

BECOMING A FEMINIST DIRECTOR  
IN THE ACADEMY

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A Dissertation  
presented to  
the Faculty of the Graduate School  
at the University of Missouri-Columbia

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

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by  
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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled

BECOMING A FEMINIST DIRECTOR IN THE ACADEMY

presented by Cece Marie McFarland,

a candidate for the degree of doctor of philosophy,

and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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Professor Suzanne Burgoyne

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Professor Jeni Hart

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Professor Elaine Lawless

To my family, by love and by blood. Thank you.

To everyone who has inspired me to  
work,  
create,  
dream,  
strive,  
write,  
write,  
write.

And to Uncle Dave and Aunt Margie. I bet you'd be "tickled  
pink" if you could see me now.

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Once upon a time, a million years ago, my good friend Ann Margrave turned to me during a conversation about the future I planned and said that she didn't think I was planning on living a very happy life. I had a practical and stable career plan that was well thought out and logical. My goals were definitely attainable. But my description of life didn't include happiness, passion, or joy. She talked to me about what I really wanted out of life. She talked to me about my passions, my joys, and what made my heart soar. I don't know what would have happened to my life if she hadn't spoken up. I doubt it would include a Ph.D. in theatre.

My parents told me that I could be anything I wanted to, if I just set my mind to it and worked hard. Life is not that simple, of course, and I know they were both disappointed when I changed my major from elementary education to literature and drama my senior year of college. At some point in the intervening years they

became proud of my decision to follow my dreams. To follow my heart. I'm not sure when it happened, but I remember how loved I felt when I noticed it. As my dissertation stalled and as the economy stagnated and I moved home...the pride was less evident. But one night I sat on the floor of the living room and talked about theatre. Apparently my passion was evident in my voice, in my words, in my eyes, and for the first time there was understanding between us. They understood that I *need* to do theatre—I'm called to the theatre the way some are called to religious orders. I do theatre because I need to make the world a better place, because I believe in the good of humanity, because I need to touch people's lives and hearts, because the thing that makes us human is our ability to think and feel and create together...and I need to encourage that. Because I believe that theatre has the ability to make the world a better place, one person at a time. I don't doubt my parents' love or their pride that I have a Ph.D. But what is most important to me is that they understand *why* I do this. And I think they do. Which means they understand me, and so few do. So, Mom, Dad, thank you for listening. Thank you for your support and your love.

I truly would not be here without Joe Sotelo. He was with me along the beginning of this path and listened to my ideas and frustrations and challenges and successes for years. His support and faith were as invaluable as his

love and hugs and cups of tea. He explored new cities alone while I did homework. He washed dishes and did the grocery shopping so that when I took a break I didn't have so many other things to do. He came to visit, surprised me during tech, and made sure I knew I was loved. He watched me give up so much to chase a dream, and then one day I gave up on him to keep chasing that dream. Some things change, and others never do. You were my rock and my home and my best friend.

I am in debt to the casts of the shows I was in, and the casts of the shows I directed. Without those experiences, none of this would be worth it. And I am in debt to the casts of my shows yet to come. I hope to learn as much from you as I've learned thus far.

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How can I possibly thank or acknowledge all of the people who helped to make this dissertation a reality? From Jessy, who found me a spot in the corner of her office when I didn't have a place to write, to Chayn Lush, who found me a spot in the corner of her house when I needed a different roof over my head, friends from all corners of my life have offered help, encouragement, and occasionally a kick in the pants. I appreciate every post, comment, or 'like.' Such simple gestures of support made me feel less like I was alone on a journey, and more like I had my own cheerleading squad, rooting for my success.

Among those whose influence I could not do without are my theatre professors through the years leading up to my Ph.D. Katie Simons, who first inspired me to love theatre. Andrew Belser, who nurtured that love and showed me I could make a career out of my passion. And the faculty of the Villanova Theatre department: Earl Bader, Jim Christy, Father Peter Donohue, Harriet Power, Joanna Rotte, and Janus Stefanowicz. You taught me so much and modeled a career that I strive to emulate, one that combines artistic and academic excellence. I feel blessed to have worked with each of you.



And, of course, I have to thank my cats for all their years of waiting. Charlie, "the pogo kitty", who passed away far too young and before I even started on my Ph.D. He used to attack the back of my head when I sat at the computer for too long. I can only imagine how many tooth marks I'd have on my skull if he'd lived through my Ph.D. But he would also look up at me with such love and concern any time I read a play that made me cry. Abooksigun, "the pirate kitty," whose loss I still feel so acutely. Typing is easier without him draped over my arm, but I'd give anything to see him squinting at me from his basket. Kasa, "the depressed little goth kitty," whose piggy noises, snoring, and wheezing still make me smile, even though I've heard them for years. Mukki, "my little grey ghost," whose love and trust feels like a true gift, considering all he has overcome in his short little life. So many years of waiting for me to be done, of being shooed off my laptop or whatever I was reading. So many years of falling asleep while waiting for me to go to bed (including tonight, while I write out my acknowledgments). So many years of snuggling in close when I needed warmth or affection or to take a break. So many years of waiting patiently, or not so patiently. So many years of making sure that I took a break, every now and then, to laugh, rub a belly, and, occasionally, to dance in the kitchen. Thank you.

Jamie and Alli Lindemann are my family by love. They are my best friends, my family, my favorite roommates, and the collaborators I most want to work with again. Their faith, love, and unshakeable support mean the world to me. They have taken care of me when I was sick, held me when I cried, and cheered me when I succeeded. I don't think they ever doubted that I would finish, even when I did. But I also know that they wouldn't have thought any less of me if, for some reason, I didn't finish. And that kind of love is hard to come by.

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## ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I investigate the creation of my performance of a feminist director. I examine how I became a feminist, what led me to directing, and what choices I made when I intentionally attempted to embody feminist theory in the rehearsal hall. More specifically, I examine how I worked to de-center the power of the director. The theme of silencing is prevalent in the literature about women in higher education, women in leadership, and women and communication. The theme of silencing was prevalent in my life, and I examine how I overcame that silence. I am left with the question: can there be a truly feminist directing experience in academia?

I use performative writing and Scholarly Personal Narrative (SPN), developed by Robert Nash, as method and methodology to guide my research into and reflection upon the topics listed above. In addition to my own recollections of directing *Touch* as a feminist, I contextualize my experience within the broader scholarship of leadership, communication, directing, and feminism. SPN, combined with performative writing, allow me to tell my own unique story while still relating it to the scholars and practitioners upon whose shoulders I stand. Rather

than simply telling my story, I examine the experience through a critical lens. SPN includes thick descriptions interwoven with theory. This is an autobiography as a performance of self on paper. SPN is not intended to create a 'how-to,' rather it encourages the writer to search ever deeper for underlying meanings and messages that may resonate with a reader.

I do hope that my dissertation inspires others to build theatre using the tools of feminism, because, as Audre Lorde said "[t]he master's tools will never dismantle the master's house."<sup>1</sup> Theatre practitioners often get caught up in the process of *doing* and *creating*. We don't have time for deep reflection about why we make particular choices. Then, if it didn't cause any problems the first time, we may automatically make the same choice again. In this way we perpetuate an automatic, rather than a reflexive, form of directing. We operate with what we know and have done in the past. Some of the rules and expectations associated with putting on a play are studied and taught while others are simply assumed. In this dissertation, I probe and reflect upon the choices I made in the rehearsal hall. I make those choices conscious and

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<sup>1</sup> Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 1984), 112.

transparent so that others may draw from my experiences and add to their own directing toolkit.

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Every journey begins with the first step. But where does it end? Does the journey of directing a show end opening night?

Is the destination a published article or dissertation?

What about the impact the show has on the audience?

Or the actors?

Or the director?

And that first step...does it begin at auditions? When the show is chosen? Or does that first step along a path to a show start much earlier? We are a culmination of our life experiences. So did this project really begin in a directing class? Did some childhood experience set me on the road to this moment? And what of all those who came before me...all those whose influenced me?

The only story we can ever really tell is our own. It is, by necessity, an edited version. We tell our story as we see it, through the lens of who we have become.

Seen through the lens of time.

The lens of memory.

The lens of who we wish we had been,  
or could be.



Even through the lens of who we fear we could have been. As Robert Nash asserts in *Liberating Scholarly Writing*, self "is whatever story we construct about who we are, depending on whom we are with, and who we would like to be, at any given time."<sup>1</sup> In other words, self is performed. And if self is performed, then so is the story.

This is the story of becoming a feminist—  
of finding a voice.

It is the story of a director—  
of becoming a director.

This is also the story of a production.  
It is the story of a daughter, a student, a teacher, a quilter, a runner, a pet owner, of a lover, and of a deliberate optimist. It is the story of a childless, white, unmarried, shakily middle-class woman...sinking into a lower economic class even as I'm educated into an upper socio-class. Some of these aspects of my self are important; some not. I knit, but I doubt that is relevant. I had trouble learning to read—which is surprisingly important.

There is overlap between chapters. There is no way to separate the elements of myself into component parts. As I

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Nash, *Liberating Scholarly Writing: The Power of the Personal Narrative* (New York: Teacher's College Press, 2004), 19.

became a feminist I also became a director. As I grew and changed I was many things at once. We all are. Categories and labels, chapters, give us a false sense of separation. And so experiences bleed over from one page to the next, soaking through the fabric that is my life, that is my self.

This is the story of me. Of parts of me. Because this story might help you. It might give you ideas. It might give you warnings.

It might make you feel less alone.

It might encourage you to tell your own story.

It might shed some light into the often obscure world of theatre rehearsals. Or feminist thought (my own anyhow).

If it does any of these things then it has succeeded. If it makes you think or talk or remember or reflect, then it has succeeded.

I am a feminist. I am a director. I am a feminist director. Those things are always true.

According to Michael Bloom in *Thinking Like a Director*, "[f]or the past decade or more, theater departments have suffered from a severe disconnection

between theory and practice.”<sup>2</sup> I strive to bridge that disconnect. And once upon a time, I attempted to enact my feminism by deliberately combining feminist theory and practice within the rehearsal hall, an environment typically structured according to a strict hierarchy.

No one taught me how to direct. How could they? How can you limit yourself to one way when every show has a different set of given circumstances, even as every script does? How can one method encompass the needs and intricacies of diverse personalities, circumstances, abilities, drives, locations? And yet, some maintain that a method is precisely what’s needed.<sup>3</sup> But how can you approach a modern comedy in the same way you approach Shakespeare? How can you work in a way that honors different needs and abilities in script, audience, actors and crew? And can you direct in a way that supports the authentic self of the director? One size does not, cannot, fit all.

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Bloom, *Thinking Like a Director: A Practical Handbook* (New York: Faber and Faber, Inc, 2001), 200.

<sup>3</sup> Some maintain that The Method is precisely what’s needed.

## *The Last Day of Class*

Our eyes meet. "Not to offend anyone," his eyes drop,  
"but I *hate* that just anyone can call themselves a  
director, regardless of what they *do* in rehearsal."

Heat creeps up my face, burning shame.

Prickling scalp.

Silent.

I sit stunned and blushing furiously.

He is talking to me.

He is talking about me.

How did I get here? Being chastised by a fellow  
student because I don't do things *his* way? What gives him  
the right to question my process, so long as my product is  
satisfactory and my methods ethical? Why is his directing  
legitimate and mine unacceptable? Is it simply that my  
methods are unconventional? Or is there something else  
going on?

And why can't I answer him?

That colleague's method of working is authoritative.  
He decides in advance what the answers are and the actor's  
job is to make his vision come alive. I prefer to have the  
vision evolve through the creative input of everyone  
involved. I seek a complicated web of connection, where

each member of the company is responsible for the outcome. Each voice is heard and valued as a group of artists strive to create a show together. The director's voice is one among many.

To be fair to my colleague, many concepts of the director set him up as the individual responsible for the artistic vision of the show...and I use 'him' deliberately here. The traditional definition of a director's role within a production sets him up as the patriarch, with all of the actors and designers subordinate to his vision. He makes the rules and everyone else is expected to abide by them. He determines the concept or vision for the show and everyone else works to make it a reality. As Brockett and Ball's *The Essential Theatre* states, the director has "ultimate responsibility for the artistic aspects of productions."<sup>4</sup> The role of the director embodies masculine leadership qualities, and, historically, the director is male.

It might be easy to suppose that my colleague directs in an authoritative manner because he is a man and that I direct in a collaborative manner because I am a woman. I do not believe life is so simple. As I discuss throughout

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<sup>4</sup> Oscar G. Brockett and Robert J. Ball, *The Essential Theatre* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2004), 319.

this dissertation, gender is performed, communication is gendered, and directing has been, and continues to be, a male and masculine dominated profession. As a masculine profession, historically, most of the directors who are successful enough to become mentors, or teachers, are men. Women learn to direct from men, and the masculine qualities of the director are perpetuated to the point where, as my colleague might assert, no one who uses other methods has the right to call themselves a director.

### *Communication and Gender*

Theatre relies upon communication. Many people consider the interaction between the playwright and the audience, through the play itself, to be the quintessential act of theatrical communication. Even when the actor, the community, or the audience itself is the playwright. And really, without this communication, what are we doing up on that stage? Others might cite the communication between the actors and the audience to be of primary importance. However, there is another form of communication that I believe is important, and is often overlooked. The very basic communication between the director and the actors. The way a director communicates with the actors is not seen by the audience, and yet it influences all aspects of the

production process. And when working in educational theatre, we are modeling interpersonal, communication, and leadership skills to our students. We are teaching them how to interact.

Every rehearsal process creates its own set of cultural expectations. Actors, stage managers, and directors work together to establish the rules by which the company, or culture, functions. The questions can be as simple as when and where eating is acceptable. Or as important as the complex dance surrounding what can and cannot be questioned. What are the rituals surrounding the everyday working process and the social time before, during, and after rehearsal? And, more importantly, how will the actors, designers, and director communicate as they create the production?

How are challenges resolved?

Who has the power to question?

Who has the power to decide?

Typically, the director has the largest impact upon what is and is not acceptable within the sphere of the rehearsal process, and he or she establishes the rules through their communication and leadership styles. And often, these questions are answered without the director's conscious

thought, based upon what he or she learned before stepping up to the director's chair.

As Judith Butler discusses in *Gender Trouble*, gender is not a property of the body, it is a regulated repetition of practiced action.<sup>5</sup> In other words, gender is performed. We learn how to convey our gendered identity within the constraints of our society. We choose, based upon our self-concept, how much, and of which, "gender" we perform. However, just as with a theatrical performance, we cannot control the "audience's" interpretation of our performance of gender. We can only vary our performances to fit the situation. I believe that we also perform acts of gendered communication and gendered leadership, regardless of the gender we perform, or the gender that is typically assigned to our physical characteristics. As directors, we perform gender, we perform leadership, and we perform acts of communication both verbally and physically. Directors perform their roles as much as actors do. I explore the contradiction inherent in being a feminist director, especially within an academic setting. And just because I am a woman and I am in charge does not mean it is a

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<sup>5</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999).



feminist experience, so I explore what it means to create a feminist experience within the rehearsal hall.

### *When the Student is Ready*

In 2005, I studied directing at the LaMaMa International Directing Symposium, held in Umbria, Italy. For three glorious, sun filled weeks I studied with six directors. JoAnne Akalaitis, Alida Neslo, and my personal hero, Anne Bogart, were among them. During one session, Neslo discussed the importance of finding a teacher—that you need to find someone who teaches what you already know is true. She didn't mean that you find someone who teaches facts that you have already learned. She meant you find a teacher whose scholarship or philosophy resonates with your inner self. If you find yourself saying, "yes, yes, you are teaching what I believed before I met you" then you have found the right teacher. Feminist scholarship is that kind of teacher for me. Performative writing is that kind of teacher for me. In the following chapters I recount my evolution as a feminist and as a director, and I

incorporate concepts from feminism that fed into or influenced my development as a director.<sup>6</sup>

Finding a way to embrace my feminist ideals was more difficult than coming to terms with being a feminist, and this performative journey through my scholarship, culminating in the design of a dissertation that embraces feminism in both content and methodology, is my attempt to practice my performance of "feminist." I explore the process of finding an authentic scholarly voice, the gendered implications of leadership, trace my steps through my attempt to direct as a feminist, and realize my dream of a dissertation that combines my interest in gender, communication, leadership, directing, and performative writing.

## *Voices*

This dissertation tracks my development as a feminist and as a director and as a feminist director.

Sort of.

I look at those categories and I'm struck by how incredibly incomplete they are. After all, according to Ron Pielas in *Writing Performance*, "[w]e will never

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<sup>6</sup> Or that are likely to influence me the next time I direct "as a feminist."

completely capture the diffuse and diverse dynamics of everyday life.”<sup>7</sup> It is impossible to track my development as a person; it would be unbearably long and tedious for both you and me if I tried.

And yet...

Being a feminist is an integral part of my self.

And as a director I am also a teacher.

And as a teacher and a director I am also performing.

I am performing my self.

And so I am writing my self.

And “[t]o write the self is to perform the self.”<sup>8</sup>

My own story, trapped on paper and unable to evolve.

My story, my self.

My performance of self offered up for critique and criticism.

My story.

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<sup>7</sup> Ronald J. Pelias, *Writing Performance: Poeticizing the Researcher's Body* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 2001), xi.

<sup>8</sup> M. Heather Carver, “Risky Business: Exploring Women’s Autobiography and Performance,” in *Voices Made Flesh: Performing Women’s Autobiography*, ed. Lynn C. Miller, Jacqueline Taylor, and M. Heather Carver (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 21.

Told in my voice. That is what you will find on these pages. The story is true, as far as truth can be ensured. The voice is mine, but which voice? And when?

You won't find a single voice between these covers.

You'll find all of my voices. Most of my voices?  
Some of my voices.

These are the voices that duke it out.

These are the voices that vie for primacy.

These are the voices that collaborate.

I am a writer and a scholar and a feminist and a director and a woman and and and and...

And the voice I write with

and speak with

and think with

and teach with

and direct with

and live with

changes with the circumstances. Here I showcase some of those voices. If you have trouble with that...then think of each section as being written by a different author. This is a collection of essays grouped around my life and experiences, but written by different voices. Written by different parts of me. But they are all me. I won't claim that they make a cohesive whole. But they try.

