intended to put parents and students at ease leave us in the dark again? I couldn't even use the phrase "intimacy choreography" with my high school families because intimacy was too "intimate." More information about the moments would be needed in the disclosure which meant work would have to be done up front with the touch moments. The choreography would need to be shared more explicitly.

Although it was meant to be communicated before she got the part, this actor was able to communicate her concerns and have them listened to. We were creating a culture that empowered her. There was balance in the room. Together we concluded what movement could serve the story and respect her preferences. We decided on limited touch choreography, and a

work around would be Chuck's chase or pursuit of Ariel. The relationship became an implied one (as the disclosure had stated) and established efficiently by Chuck *reaching* for Ariel. Touch was relegated to arms and hands and the kiss was dropped. The change was effective enough at relaying plot and character while the song in the scene "The Girl Gets Around" supported the type of physical relationship that Chuck and Ariel shared in moments we had to imagine. The story was not changed, but the way we told it was something the actor could agree to.

I don't know why the actor waited until the staging moment came to express concern. It's not the easiest scenario, but there may be reasons not apparent to her until it came time to stage the song. Proposed moments can be planned and disclosed, but an actor may not know they have a boundary until they are in the middle of the action. As the director of the production, I must facilitate each rehearsal, and it is my responsibility to give each participant room to make choices around the material even if we are in the middle of it.

In "Best Practices" workshop, TIE Co-Founder Laura Rikard reminded us that "theatre is uncomfortable and that it's supposed to be because the human condition most often is. It can push you up against boundaries, but there is a difference between pushing up against boundaries and crossing boundaries" ("Best Practices"). I remind my students of this before I give them their disclosures. I ask them to take the document home, discuss whatever they need to with their parents and bring it back the next day.

In our rehearsals, we will proceed slowly, engage with boundaries, and adjust where boundaries are as the students discover how they feel about the content. I will continue to make students aware of production elements they are being asked to engage in, so they have the power to make choices. They are becoming accustomed to the process, and they are learning to expect it – as they should.

*Footloose* Audition Disclosure  
(Please return tomorrow)

**This disclosure is to continue establishing appropriate and changeable boundaries for each actor in the rehearsal space. This disclosure will also serve to establish production boundaries.**

Name (Printed) \_\_\_\_\_

“Ensemble A” or Primary Cast \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Student Email \_\_\_\_\_

Parent email \_\_\_\_\_

T-Shirt size \_\_\_\_\_

*Footloose* involves themes that may be sensitive for some actors. *Footloose* also has a number of choreographed physical elements.

**Breakdown for those characters with potentially sensitive material:** *(for all other character breakdowns, please see script attached to the provided Footloose Google Document)*

**Ren McCormack** - A teenage boy from Chicago. *Ren uses mild language and kisses Ariel onstage.*

**Ethel McCormack** - Ren's mother. *Ethel is divorced.*

**Reverend Shaw Moore** - The minister of Bomont. *In anger, Shaw attempts to strike Ariel. As a reverend, there is much talk of traditional, Christian beliefs.*

*Note: Shaw may be played by a male or female.*

**Vi Moore** - The minister's spouse. *The relationship between Mr. and Mrs. Moore is a traditional one.*

**Ariel Moore** - The Moore's teenage daughter. *Ariel participates in a musical number where the lyrics identify her as promiscuous. (Our staging of that number*

(Pace 2020. Modified by Cortelyou. 2021)

Figure 5: *Footloose* Disclosure Page 1

will be mild.) Dialogue infers that Ariel has had physical relationships with the opposite sex. Ariel defies and lies to her parents. There is a kiss between Ariel and Ren. Ariel kisses Chuck.

**Chuck Cranston** - Ariel's boyfriend. Chuck is a bully and alludes to Ariel being promiscuous in a musical number. Attempts to physically assault Ariel onstage. Chuck and his friends beat up Ren offstage. There is a kiss between Ariel and Chuck.

**Lyle and Travis** - Chuck's friends. Beat up Ren offstage and are in a musical number that alludes to Ariel being promiscuous.

**Wes Warnicker** - Ren's uncle. Strikes Ren.

**Willard Hewitt** - A country boy and Ren's best friend. Uses mild language. Rusty and Willard kiss.

**Rusty, Urleen, Wendy Jo** - Ariel's friends. Objectify boys, use mild language. Rusty and Willard kiss.

Themes in *Footloose* include those related to:

- Death, violence, physical relationships, religion, abandonment, substance abuse

**Please indicate your preferences for working on productions with the following material found in *Footloose*:**

**Physical Contact**

Note: All physical contact will be choreographed.

	Yes	No	Need more information
Performing or witnessing "close relationship" moments that involve kissing a person of the opposite sex?			
Performing or witnessing non-romantic physical contact with others?			
Performing or witnessing "close relationship" moments of touch (embracing, hugging, or caressing)?			
Performing or witnessing implied close relationships.			

(Pace. TIE. 2020. Adapted by Cortelyou. 2021)

Figure 6: *Footloose* Disclosure Page 2

### Violence

Note: All stage violence will be choreographed.

	Yes	No	More information needed
Performing or witnessing simulated acts of violence.			

### Other Content

	Yes	No	More information needed
Performing or witnessing profanity?			
Performing or witnessing derogatory language?			
Performing or witnessing themes of death, violence, abandonment, physical relationships, or religion?			
Are you comfortable playing any gender? If you would like to specify your preference for casting, please do so here or speak with Mrs. Cortelyou.			
Can you rollerskate? Really, <i>really</i> rollerskate?			
If you <i>can</i> rollerskate, do you own skates?			
Do you play any musical instruments well? If so, which ones?			

(Pace. TIE. 2020. Adapted by Cortelyou. 2021)

Figure 7: *Footloose* Disclosure Page 3

Covid 19

	Yes	No	More information needed
Unless school policy changes, it is our intention to perform without masks. If you are more comfortable performing with a mask on, you are welcome to do so. I am comfortable with the mask policy for <i>Footloose</i> .			

