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## Rebirth of the Renaissance Man: Creating Actor Agency through Ensemble Theatre

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REBIRTH OF THE RENAISSANCE MAN:  
CREATING ACTOR AGENCY THROUGH ENSEMBLE THEATRE

by

KODY GRASSETT  
B.A. University of Vermont, 2014

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Fine Arts  
in the Department of Theatre  
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## **ABSTRACT**

Contemporary models of educational and commercial theatres espouse the belief that theatre is the true collaborative art form: one in which artists of different talents, training programs, and experiences can come together to briefly create something more significant than themselves. However, as the theatre has moved into the twenty-first century, the ensemble nature that is so unique to theatrical performance is frequently abandoned for a streamlined top-down structure of theatre making, one in which monetary, scheduling, and efficiency concerns inhibit the true creation of an ensemble. For multi-faceted theatre artists who have interest and talents in more than one field of the theatre, the current reigning structure of theatrical creation can seem restrictive, even reductive to their creative potentials. In this thesis, I explore a revived form of theatrical creation centered around the concept of the total ensemble artist, or the modern-day equivalent to the Renaissance man, an artist and student of many different passions. By developing a model of theatrical creation that allows and encourages an actor's agency in the creative process, I hope to show that the ensemble approach to theatre making, in which actors must work together to create and support a production in intimate and challenging ways, is beneficial and necessary to both theatre artists and the audiences that come to view theatrical productions. Rather than being limited to the confines of the categorized and structured model of commercial theatre, these artists will be able to work together to create individualized, meaningful stories on stage that allow the theatre to remain influential, relevant, and representational of our collective experiences.

“Art is not a mirror held up to reality  
but a hammer with which to shape it.”

*-Bertolt Brecht*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In *Henry VI, Part III*, Shakespeare brands one of his most formidable characters, Queen Margaret, with the moniker She-Wolf of France. This title is apt for the queen, unperturbed by adversity, disarmingly adept, and fiercely loving; it is even more apt for the chair of my thesis, Kate Ingram, a woman whose unrelenting dedication and support, not only of me, but of the entire MFA Acting program is unparalleled. To this She-Wolf of France, I am forever grateful to have known you as a professor, a director, and a friend.

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Now to recognize far too many people in far too few words. I would be remiss if I did not thank Lynne Greeley and Gregory Ramos, without whom I would never have made it to grad school in the first place. Thank you for pushing me then; I'm so grateful to be here now. To my family, Mom, Dad, Kalbie, and Kacie, you've made 'home' one of my favorite words in the dictionary. Thank you for seven years of unwavering support. To my graduate cohort, I could not ask for a more supportive, humble, and loving group of people to spend every day of every year for three years with. To Joe D'Ambrosi, I am incredibly jealous of the students who will one day call you their professor; I am lucky enough to call you my friend. To Dago Blanco and the crew, you have kept me laughing, crying, dancing, and loving and therein made a lonely place feel more like home. To

Jordan Reeves, thank you for reminding me why what we do is worth doing. To Trevin Cooper, thank you for always understanding me, even when others might not. Lastly, to my ensemble of actors, these words, this thesis, the impending degree would not be mine without your dedication, your passion, your energy, sweat, tears, mistakes, breakthroughs and goddamn talents. You humbled me then, you humble me now. Thank you.

A play is nothing without its ensemble; so too, my journey through higher education would be nothing without the professors, friends, family, and colleagues that have populated it. Thank you all, and in the words of the legendary Ms. Britney Spears, *I think I'm ready now*.

Kody Grassett, 2017

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## INTRODUCTION: SETTING THE STAGE

### **An Introduction to the Inspiration and Themes of the Graduate Thesis**

*“By the pricking of my thumbs / Something wicked this way comes.”*  
-*Macbeth*, Act IV, Scene i

In a well-worn journal, overflowing with notes and reflections on my graduate acting experience, is a short note from the undergraduate Theatre History professor who gave it to me four years ago as a ‘thank you’ for my work as her teaching assistant. On the front page, in slanting purple ink, she has written, “We don’t really have a modern equivalent for the Renaissance man, but if we did, it would be you. An artist you are—in every regard, so it will be a matter of time before you find your perfect form.” She recognized then what I would not be fully aware of until the following year while applying to graduate school: although an actor by all accounts, I had interests and talents in a wider swath of theatrical areas than were practical or possible to explore in a traditional educational setting. Although my resume continued to grow in terms of the roles I performed, my last years of undergraduate education revealed a student who was testing the limbs of his art form, to see if another branch felt sturdier, more comfortable. Serving as a harried combination of actor and scenic designer on an Agatha Christie production, an assistant director during the annual holiday show spent mostly in the dark with a headset and a set of jingle bells, and the playwright and director of my undergraduate thesis project were all evidence of my desire to branch out; each tested my creativity in ways that challenged and changed who I was as an actor.

I remember the combination of excitement and frustration while beginning the graduate school application process, at the rigidity and comprehensiveness of the programs offered. The student within me thrilled at the thought of having three years of uninterrupted focus and

immersion in the craft of acting. Meanwhile, the actor within me who had so enjoyed being a part of the ensemble production of Mary Zimmerman's *Arabian Nights*, drafting set designs in the basement of the theatre, and working with other actors as a director, worried. I knew that a three-year graduate program in Acting would mean a limited ability to explore theatre with the freedom that my liberal arts undergraduate program had provided. And in many ways, my assumptions about the immersiveness of an MFA Acting track were proven correct in both the negatives and the positives: days were long and classes were almost entirely devoted to various elements of the actor's craft; graduate students were expected to act onstage in shows, but not backstage; and the amount of homework often made the prospect of additional creative outlets an impossible notion. In two years, I was left to reckon and reconcile with myself solely as an actor.

It was by happenstance, then, that I stumbled upon a project while in graduate school that unexpectedly married my desires of acting and working more collaboratively on a theatrical production. The winter of my first year in graduate school, an audition notice went up for a production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that was to be directed by a visiting professor, Jordan Reeves, and which would be staged the following spring semester as an independent project unaffiliated with the university's mainstage season. Being unable to participate in the Theatre Department's spring season due to scheduling conflicts, I decided to audition for what promised to be a slightly different theatrical endeavor than I'd yet experienced in graduate school. Within weeks, the cast list was posted, my name was included, and emails were sent out organizing an initial read-through of the script and a discussion of the process.

What followed in the coming months was a uniquely different, creatively challenging, and physically and emotionally demanding process that reminded me why I first became obsessed with the art form as a high school theatre geek. The cast of seven actors would perform over 20

characters in an abridged version of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, rehearsing in an outdoor space for several days a week until the performances in mid-April. Functioning, for all intents and purposes, as an independent theatre company, Guerrilla Shakespeare, as we titled ourselves, were in some senses unencumbered and others unsupported by university professors, designers, and technicians that we had come to rely on as college students. This meant that we, as actors, were involved in the design, construction, and performance processes. We were given the responsibility for rendering drafts of our set, collecting lighting instruments including flashlights, dollar store LEDs, and various strings of Christmas lighting, scrounging through wardrobes for appropriate costume pieces, and discovering music to fit our concept of the play. Acting rehearsals lasted four to five hours three nights a week, but the process did not end there; we often found additional time between classes or over the weekends to continue obtaining and putting together our set pieces, lights, costumes, music, and marketing. We left each evening sweaty, usually covered in dirt and wood chips, and with a list of things to accomplish before the next rehearsal.

I remain slightly unaware of how I accomplished that semester with school, work, and a social life on top of the production; however, as we prepared for opening night in the darkened studio space we had moved into due to an unforeseen seven solid days of rain, I recognized a sense of ownership and pride, seated in a narrow and makeshift backstage behind raised gym mats with my six other cast members, a sense that I had not felt so palpably in quite some time. As we sorted costumes, cracked glow sticks, and helped one another into LED wires that were constantly coming unplugged, there was a sense that what we were about to perform and share with an audience had been created very decidedly by us. The highlights of the production, the faults in all their low-budget glory, the enjoyment or disapproval from those watching, and our growth as students and performers were all ours to own, and without descending too much further on the ladder of

sentimental hyperbole, this ownership carried both the cast and the audiences on a creative high through the weekend of performances.

I share this story, not only to accustom the reader to my predisposition for nostalgic musings, but also because this production of *Midsummer* was perhaps the most influential puzzle piece on the road to discovering my graduate thesis topic. I finished that production with an acute awareness of why I decided to dedicate seven years of my life and multiple tuition payments to pursuing a higher education in the theatre; while I have experienced this same feeling on more traditional productions where creative roles are more clearly delineated and enforced, it is never more palpable, or more rewarding, than in this setting of true ensemble theatre. This type of theatre not only requires actors to have a strong performance background, it also demands collaboration, experimentation, problem-solving and the utilization of the creative mind both on and off the stage, in and out of rehearsals. It requires what I have come to describe as an actor's agency.

Hannah Simpson, in her essay on the dictatorial directing styles of Yeats and Beckett, asserts that "we understand 'agency' as the capacity to act according to one's will."<sup>1</sup> An actor's agency, then, is his ability to effectively and independently use his skills and intelligence to contribute to the creation of a theatrical production. The extent to which actors can have full agency in the creative process depends on the production and director. During some productions, the physical life of the play may be predetermined by strict blocking, a director may offer an actor various line-readings, or cast members may refuse to let other actors influence and affect their rehearsals and performances. These are all examples of when an actor's agency can be limited during the process of creating

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<sup>1</sup> Hannah Simpson, "Now Keep Out of the Way, Whitelaw": Self-Expression, Agency, and Directorial Control in W. B. Yeats's and Samuel Beckett's Theatre," *Comparative Drama* 49, no. 4 (Winter 2015): 400, *International Bibliography of Theatre & Dance with Full Text*, EBSCOhost.

theatre. Conversely, a director may say to her actors, “I’d like the two of you to take some time to work on the movement in this scene on your own.” Rather than dictating to the actors what she would like to see, the director is providing them with the freedom and opportunity to solve a problem in the play using their own creativity, and therein their own agency.

To this end, I began devising a thesis, both practical and written, that had the potential to express the importance of this type of theatre, both for the creators and the audiences that witness them. In the following pages, I will detail this process, including historical and textual research, practical realizations, and auxiliary reflections from the ensemble of my thesis performance. Chapter One is dedicated to my pre-performance research tracing the development of actors’ agency in educational and professional theatre in the United States. In conducting this historical overview, I hope to depict how the status quo of theatre in the States has changed over the nearly three centuries, paying particular attention to the ways in which an increase in actors’ agency could benefit the current theatrical climate. The second chapter will focus on the reasoning behind using William Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* as the source material behind the practical component of my thesis. In researching the history of Shakespeare’s company, the Lord Chamberlain’s Men, I hope to show how Shakespearean productions historically encourage the use of actors’ agency; similarly, through research on *Macbeth* I aim to justify the adaptation and use of the text as the foundation of my practical project. Chapter Three will outline the practical project itself, providing a breakdown of the pre-production, rehearsal and performance structure of *Macbeth*. The fourth chapter will combine personal reflections on the effectiveness of the project from both myself and the company of my thesis project. I argue throughout that granting actors increased agency during the theatrical process allows them to have more ownership over their craft, and is indeed beneficial and necessary to creating creatively fulfilling rehearsals and performances.



## CHAPTER ONE: AN ACTOR'S AGENCY

### A History of Actor Agency in the United States

*"What's past is prologue."*  
-*The Tempest*, Act II, Scene i

Contemporary American models of educational and professional theatre frequently limit, rather than encourage, an actor's agency. Productions in which actors are included as innate parts of the creative process and are allowed the opportunity to create a theatrical world, rather than have it dictated to them, are few and far between. In their essay *Collaboration in Time*, authors Rich Brown and John Wiese recognize that, although the theatre is often lauded as the most collaborative art form "the standard production process contains numerous obstacles to collaboration, especially its hierarchical structure, time constraints, and specialized roles."<sup>2</sup> In a discovery worth quoting at length, both men assert that:

*cooperation* is different from *collaboration* . . . in a typical production process . . . the two relatively separate worlds of acting and design rarely meet in the same space. Although the director and stage manager bridge these worlds, the standard process engenders little-to-no actor/designer collaboration, and even limits opportunities for designer/designer collaboration. Additionally, in order to provide shops the necessary lead-time to construct sets and design costumes, production meetings and design deadlines normally occur before rehearsals begin. Due to this limitation, designers must rely solely upon their research skills to respond to the text; they have few opportunities to react to live bodies moving and speaking in space. Actors also often lack time for character physicality and language to settle deeply into their bodies and may resort to early choices as a result of opening-night anxiety. Finally, directors approve the visual language of the play's world before they have the opportunity to make discoveries with actors and designers during rehearsals.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Rich Brown and John Wiese, "Collaboration in Time: An Interdependent Production Process," *Theatre Topics* 26, no. 1 (March 2016): 91.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

These concepts of collaboration and artistic agency are intrinsically linked; collaboration is the celebration of multiple individuals' agency working together towards a common goal, while an individual's agency cannot be fully utilized without the spirit of collaboration. In attempting to develop a system of theatrical creation that promotes an actor's agency in the creative process, it became essential to understand how the theatre has developed into this anti-collaborative "machine into which a great many parts snugly interlock."<sup>4</sup> Only through gaining an understanding of the historical factors that have led to and perpetuated a hierarchal, anti-collaborative theatre can I begin to explore a new system that confronts the limitations of the present by acknowledging the trajectory of the past.

American theatre at its most collaborative was also arguably the American theatre in its earliest form. Although slow to take hold due to a variety of reasons including "the sparseness of the population . . . the rigors of pioneer life . . . [and] the attitude of a large proportion of the settlers, who brought with them a strong religious intolerance of all kinds of 'show,'"<sup>5</sup> the theatre found its way into the American colonies as early as the start of the eighteenth century. Ian Watson argues that, as was the case with much of the cultural landscape of colonial America, "English stage practices were the primary model for their Atlantic cousins"<sup>6</sup> and repertory companies in which a troupe of actors performed theatre as an ensemble began appearing along the Eastern coast of the country as demand for entertainment increased. These repertory companies are seen by scholars as something of a conglomerate, populated not only by trained British actors but "quite likely . . . [by] some of them [who] were definitely amateurs when they joined the company."<sup>7</sup> From this we can

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<sup>4</sup> Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (London: Penguin, 2008), 20.

<sup>5</sup> Glenn Hughes, *A History of the American Theatre: 1700-1950* (New York, NY: French, 1951), 2.

<sup>6</sup> Ian Watson, *Performer Training: Developments Across Cultures* (Australia: Harwood Academic, 2001), 62.

<sup>7</sup> Hughes, *A History of the American Theatre: 1700-1950*, 15.

intuit that American actor training, in its earliest form, was akin to that of an apprenticeship where local amateur performers developed their craft through observing and collaborating with skilled performers. Much as the acting troupes of William Shakespeare would have done little over a century before, these early American troupes also performed and traveled with one another, necessitating a spirit of collaboration and agency in the creation of theatre that was led by the collective.

This tradition of repertory theatre continued into the nineteenth century and fostered actor training from within individual companies rather than from outside institutions and training programs. However, during the mid-nineteenth century the face of American theatre, as well as the freedom to utilize agency, changed drastically with the creation of the director. Alison Hodge notes that “the rise of the modern theatre director brought about a seismic shift in theatre structures; the dual functions of the nineteenth-century actor/manager had given way to the more specialist position of the modern director . . . This figure was engaged with all aspects of theatre production. No longer necessarily a performer, the director was to become the central figure of twentieth-century theatre making.”<sup>8</sup> As the theatre reorganized itself around this new concept of a director, the traditions of the ensemble-based repertory companies gave way to the more commercial model of “the long run of a single play in which actors were only hired for each production; and . . . combination companies in which a star and an entire cast toured together with a fully rehearsed and designed production.”<sup>9</sup> No longer the stable employment it had once been, actors were now seen as transient, employed on a show-to-show basis, while the individual agency of the actor was diminished by the position of the director and the delegation of only a few actors to “leading” roles

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<sup>8</sup> Alison Hodge, *Twentieth Century Actor Training* (London: Routledge, 2000), 2.

<sup>9</sup> Watson, *Performer Training: Developments Across Cultures*, 62.

in the production. The theatre became decisively less collaborative, and actors quickly lost agency in the process.

This shift in the American theatrical structure was accompanied by advances in both the fields of science and technology elsewhere in the world. The American theatre continued to develop in large part due to a heavy European influence where there was “a growing awareness of the rigorous training in Eastern traditions but also [a] widening influence at the turn of the century of objective scientific research. Western European practitioners began to search for absolute, objective languages of acting that could offer models, systems and tested techniques to further the craft.”<sup>10</sup> Collectively the scientific, industrial, and the artistic were “attempt[ing] to capture knowledge that was at first glance tacit, embodied, natural, and mercurial, in the form of method – understandable, transmissible,” the belief being that “when embodied or intuitive practices are broken down, whether they are the mechanic’s craft or the actor’s work, they can be understood and perfected.”<sup>11</sup> This belief continued the theatre’s trajectory away from traditional repertory practices of apprenticeships and towards a more methodical approach to actor training that would go on to shape the tradition of actor training we have today.

The St. James Theatre in New York City, founded by Steele MacKaye in the fall of 1871, was the first attempt at creating an institution of formalized actor training and was accompanied by “a prospectus setting forth . . . plans to start an acting school in conjunction with the theatre.”<sup>12</sup> A young American man with dreams of the stage, MacKaye had studied, and become enamored with, François Delsarte in Paris for eight months and sought to bring his mentor’s “system” to the States

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<sup>10</sup> Hodge, *Twentieth Century Actor Training*, 2.

<sup>11</sup> Broderick D.V. Chow, “An actor manages: actor training and managerial ideology,” *Theatre, Dance & Performance Training* 5.2 (July 2014): 134.

<sup>12</sup> James H. McTeague, *Before Stanislavsky: American Professional Acting Schools and Acting Theory, 1875-1925* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1993), 17.

through a formalized method of actor training at the St. James Theatre. MacKaye's school would be a place "to teach the art and purify the artist, a conservatory not only to instruct the actor but to elevate his art and protect it from abuse . . . a slight promise of what might be accomplished by a four years' course of study."<sup>13</sup> The curriculum was focused on MacKaye's work with Delsarte, particularly "the exposition of the principle, and then the practical application."<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately, the St. James Theatre "lasted a mere six months,"<sup>15</sup> and MacKaye's dream of developing a popular system of actor training around the theories of a European practitioner was never fully realized. In fact, it would be another half a century before MacKaye's vision would be realized, not by an American actor teaching the methods of Delsarte, but by a Russian theoretician whose acting company would take the American public by storm and permeate the fabric of the American theatre.

The 1923 premiere of Konstantin Stanislavski's Moscow Art Theatre in New York City, lauded for its "realization of the inner truths of the text,"<sup>16</sup> was a seismic shift for both educational and professional theatre in the United States. Although Stanislavski himself did not teach his theories directly to American actors, the subsequent fervor over the Moscow Art Theatre's work opened the doors for students and associates of Stanislavski to offer their interpretations of his acting theories to a clamoring public. Two actors from the Moscow Art Theatre, Richard Boleslavsky and Maria Ouspenskaya, remained in the United States to open their own conservatory to rival the native training programs. Known as the American Laboratory Theatre, this school "was the first in the Americas to teach the Stanislavsky system,"<sup>17</sup> and trained notable performers Lee Strasberg, Stella Adler, and Sanford Meisner, among others. At the Laboratory, Boleslavsky and

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<sup>13</sup> McTeague, *Before Stanislavsky: American Professional Acting Schools and Acting Theory, 1875-1925*, 19.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Watson, *Performer Training: Developments Across Cultures*, 63.

<sup>16</sup> Robert Parker, "Moscow's Art Theatre Visits New York," *Independent* 110 (1923): 98.