## *Performative Writing*

In the meantime, if you demand on the one hand,  
the raw data of life in  
all its rawness and  
that which is on the other hand  
genuine, then you are interested in  
performative writing.  
~Ronald J. Pelias<sup>9</sup>

Stories are the way humans make sense of their worlds.  
Stories are essential to human understanding.  
~Caroline Ellis<sup>10</sup>

Writing in the third person objective voice isn't  
connected to the I, or the eye, so it has no body, no  
specifics in terms of time

place

politics.

It is universal and Truth. Writing through the body,  
through the I, through the eye, recognizes the self of the  
writer. It recognizes a focus, a locus, from which  
knowledge and truths flow. Jeanne Perreault, in *Writing  
Selves: Contemporary Feminist Autography*, observes that  
"I" and "we" are the most important words in the

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<sup>9</sup> Ronald J. Pelias, "Performative Writing as Scholarship: An Apology, an Argument, an Anecdote," *Cultural Studies/Critical Methodologies* 5, no. 4 (November 2005): 416.

<sup>10</sup> Carolyn Ellis, *The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel about Autoethnography*, Ethnographic Alternative Book Series, ed. Carolyn Ellis and Arthur P. Bochner (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2004), 32.

writing(s) of contemporary feminism, continuously transformed and reenacted as feminists claim the rights of self-definition."<sup>11</sup> She goes on to say that since "...available discourses of selfhood have been largely masculinist, the sense of self that the feminist writer has at any moment must be a mixture of contradictory and shifting configurations of personhood..."<sup>12</sup> To encapsulate this personhood, my personhood, on paper, requires a qualitative research method and a writing style that can embrace the fluidity of self and the complexity of the development of identity.

Performative writing fits within the overarching category of qualitative research. Carolyn Ellis, in *The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel about Autoethnography*, defines qualitative methods as "a variety of research techniques and procedures associated with the goal of trying to understand the complexities of the social world in which we live and how we go about thinking, acting, and making meaning in our lives."<sup>13</sup> In her own work, Ellis wrote about her own experiences in order to

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<sup>11</sup> Jeanne Perreault, *Writing Selves: Contemporary Feminist Autography* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 1.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>13</sup> Ellis, 25.

"provide a model, not for how readers in the same situation ought to be, but to give them...the benefit of experiencing how I had acted and felt...I wanted to provide a story to which they could compare their experiences."<sup>14</sup> No two experiences are alike, but in the following pages I perform the story of how I became a feminist director. To my knowledge, no one else has yet documented their journey, progression, development, story, evolution into a feminist director.

Elizabeth Bell, in "Orchids in the Arctic: Women's Autobiographical Performances as Mentoring", observes that "[t]he academy is often a hostile place for women, a hostile place for performance work, and a hostile place for feminism."<sup>15</sup> By sharing my story I am working to change that perception.

Ronald J. Pelias, in "Performative Writing as Scholarship: An Apology, an Argument, an Anecdote," offers a succinct set of characteristics,

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>15</sup> Elizabeth Bell, "Orchids in the Arctic: Women's Autobiographical Performances as Mentoring," in *Voices Made Flesh: Performing Women's Autobiography*, ed. Lynn C. Miller, Jacqueline Taylor, and M. Heather Carver (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 302.

...or guidelines,

...or arguments in favor of,

but not rules for,<sup>16</sup>

performative writing:

1. Performative writing expands the notions of what constitutes disciplinary knowledge.
2. Performative writing features lived experience, telling, iconic moments that call forth the complexities of human life. With lived experience, there is no separation between mind and body, objective and subjective, cognitive and affective. Human experience does not reduce to numbers, to arguments, to abstractions.
3. Performative writing rests on the belief that the world is not given but constructed, composed of multiple realities. All representations of human experience are partial and partisan.
4. Performative writing often evokes identification, and empathic responses. It creates a space where others might see themselves.
5. Performative writing turns the personal into the political and the political into the personal.
6. Performative writing participates in relational and scholarly contexts. No writing occurs without context.<sup>17</sup>

My writing encompasses all of these guidelines...

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<sup>16</sup> Why not rules? Because "[n]o one definition of performative writing can or will exist; the elusive nature of the phrase is a component of its value. If a clear definition existed, if an understanding of the phrase were right or wrong, if a noted scholar authored the final characteristic of the concept, performative writing may well be put to a deserved rest." Fred Corey, quoted in Lynn C. Miller and Ronald J. Pelias, eds. *The Green Window: Proceedings of the Giant City Conference on Performative Writing* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2001), xii.

<sup>17</sup> Pelias, "Performative Writing as Scholarship," 417-421.



...suggestions...

...characteristics...

...layers. I use performative writing so I can sidestep whether I'm "supposed to be an artist or a scholar."<sup>18</sup> I am an artist, a scholar, and a teacher. And I use performative writing because it is, as M. Heather Carver suggests in *Troubling Violence: A Performance Project*, "a way of defying issues of control on the page, just as we seek to defy issues of control in our performance work and our lives."<sup>19</sup> If I am to contest the hierarchy of patriarchy within my rehearsal hall then it is just as important to contest the hierarchy of patriarchy on my page.

Lynn Miller and Ron Pelias, in *The Green Window: Proceedings of the Giant City Conference on Performative Writing*, claim that performative writing is "where the body and the spoken word, performance practice and theory, the personal and the scholarly, come together."<sup>20</sup> My story, told through the spoken word as recorded on the page,

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<sup>18</sup> Sadie Chandler, quoted by M. Heather Carver and Elaine J. Lawless, *Troubling Violence: A Performance Project* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), 62.

<sup>19</sup> Carver and Lawless, 44.

<sup>20</sup> Lynn C. Miller and Ronald J. Pelias, ed., *The Green Window: Proceedings of the Giant City Conference on Performative Writing* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2001), v.

combines performance practice, theory, the personal, and the scholarly, so how could I write in any way except performatively? The conference was convened in order to discover "possible methods to make scholarly writing more performative, in particular ways to make the textual inscription of work as performers and directors more like the performances that had inspired it."<sup>21</sup> My production of *Touch* was full of heart, full of passion, full of pain. It was full. My development as a feminist, as a scholar, as a director have been full of heart, full of passion, full of pain. They have filled me. And I owe it to myself to write that heart, passion, pain into a record of those experiences.

Pelias notes that "[n]o essay can translate the art of the stage to the page" but he goes on to say that failing to try is "at best, misleading or, more strongly stated, fraud."<sup>22</sup> He notes that "[p]erformance research is still frequently marked by a dispassionate, third person author who proceeds with calculated neutrality..."<sup>23</sup> He goes on to assert that "[t]he poetic essay finds kindred spirits in

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Pelias, *Writing Performance*, ix.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, x.

the diary, the journal, the personal narrative, the confession, the autobiography, not in objective research report, the factual history, or the statistical proof."<sup>24</sup> I worked too hard to become who I am to hide that self behind calculated neutrality. I want my passion for theatre

and directing

and communication

and leadership

and teaching

and feminism to come through. My passion makes me a better teacher. It makes me a better facilitator for interactive theatre. It makes me a better director. It makes me a better artist. It makes me a better scholar. It makes me a better writer. And it makes me a better human being. How can I remove it from my story?

In *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*, bell hooks insists that "[l]iterature that helps inform masses of people, that helps individuals understand feminist thinking and feminist politics, needs to be written in a range of styles and formats."<sup>25</sup> This is my response to that need.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, xi.

<sup>25</sup> bell hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2000), 22.

Why performative writing? Because it is "a recognition of the ability of words on the page to perform and an attempt to write in such a way that draws attention to that performance..."<sup>26</sup> In their introduction to *Voices Made Flesh: Performing Women's Autobiography*, Lynn Miller and Jacqueline Taylor assert that "...until a life is shared through writing or performance, it does not exist at all, or at least it does not resonate in the broader realm of public consequence."<sup>27</sup> And Tony Adams and Stacy Holman Jones, in "Telling Stories: Reflexivity, Queer Theory, and Autoethnography," claim "the autoethnographic means sharing politicized, practical, and cultural stories that resonate with others and motivating these others to share theirs; bearing witness, together, to possibilities wrought in telling."<sup>28</sup> My story, my narrative, my performance of self on paper, my experience, all are offered up for examination, critique, inspiration, warning, witness.

Rather than including the text of a performance within the body of my dissertation, I present the entire

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<sup>26</sup> Miller and Pelias, viii.

<sup>27</sup> Lynn C. Miller, Jacqueline Taylor, and M. Heather Carver, eds., *Voices Made Flesh: Performing Women's Autobiography* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 3-4.

<sup>28</sup> Tony E. Adams and Stacy Holman Jones, "Telling Stories: Reflexivity, Queer Theory, and Autoethnography," *Cultural Studies & Critical Methodologies* 11, no. 2 (2011): 111.

dissertation through performative writing. My intent in using performative writing is neatly justified, again by Pelias, and so I leave you with a rather lengthy quote, because I could not possibly say it any better.

Instead of writing a work that hits hard, that is straight to the point, that is based in well-formulated arguments, carefully arranged to leave no room for doubt; instead of crippling my critics, recruiting new members and eliciting new allegiances; instead of being armed, ready for a good fight, ready to enjoy the bounty of conquest, I want to write in another shape. I seek a space that unfolds softly, one that circles around, slides between, swallows whole. I want to live in feelings that are elusive, to live in doubt. I want to offer an open hand that refuses to point but is unwilling to allow injustices to slip through its fingers. I want to be here for the taking, a small figure against the academic wall. I am content to be alone but enjoy the company I keep.<sup>29</sup>

Pelias is no longer alone, against the academic wall.

Others stand with him now. And I am joining the line.

My story is important because women's voices have been left out or silenced for too long. Telling my story is itself an act of feminist practice. Many/most directing texts are written by men. Many/most of the highly visible directors in the field are men. Many/most professors teaching at the college and graduate school level are men. My story is just a story. One example. We need many.

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<sup>29</sup> Pelias, *Writing Performance*, xi-xii.

## CHAPTER TWO: FINDING A VOICE PART I: BECOMING CECE

Using my past to shape my future, or, What's in a Name?

I don't have to know the story to know it's not old or  
tired if it's your story.<sup>1</sup>  
Kathleen in *Touch* by Toni Press-Coffman

If we don't name ourselves we are nothing.  
Audre Lorde<sup>2</sup>

May 2, 2008: My breath catches as I slide a finger  
into the envelope and rip.

Are my hands shaking? No, I don't think so.  
But my throat is thick, heavy with emotion.

Fear and joy,  
anticipation and old pain.

I carefully unfold my amended birth certificate and stare  
at my name. Carla is gone and has legally been replaced by  
Cece. I blink back the tears and write 'The End' on that  
chapter of my life.

Life is full of turning points. Sometimes we  
recognize them at the time; name changes usually signify an  
important event. More often though, we don't know an

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<sup>1</sup> Toni Press-Coffman, *Touch* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 2005), 34.

<sup>2</sup> Audre Lorde, "An Interview with Karla Hammond," *American Poetry Review* (March/April 1980): 19.

event's significance until later. Poet and philosopher George Santayna warns that "[t]hose who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it"<sup>3</sup> and Anne Bogart, in *A Director Prepares*, discusses the importance of actively remembering the past in order to use it.<sup>4</sup> Feminist theory values the lived experiences of women. That is one way to interpret the oft heard "the personal is political." How can these experiences be shared unless we actively remember them, with the hope that our experiences can be used to help someone else? Feminists believe people should tell their stories in their own words. My personal history has shaped me into a feminist director, but the road was long, winding, and often rocky.<sup>5</sup>

Before I learned to be a director I learned to be a feminist.

Before I learned to be a feminist I had to find my voice.

But first, I had to learn to see.

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<sup>3</sup> George Santayana, *Reason in Common Sense* vol. 1 of *The Life of Reason: The Phases of Human Progress* (New York: Dover, 1980) 284.

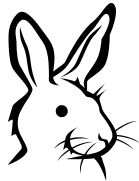
<sup>4</sup> Anne Bogart, *A Director Prepares: Seven Essays on Art and Theatre* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 21-26.

<sup>5</sup> No one is just ONE thing, and so I certainly identify as more than just a feminist director. I don't even think it would be accurate for me to claim to be a feminist director without acknowledging that I draw from more than one directing toolbox, making choices according to the circumstances at hand. The important thing is that I am consciously striving to be a feminist director, to put theory into action, to combine scholarship and performance.

## *Learning to See*

We don't see things as they are, we see things as we are.  
Anais Nin

I know that I don't see the world the way you do. Maybe no two of us really see the world the same, but I had to learn to see what others *expected* me to see. The real problems began when I was learning to read. I would see the word 'rabbit' and say 'bunny.' You see, my school was using the 'whole word' method of teaching reading. So, I took the word from the page, transformed it into a picture in my mind, and gave the word that corresponded with the picture. Not a big deal...I could still be understood, even if my answer was technically wrong.



RABBIT

"Bunny"

And then, I failed my first standardized test. I didn't just fail; I bombed. Apparently, having my own way of processing written words interfered with my ability to pass a test designed to *standardize* students. I scored in the bottom 13<sup>th</sup> percentile. My parents were dismayed.

So, I took a trip to see a specialist and discovered that I didn't "see" the world the way others do. I



remember only one of the "tests" he performed. He showed me a square with an x through it and asked me to draw it. I did, but I drew four triangles. While I watched, he drew a square, then drew an X through the center of it and asked if I'd ever thought of drawing it that way. A light bulb went off and I remember being excited to learn an easier way to draw the *four triangles*. It still wasn't *really* a square with an X through it to me. Most will see the square with an X in it first and only later conceive of the drawing as triangles, whereas I'd never thought of it as anything *but* triangles.<sup>6</sup> I had to learn to see the square with the X. And I had to learn that other people don't see triangles right away, they see the square. On a standardized test triangles were wrong, the square was right. Of course, both are literally true, but one is accepted and I needed to learn to decode the accepted answer...the answer others would see first.<sup>7</sup>

No record of any diagnosis is in my medical records. My mom thinks her mother paid for the visit to the specialist. Unfortunately, my grandmother passed away the

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<sup>6</sup> Despite my efforts, I have been unable to find this "test" to see what percentage see a square first and what percentage see triangles...and I don't know what this exercise is used to test.

<sup>7</sup> Obviously I am simplifying things here. I don't know of a teacher who wouldn't accept both of those answers as being correct. But sometimes there are multiple answers that are technically correct, but one that is expected. And in those instances, I was often wrong.

year I started on my Ph.D. and I never thought to ask...having a different way of seeing the world was simply a part of my life. The best guesses of a few friends in the medical and education fields lead me to believe it is likely a mild case of a visual processing disorder, possibly with a touch of dyslexia<sup>8</sup> thrown in. My processing capability is not necessarily hindered, just atypical. Or maybe I compensate for it with exception ability to process visual imagery. Without access to the diagnosis or knowledge of what *type* of specialist I saw, I can only speculate.

I may not initially interpret stimuli the way most people do, but I have learned to fake it. I had to in order to get along. Eventually, I went to a special class that taught me to read phonetically and I stopped reading 'rabbit' as 'bunny'. That year, I went from the lowest reading group in the grade level to the highest, but I still see the bunny. And I still see four triangles first.

It's impossible to know just how much this early failure and diagnosis impacted me. Imagine doubting, and having reason to doubt, your every answer as you learn everything you know about the world. Second-guessing every

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<sup>8</sup> Dyslexia: neurological disorder that causes their brains to process and interpret information differently. [www.ncld.org/types-learning-disabilities/dyslexia](http://www.ncld.org/types-learning-disabilities/dyslexia). Accessed 01/01/2013.

reply. Constantly judging, evaluating, assessing, probing, weighing, and interpreting everything you think you know. It became second nature to doubt my impulses, to assume I was wrong or didn't "get it." To see the world through different eyes, through a different lens, is a terrible curse in elementary school. Is it any wonder that I ended up in a profession that welcomes multiple interpretations? Or that I embraced a theory that values the lived experiences and shared voices of real people?

The result of this cognitive disconnect with 'normal' minds is that I am usually quite good at seeing two sides of an issue, and I learned to ace reading comprehension tests. In addition to my own first interpretation, I have to understand what others are likely to find important. I learned that if I could find evidence to justify my interpretation then I might be right, even if my interpretation wasn't the commonly accepted one. I also learned to gauge what I thought others would see first and adapt my responses to the most likely response of others. Unfortunately, that adjustment is now automatic. I no longer always know what my first response is. Instead, I'm always looking for what others see first or justifying what I see. I understand now that our answers are based, in part, upon our own life experiences. In their study

investigating *Women's Way of Knowing*<sup>9</sup>, Belenky et al. reveal that:

[i]t is only with the shift into full relativism that the student completely comprehends that truth is relative, that the meaning of an event depends on the context in which that event occurs and on the framework that the knower uses to understand that event, and that relativism pervades all aspects of life, not just the academic world. Only then is the student able to understand that knowledge is constructed, not given; contextual, not absolute; mutable, not fixed.<sup>10</sup>

So, I may not be able to identify what others see, because their experiences and mine are not the same.

It's hard for me to speak in terms of absolutes. For too long I've been aware of the possibility of multiple interpretations and the need to justify choices. I love theatre and dramatic literature for that very reason. What did I see in a play versus what someone else saw? I don't need there to be a "right" answer. The important part is that various interpretations are valid, so long as you have evidence. My interpretation was no longer wrong; it was simply different and led to more enriching class

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<sup>9</sup> In their study, Belenky et al. draw conclusions as though the women they interviewed were typical of the development of all women, and only women. They also plot this development as a rather straight line, with one end less desirable than the other. While their conclusions tend to be essentialist, they do, rather extensively, include the voices of the women they interviewed. For me, that inclusion makes the work valuable. Though their work has merits, it is important to point out that it has drawbacks as well.

<sup>10</sup> Mary Field Belenky and others, *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 10.

discussions. Eventually a strength, it was a crippling handicap for many years.