Rehearsal Schedule

	Yes	No	More information needed
There are up to 10 - 15 lunch rehearsals scheduled for scene work or small musical numbers. Are you available to rehearse for up to 50 minutes during lunch?			
If you are sick you should not come to rehearsal, but it is vital that you are at each scheduled rehearsal if you are able. <b><u>If you are not present the entire time for a scheduled rehearsal for any reason other than illness, you will not be worked into that scene.</u></b> Please check that you understand the rehearsal policy.			
I have seen the rehearsal schedule, am aware of, and agree to the requirements.			
<i>Footloose</i> is a traditional musical with primary and secondary characters. There are some smaller roles and a large chorus that will either sing, dance, or both. Are you interested in participating in this traditional musical format?			
Our production of <i>Footloose</i> has boundaries that allow each person associated with this production the opportunity and freedom to do their best work. I understand that it is my job to			

(Pace. TIE. 2020. Adapted by Cortelyou. 2021)

Figure 8: *Footloose* Disclosure Page 4



support and respect these boundaries and will foster the spirit of the ensemble in and out of the rehearsal space.			
It crosses a boundary in our production to not be inclusive. Are you willing to include someone new or someone you don't know well into your conversations and theater activities?			

Questions, comments, concerns, and schedule conflicts:

(Pace. TIE. 2020. Adapted by Cortelyou. 2021)

Figure 9: *Footloose* Disclosure Page 5

## Costume Disclosures

Student tools in the fitting room include:

- Saying “button”
- Request a two-minute break
- Request a reduction in the number of people in the room
- Request that the door be open or closed
- Request to be fitted in an open or closed area of the shop
- Request help or additional privacy for dressing or undressing
- Request that the appropriate faculty or staff member makes the adjustments
- Ask questions for clarification

The measuring process was explained, and preferences were asked for.

*The measuring process for costume fittings requires accuracy. This process involves physical contact with the measuring tape and minimal touch from the measurer. Please contact Mrs. Cortelyou if you have any questions or concerns.*

Table 1: Dressing Room Preferences

	Yes	No	More information needed
I am comfortable changing in a common area of my assigned dressing room.			
I am more comfortable changing in a private space.			
I am comfortable completing a quick change behind an enclosed screen close to the stage.			

(Pace. TIE. 2020. Adapted by Cortelyou. 2021)

*Please Note: Not liking your costume is not the same as being uncomfortable. Please do your best to be aware that the costume designer is designing not just for you, but for the overall look of the show. Ask for clarification if you have a “button”*

## CHAPTER THREE: BOUNDARIES ARE FOR EVERYONE

To begin boundary work on 2021's *Welcome to the Moon* directed by UCF alumnus Peter Cortelli, Tara Kromer, and Joshian Morales, I use a game recommended to illustrate consent. We played the drama game, "Go" often in high school and middle school but had mostly thought about it from the inside out. A participant looks for someone to give them permission to leave their spot in a circle. They often leave their space before getting consent to go, but consent is key. If there is no permission, you may not proceed with anything else. The important person became the person across from you. Break operative flow, slow down and focus on another. We had to get used to waiting for consent.

Humans can do more than one thing at a time. Skilled performers do it all the time. And although acting is not rocket science, good actors have been trained to function and think on multiple levels while performing. There are many technical requirements a trained performer must remember and execute while keeping the moment true or essential. It's not unlike any good athlete. You've practiced, you've honed your skills, you've run the play many times, you get out there hoping for a textbook presentation, but you're prepared for anything because it's live and happening in the moment. The prescribed play will be the same though. You can't rewrite it. You follow the plan and perform within it.

The reports in *The Cut* and *The New York Times* of actors not following their intimacy choreography because it interferes with their spontaneity (Truffaut-Wong. "Male Actor Doesn't See the Point of Intimacy Coordinators." 1) or "undermines instinct" (Langella. "Fired By Netflix, Frank Langella Refutes Allegations of 'Unacceptable Behavior'" 3) are difficult to understand. There is no spontaneity. It's all planned. Actors just make it look like it is spontaneous. That is their job. What actors do is *imaginary*. They are telling stories.

As early as 1877, ballet companies have been performing the same Swan Lake choreography. They will execute each choreographed step with precision while finding story and performance that makes an audience feel something. This is artistry and craft and surely, this is expected of seasoned actors. So, we practice moving through task, our “Go” game, while following the prescribed movements or rules. We will play until everyone wraps their heads around receiving consent before acting even if the task seems more urgent than the asking.

After we play the game, I introduce the self-care word, “button.” Button will stop all activity so there can be either a clarification, a question asked, or concern expressed. In my boundary work with high school students, button exercises were reduced to a silliness but there were also times they used it and they knew that whatever was happening in the room would stop. They could expect results when they had concerns, when they had questions, or said no.

We would soon move into partner work that would establish touch boundaries for each participant that were changeable and surrounded by a “fence” or area that was off limits (Pace 21). Fences could be opened for a particular moment in a production if they chose to do so. But before we did this, I spoke about boundaries and TIE’s specific expansion of their purview, which included boundaries around cultural, political, social, and religious elements (“Best Practices”). I was ineffective here because I did nothing about whatever anyone might have felt in any of these areas. We didn’t stop to discuss anything. I hadn’t seen any disclosures regarding any sensitive content for *Welcome to the Moon* and hadn’t had any discussions with the directors about approaching these topics. I should have approached the issue of extenuating boundaries with the directors. My inexperience, lack of confidence, and the request that I not disrupt the directors too much with the process put me on the back foot. I was invited into the process just prior to the first read through and the room was now full of designers, faculty, and actors and it

felt too late. A conversation before this first rehearsal was what was needed, and a more seasoned intimacy choreographer would have known that, asked for that, and made sure it took place. I have been able to address sensitive topics in my work with high schoolers because that material has been presented and weighed in on by the actors from the beginning with disclosures. I hadn't had access to UCF disclosures and was not aware of the specificity or depth of information disclosed to them. My work would center solely around physical touch aspects. Perhaps choreography was the only thing expected of me, but I knew that TIE had been seeking to do more in protecting cultural, political, social, and religious boundaries as well.

