Building the Container of the Room:

Ethics, Power, Enacted Values, and Production Dramaturgy

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Abstract

This written document supports and references Charles (Charlie) Peters' thesis work, a theatre production of Mary Zimmerman's *The Secret in the Wings* presented as part of the 2021 Studio Theatre season on which the author worked as production dramaturg. Peters uses this production as a case-study to reflect on the production dramaturg's role and to explore power dynamics in mainstream theatrical rehearsal processes. The document explores the possibilities for director-dramaturg collaboration, articulating some of the possibilities for grounding this work in a commitment to embodied ethics especially via analyses of power dynamics and a commitment to the living out of articulated values.

Beginning with an exploration of ethical concerns in contemporary theatre making, the first chapter discusses the role of the production dramaturg generally and then in relation to ethics and *The Secret in the Wings* more specifically. The chapter then outlines two processes employed on the aforementioned production: a power literacy analysis and a values document. The power literacy work is based on a framework created by Goodwill and Kennisland for use by participatory designers while the values work is inspired by Algonquin and Irish theatre artist Yvette Nolan. The second chapter analyzes the many production dramaturgy tasks Peters undertook for *The Secret in the Wings* through the lens of how they were informed by the insights offered by these two processes. This chapter includes a summary of interviews undertaken with members of the production team which offer multiple perspectives on the process. The final chapter focuses on audience engagement practices that were undertaken for

The Secret in the Wings and how they were informed by ethical considerations surrounding artist-audience relations as well as the values articulated for the creative process.

Without making universal claims about theatrical processes, production dramaturgy, or audience engagement, Peters includes reflections on successes, limitations, and possible future adaptations of the dramaturgical and ethical thinking carried out on *The Secret in the Wings*.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Charles (Charlie) Peters. The interviews with members of the creative team of *The Secret in the Wings* received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name "Equitable and Anti-Oppressive Performance Creation: Understanding Current Practice and Visioning Future Possibilities", No. Pro00103343, September 14, 2020.

Interviews with Yvette Nolan were conducted as part of an undergraduate research project for WGST 312 at the University of Saskatchewan in 2018 under the supervision of Dr. Pricilla Settee which received ethics approval from that institution's Research Ethics Office.

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To my late mother, Lynne Higgins, who has shaped and inspired me in ways I am still discovering…

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I am indebted to Yvette Nolan in more ways than I can count. She has always been willing to share and to teach during interviews, during coffee dates, and in the midst of creative processes. She is unfailingly courageous, generous, and tolerant while embodying strength of character, patience, humility, and wisdom. She truly lives her values.

Finally, I must thank Elizabeth Hobbs, whose thesis work was directing the play *The Secret in the Wings* for which I provided production dramaturgy as my own thesis project. Without her, none of this would have been possible. She and the wonderful Josh Languedoc took me in early in my graduate studies and our "Harry Potter Trio" (I'm Hermione) defined my grad

school experience. More to the point, I have truly learned what collaboration means by being in-process with Liz. In so many ways we rode out the COVID-19 pandemic together: personally, creatively, and academically. I am beyond thankful to know and to work with her. There are no words.

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Introduction

"tiny things build the container of the room so people can feel well enough to do the work"
-Yvette Nolan (Zoom)

Though my thesis work originates in dissatisfaction, it strives for justice, joy, discovery, and fulfilment. As an emerging artist entering the theatre, I bore witness to practices, attitudes, and ways of working which I found distasteful, unethical, and even dangerous. While I was fortunate to avoid what might be termed "the worst of it," friends and colleagues confided stories of everything from disregard to exploitation to outright abuse. Unsurprisingly, these stories came disproportionately from women, queer, and racialized colleagues. These are not my stories to share, but they have been highly influential in motivating me to undertake this creative research.

I came of age as a theatre artist in an era of increasing awareness of the prevalence of problematic practices in the theatre community. My early years as a working artist were coloured by a profession wrestling with its own complicity in light of the #metoo movement and the MacArthur report on equity (or lack thereof) in Canadian theatre. It was also a time when the practice of land acknowledgments was becoming more widespread—in ways that were sometimes radical and sometimes merely performative acts papering over the theatre's complicity in Canada's ongoing occupation of land, breaking of treaties, and exploitation of Indigenous children via the so-called child welfare system (to name but a few atrocities). More recently, the theatre has been confronted with its longstanding racism via the surge Black Live Matter has made into the cultural zeitgeist. These movements and the distasteful realities to which they are responding have been, in many ways, my welcome into the profession of the theatre. I make no claim that my work can address all of these huge problems, only that they

inform my desire for more just and equitable creative practices. This project is most concerned with the micro-level of the rehearsal room where macro socio-political forces play out in embodied, inter- and intra-personal ways. Though all things are interrelated and influence each other, this project's scope is the micro-level of practice.

The theatre processes I have experienced have not all been bad. I have been privileged to find myself in some wonderful rooms that prioritized the wellbeing of the artists involved. I have been especially inspired by the work of Algonquin and Irish theatre artist Yvette Nolan whose influence permeates these pages. Hers and other equally inspiring processes are attentive to and respectful of everyone involved, even—and perhaps especially—while creating challenging work. To achieve this, Nolan consciously "build[s] the container of the room so people can feel well enough to do the work" (Zoom). It is this conscious building of the room that I have aimed to explore in my thesis work.

The contrast between Nolan's working methods and less empowering processes of creation led me to question what was so different about these spaces and these ways of working. Motivated by a desire to better understand what made some processes so destructive and others so empowering for artists—to understand the different containers being used in different rooms and their markedly different effects on those involved—I decided to return to school. I felt I needed to take time away from the hustle and grind of making theatre to think deeply about the how and the why of theatre practice through a lens of ethics and justice. I wanted to expand my thinking beyond who was invited into the room (representation) to focus on the experiences of artists once they got into the room. A Master of Fine Arts (MFA) program seemed the perfect

way to do this thinking, since the resulting thesis would be a reintegration of the academic and critical thinking into theatre practice: theatre praxis.

COVID-19 has radically changed the nature of my work. What is safe and legal at any given time is constantly shifting; likewise, my thesis has had to change many times to address new reality after new reality. While many things have been rendered impossible by the global pandemic that swept the world in 2020 and continues to wreak havoc as of this writing, other things have become possible. While my original intention was to do my research from the position of director, at the invitation of my colleague Elizabeth Hobbs, an MFA Directing candidate, a new possibility emerged: engaging in this work as a production dramaturg.

Ultimately my thesis project saw me serve as production dramaturg for the University of Alberta Studio Theatre's production of Mary Zimmerman's *The Secret in the Wings*. This document is an exploration of my preparation for, execution of, and critical, reflexive response to my work on that production. I focus specifically on notions of ethics and power relationships within the process, drawing on scholarly research, interviews with others, and my own reflections on moments and trends within the process. In all cases, my interest is in how these ethical concerns play out in the embodied, inter-personal work of creating theatrical art. I treat my production dramaturgy work on *The Secret in the Wings* as a case study and catalyst for reflection, offering insights into broad questions of ethics as they relate to theatrical processes generally and the work of a production dramaturg in particular. The role of production dramaturg has also offered me the opportunity to expand my ethical thinking to include how theatre productions engage with audiences. Working on a Studio Theatre production has allowed me to

consider my questions of ethics in relation to the mainstream English-Canadian theatre practices by which shows in its season are created.

I must stress at the outset that none of this work has been done solely on my own. Though the thinking in this document is mine, it is also deeply interconnected with that of my colleagues and collaborators—especially director Elizabeth Hobbs. For more than a year, Hobbs and I have been working closely together on this production which is a thesis project for both of us. Our work has been so intertwined that, as she says so perfectly in her thesis document, it is often "difficult at this point to discern which of us brought what to the table" (*The Secret* 7). Theatre is a collaborative art form. Throughout this process I have been reminded of this deep truth again and again. I have also been reminded that learning does not happen in a vacuum, that knowledge is created relationally, and that the true test of any insight is its ability to help shape the world, not merely describe it.

Finally, before delving into the bulk of this work, I feel it is important to situate myself. I hold it as a central truth that our realities are shaped by our unique experiences of gender, racialization, disability, class, Indigeneity, and many other factors. I offer the following in order that my own experiences—and potential biases and blindspots—might be better understood by the reader. I am a white, queer, non-disabled theatre artist from a middle-class upbringing who is non-Indigenous and has lived my entire life as a settler on various parts of Treaty 6 territory. I have been socialized in masculine ways, benefiting from the many privileges afforded those who are read as male; however, over the course of my time undertaking this work, my understanding of my own gender has evolved into a non-binary or genderqueer identification[1] and I have

[1] For an explanation of non-binary and genderqueer identities, see Beemyn.

adopted ze/hir/hirs pronouns in addition to he/him/his. All these factors and more are present in my creative and critical work. In presenting myself as well as my hopes, dreams, and goals for this work, I feel it appropriate to remember the words of Alice Walker: “People who go about seeking to change the world, to diminish suffering, to demonstrate any kind of enlightenment, are often as flawed as anybody else. Sometimes more so. But it is the awareness of having faults, I think, and the knowledge that this links us to everyone on Earth, that opens us to courage and compassion” (qtd in Dugan 182). It is in the spirit of a link to all humanity via my flaws that I undertake this work.

Chapter 1 - Theorizing Theatre Practice(s): Visioning and Values

"As busy practitioners, we pretend that we do not have time to question the philosophical basis of what we are doing, or that we can take for granted unspoken agreement on the subject."

-Peter Hay (13)

1.1 - The Big Question

The central question of my thesis work is one of justice: how can theatre artists create together ethically? I acknowledge that this question will not have a singular answer. Rather, it will be highly context-dependent. Before offering a detailed examination of my work on a specific process, I wish to elucidate some of the overarching concerns that I see as ethically significant in mainstream theatre practices generally. I approach this theoretical investigation in several ways, notably by studying existing theatrical creation methods and critiques of mainstream theatre practice, but also, importantly, by exploring ethical concerns which are not directly related to theatre and then applying that thinking to artistic practice.

What would constitute an ethical space for creation? Ethics is a massive field of inquiry and a full argument about the nature of ethics and justice is well beyond the scope of this project. However, I offer these thoughts in the hope that it might clarify the perspective from which I approach my work. I am deeply influenced by the ideas of an ethics of care. In an overview of the subject, Sander-Staudt describes such ethics as enacted not in universals, but rather in "a network of social relations . . .[which] affirm the importance of caring motivation, emotion and the body in moral deliberation, as well as reasoning from particulars" (Sander-Staudt). To me, the focus on interpersonal, embodied particulars is a perfect fit for considering ethics within a collaborative, corporeal art form such as theatre.

My ethics as an artist and scholar arise out of a sense of interconnectedness and communal responsibility. I take seriously the call of Anishinaabe/Ashkenazi artist and scholar Jill Carter to eschew impersonal, positivist, colonial distance and "engage with these things [our art and scholarship] personally . . . to ask and begin to answer, 'Who am I in all of this?" (Carter, Recollet, and Robinson 221). Paulo Freire's thinking has been highly influential on my own, most notably his framing of praxis: "discovery cannot be purely intellectual but must involve action; nor can it be limited to mere activism, but must include serious reflection" (52). I also take seriously Freire's insistence on engaging in "dialogue [which] cannot be reduced to the act of one person's 'depositing' ideas in another, nor . . . a simple exchange of ideas to be 'consumed' by the discussants" (77) but which centres people "in communion liberat[ing] each other" (128). My interest in how theatre artists interact arises from my belief that ethics is largely centred on our interdependence and our responsibilities to care for each other. This care for each other necessarily includes honouring the need for informed consent. As performance researcher, theorist, and artist Ben Spatz argues, consent "refers not to a one-time agreement, as in the signing of a contract, but to a continual, active process" (56). Ethics scholar John Kleinig notes that informed consent means that the person consenting "ought to understand the nature and ramifications of what he [sic] is doing" (16), adding that "consent is rooted in a conception of the social conditions under which humans may best flourish, conditions that will ordinarily support the [morally] magical power that consent is able to display" (22). Importantly, Kleinig argues that "subjects of consent need not be singular" but that consent can be considered from the point of view of "a collective unity (such as an orchestra [or theatre ensemble])" (6). This must not be used coercively, however, but relationally. Intimacy directors Pace and Rikard highlight the

"need to get consent from *everyone* involved in the process every step of the way" (6). The balance between collective and individual thinking is an ethical moving target which must be collectively wrestled with and cannot be perfectly pinned down.

How does this sense of care ethics, interdependence, and informed consent manifest in the theatre? The emerging field of intimacy direction represents a major contribution to this discussion as it highlights historical inequities in theatrical processes and the ways theatre practices have *not* been ethical. I find the thinking of intimacy directors useful for understanding caring creative process broadly, not just for staging scenes of intimacy. The movement brings attention to the complex power structures (formal and informal) at play in creative processes which have the power to undermine individual and communal wellbeing as well as informed consent. Intimacy directors highlight the need for emotional safety in artistic processes, much as fight direction has argued for an increased focus on the physical safety of actors. Métis artist Olivia Marie Golosky, however, cautions that the idea of safety itself must be unpacked. She argues that it is often the safety of "those who already enjoy power and who, consciously or unconsciously, fear losing it" (25) which is prioritized in discussions of safety. In this way, safety and comfort can be conflated (see Arao and Clemens). In place of a desire for a "safe space," Golosky calls for a focus on "*equitable* spaces… where negotiations can start to occur. Negotiations of power" (38). Intimacy directors, too, underscore the need to unpack power dynamics as new theatre creation practices emerge: "old approaches ignored the power *in* the rehearsal room, and the power *of* the rehearsal room. They were based on the assumption that good intentions were all that were necessary to create a good experience for the cast (and ultimately the audience). This assumption is incorrect" (Pace with Rikard 7). Framing the issue

as one that transcends good intentions highlights the need for tangible practices which can be employed by practitioners as they work to understand and challenge power dynamics in pursuit of equitable spaces.

In the context of Canadian theatre, the term "equity" is often used colloquially to refer to the Canadian Actors Equity Association; however, in this context, I use it in its ethical sense, as does Golosky. The Oxford English Dictionary defines equity as "What is fair and right" ("equity, n."), noting that its earliest English uses borrow a connotation from Greek suggesting "reasonableness and moderation in the exercise of one's rights, and the disposition to avoid insisting on them too rigorously" ("equity, n"). This connotation hints at an important distinction between *equity* and *equality*. While equality suggests everyone has identical rights and must be treated exactly the same, *equity* suggests that everyone be treated according to their unique circumstances and needs, acknowledging that this may involve treating different people differently because we are not all the same, nor do we all have the same needs, the same access to resources and opportunities, or the same ability to thrive within institutions or economic and cultural systems. As Jean Paul suggests, a focus on equality risks individual needs being "ignored to promote the ideals of fairness and equal treatment" (217). Equity does not equate fairness with equal treatment. It rejects universality and calls for a focus on specific situations rather than abstractions.

While many radical reimaginings of theatre processes exist, in this work I am concerned primarily with theatre made using what I call mainstream theatre practices. I use this term to refer to theatre produced using normative methods and timelines in English Canadian theatre spaces. While there is great variety within this broad definition, this mainstream theatre is largely

text-based (as opposed to collectively created or devised), and is rehearsed using the procedures and timelines commonly found in theatres affiliated with the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres (PACT). Such theatres typically employ artists who are members of—and therefore bound by the collective agreements of—Canadian Actors Equity Association (CAEA), Associated Designers of Canada (ADC), and/or International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE). These are the structures under which much mainstream professional theatre is made, affecting timelines, roles and responsibilities, working conditions, access to resources, and many other factors. Deeply engaging with how ethics and equity can play out within these structures is, therefore, important due to their widespread use and the correspondingly widespread impact interventions into them might have.

Why not simply reject the old structures entirely and build new ones? In much of my artistic practice I do reject or work outside of all or parts of the structures I outline above. I create this work through ensemble-devising, collective creation, and community-engaged processes. However, I also acknowledge that radical shifts from mainstream processes will not take place universally—and in fact may not be appropriate to all situations or artistic projects. Thus, adjustments to inherited processes are also necessary in addition to (and not in place of) outright rejections of mainstream theatre practices. I hope this thesis project can contribute to dialogue regarding how the pursuit of justice and equity can take place at the level of practice within the limits of mainstream English-Canadian theatre. While acknowledging that as long as we create in the capitalist, colonial, cisheteropatriarchal, white-supremacist world of our current time and place we are complicit in unjust systems, I reject the hopeless notion that justice is, therefore, an impossible pursuit. As theatre artist and activist Nicole Brewer writes, "[a]nti-racist theatre is not

about doing all the things to end oppression at once; it's about doing what you can. Small changes in behaviour and thinking can have profound impacts on you and your organizational culture." This may seem under-ambitious, but I believe it is radical in its insistence on action in an imperfect world, as opposed to the inertia of waiting for perfect solutions before undertaking any work. I am compelled by the words of Michelle Olson on the fraught nature of collaboration between settler and Indigenous artists: "We just have to get in there and get dirty" (qtd in Nolan, *Medicine Shows* 129).

Ospina et al. offer a useful framework for thinking about various goals of projects seeking change. For their research on leadership in social justice contexts, they found that the "systemic change being demanded may range from 'inclusion' to 'transformation'" (270). Calls for transformation insisted on "replacing the current system with another one" (270). Systemic change seekers using a model of inclusion, however, focused on "altering the current system so that its benefits reach everyone equally" (270). Using Ospina et al.'s model, my thesis work may be best categorized as pursuing theatrical inclusion. I find the word inclusion problematic, however, in that it is often narrowly understood to refer to representation, asking only if people of a certain group are included in the sense of being present. This highlights the latter two buzzwords of the common phrase 'Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion' or 'EDI' which Jill Carter re-orders to become "D.I.E. . . . [due to the] series of cognitive, corporeal, and ontological contortions—or outright amputations—by means of which we may, however awkwardly, squeeze ourselves through their [institutional] doors" (9). Carter is referencing how a narrow interpretation of inclusion neglects to ask the more fundamental question of whether those included are *meaningfully, safely* and *constructively* included, as opposed to tokenized, exploited,

or worse. Thus, I highlight that Ospina et al.'s definition of inclusion insists on "benefits reach[ing] everyone" (270). If the benefits of a system are not shared, presence in that system does not constitute inclusion. I find Ospina et al.'s breakdown a useful theoretical framework by which to conceptualize the goals of my own work, though I prefer the term equity to their choice of the term inclusion due to the commonly-employed and narrow conceptualization of inclusion explored above. Indeed, I also find the word justice a useful one: when added to the EDI acronym it allows the pursuit of JEDI—which appeals to my storyteller's heart.

I believe that multiple approaches to the pursuit of justice in theatre practice are not only welcome but necessary. Ospina et al.'s conceptualizations of inclusion and transformation are not mutually exclusive, but can be mutually reinforcing. Decolonial scholars Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang posit that various approaches to the pursuit of justice may in fact be "incommensurable in their goals" (*Toward What Justice* 1); nonetheless, they argue that "an ethic of incommensurability acknowledges that we can collaborate for a time together even while anticipating that our pathways toward enacting liberation will diverge" (*Toward What Justice* 2). Solidarity between seemingly-incommensurable projects is possible, if only for a certain period —for example, as the mainstream processes into which I am intervening are slowly replaced by more transformative projects.

The practices I explore in my thesis work are steps on an ongoing journey. As Tuck and Yang explain, understanding "justice as an imperative, rather than as an end, might help us put our own justice projects in relation to others. Our theorizing is enhanced when we understand how projects are fulfilling an imperative, answering a calling" (*Toward What Justice* 11). No doubt looking back on this work in thirty years, a decade, or even six months, it will feel

incomplete. This is necessarily so. This work is a contribution to an ongoing and ever-evolving dialogue and represents a certain time and place on that journey. My focus is the hands-on, corporeally-situated work of theatre practice, but more specifically theatre *praxis*. I am interested in a deeply informed practice which then leads back to critical reflection and once again onward to renewed action. As Paulo Freire writes, "reflection—true reflection—leads to action. On the other hand, when the situation calls for action, that action will constitute an authentic praxis only if its consequences become the object of critical reflection" (52-53). This thesis project represents one such cycle of praxis—in this case as a production dramaturg.

1.2 - The Production Dramaturg and the Director

My original intention for my thesis project was to engage with my research questions from the position of director. As the leader of the creative team, the director in mainstream theatre sits at the top of the artistic power structure. In one extreme conception of this role, the director becomes "absolute leader, general, visionary, and authority, the sole source of wisdom, creativity, insight, and power" (Knowles 2) or "a kind of dictator, a boss" (Thompson 105). Thus, it seemed to me, this position offered the opportunity to explore possible variations on power structures and leadership within a creative process with a view toward equity and justice. Due to the pandemic, several of the projects I intended to use as the basis of my experimentation were canceled or became impossible. When Hobbs asked me to work as the production dramaturg for *The Secret in the Wings* by Mary Zimmerman, I began to realize that this new position offered many other possibilities for exploring power structures.