While I'd like to say I quickly learned to convert my own first impression into what I thought others saw, that simply isn't true. I was silenced by my insecurity about my answers. It is still difficult for me when I don't know *why* I think something, because I cannot justify my answer. If I thought an answer but couldn't defend it, I didn't share it. I'm still like this. If I'm playing Trivial Pursuit and I think I know the answer but don't know why, then I won't defend my answer. I won't stick up for it if my team-mate has another suggestion. I do not trust my own first thoughts because I learned to distrust them at such a young age. I use Trivial Pursuit because it is a current example of how this visual processing abnormality still manifests itself. As a shy girl in elementary and junior high school, I remained quiet, rather than give an answer different from what everyone else thought was true. Sometimes seeing the wrong thing is okay, and sometimes it isn't.

Beginning in high school, theatre teachers told me I had an eye for directing. I didn't know what that meant, but I heard it over and over again. Now I think it means that, due to my exceptional visual imagery capabilities and

my extensive practice at supporting my opinions with evidence, I have the ability to infer meaning from what I read, implications that go beyond the story-level of a play. Bloom believes that "[o]n the most basic level, interpretation is necessary because language carries multiple meanings."<sup>11</sup> I see the action as though a movie is playing in my head while I read. And I can understand and accept multiple interpretations of the same play. I read human motivations into character's actions because I am so used to searching for the meaning everyone else sees and accepts is the *only* way to 'read' the character.

Although Bogart was referring to a past larger than personal history, I feel I can learn from my own past, and I hope others will be able to learn from, and use, my remembered past. I have a unique opportunity to tap into my own childhood. I don't have a perfect memory; however, I started keeping a journal before I was even a teenager. Although I am sure my interpretations of events are one-sided, at least they have not also been colored by time.

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<sup>11</sup> Bloom, 13.

## *Learning Gender*

Before I learned to be a director I learned to be a feminist...

before I learned to be a feminist I had to find my voice.

I had to learn.

And I had a lot of upbringing to overcome, because first I learned how to be a girl. As Belenky, et al. discuss in *Women's Ways of Knowing*, "[a]ll women grow up having to deal with historically and culturally engrained definitions of femininity and womanhood..."<sup>12</sup> At the oh-so insightful age of twelve, I thought I knew what guys wanted. In my journal I wrote: "I've tried to show him that I'm interested by talking to him,...staying as close to him as possible, and asking his advice."<sup>13</sup> Naturally, a girl should be paying attention to and asking the advice of a boy, right? Especially since we were in technology class together. Obviously a girl shouldn't be any good in a class like that and should need to ask for advice. I already recognized turning to a boy for help, showing my dependence on him, as a way of demonstrating my interest in

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<sup>12</sup> Belenky et al., 5.

<sup>13</sup> Cece McFarland, unpublished personal journal (October 27, 1988).

him. Now I'm appalled by my thoughts, but at the time it seemed normal.

A few months later I showed my understanding of the feminization of names, used it to create a nickname, and also rebelled against it, perhaps my first hint of becoming a feminist. I began referring to myself as Sam. Carla Marie becomes the initials CM then add Y and it becomes CMY (because so many girls' names end with Y or IE, Amy, Katie, Becky). CMY becomes Sammy and then is shortened to Sam.<sup>14</sup> I used Sam as my nickname, not Sammy. I find it interesting that I gave myself nicknames, continually striving to distance myself from 'Carla' and the things I didn't like about who I was, culminating in legally changing my name. Many nicknames paraded their way through the pages of my journals: only Cece lasted.<sup>15</sup>

May 1990 was a traumatic month for me because I seemed to always be fighting with my best friend. Even as a moody 8<sup>th</sup> grader it's clear that the role of peacekeeper was fully ingrained in my interactions.

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<sup>14</sup> Cece McFarland, personal journal (May 8, 1989). The original explanation went as follows: Carla Marie = CM = CMY = Sammy = Sam! CM+Y because so many names end with Y or IE...

<sup>15</sup> While I could speculate about my eventual willingness to use a 'feminized' name, Cece was actually C.C. or CC for years. I only adopted the spelled out version when I began to seriously consider going through the legal name-change process. Cece is more of a 'name' than the initials would be, and I thought my father would accept it more quickly since he was the first to spell out the name.



May 4: Gail and I got into a fight...I've wanted to yell at her for a long time but I always worried about what she'd say about me. I don't regret what I did but we have a campout this weekend. I'll probably apologize tomorrow as soon as I see her. Maybe I should wait and see how she acts first. No, if I do that then I'll never say I'm sorry.<sup>16</sup>

May 8: As soon as I got to camp...I apologized and she said fine...and now we act like it never happened but if she gets real SNOBBY again I'll tell her. Next time I think I'll yell. It really makes me mad when she treats me badly.<sup>17</sup>

May ?: Gail and I are in another fight. I got tired of her making me feel like everything I say and care about is unimportant but everything she says is WORLD NEWS and should be put up in lights.

May 23: Today, before school, I went up to Gail and asked her if she knew why I am mad at her and she said "No, and I don't care!" then she walked away...All she has to do is find out why I'm mad at her and say she's sorry. She doesn't even have to mean it. At least not THIS time. I'd like it more if she did mean it or at least sounded like she meant it.<sup>18</sup>

May 28: Today Gail and I made up. I called her and said that I thought we should talk and she said that she was going to make up before but...then there was a long pause and then she said... "but I never got around to it, just kidding." ...I told her that on Wednesday I was going to apologize for being mad but then she said that she didn't care why I was mad and that made me madder. She said that she didn't feel like being friendly just then. She also asked why I was going to apologize for being mad. I said "Because I don't usually get angry at

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<sup>16</sup> McFarland, (May 4, 1990). For the full entries see Appendix A.

<sup>17</sup> McFarland, (May 8, 1990).

<sup>18</sup> McFarland, (May 23, 1990).

people, I just put up with them but I couldn't stand it any longer." She said then that I just take the way I feel and put it inside me and don't say anything, then it all comes out at once.<sup>19</sup>

She was right, I bottled up my feelings, and I can't help but notice my willingness to subsume my own needs in order to keep the peace among my friends. Was that a result of being a middle child? Of being the only girl in my family? Was it an unintended result of never trusting my own interpretations? I could often see other people's point-of-view even when they hurt me. If I could understand the other person's reasons for slighting me then I usually had empathy for him/her as well. I needed an outsider to validate that my emotions were justified. Gail treated me poorly and in several entries through the years I questioned the validity of calling that relationship a friendship. And yet I did. And I was always the one to apologize. Even after we graduated from high school, I still acted to keep the peace instead of dealing with the underlying problems in the relationship. After a particularly bitter fight I wrote:

...I went along with [Gloria's] explanations that I'm jealous of them both because it's so easy for them to joke and flirt with guys. I went along with it all for the sake of peace...I apologized for saying things that might have hurt

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<sup>19</sup> McFarland, (May 28, 1990).

her and that I thought if I'd been saying thoughtless things that they would have told me— didn't they know I'd never hurt any of them on purpose?

...I'm not jealous and I wouldn't ever have hurt any of them intentionally or knowingly— though they've done it to me (Gail seems to have a history of it). So I ended up making up with them both less than 24 hours before [I left for a year in Germany]. They both made it to the airport and acted like nothing happened.<sup>20</sup>

Even though I was well on my way to being Cece by that last fight, I still did everything I could to keep the peace, and make sure everyone else was as happy as I could make them. Although I was resentful of the situation, I thought keeping the "friendships" with Gail and Gloria intact was more important than standing up for myself. More importantly, I thought that if I stood up for my feelings and what I thought was going on then I might be perceived as a bitch and not worth being 'friends' with.

A boy who later became a good friend, tried his best to get to know me through my friends. Although I don't think it meant much to me at the time, his simple words are quite revealing. In a note slipped into my locker he wrote: "Ya know what?!! I was on the phone with Gail last night trying to find out more about you, and even though she's your best friend she wasn't able to really tell me

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<sup>20</sup> McFarland, (December, 1994).

all that much."<sup>21</sup> She didn't know much, none of my friends did. I was so shy that I didn't really talk; even to my friends...I just listened to them. On the phone I simply let them talk, giving enough feedback to keep them talking. No wonder they liked me...I was a passive and mostly silent audience who only refused to be a doormat occasionally, and even then I apologized for becoming angry.

In the intervening years I have become increasingly straightforward, at times being blunt almost to a fault. The pendulum swings first one way and then the other. Despite my recent reputation for being brutally honest, I still choose to keep the peace far more often than I speak my mind. And yet a good friend revealed that she is sometimes intimidated by me and before we became close she thought I was (*gasp!*) a bitch. Unfortunately, our culture frowns upon women having strong opinions.

Strong opinions?

Opinions.

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<sup>21</sup> McFarland, (March 9, 1990).

## Courage

Without embracing the risk, there can be no progress and no  
adventure.

Anne Bogart<sup>22</sup>

Change or stagnate. Keep moving or die...But if we change,  
we grow.

Mercedes Lackey in *The White Gryphon*

Creativity seems to come in spurts. When I was in grade school I enjoyed writing short stories. One year in high school I wrote poetry...These poems came from a place inside me that I can't find anymore. They flowed from me without thought or effort. I did a little bit of revising to them but not much...Now, when I try to write poetry, that's exactly what it is—try, nothing happens. I'm just as full of emotions and things to say but they don't flow out. The wording is awkward and the whole process leaves me frustrated and drained. It is no longer the joy, the release it was then. Where did that ability go? What happened to that place inside me that sang when I wrote?<sup>23</sup>

In their research, Belenky, et al. found that "women repeatedly used the metaphor of voice to depict their intellectual and ethical development; and that the development of a sense of voice, mind, and self were intricately intertwined."<sup>24</sup> Even as I learned to see and found my voice, I also experienced a silencing.

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<sup>22</sup> Bogart, 48.

<sup>23</sup> McFarland, journal for English I (Huntingdon, PA: Juniata College, November 20, 1995).

<sup>24</sup> Belenky, 18.

The creativity came from the pain I was feeling. From the agony of loneliness as I shifted from one identity to another,

the pain caused by my family,

my friends,

and my shyness. I find it odd that I describe the experience as a "place inside me that sang when I wrote" since many of my poems were full of negative emotions.<sup>25</sup> Still, I obviously missed the release of pain, and the easy flow of words. I felt trapped in myself and trapped in my own home.

...I need to get out of this house! It is destroying me! ...It is impossible for me to really relax...thanks to Ryan [my older brother] and Dad I don't feel as though I can have my own opinion or let people know when I'm angry<sup>26</sup>...[I] told [a good friend] how scared I was but I also told him how I felt a little guilty because my problems aren't really all that bad. I mean, they aren't abusing me. Sean said that in a way they are. With a family like mine I can't trust them, I barely like most of them. I'm scared to trust people. I build so many walls to keep people from hurting me that I'm scared to let

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<sup>25</sup> See Appendix B for some of the poems I wrote during this transition. I'm glad to have found that song again, and this time without quite so much pain.

<sup>26</sup> My older brother had anger issues that he took out on me. He lashed out at me with violence for offenses as varied as coughing uncontrollably or for daring to stand by my claim to dislike cafeteria food. I know that his behavior, and our relationship, had a huge impact on my shyness and disliking myself. Distancing myself from his treatment of me factors into my decision to use a different name. But I'm not ready to tell that part of my story. Not yet.

people through again...Trust is so important to me because there are so few people I trust enough for me to do *anything* for.<sup>27</sup>

Why am I so scared of dad? Because when he gets mad he becomes violent.

Why does he become violent? It must run in the male McFarland blood. Dad gets violent, Ryan gets violent,...and now so does Kevin...Someday VERY soon they're going to be surprised. Extremely shocked at how violent I become. I am tired of always having to carefully monitor what I say, my tone of voice, when I say it. I am tired of being careful not to provoke them in any way. I am tired of not letting my feelings show, just so they don't know they got "under my skin," as mom puts it...The sooner I leave this house the better!<sup>28</sup>

I am stunned by my own words...

someday they will be shocked at how violent I become.

In *Imagining Medea*, Fraden writes:

[w]hile it is thrilling to see the oppressed rise up against the oppressor, one wonders at what point the oppressed, in adopting the master's weapons, becomes an oppressor, nothing more than the weapon itself—whether that be anger, selfishness, or violence."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> McFarland, personal journal (January 2, 1992).

<sup>28</sup> McFarland, personal journal (January 5, 1992). I didn't ever get violent, I still don't, although I've been told I'm scary when I'm angry. I'm not violent, but I'm very intense and it's too strong of a contrast from my normal even-keeled state. I also didn't get out of the house. I lived there until I graduated from high school, and though I managed to avoid going home for most summer breaks in college, I've moved back in with my parents twice since high school.

<sup>29</sup> Rena Fraden, *Imagining Medea: Rhodessa Jones and Theater for Incarcerated Women* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 103.

How narrowly I avoided taking on the master's weapons and violence. Instead I fought back by becoming

a feminist,

a pacifist,

a liberal,

educated,

and open-minded.

Several of my college courses asked students to describe ourselves, so I can track what I thought of myself shortly after I transitioned from Carla to Cece. I changed in order to grow, knowing that if I didn't...if I stagnated, I would die.

Growing up I had very little self-confidence or self-respect. In fact, I didn't like myself at all. I was so shy I couldn't talk to anyone, not even my friends. I let people walk all over me and never stood up for myself.

The summers after my freshman and sophomore years in high school I was a counselor-in-training (CIT) at a Girl Scout Camp. All the CIT's had to have a camp name and I chose Candy Cane [which was later shortened to C.C.]. Both summers I worked hard to change myself into the person I wanted to be. It was a very difficult and emotional process but I succeeded.<sup>30</sup>

...There wasn't much about me that I liked and I didn't feel as though my family loved me. If they didn't love me how could anyone else, including me? I actually started changing (or trying to) in 9<sup>th</sup> grade by taking a theatre class.

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<sup>30</sup> McFarland, journal for English I (Huntingdon, PA: Juniata College, October 6, 1995).



I was so painfully shy that even those "friends" who I spent the most time with couldn't tell other people much about me. I figured Theatre would help me come out of my shell.

My transformation was so difficult that I made a conscious decision to separate myself from the person I had been. To facilitate that I started asking everyone to call me CC instead of Carla...I don't really even answer to my given name anymore and lots of my friends don't even know my real name.

Forcing myself to change over those few years really shaped who I am today. Because I consciously molded my personality I think that my parents and environment have had a minimal effect on me. Those are the things that created the shy, self-hating obedient thing I had become...

I have come much farther than I ever dreamed possible. I have a very positive self concept. I like who I am and feel I deserve my best. As a result of that I always do my best—at everything I attempt. However, if something adds more frustration and stress to my life than it's worth then I drop it. I'm comfortable with how I look and move, which makes other people's opinions less important. I will never, and have never, given in to peer pressure. The more someone tries to change my mind the less likely I am to do what they want. If they're trying to persuade me then they don't have enough respect for me and my decisions.

Honesty is the most important thing to me in any relationship. I don't lie if I can ever help it and expect the same from others. I don't make promises I can't keep—ever. I will promise to TRY to do things but that's no guarantee that they'll get done.

...I'm honest about my feelings. I can be blunt (too blunt for others' comfort sometimes) and I can talk around a subject—hinting at my meaning. I enjoy discussions when they don't turn into trying to convince each other to change their minds. I can usually see both sides of an issue and can argue both. I strongly believe that there are two sides to every story and the truth is somewhere in between. I don't judge people quickly...

...I am very determined and stubborn. I have perfected my own self-discipline and set exceptionally high expectations/goals for myself—and usually achieve them.<sup>31</sup>

You might ask how I achieved this great transformation, from shy and obedient to strong and independent. I remember that it was hard. I remember that it took years. I remember backsliding into a shell that seemed safer, even as it was a lonely place to hide. I remember that I didn't fit in with my peers when I was shy, or when I emerged from that hiding place. I put on masks and pretended. I developed a character and embodied it. I thought about the voices in my head and the voices in my heart, and I chose who to listen to, I chose who I wanted to be. I wrote about my pain, but I didn't write about my strategies.

I took theatre classes,

I spent time alone,

I read,

I wrote.

I dreamed.

I performed.

I read books about people, mostly fictional, mostly women, overcoming incredible odds. I read coming-of-age novels. I read about heartbreak and strength. In their

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<sup>31</sup> McFarland, Acting Class journal (Huntingdon, PA: Juniata College, January 30, 1997).

research, Belenky et al. posited that women who identified as constructivist "learned to immerse herself in at least one symbol system from a very early age...most often they found another world through books and literature.

Frequently they kept a diary..."<sup>32</sup> As an avid reader, after struggling to learn to read, I discovered people

and places

and worlds

and events

and situations that were different from my life. I found friends in books. I found strategies in books. I found life and hope. I found me. People told me I had an "old soul." I looked into that soul and found the courage and strength to overcome my own heartbreak. I chose life. And I named myself.

Ultimately, I took the experiences that were important to me and made an effort to embody them, to learn from them, and to actively remember them in order to use them. Now I use these reflections to strengthen my commitment to myself, to the self that strives. My self-description from 1997 does not encompass all of who I am. How can anyone fully disclose their identity? According to Fraden, "...recognizing the multiplicity of identities within us

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<sup>32</sup> Belenky, 162.

reveals the limits of single labels. We need long strings of adjectives to locate our complex selves by race, religion, sexuality, physical ability, ethnicity, and the like."<sup>3334</sup> And according to Freedmen, feminists tend to be "...alive to the complexity of life and no one offers easy answers."<sup>35</sup> Being able to see past the surface of events at an early age may have given me the capability to see a different outcome for my life. Just because I was shy didn't mean I *had* to be shy. If characters in books could change, then so could I. Being able to envision a different future enabled me to create a different future. Stepping out of the accepted path takes courage.

Through the course of my childhood I managed to move from a kid full of self-doubt who couldn't see the right answer, to a young lady full of independence and self-confidence. I was a nanny in Germany right after high school, I went to a college where I didn't know a soul, I became involved in leadership opportunities, the theatre program, and residential life. Anne Lamott reminds us that:

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<sup>33</sup> Estelle B. Freedman, *No Turning Back: The History of Feminism and the Future of Women* (New York: Ballantine, 2002), 93.

<sup>34</sup> It's interesting to me now that, although I identified as a Christian at the time, I apparently didn't feel it was worth mentioning.

<sup>35</sup> Fraden, 177.