Another UCF intimacy challenge I undertook that Fall was the musical *First Date*, written by Austin Winsberg and directed by Earl D Weaver. On this production I would serve as sole choreographer, and it would be up to me undertake both the boundary work and movement. When I came onto that production, they were well into the rehearsal process, and placeholders were established for the elements I was to choreograph. The two moments I would take care of were a hand touch and a more heightened moment where a puppet baby operated by a male actor was to be placed on the chest of female actor to simulate nursing.

The two performers involved did their boundary work around physical touch, and it was established there was no fence around her chest, so I figured the moment would end up looking much like it was described in the script. As we worked toward the moment of touch, the male actor operating the puppet appeared uncomfortable and seemed reluctant to execute the moves involved. There were no fences around his chest area, but it hadn't been established what boundaries he had around touching the chest area of the person he was working with. IDC's *The Pillars; Rehearsal and Performance Practice* compiled by co-founder of Intimacy Directors and Coordinators (IDC), Marie C Percy in 2020 states that, "before any scene of intimacy can be

addressed consent must be established between the actors. Permission may be given by a director, script, or choreographer; however, consent can only be given from the person receiving the action” (Percy 5). He wasn’t receiving the action and he had been given consent to perform the choreography. I wasn’t aware of his boundaries regarding the execution of the material because the boundary work isn’t set up that way. I could find nothing about it in *Staging Sex*.

What if consent isn’t wanted? What is being assumed and how can it be right? In this instance, there seemed to be a bias against those who are required to instigate action that needs to have consent around it. Is there a circumstance where bias is good? Can’t the movement instigator have sensitivities around the situational touch? Is it because instigators are often men? Or consent seekers usually men? Do we see men as not having the same sensitivities around this situational touch? Would it be considered differently if the instigator was a woman? I would find out with my next experiences at UCF with Paula Vogel’s *Indecent*.

I only had questions and not a lot of answers but it all needed attention. Each person’s preferences needed to be investigated, expressed, and respected. It was a learning opportunity for me. The puppet movement was written into the stage directions of *First Date* which didn’t make it a requirement like language surrounding the action might have. If hearts were set on this moment, again disclosures would have been a great way to make everyone auditioning aware of the moment and select an actor who had no boundaries around the material. Since then, I have been careful to find out the boundaries present for the performer instigating the movement and have redirected based on their preferences. I would work to discover choreography that could accommodate the storytelling even if the moment might look different than originally planned.

## CHAPTER FOUR: SPACES

I had staged many productions with students but prior to my boundary practice on *Welcome to the Moon* my explorations of a standardized process of intimacy work had only ever been theoretical. All my training had been through TIE zoom courses.

I wouldn't say the amount of experience I had was unusual because the training for intimacy work is new. In her 2020 HowlRound Theatre Commons essay "The Art and Craft of Intimacy Direction," Holly L. Derr writes that we are "experiencing a revolution in the way artists rehearse and perform intimacy" but points out that the "seeds were planted" only about ten years ago and there are very few publications available for those trying to implement the work in their rehearsal rooms (Derr 1). Marie C. Percy's resource guide is only twenty pages in length and available on the IDC website. Another resource published too late for me as I began my work is *Supporting Staged Intimacy, A Practical Guide for Theatre Creatives, Managers and Crew* by Alexis Black and Tina M. Newhauser.

Theatrical Intimacy Education wasn't officially organized until 2017, but Chelsea Pace's *Staging Sex*, was the first book published on how to approach theatrical intimacy and would have to be my go-to for material to supplement and support the intimacy zoom courses I'd taken through TIE. Pace's book was referenced many times as a companion to course discussions, had forms we were invited to use or adapt, as well as illustrations of choreography. There was little in the way of written resources to be found as a reference for work that thousands of theatres need to be thinking about if they wanted to do better.

As the pandemic began to wane in 2022, what appeared to be offered now was a limited amount of training weekends in select cities. Theatre practitioners seeking training in theatrical intimacy but unable to secure a spot or afford the travel could enroll for courses online as I had

done and rely on what little they could find in print. The good thing was that we were thinking about protecting others in theatrical workspaces. The question for me would be whether online training could ever make me proficient in intimacy direction. Can digital courses offer complete training and if so, what is the value added to training in person? The hours I had invested were more than a weekend of in-person training, but my hours were digital, and I don't think three hundred hours of digital training would ever make me an expert in a physically based practice. Could face to face training with TIE in New York or Los Angeles put more technique into practice or were participants in face-to-face courses also sitting taking notes and flipping through *Staging Sex* as they listened to a lecturer who had actually done the thing we were all hoping to?

In *Staging Sex*, Pace states that the best practices in her book could “help eliminate a culture of ineffective, traumatizing staged intimacy” (Pace 9). TIE had a corner on the intimacy education market leaving them one of the few authorities on the topic (which will always raise a red flag for me), but I believed the theoretical “Best Practices” discussions I took part in made sense. I believed the material shared was sufficient for me to approach boundary work where participants in the rehearsal space could establish preferences and have their preferences respected. With the information I had acquired, I could begin to establish a consent-based rehearsal space.

In the Fall of 2021, I wouldn't have applied for a job as an intimacy director or have presented myself as experienced, but I felt I could assist when I was asked to contribute at UCF. I knew as much as hundreds of others who'd taken TIE courses and, as it was my understanding that there was no intention of hiring professional choreographers, I agreed to take part. I wanted to explore what I felt was an important process. With 14 years of experience in educational theatre and another 20-some as a working professional, I had little fear of doing any harm, some



anxiety about getting it completely right, and was hopeful that I might be of help. My practical training would have to happen there in the room beginning with boundary work for *Welcome to the Moon*. My armor would be my transparency around my lack of practical experience. I, like the actors I would be working with, was also a student putting what I was studying on its feet. This was the only way I would be able to continue learning about it.