What exactly is a production dramaturg? One of the few things scholars of dramaturgy can agree on when attempting to define the field is that dramaturgy is notoriously hard to define (Lang 4; Luckhurst 2; Chemers). In conceptualizing my own approach to the role, I have found most useful the thinking of dramaturgs Peter Hay and Teressa Lang. Hay explains dramaturgy as "a process of making sense both for the production and the audience. A good dramaturg helps to articulate the sense" (7). Lang suggests that "actors, directors, designers and technicians read with a particular viewpoint, [but] to read as a dramaturg means to look at the text holistically" (27). Lang reminds us, however, that a dramaturg is "a creative role that understands and respects the creative responsibilities of the other artists" (10) and that their major task is "to help ensure the company has the necessary tools to make the journey" (28). Dramaturg LaRonika Thomas explains that the dramaturg is "the theatre artist who most conspicuously straddles the divide between the more private interactions of artist and artist and the more public interactions between artist and audience" (506). Thus, the production dramaturg sits at the intersection between dramatic text, theatrical process, and audience reception.

Though common in continental Europe—and Germany in particular—for centuries (see Stegemann and Luckhurst 1) the role of production dramaturg is not as well known, understood, or accepted in North American theatre. In Canadian theatre, the role of dramaturg is usually understood as referring to a developmental or new play dramaturg who supports a playwright in shaping theatrical text as works in-progress (see Quirt). In contrast to this association with new play development, in Europe the role has evolved such that "dramaturgs are no longer employed merely to facilitate the translation from text to performance, but to act as in-house philosophers and historians contemplating the practice of theatre itself" (Tinius 236). It is this philosophical

understanding of the role of dramaturg which clarified the possibilities dramaturgy offered me for considering ethical theatre creation. As a practitioner whose position demanded philosophical (especially ethical) reflection as well as active support for the work of a creative team, I felt the position would offer an opportunity to subvert North American theatre's "deep-rooted suspicion of working models that insist on a dynamic relationship [as opposed to strict opposition] between critical reflection and artistic practice" (Luckhurst 2). I saw the opportunity to achieve the praxis I was seeking.

In Elizabeth Hobbs, I found a collaborator equally interested in these pursuits, and one who appreciates Peter Hay's caution that "[i]t would be too simplistic and neat to say that the dramaturg asks the 'why' and the director deals with the 'how.' Clearly the latter must also ask why and the former has to be aware of the limitations that every production is heir to" (14). This is not to say that our roles became unclear. It did, however, mean that we strove to avoid the risk of dramaturgy being "reduced to a list of tasks" (Lang 5). It is also worth highlighting that Hobbs herself is a director with a very dramaturgical disposition who carried out many tasks that might be normatively understood to be those of the dramaturg. Instead of duplicating tasks, we worked to complement each other in our work, building a collaborative spirit of discussion and mutual reinforcement. Yvette Nolan has suggested that her work as a dramaturg can include "dramaturging not just the text, the staging, and the production elements, but the process" ("New Ways to Fail"). In this spirit, my work with Hobbs included a strong focus on envisioning the artistic process through an ethical lens—in addition to dramaturgical research in support of the creative team and work on audience engagement. Thus, my work as dramaturg included three major processes: understanding the text, supporting the process of staging the text, and shaping

the production's engagement with its audience. In the end, the final two became the predominant foci of my work. While I definitely did work on analyzing the text, Hobbs took the lead on this and I played a supporting role as outside eye or sounding board. For that reason, I have chosen to focus on support for the creative process and audience engagement in chapters 2 and 3 of this document, respectively.

Much of my learning on this project was thanks to Hobbs' insight and generosity. I sometimes use the first person plural (we, our) in reference to Hobbs and myself, not in an attempt to speak for her, but rather because so much of my work as dramaturg was done in the context of the processes she articulated, carried out after intense dialogue with her, and undertaken in service of shared goals. It is hard in many ways to disentangle my work from hers and vice versa—nor, I suspect, would there be much value in attempting to do so. I believe our close working relationship highlights the collaborative nature of theatre creation even in the context of strong directorial leadership; it also highlights that my personal, professional, and research interests and concerns are part of a larger, relational whole. We embraced Lang's articulation of dramaturgy as concerned with a "relationship between tree and forest, between part and whole . . . [whereby the dramaturg] is able to reflect on the process and reassure collaborators that the production is appropriately affirming both forest and trees" (38). While Hobbs did the necessary work of dealing with each of the production's individual trees, I was tasked with focusing on the forest.

Our process had several advantages over what is commonly experienced by dramaturgs in mainstream theatre situations. Significantly, I was present from the beginning. Lang describes this as an ideal dramaturgical process, suggesting that the most effective dramaturge is "a useful

resource for the production team from early in the production cycle" (22). In many cases, a dramaturg arrives later in a process, after many curatorial and artistic decisions have been made. When the Department of Drama was unable to secure the rights to her earlier choice of thesis production, I suggested to Hobbs that she reconsider the work of Mary Zimmerman. I had not read *The Secret in the Wings* at that time, but I suggested Zimmerman's oeuvre based on Hobbs' description of her artistic and research goals for her thesis and her descriptions of the cast and creative team with whom she was to work. Thus, the dramaturgy began before the play was selected. I was present (via a coworking session over the Zoom video conferencing platform) while she read the play for the first time and subsequently when she sent the email suggesting it to her thesis supervisor.

1.3 - Hierarchies and Power Literacy

Hobbs and I were extremely interested in understanding and challenging the hierarchies that tend to exist in mainstream theatre rehearsal contexts. As Elaine Aston notes while exploring how consciously feminist theatre processes differ from other approaches, "mainstream theatre is hierarchically organized with writers and directors making the 'big' decisions, and actors and technicians acting them out" (28). Based on our shared values, Hobbs and I found common ground in our desire to subvert these hierarchies and create a more collaborative process. Writing in *The Director as Collaborator*, Robert Knopf suggests that this subversion is possible because each director can, to an extent, "set the boundaries of their job for each production" (15) but also cautions against letting a subversion of hierarchy translate to an outright rejection of the work a director must do to lead a production: "Indecisive directing is not collaboration" (18). Likewise,

Beth Watkins cautions that, even when attempting to craft a feminist directing practice, "relinquishing control in rehearsal is not always easy or wise" (186) arguing that a "director's decentering of her authority in rehearsal . . . at worst can lead to an abdication of directorial responsibility" (195). In "This Extraordinary Power," Ben Spatz calls for "a more sophisticated theorization of power" that resists simplistic notions of power as only an exercise of force or a resistance to said force and which acknowledges within theatre practice "the abusive potential of hierarchy and … its generative aspects" (47). Intimacy direction likewise calls for those with power to use it consciously to pursue justice within the creative process: "Bring best practices in the room. Model good behavior . . . [and] normalize asking questions and setting boundaries" (Pace with Rikard 10). Since neither all hierarchies nor every use of power are inherently unethical, Hobbs and my task became to both understand the hierarchies in which we found ourselves and to find alternative ways of working that would allow us to challenge the most harmful elements of them—while still providing the necessary leadership to create meaningful theatre within the contexts of the Studio Theatre's mainstream-influenced structures. In other words, we set out to determine the *appropriate* use of power within the hierarchies of the Studio Theatre.

My understanding of power is influenced by postmodern thinking and intersectional analysis. This means that power is not derived exclusively from a position or a role. As Mills explains in reference to Foucault's conceptualization, power is "more like a strategy than a possession. Power should be seen as a verb rather than a noun, something that does something rather than something which is or which can be held onto . . . something which circulates" (34). Intersectional analysis also insists that we recognize that our bodies and identities are important

factors. How we are gendered, racialized, and classed as well as perceptions of our age and experience are salient factors in understanding interpersonal interactions, including those in theatrical processes. As Graça P. Corrêa argues, “a contemporary political dramaturgy should address the micropolitics of power or the ways normative values and institutionalized modes of production permeate personal relationships and individual desires" (308). In my view, this is as true of the work of a creative team as it is of the theatrical worlds that they present to their audiences. Yvette Nolan’s reminder to me that process and product are an inseparable whole, that they are in fact “the same thing” (Nolan, 10 Dec) further reinforces this understanding. A detailed analysis of power became an important part of my philosophical role as dramaturg. The analysis outlined below empowered us to make decisions based on a deep appreciation of the context in which we were making them.

To appreciate the dynamics of power within which we were working, Hobbs and I used a process developed by Maya Goodwill in collaboration with the Kennisland organization. This process was created to help social designers craft more equitable and power-conscious design processes. The authors understand their target audience, social designers, to be those practicing “social design, participatory design, action research, civic design, social innovation, design for the public sector, urban design” (5) among others. Though our work does not strictly fit this definition, with a little imaginative tweaking, the document proved useful in understanding the power dynamics of the Studio Theatre and in *designing* our creative process. Goodwill and Kennisland articulate the goal of their work as “power literacy” which they define as “being self-aware of, sensitive to and better able to understand the impacts of your power and privilege in the design process, and to then take action based on your values” (5). This initial exploration of

power is followed by a commitment to engage in "power checks" (Goodwill and Kennisland 7), specific times within a process during which leaders commit to engaging in a structured reflexive practice. By formally integrating these checks into the creative process, the technique aims to better equip creative leaders to "recognize power, name power, understand the impact of power and act accordingly" (7).

Hobbs and I used Goodwill and Kennisland's Power Literacy framework to understand and frame the creative process for *The Secret in the Wings* long before rehearsals began, and then did a version of the power check process during rehearsals to consciously reflect on the work as it was underway. Our power analysis and subsequent responses to it were meant to minimize a reliance on good intentions as the sole check against power imbalances by adding conscious forethought, adjustments to process, and mid-process reflexivity as further tools. Goodwill and Kennisland divide power into distinct categories to allow practitioners to more clearly engage with the factors at play at different stages of a creative process: Privilege, Access Power, Goal Power, Role Power, and Rule Power. I outline our pre-rehearsal analysis of each of these categories in the following sections.

Privilege

Goodwill and Kennisland define privilege as "a social relation where one social group benefits at the expense of another. It is an unearned advantage and is often invisible to those who have it." (8). Acknowledging that the specific workings of privilege "can vary depending on geographic context and other factors" (15), they offer a chart to provide a visual prompt for making visible one's own privilege (see fig. 1). They encourage detailed consideration of one's

own privilege so that one "can actively make informed decisions in order to avoid reproducing status quo inequities and patterns of oppression" (14). Tuck and Yang refer to this as "attending to 'the isms,'" (*Toward What Justice?* 6), contextualizing it as a problematic blend of "being inclusive (liberal) and actually attending to difference (radical). It shows how the foundation of this kind of thinking is inclusion by list making, by making objects appear on a list of what matters" (*Toward What Justice?* 6).

FIG. 1 - Goodwill and Kennisland. "Privilege." *A Social Designer's Field Guide to Power Literacy*, 2020

During our analysis Hobbs pointed out that mental health and non-physical Disability were notably absent from the considerations to which the authors caution readers to be attentive. As intimacy directors Pace and Rikard point out, an actor's work embodying a play's emotional themes and stories "has the potential to damage an actor's emotional well-being" (5). While the category of Disability may have been intended to be broadly understood, in a theatrical setting mental health absolutely must be considered in its own right.

Another privilege absent from the list but salient within the context of a university production was employment status/security. The creative team included a mix of salaried folks

and students. Within both categories, however, lay further demarcations of privilege. For example, those with salaries may be university staff or faculty. Faculty may hold different academic ranks and may or may not have tenure or an ongoing contract. Each of those statuses comes with different levels of income (which ties into class privilege, which is included in the document), but also different levels of job security. Other than a pair of professional actors hired for the production, the team contains a mix of graduate and undergraduate students doing work to fulfil various academic requirements. Students are being graded on their work and thus experience a sense of others exercising power over them. To complicate matters, graduate students are employed (in the sense that they receive a certain amount of funding to support them as students) while undergraduates are not and must independently finance their studies (this, again, links to but does not fully demarcate class privilege). Finally, it is worth noting that undergraduate students likely will not have an established career in the field in which they are training, whereas graduate students and staff have been accepted into those roles in light of having achieved a certain standing in their careers. In all cases, artists rely on perceptions of their talent, success, and potential for good working relationships to gain employment in a gig economy. This need to please leads to what Pace and Rickard call being "professionally vulnerable" (8). Each unique, intersectional combination of privileges can lead to different external and internal pressures acting upon participants.

Hobbs and I discussed our understandings of our experiences of privilege using the worksheet. An articulation of my privileges can be found in the introduction to this document. After discussing our own experiences, the document instructed us to reflect on what those privileges might mean in terms of who may be "unintentionally excluded or marginalized"

(Goodwill and Kennisland 15). We looked at this in terms of what could happen within the creative process and had many conversations about ensuring space for experiences different from our own. The makeup of the creative team (and the exclusion or marginalization resulting from it) was largely beyond our control, dictated as it was by Department of Drama policies and practices regarding program requirements (see the following section on Access Power). In analyzing the team that was working on the project, we noted an absence of visible people of colour, Indigenous peoples, and non-conforming gender expressions. We also noted, however, that our *perception* of the presence or absence of these identities is far from the *reality* of their presence or absence and that we lacked information to analyze this in depth. Asking people to self-identify comes with ethical issues around privacy and coercion and would certainly be illegal in a professional setting. As Tuck and Yang point out, focusing too strongly on "the isms" has definite limitations. We can't ever be sure which identities are in the room and therefore we must create systems to respect and broadly empower everyone in a room to pursue equity for themselves and others.

Access Power

Access power refers to "the ability to influence who is included in and who is excluded from the . . . project and process" (Goodwill and Kennisland 20). Access to this project was determined by a complex web of factors relating to different academic and practical demands. As a Studio Theatre production, it provides a final showcase for some of the BFA acting class and therefore must be tailored to their needs and abilities since they make up all but two of the production's cast. Likewise, a majority of the technical team and crew are drawn from the BFA

Stage Management and Technical Production programs and it is also an MFA thesis project for the Production Designer. The creative team is therefore largely determined by program requirements with the exception that the Department of Drama provides funding to hire two professional actors from the Edmonton community, selected by the MFA Director. In professional productions outside of a university context, a director is likely to have a broader pool of actors and designers from which to cast (though a producing theatre may indeed impose restrictions); thus, while a director's ability to cast a play tends to give them a great deal of control over who has creative access to a production, in this case that power was much more limited. The approval of the playtext through to the assignment of the creative team are subject to the concerns and interests of various forces and needs within the Department of Drama. In this sense, it might be rightly understood that the system itself far more than any one person holds access power.

We undertook our power literacy analysis early in the process, at a stage when design planning was just beginning. Notably, actors are not invited to this stage—nor to production meetings—in mainstream processes. They are given access to the production much later in the process, once many things have been decided. In my experience, designers and technical collaborators are absent from the rehearsal room in many mainstream theatre productions in a way that mirrors the absence of actors from earlier creative processes. Though Hobbs (along with many other directors) values a room which is much more open, this divide between performers and production team remains common in mainstream practices. While it may not be practical or desirable (from the point of view of the production or the point of view of particular artists who may wish to focus on their specific roles within the process) to have everybody involved in every

decision or step of the process in a large-scale production, working with highly delineated as opposed to collectively shared tasks and decision-making responsibilities—what I call siloing—creates further ethical concerns. It becomes important to consider who has creative access to the production overall, but also to each phase or silo of a production. For example, is there a diversity of experience within the cast and relative homogeneity in the production department? Do all designers experience similar intersections of privilege? Of course, every possible identity cannot be represented everywhere—and that is not a feasible goal. Yet, access must be considered at the level of each silo.

With so much Access Power being exercised in complex ways by forces in various parts of the Department of Drama, a thorough analysis of the ways in which access is granted or denied is beyond the scope of this particular work. However, such an analysis could be meaningful work for the Department of Drama to undertake in conjunction with its other EDI initiatives. The Goodwill and Kennisland document could prove to be a useful tool to support such an analysis.

Goal Power

As Goodwill and Kennisland conceive it, "[g]oal power is the ability to initiate the [social] design project to begin with, as well as the ability to influence decisions related to framing the problem, goals and the structure of the [social] design process" (24). Our project was initiated in most senses by the Department of Drama in order to achieve its various educational goals. Even the selection of a text to stage for her thesis, while led by Hobbs, must conform to the needs of the various pedagogical needs of the department. Moreover, the goals of

any text-based theatre piece could be said to be determined in large part by the script: in many productions, including this one, the contract to acquire the rights to perform the play necessitated that the text not be altered. The structure of the process was subject to many external demands, most especially those of deadlines required by the production department. For example, costume and set shops required final decisions by certain times in order to ensure everything could be located and/or built in time. Complex coordination and scheduling was required to ensure that the set could be installed and lighting instruments hung and focused, while still offering time for actors to rehearse on the completed set. These are demands common to mainstream theatre productions which are necessary to understand when working within those structures; articulating these demands within Goodwill and Kennisland's framework helped me to clearly articulate systems which I too often take for granted. The timelines and procedures within which the production operated were made even less flexible by the safety concerns related to COVID-19 which necessitated additional cleaning procedures and stricter restrictions on how people could work together in shared space.

The framing and setting of *artistic* goals, however, is undertaken by the creative team of the production within the contexts outlined above. Thus, the expression of power as goal power is where Hobbs as director—and myself as dramaturg, the production designer, and the creative team more generally—end up most able to utilize power. This manifestation of power is also where the possibilities of a subverted hierarchy are most palpable.

In mainstream theatre, artistic goals are generally considered to be the purview of the director. Rather than a dictatorial approach, Hobbs favoured a collaborative model articulated by scholar and artist Ric Knowles which positions the director as establishing "a clearly defined

context within which all of the collaborators work as contributing artists, producing a whole that is more than the sum of its parts and more than what any individual director might have imagined on her or his own" (2 emphasis original). Informed by the creation methods which led to the script of *The Secret in the Wings*, Hobbs highlighted the need to ensure that our process, like Zimmerman's, would be "made by who we are, who we are together, the circumstances of production, and the conditions of the world as they exist and change throughout our rehearsal process" (Zimmerman, "The Archeology" 25). From the planning stages through to opening night I felt included in a respectful dialogue, one in which my contributions as one part of "who we are together" tangibly impacted the production. We set ourselves a goal of ensuring each member of the creative team felt similarly.

Role Power

Goodwill and Kennisland define role power as "the ability to influence the roles that different stakeholders take on. This includes the ability to assign any roles or titles" (30). Role power for this production was determined, largely, by the accepted norms of mainstream theatre generally and the Studio Theatre specifically. Who occupied each role was also strictly delineated both because this is so in mainstream theatre practice and because many roles included a pedagogical component within which a student was expected to be trained in the standard duties of that role. Roles were delineated both creatively as one might find in a regional theatre but also academically, with delineations of supervisors and students. Goodwill and Kennisland remind us that "[d]epending on the roles that are assigned, the experience and outcomes of the design process will be very different. The way this power is used will determine

whether the design network challenges existing inequities or reproduces them" (31). In our work on *The Secret in the Wings* we found, for the most part, Role Power to be exercised at the level of the Department of Drama and thus largely beyond the scope of our work within the creative team. The responsibilities of, for example, a set designer, production manager, or performer were not subject to revision. The challenge became, then, to remain aware of possible limitations imposed by how role power was exercised while still working for equity within our delineated roles.

Roles themselves are not inherently unethical. A strict delineation of roles does not need to be meant maliciously; in fact, intentions are not strictly relevant to an analysis of power. As Pace and Rickard point out, when "you hold power in the situation . . . [y]ou can't give it away by being approachable" (9). Spatz, for example, calls for a much-needed distinction between "creative and consensual hierarchies and those that are unhealthy or exploitative" (46). Much of the Goodwill and Kennisland document focuses on "lived experience of the problem" (30), a concept which can only be imperfectly applied to the theatre. A play is sometimes understood as a problem to be solved in production, however, and lived experience is certainly a significant factor shaping an interpretation of a play. In the context of highly-structured mainstream theatre processes, understanding role power is crucial to finding considered opportunities to make change or strategically work within the system. One cannot make change if one does not understand the status quo.

Rule Power

Rule power "includes the ability to influence what is considered normal, what is allowed and what isn't, how actors [in the sense of agents capable of action, not only performers] will communicate with each other, including language used, and beliefs about what types of knowledge are valid" (Goodwill and Kennisland 34). This is another domain in which the director, and not just the producing institution, has a great deal of power in a theatrical process. This is less true on the production side of things than it is within the rehearsal room itself. While the moment-to-moment running of the rehearsal room is predominantly the domain of the director—supported by stage management and constrained by the rules of mainstream theatre unions, associations, and policies—the work of production departments is far more institutionalized in the form of the norms established by the various departments and shops which transcend individual productions. The complexity of a theatre producing a multi-show season comes with many demands which limit the ability of any one production to deviate significantly from institutional norms. This is not to say that the production department makes no attempt to be flexible, but there is a more radical flexibility offered by the rehearsal room which is, in some ways, an experience unto itself.