...you can't get to truths by sitting in a field smiling beatifically, avoiding your anger and damage and grief. Your anger and damage and grief are the way to the truth. We don't have much truth to express unless we have gone into those rooms and closets and woods and abysses that we were told not to go in to...then we will be able to speak *in our own voice* and to stay in the present moment. And that moment is home.<sup>36</sup>

Every day I choose. I choose Cece. Never again do I want to feel the way I did. I remember being suicidal in sixth grade and recognizing a desire to drink away my unhappiness, before I had ever been drunk.<sup>37</sup>

"I used to hate who I was."<sup>38</sup>

No child, none, should ever hate who they are. And yet, if I hadn't hated myself so much I wouldn't be who I am today. In 2008 I legally changed my name to Cece. I will never be Carla again.

We each have our own burdens to carry, our own pain to deal with. My narrative is not better or worse than your narrative. My story is simply that, mine. In my work as a director I strive to avoid becoming the oppressor.

According to Glazer-Raymo in *Shattering the Myths: Women in*

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<sup>36</sup> Anne Lamott, *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life* (New York: Pantheon, 1994), 201.

<sup>37</sup> Actually, I was drunk once before then...when I was about four I downed enough of my dad's unattended beer to get me pretty drunk. As a result, I can't stand the taste of beer...but I certainly don't remember the event well enough for it to make me want to drink in 6<sup>th</sup> grade.

<sup>38</sup> McFarland, personal journal, (May 30, 1991).

*Academe*, some believe that "women's acceptance and mastery of male gamesmanship is a prerequisite for leadership positions."<sup>39</sup> I see that path as a dark one that heads toward becoming the master. The professional ideal is often "based on the male experience and on values generally associated with masculinity, perpetuating gender segregation, subordination, and tokenism."<sup>40</sup> Feminist directing works to subvert that ideal. The models of patriarchal directors do not need to be followed and perpetuated. We can find another way. We can choose another path.

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<sup>39</sup> Judith Glazer-Raymo, *Shattering the Myths: Women in Academe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 164.

<sup>40</sup> Glazer-Raymo, 103.

## CHAPTER THREE: BECOMING A FEMINIST

### *Family Ties*

I myself have never been able to find out precisely what feminism is: I only know that people call me a feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a doormat.<sup>1</sup>

Rebecca West

In all my work, what I try to say is that as human beings we are more alike than we are unlike.

Maya Angelou

Growing up as the only girl in my family, I witnessed firsthand the different expectations our society has of males and females. I watched my unhappy mother wait on my father hand and foot, and knew I didn't want her life. On the few occasions when my father did yard work he had my brothers help him, while I was expected to help my mother with housework. A free writing exercise from one Thanksgiving encapsulates how things worked in my parents' household.

My father was extremely insensitive today (nothing new there). Rather than help with things in the kitchen or clean the house (we have company coming Saturday) he decided to order a movie... He made a big deal out of "show time" and called me in to watch it with him and my younger brother. I declined and helped my mother with

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<sup>1</sup> Rebecca West, quoted in Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*, (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1991), 2006, 14

the dinner instead. It never occurred to him that she might need help.

She didn't even want to make dinner this year. She would much rather have gone to her mother's house in State College and helped her out. But no, he declined the invitation without even asking my mom. I think he decided [not to go] because his mother (who also lives in St. College) was spending the holiday in Pittsburgh with her sister.

Talk about traditional gender roles... The only things he deals with are the entertainment system and his darkroom.

When he gets back from training events (he's a Boy Scout leader/trainer) he leaves boxes and boxes of "stuff" piled in the living room. My mom vows not to put anything away for him "this time"...And he's the one who really wants the house to be kept clean. Most of the mess in the house is caused by or related to him.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to the gender divide in how household labor was divvied up, my parents also treated me in a manner markedly different from my brothers.

I think that most parents at least claim to love their children equally, but often actions speak louder than words. And sometimes words are loud enough. On my thirteenth birthday my dad told me I was his favorite, but he also told me I was his favorite because my mom favored my brothers. Around the same time my maternal grandmother mentioned the favoritism *both* my parents showed my brothers. That apparent favoritism continues. After spending an evening with my family, my (then) fiancée asked

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<sup>2</sup> McFarland, Women and Literature class journal (Huntingdon, PA: Juniata College, November 29, 1996).



if it bothered me that my parents favor my brothers. It wasn't something I'd discussed with him. I'd *forgotten* that it was a problem because it was *normal* and I saw my brothers rarely enough that I could block it out for long stretches.

As a teen I chafed that my rules were different from my brothers' rules. They were allowed to talk back, to try to turn "no's" into "yes's" while I was punished for the same thing. I struggled not to get lost in adolescence, fought to overcome shyness and change my personality so I could be the person I wanted to be. I fought against the maxim to be seen and not heard.

And then my father changed my life forever.

Two statements form one of the most pivotal moments in my life. The moment when I deliberately and knowingly turned away from being an acceptable, or docile, young woman because "[c]onventional feminine goodness means being voiceless as well as selfless."<sup>3</sup> And I knew that "[n]ice girls fulfill other people's expectations."<sup>4</sup> I decided I could not be "good" or "nice" if it meant abandoning the self I had become.

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<sup>3</sup> Belenky, 167.

<sup>4</sup> Belenky, 206.

The kitchen is the heart of the home, full of fights and Wednesday night spaghetti, birthday parties and Christmas cookies, laughter and tears. We stood in the kitchen, bathed in sunlight and near the bird clock that sings out the hours. Others may have been home, but we were alone in that moment. I don't remember the conversation leading up to those pivotal seconds, but I remember his words exactly as he spoke them.

"You'll never have a relationship last very long because you don't make others feel needed enough. Men need to feel needed."

My world stopped in that moment.

Breathing was impossible.

Movement impossible.

My heart was racing and pounding,  
deafening.

And silent.

I probably made some response, but my memory contains only that moment...

...followed by silence.

A few weeks later we had lunch together. He came up with another winner, as we sat in a parking lot, again in

the sun,<sup>5</sup> eating sandwiches and drinking soda. We were talking about my brothers' dating habits. My blue-collar father, struggling to fit into a white-collar job, actually said to his teenaged daughter:

"Maybe you don't keep boyfriends for very long because you don't put out enough."

What?

Seriously?

Once again, my answer, in my memory at least, is silence. I mean, what answer could I possibly give? Now, my father had no idea what I'd done or with whom because I didn't discuss sex with my parents.

Regardless, who says that to an eighteen year old girl?

Who says that to their *daughter*?

At the time I didn't consider the overwhelming pressure society places on us, on children and their parents, to live up to a mythical standard of gendered behavior. My parents modeled the gender roles they were socialized to value. According to Pamela A. Fox in *Working*

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<sup>5</sup> Why am I so certain the sun was shining on both of these occasions? I think most people associate sunshine with happy times; I associate sunshine with important moments. The sun also shines in one of my earliest memories. When I was four my paternal grandfather died very suddenly. I clearly remember the sun streaming into the family room as my mom sat on the couch folding clean clothes (to take on the trip to the funeral I think) and together my parents tried to explain to us what had happened.

*Class Women in the Academy*, "...children in working-class families are usually taught obedience and discipline in a way that prepares them to accept subordinate employment positions, and they are additionally socialized to adopt traditional gender roles."<sup>6</sup> My mother has a bachelor's degree in Elementary Education that she's never used, because she stayed home to take care of the kids. Later she worked to support my father's small business projects. Even today, the perception remains that, as Astin wrote in 1969, "even the most capable, ambitious, and well educated woman will usually choose husband and children over career if conflicts arise between these two areas of her life."<sup>7</sup> My father earned an associate's degree and was a first-generation college student. He expected to work for the railroad but was hired by Xerox before enlisting in the Army during Vietnam. My parents certainly modeled traditional gender roles. Even when my mother worked full-time she did all the cooking, cleaning, and grocery shopping, while my dad watched TV or played computer games. He supported the family financially and Mom did everything

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<sup>6</sup> Pamela A. Fox, "Recasting the "Politics of Truth": Thoughts on Class, Gender, and the Role of Intellectuals," in *Working Class Women in the Academy: Laborers in the Knowledge Factory*, ed. Michelle M. Tokarczyk and Elizabeth A. Fay (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), 227.

<sup>7</sup> Helen S. Astin. *The Woman Doctorate in America: Origins, Career, and Family* (New York: Russell Sage, 1969), 22.

else, even when she was also helping to support the family financially.

"...you don't make others feel needed enough."

"Men need to feel needed."

"...you don't put out enough."

I'm sure I've internalized most gender constancy expectations; however, I ultimately failed to accept one of the lessons most important to a women's ability to sacrifice for her man. In the words of Rena Fraden, in *Imagining Medea: Rhodessa Jones and Theatre for Incarcerated Women* "girls are taught that boys are the most important thing they can catch. They learn they have to compete with each other for the prize; their worth is measured not by their own accomplishments but by the men they can attach themselves to..."<sup>8</sup> I utterly failed to measure my worth in terms of a boy. If my father had been less explicit about what I "needed" to do in order to catch or keep a partner, perhaps I would have internalized the lesson without thought. After all, "...the adolescent female...has frequently been rewarded for her quiet predictability, her competent though perhaps unimaginative work, and her obedience and conformity..."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Fraden, 175.

<sup>9</sup> Belenky, 65.

I was raised to be obedient and conform.

I was raised to seek praise and approval from others.

I was raised to fulfill other people's needs before my own.

However, after working so hard to change my personality into someone I could live with, how could I become dependent again, just to make someone else feel needed?

People have been telling me for years that I am very mature for my age but I could never see it (since it is so hard to look at oneself objectively). All I knew was that I didn't fit in, not even with my friends. They were gossipy, into flirting and boys, and just plain silly. I swear they let their grades slip on purpose so that no one would think they were smart and they acted like such airheads in an attempt to get all the boys to like them. I don't think I've ever been ditzy on purpose. I feel that people should like me for who I am, not who I pretend to be.<sup>10</sup>

I decided that I didn't want a relationship I needed to 'put out' for, whether it was sexually or by making someone feel needed at the expense of my own self-esteem. I wanted to be measured by my own accomplishments, not by the accomplishments of a man. Fraden's words, found many years later, help me understand. "She needs to listen and learn from a reality that exists beyond her self if she is to escape her fate, wrest control, become her own agent,

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<sup>10</sup> McFarland, journal for Women and Literature class (Huntingdon, PA: Juniata College, September 24, 1996). I was twenty.

construct a different ending, become a different subject.”<sup>11</sup> I needed to be able to imagine a world with different rules so I could be a different person. Perhaps my ability to look at the world through multiple perspectives helped me to imagine those different rules. Or maybe the necessity of understanding different interpretations allowed me to choose the reality I wanted to believe in. Or maybe it was all the science fiction I read. Regardless of how it happened, I decided to be strong and independent. In retrospect, I decided to be a feminist.

At the time I would have been horrified by the label *feminist*. As Skeggs states in *Formations of Class and Gender*, “...the ways in which we position ourselves in relation to feminism and the identity ‘feminist’ will depend on the knowledge we have about feminism.”<sup>12</sup> Growing up in a conservative household meant that all my perceptions of feminists were negative; however, that sun-filled spring was a turning point in the construction of my feminist self. My parents had always told me I could be anything I wanted to be, but for the first time I realized that I didn’t have to get married and have kids. My father’s unequivocal statement of what I needed to do in

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<sup>11</sup> Fraden, 65.

<sup>12</sup> Beverley Skeggs, *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable* (London: Sage, 1997), 140.

order to maintain a serious (traditional) relationship  
allowed me to rebel against tradition. I decided not to  
give up more of myself than men typically do, and to focus  
my life on my needs

and desires

and career

and education,

instead of focusing on acquiring and keeping a husband. As  
Fraden stated of the female prisoners she worked with,  
"...they manufacture a past self, a present one, and, one  
supposes, a self they may inhabit in the future."<sup>13</sup> I  
manufactured a new self. I became the subject of my own  
narrative. I worked hard to become someone I was proud of.  
And then my eighteen year old self was face to face with  
what Faludi, in *Backlash*, terms feminism's basic agenda:

...that women not be forced to "choose" between  
public justice and private happiness. It asks  
that women be free to define themselves—instead  
of having their identity defined for them, time  
and again, by their culture and their men.<sup>14</sup>

Without choosing the term feminist, I chose to be a  
feminist and to determine the course of my own life. My  
father thrust that choice into my face, and I did not

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<sup>13</sup> Fraden, 135.

<sup>14</sup> Faludi, 15.



fulfill my role of "good daughter." I was true to myself instead.

I interpret my father's attitude toward women and relationships as an outward expression of sexism and our patriarchal society. Nothing in his talk alluded to what I would gain by altering my behavior to catch a man—except, potentially, a husband.<sup>15</sup> And I remember a time when I wanted nothing more than to be a stay at home wife and mother, but that was considerably before my late teens. The sexist behavior and attitudes I experienced at home increased my awareness that we are socialized to accept the status quo, especially in terms of gender expectations. Sexism may be so normalized that we cannot even see it when we experience it. As bell hooks states in *Feminism is for Everybody*, "[f]eminism is a movement to end sexist exploitation, and oppression...It makes it clear that the problem is sexism. And that clarity helps us remember that all of us, female and male, have been socialized from birth on to accept sexist thought and action."<sup>16</sup> I'm sure my father thought he had my best interest at heart when he gave me advice about getting/keeping a man. It just wasn't the right thing to say.

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<sup>15</sup> And, *maybe*, financial security...a rarity right now.

<sup>16</sup> hooks, viii.

## *Shifting Perspectives*

"No one should have to dance backwards all their lives."  
Jill Ruckelhaus<sup>17</sup>

"Feminists are made, not born."  
bell hooks

I know the very moment I realized I was a feminist. During my sophomore year at Juniata College, a small liberal arts school in central Pennsylvania, I took a Women and Literature class. Throughout the semester we had to keep a journal that included responses to the readings, free-writes, and a few assigned topics. One assignment was to write about the term 'feminism.' Prior to that assignment I associated the term feminist with ball-breaking, masculine women. They were (then) First Lady Hillary Clinton types...outspoken, brash, decisive, and decidedly unfeminine. After growing up in a conservative, Republican, Christian household, the last thing I wanted was to be a feminist. As Millett declares in *Sexual Politics*, "[p]atriarchy has God on its side."<sup>18</sup> And Freedman observes that "[m]ost of the supernatural theories

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<sup>17</sup> Jill Ruckelhaus quoted in Ashton Applewhite, William R. Evans III, and Andrew Frothingham, eds., *And I Quote: The Definitive Collection of Quotes, Sayings, and Jokes for the Contemporary Speechmaker* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2003), 451.

<sup>18</sup> Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 51.

of how humans came to be assert that a higher power—a God, gods, or other spiritual force beyond human reason—ordained that men should rule over women.”<sup>19</sup> At the time I considered myself a Christian, and did not question the sexism inherent in Christian theology. I had decided that I wouldn’t sacrifice myself for a relationship, but I still didn’t think I was a feminist.

August 27, 1996

Feminism

Feminism is not a topic I often think about. I don’t consider myself a feminist, by the definition often implied by today’s media, but I firmly believe in equality...The media...have given me the functional definition of the concept of feminists. According to this view all feminists are hard-core man haters. Most are lesbians and there is something wrong with all of them. They are so radical that they want to call themselves womyn, or something like that. There can be no distinguishing between the sexes at all...feminists are never good mothers and usually have no children at all and that is abnormal. They are cold, frigid, unfeeling, uncaring, robots, moving through society trying to undermine the strong, perfect male...

According to the model of feminism presented to me by society I am not a feminist. If, on the other hand, being a feminist means believing in the fact that women are equal to men in every way, though different in many, then I am a feminist. I feel that men and women are equal and that a woman should not be treated differently than a man in any situation.

My dictionary (Webster’s New World Compact School and Office Dictionary, pg 160) defines feminism as “the movement to win political,

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<sup>19</sup> Freedman, 19.

economic, and social equality for women" so I guess a feminist would be someone who supports that movement. If this definition is used then I am most definitely a feminist for it reinforces my own views on women's place in society—right next to the men.<sup>20</sup>

At that point I began to understand the difference between the denotation and connotation of the term feminist. At its core, feminism is about the equality of rights between men and women and I was a feminist. In the intervening years I've discovered there are many branches of feminism. I know that my father feared that I would be indoctrinated into the ideals of feminism by a liberal educational system when I went off to college. Unfortunately for him, the ideals of feminism already existed as a part of my belief structure before I left for college, in large part because of his own words and actions.

### *Emerging as a Feminist*

Discovering I was a feminist didn't have much of an effect on me at that point. In theatre classes I preferred playing strong female characters and understood why.

...I have found that I enjoy playing strong female characters. For example—Nessa. She doesn't let anyone push her around. She knows what she wants and how to get it. She wouldn't be the type of person to stand around screaming

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<sup>20</sup> McFarland, Women in Literature course (Huntingdon, PA: Juniata College, PA, August, 27, 1996).

(as so many female characters do in movies and on TV) she would do her best to solve the problem herself—not let some strong man come in and rescue her. Those types of characters drive me crazy—probably because they encourage the opinion that women are all weak, helpless beings who need to be protected and taken care of.<sup>21</sup>

Now I can see that I wanted to play the kind of person I wanted to be. I wanted to play the kind of person I was trying to be. As a feminist director I have a responsibility to provide actors with roles that allow us to see the characters as agents of their own destiny. Actors get the chance to practice, and audience members get the chance to envision, a different reality, one in which women (and others) are agents of their own destiny.

In *No Turning Back* Estelle B. Freedman doesn't assume she knows what feminism looks like in any particular time or place, in part because she believes "we cannot universalize the female, given our national and cultural differences."<sup>22</sup> She leaves the definition of feminism open and describes it in various ways and contexts, but she give the very basic description that it is "the simple premise

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<sup>21</sup> McFarland, Acting class journal (Huntingdon, PA: Juniata College, 1997).

<sup>22</sup> Freedman, 9. She also notes that "[t]he overlapping identities of women as members of classes, races, and nations raises questions about the usefulness of the category *woman* itself. I use the term but with the recognition that there is no single, universal female identity, for gender has been constructed differently across place and time. Ibid., 8.

that women are as capable and valuable as men."<sup>23</sup> As a director I strive to incorporate this concept by broadening my definition of woman/feminine and man/masculine. Even now I easily fall into the trap of binaries, but I am working against that conditioning. I try to consider multiple gender identities when casting a show and try not to assume that I know what point of view the character or the actor is coming from. Variety is the spice of life and many productions are as bland as my mother's New England cooking.