We were in the second year of Covid, and school was back to in-person, but everything was still unsettling. The rules of our physical engagement kept changing, and people were still getting sick. Vaccinations were available and most seemed to be getting them, which meant cases of Covid might be less dire, but being diagnosed meant you were likely quarantined for enough days to fully derail the rehearsal process. A domino effect of those infected or exposed would ensue. Questions arose and there were no direct answers. Exactly how far apart we were supposed to be from each other during rehearsals? How many understudies did a production have to have to guarantee a show could happen when an actor got sick? How many stage managers should be assigned to a show to make sure someone was there to tend to rehearsals? Could we attempt to approach modern theatre this way: apart, covered up, and afraid of getting sick or making others sick? How would we create the physical connections that reflected the human experience?

There were physical moments written into *Welcome to the Moon*. Three kisses were referenced in the dialogue. Because the kisses were referred to in text not just stage directions, they became a requirement. The text could not be changed without written permission from the publishers. Two face masks coming together in a kiss would be the last thing anyone would want to perform or see in a show. Another intimacy choreographer ended up being assigned to the touch moments, so I am not sure how the obstacles were overcome. My part in the process would

be to establish boundary practice and help to establish a space where agreement was fundamental.

When beginning boundary work, TIE suggested we work out a quick speech to let everyone know why we as intimacy directors were present in the room and how we were to serve the rehearsal process. When it was my turn to introduce myself, I let them know I was there to help facilitate their creative process by helping to put in place a consent-based rehearsal space with boundaries that were established and respected. I spoke slowly, which is hard for me. In taking my time I was able to observe the people around me. Why had I usually rushed through making a connection with others? Maybe it was easier to look at people and be looked at when I was protected behind a mask. I was getting pretty good at reading body language because the face, the most socially acceptable place to look, was mostly covered up. The actor closest to me had his eyebrows up almost into his hairline, with his shoulders rounded and hands clasped between his legs. He was perched on the edge of his chair, and he looked either worried or afraid. He looked to me like I had something he needed.

From what I could see, the power in the room was held where it typically is in an educational theatre setting: faculty members and next the directors, who in this case were all UCF alumni. The production team came next in the power dynamic with stage managers acquiescing to them, but stage managers had it over the actors. There were no celebrities there, so the actors came last. Again, what was most remarkable in the twenty seconds it took to state my purpose was this male student actor and several of the others who were in closest in proximity to me. There were some big guys in there, but now they seemed to be making themselves smaller. Was it the intimacy topic that diminished them?

They were mostly young men, but old enough to know something about most things, and they were all facing me. The only other time I could remember having this sensation was with my son, especially when he was a boy but sometimes still as an adult, when he's in a bind. These men seemed to be looking *to* me. Was I talking about what was important to them or what they were afraid of?

We were all on the edge of beginning something together in a time where socially we were asked to wake up to what was going on around us. In this setting, the #Me-Too movement would be one of the foremost on their minds. The rehearsal space was undergoing a transformation and an intimacy chorographer being present was proof of the steps being taken to implement protections, but no one looking at me was sure of what this space was supposed to look like or how it was meant to function. What were the rules? There was a chance anyone could get it wrong before they got it completely right. It was a crapshoot as to whether the participants in the room would let someone get it wrong. I was at risk, too. My words were so important. I so much wanted to get it right, but it may be unforgiveable to get it wrong. The wrong word and most certainly the wrong deed whatever good intention behind it, could leave you quickly isolated and ostracized. In this environment of anxiety what would intimacy moments mean? The stakes seemed so high.

I assumed, maybe naively, the students in that room were not the problem. They were there to learn and create. They were not the abusers, manipulators, or harm doers. I assumed that they were the ones who were "awake" and wanting to know how do better. Colleges had traditionally been places for exploration, social change, and justice, but in our age of technology justice for a real or perceived wrong could be very swift. Will the danger they face now be from

each other? Will they be their own threat to “job, community, reputation, platform?” (brown. *We Will Not Cancel Us: And Other Dreams of Transformative Justice*. 41).

In *We Will Not Cancel Us: And Other Dreams of Transformative Justice*, movement mediator, adrienne maree brown, explains that we are now “steeped in punitive culture...punish now, ask questions later” (brown 50). Abusers should not “harm without punishment” and should be held accountable, but there are levels of mistakes and there should be a process to consequences where understanding should first be sought. She invites us to engage in “generative conflict, which includes actively working to gain awareness of the ways we can and have harmed each other, where we have significant political differences, and where we can end cycles of harm and unprincipled struggle in ourselves and our community” so that there can be “transformative justice,” where those who commit infractions “have the opportunity to change and grow, to do and be better” (brown 57). brown worries, as I do, that soon “there will be no one left standing beside us to cancel” because “being able to destroy is different from being able to generate a future where harm isn’t happening all around us” (brown 55).

The cultural shifts today are large, and we have to embrace commitment to change if there is to be any. Whatever happened quietly? Maybe the rigor and exactitude that often accompany the attempts at change are the only options available to bring about something lasting. No half measures. But the exactitude seems to leave little room for error. Are students not able to ask questions in and of their community without retribution, and is the fear of doing perceived harm paralyzing? If our fear of transgression keeps us from growth, how can there be transformation or “movement alignment?” (brown 56). Aren’t universities the most likely places for “movement and growth?” (brown 2). How is there growth if students and educators are too afraid to bring up varied topics or challenge popular thought? How do we look at a thing to see it

needs changing if we are too afraid to look at it? And the fear is everywhere. You *feel* it. The young men in front of me are afraid. I realize I have nothing to lose. I'm not actually their teacher or an employee. I am a student, and I don't have to look on these faces every day. I believe in the transformative power of the *attempt* to do and be better, knowing it is what seems better and has the backing of groups of people whose tenets make sense to me for now (This is the best I can offer when ideas are rapidly being refined and changed just enough to make a difference). I will support discussions and embrace the imperfect so I can grow and I'm going to drag these students along with me. Together we will work toward establishing a space where we might all be less afraid.