My above assertion about the relative autonomy of the rehearsal room is somewhat complicated and undermined by the regulations related to the pandemic. These rules evolved not from the specifics of the process envisioned by the creative team for *The Secret in the Wings*, but from Alberta Health, the administration of the University of Alberta, and the Department of Drama—each responding to the regulations of the others with jurisdiction above them. A comprehensive summary or analysis of such rules does not seem necessary, but these rules

governed many things: the proper use of and types of masks required; how physically close collaborators could be to one another; when, where, and how one was allowed to eat; even what items one was allowed or forbidden to touch. I do not view these rules as problematic. Indeed, such safety restrictions can absolutely be understood through the lens of an ethic of care whereby adherence to the rules is an act of communal and inter-personal care. Crafted (at least in principle) in accordance with best practices determined by experts in fields like epidemiology and immunology, COVID-related rules do, however, highlight the ways in which rule power was exercised in different ways during this production than it would have been in other circumstances. In responding to these rules—both extremely necessary and extremely limiting—we tried to keep in mind the assertion of the founders of Frantic Assembly, a company whose working methods are influential to Hobbs, that "limitations create freedoms and breed creativity" (Scott and Hoggett 7). This assertion encouraged us to consider rules such as the need to maintain six feet of distance between performers as creative challenges or inspirations more than limitations or impediments.

Working with Power

The power literacy exploration outlined above gave Hobbs and I a clear understanding of where she and/or I could exercise power and where we could not, except in the form of resistance. It mapped the lay of the land and pointed out the areas we could most readily explore. It also pointed to the complexity of power dynamics in a relatively large-scale production. As Ben Spatz argues, "the actor in theatre is neither a completely free individual . . . nor simply an exploited subject" (51). Similarly, no one member of a creative team nor even of an institution

can be said to be completely free or completely exploited. For example, a director has power over a creative team, surely, but this is also an oversimplification in that it ignores the power dynamics outside the room which affect the dynamics within the room. As the above analysis of power dynamics shows, there are webs of interest at play in the process and their interactions are complex. Our detailed analysis of the power structures in which we found ourselves provided a solid base from which we could move forward in planning how we wanted to undertake our work. An analysis of the impact of the power literacy work can be found in the following chapter. Goodwill and Kennisland argue that a thorough analysis of power structures is, however, the beginning of the work and not the end; after a thorough analysis of power structures has been undertaken, power literacy demands that one "take action based on your values" (5). It was, indeed, through attention to values that we took the next step, a step from theory in the direction of practice.

1.4 - Values

My interest in the role of values in a rehearsal process originates in my work with Yvette Nolan. Having worked with her in several professional capacities, I undertook a research project as part of an undergraduate research course to better understand her creative process as a director —especially vis-a-vis power dynamics and equity in rehearsal rooms. This took the form of a series of interviews and less-formal conversations.

During this research project, Nolan's use of explicitly laid out values as a guiding force in her rehearsal halls particularly interested me. She explained how she would shape each creative process using a set of values which she wanted to underlie and inform it. Her articulation of her process explained and clarified my experiences working with her. Nolan explains values as "the

tool we use to manage the work" (Nolan, 13 Nov). Usually articulated in advance, these values offer a creative team a "way to check ourselves and check each other" (Nolan, Zoom). As Artistic Director of Native Earth Performing Arts (NEPA) from 2003-2011, Nolan guided the company toward adopting as its official values the Grandfather Teachings shared with Nolan by her elders. These values—Courage, Generosity, Tolerance, Strength of Character, Patience, Humility, Wisdom—are still used by the company ("About Us"). Nolan used these values to guide NEPA's creative and administrative work. At company meetings, Nolan would ask each of NEPA's departments to contextualize their work in relation to the company's values. These shared values offered a point of reference for the entire team and allowed for encouragement and guidance, both at the company level and in the rehearsal hall: "When we were afraid, we would remind each other of courage; when we were angry at someone we would remind each other of generosity" (Nolan, Zoom). For Nolan, reference to the clearly-articulated values of a process prevents toxic behaviours being justified or excused as part of creative work; one has a clear point of reference by which to evaluate and articulate why and how a particular action or attitude is or is not justifiable (Nolan, 13 Nov).

The clarity offered by values is key. Hobbs and I were highly influenced by the thinking of educational theorist Lisa D. Delpit, especially her paper "The Silenced Dialogue" in which she explains what she calls the "culture of power" (282) at play in a classroom. Delpit writes specifically in the context of white educators interacting with racialized students, however her thinking on power is broadly applicable—especially her framing of the issues of intercultural miscommunication which can give rise to the entrenchment of pre-existing power structures,. Applying Delpit's ideas to rehearsal halls proved generative—especially in combination with

Nolan's conception of values. One of Delpit's major arguments is that a culture of power is always present, and that "being told explicitly the rules of that culture makes acquiring power easier" (282). Rather than limiting a subject's autonomy, explicit outlining of expectations empowers those who have not been taught or are not able to intuit those expectations. I would add that explicitness also empowers people to hold those in power to account based on a clearly articulated set of standards. If expectations are laid out, they can be critiqued, discussed, and revised.

Although the idea of values had come up in our discussions many times, the shaping of the values as Hobbs and I presented them to the creative team was primarily the result of a dramaturgical discussion in which Hobbs and I explored the type of process she was endeavouring to lead. I acted as a facilitator for the conversation, echoing back what I heard Hobbs say and offering responses, suggestions, and provocations to help shape our collective understanding. We were inspired by the values identified by Nolan, by Delpit's articulations of cultures of power, by Golosky's articulation of equitable spaces, as well as the principles of Tara Beagan's company, Article 11, as outlined in Beagan's paper "Arthome." In the end, however, it was a discussion of the specifics of this particular production of *The Secret in the Wings* and its unique demands that proved most fruitful. The values we settled on arose from analyzing the needs of Zimmerman's text, Hobbs' ideal working processes, the realities of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the demands of the Studio Theatre's process as we had come to understand it via the power literary work outlined above.

We crafted a two-page document (included in Appendix A) to be distributed to each member of the creative team several weeks before rehearsals began. By distributing the

document in advance, we hoped to demystify the process into which the team was about to enter. Moreover, we hoped it would provide the team with a chance to sit with the values laid out for this process and consider how they align with and/or differ from their personal values, making a discussion of values on the first day more fruitful. The values were meant to serve as a reference during our work together, offering a common language for us all to use. Many notable practitioners such as theatre artists Nicole Brewer and Claire K. Redfield or educators Arao and Clements advocate for crafting such documents or agreements communally early in a process, though sometimes acknowledging the need to offer a well-considered formulation to the community in advance. The scale of the work and the quick timeline of rehearsals demanded by a mainstream theatre process led us to favour the latter approach. We felt this to be an ethical use of power, balancing the demands of the process with respect for each team member. This also aligns with Knowles' concept of a director providing clear context for a collaborative process. In many ways, the values of the room could be seen as an articulation of Rule Power. We were, in some senses, crafting the rules of engagement for this working process. While our process did not fully democratize the creation of the values, it aimed to leave space for contributions by other members of the creative team and to offer the explicitness Delpit suggests is crucially important in promoting more equitable access to the cultures of power whereby people achieve success.

The document itself was written in the present tense and aimed to inspire the process rather than confine it. We hoped it would serve as a manifesto more than an HR policy. Nonetheless (and in keeping with the value of specificity), we crafted the document to include enough concrete connections to the specifics of *this particular* process to make it of tangible use to the artists. We listed each value followed by a paragraph or two of prose contextualizing it.

This included making specific references to how each value would help guide us in, for example, our response to the pandemic or Hobbs' desire for the production to feel like a process of *devising* rather than *staging* Zimmerman's text. We intentionally introduced phrases and ideas that Hobbs would return to as she guided the production. For example, "perfection is not an option" is a refrain that she uses often in rehearsal. Thus, including a version of it under the value of kindness introduced the phrase early and set up the company to expect and understand it when used in the course of Hobb's directing. Ideally, the use of that phrase would then evoke for her collaborators everything else articulated under the value of kindness, thereby creating a production-specific shorthand. The values document was intended to serve as both a starting place and an ongoing reference point for the processes of exploration and negotiation that constitute artistic collaboration.

In the following subsections I outline the various values that we identified for this process, including a rationale for each and an articulation of how they came to be adopted.

Ensemble

Derived from the French word for "together" or a "unity; whole . . . [or] group, body" ("Ensemble"), ensemble is a well-used term in theatre circles which usually refers to an acting company (an ensemble). In a theatrical sense, the term also has connotations of a focus on unity rather than specific star performers (Beckerman and Barker; "ensemble acting"). Ensemble is also a focus of the BFA acting program (University of Alberta Department of Drama). Ensemble is a common enough theatre term. We wanted, however, to be explicit about what it connoted for us in these specific circumstances.

Ensemble emerged as a key value early in Hobbs and my discussion and was in many ways the most clear from the start. One of Hobbs' central goals in her thesis work was to integrate devising methodologies which centre the ensemble as a locus for creation into a more mainstream rehearsal process. As explored earlier, the intention was far from removing the director's authority from the process entirely, however we wished to communicate our interest in de-hierarchizing the process via this value. The value of ensemble also arose from the text itself which has central characters, but ones that do not actually have the most stage time. Much of the play's meaning is achieved via a large chorus playing multiple characters: via the ensemble. Ethically, this value also highlights our relationships and our interconnectedness.

Flexibility

Though presented second in our document, flexibility was the first value to emerge for this process, long before Hobbs and I even began to discuss values formally. Preparing for early conversations with her cast and creative team in light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, Hobbs identified and articulated the need for flexibility. Ways in which artists were accustomed to working would not be applicable due to added restrictions around physical distance, sanitization of objects and surfaces, and other public health mandates and university policies, and safety rules were likely to change at various points during the production. While every artistic process will have different rules and procedures, we knew that, due to the pandemic, an exceptional and radical amount of shifting could be expected in advance of and even during this process. In addition to changes in rules, changes in personnel could also be demanded on short or no notice; if people got sick, they would have to isolate for up to a fortnight. In a theatre culture

which usually stresses showing up unless one is physically unable to do so, this represents a radical departure from mainstream theatre expectations. To highlight how we hoped to approach this uncertainty, we included the phrase 'what if.' We hoped to frame the question as a source of endless possibility (ex. What if we tried this? Maybe that will work) as opposed to a source of fear (ex. What if this happens? Then we're in trouble).

Specificity

This value speaks to the way Hobbs thinks rehearsals are most effective. Like many directors, she generally wants artists to embody an offer rather than describe it: actors can better communicate by playing out their ideas, designers by sketching or otherwise demonstrating. By tying specificity to action, Hobbs felt we could avoid talking around issues in rehearsal and instead address them directly. In a broader sense, this value also arose partially from Delpit's assertion that "explicit presentation makes learning immeasurably easier" (283). We also tried to use this value as a way to invite early naming of issues so that they can be addressed before they grow into major ones. We worked to frame this not just as an expectation that others would do this, but as a commitment to honouring and addressing issues when presented by any member of the creative team.

Rigour

Unlike notions such as professionalism or excellence which we felt connoted an external and absolute set of criteria for evaluation[2], the notion of rigour allows for similar pursuits within

[2] Nolan describes the notion of excellence as "a huge stick with which marginalized artists have been beaten for a long time… [standards that are] tied to someone else's judgement… a way the status quo has been reinforced" (Zoom).

the framework of each person's current ability as opposed to an unchanging standard. We hoped that this would encourage each of us on the team to reflect actively on how we can be rigorous at all times and in all situations, recognizing that this will look different each moment. We highlighted arriving on time and prepared to engage in the work as important—especially in an ensemble context in which failing to do so would have a direct impact on the ability of others to do their work. We strived to balance such specific calls to action, however, with recognition of contextual realities: we are not always in an ideal place emotionally, personally, or physically (especially in the midst of a pandemic). Moreover, we hoped the value of kindness which immediately followed rigour on our list would serve as a further balance to what can otherwise be an oppressive call that negates the unique life circumstances in which we all find ourselves. To me, this also aligns with my understanding of equity as recognizing that ethics is deeply situational.

In explicating our vision of this value, we highlighted several other traits which Hobbs hoped would become central to the process. We centred the importance of making offers, an openness to each person bringing forward ideas, and the need to honour and thoroughly explore the offers of others. We hoped to communicate that no member of the team would be expected to act as a passive receptacle of directorial, dramaturgical, or even playwright intention, but rather would be welcomed as an active participant in the creation process. This is alluded to in the concept of ensemble, certainly, but tying it to rigour, we hoped, would add another way to understand this responsibility and serve to highlight the interrelated nature of each of the values.

Kindness

Both Hobbs and I were highly influenced by an "unofficial rule" adopted by Tara Beagan for her company, Article 11: "no assholes" (130). While this was not the phrasing we wanted to use, we agreed that we had to articulate a version of this as a value for our process. Importantly, Beagan's framing insists on turning this principle back upon oneself: "This means we have to keep our own stress in check" (130). We wanted to frame our values as positives, thus we focused on what we wanted to cultivate in ourselves and others. We identified generosity toward ourselves and others, supportiveness, and forgiveness as qualities necessary for an effective creative process. In the end, we felt the term kindness had space for each of these qualities.

Kindness, however, is complex. As Arao and Clemens explain, rules of interaction aimed at "setting tone and parameters" (142) run the risk of "shift[ing] responsibility for any emotional impact of what a participant says or shares to the emotionally affected people" (145). Like Golosky, they caution against "a conflation of safety with comfort" (Arao and Clemens 135) especially by those who occupy positions of relative privilege. To prevent such a conflation, we tried to articulate the productive tension implicit in the term kindness. We wrote of the need to offer kindness to each other, and, crucially in a mental health context, ourselves. We wrote of the need to practice kindness in our conflict: both when we are disagreeing with others and when others are disagreeing with us—both of which are necessary parts of collaboration. We worked to structure the value of kindness as complimentary of and contextualized by values like rigour and specificity. By doing so, we hoped to enmesh these various values so that they could become useful tools in the pursuit of equity and justice conceived as imperative or calling rather than definable end.

Play

Play is deeply important to our conception of creation. With devising as a major goal of the process, the need for creative play is especially important. Writing about Frantic Assembly's creative process, Graham and Hoggett describe the importance of a "working environment of trust and support, where the adding of ideas does not feel like walking a tightrope" (31). Hobbs suggested that a room in which we can laugh at ourselves would be one in which such an environment is possible and that freedom to laugh at ourselves can be accomplished by recognizing that what we do is work, but also that our work is play. Thus, play is a means by which the value of rigour—with its expectations of making creative offers—can be accomplished. Each value is deeply interrelated.

The text itself is playful. So too is the process by which it was created. Zimmerman uses a fast-paced process which she describes as prioritizing "the first idea you get, the one that deeply embarrasses you and that you wouldn't normally bring up, that you would censor were there time for a second thought" ("Archeology" 35). Asking this of a creative team is a large demand in terms of vulnerability, but one which we hoped would allow our process to align with the one by which Zimmerman created the text. Ideally, this would help us create a process which would bring the playfulness of the text to life by means of the playfulness of our process. Zimmerman herself reminds us that "[i]t's not called a 'play' for nothing" ("Mirroring" 430).

We wanted to include Play as the final value on our list in order to end on a note of fun. Ideally, this final value would serve as an inspiring call to action, focusing on what would hopefully be the joyful parts of the process, as opposed to rigour or specificity which highlight the challenges of creation.

Working with Values

To me, the way we presented the values set them up as a kind of poetry. They needed to be interpreted, certainly, but not in the way a law statute is interpreted. I believe the presentation of a single-word value followed by an explanation meant to *evoke* rather than *define* strikes a balance between explicitness on the one hand and openness on the other. We presented the values as deeply interconnected, reinforcing and even counter-balancing one another. We were explicit in stating that they were meant to apply to everyone in the creative process—including those of us who shaped the original document, a conscious act of de-hierarchization.

The following chapter explores the rehearsal process and includes many discussions of how the values came to be applied in the crucible of the creative process.

Chapter 2 - Practicing Theatre Practice(s): Enacted Values and Dramaturgical Work

"If we go the one-way street of abstraction, then we cut ourselves off from the nourishing ground of participatory experience. If we go the one-way street of practice, then we drive ourselves into an isolated cul-de-sac, a practitioner's workshop or artist's colony. Our radical move is to turn, and return, insistently, to the crossroads"

-Dwight Conquergood (153-154)

2.1 Power and Values in Practice

The Interviews: Methods

In order to better understand my collaborators' subjective experiences of the artistic process of staging *The Secret in the Wings*, I undertook a series of interviews with members of the creative team. I wanted to reflect deeply on my own experience and observations of the process, certainly, but also to get multiple perspectives to challenge the innate limits of a singular perspective (my own). These interviews took place in the five days immediately following the closing of the in-person run of the play. I interviewed Galen Hite (the stage manager), Anthony Hunchak (the sound designer), Elizabeth Hobbs (the director), and three performers: Elizabeth Chamberlain, Lauren Brady, and Dylan Maguire. To recruit participants, I sent an email to the cast and creative team on the second last day of the in-person run detailing the study and requesting participation. Participants could then elect to participate, but had to do so by actively replying to that email or the follow-up I sent a week later. The requirement that participants actively reply was meant to ensure there was no coercion or sense that participation would affect school and/or professional outcomes. I included a consent letter detailing the nature of the study

along with the emailed invitation to participate; I discussed this with each participant and obtained verbal consent to participate in advance of each interview.

Interviews were roughly 30 minutes long (with the exception of Hobbs' which ran just over 50 minutes), conducted via Zoom, and recorded. I then transcribed and condensed the recordings and sent them to the interviewees for approval and editing as they saw fit. These condensed, edited, and approved versions are what I quote here. The document I used to organize myself during the interview is included in Appendix E. This was not shared with the interviewees. Instead, I kept it open on a second screen during Zoom interviews for my own use as a reference. The simple nature of the document reflects the intended open-ended nature of the conversation. The interviews were semi-structured (see Hesse-Bieber 186), opening with the same question and progressing according to the natural flow of each conversation. I injected my pre-determined questions as they seemed appropriate (or not at all) as well as other questions of clarification with an aim to maximizing the "room left for spontaneity on the part of the researcher and interviewee" (Hesse-Biber 187).

I aimed in the interviews to achieve a feeling of conversation rather than a one-sided extraction of information. To do so, I did not merely limit myself to asking questions, but also offered my own comments, trying to do so, however, in response to what participants had offered rather than in any way leading the conversation. More frequently than any such comments, however, I offered what Hesse-Biber describes as "probes," responses which "provide the participant with support and encouragement without pushing . . . [an] agenda into the conversation" (198). Three types of probes were specifically useful in the online environment: Silent, Echo, and Uh-huh. A silent probe is a nod or other gesture of encouragement to show

engagement. An echo probe is when a facilitator "repeat[s] what the participant has just said" (Hesse-Biber 198). This can serve as a way to ask a speaker to clarify what they mean, but it can also be a way of "keeping the conversation going and encouraging participants to continue with their agendas" (Hesse-Biber 198). Finally, the uh-huh probe is a way of signalling that one is listening "by providing an affirmation sound like 'uh-huh,' 'yes,' or 'uhmm, I understand.' . . . encouraging the participants to continue with their stories" (198). Conscious use of these types of probes also proved useful when facilitating audience conversations, a topic I will take up in Chapter 3.

Once each interviewee had approved the condensed transcripts, I began to search for recurring themes and narratives in the various interviews. I highlighted several broad categories and also noted times when the same (or a similar) story was used to highlight a certain idea. From these broad categories and recurring stories, I began to draw my interpretations of the interviews which I outline in the following section.

There were strengths and limits to my chosen method. As an insider to the process, I had an established relationship and rapport with those I interviewed, mitigating somewhat the problematic, extractivist nature of some forms of research. Dwight Conquergood asserts that "original scholarship in culture and the arts is enhanced, complemented, and complicated in deeply meaningful ways by the participatory understanding and community involvement of the researcher" (154) and this was definitely true of the interviews I conducted. We were able to discuss an artistic process in which we had each participated. However, as interviewees knew that I had been deeply involved in shaping the rehearsal process from the beginning, this could have affected their framing of their responses. I do not believe impartiality is truly possible.

Nonetheless it is important to name and understand the interviews in their full context, recognizing how my positioning may have affected what was said and how it was said.

Another limitation of the study is representation of perspectives. Due to the voluntary nature of the study, only student actors took part and thus the perspectives of the non-student actors are absent. I did not specifically ask about race, gender, Indigeneity, sexuality, class or other possible demarcations of difference in the study, though some participants volunteered some of this information in the course of our conversations. Again, due to the voluntary nature of the study and the limitation of participants to those directly involved artistically in the creation of this production of *The Secret in the Wings*, ensuring a range of experiences along the aforementioned identity categories was possible in only a limited way. In no case can any sort of so-called universal understanding be derived from this study. Recurring themes and responses are interesting, however, as they represent points of alignment between different subjective positions.