Something new and interesting has happened to me recently and I'm not sure how I feel about it. *Other people* have started to define me as a feminist. I suppose I wouldn't even notice except they define me *only* as a feminist...as though being a feminist determines my beliefs and actions instead of it being the other way around. Yes, I have been talking about feminism more. I've been discussing gender. I've been trying to find ways to incorporate my feminism into my teaching and directing and I'm talking about that too. I guess I've 'outed' myself and am no longer a closet feminist, if I ever was. I wear my feminism on my sleeve as limitations on reproductive

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<sup>23</sup> Freedman, 1. See chapter 1 of *No Turning Back* for a brief overview of the "Historical Case for Feminism."

rights are proposed, and there is talk of the medical profession treating all women as "pre-pregnant." I've found that I can no longer be a silent feminist as I walk through the patriarchal halls of academia. However, that doesn't mean I'm *only* a feminist.

Perhaps the change in my environment changed my ability to talk about feminist issues. For the first time I live in a conservative state and some of my students openly profess to be in college to find a husband. Are we in the 1950's? I'm reading student journals full of the self-sacrificing drive that I saw making my mother unhappy as I was growing up. I see young women doing what they can to make/keep their boyfriends happy. What are these students sacrificing in order to make others feel needed enough to stick around? And how do I show respect for their beliefs, which are just as important to them as mine are to me, when those beliefs appall me? I don't think there's anything wrong with getting married and having children, I hope those things are in my own future. I have a problem with young women defining themselves by their quest for a husband, as though they have no self apart from their future spouse.

What do I mean when I say that others define me as a feminist and only as a feminist? Well, I recently had

lunch with a friend of mine. She is married, with kids, and a devout Catholic. I asked her for advice in dealing with a friend of mine from college. I suspect that he might have feelings for me that go beyond friendship. That might not be a problem if he wasn't married, and unhappily married at that. So far he hasn't said or done anything that I can point to and say 'that's inappropriate and you need to stop,' but I suspect that moment might come. My friend's response flabbergasted me. She asked if I had a problem with the idea of an affair because, as a feminist, I felt I had a duty to protect a fellow woman. The actual reasons behind my unwillingness to have an affair aside, I found it bewildering that my conservative, Catholic friend would think that I opposed it *because* I'm a feminist. As though I'd have the affair if I *wasn't* a feminist? Other friends have started making similar comments to me or around me... "Well, when a feminist tells me it's okay..."

I don't believe certain things because I'm a feminist;

I'm a feminist because of what I believe.

The beliefs came first.

Since developing such ideas I've found scholarship that encourages, supports, and, dare I say it...validates...the beliefs I hold. But I'm not *just* a feminist.

I'm also a Yankee,



a director,  
a middle child,  
a blond,  
a runner,  
a knitter,  
a scholar,  
and a dancer.

I'm an avid science fiction reader.

I'm a student.

I'm a woman.

And, I'm a feminist.

Although I can list off lots of things that I am, or that I do, I'm not fond of labels. While I no longer associate the term feminist with man-hating, bra burning, witches, I know that others may have a negative connotation of the term, which makes it disconcerting when others announce my feminist perspective at parties. It's as though they are making excuses for my opinions, or expecting me to perform tricks on demand.

I've taken so much time to reveal my background because it is important to me that you understand where I'm coming from. I'm a feminist not because I believe in feminist theory on an intellectual level. I'm a feminist because as I learn more about feminist scholarship and

politics I find elements that resonate with my own deeply held beliefs. My (now) innate feminist tendencies come through in my directing methods, just as they come through in my interactions with friends, with students, and with family.

A change came over me after moving to Missouri. I lost my voice. Literally *and* figuratively. At least once a year while living there I got sick and ended up with no voice for two or three weeks. More alarming...I stopped being able to write. I could no longer find my own voice among the voices of academia buzzing in my head. I still turned in papers, but writing them was a chore. Losing the authentic and passionate voice I used in papers was more distressing to me than not being able to speak aloud. I love having a model for my papers, I hate having a formula, and felt a formula being imposed. First is this, then that, dissect, analyze, judge, summarize, and conclude.

Tell your readers what you're going to do,

do it,

then tell them what you did.

Leave nothing to chance and don't leave any work for your reader to do, except maybe to look up all the jargon you used.

Present a thesis and prove it's true.

Convince your readers.

Sway them into your camp.

I rebelled against what I felt was a straightjacket cutting me off from the self I'd worked so hard to construct. The value feminism places on the lived experiences of real women helped me to find my way through (around?) the maze of scholarly writing conventions and I once again wrote passionate papers in my own voice. Performative writing released my voice.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDING A VOICE PART II: AN (ACADEMIC) VOICE

Transgressing Expectations and the Courage to Not Write a  
Literature Review

If you don't tell your story, someone else will. -Betty  
Castor

It's becoming apparent that female insights such as  
connection, introspection, intuition and complexity of  
relationship are more appropriate concepts to describe what  
we now know about reality. -Summer Savon

My hands tremble as I type these words. Adrenaline  
joins the caffeine already buzzing in my veins and my pulse  
quickens. I compulsively check the guidelines again, even  
though I know the reassurance I seek is not there. I  
consider the possibility that what I am writing may not  
fulfill the requirements of a dissertation, of scholarship,  
thus ending my academic career.

That thought threatens to paralyze me.

That thought threatens to silence me.

And yet, in the course of my studies I have engaged  
with a wide variety of scholarship and performative writing  
and alternative research projects. In "Language: Closings  
and Openings" Pat Belanoff points out the injustice of  
providing a model for students and then not allowing them

to follow that model.<sup>1</sup> Belanoff offers only cold comfort since her main point is that the academy frowns upon discourse that does not conform to a formal academic style.

But maybe,

just maybe,

that is changing.

Slowly.

And maybe,

Just maybe

I can help that change.

Slowly.

Robert Nash, in *Liberating Scholarly Writing*, understands my plight and warns that if you "[l]ose these [your special sound and style], and you will continue to be silenced. Writing will be impossible—if not now, then soon; and probably forever."<sup>2</sup> I need to write, to speak, every bit as much as I need to do theatre. I find I'm able to take courage from Belanoff's statement, "[w]omen, whose language evolves out of their bodily labors and loves, contest the

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<sup>1</sup> Pat Belanoff, "Language: Closings and Openings," in *Working-Class Women in the Academy: Laborers in the Knowledge Factory*, ed. Michelle M. Tokarczyk and Elizabeth A. Fay (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), 257-8.

<sup>2</sup> Nash, 24-25.

language of the academy."<sup>3</sup> I used to believe that when writers mentioned writing from a woman's body they meant that the womb influenced all of women's writings. I doubt my uterus is involved; however, my body is certainly reacting to this paper. When I speak or write from the heart I can feel my passion coursing through me, over me, spilling out onto anyone near enough to touch.

Spilling onto the page.

Words dance across the page

as they danced through my heart.

Dripping from my fingertips

like ink off a fountain pen.

Begging to be heard

and not seen.

Words that want to jig through your ears,

play in your imagination.

Words, as elusive,

playful,

and captivating as fireflies.

Why am I nervous?

I am contesting the language of the academy, and this project is an act of resistance against the silencing

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<sup>3</sup> Belanoff, 252.

effects of academic writing. I should think that would be enough to terrify any "good student."

I have performed the role of "good student" for as long as I can remember. A chorus of voices from my childhood chant the directions over and over again.

"Be polite."

"Raise your hand."

"Sit still."

"Follow directions."

And then report cards arrive.

"She is a pleasure to have in class."

Oh yeah?

A pleasure to have in class?

Really?

I saw that line written every year and never understood it.

I was so painfully shy that I barely spoke, even to my friends, until high school. So, silence must be the primary requirement for being a pleasure to have in class.

To this day I have a difficult time interrupting a conversation, and will stand off to one side, politely waiting to be acknowledged. Part of that self I created...somehow I did not turn away from being polite. I play by the rules and wait my turn; however, as Baxter affirms in *Girls' and Boys' Talk*, the rules of conversation

are gender specific and do not often lead to pay offs for girls. In fact, quite often in school girls' attempts to speak are ignored or boys plow down their contributions.<sup>4</sup> The rules for boys are different after all, just like the rules were different for my brothers. I bristle silently when interrupted and the "good student" in me resists the temptation to continue speaking over the interrupter. If I do continue, or (*perish the thought!*), interrupt, I feel guilty about it afterward because I was impolite. Mills, in *Gender and Politeness*, succinctly states that "[p]oliteness is already gendered, classed and raced, so that stereotypically it bears the signature of middle-class, white, femininity."<sup>5</sup> My gendered, white, middle-class upbringing certainly stressed politeness. And often my desire to be a good, and polite, student prevents me from ever making my point. When did the rules change? How did other female students avoid being silenced and how can I rediscover my voice?

Do I perceive the women who interrupt more negatively than the men?

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<sup>4</sup> Judith Baxter, "A Juggling Act: A Feminist Post-Structuralist Analysis of Girls' and Boys' Talk in the Secondary Classroom," *Gender and Education* 14, no. 1 (2002): 195.

<sup>5</sup> Sara Mills, *Gender and Politeness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 197.



Or, to take a different view, why did no one teach these women manners?

I originally set out to write a traditional literature review; however, as the voices of the researchers buzz in my head I think about the task ahead of me. The simple act of writing a literature review is a masculine communication task. In descriptions of lit reviews I find I am supposed to

    categorize,

        summarize,

            synthesize,

                evaluate.

Dissect books, articles, and research.

    Tear them apart.

        Assess a value to each.

My *subjective* analysis of worth

*masquerading* as *objective* truth

        is a *masculine* way of sharing knowledge.

It stinks of patriarchy because it requires me to categorize knowledge, look for causation, and identify dichotomies. But more about that later. In the meantime, the "good student" in me demands that I try my hand at a traditional lit review, regardless of my feelings...

...And when I do my voice vanishes. Interesting...each word must be pulled, kicking and screaming, from the muck of my brain. I write as though I am running through quicksand. I feel the spark of my inner voice shutting down. In Visweswaran's comments about the scientific voice, which I extend to include traditional academic style, she says:

[The scientific voice] rarely uses a personal pronoun, never speaks as "I" or "we," and almost always implies that it has found absolute truth, or at least has the authority to do so. In writing...you will recognize this voice from its use of such phrases as "it is decided" or "the discovery was made."<sup>6</sup>

I feel every fiber of my being resistant to the all-seeing imperial eye associated with the scientific voice. First of all, I have a body that demands to be recognized. Writing as a disembodied, omniscient narrator does not work for me. Elizabeth Fee, a feminist scholar, observes that "[t]he voice of the scientific authority is like the male voice-over in commercials, a disembodied knowledge that cannot be questioned, whose author is inaccessible."<sup>7</sup> I

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<sup>6</sup> Kamala Visweswaran, *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography* (Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 31.

<sup>7</sup> Elizabeth Fee, "Women's Nature and Scientific Objectivity." In *Women's Nature: Rationalizations of Inequality*, ed. Marian Lowe and Ruth Hubbard (New York: Pergamon Press, 1983), 19.

latch onto another passage of Visweswaran's, that states, "...first-person narratives are being selected by women as part of an implicit critique of positivist assumptions and as a strategy of communication and self-discovery."<sup>8</sup> In the past year I have discovered that I am a constructivist. Belenky et al., define constructed knowledge as "a position in which [individuals] view all knowledge as contextual, experience themselves as creators of knowledge, and value both subjective and objective strategies for knowing."<sup>9</sup> Taking that definition a step further, I believe that we construct our own realities based upon our perceptions of our experiences and our received knowledge. An idea begins to form. Could I write a first-person narrative about the process of not writing a lit review?

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As I scan through my notes looking for specific quotes, the word 'silence' jumps out at me over and over again. It seems that everyone who discusses communication and feminism

feminists

femininity

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<sup>8</sup> Visweswaran, 23.

<sup>9</sup> Belenky, 15.

feminine

also discusses silence, especially in the context of education.<sup>10</sup> Naturally that is a gross generalization. In the thirty years that various disciplines have been studying gender and communication there are no similarities common to every study. In fact, in "Politeness and Postmodernism," Holmes even states that, "[a]ny researcher can find counter examples"<sup>11</sup> for a given point of view. How am I to make sense of what I read if for every conclusion there is contrasting evidence? That inability to generalize is exactly why I am drawn to qualitative research that values the lived experiences of individuals. I can create my own meaning from another's story, and in order for that to be possible, women need to speak, and write, their experiences. That is one reason why the recurring theme of silence concerns me.

Women lose their voices and fall silent. Why?

Visweswaren gently reminds me that "[s]peech has, of

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<sup>10</sup> For further reading see Baxter, Belanoff, Belenky, et al., as well as, Elizabeth Bell and Kim Golombisky, "Voices and Silences in Our Classrooms: Strategies for Mapping Trails Among Sex/Gender, Race, and Class," *Women's Studies in Communication* 27 no. 3 (Fall 2003): 294-329. Sheelagh Drudy and Maire Ui Chathain, "Gender Effects in Classroom Interaction: Data Collection, Self-Analysis and Reflection," *Evaluation & Research in Education* 16, no. 1 (2002): 34-50. Kevin M. Leander, "Silencing in Classroom Interaction: Producing and Relating Social Spaces," *Discourse Processes* 34 no. 2 (2002): 193-235. Kimberly Roots, "Raise Your Hand...If You're a Boy." *Science & Spirit* 15, no. 6 (Nov/Dec 2004): 21.

<sup>11</sup> Holmes, 111.

course, been seen as the privileged catalyst of agency; lack of speech as the absence of agency."<sup>12</sup> Women's silences indicate that they have no agency. And without a voice how can a woman fight for agency? In their study, Belenky et al found that:

[e]ven among women who feel they have found their voice, problems with voice abound. Some women told us, in anger and frustration, how frequently they felt unheard and unheeded—both at home and at work. In our society, which values the words of male authority, constructivist women are no more immune to the experience of feeling silenced than any other group of women.<sup>13</sup>

Women finding their voices can lead to empowerment and change, but first they have to find their voices, and keep them, in a society that believes that women should be seen and not heard.

How do women lose their voices?

How does that happen in the classroom?

How do teachers contribute to the problem and how can I,  
as an educator,

as a director,

as a feminist,

help students regain their voices?

How have I lost my voice in the classroom?

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<sup>12</sup> Visweswaran, 68.

<sup>13</sup> Belenky, 146.

In Elizabeth Bell's auto-ethnography about teaching "Women and Communication," she indicates that forty-five percent of students are silent and most of them are women.<sup>14</sup> Baxter's study "...aims to reveal how and why girls can be silenced in particular classroom contexts"<sup>15</sup> and research conducted by Leander<sup>16</sup> and by Drudy and Chathain supports the notion that male students receive more opportunities to participate in classroom interactions than female students. Two reasons for the difference emerge: teachers call upon male students more often, and male students are better at attracting the teacher's attention, even if it is negative attention.<sup>17</sup> As a teacher do I fall into that trap, displayed so obviously in statistical data?

I suddenly realize that I have spent the entire semester allowing a student to silence others with his vaguely disruptive comments. He commands more of my attention than any two other students combined. How can I avoid being sucked into his attention-grabbing behavior?

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<sup>14</sup> Elizabeth Bell, "Listen up. You have to: Voices from 'Women and Communications,'" *Western Journal of Communication* 61, no. 1 (Winter 1997): 91.

<sup>15</sup> Baxter, 5.

<sup>16</sup> Kevin M. Leander, "Silencing in Classroom Interaction: Producing and Relating Social Spaces," *Discourse Processes* 34, no. 2 (2002): 195.

<sup>17</sup> Sheelagh Drudy and Marie Ui Chathain, "Gender Effects in Classroom Interaction: Data Collection, Self-Analysis and Reflection," *Evaluation & Research in Education* 16, no. 1 (2002): 37.

How can I avoid rewarding a student for interrupting, or silencing, other students? How can I teach students not to allow anyone to wick away attention that belongs to them?

How do I find *my* voice in the patriarchal halls of academia?

How do I get it back?

How do I keep it once I find it?

In a literature review the writer poses a research question and reports back about what has been written on that topic already. Every time I narrowed my topic in one direction the field opened up again in a completely new way. My focus shifted and danced until I settled on one aspect of feminine communication. Now that I am hip-deep in this work I wonder if I fear answering questions.

If I offer answers then I might be wrong.

Why am I willing to take risks with my form and content and not with answering questions?

Do I fear being successful at writing in a masculine style?

Do I fear an inability to be successful?

Does this fear silence me?

What caused my inability to write the paper I planned?

Baxter states that "...the literature on *speech in public contexts*...has argued fairly consistently that girls/women

are less valued, confident and effective than boys/men as speakers in public settings."<sup>18</sup> I believe that girls/women are less confident and effective because their voices are less valued, they (we) have been taught that our voices do not matter. According to bell hooks, women are "socialized as females by patriarchal thinking to see ourselves as inferior to men, to see ourselves as always and only in competition with one another for patriarchal approval..."<sup>19</sup> Women also receive less practice at public speaking in the classroom, further contributing to the feeling of being undervalued and ineffective.

Writing in my own voice shatters my silence.

I live nearly one thousand miles away from my parents, my younger brother lives ten miles from them. The last time I was home I was talking to my parents in their kitchen...that kitchen with the memories of Wednesday night spaghetti and baking Christmas cookies...when my brother walked in from another room. My parents immediately shifted the conversation to center around my brother. My brain drifts back to a family trip taken many years ago. My father asked a question and I began to answer it. He cut me off to state that he was asking my brother, not me.

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<sup>18</sup> Baxter, 7. Emphasis in original.

<sup>19</sup> hooks, 13.



Oh. Silenced. If my voice was not valued in school or at home is it any wonder I lost my voice?