<sup>17</sup> Watson, *Performer Training: Developments Across Cultures*, 65.

Ouspenskaya “stressed primarily the technique which had been emphasized during [their] student days at the First Studio: the use of personal and natural emotion.”<sup>18</sup> Increasingly personal and internal in nature, these early theories of Stanislavski were less focused on the ensemble than they were on the individual, emphasizing internal work as the means for a successful product. Despite the introspective nature of the theories, they did not completely stop practitioners from utilizing that ensemble-based, collaborative approach to creating theatre.

In fact, several of the most well-known practitioners of Stanislavski were responsible for the creation of the American theatre company that perhaps most effectively celebrated the agency of the actor. The Group Theatre, founded in 1931 by Harold Clurman, Cheryl Crawford, and Lee Strasberg, was relentlessly American and devoted to the concepts of collaboration, despite its close ties to the Stanislavski-based Laboratory Theatre. Employing other Stanislavski-based actors including both Stella Adler and Sanford Meisner, the Group sought to become “the unattainable: a permanent theatre of their own with a permanent stock of actors, working constantly and planfully, as a creative and truly representative American theatre, the free ‘association of the strongest creative forces of the country,’ the concentration and accumulation of contemporary talent in all the branches, writing as well as acting and directing.”<sup>19</sup> And for nearly a decade they worked relentlessly to achieve that goal; built of an ensemble of nearly 30 members, they focused on producing quintessentially American work that “grappled as honestly with modern life as America’s novelists and artists already did.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Mark H. Sterner, "From Stanislavski To The Method: The Ossification Of Actor Training In America," *North Dakota Journal Of Speech & Theatre* 3.1 (1990): 35.

<sup>19</sup> Berthold Viertel, "The Group Theatre," *The Kenyon Review* 8, no. 2 (1946): 302. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4332753>.

<sup>20</sup> Wendy Smith, *Real Life Drama: The Group Theatre and America, 1931-1940* (New York: Vintage, 2013), xi.

Idealism was the language of the Group, who, in echoes of the repertory companies before them, spent communal summers developing, rehearsing, and touring plays to varying degrees of critical and commercial success. Members were “willing, even eager, to subordinate their egos and their desire for stardom to a group that aimed at a higher goal,”<sup>21</sup> and were responsible for the creation of now legendary examples of American theatre including Clifford Odet’s *Waiting for Lefty*, and sponsoring a young Tennessee Williams in a career catapulting move, among other achievements. However, the Group also suffered from financial hardships and the personal disagreements engendered from such an intimate union. In his memoir, *The Fervent Years*, founder Harold Clurman recalls that during the last year of the Group “many causes were ascribed” to their decline: members suggested that “we lacked new blood and had made no artistic progress for two years, we had poor business management, we were all now seeking personal success, [and] we were allowing many commercial considerations to stand in our way.”<sup>22</sup> The Group officially disbanded on the verge of World War II in 1940. However, its legacy as a truly collaborative, ensemble-based, and agency-driven theatre remains a testament to the power of this type of creation.

As the Group theatre declined, the Stanislavski-based actors within began to fracture as well. Initially, neither Adler, Strasberg nor Meisner had studied under Stanislavski himself, receiving their training entirely through the offshoot Laboratory Theatre. However, when Stella Adler left America in 1934 to “work with Stanislavsky for more than a month,” she learned that the theoretician had discarded the use of emotional recall, a staple in Laboratory Theatre training, and was “concentrating instead on physical actions and given circumstances.”<sup>23</sup> Adler returned to the states

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<sup>21</sup> Smith, *Real Life Drama: The Group Theatre and America, 1931-1940*, 31.

<sup>22</sup> Harold Clurman, *The Fervent Years: The Group Theatre and the Thirties* (New York: Da Capo Pr., 1985), 238-9.

<sup>23</sup> Jean Schiffman, “Know Your Gods,” *Back Stage West* 12.27 (2005): 2.

to share this exciting development with a number of colleagues and friends who differed vastly in their reaction to the changing system. Strasberg, in particular, found much personal success with the initial training of the Laboratory and was resistant to the new ideas, while Meisner and Adler were more receptive to this new vision of Stanislavski training. This change in perception of the Stanislavski method “created a permanent rift within the Group”<sup>24</sup> and established “Strasberg’s Method, with its emphasis on emotional memory . . . Adler’s greater concern with actions and imagination rather than personal life of the actor,”<sup>25</sup> and Meisner’s focus on “listening, reacting, and emotional spontaneity . . . the in-the-moment interaction between two people, within the circumstances set by the script.”<sup>26</sup> As both the Group theatre and its core actors fractured and went their separate ways, each opened up training institutions of their own, ensuring that various interpretations of Stanislavski’s more internal theories “evolved [into] a distinctly American style of acting.”<sup>27</sup>

As the United States grew throughout the twentieth century after the turmoil of the Great Depression and two World Wars, the theatrical industry grew as well, once more prompting a change in the way actor training was conducted. Ian Watson notes that “[t]he late 40’s and 50’s saw the beginnings of regional theatre in the United States”<sup>28</sup> coupled with the growing avant-garde movement that was making its way across the Atlantic towards American painters, writers, and theatre makers. The development of regional theatres across the country and the introduction of experimental, nontraditional theatre changed the demands being made on the actors of the time. Peter Zazzali notes that “in conjunction with the emergence of the regional theatre movement, U.S.

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<sup>24</sup> Schiffman, "Know Your Gods," 2.

<sup>25</sup> Watson, *Performer Training: Developments Across Cultures*, 67.

<sup>26</sup> Schiffman, "Know Your Gods," 2.

<sup>27</sup> Watson, *Performer Training: Developments Across Cultures*, 67.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 68.



universities started to form conservatories that offered BFA and MFA degrees in preparation for a career in the professional theatre . . . because private acting schools were not graduating people with the technical skills needed to meet the demands of repertory theatre, whose seasons consisted of a balance of classical European and modern American dramas that ranged from Wilde to Williams.”<sup>29</sup> As theatrical job prospects opened around the country and actors were no longer delegated to large cities, universities began developing their schools of elocution into the fully fledged actor training programs Steele MacKaye had once dreamed of, revising their curricula to include “re-addressing the importance of the movement, voice and speech components of training, as well as by teaching ways of approaching the works of Shakespeare, his fellow Renaissance playwrights, the plays of George Bernard Shaw, Molière, Goldoni and the like.”<sup>30</sup>

Throughout the mid twentieth century, particularly on the fringes of the theatrical world and within the avant-garde movement, there was a regression from the more individualized university actor training and a return to education that promoted actor agency through the means of a company. Experimental groups, such as the Open and Living Theatres, explored “alternatives to psychological-based theatrical realism . . . through workshops, developing new training methods, and performances”<sup>31</sup> more akin to the repertory theatres of colonial America in their ensemble structures than the hierarchal commercial models of the time. However, the avant-garde movement “had subsided by the decade of the 1970s into an acknowledgement that progressive artistic programmes would not be, nor could ever be, adopted and experienced by the vast majority of any country’s

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<sup>29</sup> Peter Zazzali, "Actor Training in New York City," *PAJ: A Journal Of Performance & Art* 35, no. 1 (January 2013): 50.

<sup>30</sup> Watson, *Performer Training: Developments Across Cultures*, 67.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 70.

citizens,”<sup>32</sup> and few of those theatres, perhaps with the exception of the Living Theatre, still offer opportunities for performance and actor training today.

The current model of training varies slightly from program to program, but remains an unmistakable product of the past, geared towards the hierarchal structure of professional theatre. The standard form of theatrical education now takes the shape of a BA, BFA, or an MFA degree at an accredited university and typically “focuses on four areas: acting, voice, speech, and movement.”<sup>33</sup> Acting theory can be derived from many different sources, although the primary influence remains Stanislavski’s theories. Contemporary models of both educational and professional theatre that promote actor’s agency, such as the old American repertory companies, or establishments akin to the Group theatre, are few and far between, and today’s actors are faced with the fact that

despite the fact that the best programs are highly competitive, even they, along with the myriad of lesser institutions that churn out graduates at a giddy rate, produce more actors than there are jobs for them to fill. Should schools stop training? Should the majority of students be guided into different professions? Should training be adapted to better equip graduates for finding work in other fields?<sup>34</sup>

The model of professional theatre that currently exists, and our educational programs that feed into it, do little to ensure the success of actors, to provide them with consistent and reliable work, or to give them the opportunity to foster and develop consistent creative and personal relationships with other artists due to the transitory nature of the business. This, in turn, frequently forces actors to become managers of their own careers rather than artists using their craft for personal and public benefit.

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<sup>32</sup> Robert Cardullo, "The Avant-Garde And The Unamerican: Experimental Theatre And Drama From Europe To The United States After World War II," *Studies In Theatre & Performance* 33.1 (2013): 43.

<sup>33</sup> Watson, *Performer Training: Developments Across Cultures*, 71.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 79.

Many causes can be attributed to the complicated issues facing actors in the United States, but in delving into the history of actor training and professional theatre I argue that the most pervasive issue that has developed alongside the growth of American theatre is the lack of agency provided to actors in the educational and professional fields. With the commercialization of theatres in the nineteenth century that established the primacy of the director and did away, in large part, with the ensemble repertory theatres of the past came the view of the actor as transient, impermanent, and naturally competitive, rather than necessary, familiar, and collaborative. As a result of the decay of apprenticeships, actor training is now primarily conducted through universities that, by their very nature as grade-based institutions, stress the importance of the individual over the collective. Stanislavski-based training, frequently concerned with the interior of the individual, allows for an academic environment that is more focused on intimate scene work than on the skills of creating an effective ensemble. Finally, and most significantly, due to the structure and limitations of commercial theatre, actors are taught that their role in the creative process begins with the first blocking rehearsal rather than the creative, collaborative meetings that will determine the season of a company or the world of an individual play.

Despite all this, it is not so hard to imagine a production in which actors feel essential to its creation, because that is precisely what they were before the advent of the director. It is not impossible to imagine an actor who is stable and employed, because the repertory and ensemble theatres of the past have provided it. It is possible for an actor to be both internal and external, blending traditional training with dedicated ensemble work. It is not a lost cause to imagine a world in which actors are as much of a trusted and valued part of the production process as the director and designers, because actors are more than just the people onstage, they are the life of the play. Providing models of theatrical creation in which actors have more agency begins to offer

manageable solutions to complicated issues. The advent of the director, the creation of hierarchical production structures, the individualized approach to actor training, and the financial impositions placed upon the theatre complicate the pursuit of actors' agency, but they do not preclude it. Over the course of the next few chapters, I hope to show how.

## CHAPTER TWO: SHAREHOLDING & THE SCOTTISH PLAY

### Shakespeare as an Ensemble Artform

*"The play's the thing."*  
-*Hamlet*, Act II, Scene ii

Selecting the material for the practical portion of this thesis was crucial to the success of the project. In order to provide a setting in which my actors felt encouraged to use their agency I knew that it was important to find a play that could easily do away with the hierarchal structure of "lead" versus "supporting" characters—so an ensemble piece became a necessity. As I had no way of knowing what the turnout for auditions would be like, an ensemble piece that could also be done with a smaller cast was preferred. It was also important for me to find a play that was not so married to a particular tradition or aesthetic that my ensemble would be unable to create the world of the play organically and objectively. Finally, I needed a show that that did not require exorbitant finances and impressive technology to effectively produce. In my research on the early repertory companies of North America I had been struck by the similarity between those repertory companies and the shareholding companies that my undergraduate Theatre History professor had described to us during our class discussion of Elizabethan theatre. The term shareholding company had stuck in my mind: a model of theatre in which several of the main actors, responsible both for performing and managing the company, held stock in the theatre, were routinely employed, surrounded by familiar artists and relationships, and required to be both creative and fiscal. I remember wondering at the time why this type of theatre had ever died out, when it has historically proved to be one of the most successful creative and financial endeavors of its time. My search for a playwright seemed to have found its target, and I turned decisively to the works of William Shakespeare.

### Shakespeare & Shareholding Companies

When a young William Shakespeare journeyed from Stratford-upon-Avon to London in the late 1580's the city's theatrical scene was fraught with a complicated history involving religion, politics, and the desires of the people. The culture war being waged in England leading up to and throughout his arrival had made the theatre a particularly contentious profession. According to James H. Forse, "The hostility of the London Council to all theatres was well known. Much of that hostility was based on Puritanical values, and jealousy about theatres cutting into legitimate businesses' workday and profits."<sup>35</sup> As a result, for much of the 1580's theatres were transient touring companies, often on the fringes of London society. It was not until the founding of the Queen's Men in 1583 that troupes were able to give up their "traditional practices as nomadic entertainers," and secure "legitimate status for professional playing in London."<sup>36</sup> However, even though they now had political and legal legitimacy, theatres and players were still plagued by an unsavory reputation, and the first official establishments, including the Swan, the Rose, the Theatre, and the Phoenix were all "located in the suburbs outside [the London Council's] jurisdiction"<sup>37</sup> where their players would be free to make a living without fear of repercussion if not without disdain.

Although knowledge of Shakespeare's personal and professional life during this time remains limited, as are most concrete details concerning his life, what is clear is that he had been working within the theatrical world years before the formation of the playing company he would come to call home. Historical records indicate that surviving texts attributed to Shakespeare such as *Love's*

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<sup>35</sup> James H. Forse, *Art Imitates Business: Commercial and Political Influences in Elizabethan Theatre* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State U Popular, 1993), 18.

<sup>36</sup> Paul Whitfield White, "Playing Companies and the Drama of the 1580s: A New Direction for Elizabethan Theatre History?," *Shakespeare Studies* (0582-9399) 28, (January 2000): 269.

<sup>37</sup> Forse, *Art Imitates Business: Commercial and Political Influences in Elizabethan Theatre*, 22.

*Labour's Lost* and *Titus Andronicus* were already being performed in rotation, and “the sequence of attributions in the playbooks of his drama suggests very strongly that he served briefly with the Earl of Sussex’s Men.”<sup>38</sup> However, when the Lord Chamberlain’s Men was founded by Lord Hundson in 1594, nearly a decade after the Queen’s Men, Shakespeare’s brief tenure with Sussex’s Men ended permanently.

Initially made up of “established performers with ten or more years of stage experience,”<sup>39</sup> Lord Hundson populated the Lord Chamberlain’s Men with “the best actors from a variety of companies—among them the Lord Strange’s Men, the Queen’s Men and Sussex’s Men.”<sup>40</sup> Shakespeare, along with Richard Burbage and John Sincler, departed Sussex’s Men to join the company that would secure their names in the annals of theatre history for centuries to come. Along with the rest of the established London theatres at the time, the Lord Chamberlain’s Men functioned as a repertory company performing a rotating selection of plays for the public with a small ensemble of performers. It was also a shareholding company, and as such was composed of “eight or ten ‘sharers’, a core of experienced players who took most of the speaking parts, and who had equal shares in both the income and expenditure of their company.”<sup>41</sup> This core ensemble was supplemented with “hirelings,” young boys and apprentices who were hired to play the female roles or to study the craft with a sharer. David Grote’s description of the practical effects of a shareholding company is worth quoting at length. Grote notes, first and foremost that it was:

a communal organization. All of the Sharers participated in all the decisions as well as in all the income. A share was in effect permanent. In one way, it was like tenure in a small college, requiring the vote of all the faculty. It was not given lightly, for the candidate would be with the group every day for the rest of his professional life. In another way, the company

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<sup>38</sup> Peter Ackroyd, *Shakespeare: The Biography* (New York: Doubleday, 2005), 217.

<sup>39</sup> David Grote, *The Best Actors in the World: Shakespeare and His Acting Company* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2002), 1.

<sup>40</sup> Ackroyd, *Shakespeare: The Biography*, 220.

<sup>41</sup> Andrew Gurr and Mariko Ichikawa, *Staging in Shakespeare's Theatres* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 39.

was like a marriage . . . An actor might leave or might be thrown out, but if that happened the result was like a divorce, messy, disruptive, and possibly even life-threatening for the group. But as in a small faculty or a marriage, all decisions were made communally; at various times, some individuals might be more powerful and influential, but eventually, they would require the consent and cooperation of all the other Sharers for any decisions made on behalf of the company. This included both the selection and the casting of all plays.<sup>42</sup>

This extreme level of intimacy, arguably unparalleled today, can be seen in the commercial and critical successes of the company.

The Lord Chamberlain's Men enjoyed a virtual duopoly with The Admiral's Men on the London theatre scene, and both experienced popularity and success on opposite ends of the city; however, the Lord Chamberlain's Men faced potentially catastrophic challenges in maintaining their performance locations. An expired lease on the land that held their original performance venue, the Theatre, pushed the Lord Chamberlain's Men into an indoor venue within the city boundaries. This theatre, entitled the Blackfriars, was unusual for its time being an indoor stage within the city limits. However, its initial potential was quickly cut short by neighboring citizens who presented a petition to London's Privy Council demanding that the theatre be permanently closed. Following the expulsion from the Blackfriars, the company was forced to rent a neighboring playhouse, and they existed in a state of limbo for two years before Richard Burbage and his brother ordered the original timber from the Theatre to be moved from its resting place in Shoreditch to a new location on Bankside. This would be the location on which The Globe was built, cobbled together from the timbers of the deconstructed Theatre, amid considerable financial duress suffered by the Burbage brothers. Andrew Gurr notes that, as sharers of the company whose personal and collective successes depended on the success of the theatre itself, the members of the Lord Chamberlain's

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<sup>42</sup> Grote, *The Best Actors in the World : Shakespeare and His Acting Company*, 1-2.



Men “had a strong interest in getting a new playhouse.”<sup>43</sup> Therefore, when it became apparent that the financing of the Globe would overcome the Burbage brothers’ resources “Shakespeare and three of his colleagues put up the balance of the cost of the Globe. Thus, five of the company’s leading players . . . were turned into co-landlords, with the company as a whole as their tenants.”<sup>44</sup>

This level of commitment and interdependence was common for shareholding companies, which “depended absolutely on every sharer literally playing his part in every day’s work.”<sup>45</sup> Naturally, this camaraderie extended beyond the bounds of finances and commercial success and is evidenced in the artistic endeavors and personal lives of the company. As artists who worked consistently with one another, the members of the Lord Chamberlain’s Men understood one another’s individual strengths and used them to benefit their creative works. Based off various listings in the original folio and quartos, we can deduce that certain players were known for playing particular types of roles.

Some of the most renowned performers of the age, Burbage and Augustine Phillips have been credited as “straight” actors within the company, tackling some of Shakespeare’s more intricate and challenging characters including Hamlet, Othello, Lear, and Bolingbroke. A particularly thin member of the company, John Sincler, had several parts written specifically highlighting his slender appearance, including “Nym, the beadle, and Slender in *2 Henry IV*, *Henry V*, and *Merry Wives*, [and] Aguecheek in *Twelfth Night*.”<sup>46</sup> Both Will Kemp and Robert Armin were known for taking on the roles of Shakespeare’s clowns, and the temperaments of the two men can be glimpsed in the ways in which Shakespeare evolves his fools over the course of his career. Will Kemp, an earlier member of

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<sup>43</sup> Gurr and Ichikawa, *Staging in Shakespeare's Theatres*, 17.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>46</sup> Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespeare Company: 1594-1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), 241.

the Lord Chamberlain's Men and well-known Morris dancer, was famous for his repartee with the Elizabethan audiences, interacting with, improvising around and prodding them so much so that he would sometimes "temporarily bring the action [of a play] to a halt."<sup>47</sup> He played some of Shakespeare's most comic roles in the earlier plays, and his talents of tomfoolery and dancing are intentionally showcased by Shakespeare in roles that require jigs and buffoonery such as Cade and Falstaff in *Henry VI, Part 2* and *Henry IV* respectively. Conversely, when Kemp fell out with the Lord Chamberlain's Men to "extend his repertoire of long-distance Morris dancing,"<sup>48</sup> Shakespeare appears to comment on some of Kemp's less desirable qualities, embedding acting lessons within the script of *Hamlet* in which the young prince urges to "let those that play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them; for there be of them that will themselves laugh to set on some quantity of barren spectators to laugh too."<sup>49</sup> As Robert Armin, a "singer and a wit, [and] a noted solo player,"<sup>50</sup> came to replace Kemp as the company clown, the nature and humor of Shakespeare's fools shifted: gone were the farcical and physical clowns such as Bottom and Dogberry; these were replaced with the wry, melancholic humor of *Twelfth Night's* Feste, *King Lear's* Fool, and *Macbeth's* Porter. Like any good collaborator, Shakespeare was adapting and revising his own work to benefit the ensemble as a whole—to fit a less rambunctious and more nuanced performer.