In her influential untitled poem about shared spaces, Beth Strano asks us to give up the notion of an idyllic space that will not cause harm just because we wish it not to. She suggests we move to establish spaces that instead ask us to be brave and seek to grow together despite the danger. With a hand painted image found on the door of The Space, an anarchist community center near Phoenix, Arizona, Strano offers that "There is no such thing as a 'safe space' —We exist in the real world. We all carry scars and have caused wounds. This space seeks to turn down the volume of the world outside and amplify voices that have to fight to be heard elsewhere. This space will not be perfect. It will not always be what we wish it to be, but it will be our space together, and we will work on it side by side" (Strano 1). So safe spaces can't be counted on, but it appears brave spaces aren't realistic either.

In her article "Safe and Brave Spaces Don't Work, and What You Can Do Instead," Elise Ahenkorah explains that "safe spaces are impossible to create because you can't predict people's behaviors and thoughts," but being brave puts the onus on the participants and disproportionately on women, minorities, and people of color. The concept of brave spaces "consistently ignores the

reality that underrepresented and marginalized communities must remain consistently brave...merely existing, being joyful, and striving against the odds requires an overwhelming amount of daily bravery that is difficult to put into words” (Ahenkorah 5). Ahenkorah offers a solution with “accountable spaces.” Her proposed guidelines for accountable spaces require participants be “responsible for (yourselves), your intentions, words, and actions.” She asks that we enter a space with “good intentions but understanding that aligning your intent with action is the true test of commitment” (Ahenkorah 6).

How are we asked to enter the space seems clearer but should there not be alignment of intent with those who establish and administer the spaces? Spaces can’t be safe, but should that not still be the goal? It is inevitable that there will be exceptions in all spaces, and it is unlikely that a perfect space can be established, but that cannot let us off the hook for a baseline.

In the 2019 *The New York Times* opinion article, “Don’t Dismiss Safe Spaces,” the president of Wesleyan University, Michael S. Roth, wrote that safe spaces are still a primary obligation. Roth is primarily speaking about how many academics feel that safe spaces have left students insulated from the discourse necessary to facilitate critical thinking and reasoning skills and argues that “safe enough” are where students are able to “participate in argument and inquiry without the threat of harassment or intimidation. Calling for such spaces is to call for schools to promote a basic sense of inclusion and respect that enables all students to thrive” (Roth 2). He explains that “basic sense is feeling ‘safe enough’ to explore differences without fear and work toward positive outcomes with courage” (Roth 2). These thoughts can certainly apply to rehearsal rooms.

Our spaces cannot look or feel the same for every participant, but a “safer space” (Potter.

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*Making Spaces Safer: A Guide to Giving Harassment the Boot Wherever You Work, Play, and*

*Gather*. 2019) should be the least we expect. Safe, brave, safer, accountable – they are all just words if good intentions and better actions aren't behind them. We have to approach what is intended every time we gather.

In “How to Write like Octavia Butler,” for *New York Magazine*, adrienne maree brown discusses the science fiction writer's practical approach to making it through an apocalypse. Survival required “new skills, radically changing your priorities, and understanding there is individual work to do inside the collective survival” (brown 3). brown explains that Butler's idea of functional communities was a movement toward a future and that it took practice in order to change (brown 3). The apocalypse is science fiction – for now, but the building of a functional community so that we might flourish is not.

We can practice building community in better spaces that hope to make us safer, where participants can feel braver or perhaps might feel that that they aren't required to have to be as brave in that space as they need to be daily outside of it because those in the room agree to be accountable for their words, intentions, and actions.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CHOREOGRAPHY; PROCESS PLEASE

Choreography was the reason I was asked to help at UCF. I was to be a part of productions because actors were going to be touching each other and I was going to take care of it. I wasn't there to change the culture of rehearsal spaces. I would play a part in that process, but it was the administrators, production directors and faculty members who sought to facilitate better spaces. My bottom line was movement, but so far, I had been training in an intimacy choreography program that didn't train me in movement technique.

There is no certification offered through TIE. In "The Certification Question" Pace's 2021 article for the TIE website, she explains her thoughts behind this policy. "The existence of 'certification' leverages systems of power that promote inequality, exclusion, and the dynamics of deeply problematic master-teacher models to capitalize, financially or otherwise, on gatekeeping access to knowledge and opportunity" (Pace 1). But without the requirements certification would demand and with the absence of any in person training, could I ever be certain I'd gotten it down? Mastery of their choreography process was not something I'd ever be sure of. Our training sessions covered boundaries, safe words, ethical behavior, agreements for the room, and choreographer agreements ("Best Practices"). Were students practicing choreography at the limited in-person training sessions offered? If so, most people seeking training wouldn't be taking part in it. The work is what would bring us together in the spaces we were creating, but if the work never came into focus, what were we there for? Perhaps focusing on participant comfort and creating the culture of care in our programs was the most important thing we were to take away from training. These aspects were highly important, but without any focus on the movement, how could those training be effective in touch moments? Touch moments would be the reason we were called in to work on intimacy moments. Why leave us on



the back foot? Why not share the part of the process that might make us secure in the practice and could potentially send us out into the world to work? Why leave us doubtful and searching?

My next project at UCF was Paula Vogel's *Indecent*, directed by Dr. Julia Listengarten. In the January 8, 2023, edition of *Broadway World* which was covering the cancellation of a production of *Indecent* at a Florida high school, Vogel describes *Indecent* as an homage to Sholem Asch's 1906 *God of Vengeance*. *Indecent* is about the journey of the 1923 English translation of Asch's play which "documents the violence against women, the antisemitism of the time, and respectfully depicts two young women who fall in love" (*Broadway World* 2). Vogel states that in *Indecent*, "The vice cops (were) called in to arrest the cast; the play was deemed obscene. Using the lesbian characters as a pretext...(the) Broadway Production was shuttered due to the rising antisemitism in the 1920's: an American fascism bloomed with deadly consequence against Jews, immigrants, endorsed by Father Coughlin, Henry Ford, some politicians, other American Nazi's and the KKK" (*Broadway World* 2).