Instead of looking at my silence in such a negative manner, I turn the problem around and again find comfort in Visweswaran. She believes that her "authority rests not on positing facts; rather, it risks forfeiture by posing more and more questions. In so doing, my role as an unreliable narrator is activated."<sup>20</sup> I am certainly skilled at posing questions. I cannot set myself up as an expert; however, I can fill the role of an unreliable narrator. Some research actually indicates that, if I attempted to write in a masculine form and was successful, I might be chastised for my success.<sup>21</sup> I find that difficult to believe. I prefer Mills' assertion that some individuals use feminine tactics in communication as an intentional method of achieving a goal, instead of as a way to perform gender related subservience.<sup>22</sup> Another explanation for girls' silence surfaces from my notes. As Bell and Golombisky suggest, the silence may be deliberate, thus creating a need to

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<sup>20</sup> Visweswaran, 62.

<sup>21</sup> Holmes, 112.

<sup>22</sup> Mills, 235.

rethink the implications of silence.<sup>23</sup> Though several studies support the statement that female students are engaging in fewer interactions in the classroom than male students, I remind myself to draw conclusions cautiously. Humans are incredibly complex beings whose every action is, in part, determined by the circumstances of a given interaction. Girls may be silent for a variety of reasons, only one of which being that they do not feel they are able to speak.

Though the scope of this project cannot recap three decades of research I feel honor bound to mention that not all scholars in the area of gender and communication studies believe there is necessarily a gender difference in communication. Socialization, race, class, power, education, and the construction of gender identity all factor into how we communicate.

So, if I am to find guidance in my research, I need to change my focus. Yes, there are times when I was silenced by family,

teachers,

peers,

friends;

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<sup>23</sup> Elizabeth Bell and Kim Golombisky, "Voices and Silences in Our Classrooms: Strategies for Mapping Trails Among Sex/Gender, Race, and Class," *Women's Studies in Communication* 27, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 324.

however, there have been other times when I chose my silence. I remember a professor asking for our definitions of a certain term. Others jumped in until I was the only one still silent. The professor asked if I had anything to add. I did, and I provided a different point of view, a different interpretation and justification. My definition was the one the professor returned to again and again through the rest of the discussion. Remaining silent for as long as I did gave me the opportunity to consider my response and attack the question from a different angle. I made use of the submissive position of speaking last in order to compose a better response. I used the strategy of silence as a gateway to my own agency.

Before women can co-opt a dominant way of communicating, we should consider if there is a difference in *how* men and women communicate. Thorne et al., identified characteristics of patriarchal vs. female expressive modes. He and his research team even framed their expressive modes as dichotomies, thus providing readers with an example of the patriarchal expressive mode.

<b>Patriarchal Expressive Mode</b>	<b>Female Expressive Mode</b>
Categories	Ambiguities
Dichotomies	Pluralities
Roles	Processes
Stasis	Continuities
Causation	Complex Relationships

Surely, few individuals' communication styles fall neatly into one column or the other all of the time. If women, in general, experience life, and therefore create their worldview<sup>24</sup>, based upon ambiguities, pluralities, processes, continuities, and complex relationships then it would be difficult to express that worldview in terms of categories, dichotomies, roles, stasis, and causation. If the academy values only the patriarchal mode of communicating, then people who use the feminine mode of communication as their primary style are sure to struggle, regardless of their perceived or performed gender. Though it may simply be my own bias shining through, as a feminist I think that when people embrace a worldview that compels them to assign a

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<sup>24</sup> I am a constructivist, after all.

label to *everything* it also coerces them into supporting patriarchy's hegemonic oppression in the classroom.

I believe that in naming, or categorizing, we enable everything inside the category to be dismissed. The very act of naming diminishes the potential of the phenomenon for change. We can dismiss anything we can categorize, especially with the addition of the little word "just." Applying a label weakens it, diminishes it. Phenomena that we cannot shove into a tidy box capture our attention and we must grapple with the issue. There can be fear and joy in discovering the surprises inherent in anything difficult to categorize. The ambiguity of definition allows for multiple layers of meaning. The female expressive mode of communication is messy, just as women's bodies are messy, and just as life is messy.

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This is difficult for me. I feel I have failed, and yet the words fly onto the page, and excitement courses through me. My performance of good student has never before allowed me to stray from what I knew was expected. It takes courage to transgress. Writing in my own voice, performing my self on paper, shatters my silence.

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Must a woman choose between writing as a woman and writing in an academic style? The methods of female ethnographers have been questioned because of the perception that the researchers are too close to their subjects and the products are too personal. In other words, the research is not objective enough. The *illusion* of objectivity is created when the patriarchal expressive mode is used. Then the writing is formal and contains no hint of the researcher. Visweswaran believes that "...feminist ethnography can consider how identities are multiple, contradictory, partial, and strategic."<sup>25</sup> Ethnography is a subjective methodology that assumes every participant has a body and women's ways of knowing and sharing knowledge include personal narratives.

I do not want someone else to tell my story. I discard the expectations tied to the traditional dissertation even as I seek approval for taking a risk. By writing about and in my own communication style I expose my resistance to the idea of embracing the hegemony inherent in writing a traditional literature review, and choose instead to focus on the silencing of my own voice, using research to justify my choice.

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<sup>25</sup> Visweswaran, 50.

I know what is expected of me and I have done my  
research. I look at my notes, the books, the articles. I  
have researched gender  
and communication  
and directing  
and feminism.

Though I have not worked other theories into my paper the  
"good student" insists I prove that I read more, that I can  
do more, even though I know it is not necessary. Cursing  
at my weakness, I cave in and mention them, wondering when  
I will allow myself to go.

.....

I bolt upright from my terrifying dream of failure.  
My academic side resists the act of resistance that my  
feminist side is making yet the trickle of words has turned  
into a flood. My writing used to come from me; I had my  
own voice. My papers, to one extent or another, dealt with  
my body. Not my actual body, per se, but the embodiment of  
my self. The self I created. The connections I made were  
organic and the essays sometimes flew from my fingers  
almost faster than I could type.

I cared deeply about those papers.

I was passionate about them.

I put something of myself into them.

I lost that in graduate school.

Suddenly I felt the need to conform to a scholarly voice and my writing turned sterile and impersonal. Belanoff explains this phenomenon as "the need felt by women to move toward prestigious forms of speech..." She goes on to say that it "moves them away from their natural dialect and...away from satisfying their needs to learn in ways compatible to women's ways of knowing."<sup>26</sup> There is something dangerous about tucking your own manner of speaking away and unpacking a new one. Where is my *self* in my academic voice? Where are my body, my experiences, and my heart when I write, "the discovery was made..." I was not conscious of my writer's voice changing but I was conscious of the fact that writing no longer came easily and I rarely cared about the papers I submitted. Oh, the "good student" in me cared about the grade, but I did not care about the paper.

And that is a problem for me.

How can I enter a profession that silences my voice?

I know that I could have written a dry literature review, and I know I'll need to someday. I am floundering to find a voice I used to know. Belenky found that "...women hear themselves speaking in different voices in different

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<sup>26</sup> Belanoff, 255.



situations. They hear themselves echoing the words of powerful others. And, like so many women, they feel like frauds. They yearn for a voice that is more integrated, individual, and original—a voice of their own.”<sup>27</sup>

Yes, embracing the patriarchal,

or academic,

or formal voice feels fraudulent,

yet doubts whisper in my ear..

“You have to play the game and do what is expected.”

“You have to jump through the hoops.”

“Follow directions.”

“Raise your hand.”

“Be polite.”

“She was a pleasure to have in class.”

I sigh, and wonder if there is still time to write a traditional literature review. Instead, I shuffle notes together, close the binder full of printed articles, and add books to the pile destined for the library. The mouse hovers between ‘save’ and ‘delete’ as I think of what I have written.

Writing in my own voice shatters my silence.

But am I still a good student?

Robert Nash’s questions echo my own:

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<sup>27</sup> Belenky, 124.

Can't I demonstrate that I know the literature in my field, that I possess the requisite analytical skills in my discipline, and that I can formulate and solve problems, without turning my work into one long literature review qua book report? Or into a lengthy statistical or qualitative analysis whereby the means of my research completely overwhelms my ends?<sup>28</sup>

### *Reflections Upon Looking Back*

Looking back at myself,<sup>29</sup> I still feel the terror and joy that filled me as I wrote with my own voice for the first time in years. I vowed to myself that I would strive to keep that voice alive in the rest of my scholarly writing. I can now see that, even with my awareness of the performative nature of gender, I fell into the trap of essentializing men and women. As I turned my attention to gendered leadership, I worked to move away from automatically associating feminine with women and masculine with men, although it sometimes led to awkward phrases. I found that most studies dealing with gender and leadership, or communication, consider the sex of the participant to be equal to their gender. More research needs to be conducted that looks at the application of gender characteristics to

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<sup>28</sup> Nash, 17.

<sup>29</sup> How do we learn about ourselves except by looking back and reflecting?

the act of communication or leadership, instead of the gender of the person communicating or leading.

## Chapter 5: Gendering Leadership

"It doesn't matter what I say about an issue. If I have a run in my panty hose, that's all anybody will talk about."  
Senator Blanche Lincoln (D-AR)

"Femininity remains a pejorative term among most managers (male and female) because it conveys the opposite of leadership. If there is one thing that has often united feminists and liberal female managers it is the desire to avoid the label 'feminine', because it simultaneously defines one as ineffective."  
Amanda Sinclair

At the end of my sophomore year I applied to a leadership program being held in Washington, D.C. for female college students. I was accepted into the program but balked at the last minute. Looking back, I know my decision was two-fold. I didn't relish the workload indicated by the program itinerary, which is the reason I gave myself for withdrawing. The second, and real reason I didn't attend, was that I was uncomfortable stepping so far outside of the role expected of me as a young woman.

Hillary Rodham Clinton, then First Lady, was the keynote speaker, and I was loathe to put myself on the path toward any future that resulted in me resembling Clinton, also known as "Hillzilla" in the popular press of the time.

Instead of seeing her as a leader worthy of emulating, I saw her as an anti-role model, likely because she violated

gender role congruency expectations. I passed up a potentially life changing experience because I did not want to be perceived as unfeminine, despite an awareness of my own feminist beliefs. Women who are leaders might be strong and independent, which I aspired to be, but they also carry the negative connotation of being too masculine.

Leadership is a difficult concept to define, and yet most of us assume we understand the idea.

What is leadership?

Who is a leader?

How does one lead?

What makes a good leader?

According to <http://dictionary.reference.com> there are at least a dozen definitions of "lead" that apply to leadership including "to go before or with to show the way," "to conduct by holding and guiding," "to have the directing or principal part in," and "to be superior to; have the advantage over."<sup>1</sup> None of the definitions specify masculinity as a prerequisite for leadership; however, the gender of "leader" is normally assumed to be male in our culture.

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<sup>1</sup> Lead. Dictionary.com *Dictionary.com Unabridged* (v1.1). Random House, Inc. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/lead> (accessed: January 10, 2007).

Websites and bookstores are full of advice about how to be a better leader, and yet the term is still difficult to define because it is a socially constructed concept. Amanda Sinclair, in *Doing Leadership Differently: Gender, Power and Sexuality in a Changing Business Culture*, states that "[l]eadership is...the product of the emotional and often unconscious needs, early experiences and group aspirations of the led, as well as the traits and skills of the leader."<sup>2</sup> Gender, when defined as more than biological sex<sup>3</sup>, is also socially constructed. As Hojgaard states in "Tracing Differentiation in Gendered Leadership: An Analysis of Differences in Gender Composition in Top Management in Business, Politics and the Civil Service," gender is "constituted by actions in social space, orchestrated by structural processes and a symbolic order of gender." In other words, "[g]ender is something we do and something we think."<sup>4</sup> Gender is not something we are, it is something we have learned to *perform*. The concepts of masculinity, femininity, leadership, and their

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<sup>2</sup> Amanda Sinclair, *Doing Leadership Differently: Gender, Power and Sexuality in a Changing Business Culture* (Carlton South, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 1998), 1.

<sup>3</sup> Some (see Judith Butler) argue that even biological sex is not the binary usually assumed.

<sup>4</sup> Lis Hojgaard, "Tracing Differentiation in Gendered Leadership: An Analysis of Differences in Gender Composition in Top Management in Business, Politics and the Civil Service," *Gender, Work and Organization* 9, no. 1 (January 2002): 18.

corresponding qualities, are created by society and evolve as our cultural expectations shift.

The social construction of gender and of leadership encourages us to look for commonalities between them. Researchers have identified qualities that our culture assigns to masculinity and to femininity, and those qualities can then be applied to communication and leadership, for what is directing if not communication and leadership? We are socialized to believe that gender and leadership both operate as binaries. A person is masculine or feminine, a leader or a follower. Dualisms pervade our culture and determine how work is valued.

Participation in public life is valued over private,  
hardness over softness,  
reason over emotion,  
activity over passivity.

Women leaders are, according to Coleman in "Gender and the Orthodoxies of Leadership," stereotypically described as "caring, tolerant, emotional, intuitive, gentle and predisposed towards collaboration, empowerment and teamwork."<sup>5</sup> We can link feminine qualities to the home, where women are expected to be soft, passive, and

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<sup>5</sup> Marianne Coleman, "Gender and the Orthodoxies of Leadership," *School Leadership & Management* 23, no. 3 (August 2003): 325.

emotional. Men, on the other hand, are supposed to be "aggressive, assertive, analytical, decisive and more inclined to act independently"<sup>6</sup> both as leaders and as masculine individuals.<sup>7</sup> When leadership qualities are defined, they are most often "characterized by competitiveness, hierarchical authority, and emphasis on control."<sup>8</sup> Women are expected to behave in stereotypically feminine ways and men are expected to behave in stereotypically masculine ways.<sup>9</sup> Both expectations limit the options of individuals, whose gender identity may not match the stereotype expected. Women are hindered by such expectations more than men; however, because our society

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid. See also Beverly Ayers-Nachamkin et al, "Sex Differences in the Use of Power," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 67 (1982):464-471. Sandra Bem, "The Measurement of Psychological Androgyny," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 42 no. 2 (1974): 155-162. HL Gray, "Gender Issues in Management Training" in *Women in Educational Management*, ed. J Ozga (London: Paul Chapman, 1993).

<sup>7</sup> For further discussion of social role differentiation see Susan Reynolds Fisher and Degra L. Nelson, "Feeling at the Top: An Underutilized Resource in Top Management Teams," *Journal of Social Behavior & Personality* 11 no. 5 (1996): 80.

<sup>8</sup> Marloes L. van Engen and Rien van der Leeden, "Gender, Context and Leadership Styles: A Field Study," *Journal of Occupational & Organizational Psychology* 74, no. 5 (December 2001): 581.

<sup>9</sup> Carrie Wittmer, "Leadership and Gender-Role Congruency: A guide for Wilderness and Outdoor Practitioners," *Journal of Experiential Education* 24, no. 3 (Winter 2002): 174. Wittmer provides a more comprehensive summary of gendered leadership qualities. "...masculine leaders are autonomous, organized, task-oriented (Guido-DiBrito, Noteboom, Nathan, & Fenty, 1995), controlling, unemotional, directive, assertive (Rojahn & Willemsen, 1994), autocratic, dominating, or independent (Eagly et al., 1992). Feminine leaders, on the other hand, are mediating, facilitating, less efficient, less action-oriented (Rogers, 1995), understanding, helpful, warm (Rojahn & Willemsen), democratic, unselfish, collaborative, interpersonally oriented, concerned with others, or emotionally expressive (Eagly.)"



conflates the qualities of masculinity with those of leadership, thereby discouraging women from seeing themselves as leaders.

### *Toeing the Line between Theory and Practice*

The action of leading,

or communicating,

or directing,

can be assigned a gender using the characteristics discussed in "Gendering Leadership." Does the gender of the individual, whether self-identified, perceived, or performed, matter? If, as Butler and others seem to indicate, gender has no constant but is always performed, then gender can shift from moment to moment. If an individual who normally uses a masculine leadership style decides to approach a particular meeting using feminine leadership qualities, then does the gender of the leader matter? Does the gender of the led matter? According to Mary-Jeanette Smythe and Jasna Meyer, in "On the Origins of Gender-Linked Language Differences: Individual and contextual Explanations," there is empirical evidence to support the ideas that:

1. Male and female speakers will exhibit characteristically distinct language

- patterns conforming to the gender-linked language profiles.
2. Male and female speakers will exhibit speech accommodation by adapting their language cues to match those of their conversational partner.
  3. Performance of a sex-typed (male or female) task will affect the characteristic language patterns of male and female speakers.<sup>10</sup>

Smythe and Meyer make it sound as though gendered characteristics of communication are as fluid as gender itself is. If a sex-typed task changes the use of characteristic language patterns, then sex-typed tasks could also affect other behaviors. Directing is a male sex-typed activity and, as such, encourages directors to use so-called masculine communication and leadership strategies.

The masculine expressive mode and patriarchy rely on a rigid adherence to a hierarchical power structure. That hierarchy is normally recreated in the rehearsal hall with the director, or perhaps producer, sitting at the head of the table. Although the director, or patriarch of the production, may allow others to give input, the ultimate decision is his alone. Coleman posited that a masculine leader is "aggressive, assertive, analytical, decisive and

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<sup>10</sup> Mary-Jeanette Smythe and Jasna Meyer, "On the Origins of Gender-Linked Language Differences: Individual and Contextual Explanations," in *Differences that Make a Difference: Examining the Assumptions in Gender Research*, ed. Lynn H. Turner and Helen M. Sterk (Westport, CT and London: Bergin and Garvey, 1994), 53.

more inclined to act independently,"<sup>11</sup> which are all characteristics associated with a traditional director.

A woman does not necessarily use a feminine communication style.

A woman is not necessarily a feminist.

A feminist director does not necessarily use a feminine expressive mode in communication or feminine leadership characteristics. I believe that a feminist director needs to de-center the power of the director sitting at the head of the table; she needs to shake up the hierarchy and share power.

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<sup>11</sup> Coleman, 325. Also see Beverly Ayers-Nachamkin et al, 1982, Bem, 1974, and Gray, 1993.

## CHAPTER SIX: BECOMING A FEMINIST DIRECTOR

I only really feel alive when I'm doing theatre. If I'm happiest when I'm doing theatre then I need to always be doing theatre, despite the insane schedule and overwhelming stress.<sup>1</sup>

The road to choosing theatre as my profession was a long one. I'd love to tell you that my first entrance onto the stage had a profound effect on me and I've been drawn to the theatre ever since.