The company's successes and failures were intimately connected to the level of commitment with which its members worked to mount a production. Actors were expected to supply the ordinary costumes for each show through their own means and were tasked with learning an immense number of lines in order to produce shows in repertory. The modern-day concepts of

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<sup>47</sup> Ackroyd, *Shakespeare: The Biography*, 222.

<sup>48</sup> Gurr, *The Shakespearian Playing Companies* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 291.

<sup>49</sup> William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2006), III.II.36-39.

<sup>50</sup> Gurr, *The Shakespearian Playing Companies* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 291.

director and blocking were undefined at this point in history, and “those few scripts which show signs of having been used by a book-keeper for prompting purposes indicate that a great deal was left to the players themselves . . . Once a player was on stage his conduct of his scene was his own affair.”<sup>51</sup> In this intricate and dependent system of theatre-making it seems as though there was hardly room for stars—or egos. History has awarded its laurels to particular members—Shakespeare and Burbage among others—but often ignores the truth that the Lord Chamberlain’s Men were, ultimately,

a society of friends and colleagues . . . with common interests and common obligations. It was an extended family, with the actors living in the same neighborhood. The actors married into one another’s immediate families, too, uniting with various sisters, daughters, and widows. In their wills they left money, and various tokens, to one another. It was a family that played together and stayed together. They were ‘fellowes,’ to use the word they themselves employed.<sup>52</sup>

Renaissance men of their time, they embodied the concepts of actors’ agency, ensemble theatre, and collaboration I was so eager to explore and, in retrospect, their plays seemed the perfect vehicle for this project. As evidenced in his writing, as well as his careful curation of characters to bring out the best in his fellow performers, Shakespeare must have known that his plays were nothing without his players, and his players were nothing without his plays.

### *Macbeth: The Source Material*

I was unaware at the time I selected *Macbeth* as the source material for my thesis project how appropriate choosing one of Shakespeare’s play would be. In seeking to find a production in which my actors could work collaboratively toward the creation of a theatrical world—from costumes, sets,

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<sup>51</sup> Gurr and Ichikawa, *Staging in Shakespeare's Theatres*, 42.

<sup>52</sup> Ackroyd, *Shakespeare: The Biography*, 226.

sound effects, and staging—I had stumbled upon a tradition of theatre-making that required that very level of commitment from its actors. The familiar yet mutable nature of much of Shakespeare’s canon provided a framework that, although familiar to audiences, is not as beholden to traditions of staging or interpretation as are more contemporary plays. Their history as productions that were staged simply yet effectively in the wooden Globe would allow for the limitations of our Studio production and meager budget. Their large casts, in which many roles are historically doubled, would allow me to work more intimately with a smaller group of actors, while still ensuring that the actors would have relatively equal material with which to work on stage. It could not have been a more unintentionally perfect decision. However, although the selection of a Shakespeare text was serendipitously appropriate, I still faced the challenge of massaging the script to fit the particular needs and demands of my project.

Widely accepted to have been written in 1606, *Macbeth* is categorized as Shakespeare’s “shortest tragedy and the fastest moving.”<sup>53</sup> At 17,121 words, it is the fourth shortest work in the canon behind *Comedy of Errors*, *A Midsummer*, and *Tempest* respectively and under 10,000 words shorter than *Hamlet*, Shakespeare’s lengthiest play.<sup>54</sup> Despite its comparative brevity, *Macbeth* remains a five act Shakespearean venture; both Trevor Nunn’s 1978 production at the Royal Shakespeare Company and Jack Gold’s filmed version for BBC Drama clock in at a comfortable two and a half hours of performance. Despite the fact that I am of the firm belief that contemporary audiences do not, nor should be expected to, have the patience to sustain themselves through two and a half hours of Shakespearean verse unabridged, the length of the play was also impractical from a

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<sup>53</sup> William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. Sandra Clark and Pamela Mason (New York: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2015), 1.

<sup>54</sup> Eric M. Johnson, "Shakespeare's plays, listed by number of words," OpenSource Shakespeare, accessed January 18, 2017, [http://www.opensourceshakespeare.org/views/plays/plays\\_numwords.php](http://www.opensourceshakespeare.org/views/plays/plays_numwords.php).

rehearsal standpoint. Working around my own academic schedule and those of other student actors, I knew that rehearsals were going to be sparse and limited mostly to a few hours in the evenings. Therefore, the prospect of mounting a full-length Shakespeare was daunting, if not impractical, and I was resolved to make cuts to the text in order to trim the show down to a more palatable 90-minute production.

Luckily, *Macbeth* has a long history of revisions and textual bastardizations that have, perhaps more than any other work in the canon, blurred the line between Shakespeare's original and the play we have come to know today. Although scholars debate the veracity of claims that our current edition of *Macbeth* is fractured or incomplete, textual complications involving time and sequence of events have lead scholars to entertain the concept of lost or deleted scenes.<sup>55</sup> Various instances in the text seem to contradict one another: Lennox's allegiance towards Macbeth appears to shift from distrust to comradeship without explanation between III.vi and IV.i, and Banquo's comment in II.i that he "dreamt last night of the three weird sisters"<sup>56</sup> is logistically impossible, as a day has not yet passed between his introduction to the Sisters and his delivery of the line. Similarly, Lady Macbeth chastises her husband in I.vii demanding, "What beast was't then / That made you break this enterprise to me? / When you durst do it, then you were a man."<sup>57</sup> The specificity of "her temporal indicators – 'when', 'then . . . then' . . . support the theory of a lost scene, or even of a plan to kill the King conceived before Macbeth met the Sisters."<sup>58</sup> These complications in the chronology of the play afford liberties in how various scholars and directors interpret and utilize them in performance,

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<sup>55</sup> Daniel A. Amnéus, "A Missing Scene in 'Macbeth,'" *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 60, no. 3 (1961): 437-8.

<sup>56</sup> Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, II.i.20.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, I.vi.47-49.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

and it was this knowledge that the script currently exists as flawed and incomplete, that gave me the license to make significant adjustments to the script in order to suit my needs for this project.

Early in the process of cutting and editing the script, I stumbled across another piece of curious information from *Macbeth*'s past. Among its issues of chronology and fragmentation, a slightly more concrete debate surrounding the text's authorship exists involving the character of Hecate, who appears briefly in III.v and IV.i of *Macbeth*, but has no decisive effect on the plot of the play or actions of the characters. Historically known as the Greek goddess of witchcraft, Hecate within the text of *Macbeth* functions as the apparent ruler over the Witches in the play, chastising them for their dealings with Macbeth without her consent. That Hecate's presence in the text was a contribution of Shakespeare is specious for a variety of reasons; however, her noticeable absence in a first-person account of a 1611 production of *Macbeth* by Simon Forman seems to be the basis for most scholarly arguments against her original presence in the text. "An astrologer and known to be interested in witchcraft,"<sup>59</sup> Simon Forman makes mention neither of the character of Hecate nor the climactic cauldron scene in which the Witches summon prophecies for Macbeth in his report on the performance. However, over ten years after Forman's viewing of *Macbeth*, the first published version of the script appears in the 1623 folio, complete with the character of Hecate. If we are to believe Forman's account that there was no Hecate in the 1611 production of *Macbeth*, we must then acknowledge that her presence in the script is an interpolation from an author other than Shakespeare.

Extensive research by Gary Taylor published in *Thomas Middleton and Early Modern Textual Culture* suggests that the most likely case for the insertion of Hecate results from the handiwork of

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<sup>59</sup> Shakespeare *Macbeth*, 324.

Thomas Middleton, a contemporary of Shakespeare and accomplished Jacobean playwright. Middleton's presence in the text can be proven by tracing the histories of two songs that are called for in Hecate's respective scenes. The songs in question, "Come away, come away, etc.," and "Black spirits, etc.," are listed within the text of the 1623 folio version of *Macbeth* only by their first lines; however, unlike other songs written by Shakespeare for his plays, the full lyrics of either song are never offered within the folio. They do appear, however, in Middleton's own unsuccessful play, *The Witch*, which was first performed in 1613, seven years after *Macbeth*'s initial performance, but ten years before the script of *Macbeth* was to be published in the folio. Little is concretely known about how the material for the original folio was compiled, making it difficult to determine how exactly two of Middleton's songs found their way into the first published edition of *Macbeth*, but what does seem certain is that the two songs were added in the time following Shakespeare's death and before the publication of the first folio.

In Middleton's lyrics, Hecate is "called upon to sing a substantial part of both songs. The songs, then, could scarcely be used unless Hecate appeared in person, and quite obviously, she could not appear unless she spoke a few lines which more or less explained her presence,"<sup>60</sup> leading scholars to believe that Middleton or another author wrote her character into the script as a means of using his songs. Although *Macbeth* mentions Hecate two times within the script, once during II.i in which he muses that "Witchcraft celebrates / Pale Hecate's offerings"<sup>61</sup> and once III.ii in which he refers to "black Hecate,"<sup>62</sup> both are allusions to an intangible force and do not suggest an awareness of the corporeal being that is seen in III.v and IV.i. *Macbeth* himself never physically

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<sup>60</sup> J. M. Nosworthy, "The Hecate Scenes in *Macbeth* Macbeth III. V; IV. I," *The Review of English Studies* 24, no. 94 (1948): 139.

<sup>61</sup> Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, II.i.52.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, III.ii.42.

comes into contact with her in the play, nor does he appear to have any knowledge of her existence, contrasting starkly with his keen awareness of the three Sisters. Further complicating her presence in the script, Hecate's speeches are "in iambic couplets rather than the trochaic meter used earlier by the Witches,"<sup>63</sup> and the language of both her monologues and the two songs noticeably contrasts with the darker, macabre imagery used by the other Witches. Hecate's references to magic sleights, sprites, and a little spirit,<sup>64</sup> as well as lyrics such as "O what a dainty pleasure 'tis / To ride in the air / When the moon shines fair, / And sing, and dance, and toy, and kiss,"<sup>65</sup> are much more akin to the glittery magic and playful spirits of *Midsummer* than to the sinister, earthly Witches of *Macbeth*. Although the songs in both Hecate's scenes are irrefutably Middleton's, there is not a common consensus on who specifically inserted Hecate into the script of *Macbeth*. In his "Notes and Observations," J.M. Nosworthy argues that "of all contemporary claims to the Hecate scenes, Middleton's is, in fact, the weakest,"<sup>66</sup> citing significant stylistic differences between Middleton's Hecate in *The Witch* and the Hecate of *Macbeth*. However, that an author "was commissioned by the King's Players to supply her lines"<sup>67</sup> seems irrefutable. For these reasons, Shakespearean scholars and directors tend to consider the entirety of III.v and Hecate's portions of IV.i as textual interpolations, and they are often removed from staged productions of *Macbeth*.

The "Hecate problem" proved to be the guiding principle behind how I chose to adapt the script of *Macbeth*. Having always had the intention of cutting the script down and streamlining characters, the research I conducted into her character allowed me to take creative license in further

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<sup>63</sup> Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 330.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, 230.

<sup>65</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Norton Shakespeare: Tragedies*, ed. Stephen Jay Greenblatt, and Andrew Gurr (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008), 856.

<sup>66</sup> Nosworthy, "The Hecate Scenes in Macbeth Macbeth III. V; IV. I," 138.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, 139.



developing an adaptation of *Macbeth* that would effectively serve the needs of this project. My fascination with how different scholars and directors have tackled the issue of including or removing Hecate from the play was matched only by my fascination with the character of Macbeth's Lady who has, of course, colloquially become known as Lady Macbeth. Both women in the play hold powerful positions: Hecate rules over the Sisters, chastising them and ultimately directing them in how to ensnare Macbeth, and Lady Macbeth is her husband's backbone and strength throughout, supplying him with the courage and determination he lacks in order to gain "the golden round."<sup>68</sup> It was while contemplating what I've always considered to be Lady Macbeth's plot-serving descent into madness and convenient offstage suicide that I first had the thought of combining the characters of Hecate and Lady Macbeth into one. I sat for several moments mentally scanning through the script in my head to determine if this was an interpolation that would work. With Hecate and Lady Macbeth functioning as one character it drives the subtext of the show in a much more interesting and complicated direction. The character of Lady Macbeth's motives shift from helping her husband to become king to a more sinister purpose: helping her husband to become king knowing that he will ultimately be killed for doing so. This adjustment to Lady Macbeth felt perfectly in line with the sinister workings of the other three Witches, as well as giving the character Hecate a legitimized reason for existing within the text in the form of the Lady. This decision undoubtedly veered the production firmly in the direction of an adaptation, but it provided the production of *Macbeth* with a fresh outlook and a new story to tell that audiences would not necessarily expect. I felt this would only be beneficial in working with the ensemble to create the world of the play, as it would be a new

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<sup>68</sup> Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, I.v.28.

interpretation of that world, with different meanings, different relationships and a different payoff than the original.

The text of *Macbeth*, of course, does not necessarily support an adjustment of this magnitude, and sacrifices had to be made, but they ultimately helped to streamline the plot and shorten the play. Lady Macbeth's infamous speech calling on spirits to fill her "from the crown to the toe, top-full of direst cruelty" was now redundant and unnecessary to this blend of Hecate and Lady Macbeth, while the Lady's first scene of true doubt while she waits for her husband outside of Duncan's chamber showed a weakness that was not conducive to this interpretation of the character. That scene was pared down considerably and rearranged so that Lady Macbeth is present in the room while her husband kills the king. Her penultimate scene in V.i in which the doctor and gentlewoman observe her sleepwalking, attempting to wash invisible blood from her hands, was similarly pared down to be a monologue of ravings which Lady Macbeth could now utilize to manipulate her husband by feigning her insanity in order to further unsettle the already crumbling Macbeth. Other pacing cuts were made to the script; several more expository scenes including the Witches' introduction in I.iii, Ross in II.iv, Lennox in III.vi, and Malcolm and Macduff in IV.iii were streamlined or cut entirely, and the characters of Donalbain, Angus, Menteith, Caithness, Siward, and Young Siward were removed from the text. Despite these significant changes, I made a concentrated effort to maintain the style of the verse and was able to cut the script in a way that maintained the original iambic pentameter so that Shakespeare's rhythms were still intact. Some lines were cut altogether and others were portioned off to other characters so that Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, Duncan, Banquo, Malcolm, Macduff, Ross, and Lennox became the primary cast of Scots in the play.

Upon completing the cutting of the script, the next task became determining a cast breakdown that would allow actors to play multiple roles while having enough time to transition

between characters. Macbeth remained the only character who was truly undoubled, although our version of Lady Macbeth/Hecate functioned as one character rather than two separate ones. They both, therefore, had a fairly consistent presence throughout the play, while the other tracks were doubled, tripled and quadrupled in true Shakespearean style. I had initially hoped to work with a group of seven actors, the same amount we had used to produce *Midsummer* the previous year, however the more complicated script of *Macbeth* required a minimum eight in order to populate the bigger cast of the production. Scripts were finalized, studio rooms were reserved, audition notices were posted, and the process would begin as soon as my production of *Macbeth* had its ensemble.

## CHAPTER THREE: THE PROJECT

### Discovering *Macbeth* in Rehearsals and Performance

*"Double, double, toil and trouble / Fire burn and cauldron bubble."*  
-*Macbeth*, Act IV, Scene i

With scripts being finalized and auditions approaching, the daunting reality of the process began to weigh on me. I was now responsible for the planning, organizing, and conducting of meetings, rehearsals, and performances. What had percolated within my mind for months as abstract concepts were rapidly becoming concrete realities that would require the dedication, talents, and time of eight other humans. As the creator of the project, I felt a mounting pressure to be confident in the process on which we were embarking, and to have the answers to questions that had not yet been asked, when in actuality the process I was creating was as new and unfamiliar to me as it would be to my ensemble of actors.

This chapter will outline this shifting, complicated, and exploratory planning process behind our production of *Macbeth*. In reconstructing the innately intangible phenomena of rehearsals and live performance, I will draw upon my own questions, notes, recordings, and recollections in the hopes that these tangible records of the process will begin to suggest an alternative model of theatrical creation. The trials and errors, the messiness and complications, and the moments of pure theatrical discovery all serve as the foundation of what this new form of theatre can be, a way of creating theatre that unlocks an actor's agency for the benefit of the individual, the ensemble, and the audience. This chapter is not meant to be truly prescriptive: each play, each director and each ensemble will clearly have elements that work for them, and elements that become unnecessary or unhelpful. However, I have provided the reader with a breakdown of our rehearsal process, from my

initial role in it, to the opening night performance, to bring some order to the chaos of theatrical creation.

### My Role in *Macbeth*

To direct, or not to direct? That was, in fact, my question. I struggled considerably with the decision of how to identify myself within the framework of this project, acutely aware that it had been the invention of the modern director in the 19th century that had put limitations on actors' agency in the creative process. For that reason, I was hesitant to call myself the "director." However, the alternative prospect of becoming an actor-manager of sorts was also unappealing. Not only do I have a well-deserved association between actor-directors with inflated egos, I also knew that in order to bring a critical eye to the research portion of my thesis I needed to exist outside of the process so that I could observe and influence it if necessary. Serendipitously, this reluctance to define myself coexisted with my actors' uncertainty about exactly what roles they were expected to play in this production, and slowly I settled into referring to myself as the director, while understanding that if our theatrical vocabulary were a bit more expansive the title of "ensemble coordinator" may have been more apt.

I was encouraged in making this decision by the fact that during each of the shows that had inspired this project someone had served as a director. Even in that position of power, they had allowed their actors to have agency for the benefit of the process and production. This knowledge reinforced my belief that the presence of a director does not necessarily preclude actors' agency; however, there must be a commitment to the cause, a willingness to be part of the ensemble, and an understanding of the responsibility and power you hold in ensuring that the integrity of the project is not sacrificed by your own desires and impulses. In the following pages, I will refer to myself as

the director for the sake of clarity but, in reality, I was as much of a Renaissance man as any other in the process. My role was, in many ways, as varied and complex as those of the ensemble, shifting to fit the given needs of a rehearsal, an interaction, or a moment.

### Casting the Ensemble

The casting of any show can determine the success or failure of the process before ever setting foot in a rehearsal room. In a production requiring a true ensemble to collaborate, discuss, debate, and create intimately with one another, it was essential that I choose the right people to work with. I was lucky in that my casting pool consisted of undergraduate students I had known for the past year and a half, but there were still qualities I knew that I must look out for, qualities that might supersede raw talent or a strong reading. Initially I conducted general auditions requiring each actor to come prepared with a Shakespearean monologue. Essential for me in these initial auditions was determining an actor's ability to make a strong adjustment to a piece of text. Frequently I would ask those auditioning to perform their monologues in ways that were drastically different to the nature of the character or the play it was from. This allowed me to determine whether they could make strong choices, but also whether they were equipped with the skills to create multiple, strongly defined characters. I also took into consideration actors who I knew were willing and passionate about going the extra mile for their craft. Some of these became apparent during auditions, others, many of whom I had worked with before on shows or in class, I asked to audition for the project. In the end, I selected eight actors that I felt were talented enough, not only in terms of acting, but in their collaborative skills and their understanding of the theatrical process, to work with me in a process that would undoubtedly challenge each of us along the way.