The *Broadway World* article reported that the high school production had been cancelled by the school board because of its "adult sexual dialogue" (*Broadway World* 1). Included in the article was Vogel's statement to the Duval County School Board in Jacksonville, "As a playwright who wrote a play about how censorship is a first step toward genocide, I am puzzled about the school board's decision. There is nothing prurient about *Indecent*. I use parts of Sholem Asch's original text for the two girls. For the past 40 years, I (have) received requests from high schools to change language in my plays, and to restage the scenes, ignoring my stage directions. And I readily give my permission. There have been high school productions of *Indecent* where the student actors hold hands. The Victorian translation is demure, and one can amend my updated translation with permission" (*Broadway World* 2). Any or all touch elements could have

been removed from the Florida high school production, but what would remain in the production might possibly be a problem for the Dade County School Board antisemitism, xenophobia, love between two women, and what censorship can look like.

It had been determined that our production of *Indecent* would not be censored but it would accommodate actor boundaries. To prepare for the work, I researched the filmed 2015 Broadway production with its original choreography to find context and meaning. There were very few descriptions in the script about the close relationship moments and research would help me with what the original creators had intended. The care culture which had been the focus of my TIE courses was in place and my training had set me up to wing it if I intended on producing choreography. The more information I could get the better. I would study the movement to interpret meaning and build context on my own.

I noted at the beginning of Act I, stage directions for *Indecent* stated that there was a touch moment; ... *two women of the troupe, holding each other*. At UCF it was decided that the touch moments didn't need to be censored or adjusted and we could proceed with movement that could be expressed much like it had been for the Broadway show if it fell within participant boundaries. In that first moment alone, there were many levels of touch to explore. Also, *Indecent* was structured in such a way that we would need to communicate in this first moment what these two characters meant to each other at the end of the play because the moment would be replayed at the end of Act II.

There were eight total close relationship or touch moments involving the girls, Manke and Rifkele, that I was assigned to address. I relied on *Staging Sex* for the movement vocabulary. Pace said the purpose of the *Staging Sex* was “not to make you a choreographer, but to give you the tools to choreograph the intimate moments that you need to tell the stories you are trying to

tell” (Pace 67). I would hopefully have enough tools to work on projects with my students, but the book would not offer enough training to work in the field. In our choreography class, Pace suggested we watch movies and television shows to study movement and practice breaking down moments. I was beginning to find some comfort in having this be my third show I’d choreographed, but could I end up being a dancer by watching *Damn Yankees* over and over? Would I ever be able to teach Fosse’s choreography? Would I have a chance if I studied with Fosse? Certainly, a better one.

I would rely heavily again on Pace’s *Staging Sex* which supplied a list of ”ingredients” to create “recipes” for moments and the process could be much like choreographing fight or dance sequences. There were curves, counts, power shifts, and eye contact. Breath and sound could also be used to build a physical moment (Pace 39-71). Levels of touch could tell a story and were listed one through three. Level one was Skin/Powder/Touching or a feather touch. Level two was Muscle/Moving or touch that was like wiping off paint. Level three, the deepest level, had the qualities of Bone/Clay/Pulling and was much like molding clay (Pace 43-44). To TIE’s credit, if you practiced those levels of touch on your arm you would understand what those levels were and could begin to have an idea of what levels of touch could imply.

With this choreographic vocabulary, I could establish story moments so that “actors (didn’t) have to rely on feeling it every time they do it” (Derr. “The Art and Craft of Intimacy Direction” 3). Instead of telling actors to pretend they were in love and embrace passionately, they could be given a list of movements to execute.

Table 2: List of Movements

Actor A	Actor B
• Close the distance between each other	• Close the distance between each other
• Arms around waist and back/level 3	• Arms around waist and back/level 3
• Eye contact	• Eye contact

If a director needed the moment to tell a more intimate story, instead of asking actors to “be more in love, more passionate” leaving the actors to try to decipher what was being asked and ending up just going for it potentially leading to awkwardness, vulnerability, missteps, and the threat of retribution, i.e., cancelling, calling out, etc., that accompanies missteps, the moment could be choreographed. With choreography, the moment could be efficient, concise, repeatable each performance, and arrived at in a respectful manner.

Table 3: List of Movements - Heightened

Actor A	Actor B
• Closing of distance/foreheads touching	• Closing of distance/foreheads touching
• Arms around waist /level 3	• Arms around waist and on back
• Eye contact	• Level 3/arm on back moving in figure 8 in 6 counts
• 4 count breaths	• Eye contact
	• 4 count breaths

With *Indecent*, I would do my best to avoid those pitfalls by finding a framework for each moment with notations of what the moments might look like. The choreography we developed for the first moment was informed by the Broadway version and refined through

collaboration with the director and actors. Again, this is where we catch our first glimpse of Rifkele and Manke, the two women in love. “From the Ashes They Rise” is projected on the screen behind them and after Lemml, the stage manager in the play, introduces character groups to the audience, he says “...We have a story we want to tell you...About a play. A play that changed my life. Every night we tell this story – but somehow, I can never remember the end.” He continues, “No Matter. I can remember how it begins. It all starts with this moment – I remember this...” (Vogel, 2). The stage directions indicate that; *Lemml gestures to two women of the troupe, holding each other, and then the troupe explodes in a joyous klezmer song and dance.* We establish in this moment that these characters were in an intimate physical relationship together.