I'm sure there are people that could tell that story.

I can't.

In third grade my class put on *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and everyone had to participate. My teacher sat at her desk, at the back of the classroom. One at a time we approached and read a passage aloud. The heat of my blush crept up my face as I walked to the back of the room. My footfalls were deadened by the carpet but my pulse beat so loud I was sure the whole class could hear it. Although I had no trouble dancing in front of others, and did so in a recital every year beginning when I was four, I was painfully shy when it came to talking to other people. *Tom Sawyer* doesn't have many speaking roles for girls so most

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<sup>1</sup> McFarland, graduate school application notes (1999/2000).

of us would just have to recite a poem as Tom's classmates, and we'd have to dance. I was terrified of reciting the poem but figured the dancing would balance things out. I still remember a section from one of those dances.

But I wasn't just a girl in the class.

I was Becky.

I hated it.

It was five years before I stood on stage again. In eighth grade I auditioned for the school play so I wouldn't have to go home after school. My older brother was a bully and I didn't want to be alone with him until my parents got home from work. I was cast as a troll in *Once Upon a Fairy Tail*. Several of my friends were in the show, and were quite likely instrumental in getting me to audition. It wasn't such a bad experience. To be completely honest I think I was okay with the show because you could barely tell it was me. I had a hunched over walk, wore a fake nose, and was covered in green makeup. I think I even wore a wig. Just like I wasn't shy when I was dancing, I wasn't shy when disguised so completely...as a troll.

I took my first theatre class in ninth grade because I thought it might help me get over my extreme shyness. Realizing that even my "friends" didn't know me, and that I was willing to do almost anything to feel accepted,

propelled me into finding a solution. I continued to audition for plays so I didn't have to go home, and I took acting classes to learn how to talk to people. I didn't particularly *like* theatre, and I wasn't particularly good at it. I was learning to act, not so I could use it on stage, but so I could use it in my daily life. And eventually I acted my way into a new personality.

There is a Buddhist proverb that says, "[w]hen the student is ready, the teacher will appear." All through high school I wasn't ready; theatre was a means to an end. In college I took many dramatic literature classes and by now you understand why I loved the opportunity to discuss different interpretations and meanings. I love that there is rarely, if ever, one TRUTH in a play. But still, theatre was an academic discipline for me, not a practice.

Then I took a theatre history class to fulfill a fine arts credit.

The professor was new and she encouraged everyone in the class to audition for her show. That course sparked one of those turning points that we don't recognize until later. I was in my first college show. I was finally ready and a teacher appeared.

Katie Simons, the only theatre professor at Juniata College,<sup>2</sup> combined Anne Bogart's viewpoints with Tadashi Suzuki's actor training methods. The result was a production of Sophocles' *Antigone* that was unlike anything I'd ever experienced. Simons didn't direct in what I'd come to regard as the 'traditional' way and much of the blocking was based on actor impulses discovered during physical improvisations that came out of the Suzuki and viewpoints work. Although her methods seem tame to me now, at the time Simons' use of Suzuki and viewpoints seemed the height of experimental theatre, which I'd never studied or experienced. *Antigone* was my first experience with the wider world of theatre, with using a technique different from method acting.

Simons also exploded my view of the casting process and choices. After auditions, Simons chose an ensemble and we worked together on the actor training for a week before she assigned parts to us. She eventually cast three people as Antigone and three as Creon, of two different races. When I found out I was cast as Antigone I thought it must be a mistake. How could I go from being Villager #3 in *Fiddler on the Roof* to Antigone? I played the third Antigone, who nobly faced the people of Thebes and Creon

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<sup>2</sup> English faculty taught the dramatic literature classes.

before calmly going to her death. Throughout rehearsals I suffered from an incredible inferiority complex. The other two Antigone's were so much better than me, and since I was the third one I was able to see their brilliance building day by day. I was crippled by fear and self-doubt by the time we reached my part, but I got through it somehow.

Although the entire process was a series of revelations to me, the performances had the biggest impact. At one point, toward the end of the show, I delivered a line directly to the audience.

Every night I was surprised to see people sitting there.

Every night.

I became so engrossed in the world of the play, the world we created, that I *forgot* people were watching. The magic of the production, of the ensemble work, had me believing in what we were doing. And the audience cried every night. *That* was when theatre entered my blood and stopped being a means to an end. That was when I started *needing* to do theatre.

Would Simons call herself a feminist director? I think she would, but I never asked her. It never occurred to me that such a thing could exist, or, at that point, that I would like a feminist director if I met one. Simons



certainly expanded my view of what it meant to be a director. She exploded the very definition of theatre for me, showing me that the power could be located within the director *without* being an autocrat or a dictator. Power could be shared with the actors without decreasing the quality of the show. And a show didn't have to look like every other show I'd been involved with. I suppose it could be a coincidence that my turning point in theatre and my conscious acceptance of feminism came at the same time. More likely, I was ready, the teachers were there, and I learned to listen to my own voice, finally truly emerging from my shy, sheltered self and embracing the strong, introspective, and independent woman I was becoming. I don't doubt that my father's comments, uttered just over a year before *Antigone*, made me more psychologically open to nontraditional women as I sought for strength within myself.

I started taking theatre because I was so shy, I used theatre to help come out of my shell, to become C.C. It was difficult for a long time. I only started to be really comfortable last semester. Before that I never really let go of ALL the shit, just some of it. It helps that nobody here knew me as Carla, so they don't have any preconceived notions about how I should behave...Part of what I want/need out of theatre is the feeling of unity. For most of my life I got that through dancing or singing but I don't do either of those anymore. In high school I didn't fit in with my peers and I've never felt like I

belonged in my family... Last year I didn't give myself the time to fit in, and I don't again this year except for where theatre is concerned. I have a very strong idea of who I am, which sets me apart from a lot of my peers. I *know* what I'm doing and I'm determined to do the best I can at everything I try to do. I don't give up easily on myself or others. I set high expectations for myself, but all I expect is my best. Theatre makes me feel even more in control of myself and my character. There are so many things in our lives that we have *no* control over, shouldn't we take advantage of things we can *control*?

Another thing I love about theatre is the trust. I've had my fair share of sorrow and betrayal. I *know* these people are trustworthy...I can trust what happens in Oller Hall, on stage. They want me to do my best, and I want them to do their best, so we help each other.<sup>3</sup>

I tell my students that if they can see themselves being happy doing anything but theatre, then they should do something else. If they *have* to do theatre, then they must do it with their whole hearts. That's what Simons told us. As Jerzy Grotowski stated, "[t]he theatre is not an escape, a refuge. A way of life is a way to life."<sup>4</sup> Theatre began as a refuge for me, as an escape from my family and myself. Through the years it has led me to life. As I said earlier, I only feel truly alive when I am involved in theatre. In the words of Suzan-Lori Parks, "[t]heater is the place which best allows me to figure out how the world

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<sup>3</sup> McFarland, Acting journal (Huntingdon, PA: Juniata College, January 15, 1997).

<sup>4</sup> Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 12.

works.”<sup>5</sup> It is where my heart lies, where my passion stems from, and the power of it has transformed my life. It was the first medium that embraced my ability to see multiple meanings, to value a (now) intrinsic ability to see past the surface and delve into motivations.

Mom doesn't think I can "make it" in theatre. She told me that to my face. Well, I asked her...So I guess they wouldn't pay for grad school if I get an MA in directing. But if I went on in education I think they would. That isn't right. I grew up with them telling me I could be anything I wanted to be if I worked for it. I guess that only counts if the career I choose meets with their approval. As long as I have enough money to survive then I don't care about being successful. I want to be happy...I had hoped that receiving the only theatre award at Juniata would give what I do more validation. Apparently that isn't the case. I really would like the support (and faith) of my parents but as Antonio said—it isn't their life. I know that. I know that I have to do what's best for me. I need to make sure that theatre is it. At the end of last semester I wanted to keep theatre as my recreation. I didn't want it to be something that I "need" to do. It is though. When I'm involved with theatre I feel like I'm doing something—my life has purpose. Otherwise I'm just existing. Going from day to day without really breathing in the sweet air or seeing the colors that surround me.<sup>6</sup>

Choosing theatre as my profession was difficult for me...I did not enter into it lightly. Eventually I came to realize that theatre had chosen me and I could either

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<sup>5</sup> Suzan-Lori Parks, *The America Play* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1995), 4.

<sup>6</sup> McFarland, personal journal, date unknown, 1998 or 1999.

accept that, or leave. I became a feminist without knowing it, so perhaps feminism chose me as well.

The way I've discovered theory that supports what I already feel I know means that the saying "when the student is ready the teacher will appear" has several connotations for me. I was ready in 1995, when Katie Simons joined the faculty at Juniata College. She introduced me to the ideas of Anne Bogart. In 2003, I was in graduate school at Villanova University and was ready when Harriet Powers assigned *A Director Prepares*, by Anne Bogart. Rather than me being ready for new ideas presented by Bogart, I found that her ideas resonated with what I already believed. In the introduction of her book she says:

I regard the theatre as an art form because I believe in its transformative power. I work in the theatre because I want the challenge of decisiveness and articulation in my daily life. Directing chose me as much as I chose it. We found one another.<sup>7</sup>

Yes. Even re-reading *A Director Prepares* now, years later, I am reminded of the magical synergy I found in her words...and I find it again. Something inside me said "yes, *that's* what I think" as I read Bogart's words. Finally, someone else supported my ideas, and seeing them in print gave me courage.

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<sup>7</sup> Bogart, 1.

Even before I was directing I worked to include other actors in the process of creating the scene in a way that is not typical for many directors. During rehearsals for an acting class scene I had the following to say about working with my partner:

...At first Nick was very agreeable but difficult to work with. Since I have more experience [in theatre] he accepted every idea I had and didn't contribute anything of his own. I had to fight the urge to become the director for the scene. I wanted him to develop his own character and ideas about Nessa and Jimmy's relationship.<sup>8</sup>

Many undergraduate students would have taken over the project and told Nick what to do. This is especially true of "good students" who are invested in academic achievement. And yet, though obviously tempted by the urge to become the director, I resisted. I sought a more equal working relationship and thought he had valuable contributions even though he didn't have a background in theatre.

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<sup>8</sup> McFarland, Acting class journal (Huntingdon, PA: Juniata College, Spring 1997).

## *Emerging as a Director*

Directing isn't a list of steps to follow like costume construction or set construction. It is as artistic as acting.<sup>9</sup>

Directing is not an exact science and does not lend itself easily to academic textbook treatment.<sup>10</sup>  
William Ball

The first time I directed a full-length show I began the rehearsal process with a lot of input from the actors. During an early meeting with my faculty advisor, I talked about needing space between the main character and everyone else.

Faculty: "[t]hat's a mistake many early directors make."

Me: Oh, okay.

I didn't want to make mistakes just because I was new to directing. I wanted to impress my adviser and the other faculty. I wanted to play the role of "good director." I needed to know that I could do this for real. I had directed scenes before, and once a 10-minute play, but never a full length script. So, instead of listening to my impulses about the script needing distance and a more

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<sup>9</sup> McFarland, reflection paper (Villanova, PA: Villanova University, June 2003).

<sup>10</sup> William Ball, *A Sense of Direction: Some Observations on the Art of Directing* (New York: Quite Specific Media Group, 1984), xiv.

presentational style, the actors and I blocked the show using the constraints of realism. A few days before we opened, my faculty advisor watched a run-through. Scattered through her notes was the oft repeated advice that they were all too close...there needed to be more space around the main character. Suddenly she was suggesting I do the very thing she'd haphazardly warned me against.

So I re-blocked.

The entire show.

At the last minute.

According to Ball, "[i]ntuition is the most important component of the creative process."<sup>11</sup> Suddenly I enthusiastically embraced the intuition I'd ruthlessly ignored day after day. The changes went against my actors' impulses, but they made the show come together.

I re-blocked 2/3rds of the show. I'm terrified. I'm excited. I feel like I'm listening to my original impulses, even though I don't know where they came from. I thought I'd have trouble re-blocking but it is actually exciting, invigorating. My heart has been racing all day and I could feel the adrenaline flowing through me.

The actors are fighting me a bit but they're trying. One is having an especially difficult time. I warned all of them in an email last night that I was going to take things in a different direction. I can understand their

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<sup>11</sup> Ball, 13.

hesitation—I'm asking them to go against their instincts.<sup>12</sup>

They did tell me that they think it's better this way but that doesn't make it easier for them to change. I hate the fact that they're fighting me. I don't feel like they don't trust me—just that they are scared. We don't train in anything but realism so I understand. And if I'm scared then how could they not be?<sup>13</sup>

Later, the actor who had the most trouble accepting the new blocking, told me that he was impressed with how diplomatically and gracefully I dealt with re-blocking the show. He acknowledged that he had trouble with it, but also knew that the show was better, and he felt as though I listened to and understood his concerns. I validated his instincts and asked him to channel those very strong impulses in a slightly different direction, leading to a more specific and compelling show. In fact, eventually the actors each told me that though they had trouble with the new staging, they agreed that it brought the production to a new level...it made things better. At the time I was simply trying to direct the show to the best of my ability. I had fantastic actors and knew I was asking them to do something difficult. It was invigorating for me, because I was listening to what I thought the play needed all along...instincts I had ignored because of the careless

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<sup>12</sup> And their training in realism.

<sup>13</sup> McFarland, personal journal (Rochester, NY, June 4, 2004).



comment of my professor. I should have realized that, as Bloom states, "...there is no one accepted method for directing, any more than there is for any other art."<sup>14</sup>

When I reflected upon the production later I wrote:

The single most helpful thing I experienced in rehearsal was probably to trust my instincts. Sometimes they were wrong but most of the time things felt right. My impulses usually made things better, they make the scene zing. That's especially true when I'm talking about connections between characters or when I think one character is referring (consciously or not) to another part of the story. When those connections come to me they seem to really work and they are things the actors haven't thought of. I think of it only as script analysis but sometimes they seem to come from somewhere else. Those are the ones that I found I needed to listen to the most closely. It's almost like these ideas are just floating out there in mid-air, swirling around me, and sometimes they jump into my head just when I need them; spears of inspiration at the appropriate moment. These were instincts that seemed to come more from the heart than from the head. Sometimes I couldn't understand what my insight was trying to tell me, I only knew that the scene needed something different, a new twist...I have to admit that those moments were the best in the play. They were also when I got the most excited and enthusiastic during rehearsal.<sup>15</sup>

Looking back now...I think it might have been that undiagnosed visual processing disorder<sup>16</sup> popping up and making new connections, different connections, come to the

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<sup>14</sup> Bloom, 3.

<sup>15</sup> McFarland, reflection paper (Villanova, PA: Villanova University, June 2003).

<sup>16</sup> If that's what caused my learning difficulties early in life.

surface. Perhaps I couldn't consciously corral the experience, leaving me with instincts and fleeting images that I couldn't quite explain.

Or maybe it was an unconscious application of the analysis I did outside of rehearsal.

Or maybe I was feeding off something from the actors.

Or maybe,

just maybe,

in that moment,

I was a good director.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: BECOMING A FEMINIST DIRECTOR

### De-centering a Director: Reconstructing my Self as a Feminist Director

If it is not a feminist rehearsal space, how can it be a  
feminist production?<sup>1</sup>  
John Lutterbie

If we imagine that the feminist director is invested in  
changing representations of women, whether by directing  
feminist drama, by subverting a male dramatic narrative, or  
by helping to construct a new piece, must not this same  
director also be rethinking the way she casts and  
rehearses? In other words, how can the product be  
subversive if the process stays the same? Isn't the  
directing process itself part of how meaning gets created  
or suppressed?<sup>2</sup>  
Ellen Donkin and Susan Clement

In terms of directing, I strive to avoid essentialism.  
A play is not good because it was written by a woman or bad  
because it was written by a man. When I chose to direct  
*Touch* by Toni Press-Coffman, I admit that I was seeking a  
play written by a woman. But I chose *Touch* because the  
play spoke to me on a visceral level. Anne Bogart, during  
an appearance at the Tisch School of Drama, told the  
audience to "[f]ollow your heart, that's where your riches

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<sup>1</sup> John Lutterbie, "Codirecting: A Model for Men Directing Feminist Plays," in *Upstaging Big Daddy: Directing Theater as if Gender and Race Matter* ed. Ellen Donkin and Susan Clement (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 275.

<sup>2</sup> Ellen Donkin and Susan Clement, eds. *Upstaging Big Daddy: Directing Theater as if Gender and Race Matter* (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2007), 233.

will lie"<sup>3</sup> and my heart led me to this script. However, *Touch* showcases the acting talents of men, and the strongest, most vibrant woman in the play never appears on stage. In fact, she is only discussed in terms of how her husband saw her.

As a feminist, do I have a responsibility to provide strong roles for women?

No, as a feminist I have a responsibility to fight sexism and oppression.

I believe *Touch* helped me do that. As Stephen Lawhead writes in *Merlin*, "—it came to me that the way to men's souls was through their hearts, not through their minds. As much as a man might be convinced in his mind, as long as his heart remained unchanged all persuasion would fail."<sup>4</sup> In my script selection I strive to fight oppression by changing people in their hearts. That is part of why I choose scripts that touch the soul, plays that are heart-wrenching, so I can convince hearts, not minds. Or hearts and minds.

I champion the causes of feminism even as I struggle to define it for myself and for my research. I have trouble identifying what a feminist director is because of

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<sup>3</sup> McFarland, notes from Women at the Helm, coordinated by Julia Whitworth (New York: Tisch School of Drama, April 15, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Lawhead, *Merlin* (New York: HarperCollins, 1988), 150.

the masculinity of categorizing. I do not want to limit the multiple layers of meaning and experience the term 'feminist director' can hold. According to Anne Bogart:

Undefining means removing the comfortable assumptions about an object, a person, words, sentences or narrative by putting it all back in question. What is instantly definable is often instantly forgettable. Anything onstage can be asleep when it is overly defined.<sup>5</sup>

I do not want my scholarship,  
my directing,  
my voice  
my thoughts  
to fall asleep from being instantly definable.  
I am not instantly definable.  
Do not dismiss me as a feminazi.  
Or as a collaborative director.  
I am neither  
and I am both.