### Creating the Rehearsal Structure

Embarking on this endeavor, I found it crucial to remain organized and to develop a rehearsal schedule that allowed time for us to discover our methodology as we worked. First and foremost, I knew that it was necessary for the success of the project to promptly begin establishing an ensemble environment. It was my belief that this way of working, in which no one person functions as a lead or a star, but all have an equitable share of stage time and contribute in equal and often different ways to the process, would allow my actors to utilize their agency more freely. Initial rehearsals, then, were dedicated to collective gatherings that focused on text work and production meetings.

In a traditional rehearsal process, text work rehearsals already involve the entire cast, but production meetings typically do not. They are meetings held prior to the start of rehearsals and are held almost exclusively between the director and designers of a show. The meetings provide directors an opportunity to speak to designers about the vision for the production, and designers an opportunity to present their work on sets, costumes, lighting, and sound. In this way, technical and design elements that take time to be created can be crafted and troubleshoot while rehearsals are taking place. Production meetings are an essential part of the well-oiled machine that is contemporary theatre-making; however, actors are rarely included in that part of the process. There are practical reasons for this omission: designers and directors must often begin work on shows before rehearsals begin, or before casting has been completed, making it impractical or impossible to guarantee an actor's presence at these meetings; compensating actors for any meetings outside of their traditional rehearsal schedule is a potential financial burden for theatre companies; and the delicate balance that exists between artistry and ego when a designer's artistic choice and the

opinions of an actor clash in the creation of a character are just a few of the challenges that including actors in production meetings might engender.

However, for as often as its practitioners laud the theatre for being the truly collaborative art form, I have always found it slightly counterintuitive that actors are denied the opportunity to be present and included at pre-production meetings, where the creative world of the play first begins to take shape. Actors will inhabit the theatrical space that is created, they will wear and utilize the costumes they are given to create their characters, they will understand the tonality of the production through the moods being set by lights and sounds, and yet they are rarely introduced to these elements until the tech weekend before opening night. What has become a necessity of time, budget, and egos in the professional world was directly counterintuitive to my concept of the Renaissance man as a theatre artist who has the skills and the agency to have his own input in the creation of his play. Therefore, in resisting the limitations of commercial theatre, my actors' involvement in these production meetings became a crucial addition to the process.

Once we had established our ensemble and conducted both text work and production meetings, blocking became the next pressing task. I left the largest chunk of time in our schedule for the blocking process, as I was still unsure of exactly how it would unfold, and a number of scheduling complications including jobs, other show commitments, and the university's spring break ensured that rehearsals in which all ten members of the ensemble were present would be very rare indeed. Blocking rehearsals were followed by a stretch of technical rehearsals that were to be devoted entirely to setting up our theatrical space, planning out sound and light cues, and running the show in its entirety before our opening weekend.

When the schedule was completed, we had planned four rehearsals over two weeks dedicated to text work and production meetings, five weeks of blocking rehearsal with five to six



rehearsals a week spanning approximately 6pm to 10pm in the evenings, and one week of technical rehearsals culminating in three weekend performances. Each rehearsal was further broken down into chunks of time that would be dedicated to working particular segments of the show, to running larger sections, and to having the occasional production meeting to discuss design elements of the production. Printed off into several packets of paper, mine slipped into the folder of my script, this would be the pen and ink framework with which we would begin this new and exciting process.

### Establishing the Ensemble Environment

In order for my actors to feel comfortable voicing their opinions, thoughts, and ideas, I knew it was crucial that a trusting ensemble was built from the very start of rehearsals. As with any production, there is justified pressure on the first rehearsal to set the tone of the entire process; I sensed that even more acutely on this project. This was the first opportunity I had since an initial email, attached with the rehearsal schedule and cut script, to explain the reasoning behind this project, my role in it, and to open up the ideas on which I had been privately ruminating to a wider audience. It was also my first chance to work with all nine of my ensemble together in one room. Before leaving for our first rehearsal, I cracked open my director's notebook and scribbled two questions on the first pages: "Am I allowing my actors to have more agency?" and—acutely aware of my tendency to marry myself to my creative ideas—"Is this choice serving me or serving us?" These two questions would come to serve as constant reference points as I made my way through the process.

The ensemble gathered in Studio III of the Performing Arts Center, a slightly smaller studio than our final performance space, but one that we used more frequently during the earlier days of rehearsal. Situated in a circle, some on the floor on mats and others seated in chairs, various binders

and copies of the script strewn between them, we began to define collectively what we wanted this process to look like.<sup>69</sup> On a large swath of butcher paper, I began to draft the document that would provide structure to the upcoming weeks and inform our decision-making process. I began by asking for suggestions from the ensemble on how to ensure that our process remained collaborative, efficient, productive, and open for individuals to use their creative agency. Initially hesitant, we slowly began to generate ideas bullet by bullet. We offered suggestions, discussed, and decided on our guidelines. The tenets my ensemble devised were as follows:

*Table 1: Ensemble Guidelines*

Ensemble Guidelines
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Always warm up</li> <li>• Positive reinforcement for ideas</li> <li>• Action/Talking and Play/Patter</li> <li>• Final Say/Majority Vote</li> <li>• Brainstorming Sessions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ 30 minutes/topic</li> <li>◦ Every person responsible for tangible inspiration</li> <li>◦ Committees</li> <li>◦ Cast Bonding Meetings</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

The decision to start each rehearsal with a warm up was truthfully initiated as an ice-breaker for myself more than anything else; in my experience teaching at the college level I have felt particularly comfortable leading warm ups to begin the class, and I sensed that this might be a way to feel somewhat in control at the start of each new unpredictable day in the process. However, with that first guideline established, more members of the ensemble began to contribute ideas. A suggestion was made to positively reinforce the ideas of cast members when conducting group

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<sup>69</sup> See Figure 1 in Appendix C.

brainstorms or taking suggestions, the goal being that no one would feel that his opinions or suggestions were unwarranted or unneeded during the rehearsal process. This is a feeling that I firmly believe plagues young actors in professional settings, preventing them from offering creative and intelligent solutions to production problems. An awareness of time constraints over rehearsals and the uncertainty of how quickly we would be moving through this process prompted our next guideline stating that we would value action over talking and encourage play over patter, patter being our colloquial term for unproductive discussion. In this way, we hoped to talk less, do more, and give every suggestion its fair due as a realistic solution before discarding or adapting it. A decision on how we would collectively agree on ideas or concepts that we liked was less decisive: some of the ensemble suggested a majority vote, and some were eager to provide me with the power to have the final say. We never made a final decision on how this would be executed, an oversight that would have repercussions throughout the process. Finally, we set down several guidelines specifically for our production meetings which we initially termed “Brainstorming Sessions.” Each topic of discussion was not to exceed thirty minutes of deliberation on a given rehearsal day in order to prevent getting stuck on the minor details of one aspect. Each member of the cast was encouraged and expected to contribute to these brainstorming sessions with tangible inspiration in the form of notes, drawings, photographs, or music, and all members would serve on various committees that would oversee the individual elements of production including scenery, costumes, lighting, and sound. Finally, and to my silent gratification, the ensemble wanted to make it a priority to schedule several times to meet with one another outside of the rehearsal setting in order to encourage cast bonding and to get to know one another better.

Reflecting on the rehearsal in my journal that evening I wrote that the most significant takeaway from listening to my ensemble speak and share ideas was the “commitment to valuing

people's ideas and giving everything a chance.” Drafting them in a format in which everyone contributed and in which we took the time to discuss and deliberate suggestions before printing them on the paper ensured that we were starting the process off by listening and responding to one another. The bullet points on our piece of butcher paper would be the standards to which we held one another and of which we reminded each other in the coming weeks, and I felt confident that they established an atmosphere that was open and accepting of anyone's creative ideas. When ensuring that you are creating an environment that promotes an actor's agency I believe it is crucial to come into that first rehearsal with a willingness to allow the group to determine how it will function. In this way, we created a shared dialogue and methodology of working, setting the stage for the rehearsals to come.

### The Text Work Rehearsals

With the ensemble guidelines decided upon and a clearer shared understanding of what the goal of this project was, we turned our attention to the focus of the initial text work rehearsals. For our purposes, those first four rehearsals were typically divided in half, with the first half focusing on text and the second half on design. Beginning with an exploration of the text allowed us to have several group readings of the final cut of the script, complete any final casting assignments for the smaller roles, and to ponder questions over the material before getting wrapped up in discussions of design and aesthetic. Over the course of these first rehearsals, I encouraged us to do several different types of read-throughs including a reading of Shakespeare's text verbatim and a reading in which the actors paraphrased the dialogue into their own terminology in an effort to bring a level of understanding and personal connection to the dated language. This kind of work has been essential to my process on any production and is particularly useful in those that employ heightened language

such as Shakespeare's. In this way, the ensemble is able to hear the text aloud for the first time and to take the time to ask clarifying or challenging questions that will inform the production as a whole.

Our ensemble was composed of actors with varying levels of exposure to Shakespearean text: some had performed full shows before, while others had never taken a Shakespeare class, let alone been a part of a larger production. It became clear within the initial read-through that some were more comfortable than others in their mastery of the text. For this reason, we took the time to stop to clarify archaic words or puzzle through a particularly dense monologue. At times, I would draw from my Arden Shakespeare edition of *Macbeth*, and at other times actors who had previously worked on scenes from the show in class, or had encountered similar turns of phrase helped to enlighten the group. Taking this time, although it did not level the playing field in terms of experience with Shakespeare, continued to develop this ensemble environment by working together in the interest of developing a shared understanding of the textual world we were about to bring to life.

### The Production Meetings

Once we had worked our way through our various read-throughs of the text, we utilized the second half of these four early rehearsals to conduct our production meetings. In the hopes of building not only a shared understanding of the text but also a shared aesthetic of where we were heading, I felt it was essential to begin this process as early as possible. Production meetings began by requesting that the ensemble bring tangible inspiration, whether that be an image, a song, a texture, or a piece of writing that represented what *Macbeth* was for them. On the first day, we had an assortment of different objects, images, and sounds that individuals each shared with the group as a way of diving in. However, as we continued these meetings they became more specific thanks to

the creation of committees consisting of two ensemble members each. Although each member of the ensemble was responsible for generating ideas for every category, the committees were an efficient way to keep all of these ideas and options organized. Each was designated to focus on either the set, costumes, music, or lights. As inspiration was brought into each meeting, the committee members overseeing a particular area would record or collect the information to be stored for later use. These initial production meetings set us off to a productive start, but I was acutely aware of how little time we would have to continue them once blocking rehearsals began. Seeking to create alternative methods of production meetings, I created several easily accessible platforms for the ensemble to collectively brainstorm on, which proved even more efficient than the committees at generating meaningful inspiration for the production.

The first of these platforms was a *Macbeth* Pinterest page, followed by a shared Spotify playlist, and finally a group Facebook page that I made accessible to each member of *Macbeth*. Once we had moved on from our two weeks of text work and production meetings, these platforms became an essential way of communicating outside of rehearsal and of solidifying a shared understanding of the aesthetics of the play. They allowed us to shape and organize the visuals, color palettes, and sounds that would later find themselves a part of the production.

The *Macbeth* Pinterest page served as the visual lexicon of the production. Each member had the ability to search and post images on a board that supported and informed our vision of *Macbeth*. In this way, we found inspiration for many of the elements we explored both successfully and unsuccessfully during the process. Repeated imagery began to inform our creative understanding of the play: white and black, light and dark, seen and unseen, and unsettling yet beautiful quickly became creative jumping points from which we began to conceptualize the performance space, costumes, and staging. In particular, our final concept of the Witches as dimly veiled figures

stemmed directly from images on our Pinterest board. These images had simultaneously intrigued and unsettled our ensemble by creating a seductive and yet discomfoting distortion of the face, the perfect duality for these otherworldly creatures who simultaneously seduce and destroy Macbeth by infecting him with the desire to become king.

My initial inspiration to direct *Macbeth* had come to me three years previous upon hearing the song “Heads Will Roll” by the Yeah Yeah Yeahs at an overly crowded and tastefully cobwebbed Halloween party. I distinctly remember hearing the chorus of the song booming from nearby stereo: “Off with your head / Dance ’til you’re dead / Heads will roll / Heads will roll / Heads will roll / On the floor.”<sup>70</sup> Entering the song’s title and artist into my phone, I decided then and there that I would one day use this simultaneously upbeat and macabre number in a production of *Macbeth*. It seemed only fitting, then, that discovered music would play a large role in the creation of this production. The Spotify page allowed each member of the cast to add music to a master playlist that they felt lyrically or instrumentally resonated with our story, creating an amalgamation of tastes, styles, and sounds that we were then able to listen to in rehearsals, at the gym, and in our cars. Over twenty-five songs were contributed, and although not every one found its way into the final production, almost every piece of music added to the playlist was used during warmups and physical explorations during the rehearsal process, allowing inspiration from each member of the ensemble to contribute to the final product.

Ultimately, the group Facebook page became our primary means of communication throughout the production. In retrospect, scrolling through the group wall brings up a variety of different memories that contributed to the making of the piece. There are strictly business-related

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<sup>70</sup> Yeah Yeah Yeahs, “Heads Will Roll,” *It’s Blitz!*, © 2009 by Interscope, MP3.

posts detailing the times and locations of upcoming rehearsals, images and videos related to discussions we'd had, inside jokes shared throughout the school day, and announcements about the pre-show setup responsibilities during production week. The page itself became a testament to the ways in which my ensemble latched onto and relished the idea of exercising their creative agency as performers. Over spring break and unable to meet for rehearsals, Helena Whittaker, the actress playing Banquo in the production posted a video to the page showing several different examples of fake, edible blood she had been making to take advice from the ensemble on how it was working. I was able to constantly update the cast on various elements of production that had been located, from belts to extension cords, and it also became an essential way to communicate with actors who had missed rehearsals due to other academic and extracurricular conflicts. In particular, rehearsals in which we would work on the group movement pieces including a devised dance towards the beginning of the show became very difficult to catch actors up to speed on, and so it became a regular occurrence at the end of each rehearsal to film that night's progress of the dance work and post it to the page for those who were not there to view and learn before the next rehearsal.

What I find most significant about the Facebook page, however, is not its ability to function as a comprehensive catch-all for the business of the production, but the outlet it provided for creative minds to communicate outside of the studio, often in ways that fostered relationships without the formality of a rehearsal setting. In one post, Amanda Tavaréz, the actress playing Lady Macbeth, provided information to the ensemble on a deal for having their digital auditions filmed and edited, on another night during rehearsal a member of the ensemble surreptitiously altered everyone's name in the group one by one so that individuals became "The Little Merman," "Two Hands, Baby," and "Wind Up Top," among other less printable monikers, all of which originated from various jokes and stories we had exchanged during rehearsals. These may seem to be trivial



examples, even childish, but it is these details—more than Pinterest boards and Spotify playlists—that highlight the way in which this production was becoming more than just individual actors rehearsing to perform a show. It was becoming an intimate ensemble in which we cared for one another inside and outside of the rehearsal room, offered personal and career advice, and enveloped ourselves in the creative process.

### The Warm Ups

For the director in me, the initial two weeks of text work and production meetings were something of a saving grace. They allowed me to begin the process slowly, cautiously, testing my presence in the rehearsal room with the personalities and reactions of my actors. However, those first two weeks were short lived and it was not long before I was facing the daunting prospect of running the first blocking rehearsals of the production. As an individual who finds great pleasure in control, the thought of relinquishing it over the placement and interaction of bodies onstage was nerve-wracking. My response to withholding authority would determine how effective I would be at serving as director while still allowing for the freedom that generates agency. Would I be able to shelve my creative ideas for the benefit of the ensemble? Would my actors give as much thought and weight to the ideas they brought to the rehearsal room as I had? How could I possibly balance the strong creative impulses I was already having with the need for my actors to explore the play using their own creative agency?

Making my way to our first official blocking rehearsal, I grappled with these questions and consequently perspired slightly more than should be expected in the dense Florida air. It was then that I made an arbitrary decision that would go on to shape much of our rehearsals: I stalled on doing anything remotely productive and opted instead to begin with a group warm up. Now, allow

me to clarify that warm ups are an important and productive part of the actors' process, but the truth of the matter was that this particular warm up was primarily to prolong the act of beginning blocking and potentially exposing myself as a fraud in front of my ensemble. Just as it had been my first suggestion on our ensemble guidelines sheet to break the ice, so too it now functioned as my comfortable life vest in an ocean of possibilities. Luckily, in this instance, my weakness proved inspiration.

We began the warm up in a similar format to those I had overseen before: the ensemble formed a circle and I coached them through various stretches and arrangements aimed at loosening up their bodies and minds. However, in my desperate bid to buy myself more time, I also made an impromptu decision to play some music from our steadily developing Spotify playlist in the hopes that it might provide some degree of inspiration. I should preface this particular portion of the thesis by stating what is obvious but not always acknowledged in the world of academic writing: there are some things that are meant to be written, and there are some things that are meant to be experienced. There is no way accurately to portray a moment of pure theatrical discovery with the written word. These revelations are a feeling, a shared excitement rippling between human bodies, a brief moment in which the senses of ten different people are aligned in the same way, a fleeting shiver of discovery that cannot be captured on the paper without sounding clichéd. However, as it is my duty to transcribe these experiences I will try, to the best of my ability, to recreate this particular moment.

The cast Spotify playlist was pulled up my laptop. The lights in the studio were extinguished and the ensemble of *Macbeth* stood huddled in the center of the room as I dabbled with the various cords that would connect my laptop to the studio speaker system. We began by using songs that had already made their way onto the playlist, shuffled in various orders, styles of music, and tones. I put

on my best imitation of a man that knew what he was doing and asked my ensemble to respond to the music in whichever ways they saw fit—both in the world of the play and without—I was looking for an organic reaction to the rhythms and the atmosphere of the sounds. It began tentatively, as actors who were more familiar with me began to explore various levels and rhythms to the movement, and actors who were less familiar shuffled and wavered their bodies along with the music, seemingly reluctant to make a choice that might be perceived as too bold for the given exercise.

Instinctively, I began to coach from the outside, using this warm up as an opportunity to search for answers to problems of staging and characterizations that I had not yet solved. Thinking of the classic sexual overtones of *Macbeth* I suggested, during a particularly slinky number, that they find another person in the room to seduce, basic acting tactics. Bodies immediately changed shapes, some straightening and lengthening, others curving towards and away from prospective partners. As the playlist slid into a more rhythmic, jolting number I was reminded of the Witches and their discomforting but familiar nature. From the sidelines, I suggested ideas that had come into my head about how to characterize them: moving without the use of their legs resulted in forced, angular dragging and pulling across the floor, while moving with steps that emphasized one leg over the other created a rhythmic pounding that echoed throughout the studio.

As the warm up continued, and the actors became more and more comfortable with themselves, I switched the playlist to the soundtrack of Robert Egger's *The Witch*, a film I had watched several weeks prior that had resonated with me in relation to *Macbeth*. The soundtrack had been one of the most chilling and memorable parts of the film, having an instrumental soundscape that “builds its terrifying atmosphere from unconventional acoustic instruments, including a waterphone, and unique uses of more conventional ones—much [of] the score’s percussion was

made by ‘abusing a cello’, as its composer puts it.”<sup>71</sup> It was all but perfect for a preliminary exploration of *Macbeth*. As the first looming, percussive tones of the soundtrack played I encouraged the ensemble to think, regardless of their assigned characters in the show, of themselves as part of the Witches—how they might move, interact, and behave around one another. It quickly became difficult to distinguish whether the music was informing the actors or the actors the music.