The Interviews: Findings

All of the interviewees had positive responses to the project overall. When invited to speak of the creative process they described it as "a really nice environment" (Hunchak), "a lot of fun" (Hite), and "very collaborative" (Brady). While these appraisals are consistent with my experiences of the rehearsal process, I am careful to note that this might represent a biased view of the process since interviewees self-selected, and those who opted to participate may have been more inclined to do so because they had a positive impression of the process. Most interviewees were quick to highlight the importance of Hobbs' leadership in the space, highlighting a sense

that “Liz was right there with us” (Maguire), that she was “always open to people’s ideas and always accepting of other creations from other people” (Chamberlain), and that she was “so excited to make art with you” (Brady). While my specific interest is not in appraising a directing process overall, it is worth noting that these characterizations were among the first things interviewees wished to highlight when describing their experiences of the creative process.

I was particularly interested in understanding how different members of the creative team experienced the values in rehearsal. It seemed that the director and stage management team had a different experience than the performers and designers. While stage management and the director made more active use of the specific values throughout the process, the performers and designer I spoke to each told me that they did not remember in exact detail what the values were: “I don’t remember what they were you’d have to remind me” (Hunchak), “I’m going to be completely honest—off the top of my head I don’t remember what absolutely all of them were” (Maguire), “I know we talked about them but I don’t remember specifically what they are to be honest” (Chamberlain), “I honestly couldn’t tell you all of them” (Brady). Nonetheless, there seemed to be a consensus that they were valuable in setting the tone for the process. Chamberlain spoke of how “it’s helpful to talk about them because it sets the mood at least.” Similarly, Brady told me “I haven’t like memorized them, put them down on a list, but whenever someone brought one up I was like ‘oh yeah totally.’” Though the specific wording of the values did not stick in her memory, Brady told me that she remembered “all these different values being used multiple times in a week. So the fact that it was actually used in the process made it have meaning and that it was something and it couldn’t be forgotten.”

It seemed that for the designer and performers the fact that the values were meaningfully enacted in the process had a larger impact than how they were articulated. Despite not remembering them in detail, Brady described the values as "always constant in the room so that you couldn't forget about it." Similarly, Maguire described values as being "just put in the everyday practice and it was not a big deal. It was just the way things were." These comments suggest to me that it was not the specifics of *how* the values were articulated, but rather *that* they had been articulated at all and—even more importantly—lived up to that was most important.

Several members of the cast suggested that they appreciated having the values articulated in advance as opposed to creating them collectively. While many practitioners advocate building such community agreements collectively (see Arao and Clemens, Redfield, and Brewer), several of the performers spoke of the limitations of this approach. These arguments ranged from ideas of authority—"everybody's going to have their different things that they're bringing in and I might not agree with somebody else's value as an equal but if a director tells me to do this I'm going to do it" (Chamberlain)—to practicality: "if you're asked to create values with strangers . . . it becomes a wash of things. It's not specific because you're trying to make it generalized for everyone, but you don't know who anyone is yet" (Brady). It is worth noting that the majority of these concerns have to do, implicitly, with tight schedules. In a longer rehearsal process, there might be more space for disagreement between peers to be fruitfully resolved, or time to get to know new collaborators and thus move beyond generalities. Arao and Clemens speak to the realities of time saying that when "time is relatively short, the facilitators may choose to advance a predetermined list of ground rules" (142).

Having the values articulated in advance seemed to communicate that care had been taken to shape the process. Hunchak articulated this sentiment by saying

> I think there is something very powerful about just being upfront about what you want the process to be about and being open and transparent with people about what we want the process to look like and what's important. In some ways it reminds me of codes of conduct and mission statements. I know as a transgender person it makes me feel a lot safer when I see in the code of conduct that anti-discrimination is part of what a company values and that's part of how they want to run their business or their process. . . . I do think it's still important to make it clear where you stand, how you want people to be interacting in the space.

This framing reminded me of a concept brought up by intimacy directors: "the power *of* the room" (Pace with Rikard 9). This refers to the power of assumptions, conventions, and peer expectations which do not necessarily need a person actively articulating them in order to have an impact. These often unspoken expectations exert their own sort of power, one that tends to work in service of normative expectations. Intimacy direction teaches that to counter "the power *of* the room, you [the director] need to be the power *in* the room . . . learn how to use your power. Bring best practices in the room. Model good behavior" (Pace with Rikard 9-10). Hobbs articulated a similar belief when she said that she strives to be the leader she wants to work with when she is not in a leadership role: "I want to know that someone has given some thought to this thing and cares about it enough to have given the thought to it. I'm going to feel a lot safer knowing that person has worked their ass off on it because they care about it" (Personal Interview). This goal seemed to be accomplished based on Maguire's appreciation of "how much

thought and work before we even entered the space was put into creating a space that felt very safe and equal." The detail with which the values were presented communicated the level of attention and care with which the process had already been crafted—and, by implication, would continue to be undertaken.

The values became something for the company to joke about. Hite described how creative team members would "apply [a value] jokingly in situations where it didn't need to be applied . . . [for example] I'm going to apply the value of rigour and make sure my dinner is thoroughly heated in the microwave." Hite clarified that this in no way undermined the values, but was rather "a way of making light of how great it is that it's a document that we have . . . making light of the fact that these values are intrinsically accepted in the space that we occupy." Hobbs leaned into this joking attitude in order to create a lighthearted tone in the rehearsal hall, describing how she would use the values "facetiously . . . in a bit of a teasing way—which is kind of the way that I interact as well. That's how I am with people. So the company also picked up on that" (Personal Interview). Brady clarified that she found these jokes useful as "something to remind yourself of [the values]." To me, the joking and lighthearted way in which the values were treated is a perfect embodiment of the production's value of play.

The effect of the values on Stage Management and the director was very different from the effect on the designers and performers interviewed. The director and stage management team seemed to utilize the values more explicitly in their work. Hite described the values as having "very little" effect on the work because "having worked with Liz before, I'm quite confident that she and I would have approached the show with that set of values either way." Hobbs, however, characterized Hite as having "locked onto that idea [of values] really early. There was a moment

when he reminded me of my own value of kindness and flexibility. And I reminded him of my value of rigour and specificity. We had a little exchange all based in values" (Personal Interview). This overt use of the values became apparent to at least one of the performers: "I'd just hear Galen be like 'Liz, gotta remember flexibility" (Brady). Hobbs clarified that her exchange with Hite was useful to her:

> I needed to hear that at that moment in the process. Whether or not [explicitly articulating the values] was necessarily mind-blowing to any of the actors involved, it certainly was for me and my stage management team in terms of being able to communicate with one another in a way that was functional. Galen took me at my word when I said 'I want you to remind me if I'm not following them.' (Personal Interview)

This suggests to me that our goal of making the values a shared language was realized at least between stage management and director. As will become apparent throughout the following two chapters, I also found the values a useful reference in many aspects of my work as dramaturg and when interacting with Hobbs in particular.

Hobbs told me that she would use a similar values methodology again in future processes. Articulating values in advance "gives me a better understanding of who I want to be in a rehearsal hall as well as what my expectations of other people are" (Hobbs, Personal Interview). When I asked if she would use the same values in future shows, she clarified that

> I might very well end up using the same categories in many other shows but it would be the specifics that I would tweak or change. Or I might find a different value for a different show. But to me those are values that hold true for most

> theatre but the definitions would potentially alter. Ensemble might be very different on a different show, like a kitchen sink realism drama . . . [or] if I was working on a show that had a whole lot of sexual or violent intimacy in it, those values would be very much crafted to reflect addressing those components. I don't know if the categories would change. Maybe they would. Safety may become one." (Hobbs, Personal Interview).

This is a key point: while our values as artists are likely consistent project-to-project, evolving slowly over our lives, the ways in which the values manifest in each production might be radically different. The specificity with which the prose that accompanied each value was considered proved a valuable framing for the production. A different production with a different team and different needs would call for a different framing of the same values. As Hobbs reminded me, "theatre is local and immediate, local to its location but also to its time and space in the world and local to the human beings that are in that room" (Personal Interview). In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, the values served to create a counter to a mainstream theatre culture wherein "it's almost like a badge of honour how badly you take care of yourself" (Hunchak). By consciously reframing a theatrical culture of self-sacrifice as one of communal responsibility, the values gave permission for the company to take care of themselves (and therefore the ensemble) by respecting public health directives as a part of the creative process rather than an impediment to it. Using several of the values, Chamberlain explained how

> because of the very accepting and compassionate values that were set in place and also because of COVID, it was really, really relieving to know that if we did have to miss because of COVID that there wasn't any penalty, there wasn't any

> judgement . . . that's really hard for actors. It's really, really hard for actors. You don't want to miss, you don't want to be unreliable, you don't want to be remembered as somebody who wasn't there when they were needed. . . . But it was just so accepted in this process, it was just unconditionally known that that is also a part of being in the ensemble and it was also a part of helping your ensemble-mates. It was seen as 'this is your duty to stay home and that is your part right now. That is just the part that you're playing' rather than something to be punished or something to be judged.

The explicit articulation of the values for this particular process, contextualized in terms of this specific time and place, served to counter expectations that might otherwise be uncritically adopted into a theatrical process—or assumed to be the values of a process based on previous experiences.

In the end, Hobbs came to understand the values in terms of how they provided safety which could, in turn, enable artistic bravery. They ended up serving as

> the thing in the room to keep everyone safe. [Although] I don't like the word safe . . . It's ok to be in a place of trepidation or apprehension or nervousness about dangerous artistic choices that have the potential to create some interesting art. Being scared of the choice artistically but also kind of thrilled by it is not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about genuine fear of doing the wrong thing, looking like an idiot, if I speak up I'm going to get yelled at, not being respected as a person, afraid the whole thing is going to fall apart, afraid there's no leadership in this room, afraid nobody likes me in this room, afraid I'm going to

> get picked on or called out for my physical inability to do something—all those terrible anxieties that actors have working in processes that do that. To me the values system is trying to alleviate all of that. Let's create a space where you know you will be taken care of even if you're asked to do something scary. Being scared of something is different than being afraid of something. Taking risks is scary. I shouldn't be afraid for my wellbeing while taking risks. (Hobbs, Personal Interview)

This clarification articulates in the specific terms of the theatre a version of Arao and Clemens' belief in "shifting away from the concept of safety and emphasizing the importance of bravery" (136).

Practical Outcomes of the Values: An Example

Interview responses indicated that the explicit laying out of values had an effect on the feeling of the process, but also on specific artistic outcomes. Both Hobbs and Brady spoke of the influence of the values on shaping the pointe solo that took place in "Allerleira Part 1." The script says that Allerleira "dances dreamily by herself" (Zimmerman, *The Secret in the Wings* 40) to Marlene Dietrich's "Falling in Love Again," but the nature of the dance is not specified further. Well trained in ballet, Brady wanted to perform that section on pointe, but was unsure whether to make the offer, finally telling herself "you know what Lauren, she said she wanted to be collaborative. Just go ask her." When responding, Hobbs was also conscious of her oft-articulated collaborative values: "I have been repeating this over and over again 'it's about play, it's about ensemble,' and so if somebody brings an idea like that to the table then what business

do I have going 'no let's not explore that'?" (Personal Interview). Her commitment to the values challenged her to be open to possibilities in a different way than she might have been otherwise. Hobbs explains how the offer

> didn't really make a lot of sense to begin with, but we shaped it and turned it into something that did make sense. It ended up being a beautiful moment that I'm super in love with. It may never have ended up being created if I hadn't spent so much time thinking about what I want this process to be and deciding on being very process-oriented instead of outcome-oriented—which is what values encourage us to do." (Personal Interview).

This example illustrates how the values opened up artistic possibilities in *The Secret in the Wings*. I will explore several examples of how the values directly impacted my work as production dramaturg later in this document.

A Power Check

Hobbs and I undertook one formal power check as called for by Goodwill and Kennisland as part of their power literacy framework. A power check is a time to "slow down to reflect on how power is showing up in design decisions" (Goodwill and Kennisland 39) by going through the various types of power and analyzing how they are manifesting in the process. Our power check took place just slightly before the halfway mark of the rehearsal period, just as the piece had been fully staged but before it had transferred into the theatre. This put us at what we considered to be the theatrical version of "the start of the convergence phase" (Goodwill and Kennisland 39), the part of a process where things are beginning to come together to reveal what

will become the end-result of the project. The Goodwill and Kennisland framework calls for such power checks as a project is being set up as well as at the "divergence phase(s) . . . convergence phase(s) . . . and the wrap up of the project" (39). Instead, we ended up checking in at the beginning (see Chapter 1, section 3), middle (as explored here), and end (via the interview and general post-production discussions).

The power check asked us to reflect on the process as it had played out to that point and on our earlier analysis of the power structures within which we were working. Upon reflection, we concluded that most of our analysis had correctly and usefully articulated the conditions under which we were working; we continued to find that we had influence predominantly in the realms of goal and rule power and less in terms of access and role power. When discussing privilege, however, we ended up reflecting on something we had not considered in our earlier analysis: the complicated relationship between the BFA actors who made up the majority of the cast and BA actors who had been brought in as understudies. While the relationship seemed very amicable in our process, it nonetheless evoked the complicated history between the two programs in terms of access to resources, perceived prestige, differing academic and artistic demands, and other factors. The power check allowed us to reflect on this hyper-specific factor at play in this particular process. Additionally, during the power check Hobbs described how she felt that it had taken several days for the cast to really embrace her insistence that she not just welcomed but encouraged the bringing of personal offers, concerns, interests, and beliefs into the room—artistically and personally. She reflected that she now believed they had embraced that possibility thanks to explicit permission being given over and over.

Though the power check was a useful re-engagement with our earlier analytic work, we ultimately found a modified version of it more useful to our practice than the instructions articulated by Goodwill and Kennisland. At this stage we began to run into the limitations of a document not intended for theatrical process. In mainstream theatre practice, much of the structuring of a project takes place at the institutional level. As made clear by our analysis, it is in the realm of goal power and rule power that artists themselves have the most autonomy. The processes envisioned by Goodwill and Kennisland are conceived and executed through a process with multiple iterations of stakeholder consultation and subsequent revision over a relatively long term and in which each of the types of power seems to be more malleable. This is not the case in mainstream theatre—at least not without expanding the scope to include institutional practices of programming, resource allocation, and creative team selection. While such an expansion of scope is a very worthy undertaking, mainstream theatre at the project level might be best broken down into pre-production and production phases, though of course each also contains many stages. In my definition, pre-production would include the director's preparation, dramaturgical research, conceiving of designs, and casting. The production phase would include rehearsals, implementation of designs, and audience engagement. While institutions themselves might readily use the power literacy framework in understanding and envisioning how pre-production is shaped (who is invited to lead the project and what expectations and restrictions are placed upon them as they do so), it is the pre-production phase where contracted artists begin to have influence. While of course still containing opportunities for revision of creative goals, new artistic discoveries, and conscious shifts in how power is used—especially earlier in the process—the production phase involves a narrowing of what it is possible to change; it is, in many ways,

the playing out of the work of the pre-production phase. In mainstream processes, even the actors who only begin their creative work at this stage are bound by production decisions from earlier in the process. Design elements are constructed in limited shop time and finite rehearsal time is used to shape staging. As a predetermined opening night approaches, there are fewer possibilities for major artistic changes without significantly increased stress or budget demands.

It is important not to confuse artistic freedoms as explored above with ethical concerns related to consent and equitable treatment. In that sense, power—perhaps especially in the form of privilege and rule power—must be given constant attention. As theatre scholar Henry Bial writes in the foreword to the first major book on intimacy direction, "the theatre is also a workplace, where the safety and ethical treatment of our co-workers should be of paramount concern" (xii). There will, perhaps, always be the potential for tension between the pragmatic demands of a time-bound theatre process and the desire for an equitable, responsive process—perhaps especially so when working within strict limits such as those imposed by mainstream theatre processes. This is one of the many reasons I favour a values-based approach to navigating this tension. As I have explained above, values hold each other in tension and invite the grappling necessary for collaboration. Lacking nuance and flexibility, a firmly set policy or procedure cannot be applicable in all situations. A value, however, can be productively wrestled with at all times. Values centre what we are striving for and why we are pursuing it without claiming a universal way it can be achieved. Values also invite multiple interpretations from multiple people.

Importantly, Hobbs and I undertook the power check together as opposed to individually. The need to articulate things aloud and find shared understanding and consensus was helpful in

clarifying exactly what we were experiencing; this was much the same as with the crafting of a shared set of values where articulating them for each other demanded a high degree of clarity. Having done the check-in as a duo, of course, brings up the limits of our two perspectives. Including more collaborators could open this process up to additional perspectives—especially via the inclusion of folks with different experiences of privilege or those with more opportunities to make change via influence over role power or access power. We undertook this process between the two of us largely as a matter of pragmatism: we were the only two privy to the earlier analytic work and including others would have been asking for additional labour from our collaborators which we had not discussed with them in advance. This could be understood as a compromise necessitated by working within mainstream processes. I believe, however, that with additional forethought and planning a broader swath of creative team members could be meaningfully included in each stage of the power literacy work. This was, unfortunately, not the case in our production.

After the power check, Hobbs and I began to include such discussions in our frequent dramaturgical conversations rather than at specific check-in times—and mostly discussed them in relation to the values as opposed to the power categories. While this trade off brought these considerations into everyday practice, it certainly ran the risk of permitting "defaulting to 'business-as-usual' without considering impact" (Goodwill and Kennisland 40) which specifically designated power check times is meant to counter. In future projects in which I use power checks, I will be more attentive to how they might be better integrated into specifically theatrical processes, which are structured differently than the social design processes envisioned by Goodwill and Kennisland. Using the pre-production and production phases I articulate above

might aid in a theatre-specific reimagining of the power literacy work. If carefully constructed, a time to pause for conscious reflection on ongoing concerns of power in the middle of a creative process could become a meaningful part of an ethics-conscious theatre practice.

2.2 Support for the Creative Team

One conception of the role of dramaturg is as support for the creative team. Lang refers to this as making sure "the company has the necessary tools to make the journey" (28). I tried to collaborate broadly with the creative team, but ended up working primarily with only certain members. Though I sent some relevant research to the production designer, for example, that relationship did not flourish into one of deep collaboration. I ended up having relatively little to do with the design department directly, though through my presence at technical rehearsals I ended up interacting with the production department to a slightly greater degree. In this process, I ended up offering support primarily to the director and the acting ensemble. The remainder of this chapter is a reflection on that support, continuing to think in terms of ethics but grounding that thinking more concretely in theatre practice.

Supporting The Director

An Informed Sounding Board

One of my primary ways of offering support to the director was by acting as a sounding board. I became another person deeply familiar with the play with whom Hobbs could discuss the production and her approach. These discussions covered a wide range of topics from early discussions of the metatheatrical conventions of the play and the complexities of the text's

structure to later conversations about process, including how devising techniques might best be integrated into the rehearsal process and how best to articulate each character's dramatic journey. In one particularly productive discussion several months before rehearsals began, Hobbs and I worked through the play from top to bottom, conceptualizing possibilities for a COVID-safe staging in relation to the set design. Many ideas which emerged from this conversation ended up onstage in the final production including a claw to steal babies in "Seven Swans," a cloak to represent the dead Snake Leaves Princess after her death, and a smaller table representing a rowboat to mirror in miniature a larger table representing a ship in "Snake Leaves Part One". Being part of this conversation and others like it throughout the production's planning stages allowed me to offer informed feedback effectively throughout the process. This led to a situation akin to what theatre director Jackson Gay describes as an "ideal dramaturg . . . someone who embraces their place in the room, listens, laughs, questions, and challenges me to do what I said I wanted to do in the first place" (Bogart and Gay 215).

One of the defining features of my collaboration with Hobbs was weekly meetings to address the most pressing needs of the moment. "Dramaturgical Mondays" in the Fall 2020 semester evolved into "Dramaturgical Fridays" in the Winter 2021 semester. Between September and March we dedicated a minimum of one day each week to preparatory work together in addition to what we were doing separately. Sometimes we would work together and sometimes co-work on separate tasks. These regular meetings were an invaluable practice which ensured we were aware of what the other was currently working on, preventing the need to spend a long time bringing the other up to date or having to reorient in light of something with which one of us was unfamiliar. This practice may not be possible in every process, but it was a deeply useful one that

I will attempt to employ again. The regularity of these conversations also laid a foundation of trust and a shared language which served us well once we entered rehearsals.