Collectively we explored movement to build the story. The run toward each other and bone deep embrace might represent the intensity of their feelings for each other, longing after they had been forbidden to see each other, and the danger present. The opening of the distance was for them to see each other. This would illustrate the depth of their connection and possibly a reflection of how their future together hangs in the balance. The breaths were there to illustrate their physical love as well as wonder in the other. The eye contact throughout was to show the fearlessness in their commitment. Rifkele’s hand raised to Manke’s face was meant to establish for the audience her equal partnership in their union and with her instigating the kiss here, show that their relationship was reciprocal. The kiss itself reiterated that their bond had a physical element. By assigning a level two to the kiss, it could live somewhere between longing and desperation. Manke twirling Rifkele out was a joyous celebration of them.

Table 4: Act I, p 2 Rifkele and Manke in the Rain

<i>At Lemml: "I remember this..."</i>	
Rifkele	Manke
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Run to Manke/Level 3 embrace for 3 counts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Run to Rifkele/Level 3 embrace for 3 counts</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Move arms to waists in 2 counts at Level 2</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Move arms to waists in 2 counts at Level 2</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open the distance/Eye contact/Breath</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open the distance/Eye contact/Breath</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raise left hand in straight line to Manke's face/Level 1 touch/Breath/Close distance in 2 counts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Breath</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 count kiss/ Level 2</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 Count kiss/Level 2</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 Count break/Eye contact/Breath/ Into company dance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 Count break/Eye contact/Breath/Twirl Rifkele out to move into company dance</li> </ul>

All the choreography was in place and agreed upon, but it couldn't exist on its own. The curves, arcs, and powershifts of choreography would be meaningless unless the actors revealed it. My challenge on *Indecent* would be centered here. How to bring actors past the execution of prescribed movements and toward performance. Why were they stuck?

In *Indecent* rehearsals, the cast regularly checked in on boundaries, and it was brought to my attention that boundary work was revisited so often that they had trouble moving on with the rehearsal process. After established, boundaries work should be revisited when there is a change in boundaries or when there were new concerns to address, but it was not necessary to do boundary work every rehearsal (Pace 15). Why check in so many times when nothing seemed to be changing or of concern? Was it the panic and worry that I had sensed in my first sessions of

intimacy work with the *Welcome to the Moon* cast? Was it apprehension around the material, being seen in the material, or was it a fear of invisible boundaries not yet known that could result in a calling out or cancellation? If focus was to be limited to care as it was in my training and now in their work as well, it could make sense that we might get stuck in those requirements.

We had built the better, braver, safer room together as best as we could, and we were respectfully cared for. Could we match our commitment to our work with our commitment to care? Couldn't both areas be addressed? We had created a better consent-based space that established and respected boundaries. Choreography was comprised of suggested vocabulary desexualized and broken down to be repeatable every rehearsal and performance. At some point they were going to have to agree to participate in what we had gathered to create. Wasn't it also our responsibility to facilitate the work as well as our spaces? If we didn't approach quality in their work, we would be putting the participants at risk, but it would be in front of an audience.

In art, quality is a subjective thing, but when there is an element of excellence many can agree on its presence, even if it's only a feeling. How do we get there? In "The Artist Must Become Secondary to the Art" for Manhattan Arts International, Artist Keith Morant explains that the "quality in art is an ultimate truth expressed through an individual's unique experience of existence. It's success in expression and transmission lies in the potential to communicate more than its surface values" (Morant 3). Did these student actors, even after all the protections were established and put into place, not feel brave enough to find the truth? Was the space inadequate or would the risk to self be too great? Were performers now accountable for the actions of the characters they present? Did the risks to their own personalities and place their community keep them from the work?

Gone are the days when the goal is more important than the people working towards it, but once we have, respectfully considered, and put into action every good intention to see to the well-being of participants, don't we have to find a way towards what we are there to do? What were our better spaces intended to do? Couldn't the braver and better spaces we sought to establish give us collective power? Or has current culture shifted too far to safely navigate, and we find ourselves, "perpetually fragile, always hurt, or vulnerable and in need of permanent protection?" (Power 3).

Perhaps we, as writer and philosopher Nina Power poses in "How Cancel Culture Has Made Us Forget the Art of Interpretation" find ourselves "in the midst of a new culture war in which the freedom to think, feel and express ourselves comes at the risk of economic impoverishment, social ostracism and mob justice" (Power 2). Does fear of misalignment keep us from participating in exploration of material that reflects ourselves - whether it be good or bad? Does censorship and self-censorship, especially in the Arts, support an idea that "the consumers of culture cannot be trusted to think for themselves but must be told or shown how to understand images, words and sounds" (Power 2). But what are we left with? What do artists owe? What do we owe each other? And what will we risk?

If theatre pieces, with their ability to offend, were now a potential exposure of self rather than an exposure of ideas to be considered and debated, could participants still be expected or persuaded to take part on more than a superficial level if participation is a threat to self? Do new social norms dictate self-censored, negotiated, and curated participation of material and modes of presentation resulting in something frail, faded and removed from who we are or hope to be? What words will we use? What actions will we allow ourselves to explore? Those that are acceptable to the majority? The minority? Are we not also bound to present material that is



uncensored and unfiltered so that they play no part in “controlling access, controlling reception, controlling minds?” (Powers 7). Powers writes that “Art, like life, is often very difficult: It is not up to others to tell us how we should interpret either. We can, and should, trust ourselves (and each other) to deal with the potentially devastating aspects of both” (Power 7).

If apprehension was our new normal, how would we get past it or find the bravery to work in spite of it? With the Indecent actors don’t believe there was a refusal to participate. I feel they were stuck in the building of better spaces and unable to move on to what we had built them for. That perhaps the imaginary offenses they felt they might commit had immobilized them. How could they find their way to the truths of Rifkele and Manke so that we might question, change, transform, and formulate our own thoughts around these two women? Create the room and share the method. Teach a process so there are many people able to complete a task leaving more than a few to go forward. Share the power knowledge can create. Don’t incapacitate us with only enough information to be left wondering, fearful, and inept. I would get these students past fear and out of their heads by implementing a process for them to find a way into the work.