In the dimly lit expanse of Studio Three I watched my ensemble create a cohesive narrative purely out of their reaction to the sounds reverberating throughout the studio. Individuals breathed in unison without instruction, sunk to the floor as one, developed rhythmic pounding and banging on the studio floor, and rose up together as a unit, carrying a member of the group on their collective shoulders as some sort of royalty, or bacchanalian sacrifice. All of this happened as a full moon rose outside of the studio, allowing shafts of light to arch across the dark performance space, illuminating some elements of the ritual and keeping others in shadow. It was, without a doubt, a moment of pure theatrical discovery, and as the warm up ended, and the last strains of *The Witch* soundtrack faded among the vocalizations and the panting of the ensemble, each actor sat in silence reflecting upon what had been experienced.

I hesitate to make this experience more noteworthy than it was, but our first taste of that collective exploration, the thrill of a sense of trust and payoff that had been established through that first warm up, inspired us to continue to use that format for many rehearsals to come, developing and informing the work we would do during blocking. And so, warm ups to music, often gently coached from the sidelines, became an everyday part of our rehearsals. Sometimes they were brief and less monumental than the first day we’d experienced, and sometimes they were breakthrough

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<sup>71</sup> Miles Bowe, "The Witch Composer on Making the Most Nightmarish Horror Score You'll Hear This Year," *FACT Magazine: Music News, New Music*. FACT Magazine, 17 Feb. 2016. Web. 20 Feb. 2017.

moments that helped us to develop difficult moments we had not yet discovered. Regardless, the commitment of the ensemble to this method of working never wavered. I was frequently impressed at how intimately they were willing to work, pressing up against one another, invading personal space, intertwining bodies across the studio floor. On some particular nights, their screams and cries reverberated around the shadowed studio so intensely that we joked afterwards how surprising it was that campus police had not been called. These warm ups built trust and comfort among individuals, some of whom had been friends at the start of the process and some complete strangers. When actors see a fellow committing so fully to an exploration, they become more willing to commit themselves, and so they nurture one another in discovering the exciting opportunities that come with owning one's agency. What began as a moment of weakness in a director's confidence ended up becoming an everyday part of the rehearsal process and a steadfast alternative when blocking rehearsals struggled to produce a satisfying product.

### Creating the Theatrical Space

After we had established these warm ups as an essential part of our rehearsal, but not before we had accomplished much in the way of blocking, it became apparent that we would need to be able to construct and understand the performance space within which we would be working. Early attempts at blocking were confounded by the fact that we did not know where our audiences would be located or how large our performance space would be. Therefore, we took one of the first nights of blocking rehearsal to explore various options within our performance space.

Although we rehearsed in various locations throughout the process, our performance space was in Studio One, the largest of the acting classrooms at the University of Central Florida. Floored with dark marley, Studio One is the only studio fit with an electrical grid above it, and two of the

four walls are bordered with mirrors that can be covered by swaths of black curtain. The studio is slightly deeper than it is wide, and in the far corner sits a large black cabinet that houses the controls for projections and music. For our purposes, we had access to a pile of nondescript acting blocks that typically remain stacked to the side of the classroom, as well as several heavy black risers and a set of flexible chairs for audience seating. Once more streaming our Spotify playlist over the loud speaker, we set out to explore various configurations of the room.

In our initial production meetings, a common theme that had been touched upon was wanting to unsettle our audience rather than make them feel comfortable. Several ideas that we had hypothesized during these early meetings—an aisle through the audience that connected two playing spaces, creating visual chaos, and resisting the temptation to play this production in traditional proscenium style—quickly became reality as we reconfigured the space. Risers were set in various locations around the studio and piled with blocks, creating strange mountainous formations that offered places for actors to climb and withdraw into. Audience chairs were set around the studio in ways that allowed for actors to weave in and out of them, and that forced those watching to turn and pivot to see different parts of the action. In my notes on this day of rehearsal we were increasingly “concerned with using the space in an artistically fulfilling way but sacrificing audience space and comfort.” This concern lingered throughout my notes until early April in which I scribbled underneath a reminder of “14 rehearsals left” that there was a “constant balance of the aesthetic world of the production with the needs of the audience. The aesthetic usually wins out.” And it certainly did as we became more concerned with effectively telling our story and less concerned with whether the audience was comfortable or able to see every last detail of the production.

Although we did not settle on it during that first night of play, many facets of that initial exploration of the space survived to the performance. When all was settled, the studio was essentially split into two playing spaces that mirrored one another. They existed in parallel corners of the room, so that the playing space began wide and narrowed as it went back. Rows of seating flanked the sides of both, with an aisle splitting the audience in the middle so that the two areas were connected and accessible to actors. In the corner of the larger playing space sat two uniformly stacked risers with a hard black throne as the sole decoration, representing the mortal world. Down the aisle and in the opposite corner we placed a single riser stacked with black acting blocks. It became a jagged, craggy representing of the cavernous world of the Witches. Within the two audience sections sat smaller piles of blocks that we intended to use asactable areas so that the audience would quite literally be a part of the action. In this way, through trial and error, several stubbed toes, and much rearranging, we created a performance space that was uniquely our own. It presented its fair share of staging challenges but was something that had been realized solely for the formation of this theatrical world, and it seemed to transform an everyday classroom into a warehouse theatre in which chaos and limited supplies came together to create order.

### The Blocking Rehearsals

With our warm ups well underway and our playing space finally established, we were at last able to begin seriously blocking the production. By this time, I had become more comfortable with my fluid role as director and with the idea that I did not need to have all of the answers, more comfortable with the large pauses that arose when collectively attempting to problem solve, and with posing questions to my actors in the hopes that they could shed some insight on solutions I had not

yet found. This level of collaboration between director and ensemble seemed mutual and made the actual task of blocking the show much less daunting than it had first appeared.

Initially, in a gallant attempt at truly providing my actors with the creative agency to make all decisions during the process, I asked the ensemble to decide on practically everything, from their entrances and exits to where and how they interacted within the scenes. In some instances, this worked smoothly. In others, it brought the process to a grinding halt. One notable rehearsal in which this approach backfired stands out in my mind as it was the first rehearsal I had invited members of my committee to attend. Having become accustomed to working intimately and independently, the addition of two new sets of eyes in the room created a palpable shift in energy in the ensemble. Further complicating the night was the fact that we were in a much smaller backup studio space, unable to rehearse in our usual studio, missing several key actors, and blocking one of the most spatially complicated scenes in the show. The banquet scene of III.IV in which Banquo's ghost appears to torment Macbeth, poses several staging challenges: all bodies in our ensemble were required to be onstage, and most remain seated while an unhinged Macbeth and his angered Lady argue off to the side. Meanwhile, the ghost of Banquo, unseen by all except Macbeth, flits in and out of the scene with disgusting ease for a production with limited to no special effects.

I felt the color rising in my own cheeks as we slogged through attempt after attempt at finding that same spark of innovation we had found so many times before in front of our new audience. When no breakthroughs were made, we ended the rehearsal with one of our trusted warmups, which allowed the ensemble to calm down and unify and provided me with the opportunity to coach them in ways I hoped would inform a second attack at the scene tomorrow. Ultimately, this was an example of a section of text that was so complicated the ensemble was unable to remove themselves enough from the process enough to effectively shape the scene around



them. Tackling it again the next day, I took on the most directorial responsibility I had taken thus far, and while I was nervous that this shift in approach might seem contradictory to the ensemble, they took it in stride, almost eager for some control in what was surely an unfamiliarly free process. Moving forward we found that the Banquet scene, and others, necessitated at least a preliminary shaping in terms of entrances and exits, where people would be placed upon the stage, and how we would need to give focus to the important parts of the story. The positive responses of my ensemble to my direction further clarified the fact that the presence of a director does not have to be at the expense of actors' agency; in fact, in some cases where an ensemble environment has already been created, the outside eye of the director can further encourage agency by guiding the ensemble in a more fruitful creative direction for all.

The Banquet scene is an extreme example of the breakdown of an actor's agency, in which too many suggestions created chaos rather than inspiration. However, we found that most scenes required a balance between the two. A significant change in our approach came on the day when my actors began requesting that I give them their entrances and exits to scenes so that they could at least be situated in the world before taking it from there. This provided us with a jumping off point and also freed actors of the responsibility of making too many choices in the moment. In many instances, we would work scenes organically as explorations, and I would offer suggestions or clean up certain images from the outside that the actors had already created. However, this rarely felt constrictive or prescriptive to me; in many ways, I felt that I was becoming more of an ensemble member than a director, using my own creative agency in partnership with my actors and my stage manager to problem solve and create.

### The Text-Based Devising

Within these rehearsals that became a collaboration of actors' and director's agency, there existed several distinct moments which I feel were truly owned by the actors and serve as valuable examples of Renaissance men and women at work. These moments were less tied down to the textual limitations of the script, relying less on the written word and more on moments of physicality that supported the vision of the play we were creating. I came to refer to them as text-based devising. Much like traditional theatrical devising, they were the product of collaborative exploration, but unlike much devising work their existence was dependent on an existing theatrical text. The first of these was a cast dance number heralding the arrival of King Duncan at Inverness, meant to showcase both the youthfulness and the violent yet beautiful chaos of our Scotland, followed by the infamous spell the Witches chant in IV.I, which gave us an opportunity to define and ground the Witches in terms of how they delivered the spell, and finally the multiple instances of stage combat within *Macbeth* that became opportunities for the participants of the fight to tell their own unique stories within them. Removed as these moments were from the text of *Macbeth*, they necessitated an actor's agency to explore, define and create, and they are perhaps the best examples in the production of my theories at work.

The initial dance was one of the first pieces we began working on in rehearsal, and rightfully so, for it took us the longest to discover and perfect. This was my opportunity to use "Heads Will Roll," the song that had inspired me to direct *Macbeth* so many years previously in our production, and so we spent the first rehearsals dedicated to the dance listening to the song, determining its measure and experimenting with preliminary choreography. Having no dancing background, I was entirely out of my element and was acutely aware of the fact; most members of the ensemble were no better off. Victoria Gluchoksi, the actress playing Lennox, was the only one with any significant

experience with choreography, and so she took on much more of a leadership role in the initial dance rehearsals. Ideas were taken from a variety of the cast, but she was more comfortable than most in counting the rhythm of the song and in demonstrating the movements for the cast. As the dance became more involved, we gravitated away from dance choreography and towards stage combat, which was a skill shared by more members of the ensemble. In this way, we used the skills of the ensemble to the benefit of the whole and began creating an amalgamation of dance and combat. It certainly proved to be a slow, laborious process that we worked on far into April, but as I noted in my journal, the “dance seems to be a microcosm of the show so far—creative input always drives, and is the result of some of the best parts of the dance that I never would have come up with on my own.”

With confidence in our system of collaboration growing, we came to the staging of the infamous scene of IV.I in which the Witches conjure visions for a desperate and deteriorating Macbeth. The beginning of the scene had already been blocked, with the Witches quietly entering from the darkness and humming the classic refrain of “Double, double / Toil and trouble,” as they gather as a coven. Ms. Whittaker had suggested delivering the lines to the tune of Desdemona’s song in a production of *Othello* she had seen, and the haunting tone seemed to set the mood perfectly. Looking to expand upon this melancholic and yet gentle mood, my initial attack at staging the actual spell resulted in my actors imitating a panting, sighing orgiastic affair on the studio floor, proving more laughable than it was formidable. Another approach, then, was needed, as it became clear that my creative instinct was several yards off the mark. We promptly shifted gears and I asked them to explore an entirely different method, using their bodies as percussives to signify the beginning of the spell. Hitting the record button on my phone and setting it on a nearby chair, what followed were over twenty minutes of rhythmic exploration. As I write this paper, listening to the recordings of this

rehearsal show a clear progression from what begins as a sound akin to horses clomping on cobblestones to a concrete, rhythmic, and sinister ritual. Both actors playing the Witches in charge of the percussion also had drumming experience in the past, and so they began to riff off of one another and find patterns within larger patterns, while the Witches delivering the text began to explore inserting Shakespeare's verse into the thumping cacophony that was generating in the studio.

Like our warm ups before, we conducted this new approach in the semi darkness of the studio as night fell outside, and I reflected in my journal that "we like to work creatively, like this, in the dark. Comfort there? Thematic?" Whatever it was, the darkness allowed our ears to attune to the pounding and slapping of hands and fists on blocks and floor, and the words of the spell gradually found their way into and around the rhythm, panting and hissing, building in intensity and volume until Macbeth's arrival promptly halted them. We would work for several more rehearsals fine-tuning this rhythm and the delivery of Shakespeare's text along with it, but it quickly became one of my favorite parts of the show to watch because it was so primeval in its nature and so spontaneous every night, infused with the creativity of the ensemble.

Our last addition to the staging, and the last process I will discuss as part of text-based devising, was the creation of the fights. In many ways, our method of conducting stage combat work became a product of working with actors who had already had extensive training, and a collective interest in managing our time efficiently. With so many competent actors I felt comfortable continuing to work with the majority of the ensemble while one or two worked together in a separate room to create the story of their fight. They would then return to the studio and we would work together, along with input from the rest of the ensemble, on finessing and addressing any safety issues in the combat scenes. Without a doubt this allowed actors to have more agency over

the stories of their fights—and therefore their characters—than if I had taught them all their own choreography; however, it also saved us valuable time in the rehearsal room. Where we did run into some issues was in the fine-tuning of some of the fights. Because so many actors had experience in stage combat, there were a variety of different suggestions and alternative options being voiced while polishing. So much so that we began losing the valuable time we had saved by crafting the fights independently. After several rehearsals encountering this I realized that this was another instance where our collaborative style of working was impeding us rather than propelling us forward, and I stepped in to take more of a leadership role in the finalizing of the fight choreography.

These sections of the play were incredibly rewarding and powerful to see developed and performed, as they were representations of actors' agency at its most successful. All members of the ensemble contributed to creating these theatrical moments in their own ways, and using their own skills, whether that was a knowledge of tempo or dance choreography or training in percussion and stage combat. These Renaissance men and women were taking their skills and applying them in real, practical ways to the art that they were creating, and in doing so crafting a production that was uniquely and intimately theirs.

### The Tech Rehearsals

As we neared our final days of rehearsal and finished the process of blocking *Macbeth* it became time to begin incorporating the technical elements into the show, and I subconsciously made a swift and firm transition from the director who was also a member of the ensemble to a director. It was not a transition I had been intending to make, however, the stresses of mounting the production in an increasingly shorter amount of time, partnered with the pressure of having this work be a result of my Master's thesis instilled in me a desire to re-harness the control that I had

slackened for a majority of the process. This is not to say that I became the dictatorial director that ordered and bossed my dedicated ensemble around, disrupting the ensemble environment we had so successfully nurtured, but it did mean that I became more efficient, more concerned with running cues and transitions than exploring, and more streamlined in my thoughts. This transition meant that we had reached the point in the process where we had completed our major explorations. The process was at a closure and we were beginning to prepare the product, which required the outside control of both director and stage manager.

The ensemble, for their own part, also embraced this new hierarchal approach to the process, and many of our tech rehearsal consisted of a group effort to prime and prep the space for our production. Each ensemble member lifted, dragged, and pulled the excess classroom material out of the studio and into the hallways multiple times that week, leaving no shortage of fire hazards in their wake. Some could be found outside painting the acting blocks with a fresh layer of paint, while my stage manager and I white-knuckled our way up a ladder to hang shining filament bulbs that descended across the playing space. Others took an inventory of costume pieces which, much like Shakespeare's men in their time, had been carefully selected from the collective wardrobes of the ensemble. Extension cords were snaked around the studio and taped down, connecting all sources of light back to the small ramshackle light board that had been created for our production of *Midsummer* the previous year, and a fog machine was placed under the Witches' mound, slowly filling the room with a murky haze.

Our tech rehearsals functioned as most traditionally do. My stage manager and I had seats at the makeshift booth to run lights and sounds, while the actors disappeared backstage for their entrances and exits. It was during this time that I sensed the clear divide taking place between us. We were now functioning within our respective roles; however, despite the delineation between stage

manager, director, and actors there was an acute sense of communal ownership over the production. We were witnessing scenes and moments come together that we had all, in some way, contributed to. We were taking the time and effort each night to clear the studio for a run and to put it back together again at the end of the day. All committed to making the production happen and all receiving a new appreciation for the work that often goes unseen by actors, the work that goes into creating the world that we inhabit.

### The Performances

The light at the end of the long tunnel of tech rehearsals was the fact that, once we opened on a Friday night towards the end of April, we no longer had to strike our set each night. It stayed, fully mounted, in the studio. Our performances, like our tech rehearsals, adopted the feel of a more traditional production. Actors checked their props, my stage manager and I ran light cues and checked the fog machine; we led group warm ups but even these were more traditional, of the physical and vocal variety, not the exploratory. As the actors disappeared into our backstage area, and my stage manager and I prepared to open the house, I took a moment to stare at the studio in front of us and appreciate how much we had done. The darkened room that was usually lit so brightly by fluorescent lights was almost unrecognizable. Empty chairs flanked the room, and whether they would be filled or not was anyone's guess. Filament bulbs glinted through the murk of the fog machine while other lights sat clipped to blocks and waiting behind platforms. The music of *The Witch* lingered beneath it all so that you knew, stepping into the studio, that you were entering a different world.

It would be unnecessary for me to recount our three performances in great detail, but what became clear after the first showing was that we had underestimated our audience sizes. The first

night just barely fit the waiting crowd, even with hastily added chairs, and so the period before our second performance was spent erecting another set of risers to add more elevated chairs to for the second and third performances. It is not possible to measure the success of a show in any scientific way; however, I find that these productions that are made from scratch, that are put together solely by an ensemble, and inspired purely by students and artists, have something intangible about them that resonates with audiences. There is the necessary ownership of the show that comes not only with acting in it, but also constructing the set, finding the costumes, and having an idea become a part of the production. There is a pride in knowing that what is being seen is yours, palpably yours, but that you are taking the opportunity to share it with others. Watching my ensemble share what was ours with audiences each night was every bit as fulfilling as I had hoped it would be, and the response of our audience, the pride I felt at our small group of Renaissance men and women, has stayed with me. Stayed with me long after we re-stacked the blocks in the corner of Studio One, long after precariously taking down the filament bulbs and placed them gently in boxes, after redistributing costume pieces and taking collective swigs from the closing night bottle of whiskey. After all, isn't that all we can ask, as audience members and as artists, of this most transient and impermanent art form? That it stays with us?



## CHAPTER FOUR: CREATIVE & CRITICAL RESPONSES

### Reflections on *Macbeth* by the Company

*“All the world’s a stage / And all the men and women merely players.”*  
-*As You Like It*, Act II, Scene vii

How do we measure success in the world of art, a world that is inherently subjective? Performances lauded by some are seen as uninspired by others, productions that left some audiences in tears see others leaving the theatre during intermission. It becomes increasingly difficult to quantify the worth and value of an artistic endeavor. However, for this project it was crucial that I not only offer my own personal reflections but also consider the thoughts and opinions of my ensemble of nine students. For one semester, the ten of us worked constantly, intimately, and tirelessly with one another to create this production; our moods on a given day were collectively felt, our willingness to commit directly influenced the commitment of others, and our successes and failures were shared experiences. Most significantly, eight of these members were approaching this production as actors. Having previously experienced this style of theatrical creation from the vantage point of an actor, I consider this approach to working as an extremely positive endeavor; however, there was no guarantee that other actors would feel the same way.