Research

As part of my preparatory support for the production, I undertook a great deal of research. I offered summaries of reviews of previous productions, interviews with Zimmerman about her work, and articles on collaborative approaches to rehearsal which seemed to align with Hobbs' goals for the process. Much of this research provided a shared language for us to use when discussing the production. Goodwill and Kennisland's power literacy document, both Knowles and Knopf's framing of the director's work, and interviews with Zimmerman proved especially useful in offering ways for us to think about and discuss ideas, many of which we had previously intuited without having a specific framework by which to articulate them. I supplemented this gathering of published works with my own independent research, including interviews with Yvette Nolan on her philosophy of directing and a paper in which I used Lisa Delpit's thinking on power structures in classrooms to examine mainstream theatre rehearsal practices. All of this research was intended to support Hobbs in articulating a creative process—and some of it was later distilled into resources for other members of the creative team. The research I offered fell into two broad categories: the play and ethical creative practices. To communicate my research, I would create a document which briefly summarized each article, highlighting specific quotes that were relevant to our work. I then sent these summaries along with the whole text of the article to Hobbs. We also placed these in a Google Drive she had set

up to ensure the information was available to the production team should they be interested. A full list of the articles I summarized can be found in Appendix B.

Secrets and Wings: the Play's Structure and Feeding Back to the Director

A detailed structural analysis of the text can be a key task of the dramaturg. For *The Secret in the Wings*, Hobbs led this work and my role became reviewing and discussing her analysis rather than building my own from scratch. Much was refined in conversation, but it was Hobbs who led the process. Because the analysis was not mine alone, I will not include a full structural analysis in this document. The detailed structural understanding we arrived at, however, became the basis for much of my feedback during rehearsals; therefore, in this section I will focus on how a structural analysis was useful in contextualizing my work with Hobbs, especially in offering observations and feedback at key moments during rehearsals. In these discussions, my feedback attempted to connect the minutiae of specific moments to larger structural and meaning-making themes and motifs. To return to Lang's framing of the dramaturg's role, I was free to maintain a dramaturgical view of the whole forest while Hobbs, as director, needed to concern herself with the minutiae of the trees.

The title of the play *The Secret in the Wings* provides a useful way of understanding the play. The notion of the secret, for example, is helpful in framing several truths about the text. First, the last moments of the play reveal a hitherto concealed truth: that the whole bizarre experience has been a child's dream, a child we had understood to be an ogre and the villain of the piece. The girl we had thought to be the main character is, in fact, the child's mother who appears as a child herself in his dream. This remaining a secret until the final moments of the

play is central to the play's structural functioning. Hobbs and my conversations—especially those about the transitional and metatheatrical moments of the play—were done with the understanding that each of the fairytales was "read" into being by the ogre, but that the "reading" took place within a dream. Multiple levels of reality were always at play at once. In Hobbs' interpretation, the play's major thematic argument is contained in this structure. Only when able to embrace his own psychological "shadow on the ground" (Zimmerman, *The Secret* 78), does the child wake from the nightmare in which he has cast himself as a repulsive ogre. When he wakes, his mother shows him that he is, in fact, loveable, though in his nightmare he has not been. Zimmerman opens the published text of *The Secret in the Wings* with a quote by poet Rainer Maria Rilke: "Perhaps all the dragons in our lives are princesses who are only waiting to see us act, just once, with beauty and courage. Perhaps everything that frightens us is, in its deepest essence, something helpless that wants our love" (*x*). The little boy, then, is the true princess of the story and the thing that frightens him is the possibility that he might be unlovable. Thus, in our production, we understood the repeated marriage proposals not in a Freudian sexual-development sense, but rather as a quest for secure attachment, a deep sense of being loved. The need to feel securely loved became the major drive we looked to in order to understand the characters and stories in *The Secret in the Wings*.

The idea of a secret is useful in understanding other things which are withheld from an audience's intellectual understanding. In *The Secret in the Wings*, Zimmerman does not seem overly concerned with ensuring her audience has a clear knowledge of exactly what is going on at any moment. As mentioned above, the whole play is a dream. Zimmerman has been described as "a theatre phenomenologist … [focusing on] the *experience* of watching a play" (Loewith 419

emphasis added). In this case, phenomenology is being used to refer to "that strain of postmodern theory that attempts to understand how theater works on its audience: what is the experience of watching a play?" (Loewith 419). Zimmerman's work "aims to provide spectators with 'maximum delight'" (Loewith 419). Zimmerman tells us she is "not interested in lecturing or haranguing the audience. There are lecture halls and churches for that" ("Mirroring" 440). This is in-keeping with the thinking of psychologist Bruno Bettelheim whose ideas Hobbs found useful in understanding *The Secret in the Wings*: "While fairy tales invariably point the way to a better future, they concentrate on the process of change, rather than describing the exact details of the bliss eventually to be gained" (73). In both *The Secret in the Wings* and the fairy tales on which it is based, the journey or experience is the focus rather than the meaning or the destination.

While our production strived for internal coherence, an immediately recognizable meaning was not a priority. Indeed, the theatrical, affective impact was of central importance. Thus, while my feedback throughout the process was informed by and referenced Hobbs' analysis and how clearly what I was seeing reflected it, making this overt to an audience was not the top priority. Indeed, allowing many aspects of the rationale(s) behind choices to remain secret —or at least secretive—in terms of easily-graspable meaning seemed to be in-keeping with the goals of the text. This was supported by the fact that "Zimmerman analyzes her work from this [phenomenological] point of view, as opposed to, say, a textual one, or even a symbolic one, despite the ample symbolism onstage" (Loewith 419). For Zimmerman, the priority is for "the evening to keep unfolding, to keep *blossoming*" ("Mirroring" 440), with theatrical experience—in this case a dream-state reality—prioritized over intellectual meaning, though including both.

Another key way to understand *The Secret in the Wings* based on the title comes from the image of wings. The play is made up of a series of fairy tales told, with the exception of the central story, "Seven Swans, Or Silent for Seven Years," in two parts. This means that *The Secret in the Wings* "'fans in' to the central story, and then 'fans out' again" (Zimmerman, *The Secret in the Wings* xi) with "Stolen Pennies" interspersed in fragments. A major shift occurs in the central story, in which the characters are turned into swans and, even at the conclusion, one of the brothers' arms has "remained a wing" (Zimmerman, *The Secret in the Wings* 51). This story is a structural and thematic turning point in the play and the only story told in its entirety without interruption. It is the only story that focuses on familial as opposed to romantic love (though it includes both) and it is the point after which the orge stops proposing marriage and instead asks "*why* won't you marry me" (Zimmerman, *The Secret in the Wings* 72 emphasis added). Hobbs did not want to foreground a Freudian interpretation of a child asking a parent to marry him, but rather believed, following Bettelheim, that the "happily ever after" represented by marriage is meant to "indicate that which alone can take the sting out of the narrow limits of our time on this earth: forming a truly satisfying bond to another. The [fairy] tales teach us that when one has done this, one has reached the ultimate emotional security of existence" (11). The marriage proposals, then, are not sexual requests, but rather manifestations of a desire for the comfort of a secure parental bond, a comfort which comes at the play's end as a series of parents tuck their children in and wish them goodnight. Though we felt this understanding was supported by a deep reading of the text, it is so subtly written that an audience is unlikely to understand it intellectually, though the production intended for them to intuit or sense it. Many of our choices about what to foreground arose from our structural understanding.

I found the title's inclusion of the word *wings* helpful in understanding the metatheatrical nature of the play. In addition to the wings of the central story, the wings could also refer to a theatre's wings, the spaces just offstage into which actors can exit. A metatheatrical reference in the very title of the play highlights its importance to the play's intention. *The Secret in the Wings* is not just metatheatrical in the sense of being aware of itself as *a* theatrical world, it is aware of itself as *a particular, situated* theatrical world. The text specifies that each production should make changes to reflect its specific circumstances. For example, the three suitors are told to improvise their attempts to amuse the The Princess Who Wouldn't Laugh each night. Though brief descriptions of the choices made in the original production are included in the published text, these are offered as suggestions (Zimmerman, *The Secret* 30-31). Even more crucially, character names change production to production. The names we used in our production (ex. Mr. Ross, Garett, Michelle) differ from those in Zimmerman's text (Mr. Fitzpatrick, Tony, Heidi) because Zimmerman tells those staging her text that "the actual names of the actors performing the roles should be used for any proper name (with the exception of 'Allerleira')" (*The Secret* 83). For us, this was an embodiment of Bettelheim's belief that fairy tales deliberately provide space for each of us to insert ourselves, "facilitating projections and identifications" (40) which aid in psychological development.

To further encourage this placing of self inside the stories and the play itself, Hobbs focused on a certain improvisatory liveness in transitions, despite the incredible specificity with which they were choreographed. The spontaneity and playfulness of the transitions were meant to allow for self-insertion on the part of the performers and the audience. Rather than watching an unchanging (re)presentation, the audience's presence—and therefore contribution to the

theatrical event—was acknowledged in these moments. In each transition, while most cast members executed precise quick changes or moved prop and set pieces to prepare for upcoming scenes, some performers were playing games as children. These games often directly referenced and responded to the presence of the audience. This did not take the form of audience participation or direct interaction, but clearly included them in the play, disregarding any so-called fourth wall. This spontaneous, childlike playfulness came to characterize the play's transitions, providing a structural framework for the production.

While an audience clearly understanding *why* a certain shift had happened was not necessary in the dream-state world of the play, an audience understanding *that* a shift had occurred seemed crucial. Thus, Hobbs and I spent a great deal of time discussing transitions, especially how they signalled the end of one section of storytelling and carried the audience to the beginning of another. About midway through the process, having seen a run of the play, I offered Hobbs a series of questions and observations on the nature of transitions. First, I observed that the first transition involving the chorus rearranging items and changing costumes onstage (between the first parts of "Three Blind Queens" and the "The Princess Who Wouldn't Laugh" respectively) occurred so far into the production (probably 15 minutes in) that it was jarring and felt like an imposition on the play rather than an integral part of its framing. She had identified a similar problem, noting that the structural frame of stories being read from a book also appeared quite late (following the opening scene in the basement). I noted that I also wasn't seeing the childlike playfulness she had described to me early in our collaboration as central to her understanding of the quality with which she hoped to stage the play. She agreed and subsequently devised a sequence addressing these various concerns. Hobbs staged a new opening

in which the actors, as children, exploded onto the stage, laughing and playing games with each other and the audience. They exited just before Garrett entered, missing seeing the playing children and finding himself alone with the book. Opening the storybook caused him to transform into the ogre Mr. Ross by adopting the physical and vocal traits of the character and by putting on the costume tail in full view of the audience. He then exited with the storybook he would later bring with him when meeting Michelle in the first scene. While the meaning of all of these choices would not have been immediately clear to an audience, this new sequence effectively established the metatheatrical and storytelling frames as well as the playful quality of the production right off the bat, rather than much later in the play as indicated in Zimmerman's text. Because of this innovation, the opening scene (which now followed this new sequence) was actually the third storytelling point the audience had seen (following the children playing and Garrett discovery of the book) in the first few minutes of the play. We concluded that this established far more clearly that the audience should expect rapid shifts in structural frame and storytelling mode, respecting the intentions and structures of Zimmerman's text even while augmenting it.

Learning How and When

Of our many conversations, one stands out as especially instructive regarding the relationship between dramaturg and director mid-process. During a dinner break following a rehearsal run of the play a week and a half before opening, vocal coach Michael Kaplan and I sat down to offer our respective comments to Hobbs and to plan how we would each move forward. Kaplan gave his notes first and he and Hobbs had a productive conversation which I was happy to witness.

When I offered my comments, however, Hobbs and I seemed unable to achieve our usual level of mutual understanding and collective problem solving. It was an awkward exchange that did not seem to include any meaningful communication.

When I got home, I sent an email to Hobbs reflecting on the experience and asking if we might discuss how best to conduct future conversations, since that one had seemed unproductive and unhelpful to the process. I had been reluctant to send the email, worried—as practitioners often are—about causing problems or making waves in the midst of the difficulties of production. However, the explicit encouragement in our values statement to "name and address [problems, discomforts, or conflicts] as early and as thoroughly as possible" (*Values of the Process* 2, see Appendix A) empowered me to send the email, trusting it would be well received. It was.

Hobbs called me later that night and we had a very productive discussion both about the comments I had made in our earlier conversation and, more importantly, about how best to have those conversations going forward. Hobbs told me that my email had prompted her to think more deeply about the awkward unproductiveness of our earlier conversation, a characterization of it with which she agreed. She told me that she had come to the conclusion that it was not the nature or the quality of the conversation which had been amiss but rather the timing. Unlike notes from a vocal coach which tended to be specific, small-scale and actionable (to use Lang's metaphor: trees), my dramaturgical feedback was generally broader in scope (the forest). This meant that receiving it in a break before diving back into a notes session with the company was unhelpful. My dramaturgical feedback required longer-term consideration and highlighted concerns which were unlikely to be able to be addressed in a simple note to an actor or designer or by a brief

rehearsal of a section of the play. Because my observations could not be addressed immediately and because there was only a brief break before the resumption of rehearsal, the timing of the conversation was inappropriate. Instead, we decided that our conversations would happen following rehearsals, when Hobbs was freed from the imperative of considering exactly how she would approach the next moments of rehearsal. We adopted this as a practice for the remainder of the process to great effect. I give credit to the explicit articulation of the value of specificity for empowering me to have this conversation, a conversation which Hobbs and I agreed led to a much more effective working relationship and which may not have happened had the *way* we wanted to communicate in our work not been explicitly considered and articulated beforehand.

Marketing Tasks: Dramaturgical or Directorial?

As Dramaturg for *The Secret in the Wings* I took on several duties which usually fall to a Studio Theatre production's director but are arguably a better fit for a dramaturg. The Faculty of Arts' marketing department asked Hobbs for a show description and images from which to create a poster. Knowing how occupied Hobbs was with a rehearsal process made even more complicated by COVID-19, I offered to take on this work. As I had spent such intense time working with Hobbs to understand and support her interpretation of the play, I was well placed to undertake these tasks. Because they involve communicating meaningfully with an audience, each duty seemed to me inherently dramaturgical[3].

After a brief conversation with Hobbs, I drafted a synopsis for her to review, saving time while she was otherwise occupied in the midst of an intense rehearsal process. In response to the

[3] I write about the dramaturg's role in communicating with an audience as well as the relationship of a dramaturg's work to that of marketing a production in Chapter 3.

marketing department's requests for images that might be used on the poster, Hobbs sent a selection which she had collected early in her directing preparation as inspiration images. The marketing department replied with thanks but clarified that they needed royalty free images if they were to form the basis of the poster. As Hobbs' images had been culled primarily from Google searches with no intent of using them for anything other than sparking the creative imagination of the creative team, Hobbs did not have copyright information. Using a Google reverse image search, I tracked down the image that had most resonated with Hobbs as a way to represent the production visually for an audience. This turned out to be a screenshot from a motion picture, and therefore not copyright free (fig. 2). A quick conversation with Hobbs gave me an understanding of why she thought that image might appropriately evoke the production as it was shaping up. Using the skills of dramaturg-as-researcher, I set about searching royalty-free sites for images which aligned with Hobbs' goals. I was able to track down a pair of royalty free images (figs. 3 and 4) which the Marketing

Fig. 2 - Screenshot from *Pan's Labyrinth*. Directed by Guillermo del Toro, performance by Ivana Banquero, Estudios Picasso and Tequila Gang, 2006.

Fig. 3 - Greyerbaby. "Royalty free image tagged 'girl,' 'backside,' 'woods,' 'teddy bear,' 'young,' 'female,' 'back.' Pixabay.com.

Fig. 4 - jplenio. "Royalty free image tagged Nature Forest Trees Light Sun Fog Foggy

department edited together to create a striking visual for the poster (fig. 5). Serving both meaning-making and audience communication functions, these tasks were decidedly dramaturgical in nature and epitomized the ways in which a dramaturg can facilitate effective collaboration within a theatre.

Fig. 5 - Secret in the Wings Production Poster, *University of Alberta Faculty of Arts,* 2021**.**

Supporting The Acting Ensemble

My support for the acting ensemble had one central goal: usefulness in practice. My aim was to communicate the research and deep dramaturgical thinking I had done in ways that were useful to the creative process of the artists with whom I was working. As Ian Andrew Carlson

notes in his article on effective communication between performers and dramaturgs, "there is a widespread belief that the actor should not over-think or intellectualize character, but play actions in pursuit of goals. The idea is commonly taught in university classrooms, repeated in professional rehearsal halls, and codified in theatre textbooks" (317). Carlson articulates how this can cause "miscommunications between the intellectually minded production dramaturg and the impulse-driven Stanislavsi actor" (317). Though Hobbs was drawing on more than Stanizlavski in her methodology and the acting company was familiar with many techniques outside of that tradition, it was certainly true that Hobbs' directing methods strongly encouraged the performers to "avoid playing the generalized quality of an idea by solving practical problems in pursuit of a goal" (Carlson 319). Thus, it was incumbent upon me to frame my research in active, playable language because "if the analysis is not translated into active language, it will not influence process" (Carlson 319).

The First Day

As is common practice for dramaturgs, on the first day of rehearsal I did a presentation for the assembled company. This was accompanied by a pair of documents which had been sent out in advance as a dramaturgical packet: "Mary Zimmerman and Us" and "The Secret in the Fairytales" (see Appendix C). The presentation and documents were created in collaboration with Hobbs and intended to provide background context for the particulars of the process the company was about to undertake. As noted above, a central goal was distilling information into a usable, readable form. Thus, I made sure to avoid academic jargon and to focus on the things which my discussions with Hobbs had highlighted as most likely to be of direct influence on the

creative process. I did not include the bulk of Mary Zimmerman's theatrical or personal biography, for example, focusing instead on how her unique creative process would influence our own work. Hobbs had highlighted psychologist Bruno Bettelheim's thinking on fairy tales as an important influence on her understanding of Zimmerman's text. Combining this with my own thinking on storytelling, I tried to include the quotes and ideas from Bettelheim that Hobbs had highlighted as most resonant for her. In this way, I aimed to ensure the creative team also had access to those influences. Informed by the value of specificity, I included references in case people felt drawn to do further research. While certainly aiming to write in detail, I tried to adopt a tone that was not overtly academic, attempting to avoid what Carlson calls "the scholar/artist divide [that] continues to create communication barriers in the rehearsal hall" (318). I consciously wrote in the first-person plural (we, us) to help achieve this tone and to reinforce the value of ensemble.

Topics Arising From The First Day

When presenting the values document on the first day, I told the company that this particular way of framing a rehearsal process was inspired by my work with Yvette Nolan. I noticed many members of the creative team frantically writing notes as I spoke about Nolan, her artistic work, and her books on Indigenous theatre. Both creative team members who would be working on Nolan's adaptation of *The Birds* later in the Studio Theatre Season as well as those who would not be involved in that production were interested. In response to this, I asked if more information on Nolan would be useful. Receiving a resounding yes in reply, I prepared a written document which included a more thorough biography, descriptions of some of her published

works and links to various places they could be accessed, as well as a brief section on how Nolan uses values in her practice (see Appendix D). While this was not of direct relevance to our work on *The Secret in the Wings*—except for providing slightly more clarity on the inspiration for our use of values in the process—I nonetheless viewed this as an important dramaturgical task demonstrating how I could, as dramaturg, provide support to my collaborators. As well as responding to the desires of the company to further contextualize one aspect of how we were working, it also provided a written resource to complement an otherwise aural introduction. Perhaps most importantly, however, I viewed it as a dramaturgical service to theatre more broadly. Indigenous theatre is underappreciated and undervalued by much of so-called mainstream theatre, so I view the opportunity to foreground an important Indigenous artist and to point a group of theatre-makers towards works like Nolan's *Medicine Shows* to be a worthwhile use of time that could be of benefit to the artists generally if not on this project specifically. To me, this might be understood as an activist dramaturgy, concerned with a particular production and theatre, of course, but with the state of theatre, society, and the world more broadly as well.

Rehearsing With Actors

Early in the rehearsal process Hobbs asked me if I would be willing to participate in rehearsal in a way uncommon for a production dramaturg: rehearsing with the actors. Knowing my background as a director and intent to get the most out of rehearsal, she wondered if, at times, I might be willing to take a group of actors into a second space to run choreography while she worked with other actors. I was originally hesitant to agree to this, not wanting to blur the roles of dramaturg and director. Nonetheless, the value of flexibility encouraged me to agree.

Strict siloing of roles and responsibilities was antithetical to the values and ways of working Hobbs and I set out to explore. In the end I agreed and it became a useful part of my work on the production.

I led a mid-process rehearsal with the three princes in "The Three Blind Queens" during which we rehearsed their overlapping dialogue and its accompanying choreography. This was a particularly complicated bit of text and choreography so Hobbs was eager to give the performers as much rehearsal time as possible to work on it. My experience directing actors (and background as a performer) meant I felt confident leading a rehearsal and helping the three performers plan how they would rehearse on their own going forward. Moreover, because I share so many values with Hobbs, my style of work was very similar and thus not a major deviation from the process the actors had experienced thus far. Because of our detailed preparatory work together, I was able to quickly and easily grasp Hobbs' goals for each rehearsal I was to lead. This work with the actors helped me to develop deeper relationships with those members of the ensemble. Before this, I had creatively interacted with actors only briefly during early rehearsals.