Neither IDC or TIE have published any information on acting or how to get an actor to perform through movement. Again, I don’t claim to be an authority, but I do have experience as an actor and as an acting teacher and I know there are many processes an actor can use to get where they want to go. It’s my strong belief that without a process it is only a matter of time until personality driven work will fail, and the actor will be subject to all the sabotage the actor brain will inevitably inflict upon them.

For some time, I had been using “Actioning” first developed in Great Britain by the Joint Stock Theatre Company in the 1970s (Moseley vii) with my high school students. *Actioning* is an

“analytical process which encapsulates each moment of the play into a single word that you yourself have selected” (Moseley ix). I was introduced to the work through *Actioning and How to Do It* by Nick Moseley and I had found success with getting them away from mechanical performances they thought sounded right, which always left them listening outside of their performance instead of responding to what was happening around them. Their earnest preparations had kept them separated from the work and from quality.

Actioning required actors to assign an action verb to each sentence of text. The verbs had to be transitive or “something your character (could) *do* to another character” (Moseley vii). Moseley explains that action verbs “have a strong spatial/physical dimension which offer the actor possibilities for interacting with other characters and with the space” (Moseley vii). For our purposes, we made sure the verb would fit in between *I* and *you*, i.e., *I* “embarrass” *you*, *I* “destroy” *you*, *I* “entice” *you*. Moseley explains that “nontransitive verbs such as ‘muse’, ‘cry’, and ‘hesitate’, tend to pull focus back onto yourself” (Moseley viii) which is where we did not want to be with *Indecent*

TIE workshops and *Staging Sex* offered no acting insights or tips but applying Actioning to each movement could help because “it could be used as a physical as well as verbal tool” (Moseley xi). With this type of tool, the actors could concentrate on their work instead of what dangers might lie ahead. *Indecent* actors would now action each move with a transitive verb.

Table 5: Act I, p 2 Rifkele and Manke in the Rain with *Actioning*

<i>At Lemml: "I remember this..."</i>	
Rifkele	Manke
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Run to Manke – I EXHILARATE you</li> <li>• Level 3 embrace for three counts - I ENVELOP you</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Run to Rifkele– I BRIGHTEN you</li> <li>• Level 3 embrace for three counts – I WREATH you</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Move arms to waists in two counts at Level 2 – I SOOTHE you</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Move arms to waists in two counts at Level 2 – I ALLAY you</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open the distance/ Eye contact/ Breath – I PRIZE you</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open the distance/ Eye contact/Breath – I CHERISH you</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raise left hand in straight line to Manke’s face/ Level 1 touch – I CARESS you</li> <li>• Slow Breaths – I SEARCH you</li> <li>• Close distance in two counts – I BECKON you</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Slow Breaths – I REVERE you</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Three count kiss/ level 2 – I IGNITE you</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Three count kiss/Level 2 – I WELCOME you</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 count break – I CHEER you</li> <li>• Eye contact/breath – I BOOST you</li> <li>• Into company dance – I CHARM you</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 count break – I AMUSE you</li> <li>• Eye contact/breath – I CELEBRATE you</li> <li>• Twirl Rifkele out to move into company dance – I SURPRISE you</li> </ul>

With Actioning, the actors now had a tool that helped them into their work. The actors were able to move beyond movement that was tentative and self-conscious, and into moments that were activated by process. The actioning verbs ignited thought and thought instigated movements that were full of storytelling qualities. By focusing on what was in front of them

instead of what followed them into the rehearsal room, the process could influence how they would perform each element. Each moment now had intention, meaning, and context behind it.

There were a number of methods that could have been effective, but the crucial thing was that we were now approaching how we might achieve better work as well as the better spaces. They could concentrate on their tasks instead of what might be a danger to them. They were braver in better spaces with the implementation of tools.

## CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

In researching disclosures, boundary practice, and better spaces, I have investigated a process that is respectful to the people who take part in it. These practices are easy to implement, and we deserve them. There is no good reason to be without them and many for why we should. At some point we need to ask, why not? Who will keep us from them?

I will put all this research into practice with students with whom I continue to work. I like that they will come to expect something from adults, and that I am helping to build a culture of care that may become habit for them. Hopefully, they will become accustomed to being asked their preferences, and if not asked, feel sure enough of what is better to make those who hold the power in the room aware of what their preferences are.

TIE and groups like them, have passed on specific language and structure to help me help others. I am less vague. It is less about feeling care for students and more about implementing that care. For all my grumbling, I realize that not having enough training in movement called on me to establish my own version of the process. Maybe that's another reason TIE doesn't certify? Perhaps TIE's "no certification" policy is empowering. There are many ways to do a thing and the suggestions they provide could be a way to assist in our beginning as we make our way into our own practices.

My most interesting experiences centered around people and the communities we chose to be a part of in the spaces we share. I appreciate the current social and cultural movements that push us in directions that are better, but inevitably, there will be dynamics that come from being with and working with other humans. There are micro power structures to deal with even at the lunch table and the lines between being a leader and holding power can be blurry.

So, what kind of space am I looking for? When I enter them will I be welcomed to form new ideas or opinions about what I am learning or how the spaces operate? If I have new ideas that don't align closely enough, do I create a new group? When I create these new spaces will the old ones become worthless? (If I create the space, do I get to run it?) Can groups function productively without leadership, and is leadership the same as authority? I've not seen a group that could, someone always rises to the top, and I feel more comfortable when leadership elevates others rather than itself, leader as facilitator. Give enough power away so that everyone has a piece of it and interesting things develop.

The kind of space I'd like to be in is the kind adrienne maree brown dreams of where "we can hold the complexity of a gray situation," "where we can navigate conflict and struggle in principled ways" (brown 58-59). "Where we are struggling for the sake of something larger than ourselves and are honest and direct with each other while holding compassion" (brown 21). It is a space where "we can look at each other with the eyes of interdependence, such that when someone causes harm, we find the gentle parent inside of us who can use a voice of accountability, while also bringing curiosity – 'Why did you cause harm? Do you know? Do you know other options? Apologize...That we can act towards accountability with a touch of love'" (brown 59). We can all grow in a space like that.

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