In an effort to measure the success of the theories I implemented during rehearsals, I decided to conduct post-production interviews with the nine members of my ensemble, including my stage manager. In this way, I hoped to allow the ensemble to reflect upon their experiences and decide for themselves whether they found the process helpful and beneficial as performers and theatre artists. Interviews were conducted at the ensemble members’ convenience through a

privately linked Google document that contained the same questions for all nine participants. Seven questions were short answer responses and were followed by twelve statements that the interviewee was then asked to rank along a scale of one to ten; one represented “I strongly disagree,” and ten represented “I strongly agree.” What follows is a sample of responses from the interviews I conducted with the ensemble compiled into a narrative that will explore the successes and the flaws of the thesis project.<sup>72</sup>

### Reflections from the Ensemble

The interview process began with a general question asking each ensemble member if they felt they had more agency in working on *Macbeth* than on more traditional productions. My stage manager, Tommy Heller, whose experience of the process, like mine, was removed in some ways from the performance aspect responded that “before working on this production of *Macbeth*, I worked on numerous productions at the collegiate level. Comparing the amount of creative expression other directors gave their actors . . . the ensemble of *Macbeth* had much more creative leeway and opportunity to contribute to more than just their own character analysis.”<sup>73</sup> His observations on an actor’s role in collegiate productions were echoed directly by several other actors, including ensemble member Sydney Walker, who noted that “in traditional productions I would manifest my own ideas of where I believe a character or scene should go but it would ultimately be the vision of the director,”<sup>74</sup> and actor Saniel Toribio who, in previous productions acknowledged that “my only job would be to bring ideas to my character(s) and relationships.”<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> See Appendix B for full transcriptions of the interviews.

<sup>73</sup> Tommy Heller (Stage Manager) in discussion with the author, December 26, 2016.

<sup>74</sup> Sydney Walker (Third Witch and Others) in discussion with the author, December 12, 2016.

<sup>75</sup> Saniel Toribio (First Witch and Others) ) in discussion with the author, January 10, 2017.

However, during *Macbeth*, most noted that an actor's responsibility and role in the process consisted, not merely of acting, but rather as actress Helena Whittaker put it, "every aspect of the design process: how the space should be arranged, what time period we were in, what we would wear, how we would move from scene to scene."<sup>76</sup> Discovering and utilizing actors' agency "started immediately within the first few days of rehearsals discussing the rehearsal process, set ideas, costumes, and the tone we wanted the play to have," remarked actress Amanda Tavaréz. "Instead of being told what all these things were going to be, it became a discussion between the entire cast."<sup>77</sup> Actor Sebastian Gonzalez saw it as "develop[ing] our own language of bringing ideas forward and how to communicate whether or not we liked them, if we wanted to explore them, or how we could reach for them."<sup>78</sup> This multi-faceted approach that required actors to think in broader and more creatively challenging ways led to "more work having to create my costume and collaborate with my team on building the set and aesthetics," wrote John Michael McDonald who played the part of Macbeth in our production, but because of this unique process he "felt more invested, not only in my own character and how he fits in this world, but with the entire play as a whole. It wasn't an environment where I show up, do my part and leave. It was an investment to the entire production as a whole."<sup>79</sup> Others, such as actress Victoria Gluchoski, described how the production allowed her to "[take] on the challenge[s] of choreographer, musician, dancer, concept, costume, and scenic designer."<sup>80</sup>

This collaboration by necessity was largely viewed positively. Ms. Whittaker concluded by saying "we took bits and pieces of everyone's thoughts and melded them together to form

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<sup>76</sup> Helena Whittaker (Banquo and Others) in discussion with the author, December 13, 2016.

<sup>77</sup> Amanda Tavaréz (Lady Macbeth) in discussion with the author, January 22, 2017.

<sup>78</sup> Sebastian Gonzalez (Malcolm and Others) in discussion with the author, January 31, 2017.

<sup>79</sup> John Michael McDonald (Macbeth) in discussion with the author, December 19, 2016.

<sup>80</sup> Victoria Gluchoski (Second Witch and Others) in discussion with the author, December 15, 2016.

something that we all took responsibility for,”<sup>81</sup> while Mr. Toribio reflected on how he “was able to open up about [his] ideas and accept the fact that some ideas are going to be better than others . . . Every choice made was for the sake of developing the production as strongly as possible.”<sup>82</sup> Ms. Tavaréz noted that “it was extremely rewarding to be a part of show where you were responsible for more than just yourself,”<sup>83</sup> and although Ms. Gluchoski acknowledged that the process occasionally “[became] frustrating and overwhelming” for her, she also stated that “it has been the most influential experience on my growth as a theatre professional thus far.”<sup>84</sup>

The following question asked the ensemble to reflect upon whether they thought this approach to theatre-making could be useful to other actors or whether it had felt like an isolated experience. Most agreed that it could be a useful approach, but there was some uncertainty over how it might be executed in a practical way. Ms. Walker stressed the importance of “show[ing] an actor how strong of a bond an ensemble can and should have. The fact that we were all able to create every element of this piece together morphed us into a family.”<sup>85</sup> Mr. Gonzalez described the process as “feel[ing] much more inclusive than usual. There is sense of equality among the company. This should be the goal.”<sup>86</sup> Others, such as Ms. Tavaréz, saw this type of theatre as a way of instilling actors with “an appreciation and a view into the other jobs that are involved in making a production, and how difficult the jobs of others are.”<sup>87</sup> Ms. Gluchoski’s response complemented Ms. Tavaréz’ by recognizing that “it’s deeply beneficial for an often self-absorbed actor (which makes sense given

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<sup>81</sup> Helena Whittaker (Banquo and Others) in discussion with the author, December 13, 2016.

<sup>82</sup> Sarel Toribio (First Witch and Others) ) in discussion with the author, January 10, 2017.

<sup>83</sup> Amanda Tavaréz (Lady Macbeth) in discussion with the author, January 22, 2017.

<sup>84</sup> Victoria Gluchoski (Second Witch and Others) in discussion with the author, December 15, 2016.

<sup>85</sup> Sydney Walker (Third Witch and Others) in discussion with the author, December 12, 2016.

<sup>86</sup> Sebastian Gonzalez (Malcolm and Others) in discussion with the author, January 31, 2017.

<sup>87</sup> Amanda Tavaréz (Lady Macbeth) in discussion with the author, January 22, 2017.

that our work is mostly inward) to have an understanding of what goes into the production process as a whole.”<sup>88</sup>

The problem arises in the implementation of this approach to theatre-making. Despite serving as a “playground for actors,”<sup>89</sup> there are practical reasons why this methodology may not always work outside of an educational setting. Mr. Heller recognized that

some theatre practitioners are not as open to collaboration or suggestion as others . . . this type of theatre can be important and satisfying but with the right group of people. I also think this type of theatre is easier to create for a small-scale production at the collegiate level. It might be hard to produce this kind of theatre with a big budget in a regional theatre simply because actors don’t have the skill set to construct large set pieces or program lights and don’t have a say in how a theatre space looks.<sup>90</sup>

Mr. Heller acknowledged that we were lucky to cast actors who were so willing to collaborate and take a nontraditional approach; however, he felt that much of the progress we made could have been stilted by actors who were less committed to this method of creation. Ms. Tavarez conversely argued that “this type of theatre I think is urgent for actors to experience at least once,” echoing the sentiments of others who felt that it was important for individuals to fully appreciate the work that goes into mounting a production, although no consensus was reached on whether this experience would be better suited to an educational or professional setting.

I was very keen to receive feedback on what my ensemble felt could have be improved in future implementations of this process, as I continue to be interested in exploring and developing many of the techniques that were germinated in *Macbeth*. A common thread ran throughout almost the entire ensemble on this response, and it centered around cast absences due to outside conflicts. Ms. Tavarez observed that “I could count on one of my hands the amount of times the entire cast

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<sup>88</sup> Victoria Gluchoski (Second Witch and Others) in discussion with the author, December 15, 2016.

<sup>89</sup> Helena Whittaker (Banquo and Others) in discussion with the author, December 13, 2016.

<sup>90</sup> Tommy Heller (Stage Manager) in discussion with the author, December 26, 2016.

was there for a whole rehearsal. There was an endless amount of conflicts that kept coming up and it . . . started to diminish the cast's energy and our growth.”<sup>91</sup> Ms. Walker and Ms. Gluchoski, both of whom were involved in another independent project up until tech rehearsals began, remarked on the effect these absences had on them as performers. Ms. Walker recalled that “we were running back and forth to two different worlds and it sometimes felt as if my mind was in two different places,”<sup>92</sup> while Ms. Gluchoski also felt that by being involved with two projects her “mind was confused by switching gears.”<sup>93</sup> Actors who were not dividing their time between two performances also felt the repercussions of absences during rehearsals, although in slightly different ways. Mr. Gonzalez noted that “I feel like we were the strongest when we could collaborate without having to end on, ‘Oh well when the rest of us meet, then we can discuss this further,’” and he “wonder[ed] how much stronger we could have been had we all showed up a little more.”<sup>94</sup> According to Ms. Tavarez, frequent absences often felt like “tak[ing] two strides forward and one leap back.”<sup>95</sup>

The other notable criticism of the process was a lack of structure, which Ms. Whittaker acknowledged “almost feels like an antithesis of the process,”<sup>96</sup> but others agreed the “lack of structure added to an unnecessary amount of anxiety and stress.”<sup>97</sup> Mr. Heller also acknowledged that he “wish[ed] that from the start there was a more cohesive or specific vision,” although his comments were more concerned with the performance than the process, suggesting that “with ten creative people having free-rein of how the show would work [it] was sometimes a little messy and

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<sup>91</sup> Amanda Tavarez (*Lady Macbeth*) in discussion with the author, January 22, 2017.

<sup>92</sup> Sydney Walker (*Third Witch and Others*) in discussion with the author, December 12, 2016.

<sup>93</sup> Victoria Gluchoski (*Second Witch and Others*) in discussion with the author, December 15, 2016.

<sup>94</sup> Sebastian Gonzalez (*Malcolm and Others*) in discussion with the author, January 31, 2017.

<sup>95</sup> Amanda Tavarez (*Lady Macbeth*) in discussion with the author, January 22, 2017.

<sup>96</sup> Helena Whittaker (*Banquo and Others*) in discussion with the author, December 13, 2016.

<sup>97</sup> John Michael McDonald (*Macbeth*) in discussion with the author, December 19, 2016.

occasionally resulted in a less-than-solid aesthetic.”<sup>98</sup> As a possible solution to this, Mr. McDonald suggested “that having a specific plan laid out for everyone at the first rehearsal can make [the] use of time more efficient.”<sup>99</sup>

Having learned what my ensemble wished had been different during the process, I also wanted to understand what they felt were the most difficult aspects of producing this type of theatre. Several referred to the ambiguity that comes without having a clear delineation between director and actor. Mr. Heller responded that “though ultimately the show was extremely good . . . there were some rehearsals where we were dwelling on a specific issue or aspect of production because of the fear of hurting feelings/making a final decision.”<sup>100</sup> Ms. Gluchoski agreed noting that “it was difficult to find the balance between free range and decision making,”<sup>101</sup> while Ms. Tavaréz saw the biggest difficulty as “trying to come to a consensus on things involving the play, due to there not ‘technically’ being a director.”<sup>102</sup> Others recognized more personal challenges in adapting to this type of process. For Ms. Whittaker it was “accessing parts of my creativity that I had not been called upon to access before . . . there was sort of a ‘this is not my job’ mentality that I had to fight because I often times did not feel creative enough, which frustrated me.”<sup>103</sup> Mr. Toribio also acknowledged feeling frustrated with his perceived limits on his creativity saying “I felt like I had the worst ideas regarding costumes especially.”<sup>104</sup> Citing the additional responsibilities and work that went into the project Mr. McDonald noted, in a significant change from traditional rehearsal processes, that he

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<sup>98</sup> Tommy Heller (Stage Manager) in discussion with the author, December 26, 2016.

<sup>99</sup> John Michael McDonald (Macbeth) in discussion with the author, December 19, 2016.

<sup>100</sup> Tommy Heller (Stage Manager) in discussion with the author, December 26, 2016.

<sup>101</sup> Victoria Gluchoski (Second Witch and Others) in discussion with the author, December 15, 2016.

<sup>102</sup> Amanda Tavaréz (Lady Macbeth) in discussion with the author, January 22, 2017.

<sup>103</sup> Helena Whittaker (Banquo and Others) in discussion with the author, December 13, 2016.

<sup>104</sup> Saniel Toribio (First Witch and Others) in discussion with the author, January 10, 2017.

“put a lot more time and effort into the entire thing as a whole which consumed my body, mind and spirit. It became exhausting. Though I loved every second of it.”<sup>105</sup>

Conversely, understanding what the most positive aspects of the experience had been for my ensemble was also crucial to further developing my ideas. The answers here were almost unanimous. Although the responses are individual and unique, they all revolve around the fact that “through the process, the ensemble grew to be more than just actors in a show together,”<sup>106</sup> they “created a bond so strong that I couldn’t even begin to sum [it up] into words.”<sup>107</sup> Each member of the ensemble recognized, in their own way, the powerful realization that “we all created this world together,”<sup>108</sup> an experience that

nobody will ever know outside of the cast . . . It was like being in a long-term relationship, where as traditional theatre is kind of like a one-night stand . . . We were so close as an ensemble we felt comfortable enough to discuss our own opinions and have disagreements. Also, when one person succeeded we all succeeded. It was never a jealous or cutthroat atmosphere and [we] did everything in our power to make sure everyone succeeded not just ourselves, because it was the production as a whole at stake, not just the characters we played.<sup>109</sup>

In describing what this ensemble relationship was to her, Ms. Whittaker offered that “we lifted each other up every night we performed . . . we set a standard for Studio productions that we originally did not set out to make . . . We turned a studio into a playground and created a compelling, heartbreaking, honest piece of theatre unlike Theatre UCF has ever done.”<sup>110</sup>

As this project was centered around providing actors with more opportunities to use their agency in the creative process, I wanted to end the short answer portion of my interview by asking

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<sup>105</sup> John Michael McDonald (Macbeth) in discussion with the author, December 19, 2016.

<sup>106</sup> Tommy Heller (Stage Manager) in discussion with the author, December 26, 2016.

<sup>107</sup> Victoria Gluchoski (Second Witch and Others) in discussion with the author, December 15, 2016.

<sup>108</sup> Sydney Walker (Third Witch and Others) in discussion with the author, December 12, 2016.

<sup>109</sup> Amanda Tavarez (Lady Macbeth) in discussion with the author, January 22, 2017.

<sup>110</sup> Helena Whittaker (Banquo and Others) in discussion with the author, December 13, 2016.



them the ways in which they felt they contributed to *Macbeth*. My stage manager, Mr. Heller “felt [his] largest contribution to this production was maintaining a positive energy.”<sup>111</sup> Ms. Whittaker was “a good listener and encourager for others,”<sup>112</sup> and Ms. Gluchoski’s “willingness to go big and to fail served as a method for us to make discoveries.”<sup>113</sup> Asking “questions about things some of us had already assumed were a certain way”<sup>114</sup> led Mr. Gonzalez and the ensemble to new approaches and reminded them not to take anything for granted. Ms. Walker spoke to her “love and respect for everyone’s ideas and art,”<sup>115</sup> while “being free and open to anything and everything”<sup>116</sup> served Mr. McDonald. Mr. Toribio admitted to feeling “behind in understanding the text work while it seemed like everyone else had a basic understanding,” but “what felt accomplishing for me was my willingness to open up to the ensemble and use their help to push me forward with my work . . . The day I shifted gears with my openness to work as a true ensemble member was the beginning of what would become my biggest contribution to the production.”<sup>117</sup> Ms. Tavaréz emphasized her teamwork, recalling that “I made it a priority of mine to work as team and to be there for my cast 100% whatever they needed, whether it was staying late to clean and rehearse or meeting outside of rehearsal, I was willing to do whatever I needed to do for my cast and the production.”<sup>118</sup> As varied in their responses as they are people, when asked to articulate what this experience meant in one word, my ensemble responded with transformative, illuminating, life-changing, compelling, unimaginable, rare, elaborate, and monumental.

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<sup>111</sup> Tommy Heller (Stage Manager) in discussion with the author, December 26, 2016.

<sup>112</sup> Helena Whittaker (Banquo and Others) in discussion with the author, December 13, 2016.

<sup>113</sup> Victoria Gluchoski (Second Witch and Others) in discussion with the author, December 15, 2016.

<sup>114</sup> Sebastian Gonzalez (Malcolm and Others) in discussion with the author, January 31, 2017.

<sup>115</sup> Sydney Walker (Third Witch and Others) in discussion with the author, December 12, 2016.

<sup>116</sup> John Michael McDonald (Macbeth) in discussion with the author, December 19, 2016.

<sup>117</sup> Saniel Toribio (First Witch and Others) in discussion with the author, January 10, 2017.

<sup>118</sup> Amanda Tavaréz (Lady Macbeth) in discussion with the author, January 22, 2017.

### Personal Reflections

There are many ways in which I could choose to analyze the success of *Macbeth*. That I even completed the production in the first place is, undoubtedly, a success. That we filled our audiences each night, even turning away more than thirty people on our closing performance, seemed to indicate success. Hearing that audience members felt as though the familiar classroom studio had been transformed into a different space, a palpably immersive and creative space, was a success. However, nothing has reaffirmed my belief in this project quite like reading the thoughtful and often challenging responses of my ensemble. At its core, this thesis was never about creating good theatre; it was never about developing a more successful theatrical experience for audience members—it was about the experiences of the performers. A process that provided my actors with the creative agency to explore, influence, and inspire one another as Renaissance men and women would be a successful process, and the words of my ensemble have proven to me that *Macbeth* was, indeed, a success.

I read through their responses to my questions with an initial trepidation that was soon dispersed as I recognized that nine other artists were articulating that fleeting and difficult to transcribe experience that I had sought to harness after *Midsummer*. Hearing them speak of creating a shared language, of the sense of trust and support that permeated the ensemble, and of the ownership they found over the work was more confirmation than the studio filled with applause or the complimentary Facebook posts that we had achieved what we set out to do. This success was not determined by my actions alone. In choosing my actors for this project, I had selected performers that had already proved they could use their agency in more traditional productions—performers who I knew were capable of making bold, intelligent choices, and who were unafraid to try and fail at something—but in many ways this project bolstered their inherent agency even further. It required them to use their agency in ways they were unsure they could succeed in, in ways

that did not always make them feel comfortable. However, it was impossible to sit at my booth and watch the show every night without seeing their agencies, their success, woven throughout the scenes—a gasp-inducing ribbon of blood streaming from Banquo’s mouth and into a silvery basin, nonexistent without the playful suggestion by Ms. Whittaker during rehearsal; a flowing black gown that parted at the thigh, the perfect shroud for Lady Macbeth, impossible if not discovered by Ms. Tavarez; the stage combat intricately crafted by Mr. Rousseau and Mr. McDonald, the seductive swarming of the three Witches that was the product of Ms. Walker, Ms. Gluchoski and Mr. Toribio’s collective efforts at creating a unified physical language, the opening tableau, a particularly helpful suggestion of Mr. Heller’s, and the delicate intimacy of Malcolm’s lament to his father, Duncan, that I could not have directed more effectively than Mr. Gonzalez portrayed. These are but several of many moments that came together to unify ten different individuals within one piece of art. Like Shakespeare’s Players they not only fulfilled their roles within the show, they made informed, creative choices that forced their partners to react, they pooled their talents, their weaknesses, and their resources together, and they created an experience that was uniquely theirs, palpably ours.