Having established that part of my role as dramaturg on this production included work directly with the actors proved very useful during technical rehearsals. Delays and setbacks on the technical side demanded Hobbs' almost exclusive focus so she asked me to pass along and/or work out notes with actors at various points from cue-to-cue onward. During early technical rehearsals, Hobbs informed the actors that such work was likely. Thus, this deviation from standard practice was not unexpected. Because I had already established a relationship with some actors in which I would sometimes give notes and direction on Hobbs' behalf, I was able to work Hobbs' notes with the performers while she was occupied with technical concerns. This allowed

for a fluidity and continuity in the rehearsal process that would not have been possible if all focus on acting had needed to stop during technical work or vice versa.

Chapter 3 - Engaging Audiences Via Values: Letting Them In On The Secrets In Our Wings

"Artists are witnesses of their times: they should not impose on their public their own view of society, their own understanding of human beings, or their own way to make decisions, but, after speaking their speech, having their say, giving their testimony, delivering to us the product of their art and their craft, they should help others to stimulate inside himself [sic] the artists that lie within, under-developed and timid as they may be, shy thoughts still unborn and fragmented, the delicate sensibility that has been blunted. . . . We are all theatre, even if we don't make theatre."

-Augusto Boal (*Game*s, 17)

3.1 Audience Engagement: Conversation and Context

Conversation

The Augusto Boal quote I use to introduce this chapter highlights a central belief I hold: we as artists should not be concerned only with the making of our art, but also with the conversations that art might spur and the broader context into which we are offering it. Peter Hay insists that

> drama does not work, and it cannot be made to work, if the artists and the audiences that are involved in it do not seek the meaning of their own work and of the work itself. I am not suggesting that there are always answers when the questions are asked, only that there can be no meaning to play-making without a conscious quest for that meaning. (14)

He identifies this as a key task of a dramaturg. Likewise, Theresa Lang suggests that to dramaturg is "to curate an experience for an audience" (7). I refer to this curation in support of a conscious quest for meaning as *audience engagement*. Specifically, I am referring to work

around the production which informs, contextualizes, and situates the production: that which happens before the play begins and after it ends, adding depth to what happens during the performance itself.

My use of the term *engagement*—as opposed to audience *development* or audience *outreach*—is deliberate. While development implies a focus on marketing, on "getting bums in seats," the term outreach has connotations of evangelism or recruitment and often centres the organization doing the outreach (see "outreach, n."). While 'reaching out' to an audience is, of course, necessary and desirable, the ultimate goal should actually be a deep and meaningful *engagement* with the audience, a multi-directional interaction that is more than a transaction of money for a so-called artistic product.

I find the thinking of Paulo Freire useful in understanding what a meaningful engagement might entail. Freire writes in the context of education but many of his insights are useful to the theatre. His notion of "critical co-investigators in dialogue" (68) is especially useful. Freire's work breaks down the hierarchies between teachers and students in ways very similar to those I wish to challenge between artist and audience member. Freire is interested in dismantling the hierarchical relationship between teachers and students, suggesting that "no one teaches another, nor is anyone self-taught. People teach each other, mediated by the world" (67). Though neither artists nor audiences are teachers per se, there can exist unproductive hierarchies between them in either direction: for example, artist-as-prophet (bringing enlightenment to the masses who must uncritically open themselves) or audience-as-customer (in the context of "the customer is always right" and therefore entitled to demand whatever they want). Both of these extremes suggest one party in the relationship is the expert whose understanding and interpretation of art is

infallible. Freire suggests that instead of positioning the teacher as expert imparting knowledge, the role of the teacher "is to create, together with the students, the *conditions* under which knowledge [is generated]" (68 emphasis added). Freire also cautions against mistaking "depositing ideas" (67) for true dialogue.. Indeed, neither side can "present its own program but [instead] must search for this program dialogically" (Friere, 118). Thus, in my audience engagement work I sought to offer resources and opportunities for reflection, but not to dictate the outcomes of dialogue.

Freire's thinking has been introduced to the theatre most widely and successfully via Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed, but this application is not the only one possible. Contrary to Boal's belief that in most theatre spectators "passively delegate power to the characters to act and think in their place" (*Theatre*, 155) which leads to the necessity of "the spec-tactor" (*Games*, 15), a spectator who is empowered to make changes within the theatrical act itself, aesthetic and liberatory education philosopher Jacques Ranceière reminds us that

> Being a spectator is not some passive condition that we should transform into activity. It is our normal situation. We also learn and teach, act and know, as spectators who all the time link what we see to what we have seen and said, done and dreamed. (20)

It is this *linking* that Rancière sees as the key to an emancipated spectatorship: "Emancipation begins when we challenge the opposition between viewing and acting . . . [an emancipated spectator] *links* what she sees to a host of other things that she has seen on other stages, in other kinds of places" (13 emphasis added) making audience members "active interpreters of the spectacle offered to them" (13). Freire himself asserts that "[c]ritical reflection is also action"

(123). Active participation in the theatrical act is not a prerequisite for an emancipated—to use Rancière's phrase—or liberated—to use Freire's—audience, able to partake in an engaged dialogue. My audience engagement work sought to encourage critical reflection, informed linking of concepts and experiences, and true dialogue.

Context

Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar, writer, and artist Leanne Simpson is a major influence on both Hobbs' and my thinking about storytelling. Though this play does not deal with Indigenous knowledges or stories—it is, on the contrary, a settler-American play inspired by European fairy tales—every performance taking place on this land is ethically obliged to engage with what Ric Knowles calls "the basic fact of the 'firstness' of the First Nations and Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island, and to try to address what contemporary performance native to this continent might look like" (*Performing* viii). Indigenous knowledges cannot be relegated to the fringes but must be embraced in all work. This must be done, however, in the context of a conscious, nuanced, and (likely) fraught engagement with the risks of extractivism and assimilation. This topic warrants a thesis of its own, but I mention it here briefly to contextualize how such thinking has been one of the factors informing my approach to audience engagement.

Many of Simpson's teachings have influenced my work. Simpson's belief that "storytelling is a visionary process because it challenges us to rethink, reorder, and reimagine the world" (110) is powerful—as is her articulation of how "Elders teach us that we are to insert ourselves into these stories . . . we are not to experience these stories at arm's length, but [must know] that this consciousness is highly personal and highly contextual" (111). This evokes, for

me, the famous and deeply true words of Cherokee scholar and writer Thomas King: "The truth about stories is that that's all we are" (2). King goes on to quote Nigerian storyteller Ben Okri who says that "we live by stories, we also live in them. One way or another we are living the stories planted in us early or along the way, or we are also living the stories we planted—knowingly or unknowingly—in ourselves" (qtd. in King 153). Simpson also writes about the responsibility storytellers bear for the conditions of the telling of the story. Explaining Nishnaabeg storytelling philosophies, Simpson explains that "[k]nowledge holders spend a great deal of time setting up the conditions for engagement rather than trying to predict or control the outcome . . . the meaning comes from the context and the process" (112). This distinction is an important lesson for theatrical storytellers. While it is impossible to predetermine how art will be received—multiplicity of interpretation is both inevitable and valuable—an artist cannot merely abdicate responsibility for the context in which they share their art. We have a responsibility to consider and work to support and to shape the reception of our art—and it is an exciting responsibility. It is this responsibility for the context in which performance is received to which I now turn.

I believe that we as theatre artists would do well to consider deeply our interactions with audiences before performances begin and after they end. How are we starting the conversation which inevitably begins long before the theatrical act itself? What are we offering to inform the context of its reception? To me, this is part of the all-important *context* of the storytelling which Simpson highlights as central to meaning-making in her tradition. Taken holistically, this would certainly include the physical space of the theatre, how audiences are welcomed into it, and many other embodied factors. The COVID-19 pandemic meant that experimentation in physical

space was severely limited. Indeed, major interventions into how audiences physically and socially interact with the institution of the Studio Theatre would be a large undertaking for a Masters of Fine Arts thesis at the best of times—and near impossible with the strict restrictions imposed to promote public health. I have therefore limited the scope of my consideration to the communication and interaction between audiences and the production of *The Secret in the Wings* rather than the Studio Theatre more broadly, focusing specifically on what is shared with audiences in advance of their attendance online.

I looked to the production's playwright, as well, to contextualize my audience engagement work. Zimmerman argues that audience members attending the theatre are

> diminishing their own presence—sitting in uniform rows in the dark … not being allowed to speak … quieting themselves bodily… not being allowed to eat or drink or answer their cellphones . . . *removing themselves from the world* . . . it is a sacrifice, it's a very big thing that they're doing. ("Mirroring" 440)

Based on this understanding of the sacrifice of the audience, Zimmerman works to ensure that their experience watching the performance is stimulating. I would argue that another necessary step is to ensure that other ways in which the audience are engaged do not diminish but rather celebrate an audience's unique presence, encouraging audiences to situate themselves in the world rather than further removing themselves from it. I thus aimed to centre dialogue with audience members about their subjective experiences of the production rather than explanations of the production's artistic intent or my own beliefs about the work.

I do not wish to diminish the importance of artistic intention in the creation of art, merely that an artist's intentions and beliefs about their own art can often be elevated above audiences'

experiences. When this happens, it creates a problematic hierarchy which discourages dialogue. The subjective position of the artist is important in a dialogue with an audience, but not more important than the subjective positions and experiences of audiences. In highlighting the need for equitable status in interactions, Freire suggests that "[s]elf-sufficiency is incompatible with dialogue" (79). Nonetheless, both sides need to bring themselves to a dialogue and thus I strived to convey to an audience both the intellectual basis for our work but also the ways in which we carried out that work, including the values that underscored the process. I challenged myself to structure the engagement such that it, too, aligned with the values articulated for the production —including ensemble, which stressed the importance of "the complex links *between* us" (*Values of the Process* 1). If the values were meant to guide every aspect of the work, I could not ignore them when I left the rehearsal hall and went to engage with an audience.

3.2 Dig Deeper: An Online Dramaturgical Platform

For the 2020-2021 season, the University of Alberta Department of Drama launched a website specifically designed to host dramaturgical content related to its productions (Dramaturgy: Dig Deeper). As dramaturg on the third production to make use of this website, I was able both to benefit from extant digital infrastructure, and help to shape and expand it further.

Audience engagement is a natural fit and common role for a production dramaturg. Writing before the pandemic, LaRonika Thomas explains the possibilities of a digital space for dramaturgs whose "dual role has been symbolized by two locales: the rehearsal hall and the library . . . [but can expand to include] a third location: the virtual space" (506). Since the onset

of the COVID-19 pandemic, this virtual space has become, in many ways, the primary location of my dramaturgical work. Libraries and pre-production processes have migrated online, so too did the dialogue with audiences.

Content Notes

I consider content notes a key part of dramaturgical dialogue with an audience. The content notes for *The Secret in the Wings* featured on the Dig Deeper website read as follows:

> Content Notes (sometimes called content warnings) are our opportunity to give you a heads-up about some of the things you will encounter in the production. We recognize that certain content could be triggering and that there are some days you might not want to deal with those things or might want to have a heads-up before you do.
>
> If you prefer to be surprised by the content, feel free to skip this section. Engage with the play in whatever way you wish!
>
> [To read the following, one had to click "Read More"]
>
> This play is full of just that: play. It celebrates the imagination, yet it is based on fairytales and thus touches on many taboos that polite society pretends aren't part of the world - and especially pretends aren't part of children's stories. Things like murder, incest, cannibalism, and predatory adults are central to fairy tales and

each is present in this production. However, the stories contained here are not presented in a realistic fashion, but rather in a playful, stylized manner.

There is also limited use of a strobe light.

We cannot know every potential trigger, but we hope this offers you a sense of both what the show contains and how it presents it. With this in mind, we encourage you to take care of yourself however you need. ("The Secret in the Wings")

Crafting content notes—sometimes called content warnings or trigger warnings[4]—is all about informed consent. To what does an audience consent when they enter the theatre? How and to what extent are they informed and thus able to give their consent? A content note is one tool in answering these questions. A useful definition of such notes is "verbal or written notices that precede potentially sensitive content. These notices flag the contents of the material that follows, so readers, listeners, or viewers can prepare themselves to adequately engage or, if necessary, disengage for their own wellbeing" (University of Michigan College of Literature Sciences and the Arts Inclusive Teaching 2). Originally developed as access supports for those experiencing post traumatic stress or other anxiety disorders (University of Michigan College of Literature Sciences and the Arts Inclusive Teaching 3), feminist and disability thinking has expanded their use as social justice tools to centre also acknowledgments of systemic oppressions that may be

[4] Though I use the term "content notes" for the reasons I explore below, I will use the terms "trigger warning," "content warning," etc. when they are used by others—especially critics of the practice—in their work. Though carrying distinct nuances, histories, and implications (see Mayer and University of Michigan College of Literature Sciences and the Arts Inclusive Teaching), the terms are often used interchangeably.

addressed or embodied in the content in question, honouring the specific traumas experienced by marginalized peoples (see A. Carter).

There remains strong resistance to the inclusion of content notes both in the academy (where much of the literature and scholarly debate is centred) and in the theatre. Many critics believe that content warnings represent a form of "coddling" (Stokes; Palfrey; A. Carter; University of Michigan College of Literature Sciences and the Arts Inclusive Teaching). In contrast to this portrayal, a content note is actually an act of respect for an audience member's ability to determine for themselves what they wish to encounter. As dramaturg and director Sydney Mayer argues, "this is about respecting audience agency. Part of being a responsible theatremaker is trusting the audience to make their own choices about their exposure to certain topics." In addition to ethical concerns there are also practical ones. An audience member who has been triggered into a fight/flight/freeze response by an alarming bit of content is no longer able to engage with the production. If flight is their response, this can also mean audience members disrupt other audience members and/or the performers as they exit the space.

Many companies do not include content notes for their productions. Chicago's Steppenwolf Theatre, for example, "does not offer advisories about subject matter, as sensitivities vary from person to person" ("A Doll's House Part 2"). While it is undoubtedly true that sensitivities will vary, it does not follow that no engagement at all with potential sensitivities is the appropriate response. In the content notes for *The Secret in the Wings* I made a point of acknowledging that the notes cannot possibly account for every potential sensitivity. Moreover, the notes I crafted also take the form of a discussion of the production as opposed to a list of triggers, aiming to give a sense of the production rather than a definitive summation of it. I

object as well to Steppenwolf's alternative to offering content notes: encouraging audience members to contact the box office. This practice has several shortcomings. First, it puts the onus for further labour onto those who have already proactively searched out a content advisory section only to be denied ready access to that information. Second, it puts an unfair responsibility onto box office staff who are certainly far less familiar with the specifics of any production—including the artistic rationale for choices—than a dramaturg or other member of the production team. In fact, content notes crafted by a dramaturg based on in-depth work with the creative team and participation in rehearsal should be supplied to the box office so that they can provide informed answers to audience members when asked. Giving them primary responsibility for articulating a production's content, however, seems likely to result in far less nuanced responses, undermining the possibility for a fruitful dialogue between the production and potential audiences.

During my limited time seeing plays at Studio Theatre I have encountered a content warning only once: for *Revolt. She Said. Revolt Again.* in the 2019-2020 season. This note read "CONTENT WARNING: This production contains explicit language and graphic subject material, and is recommended for mature audiences only" ("Revolt. She Said. Revolt Again."). I chose to frame my note very differently from this one for the reasons I explore below. *The Secret in the Wings* is the first time such notes have been included on the Dig Deeper website and therefore including them required some backend programming to make this new section possible. It is my hope that the creation of such digital infrastructure will allow for content notes to become common practice.

What we title and how we phrase content notes is significant. The importance of a distinction between notes and warnings, for example, is supported by a critical engagement with the literature. Bellet et al.'s "Trigger Warning: Empirical Evidence Ahead," an oft-cited study, suggests that "warnings do not appear to affect sensitivity to distressing material in general, but may increase immediate anxiety response for a subset of individuals whose beliefs predispose them to such a response" (140). The authors note that their study's findings are not robust enough to "form the basis for immediate policy changes regarding the use of trigger warnings without subsequent replication, as effect sizes were small … [and were based on] use of a non-traumatized sample" (140). Despite its significant limitations, this study has been seized upon by critics as proof that such warnings are unnecessary and "could actually help *generate* anxiety, thus making them counterproductive" (Palus). One major flaw of the study is the extremity of the wording of the warning. For Bellet et al.'s study, the following wording was used: "TRIGGER WARNING: The passage you are about to read contains disturbing content and may trigger an anxiety response, especially in those who have a history of trauma" (137). While not necessarily inaccurate, such extreme language and use of all caps risks leading to what one commentator describes as the potential "that trigger warnings could actually help generate anxiety" (Palus). While in some cases extreme warnings may be necessary to convey the intensity of the experience to come, in many cases there is a risk of overstatement which could, in fact, lead to unnecessary stress. As theatre practitioner Hearn-Feldman points out, content warnings "can also prevent people from attending shows if they do not include a description of *the level* of violence" (Barnette et al. 119 emphasis added) or other potentially upsetting content. To counter this, Hearn-Feldman recommends that theatre-makers "inform spectators about the safety and

sensitivity surrounding the production's a*pproach* to staging violence" (119 emphasis added). This is exactly what I strived to do in *The Secret in the Wings*. I avoided hyperbolic wording about risks and focused instead on an explication of the content in the production as well as why and how it is presented. I also deliberately label them content *notes* as opposed to the more alarmist *warnings*.

It is important to frame the content with nuance. In the case of *The Secret in the Wings*, the content is presented as it is in fairy tales: in a heightened manner, which is playful despite its gruesomeness. It is not presented as gritty realism. This could be an important distinction for an audience member who may be able or willing to engage with one style and not another. As Yvette Nolan argues when discussing her 2009 staging of *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*, a more abstract and less literal presentation of violence or brutality potentially "allows the audience to feel more than just guilt and horror, enables them to keep watching rather than turn their faces away" ("A Prayer" 129). We cannot know, however, whether this will be true for any particular member of the audience nor whether any presentation of a specific kind of content might be triggering. Thus, the notes remain important even in a production with a staging strategy such as Nolan's *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* or *The Secret in the Wings*. In addition, I made sure to explicitly state both the content I suspected might be triggering and also that I can't possibly know every potential trigger and thus that the list cannot possibly be comprehensive. Unlike Steppenwolf Theatre's complete rejection of content notes on the grounds it is impossible for them to be comprehensive, acknowledging that impossibly while still making the attempt represents a level of empathetic honesty about what is and isn't possible in the theatre-audience relationship. Making this explicit allows for a more nuanced dialogue with the audience. It is also in-keeping

with the production's stated value of specificity and is an example of honest, imperfect community care.

When crafting the content notes, I tried to accommodate a variety of preferences. For example, many feel content notes reduce the power of a performance to surprise. While I do not accept this as justification for refusing to offer content notes at all, I wish to honour audience members who do not wishto engage with content notes before a production. In physical spaces, content notes can, for example, be clearly displayed but the notes themselves covered so that audience members must lift a flap of paper to read them, thus choosing actively to engage with them or not. Due to the pandemic and attempts to minimize indoor gatherings of any kind, there was no lobby component to *Secret in the Wings*. On the Dig Deeper platform, an explanation of content notes is immediately visible, but a user has to click "read more" to have the show-specific content note revealed. To me, this represented a balance which allowed all preferences to be accommodated and respected audience agency.

Another important choice on this production involved the use of prose rather than a point form list. Many content notes sections will simply list potentially triggering subjects one after the other without commentary. While the notes I crafted contained a list—"muder, incest, cannibalism, and predatory adults" (*Dramaturgy: Dig Deeper*)—this list is not point form, but rather in the midst of a paragraph contextualizing them in the context of the play and its intentions. Again, this is aimed at increasing the nuance with which the content is discussed. While requiring slightly more time and energy to read than a point-form list, it is also, ideally, less sensationalizing, encouraging measured reflection and avoiding the pitfalls pointed out by Bellet et al.'s study. I propose that even productions of a more brutal or in-your-face nature could

make use of this strategy. To me, a central ethical question for theatre artists when presenting intense, potentially upsetting or triggering content regards the reasoning for including such content: why am I asking my audience to go through this experience? The answers to this question will inevitably vary from production to production. Offering an audience not just *what* potentially-triggering content is present but *the way it is presented* and the artistic and/or socio-political reasoning for that presentation allows for an extremely nuanced conversation with audience members who may wish to engage. Based on this nuanced conversation, theatre makers can dialogue with a more *informed* audience, an audience, therefore, more able to truly consent to participation.

The debate over the value (if any) of content notes continues. My belief remains, however, that there is little to lose and much to gain from the inclusion of content notes in dramaturgical audience engagement. In the interests of establishing informed consent, they remain an important tool whether or not any individual audience member chooses to engage with them. In my work I try to minimize the risk of unwanted exposure to content in both directions —for those who do and do not want to be surprised—but, as literature professor Mason Stokes so clearly articulates, if one can prevent potentially harmful experiences and "the cost is a spoiler, that's a price well worth paying."

Articles

One of the major sections of the Dig Deeper website contains dramaturgical writing about the production. The philosophical basis for my work in this section was twofold: providing dramaturgical context as part of dialoguing with the audience and upholding the production's

values of rigour and specificity. In place of a single Dramaturg's Note that might have been included in a playbill had there been one, I opted for several brief articles on the background of the play and playwright, key themes, and approaches specifically taken by this production (see Appendix G). Many of these articles were adaptations of themes I presented in my dramaturgical package for the creative team which I re-worked for a general audience. Some, however, such as Zimmerman's biography (as opposed to her creative process) and an exploration of the fairy tales sources from which Zimmerman adapted the texts were crafted specifically for the audience. Guided by the advice of Xavia Publius, Graduate Research Assistant responsible for the Dig Deeper Website, I kept the articles short. I broke up sections on Mary Zimmerman and storytelling's relationship to psychology, for example, into smaller articles than I had originally intended. Brevity seemed fitting for an online platform. Each article ended with a bibliography to encourage interested readers to pursue the topics in greater depth. Many articles also included hyperlinks connecting readers directly to additional information. Hyperlinks are a particular strength of online platforms that would not have been possible in a printed program.

The Problem with Play: Bringing Values Online

In thinking through my approach to audience engagement, I returned again and again to a central question: how might the values that informed the process of creation also inform the way I communicate about that process and its resulting production? It seemed obvious how specificity and rigour would inform the work: surely well-researched articles on the play's background and key themes would be driven by these values. It was less clear how values like ensemble and play would inform audience engagement activities. In addition to being a

philosophically interesting exercise, I felt that there was a practical need to communicate playfully. *The Secret in the Wings* is a particularly potent example of what Loewith refers to as Zimmerman's disposition towards a phenomenological as opposed to semiotic form of theatre. I was aware that an over-emphasis on intellectualized or abstracted content risked making untrue implications about the production to an audience. To convey the sense of playfulness embodied in the process and in the aesthetics of the final production, I conceived of three items: a meme gallery, a playlist, and a Buzzfeed-style challenge video.

During the rehearsal process, one of the performers, Dylan Maguire, entertained the creative team by using popular formats to create memes specific to *The Secret in the Wings* and this production in particular. While many of them were inside jokes or contained unhelpful spoilers, I selected several that I felt a general audience might also find funny. With Maguire's permission, these were posted online with a brief introduction clarifying their relation to the show and a recommendation to engage with them after having watched the production. Whether audiences engaged with them before or after watching the production, I felt the inclusion of a meme gallery in its supplementary content would hint at a production that was neither overly-formal nor interested in conventional methods of communicating.

Though coined by Richard Dawkins in the 1970s, the specific usage of the term meme which I employ is that of "[a]n image, video, piece of text, etc., typically humorous in nature, that is copied and spread rapidly by internet users, often with slight variations" ("meme, n."). Because they use recognizable formats, often drawn from popular culture, and are inherently self-referential, I felt that memes echoed the metatheatrical elements of the production as well as the spirit of reinterpretation and appropriation which characterizes Zimmerman's approach to

fairy tales. Many of the memes I selected included bleak, sardonic, or wry humour, which also reflected the tone of the production.

Creating a playlist for *The Secret in the Wings* served several functions. Inspired, in part, by the value of ensemble, I invited members of the creative team to share music they were listening to and how it was influencing their work on the production. In line with my interest in allowing an audience access to the many factors influencing how a production is created, I framed the playlist—both for the artists contributing and the audience engaging with it—as an opportunity to present the music the creative team was using to inspire them, rather than the music that would be included in the production itself. In the end, a huge variety of genres were represented. The short notes explaining why each artist submitted that particular song included reasonings as diverse as thematic resonances and songs that are energizing on long days.

Inspired by a popular style of viral video in which people are filmed doing challenges or reacting to something for the first time, I created a challenge video for this production ("Studio Theatre's The Secret in the Wings fairy tale challenge"). Melanie Dreyer-Lude, Chair of the Department of Drama, participated in the video and recruited faculty from the University of Alberta's other two Fine Arts Departments, Music and Art & Design, to partake in the challenge: Sherry Steele and Natalie Loveless respectively. I gave each of them a series of fairy tale-related questions to answer on-camera, many of them under a time-limit. They were to open the envelope containing the questions on-camera so that their reactions to the questions as well as their answers could be recorded. This capturing of a first-response evokes, for me, the liveness and spontaneity of theatre, even in a highly-edited video. The video ended up being both playful

and thematically interesting, reflecting various relationships with and understandings of fairy tales.

None of the reasoning behind the creation of these items needed to be made explicit to an audience. Instead, I trusted that the feeling of the production could be communicated subtly by the meme gallery, playlist, and challenge video, perhaps better than any written explanation could. Indeed, if text is not primary in the production—Zimmerman describes her texts as "only one instrument in an orchestra and not necessarily the one always carrying the melody" ("Archeology" 32)—it seemed inappropriate that text be the only method of communicating with an audience.

The creation of playful content illustrates the ways in which audience engagement dramaturgy interacts with (but is not the same as) marketing. While much of the content—especially the playful content—was well-received and used by the marketing department on social media, my goal was not explicitly one of audience recruitment. Instead, my focus was on complementing and enriching the experience of the production. I did not allow myself to prioritize convincing people of the production's worth. To do so, I felt, risked reducing the production to a commodity in a marketplace as opposed to an artistic event, a meaningful dialogue with an audience rather than a transaction. I saw piquing interest in the production as a valuable but secondary outcome.

Online Audience Conversations: Forums and Book Clubs

To me, good theatre gets audiences talking. One of the valuable offerings of a dramaturg is supporting this conversation in a variety of ways, rather than simply expecting or hoping that it

will happen. In non-pandemic times, I would have hosted conversations in the lobby of the theatre following select performances. This was not possible due to gathering restrictions and the fact that most audience members would be engaging with the production in its online recorded form, rather than live. Thus, as with so much during this time, these conversations migrated online. This presented advantages and disadvantages. While there is no substitute for being physically present with one another, hosting the conversations online increased access in that they could be joined by anyone from anywhere in the world without leaving their home. Moreover, it meant that attendance was not limited to those who had seen a particular night of the run as would likely be the case for an event hosted in the lobby.

Much of my thinking about conversations of this kind is shaped by my work with the Afterplay program at Live Five Theatre in Saskatoon. This program began with a production of Diana Son's S*top Kiss* that I directed in 2014 and continued for several seasons thereafter as a standard part of Live Five's audience engagement work. I learned the philosophy of this work from Joel Bernbaum who had helped develop it during his time at Victoria, BC's Belfry Theatre. The Belfry website describes Afterplay as a "conversation [that is] audience-to-audience" which offers an "opportunity to discuss a piece of theatre after you have seen it [which] can enhance your experience of the play" ("Afterplay + Talkback."). Importantly, there is a facilitator to host the event and provide questions to stimulate discussion, but that person is "not there to answer questions or to offer expert information" ("Afterplay + Talkback."). This approach provides structure to the experience while empowering audience members to look to their own experience of the play as inherently valuable. It takes the audience seriously by considering their unique interaction with a theatre production as a source of subjective expertise which should not be

devalued in favour of the views of the artists who created a work. It strives for dialogue in the Frierean sense.

On this project, facilitating conversation took place in two major ways: forums and a book club-style facilitated online conversation.

Forums

A Forums section has been included for each of the two previous productions which made use of the Dig Deeper website and was included again for *The Secret in the Wings*. This section offered spaces for audiences to post responses to questions about the play which were then displayed publicly. Elizabeth Hobbs was the first dramaturg whose work appeared on the site (in connection with the 2020 production of *Chrysothemis* by Meg Braem) and we had several conversations about appropriate questions for the website, knowing that I would be using it also for *The Secret in the Wings*. Two of the questions we settled on—each inspired by my work on Afterplay—remained constant for the following productions and were also key to my approach to the Theatre Book Club event, explored below: "What surprised you about the play?" and "What was a moment in the production that stood out to you and why?" ("The Secret in the Wings"). These questions were complemented by a show-specific question. For our production this two-part question related to fairy tales: "Do you have a favourite fairy tale? Why does it resonate with you?" ("The Secret in the Wings"). These open-ended questions were meant to offer audiences a structured opportunity to critically reflect on their unique experience of the production.

Previous productions had seen a small amount of engagement but there were no comments left on any of the forum questions for *The Secret in the Wings*. It is impossible to know with certainty why this is the case. On previous productions there had only ever been a maximum of three comments on any one post, so uptake could be described as minimal at best. In any case, the passive nature of the forum leads me to question its value in this incarnation. Offering audiences questions to ponder is valuable in provoking critical thought and reflection, but I wonder if asking them in a largely anonymous and unmoderated online forum will lead to the type of discussion Dig Deeper aims to encourage. It is also worth noting that no comment on any production has received a reply. Perhaps on a forum such as this, the answers to the questions are less important than the posing of the questions. Put another way, perhaps the forum section could be re-worked as a section aimed at personal reflection rather than discussion between audience-members. Questions could still be posed, but perhaps responses do not need to be solicited for public posting and discussion. This might encourage the linking to other ideas and experiences that Rancière considers crucial to emancipated spectatorship without demanding that this linking be made public. Moving forward in my dramaturgical practice I will have to think further about how such a forum might be made more useful in facilitating dialogue.

A Book Club Not A Talk Back

In many ways, the *Secret in the Wings* Theatre Book Club event was defined by what it was not. In setting it up, I strived to resist what I consider to be the pitfalls of most events described as talkbacks (a description I consciously avoided). A talkback is generally an event where members of the creative team talk about their work and then audiences are given a chance

to ask them questions. This formulation risks setting up the artists who created a work as the absolute experts on it, devaluing the subjective experiences of audience members. Discussing talkbacks, dramaturg and theatre professor Jodi Kanter articulates the particular pitfalls of such events by explaining how they "can be fun and satisfying in so far as they give audience members access to privileged behind-the-curtain information, [but] they rarely serve the audience in more meaningful ways" (485). Anecdotally, I often hear the phrase "I didn't get it" spoken by theatre audience members who are not trained in theatre as if "not getting it" was a personal failing. In hearing this, my sense is that these audience members feel that they must somehow live up to the art, as opposed to appreciating their own unique experience of it—including, possibly, being confused by it, not liking it, or not having the words to express a reaction, which are all valid responses. Inspired by the Afterplay model, the book club event prioritized exploring audience experiences rather than artists' intentions. In order to manage expectations and frame the conversation, I deliberately stressed the intra-audience and conversational nature of the event both in the event description publicized beforehand and in my preamble to the conversation.

Rancière argues that an audience, like the reader of a text, inherently participates. My goal is not just to accept this as true but to support it, encouraging audiences to feel empowered in their participation in the theatrical exchange by centering the inherent value of their unique experience and understanding. Rancière's comparison of spectators to readers is a powerful one (14, 23). Nobody would deny that a reader can have a meaningful engagement with a text or that they are passive before the power of the book (though of course the inherent validity or legitimacy of an idea simply because it has been published is worth challenging). By calling the

event a Theatre Book Club[5], I hoped to evoke the perhaps more common understanding of the reader of a book as central to the value of the book, someone who can legitimately discuss their response to the work of art.

Because the overwhelming majority of those who attended the book club event were theatre scholars, the event could hardly be described as having attracted a *general* audience. A key goal of my framing of the prompt questions was to provide opportunities and tools for a non-expert audience to engage in a meaningful, nuanced conversation without requiring theatre or performance studies training or vocabulary[6]. This approach was not needed as the audience already possessed an insider's vocabulary. It was interesting, however, to note that the open-ended and jargon-free framing of the questions encouraged an open and wide-ranging discussion exactly as they were intended to do. Using echo probes as I did in the interviews and asking if others shared an experience as someone had articulated it seemed to be as effective with academics as in my earlier experiences with non-specialist audiences.

Dramaturg and theatre professor Martine Kei Green-Rogers argues that there are four key points to consider when leading an audience conversation on potentially sensitive subject matter. These points—which I believe apply to all audience conversations—are

> 1) establish ground rules; 2) physically position yourself and address the audience in a manner that helps establish trust; 3) open the conversation with icebreaker questions that establish the audience's personal response to the play (while

[5] I must give credit to my supervisor, Jan Selman, for the title. She called it a book club during one of our discussions about my intentions for the event and the name resonated with me for the reasons explored here. I later found such a framing of post-show discussions referenced in Kanter (488) as well.

[6] The document I used as my personal reference while leading the Secret in the Wings Theatre Book Club event is included in Appendix F.

> remembering how your signified body may influence the conversation); and 4) thank everyone for their thoughts and acknowledge the vulnerability involved in participating in the conversation by congratulating them on their willingness to engage in the conversation. (494)

I did my best to follow each of these points in my work, adapting them from a presupposition of in-person dialogue to the realities of Zoom.

Following Green-Rogers' guidance, I laid out a set of ground rules, which I referred to as Guidelines (see Appendix F). Using the term "talkback" but referring broadly to "audience conversations" (Green-Rogers 490), she suggests that:

> "the production's playbill is an ideal manner to disseminate the talkback's ground rules . . . [because] it allows talkback participants easy access to the rules before and during the talkback; it allows the dramaturg a physical item to direct talkback participants to when discussing the ground rules; and it provides an official way for all participants to recognize when a participant is in violation of those ground rules." (Green-Rogers 491)

In the absence of a playbill, I pasted the guidelines into Zoom's chat function to provide the same benefits to participants.

Physical positioning was much less within my control on Zoom, but the way in which I addressed the audience was still of central importance. As people gathered, we engaged in friendly conversation. This was aided by the fact that I knew the vast majority of the participants at least to some extent. This friendly conversation, however, may have been a detriment to some participants. One of the participants I did not know left after a minute or two of this banter which

preceded the discussion. It is impossible to know why this person left the Zoom room, but it is possible that the friendly chatting proved alienating to someone who did not know any of the participants and was therefore an outsider to it despite my attempts to welcome people as they arrived. Of course, it is equally possible the person received a phone call or experienced a pressing need at home. However, their departure invites me to reflect on how there is no perfect tone that will make everyone feel welcome. Once the conversation got going, I consciously employed techniques from feminist interviewing techniques such as echo and uh-huh probes (Hesse-Biber 198), aiming to encourage conversation and demonstrate my interest without exerting undue influence over the direction of the conversation. I found the conversation to be wide-ranging and interesting, with a balance of audience members offering their responses but also engaging with each other respectfully.

My structuring of the conversation began, as Green-Rogers advises, with a question that centres a personal response to the play. This is a philosophy Green-Rogers shares with the Afterplay model. The opening question—"what surprised you about the play?"—invited audience members to consider their experience of the play with few guiding constraints on how they framed their answers. Answers could be about plot, character, theme, *mise en scene*, or really anything that proved a surprise. Because the differences between one's expectations and one's experience is responsible for surprise, the question also invited audience members to consider what their expectations had been in advance of seeing the piece.

In order to follow the conversation as it happened in-the-moment as opposed to my plan, I did not rigidly follow the ordering of the interview questions I laid out. The opening question about what surprised audience members, for example, led organically into conversations about

the nature of liveness which I had identified as my sixth and final question. I eventually asked whether and/or how this could be considered a "COVID-show" and subsequently about the childlike qualities present in the production (my fifth and fourth questions respectively); each led to wide-ranging discussions including of key images and manners of storytelling (my second and third questions).

One key difference between the Afterplay model and the Secret in the Wings Book Club event was my status as a member of the production team. For Afterplay events, the facilitator has no connection to the production. This allows them to lead the discussion as a fellow audience member. This approach is important in rejecting the artist-as-expert model of so many post-show discussions. At one point in the conversation, a participant asked when *The Secret in the Wings* was first produced. I instinctively answered 1991. Though this was a matter of historical fact and not interpretation, providing information as opposed to asking questions to prompt reflection risked setting me up as the expert on the production as opposed to the one holding space for the conversation. It risked foregrounding my insider status and thus positioning the participants as outsiders. Though I do not feel this had a major effect on the conversation's evolution, the risk of it having an effect, of opening a door to an ask-the-expert dynamic, was palpable. I have facilitated Afterplay events where audiences wanted to ask a lot of questions about the production and I found it helpful to be able to reply honestly that I do not know the answer but that we could follow up later and find out. I would then be free to move back to the conversation. In an ideal world, I believe discussions like the Secret in the Wings Bookclub would be best developed by a dramaturg with intimate knowledge of the production in question, but actually carried out by someone trained in facilitation techniques but not directly connected to the

production. That said, if the artistic intention of the production is not elevated above audience experience, the presence of a member of the creative team could prove useful in establishing true audience-artist dialogue.

In future incarnations of this event, I would work to ensure live captioning was available, publicizing its inclusion in advance of the event. The conversation as it manifested was predominantly verbal. We did make limited use of the chat function, another area where the conception of what constitutes dialogue and conversation could be radically expanded. Attention to accessibility was an area in which I did not do enough work and must put increasing attention on future projects.

Finally, I ended the conversation with thanks for participation. Happily, I was thanked in return for hosting and providing the platform for conversation. I agree with Green-Rogers that participants deserve kudos for "their willingness to engage in conversation" (494). I hope being celebrated encourages folks to continue to engage in conversation and to continue to value themselves as emancipated spectators. Thanking participants sincerely was easy for me to do since I truly believe it is a courageous and important act to engage in dialogue with our fellow community members.

Conclusion

"We all share the responsibility to fully engage ourselves in a project of reworlding"

-Jill Carter (Carter, Recollet and Robinson 223)

If, as I claim in the introduction to this document, my thesis work originated in dissatisfaction, where has it ended? Has it? Has my striving yielded the justice, joy, discovery, and fulfillment I have sought? I do not believe these goals to be destinations, but instead, like Tuck and Yang, see them as "an imperative, rather than as an end" (*Toward What Justice* 11). We do not arrive, but simply refine our ways of journeying.

The sections of this document are extremely varied, articulating and analyzing very different processes which all fall under the loose and malleable umbrella of production dramaturgy. They have been unified by the pursuit of ethical relations and infused by a set of articulated values. Perhaps the most significant result of this work (if results is even a useful term in artistic research) is a demonstration of how values can infuse every aspect of a theatre production. While the specific values, practices, and belief systems that have informed this particular process are by no means universal, this case study can serve to highlight possibilities for ways ethics and values can be used as organizing principles for artistic work, ideally calling for theatre artists to centre them in all creative endeavours. I have focused on the minutiae of everyday theatre practice as it is informed by broader ethical thinking. It is my hope that articulating the connection between broader forces at play in society and in theatres and the day-to-day work of creating a production can inspire artists to re-think practices long taken for granted or uncritically accepted.

Jill Carter calls for "re-worlding," a process of making "bone-deep changes . . . to pull the institutions within which Canada's nation-building narratives are developed, performed, and disseminated out of the tangled history of colonial violence and co-optation in which they have mired themselves" (8). My work falls far short of that. I hope, however, it can be a contribution to that process, that might be one of many "small shifts [that] might cross what will otherwise become insurmountable divides" (Tuck and Yang, *Toward What Justice* 3). I hope to offer tools and inspire possibilities that will encourage all theatres and theatre artists to concern themselves with

> not only the operation of representation, dramatic structure, montage, and acting technique in public performances, but also the functioning of authority, hierarchy, and power in those behind-the scenes relationships on which the rest is built. (Spatz 44).

Attention to these forces, I believe, has the power to open up an aesthetically-focused theatre practice to the issues of equity and justice which are ever-present whether acknowledged or not.

All work in the world is inherently imperfect. This truth underscores the need for a praxis which allows conscious reflections on successes and failures to spur the next iteration of practice. Reflecting on my work on *The Secret in the Wings*, I am aware of its limitations as well as successes; both provide fertile ground for learning. By confining my work within mainstream practices as opposed to more radical re-imaginings of theatre processes, I acknowledge that I accept certain limitations to my ability to innovate. All collaborations come with limitations to a person's freedom, but this is especially so in institutional settings. The power literacy work proved useful in defining the limitations of our ability to make changes. It allowed us to

strategize and prioritize, highlighting where we had power to intervene into extant systems. In other words, it allowed us to strategically pick our battles. While our power literacy exploration had fewer tangible effects on our artistic work than the values, the understandings it offered us nonetheless infused and informed all that we did.

Moving forward in my own practice, I will continue to use values as a way to structure my creative processes. I am excited by their usefulness as tools to help a director, dramaturg, or creative leadership team move beyond imagining only what it is they want to create in order to engage deeply with *how* they want to create it. Hobbs highlighted how important deeply considering what values she wanted to bring into the process empowered her as a director and I have explored in detail the many ways the values infused my work as production dramaturg on this production. There is great flexibility, however, in how values can be implemented within a creative process. They can be circulated in advance, for example, or created communally. They can be highlighted as a central focus of conversations or allowed to infuse the process more subtly. I suspect the optimal way for values to be applied would differ from process to process and creative team to creative team. I am already envisioning different applications of the same underlying principles for different upcoming projects.

The work continues. As flawed human beings we must continue striving to create theatre in ever more ethical ways, attentive to the power dynamics at play, and respectful of the interconnectedness of all collaborators. We must continue to search for ways to construct containers for our rooms which are informed by our values, empower our collaborators, remain aware of and responsive to power dynamics, and seek equity and justice within whatever systems we find ourselves. This is good work. This work continues.