This is not to say that the entire process of *Macbeth* was effortless and comfortable for all involved. In fact, this type of intimate, collaborative work is rife for disagreement and conflict. In reading the critiques of the process from my actors the lack of structure and the difficulties of collaboration were highlighted. This is not to say that these issues are insurmountable or counterproductive, but rather they are unfamiliar to actors who have largely worked within a traditional model of theatre-making. As Rich Brown and John Weise stress in *Collaboration in Time*,

cooperation and collaboration are not the same;<sup>119</sup> the hierarchal structure of contemporary theatre does not always delineate between them, preventing theatre artists from understanding that difficult decisions, creative arguments, and communal solutions are not wastes of time or uncomfortable situations to be avoided, but an essential part of the collaborative process. In approaching this new mindset, it becomes essential then to choose actors who are capable and willing to do this type of work. I selected performers who I had some experience working with, or who were intrigued by the ideas behind my thesis, who were unafraid to take on additional responsibilities, and who were not only talented, but also humble enough to be able to work together as a collective. In productions in which other members of the creative team are constructing sets, hanging lights, and completing marketing, it is far easier for actors to become involved in the pettiness of talents and egos. When the weight and responsibility of the show is dispersed equally across the ensemble there is no room for pettiness: disagreements must be resolved, and a mutual trust and respect are essential to ensuring the success of the show. This was an essential part of our success, as even in the best conditions, not everyone involved in the ensemble always agreed or got along, but our commitment to one another allowed us to move forward and past our differences.

Of course, even with the most supportive, dedicated casts it can be difficult to form a trusting ensemble when jumping directly into blocking and scene-work. I discovered that those early warmups that arose by chance truly became the key to developing and growing that relationship before blocking rehearsals had even begun. Because the warmups provide the opportunity to communicate and interact *within* the world of the play but *without* the constraints of the text, they allow a director some control in how they are shaped. They can be crafted, as I often did, towards

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<sup>119</sup> Brown and Wiese, "Collaboration in Time: An Interdependent Production Process," 91.

accomplishing the practical goals of solving a staging problem or exploring a style of movement, but they can also be shaped in ways that allow actors to explore challenging moments or vulnerable emotions that take place in the play together as a group, rather than independently of one another. It was during these exploratory moments of frequently impressive intimacy and sometimes disturbing abandon that we learned to laugh at one another, cry with one another, but most importantly to trust in one another. From this exploration and trust came a collective language that could then be used throughout the process.

Also essential to the development of the ensemble is the presence of all members throughout the process. Absences not only disrupt the building of the ensemble during the warm ups, but they also prevent the more traditional blocking rehearsals from moving forward, putting additional strain on the ensemble when they must re-work or teach a section of the play to the absent member. Early in our process, I wrote in my journal that “the biggest complication so far is gathering everyone together at the same time.” Two members of our ensemble were involved in a second show concurrent with ours, two more had box office responsibilities that frequently overlapped with rehearsal time, and an additional two had outside jobs that occasionally caused them to arrive late. In order to work with the cast I wanted to work with, I knew that I would need to allow for absences and conflicts, and wrote in my journal that “I would rather negotiate and work with the people that I want to work with and trust.” Because so many of my actors knew one another as classmates before the production began their absences were less impactful to the creation of the ensemble than if we had been a group of strangers, but if attempting this model of rehearsal again I would be much keener on ensuring everyone’s availability for a majority of rehearsals.

Another factor in our success was that we provided enough time, not only for the development of the ensemble and to make up for absences, but also to allow the actors to discover

the play in an organic way. Discovering, rather than dictating specific theatrical moments and blocking led to beautiful breakthroughs by the ensemble, breakthroughs that may have been interrupted by a shorter rehearsal process. The added time became essential in allowing the world to grow around us, rather than fitting ourselves into a predetermined world of the play. Furthermore, the first weeks of rehearsal were something of a practice round for all involved, testing what worked and did not work for us in the creative process, and learning to trust our agency and one another. As time passed we became more and more comfortable with the structure of rehearsals and with productively using the creative language we had developed together.

In reaching the conclusion of my personal reflections on the process of *Macbeth*, I am struck most not by what I would do again, or what I could change or adapt. I am struck by the ways in which my ensemble changed my perception of the goal of the thesis itself. Each of them rose to meet the goal I had set, using their agencies and becoming Renaissance men and women in their own rights; however, unlike their historical Da Vincian counterparts who were masters of the largely solitary arts of painting, poetry, philosophy, sciences and astronomy, their mastery revolved around the theatre, decidedly un-solitary in its nature. In the planning and execution of this project I tended, ironically, to think of an actor's agency being unlocked by an individual—in this case myself, as the director—rather than by the collective. How could I, as the leader of this project, allow my actors to have more agency? Was I being too loose? Too strict? Was I putting too much weight on my preconceived notions of how the story should be told? These were questions I repeated constantly throughout the process; however, despite all my preoccupation with the directorial role I was playing, my individual choices and the affect they had on the actors were hardly mentioned during the post-production interviews.

What was mentioned, frequently and passionately, was the value of the ensemble. This has allowed me to reevaluate what truly promotes an actor's agency in the creative process—is it the permission of the director to utilize that agency, or is it the trust and relationships built within the ensemble that allow actors to unlock their agency and use it to its full potential? A dictatorial director cannot hope, nor does she wish, to see her actors utilizing their creative agency. So too, an actor that refuses to work creatively with other actors, or who feels they are more entitled than others in the process, is immediately destructive towards the utilization of agency within a cast. The truth, of course, lies in both. It lies in the concept of true collaboration. The theatrical Renaissance man cannot exist within a bubble; his agency is intrinsically connected and buoyed with the agencies of the artists around him. The individual feeds the collective, while the collective, in return, feeds the individual.

## **CONCLUSION: THE SIXTH ACT**

### **A Gesture towards the Future of Actor Agency**

*"This is the short and the long of it."*  
*-Merry Wives of Windsor, Act II, Scene ii*

If the concepts I have spoken of throughout this thesis seem commonsensical, or inherent to the craft of acting, that is because they are; they are also frequently forgotten, dismissed due to the constraints of the contemporary rehearsal processes, and the stifling belief that good theatre is only developed in a certain way. It is far easier, more comfortable, and less risky to create theatre that is boxed and wrapped before the start of the first rehearsal. There is no need to worry about the limitless possibilities of blocking, because the set design has been completed for months; there is no reason to ask your actors how they feel their character should look or dress, because the renderings have already been approved; no use in taking an unconventional or, heaven forbid, artistic approach to producing a show, because the blueprints of success have already been laid out by the Broadway runs and the National tours. This is theatre that is safe, this is theatre that is comfortable, and this is theatre that has lost its respect for the primacy of the actor.

With this loss of respect, actors lose the ability and freedom to utilize their agency in the process of theatrical creation. Without the repertory systems of the past, actors must travel from theatre to theatre to find work, often making it difficult to settle down or begin a life somewhere. This transient nature of the twenty-first century actor complicates our relationship with our art form: without an established location, actors are unable to serve their communities in ways that benefit both performer and audience member. Without familiar colleagues, actors are unable to voice important concerns and ideas about the types of stories they should be telling, and the diverse



voices they would like to bring to the stage. By ensuring the casts are selected later than the rest of the creative team in the rehearsal process, actors are stripped of many aspects of creativity and collaboration that the theatre is frequently lauded for. An already difficult profession is made more difficult by a system that values financial and critical success over determining a structure that provides for and nurtures its artists.

This is not to say that this style of theatre does not have its benefits, and indeed, many actors thrive off of the transitory and competitive nature of contemporary theatre. However, for those Renaissance men and women who yearn to be more intimately connected to their work, who itch for the opportunity to expand their artistry beyond the bounds of one particular craft, and who find success and pleasure in being surrounded by a familiar, supportive, and creatively challenging group of people, the need for new approaches to theatrical creation is real. It is my belief that the ensemble approach to theatre-making explored in this thesis, the approach that embraces and requires the use of its ensemble's agency, is a solution for artists who feel dejected and uninspired by the reigning hierarchal structure. So much of contemporary theatre is dictated by schedules, budgets, and commercial appeal; however, through this project my ensemble adopted a longer rehearsal schedule that still provided actors with the time to remain students and employees, we crafted a visual and atmospheric production from a budget of under five hundred dollars, and we staged a show that appealed so much to its audience that multiple members were turned away due to lack of seating. Most importantly, this project allowed a group of actors to feel fulfillment and ownership over their work in ways they had not been accustomed to feeling. It allowed them to unlearn the concept of cooperation rather than collaboration and provided them with useful communication and problem-solving tools. It created and strengthened real, human relationships which are, of course, essential to our work in the theatre.

It is my hope that the successes of this thesis can be expanded upon beyond a purely educational setting and into the world of professional theatre. From the shareholding companies of Shakespeare's time, the repertory theatres of early America, and the influential creations of the Group Theatre, this type of theatre has existed to varying degrees of success throughout history for a reason. What it now needs in our contemporary era is a rebirth, led by the Renaissance men and women of today who benefit and require it as a way of creative life. Only through their insistence of its necessity and value, not only for themselves as artists, but for the communities and audiences that they can provide for, will we begin to see a change in the educational and professional models that have existed comfortably as the status quo. In his book *The Empty Space*, Peter Brook claims that the actor "cannot reform his profession alone."<sup>120</sup> But I am not alone. No, a studio production of *Macbeth* produced by myself and nine college students does not restructure the nation's theatrical higher education, or burst down the commercial bastions of Broadway. It does not change the reality of directors who dictate instead of direct, or actors who would rather see their name on a billboard than spend an evening hanging lights. But ten more artists now understand the power of their creative agency. Ten more artists appreciate the lasting bonds that an ensemble can make. Ten more will not bite their tongues in a rehearsal when they have a suggestion. Ten more will be confident, and creative, and unafraid of the sticky, thorny, uncomfortable reality of collaboration. Ten more will don the titles of Renaissance men and women, think back on this process, and maybe wish that they could do it again. Ten more will do it again; and that sounds very much like success to me.

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<sup>120</sup> Brook, *The Empty Space*, 31.

**APPENDIX A:**  
**IRB APPROVAL FORM**



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board  
Office of Research & Commercialization  
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501  
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246  
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276  
[www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html](http://www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html)

### Approval of Exempt Human Research

From: UCF Institutional Review Board #1  
FWA00000351, IRB00001138

To: Kody James Grasset

Date: December 09, 2016

Dear Researcher:

On 12/09/2016, the IRB approved the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review: Exempt Determination  
Project Title: Rebirth of the Renaissance Man: Creating Actor Agency through Ensemble Theatre  
Investigator: Kody James Grasset  
IRB Number: SBE-16-12633  
Funding Agency:  
Grant Title:  
Research ID: N/A

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the [Investigator Manual](#).

On behalf of Sophia Dziegielewski, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gillian Amy Mary Morien".

Signature applied by Gillian Amy Mary Morien on 12/09/2016 09:57:57 AM EST

IRB Coordinator

**APPENDIX B:  
CAST INTERVIEWS**

## **Post Production MACBETH Interview With Amanda Tavarez**

- 1. At its core, this project is about increasing an actor's agency in the creative process of making theatre. As an actor, did you feel that you had more agency than you have had in traditional productions? If so, how did this manifest itself?**

I absolutely thought I had more agency in the creative process than I normally do or normally would have in any traditional theatre setting. It all started immediately within the first few days of rehearsals discussing the rehearsal process, set ideas, costumes, and the tone we wanted the play to have. Instead of being told what all these things were going to be, it became a discussion between the entire cast. We all did research and brought ideas to rehearsal to expand on with each other. A lot of these ideas later expanded and became final products of what our show became. As an actor it was extremely rewarding to be apart of show where you were responsible for more than just yourself.

- 2. Do you feel that this type of theatre-making can be important for other actors? Why, or why not?**

This type of theatre I think is urgent for actors to experience at least once. It's an experience I will never forget and it's because of all the things it taught me that a traditional theatre setting could not. It's important for actors, because it forces them to exercise their creativity and stretch their minds in more ways than thought possible. It also gives actors other outlets to express and expand their creativity and explore the script beyond the lines and the obvious. It also gives the actors an appreciation and a view into the other jobs that are involved into making a production and how difficult the jobs of others are. In my opinion, it keeps the actors humble and grateful for the production as a whole.

- 3. What do you wish you could change about the rehearsal process of MACBETH?**

One thing I wish I could change about the rehearsal process of MACBETH is the amount of cast absences. I could count on one of my hands the amount of times the entire cast was there for a whole rehearsal. There were an endless amount of conflicts that kept coming up and it really at one point started to diminish the cast's energy and our growth, because it felt at times we'd take two strides forward and one leap back. This process, although fun, is already a grueling and tedious process and the conflicts and absences only added to that.

- 4. What was the most difficult part of making this type of actor-generated and ensemble based theatre?**

I think the most difficult part of this was trying to come to a consensus on things involving the play, due to there not “technically” being a director. Sometimes it got a little tough trying to all be on the same page whether it was dance choreography, character work, blocking or direction in a scene.

**5. What was the most positive part of making this type of actor-generated and ensemble based theatre?**

The most positive part of making this would have to be the ensemble part. There was a such a bond and collaboration that nobody will ever know outside of the cast, and in the ways we pushed ourselves and bonded was truly something I'll take away with me forever. It was like being in a long-term relationship, where as traditional theatre is kind of like a one-night stand. With this ensemble based theatre it went deeper than surface level and casual chit-chatting. We were so close as an ensemble we felt comfortable enough to discuss our own opinions and have disagreements. Also, when one person succeeded we all succeeded. It was never a jealous or cutthroat atmosphere and did everything in our power to make sure everyone succeeded not just ourselves, because it was the production as a whole at stake, not just the characters we played.

**6. What do you feel were your biggest contributions to this production of MACBETH?**

I feel like my biggest contribution to this production was my teamwork. I feel like I made it a priority of mine to work as team and to be there for my cast 100% whatever they needed, whether it was staying late to clean and rehearse or meeting outside of rehearsal, I was willing to whatever I needed to do for my cast and the production. I tried to never be closed off even when rehearsal or warm-ups got intense, and I always tried to pitch ideas and collaborate.

**7. Use one word to describe what the experience of MACBETH was for you.**

MONUMENTAL

The following questions can be answered on a 1-10 scale, with 1 being “I strongly disagree” and 10 being “I strongly agree”

- I felt that my creative input was welcomed and incorporated into MACBETH: 10
- I felt that I contributed to the production in several ways other than acting: 10
- MACBETH made me think differently about the way we create theatre: 10
- MACBETH was a typical rehearsal and performance process for me: 2

- I grew as an actor/performer during the rehearsal and performance process of MACBETH: 10
- I felt that the rehearsal environment was a safe and open space to explore creatively: 10
- I felt uncomfortable voicing my opinions or thoughts during the rehearsal process: 1
- I enjoyed our warm up sessions and the times we worked away from the text: 10
- I felt frustrated by a lack of organization or directorial control: 5
- I felt part of an ensemble: 10
- I felt that we dedicated equal time to the text work and the devising work: 9
- I felt a sense of ownership over this production: 9



## **Post Production MACBETH Interview With Helena Whittaker**

- 1. At its core, this project is about increasing an actor's agency in the creative process of making theatre. As an actor, did you feel that you had more agency than you have had in traditional productions? If so, how did this manifest itself?**

Yes, definitely. We all brought in ideas about pretty much every aspect of the design process: how the space should be arranged, what time period we were in, what we would wear, how we would move from scene to scene. There was never a wrong answer. It helped the ensemble get excited from an early stage in the process for the possibilities that our production could have. We took bits and pieces of everyone's thoughts and melded them together to form something that we all took responsibility for.

- 2. Do you feel that this type of theatre-making can be important for other actors? Why, or why not?**

I think it is important for an actor to be heavily involved in the process. In most companies, actors are the last piece of the puzzle. The designs are set, the concept is made, and it is up to the actors to then fill in the blanks. That has been the standard model for years, and most actors thrive in that kind of environment regardless. However, I think when you let an actor engage those parts of their creativity that they're not used to implementing in the design process, you can open up a whole new world full of interesting options. It is a playground for actors.

- 3. What do you wish you could change about the rehearsal process of MACBETH?**

I would say structure, but that almost feels like an antithesis of the process. I guess what I could have desired would have been more of a clear outline of what was expected of us and when. We did have a rehearsal schedule, but because we were all busy people with separate lives and no grade attached to the project, other things got in the way and we fell off schedule several times. Although we all took the project seriously, because the stakes were not as high as our grades (for example) it sometimes felt as if some of us were putting it on the back burner.

- 4. What was the most difficult part of making this type of actor-generated and ensemble based theatre?**

Accessing parts of my creativity that I had not been called upon to access before. As an undergrad, we are assigned production tasks, but we are never asked to come up with an entire production or imagine and create solid plans for a show. There was sort of a “this is not my job” mentality that I had to fight because I often times did not feel creative enough, which frustrated me.

**5. What was the most positive part of making this type of actor-generated and ensemble based theatre?**

I think the end result was more than any of us could have ever dreamed it would be. We turned a studio into a playground and created a compelling, heartbreaking, honest piece of theatre unlike Theatre UCF has ever done. I think we set a standard for Studio productions that we originally did not set out to make. For me, personally, I got to see once again the value of a good ensemble. The way we cut the show made it entire ensemble based, and we lifted each other up every night we performed.

**6. What do you feel were your biggest contributions to this production of MACBETH?**

I don't know if I contributed anything tactile to the production - I had several ideas that I brought to the table, which morphed and meshed with others to create our production. I think I was a good listener and encourager for others. I was willing to try things even if inside I felt silly doing them or knew that there was a stronger choice. I was eager to create something with a group of people whom I loved. I did bring muffins, once.

**7. Use one word to describe what the experience of MACBETH was for you.**

Illuminating.

The following questions can be answered on a 1-10 scale, with 1 being “I strongly disagree” and 10 being “I strongly agree”

- I felt that my creative input was welcomed and incorporated into MACBETH: 10
- I felt that I contributed to the production in several ways other than acting: 8

- MACBETH made me think differently about the way we create theatre: 10
- MACBETH was a typical rehearsal and performance process for me: 5
- I grew as an actor/performer during the rehearsal and performance process of MACBETH: 10
- I felt that the rehearsal environment was a safe and open space to explore creatively: 10
- I felt uncomfortable voicing my opinions or thoughts during the rehearsal process: 1
- I enjoyed our warm up sessions and the times we worked away from the text: 10
- I felt frustrated by a lack of organization or directorial control: 4
- I felt part of an ensemble: 10
- I felt that we dedicated equal time to the text work and the devising work: 10
- I felt a sense of ownership over this production: 10

## **Post Production MACBETH Interview With Johnmichael McDonald**

- 1. At its core, this project is about increasing an actor's agency in the creative process of making theatre. As an actor, did you feel that you had more agency than you have had in traditional productions? If so, how did this manifest itself?**

Absolutely. In past productions I focused on the text and my relationships within the play. I focused on creating characters and developing voice/movement/status etc... but this production allowed me to do that while at the same time think about how my character fits into the world of the play that I have also had a say in. It was more work having to create my costume and collaborate with my team on building the set and aesthetics but because of that process, I felt more invested not only in my own character and how he fits in this world but with the entire play as a whole. It wasn't an environment where I show up, do my part and leave. It was an investment to the entire production as a whole.

- 2. Do you feel that this type of theatre-making can be important for other actors? Why, or why not?**

Yes. I found that I learned more about the process of building a show that helped me understand the level of importance all aspects of the theatre are and not just my acting.

- 3. What do you wish you could change about the rehearsal process of MACBETH?**

I would have changed the scheduling. I felt at times due to our diverse schedules, the rehearsal process was not structured as well as it could have been and I feel that lack of structure added to an unnecessary amount of anxiety and stress. I also felt in the beginning of the process things were a little sporadic and undefined and I feel that having a specific plan laid out for everyone at the first rehearsal can make use of time more efficient.

- 4. What was the most difficult part of making this type of actor-generated and ensemble based theatre?**

The hardest part was the level of commitment to the show. I feel this type of theatre can work at its best if the entire cast is on board and full-time from the start. Because it wasn't a show where I show up and just do my part, I put a lot more time and effort into the entire thing as a whole which consumed my body, mind and spirit. It became exhausting. Though I loved every second of it.

**5. What was the most positive part of making this type of actor-generated and ensemble based theatre?**

Ironically enough, the level of commitment from the entire cast and incredible bond we created through that commitment made this experience unforgettable, passionate and beautiful.

**6. What do you feel were your biggest contributions to this production of MACBETH?**

Honestly I feel my biggest contributions were being free and open to anything and everything. I feel I added ideas, accepted rejection as well as success on many accounts. I was willing to work hard and work well with others with little to no complications and I feel that having that open mindset is what was needed for a show like this.

**7. Use one word to describe what the experience of MACBETH was for you.**

Unimaginable.

The following questions can be answered on a 1-10 scale, with 1 being “I strongly disagree” and 10 being “I strongly agree”

- I felt that my creative input was welcomed and incorporated into MACBETH: 10
- I felt that I contributed to the production in several ways other than acting: 10
- MACBETH made me think differently about the way we create theatre: 10
- MACBETH was a typical rehearsal and performance process for me: 1
- I grew as an actor/performer during the rehearsal and performance process of MACBETH: 10
- I felt that the rehearsal environment was a safe and open space to explore creatively: 10
- I felt uncomfortable voicing my opinions or thoughts during the rehearsal process: 1
- I enjoyed our warm up sessions and the times we worked away from the text: 10
- I felt frustrated by a lack of organization or directorial control: 5
- I felt part of an ensemble: 10

- I felt that we dedicated equal time to the text work and the devising work: 7
- I felt a sense of ownership over this production: 10

## **Post Production MACBETH Interview With Sariel Toribio**

- 1. At its core, this project is about increasing an actor's agency in the creative process of making theatre. As an actor, did you feel that you had more agency than you have had in traditional productions? If so, how did this manifest itself?**

The process I had during the rehearsals for MACBETH was exceptionally different than any other production I have ever done. What made it so much more different was the consistent professionalism in collaboration for creating all the elements of the production without having the assistance from people who specialize in designing, for example, a set. In other words, we all put our minds together to create every single element in the production. At the beginning of the process, I was very confused and closed off by the idea of all of us throwing out ideas until the best one came along. In traditional productions, I would be the actor, and my only job would be to bring ideas to my character(s) and relationships. If I had an idea about, for instance, where a set piece would be placed, I would not be allowed to say it or my idea would not really matter because somebody already has the job on where to put the set pieces. With this production, I was able to open up about my ideas and accept the fact that some ideas are going to be better than others regardless if it was mine or not, and that is okay. Every choice made was for the sake of developing the production as strongly as possible.

- 2. Do you feel that this type of theatre-making can be important for other actors? Why, or why not?**

The thing I find most important when it comes to productions in theatre is collaboration. What Kody Grassett's production of MACBETH taught me as an actor is that precise and crisp ensemble work is so much more accomplishing than figuring things out alone or being the star of the show. In my eyes, no one was left out in the creation of things like the dance number or the fight choreographies. Sure, there were some conflicts in ideas and discussions but that is more than expected. This type of theatre-making, which especially included discussions with differences in opinion, can help actors learn to discuss art without taking it out of hand. With every conflict, I felt like we all kept it professional and considerate.

- 3. What do you wish you could change about the rehearsal process of MACBETH?**

The main thing that caused most of us to stress was the time conflicts which involved some of us missing rehearsals. During the first month or so of the rehearsals, there was never a night where the whole cast was at rehearsals. Majority of the rehearsals consisted of group exercises and experiments with the body. These rehearsals were extremely essential to the growth of the ensemble, but some people had to miss out on these nights. It made me feel bad that they were not on the same page with the ensemble the following rehearsal. I also missed some rehearsals due to working box office and a short film I was in. I felt terrible for having these conflicts while the rehearsal process for this show was so juicy.

**4. What was the most difficult part of making this type of actor-generated and ensemble based theatre?**

I cannot speak for the entire team, but I do not have experience in designing a show's costumes, set, lighting, etc. During the middle of the process, Kody would ask us to bring ideas for a certain element of the show on a curtain night. We would discuss these ideas and see how it could work. I felt like I had the worst ideas regarding costumes especially. Also, one of the most difficult parts was putting together the set every night and putting it all away afterwards. Sometimes these would involve injuries, especially with the feet.

**5. What was the most positive part of making this type of actor-generated and ensemble based theatre?**

Nothing felt more accomplishing than contributing to an ensemble piece. Whenever I felt like I was behind in the process, my fellow cast members, who were absolutely incredible, would motivate me push harder and understand the world of the play more clearly. We all were keeping the pillar stable, no hand was left out in the process.

**6. What do you feel were your biggest contributions to this production of MACBETH?**

At the beginning, I had felt like I was very behind in understanding the text work while it seemed like everyone else had a basic understanding. Sometimes, this discouraged me, but I did not want to slow the ensemble down. I remember spending weeks trying to develop ideas for my emotionally heavy scenes before we got to work on it in rehearsals. I also never put all of it on my back. What felt accomplishing for me was my willingness to open up to the ensemble and use their help to push me forward with my work. I remember speaking to Kody about how I could make Macduff's emotional breakdown on the path to his direction, and I felt very confused. I went to other cast members as well for help throughout the process. As a witch, I only ever had fun with it, and with that, I will always be proud of my work as brought to the table as Witch #1. The day I shifted gears with my openness to work as a true ensemble member was the beginning of what would become my biggest contribution to the production.

**7. Use one word to describe what the experience of MACBETH was for you.**

Rare.

The following questions can be answered on a 1-10 scale, with 1 being "I strongly disagree" and 10 being "I strongly agree"

- I felt that my creative input was welcomed and incorporated into MACBETH: 9
- I felt that I contributed to the production in several ways other than acting: 8



- MACBETH made me think differently about the way we create theatre: 10
- MACBETH was a typical rehearsal and performance process for me: 2
- I grew as an actor/performer during the rehearsal and performance process of MACBETH: 8
- I felt that the rehearsal environment was a safe and open space to explore creatively: 10
- I felt uncomfortable voicing my opinions or thoughts during the rehearsal process: 4
- I enjoyed our warm up sessions and the times we worked away from the text: 9
- I felt frustrated by a lack of organization or directorial control: 3
- I felt part of an ensemble: 10
- I felt that we dedicated equal time to the text work and the devising work: 6
- I felt a sense of ownership over this production: 10

## **Post Production MACBETH Interview With Sydney Walker**

- 1. At its core, this project is about increasing an actor's agency in the creative process of making theatre. As an actor, did you feel that you had more agency than you have had in traditional productions? If so, how did this manifest itself?**

In traditional productions I would manifest my own ideas of where I believe a character or scene should go but it would ultimately be the vision of the director. Most directors enjoy hearing out our ideas however they rarely take them. With Macbeth Kody took our ideas and allowed us to build on top of them. We all had a voice and they were not just listened too they were put into action. Most of the time as an actor you have no choice over your costume or set design but in this case we did. We created it together. Bouncing ideas off of each other and figuring out what worked for us as a group.

- 2. Do you feel that this type of theatre-making can be important for other actors? Why, or why not?**

It is extremely important it shows an actor how strong of a bond an ensemble can and should have. The fact that we were all able to create every element of this piece together morphed us into a family. As cheesy as that sounds, but we were together with the trial and errors with the ideas that were brilliant and the ideas that failed hard. We not only focused on the acting we focused on the entire production and that shows an actor a part of theatre that many actors do not get to experience.

- 3. What do you wish you could change about the rehearsal process of MACBETH?**

During the time of MACBETH I was also in another production and so was one other actor. We were running back and forth to two different worlds and it sometimes felt as if my mind was in two different places and I took away from our growth as an ensemble by missing time. Our schedule were so hectic and we all had to miss out on precious rehearsal time and it set us back sometimes. Especially when it came to key dance moves we created. We would spend an entire rehearsal solidifying the dance or a scene and someone who missed rehearsal would come in and completely change it. It was disheartening because we felt as if that time was wasted.

- 4. What was the most difficult part of making this type of actor-generated and ensemble based theatre?**

Our schedules not matching up. That is such an important part because when we are missing one person it throws off the entire flow. I believe we worked with it really well and the outcome was phenomenal but it got frustrating at times.

**5. What was the most positive part of making this type of actor-generated and ensemble based theatre?**

That we all created this world together. That all of us came together and were fully invested in this world.

**6. What do you feel were your biggest contributions to this production of MACBETH?**

Oh my god. This stresses me out. I don't know! My love and respect for every ones ideas and art? That was lame shit I don't know.

**7. Use one word to describe what the experience of MACBETH was for you.**

life-changing  
(that is one word Idc what you say)

The following questions can be answered on a 1-10 scale, with 1 being "I strongly disagree" and 10 being "I strongly agree"

- I felt that my creative input was welcomed and incorporated into MACBETH: 10!!!
- I felt that I contributed to the production in several ways other than acting: 8
- MACBETH made me think differently about the way we create theatre: 10
- MACBETH was a typical rehearsal and performance process for me: -0
- I grew as an actor/performer during the rehearsal and performance process of MACBETH: 10
- I felt that the rehearsal environment was a safe and open space to explore creatively: 10
- I felt uncomfortable voicing my opinions or thoughts during the rehearsal process: 1
- I enjoyed our warm up sessions and the times we worked away from the text: 10
- I felt frustrated by a lack of organization or directorial control: 1
- I felt part of an ensemble: 10

- I felt that we dedicated equal time to the text work and the devising work: 10
- I felt a sense of ownership over this production: um this question confuses me because I feel like we all came together and created this so yea I guess? Because if we were not all there it would not have become what it was

## **Post Production MACBETH Interview With Tommy Heller**

- 1. At its core, this project is about increasing an actor's agency in the creative process of making theatre. As an actor, did you feel that you had more agency than you have had in traditional productions? If so, how did this manifest itself?**

I was not an actor in this production; however, I will comment on both my observations and personal experience. Before working on this production of *Macbeth*, I worked on numerous productions at the collegiate level. Comparing the amount of creative expression other directors gave their actors to the amount Mr. Grassett provided his cast, the ensemble of *Macbeth* had much more creative leeway and opportunity to contribute to more than just their own character analysis. Actors helped determine the orientation of the playing space, blocking, employment of technical elements, and character motivation. As a stage manager, I had a much larger amount more of creative input than most do. Now, this was my second show with Mr. Grassett so I already had a certain amount of trust and a stronger bond than some stage managers have with their directors, but I also contributed to the creative process. While stage managers typically sit at their tables taking notes, I was always engaged in the textual analysis and blocking as well. Mr. Grassett did a wonderful job at incorporating the stage manager into the creative process (though I'm probably more outspoken and creative than most stage managers I've worked with).

- 2. Do you feel that this type of theatre-making can be important for other actors? Why, or why not?**

After working on this show, I began to try to employ a more collaborative style into other shows I worked on (whether I was the stage manager, assistant director, or director). Sometimes it worked and the actors really loved it, other times not so much. Though I am an outsider looking in since I am not an actor, I think it's important to recognize which actors want to engage in this style and which do not. The ensemble of *Macbeth* was wonderful at recognizing each other's strengths. Furthermore, Mr. Grassett was smart in his casting – he formed a group of actors willing to contribute in all aspects of production. While I found this process rewarding and would highly recommend this style of theatre to most of my colleagues, some theatre practitioners are not as open to collaboration or suggestion as others. Depending on where they receive their training, some actors are taught to serve as puppets fleshing out the director's vision, while other actors are simply argumentative and linear. I think this type of theatre can be important and satisfying but with the right group of people. I also think this type of theatre is easier to create for a small-scale production at the collegiate level. It might be hard to produce this kind of theatre with a big budget in a regional theatre simply because actors don't have the skill set to construct large set pieces or program lights and don't have a say in how a theatre space looks.

- 3. What do you wish you could change about the rehearsal process of MACBETH?**

I wish that from the start there was a more cohesive or specific vision. While I understand the purpose of this production was to create the whole thing together, I was unsure what the feel of this show would be. My non-theatre major roommate came to see the show, and I think it's important to hear feedback from people who are not involved in the arts. After the show, we were talking about what he liked and didn't like, and he said that he wasn't sure what the world of this play was (he did not say that exactly, so I'm theatre-translating for him). One minute we were hearing music from *The Witch*, a horror movie set in colonial times, and the next sound we hear just a few moments later is music by Lana Del Rey, a contemporary alternative artist. While both of these moments exclusively were super cool, they didn't quite work well together. Though that was performance, I think it ties back to what about the rehearsal process I would change. I wouldn't say there were too many cooks necessarily, but I did think with ten creative people having free-rein of how the show would work was sometimes a little messy and occasionally resulted in a less-than-solid aesthetic.

**4. What was the most difficult part of making this type of actor-generated and ensemble based theatre?**

The most difficult part of this approach to creating theatre is defining when the director makes the decision and when the door is open for collaboration. Though ultimately the show was extremely good (I'm allowed to say that, right?), there were some rehearsals where we were dwelling on a specific issue or aspect of production because of the fear of hurting feelings/making a final decision. If I were to direct an entire production this way, I would make it clear when we finalize things and when something is open for discussion. Now, I am not saying that anything should ever be final in the middle of the rehearsal process. Rehearsal is for playing; however, I felt sometimes we would decide something, then one person would have a new suggestion. When it came to crunch time, there could potentially be a list of never-ending suggestions unless there is some set of "rules" put into place. On the same token, by establishing those rules, you make the actors feel like you are inhibiting their creative contributions, which in turn could have a negative effect. It's a tricky situation, but I think it would be best to play it by ear and establish those rules and approach the situation dependent on the ensemble and their needs.

**5. What was the most positive part of making this type of actor-generated and ensemble based theatre?**

The most positive part of this approach to creating theatre is reflected in the performances, I think. While the entire process was really fun and worthwhile, I argue the show was so solid (again, am I allowed to say this?) because through the process, the ensemble grew to be more than just actors in a show together. Because they genuinely cared about one another and each of them had a say in how the production worked, they *really* cared about the show, thus resulting in a better show. Though *Macbeth* has two very obvious leads, with this production and the approach we took, if one of the members of the ensemble did not pull their weight or did not care about the production, it would not have worked.

**6. What do you feel were your biggest contributions to this production of MACBETH?**

Other than the whole original opening sequence (winky face), I felt my largest contribution to this production was maintaining a positive energy, which is sort of the stage manager's job anyway. There were a few tense moments in rehearsal, but I felt I (more often than not) helped resolve those moments. I wanted to make sure even if we all got frustrated that no one left rehearsal angry or upset. I would always ask how everyone was doing or feeling and would negate any negative energy through smiles and indirect suggestions to the ensemble and director. Because the whole purpose of this project was to create an ensemble-based piece of theatre, I felt it was important there was someone in the room whose job it was to make sure everyone was having a good time. This is also came into play with the director, Mr. Grassett. If he was having a problem with the ensemble or the way a rehearsal had gone, I would ensure I dealt with that issue. I did not want the cast to ever have a reason to resent or be angry with their director, so I sometimes played the bad guy, which (tooting my own horn) I think I'm pretty good at because it's followed by a positive comment or compliment. I always tried to 'lay down the law' with a smile to ensure everyone was enjoying their time at rehearsal (which is why I made jokingly bad suggestions – one, because I think the best way to a good idea is to pitch bad ones, and two, to make people laugh). This isn't to say that people did not enjoy the process or that Mr. Grassett carried a negative energy because both of those statements are false, but all shows have rehearsals where things are weird and people aren't on the same page. I wanted to make sure those moments never lasted too long.

**7. Use one word to describe what the experience of MACBETH was for you.**

I hate questions like this, but I'd have to say: Transformative.

The following questions can be answered on a 1-10 scale, with 1 being "I strongly disagree" and 10 being "I strongly agree"

- I felt that my creative input was welcomed and incorporated into MACBETH: 8
- I felt that I contributed to the production in several ways other than acting: 10 (obviously)
- MACBETH made me think differently about the way we create theatre: 10
- MACBETH was a typical rehearsal and performance process for me: 3
- I grew as an actor/performer during the rehearsal and performance process of MACBETH: N/A
- I felt that the rehearsal environment was a safe and open space to explore creatively: 9

- I felt uncomfortable voicing my opinions or thoughts during the rehearsal process: 1
- I enjoyed our warm up sessions and the times we worked away from the text: 10
- I felt frustrated by a lack of organization or directorial control: 3
- I felt part of an ensemble: 10
- I felt that we dedicated equal time to the text work and the devising work: 9
- I felt a sense of ownership over this production: 10



## **Post Production MACBETH Interview With Victoria Gluchoski**

- 1. At its core, this project is about increasing an actor's agency in the creative process of making theatre. As an actor, did you feel that you had more agency than you have had in traditional productions? If so, how did this manifest itself?**

I would absolutely say that my artistic freedom peaked during the production of Macbeth. In addition to creating developing multiple characters as an actor, I also took on the challenge of choreographer, musician, dancer, concept, costume, and scenic designer. While at times the process could become frustrating and overwhelming, it has been the most influential experience on my growth as a theatre professional thus far. Since we were creating the world as an ensemble, and living in it, the production felt whole.

- 2. Do you feel that this type of theatre-making can be important for other actors? Why, or why not?**

Being well-rounded at any profession is far better than being a 'one trick pony'. It's deeply beneficial for an often self-absorbed actor (which makes sense given that our work is mostly inward) to have an understanding of what goes into the production process as a whole.

- 3. What do you wish you could change about the rehearsal process of MACBETH?**

I'm sure this resonates with you Kody, but certainly the fact that so many of us had conflicts that you had to work around and nearly all of our rehearsals were broken with members missing. Myself being a big reason for that, I was absent so frequently being focused on another show that often time my mind was confused by switching gears. While I loved what we created, it would have been great to have been creating with everyone every night.

- 4. What was the most difficult part of making this type of actor-generated and ensemble based theatre?**

Trying to make decisions. Differing opinions obviously caused some delay in the process, which was expected. Even with you serving as a sort of director, it was difficult to find the balance between free range and decision making.

- 5. What was the most positive part of making this type of actor-generated and ensemble based theatre?**

Never has a production given me such fulfillment and pride as Macbeth did. The ensemble created a bond so strong that I couldn't even begin to sum into words. We expanded our creative minds on a nightly basis. I am beyond blessed to have experienced it.

**6. What do you feel were your biggest contributions to this production of MACBETH?**

I think my willingness to go big and to fail served as a method for us to make discoveries. I am certainly not a choreographer let alone a dancer, but when it came time to finding what worked for us, I would strive to find a solution. I would say this mentally was prevalent amongst the whole cast, which is why the ensemble was solid as a rock.

**7. Use one word to describe what the experience of MACBETH was for you.**

Compelling

The following questions can be answered on a 1-10 scale, with 1 being "I strongly disagree" and 10 being "I strongly agree"

- I felt that my creative input was welcomed and incorporated into MACBETH: 10
- I felt that I contributed to the production in several ways other than acting: 10
- MACBETH made me think differently about the way we create theatre: 7
- MACBETH was a typical rehearsal and performance process for me: 1
- I grew as an actor/performer during the rehearsal and performance process of MACBETH: 10
- I felt that the rehearsal environment was a safe and open space to explore creatively: 10
- I felt uncomfortable voicing my opinions or thoughts during the rehearsal process: 1
- I enjoyed our warm up sessions and the times we worked away from the text: 10
- I felt frustrated by a lack of organization or directorial control: 9
- I felt part of an ensemble: 10
- I felt that we dedicated equal time to the text work and the devising work: 8
- I felt a sense of ownership over this production: 10

**APPENDIX C:  
PRODUCTION PHOTOS**



*Figure 1: Production photos 1/2*



*Figure 2: Production photos 2/2*

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