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Appendix A - Secret in the Wings Values of the Process

This document was circulated to the cast and creative team several weeks before rehearsals began (digitally) and on the first day of rehearsal (printed copy). It was also posted in the rehearsal hall along with other company documents.

NOTE: As with several appendices included in this document, the contents of this appendix begin on the page following the title and contextualization in order to preserve the formatting of the original document which was done consciously as part of its preparation.

Values of the Process

The Secret in the Wings by Mary Zimmerman

Studio Theatre 2021
Directed by Elizabeth Hobbs
Production Dramaturgy by Charlie Peters

These values are meant to guide each of us as we create together. They are tools to help us know what to expect of ourselves and each other in this unique process. They can help us hold each other to account, inspire us to go farther and deeper, and support us by providing a shared language and mutual understanding. Each value stands alone, but also informs (and sometimes counter-balances) the others. These values infuse all we do:

ENSEMBLE

We are all in this *together*. We work for, think of, and support each other. Theatre is created by a large team with different roles and responsibilities coming together. We are more than the sum of our parts. *The Secret in the Wings* is not a play with a single star, but one in which the story lives between and around every character. Within the play and within the whole process, we work to strengthen the complex links *between* us while respecting one another's boundaries.

As much as we are staging an established text, we are also 'devising.' Zimmerman is not a playwright who sits alone and writes, rather one who shapes what is created in the room by specific human beings interacting. Likewise, we are discovering how this play lives in *us*, in the world as *we* experience it. We bring our whole selves and personal experiences to the work so we can collaborate meaningfully and tell the story *together*.

FLEXIBILITY

The pandemic in which we find ourselves poses unique challenges. More than ever, we cannot know what will come tomorrow. In the interest of safety - and in the interests of vibrant creativity - we must be ready and willing to adapt with grace and generosity. Things will change. They may change suddenly. So we let things go - and equally we let new things arrive. "What if" is an invitation to imagine all that is possible rather than a limiting, fear-based response to the unknown.

SPECIFICITY

We endeavour to be clear about the work and everything that affects it. We do our best to communicate clearly and promptly. Theatre is an art of action; we accomplish more by tangibly addressing specifics than vaguely discussing generalities. We show more than we tell. When problems, discomforts, or conflicts arise, we name and address them as early and as thoroughly as possible.

RIGOUR

We pursue our best - for ourselves, for each other, and for the work. We arrive on time, prepared, and expecting to dive into the work to the best of our current ability. We engage as fully as we are able, making offers and thoroughly exploring the offers of others. We remain conscious of our responsibilities to each other at all times in order to maintain a crucial sense of safety as well as creative potential.

KINDNESS

We are kind to the other members of the ensemble - and to ourselves. We aren't always in the place we wish we were; we don't feel pressure to 'leave it at the door.' We are generous, present, and supportive; we expect the same in return. We can - and should - disagree and criticize when necessary; and we can and should do so without accusing or demeaning. Likewise, we can *receive* criticism and disagreement with kindness; someone taking the time to engage with us is itself an act of generosity. Perfection is not an option, but kindness is.

PLAY

This is the heart of what we do in the theatre. In this work in particular, we are bringing to life a script in which a child takes on a role and creates whole worlds out of stories. Like that child, we don't just imagine new possibilities, we bring them into being through the give and take of playful experimentation. Solutions come when we stretch ourselves, when we laugh at ourselves, when we engage in process rather than fixating on an answer or a product. Play opens us up to the vastness of what is possible.

Appendix B - Dramaturgical Summaries

The following is a list of works I summarized for Hobbs and/or the creative team as part of my early research process.

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Appendix C - Dramaturgical Packet

These are the two documents circulated before rehearsals began and introduced on the first day: Mary Zimmerman and Us and The Secret in the Fairytales.

Mary Zimmerman and Us

Mary Zimmerman

Mary Zimmerman isn't your typical playwright. At least not in the sense of a solitary figure, labouring alone at her desk by candlelight in the hopes of producing a masterpiece manuscript. While she does indeed make ample use of late-night and early-morning sessions of binge writing, they are not done in an attempt to polish a script before the first day of rehearsal. Her late-night writing is done in a feverish attempt to ensure her ensemble has material to rehearse *the next day*!

Zimmerman believes that her theatre works are shaped by her ensembles, by "who we are, who we are together, the circumstances of production, and the conditions of the world as they exist and change throughout our rehearsal process." As the director/writer of her adaptations of literature, myth, and fairy tale, she shapes her plays very directly both in-the-room and in-response-to-the-room. She selects the text upon which the work will be based and brings in ideas and fragments of writing which she views as a place from which to begin. From there, she writes in the hours between rehearsals, informed by the previous day's work and hoping to inspire the next day's. In fact, her texts tend to remain in flux until audiences enter the theatre.

Because she rehearses within the same four-week timeline used by most mainstream North American theatres, the set is designed and construction begins well before her texts are completed. Thus, the constraints and possibilities offered by the specifics of the set are a crucial factor which shapes both the text and the staging. In many ways, text and staging are inseparable for Zimmerman since they are so closely interwoven and interdependent. It is important to note, however, that Zimmerman views the text as "only one instrument in an orchestra and not necessarily the one always carrying the melody." Physicality, props, costumes, set, music, anything can pick up and carry the melody of the play at any time.

Us

The process we are about to undertake is, in many ways, modeled on and inspired by Zimmerman's process of creation. Though we have inherited a text which cannot change in the way it could in Zimmerman's room - we don't have the playwright handy to make immediate changes or to come back with fresh pages in the morning - we aim to maintain the spontaneity and responsiveness to the room which is so central to Zimmerman's understanding of theatre creation.

Just as Zimmerman shapes her material to suit her ensembles, so our process will explore, honour, and utilize the unique relationship that *this* ensemble has with this text. We will begin by asking questions like 'what does this play mean to us?' and 'what does this play evoke in our contemporary world?' Our answers to these questions - often embodied and intuitive rather than intellectual - will have a direct impact on the final staging. Likewise, we will undertake a process heavily influenced by practices of theatre devising. Our unique use of props, costumes, set, and our own physicalities can and will, at times, take up the "melody" of the storytelling. Like Zimmerman's company, our collaborators have already begun work on a set and costumes that will be another source of inspiration for our creative work. Through our work we will discover exactly how the melody of this play passes between instruments.

A preexisting text. Also a process of devising. Mary Zimmerman. Us. Here we go!

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For more information, see:

Loewith, Jason. "Mark Zimmerman: Mirroring the World." *The Director's Voice*, edited by Jason Loewith, New York, N.Y.: Theatre Communications Group, 2012, pp. 417-443.

Zimmerman, Mary. "The Archaeology of Performance." *Theatre Topics*, vol. 15, no. 1, Mar. 2005, pp. 25–35.

The Secret in the Fairytales

We often think of fairy tales as being for children. The original collection of The Brothers Grimm (from which several tales in *The Secret in the Wings* are drawn) was, however, not specifically intended for kids. In fact, its goals were more academic and much more concerned with documenting and celebrating rural German folk culture. It was not until a decade after they were collected that certain of the tales were toned-down and published in an illustrated version for younger audiences, beginning their definitive association with childhood. Like the fairytales on which it is based, *The Secret in the Wings* is not for children. Theatre for Young Audiences this is decidedly not. It has an older audience in mind - and therefore serves a different purpose. But what might that purpose be?

Though they are often imposed in the name of making them child-friendly, fairy tales often lack a clear or simple moral. Psychologist Bruno Bettelheim suggests that the ambiguity of fairy tales is one of their strengths. Children, according to Bettelheim, can use fairy tales to wrestle with existential fears and questions about life, the same questions that will recur in more complexity in adulthood. Children place themselves inside the tales in place of the characters who, because they are archetypical, offer a breadth and openness which allows anyone to take on the role.

Might we invite an adult audience to do the same? If we take Thomas King's assertion that "the truth about stories is that that's all we are" (2) to be true, what value might there be in inviting an adult audience into the world of fairytales we are creating? Bettelheim argues that "for a story to truly hold the child's attention, it must entertain him and arouse his curiosity. But to enrich his life it must stimulate his imagination" (5). Might this not be just as true for adults as for children?

Some other provocative quotes from Bettelheim for us to consider:

"The child who is familiar with fairy tales understands that these speak to him in the language of symbols and not that of everyday reality" (62).

"The child intuitively comprehends that although these stories are unreal, they are not untrue; that while what these stories tell about does not happen in fact, it must happen as inner experience and personal development; that fairy tales depict in imaginary and

symbolic form the essential steps in growing up and achieving an independent existence. While fairy tales invariably point the way to a better future, they concentrate on the process of change, rather than describing the exact details of the bliss eventually to be gained" (73).

"The fairy tale […] takes these existential anxieties and dilemmas very seriously and addresses itself directly to them: the need to be loved and the fear that one is thought worthless; the love of life, and the fear of death. […] The ending 'And they lived happily ever after' does not for a moment fool the child that eternal life is possible. But it does indicate that which alone can take the sting out of the narrow limits of our time on this earth: forming a truly satisfying bond to another. The tales teach us that when one has done this, one has reached the ultimate emotional security of existence and permanence of relation available to man; and this alone can dissipate the fear of death" (11).

"despite the bad consequences which evil wishes have, with good will and effort things can be righted again" (Bettelheim, 71)

"While no inner evolution is spelled out, its nature is implied: what redeems us as human beings and restores us to our humanity is solicitude for those whom we love" (83).

"While a fairy tale may contain many dreamlike features, it's great advantage over a dream is that the fairy tale has a consistent structure with a definite beginning and a plot that moves toward a satisfying solution, which is reached at the end" (57).

"To the child, there is no clear line separating objects from living things; and whatever has life has life very much like our own. If we do not understand what rocks and trees and animals have to tell us, the reason is we are not sufficiently attuned to them" (46).

Works Cited

Bettelheim, Bruno. *The Uses of Enchantment: the Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales.* Alfred A. Knopf, 1977.

King, Thomas. *Truth about Stories : A Native Narrative*, House of Anansi Press, 2011.

Szwajkowska, Anita. "The ugly in fine arts. The sensory nature of terror in the tales of the Brothers Grimm." *Acta Universitatis Lodziensis Folia Litteraria Polonica*, Vol. 43, No. 5, 2018, pp. 223-240. https://doi.org/10.18778/1505-9057.43.16

Appendix D - Dramaturgical Documents Circulated After the First Read

These are documents I created and circulated in response to interest from the company. The first was in response to interest in knowing more about Nolan, her work, and values. The second was a request from Liz to clarify some references in the text.

Yvette Nolan and Values in Theatre-Making

Yvette Nolan is an Algonquin theatre director, dramaturg, and playwright. From 2003-2011 she was the Artistic Director of Native Earth Performing Arts (NEPA), the oldest professional Indigenous performing arts company in the nation-state of Canada. She has directed and worked as a dramaturg across Turtle Island.

Recently, she has been awarded both the Gina Wilkinson Prize for woman-identifying artists who place community and new creation models at the heart of their artistic leadership and the National Theatre School's Gascon-Thomas Award for Lifetime Achievement. She is a previous winner of the Mallory Gilbert Leadership Award from the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres (2014) and the The George Luscombe Mentorship Award of the Toronto Alliance for the Performing Arts (2011).

Her plays include:

- *The Unplugging*
    - Available at: Ualberta Library, Edmonton Public Library, Playwrights Canada Press
    - Forced to rely upon traditional wisdom for their survival, Elena and Bern retreat from the remains of civilization to a freezing, desolate landscape where they attempt to continue their lives after the end of the world. When a charismatic stranger from the village arrives seeking their aid, the women must decide whether they will use their knowledge of the past to give the society that rejected them the chance at a future.
- *Annie Mae's Movement*
    - Available at: Ualberta Library, Playwrights Canada Press
    - Dying under mysterious circumstances, it is still unclear what really happened to Anna Mae back in the late 70s. Instead of recounting cold facts, this play looks for the truth in examining the life and death of this remarkable Aboriginal woman; that we cannot know the consequences of our actions; that we live on in the work that we do and the people we affect long after we have passed from this world.
- *Job's Wife*
    - Ualberta Library, Edmonton Public Library, Playwrights Canada Press
    - Grace, a middle class Catholic white woman pregnant with the child of a Native man, prays to God, who materializes as "Josh," a large Indigenous man, dressed in rags.
- *Reasonable Doubt* (co-written with Joel Bernbaum and Lancelot Knight)
    - Yet to be published
    - A verbatim theatre play with music based on race-relations in Saskatchewan, framed by the murder of Colten Boushie.

She has also written the libretto for the opera Shanawdithit (score by Dean Burry), an opera about the life and death of the last survivor of the Beothuk Nation.

Yvette has written or edited several important nonfiction works and anthologies:

- *Medicine Shows: Indigenous Performance Culture*
  - Ualberta Library, Edmonton Public Library, Playwrights Canada Press
  - Illuminating the connections, the artistic genealogy, and the development of a contemporary Indigenous theatre practice, *Medicine Shows* is neither a history nor a chronicle. It examines how theatre has been used to make medicine, reconnect individuals and communities, give voice to the silenced and disappeared, stage ceremony, and honour the ancestors. It has excellent sections on Indigenous/Settler collaborations and visions for the future.
- *Performing Indigeneity* (Co-edited with Ric Knowles)
  - Ualberta Library, Playwrights Canada Press
  - The first collection of essays on performance entirely made up of Indigenous contributors; filled with many wonderful, accessible essays on everything from Two Spirit performance to Indigenous Theatre History and Indiegenous/Settler collaboration.
- *Refractions Solo* (Co-edited with Donna Michelle St. Bernard)
  - Ualberta Library, Playwrights Canada Press
  - A book of monologues from Canadian plays and playwrights with a heavy focus on underrepresented voices and lesser-known works.

Values

The following is based on my experiences working with Yvette and on a series of interviews I did with her over several years.

For Yvette, Values are "the tool we use to manage the work." They offer guidance in how we come to the work in a good way. They allow us to consciously and deliberately be in community together, providing a "way to check ourselves and check each other." When Yvette was Artistic Director of NEPA, the company embraced as their guiding values the Grandfather Teachings which Yvette had learned from her elders. These values, still in use by the company today, are Courage, Generosity, Tolerance, Strength of Character, Patience, Humility, Wisdom. The shared values allowed for mutual encouragement: "When we were afraid, we would remind each other of courage; when we were angry at someone we would remind each other of generosity."

Values are used differently from production to production. Sometimes they are overtly laid out - as with the Grandfather Teachings Yvette employed as the values for NEPA - and sometimes they are more subtly integrated into the process. Values are, however, always present, informing what we do. Making them explicit gives us all access to them and, therefore, a chance to understand what is expected of us and what we can expect of others. Values are laid out to guide the process, and can be used by everyone involved. Far from hard-and-fast rules, values are principles to aspire to which often exist in productive tension. Yvette shared a story with me, for example, of having to navigate a heated moment where Strength of Character and Courage had to be informed by (but not negated by) Humility, Generosity, and Wisdom. Values are embodied by everyone throughout the work.

Foods referenced in the first scene

Many of the foods referenced in the first scene are fictitious - or rather I sincerely hope they are fictitious!

Frog legs

One of the actual foods. Famous in French and Chinese cuisine but eaten in many parts of the world, frog legs are sometimes said to taste like a mixture of chicken and fish and compared to chicken wings in texture.

Tilapia à la Tiepolo

A made up dish. Tilapia is a common name for a wide variety of mostly freshwater fish. Giovanni Battista Tiepolo (1696-1770) was an Italian painter and printmaker from Venice considered an early master of the "Grand Manner" classicism during the Renaissance. From the French for "in the style of," food dishes called "à la" are common: ex. Chicken à la King/Chicken à la Keene, Lobster cutlets à la Shelley, Salad à la Dumas. It is not clear in the text what "à la Tiepolo" might indicate in terms of preparation.

Liver and lamingtons (with onions)

A made up dish. Liver refers to the organ of an animal, often prepared as a dish. Lamingtons are sponge or butter cakes dipped in chocolate and covered with coconut.

Goose pâté

Also known as "foie gras," this is a paste made from the liver of a force-fed goose (or duck). It is a traditional Christmastime dish in France.

Blackened red-winged blackbird wings

Also likely meant to be an odd dish. The red-winged blackbird is very common in North America but is not generally eaten. Blackening is a cooking technique often associated with Cajun cuisine whereby meat is dipped in butter and sprinkled with herbs and spices before being cooked on a very hot cast-iron skillet.

Orange-roughy smoothie

A play on an smoothie made with oranges, Orange Roughy is, in fact, a large deep sea fish also known as a slime-head (renamed to make it more appealing to consumers). Thus, this would also be a rather disgusting dish.

Appendix E - Secret in the Wings Interview Research Instrument

This was the document I used as reference to keep myself on-track during the semi-structured interviews. I did not ask each question in each interview, nor did I necessarily ask them each in this order.

605 Interview Questions and Notes

Before Starting

- Verbal consent to **RECORD**
- Go through letter
    - GET VERBAL CONSENT

Framing:

"This research explores your unique experience in theatre rehearsals and *The Secret in the Wings* especially.

Questions:

1. Describe your experience in rehearsals for *The Secret in the Wings*. What moments or impressions stand out to you?
2. In what ways was this like or unlike previous rehearsal experiences?
3. What effect (if any) did outlining a set of values on the first day have on the process?
4. What was your experience of those values (if any) throughout the process?
5. Anything else you would like to share?

Other Notes/Prompts:

- Tone/feeling in the room
    - What was it?
    - Are there specific things that you feel contributed to that?
- Expectations
    - In what ways was this like or unlike previous rehearsal experiences?
    - How did what actually happened compare to your expectations?
    - Did your expectations evolve throughout the process?

Appendix F - Secret in the Wings Theatre Book Club Leader Guide

This was the document I used as a reference for myself in structuring and leading the Theatre Book Club. I had it open on my second screen and referred to it throughout. I also used it to copy and paste into the chat.

Secret in the Wings Theatre Book Club

Introduction

- Thank everyone for coming
- **Introductions: *name, location, saw in-person/live*** [ideally not titles/academic roles]
    - No obligation to do so (lurking ok!)
    - On camera or in the chat
- Book club - not a talk back
    - Run is over, it's not feedback, nor asking questions of the production team but ***discussing YOUR experience***
        - You're the expert!
        - We are the audience together even if we're physically apart
    - About *you!* About *us* coming together.
- Guidelines
    - Respectful conversation
    - Focus on sharing our own unique experience of the production and learning from others' experiences
    - Prompts as starting points
    - Share the airwaves - no obligation to speak but we want to ensure everyone feels welcome to do so
    - Silence to ponder is ok!
- Zoom Features
    - Chat function
        - Feel free to engage that way too
    - Raising hands (and putting them down)
        - A moment to find that function (or just raise your hand physically)
- Questions before we begin??

To paste into chat:

Let's introduce ourselves!
1) Name, how you'd like us to refer to you
2) Where we are in the world
3) Did you see the show live or digitally?

Book Club Guidelines

1) We're seeking respectful conversation where we share our unique responses to the production and learn from others's experiences.
2) Prompts are starting points, not limitations. Let's see where the conversation takes us!
3) We're looking to "share the airwaves" - there's no obligation to speak but we want to ensure everyone feels welcome and has the space to do so.
4) Silence is ok! Sometimes we need to ponder!

Questions (no need to go through them all - or in order)

1. What surprised you about the play?
2. What is a moment or image that sticks with you?
3. What was the effect of telling so many different stories in so many different styles?
    a. Scenes, monologues, narration, song, dance, gesture, puppets, and storytelling with props, costumes, and lighting
4. The play at times has a childlike quality - but it's not a play for kids. What stood out to you about the relationship between childhood and adulthood in the play?
5. In what ways is this a "COVID show" - in what ways is it not?
    a. The performers onstage wore masks. What effect did that have on your viewing experience and why?
    b. Is it an escape from the COVID world of the present moment?
    c. Actor safety (or our perception of it) in a COVID world
6. *Secret in the Wings* is presented live with a (small) live audience but also streamed online to a broader audience, what does this do for us as audience members? With the production and with each other?
    a. Relationship with other audiences (live and online)
    b. Is online theatre a new experience for us?
    c. In what ways is it like/unlike seeing theatre in-person?

PROMPTS/CLARIFICATIONS

- "Was that anyone else's experience?"
- Rush's distinctions between: Play/production, Ambiguity/confusion, desires of audience members vs. playwright/director's intention (ex. "You should have… instead")

Appendix G - Articles Written for the Dig Deeper Website

Below is a list of articles I wrote which were posted on the Dig Deeper Website. All are available at this link: https://www.uofadramadigsdeeper.com/secret

Mary Zimmerman: About the Playwright

Mary Zimmerman: How She Creates

Fairytale Sources

Fairytales and (Child?) Psychology

The Power of Telling Stories

Creating During Covid