In 1976 Barbara Smith said that "[f]eminism is the political theory and practice that struggles to free *all* women...Anything less than this vision of total freedom is not feminism, but merely female self-aggrandizement."<sup>6</sup> The most important way feminist ideas influence my directing is in my willingness to try to incorporate my theory and my

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<sup>5</sup> Bogart, 53.

<sup>6</sup> Freedman, 73.

practice together. Within the feminist movement, and the waves of feminism, there has been a disconnection between feminists who theorize and feminist activists. By struggling to create a feminist style of directing I hope to combine theory and activism. I do not want, as Suzan-Lori Parks put it, to become "mired in the interest of stating some point, or tugging some heartstring, or landing a laugh, or making a splash, or wagging a finger" because "in no other art form are the intentions so slim!"<sup>7</sup> I am trying to enact my feminism, not because I feel I have a universal message to convey, but because I want to change the world we live in. In *Disciplining Feminism: From Social Activism to Academic Discourse*, Messer-Davidow discusses the academic/activist divide of feminism at length.<sup>8</sup> I can do little to heal this split except to join the academic and the activist in my own work.

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<sup>7</sup> Suzan-Lori Parks, 6.

<sup>8</sup> Ellen Messer-Davidow, *Disciplining Feminism: From Social Activism to Academic Discourse* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

I am a director.

Peter Brook once wrote that '[y]ou become a director by calling yourself a director and you then persuade people that this is true.'<sup>9</sup>

I am a director,

I am a feminist director.

I am a feminist director even though I am still struggling to understand just how a feminist can be a director.

As part of the University of Missouri's 2006-7 season, I directed *Touch*, by Toni Press-Coffman, as a feminist director. I explored how the feminist idea of de-centering authority could be used to develop characters and block a show collaboratively. I explored my simultaneous role as a director and as a feminist attempting to de-center my own power in the rehearsal process, while still maintaining responsibility for the production. Conducting my rehearsals as a feminist director served to contest the expected role of the director, just as writing in a performative, subjective voice serves to contest the formal academic style associated with the patriarchal expressive

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<sup>9</sup> Peter Brook, *The Shifting Point: Theatre, Film, Opera 1946-1987* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1987), 14.

modes as identified by researchers such as Deborah Tannen<sup>10</sup> and Thorne, Kramarae, and Henley.<sup>11</sup>

The aims of feminism have evolved over the past thirty years. As various forms of feminism have taken root, different branches of feminist criticism have emerged. According to Helen Keyssar in *Feminist Theatre and Theory*, feminist criticisms include "Marxist-feminism, radical-feminism, cultural-feminism, lesbian-feminism (which for some overlaps with radical), Lacanian psychoanalytic criticism, more traditional Freudian psychoanalytic criticism, and socialist/materialist feminism."<sup>12</sup> For the sake of this study, I chose to focus my attention on an idea gleaned from Mark Fortier's *Theory/Theatre*. He posited that "[m]ore than a critique of masculine culture, feminism is interested in the fostering of women's cultures."<sup>13</sup> I chose to direct *Touch* in a feminist way because I wanted to foster women's culture...I wanted to reject the patriarchal hierarchy often established by the

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<sup>10</sup> Deborah Tannen, *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation* (New York: William Morrow, 1990).

<sup>11</sup> Barrie Thorne, Cheris Kramarae, and Nancy Henley, *Language, Gender and Society* (Rowley, MA: Newbury, 1983). Quoted in Belanoff, 262-3.

<sup>12</sup> Helene Keyssar, ed., *Feminist Theatre and Theory* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 4.

<sup>13</sup> Mark Fortier, *Theory/Theatre: An Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 74.



director in theater rehearsals. Sue-Ellen Case "find[s] the subjective voice to be a liberation from the impersonal, omniscient and seemingly objective voice patriarchal cultures [have] used for centuries to render certain experiences invisible..."<sup>14</sup> And silent. I believe the hierarchal nature of most director-cast relationships serves to reinforce the patriarchal culture that silences the voices and experiences of most actors.

Much of the literature written about feminism and theatre focuses on either feminist playwrights and drama or on a feminist de/re-construction of classic texts. Scholars tend to examine the products of feminist directors, not their process.<sup>15</sup> Some feminist directors choose dramas that reflect a feminist worldview by investigating gender and power hierarchy *within* the text, such as in Caryl Churchill's *Cloud Nine*.<sup>16</sup> Other feminist directors work to subvert the canon by deconstructing a classic text to expose sociopolitical issues embedded in

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<sup>14</sup> Sue-Ellen Case, *Feminism and Theatre* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 3.

<sup>15</sup> For a truly thorough description of the history of feminist criticism through 1997 see Keyssar, ed., *Feminist Theatre and Theory*, 1-5.

<sup>16</sup> Caryl Churchill writes gender deconstruction into the text of the play not only by having the plot focus on gender and power issues, but also by specifying casting choices. For instance, she notes that Betty, Clive's wife, is played by a man and his son Edward is played by a woman, thus inviting the audience to examine their own preconceptions about the performance of gender and power.

the play, therefore creating a feminist reading or "take" on a text. Books and articles that discuss feminism tend to focus on the gender of the director<sup>17</sup> or on the performance of gender within the text and within the production.<sup>18</sup> While attention should be paid to these feminist theatrical products, it is also time to shift our attention to a third type of feminist director, one that incorporates feminist ideas into the working process within the rehearsal hall.

I *am* a director.

No, really, I am.

Damn it, I am a *feminist* director!

Entire college courses focus on the question of what a director is and how a director directs. Although every director and scholar is likely to give a different definition, we typically think of a director as the one with the unifying vision or concept for the production. As Rebecca Daniels states in *Women Stage Directors Speak: Exploring the Influence of Gender on Their Work*, "[t]he quality variously described as leadership, clarity of vision, or being in control of the artistic process is

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<sup>17</sup> Helen Manfull, *In Other Words: Women Directors Speak* (Lyme, NH: Smith and Kraus, 1997).

<sup>18</sup> Jill Dolan, "Gender Impersonation Onstage: Destroying or Maintaining the Mirror of Gender Roles?" *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 2 no. 2 (1985): 5-11.

identified by all<sup>19</sup> teachers and theorists of directing as one of the necessary qualities of a good director."<sup>20</sup> The director is the one in charge, the one responsible for most, if not all, of the artistic decisions.

Over the years the position of the director has evolved from the role of actor-manager, into a production's patriarch sitting at the head of the table of hierarchy. As Beth Watkins states in her article "The Feminist Director in Rehearsal: An Education," within the rehearsal process "the structure of authority [is] so often naturalized as a one-way power dynamic between director and actors..."<sup>21</sup> that we have come to expect the director to have all of the answers before he or she even steps into the auditions. Actors rarely question the director and, in my experience, they seek to be told how the director wants them to play the role. There is little art or collaboration in a system that expects all participants to suppress their own impulses in deference to the desires of a central figure.

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<sup>19</sup> I confess that I have not done my own study, but I find it difficult to believe that *all* teachers and theorists of directing would agree with this statement. That being said, I can't think of any that would refute Daniels' assertion either.

<sup>20</sup> Rebecca Daniels, *Women Stage Directors Speak: Exploring the Influence of Gender on Their Work* (Jefferson, NC and London: McFarland, 1996), 11.

<sup>21</sup> Beth Watkins, "The Feminist Director in Rehearsal: An Education," *Theatre Topics* 15 no. 2 (2005): 187.

Directors who focus on feminist plays or on the construction of gender in performance often rehearse in ways that make use of the same power hierarchy found in patriarchies.<sup>22</sup> Most feminist productions deal with gender issues within their content; however, their rehearsal techniques reinforce the director's role as the patriarch of the production. I worked to develop methods that allowed us to explore character development and staging without positioning myself as the sole arbiter of knowledge.

This is it.

This is where I enter as a "feminist director."

[Deep breath.]

Here I go.

### *Auditions*

On September 8, 2006 half a dozen undergraduate students stood in a hallway looking at me. They were the last remnants of the actors I called back for *Touch*. Although my final casting was not yet determined, I knew it

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<sup>22</sup> What I mean by this statement is that the director has all of the decision making power. The director is seen as the one in charge, the person with the answers and the vision for the show. The director is expected to unify all the elements of the production, and actors seek to perform to the satisfaction of the director. The power of all elements of the production are subservient to the vision of the director, just as, in a patriarchy, there is a clear delineation of power which guides all decision-making.

was likely that I would be working with at least a couple of these students. I took a few minutes to inform the actors that I was going to be working in a non-traditional manner.

I didn't go into detail about being a feminist director.

There are so many negative connotations to the label

feminist.<sup>23</sup>

Instead I told them I wanted to foster collaboration within the rehearsal hall and that if they wanted their director to tell them where to stand or how to say a line, then this would not be a good production for them to participate in. I explained that if they were not willing to work collaboratively then the show would be a frustrating experience for them, and for me. I urged them to withdraw from consideration, via email, if they did not want to explore a different method of working within the rehearsal hall. I felt very strongly that all of the participants in the process needed to enter into the project willingly. After all, it is difficult to collaborate with someone who does not value collaboration. All six students seemed enthusiastic about doing things in a different way and no one asked to be withdrawn from consideration.

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<sup>23</sup> Daniels, 15.

At the suggestion of a faculty advisor, I held joint auditions with the production immediately preceding *Touch* in the season schedule. In retrospect, I'm not certain that was a good idea. First, it meant that I could not consider a non-traditional audition format. Since we were sharing auditions we both needed to accommodate what the other person needed to see. Later, when the other director and I discussed our casting choices we overlapped on one actor. Of my four top picks I knew three of them from other departmental productions and activities. The fourth was new, and he was perfect for the supporting actor role. He and my lead had just the right "best friends" vibe and he had the right look and sound for what the role needed. In mid-Missouri it's tough to cast a young actor who can convincingly claim that "...I got more and more Italian—I don't know how else to say that. I got darker, and louder, and more in the world..."<sup>24</sup> but this actor was believable. In our discussions I refused to budge. I know she auditioned other people and came back to just wanting him.

I flat out refused.

I said no.

I was obstinate.

I wouldn't even discuss casting someone else.

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<sup>24</sup> Press-Coffman, 19.

No one else would do.

While I was certain that this actor was the right one for the part, there was more behind my refusal than simply wanting the right actor. The other director was a year behind me in the program. During her first year she walked into a class we were in together and announced the title of the play she was proposing for the next season. Against all odds, it was the same play I intended to submit. My advisor, who had suggested that playwright, and script, to me, was on leave that semester. The other director's advocate was the director of graduate studies for the department and told me that I could not propose that script because the other director was.

There was no discussion,

just a simple statement that I could not propose it. Along with the script, the other director received a "supported show"<sup>25</sup> that was also adjudicated and submitted for consideration to the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival. So, since she was directing the play I'd intended to propose and had the support I had hoped for, I refused to budge on the actor I needed.

There was no compromise,

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<sup>25</sup> The department had three levels of show. Fully supported, minimally supported, and unsupported. Unsupported meant just that. There was no budget, no scene/costume shop support, and, I discovered, not necessarily any rehearsal space.

no discussion.

I stood firm and refused to have another resource go to her instead of me. I was finally standing my ground and saying that enough was enough. My stubbornness may have been warranted, but I came to regret it. But I had my cast, and, as William Ball writes in *A Sense of Direction*, "[i]f you cast correctly, you have done about eighty percent of your work."<sup>26</sup> While this actor gave a fine performance, and even the playwright, who was in residence for the run, thought he was quite good, the going was rough. I did not fire him because I agree with Ball, who wrote:

I feel very strongly that when you have hired an actor, he is yours until the opening. If he's the wrong actor for that part, it's your mistake. You live with it and you make it work. It represents unprofessionalism to fire an actor. It signifies essentially that the director admits he doesn't know what he is doing."<sup>27</sup>

At the same time, Ball also asserts that "[i]t is important to the creative process to recognize that we learn from our failures—much more than from our successes. Failure is the threshold of knowledge. Since new knowledge is that by which we progress, failure must be our constant companion."<sup>28</sup> At one point the difficult actor offered to

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<sup>26</sup> Ball, 37.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 45.



quit. I talked him into staying. When he was on, his performance was captivating. Unfortunately, his resistance reached epic proportions during rehearsals, culminating during tech when he flat-out refused to do warm-ups. Next time, unprofessional or not, I might fire an actor who is so difficult to work with. An actor commented to me later that "...it was really frustrating to see such a good actor push back so hard."<sup>29</sup> I would not have fired the actor because he was miscast or not talented enough. I would have fired him because his refusal to work collaboratively hindered the growth of the rest of the cast and created unnecessary tensions in rehearsal. Not allowing him to step away of his own volition was a mistake, and I believe it was prompted by pride and fear. I worried that it was too late to replace him and was afraid that a replacement wouldn't measure up. I should have taken that risk. I have learned from that failure.

### *Casting*

I seem to be developing a knack for successfully casting people against type, and it's a skill I'm quite proud of. By not pigeonholing actors into what they have always done before I am encouraging more growth, as actors

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<sup>29</sup> McFarland, production journal, 2006.

and as people, while serving to give a voice to a wider variety of actors. For this serious and heart wrenching script, I chose an actor known for his ability to play hilarious and goofy sidekicks. Several people, including tenured theatre professors, expressed doubt about this actor's ability to handle such a difficult role, but I saw something in him that I thought could do it.

I was right.

Later, the same faculty who expressed doubt confided that they didn't know that he could do that. Kyle begins the play with a 30 minute monologue that runs the emotional gamut from lonely teen, to falling in love, to wedded bliss, to a comfortable life, all the way through to the disappearance of his wife. Later in the play his wife's body is found and he confronts her killers. All are emotionally charged scenes that this actor navigated skillfully in performance, drawing tears from the audience.

I did the same thing in a scene I directed while working on my master's degree. The professor strongly suggested I re-cast my scene when I had the goofy sidekick sink his teeth into a serious and emotionally charged role. Later the professor admitted to me that I was right, that the actor had surprised him. That actor told me that I was the first director that allowed him to play a serious role

and he appreciated the opportunity. Other people started casting him in more dramatic roles after seeing him in my scene.

### *Table Work*

I attempted to establish a collaborative environment in rehearsals early on. The first read-through was held in my apartment because we could not get a rehearsal space. After reading the script we discussed the idea that the play is a conjured memory of events instead of a representation or realistic presentation of the events. According to the playwright's notes "[t]he play is set in Kyle's mind and the places he conjures there."<sup>30</sup> I urged the actors and stage management team to tell stories about their own memories, and how events and people appear differently in their minds than they do in real life. I tell my own story of memory. Of dream. Of conjured events.

I am walking along abandoned train tracks in the woods, somewhere in Pennsylvania. My brothers and I are playing on the tracks. Those tracks stretch away between the trees...into the sun dappled distance...into infinity. We find shotgun shell casings and some kind of abandoned hut.

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<sup>30</sup> Press-Coffman, 6.

It's summer and sunny and hot. The childhood innocence is marred by the shotgun shells, an intrusion of violence. Of old violence. I've asked my parents, repeatedly, if this is a real memory or something I conjured. I can never remember the answer. It seems so real. But if it is real, then why do I always wonder if it was just a dream?

I closed the discussion by telling the actors that I did not know how thinking of the play as a conjured memory would influence our production, but for them to keep the idea in mind. In my desire to de-center my power I deliberately did not pre-determine how the idea of conjured memory would influence the production.

We went through the play,

discussing meaning,

discussing connections,

discussing relationships.

In *Touch*, the characters talk directly to the audience some of the time, and to each other some of the time. There are sections when the lines cascade like leaves from autumn trees. There are poems and memories and fluid shifts in time and place. We discussed unit breaks and beats. At no point did I decree what the answer should be.

I asked questions,

I prodded,

I probed,  
and when we had multiple interpretations to choose from, I pushed the actors to give me their opinions and we resolved differences by thinking about which choice served the play better, or which was the most interesting choice.

While I did not decree or impose an interpretation, or vision, upon the production, I did maintain my position as leader within rehearsals. I was older than the cast and crew. I was the only graduate student in a room full of undergraduate students. I set the rehearsal schedule and determined what we were doing every day. I was the director and the oldest and the most educated, so I was the de facto leader. Even though I tried to share power, it was power that I was giving to them, it came from me, they were automatically in subordinate positions. I doubt that it would be possible to completely do away with the trappings of the director being in charge in an academic setting. Unless we structured the project as a collaborative devised piece with no director or leader, there will always be someone in charge of a production in the academy. While I invited opinions and discussion, I was still the one the department would hold responsible for the production.

## *Character Development*

Since I had to be “in charge” I sought other ways to create an environment that allowed student actors to try out various solutions. I wanted to limit how often actors turned to me to say: “I don’t know how you want me to do this.” I focused on collaborative character development as one means of sidestepping actors focusing on what I, as the director, wanted of them, instead of focusing on what the show needed from their character. I took the same approach that Lutterbie describes in “Codirecting: A Model for Men Directing Feminist Plays.” “The principle underlying every exercise was to locate in the performer the authority to make choices about the performance of the character.”<sup>31</sup> I devised several ways of encouraging the actors to develop their characters, both with input from their fellow cast members, and through solo exercises.

### *Character Development: What’s on your iPod?*

The most successful activity I ‘assigned’ them was to choose music that their character would listen to or that in some way embodied their character. In rehearsal we listened to each actor’s selections and the rest of the

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<sup>31</sup> Lutterbie, 266.

cast, the stage management crew, and I told the actor what we thought the music said about their character. I then had the actor explain why he or she made the selection. Previous to this rehearsal I had one-on-one meetings with each actor to discuss their character.<sup>32</sup> I was surprised at the complexity of their choices and by my own reactions to the music. The rest of the people involved in the process gave feedback first, before I added my thoughts. I knew at the time that I might be perceived as having the final say, but I was also afraid that actors would not share conflicting ideas once I spoke, even though my comments tended toward an abstract understanding of the character. For example, one quote pulled from my journal is "[this is the] song his soul sings for Zoe and the amazement he feels in the cosmos." My response to another song from the same actors was "solitary—appears simple but isn't. Stars coming out one by one. Think you know where it's going but it veers off in a new direction." The responses from the other cast members tended to be no less complicated, and I was astonished by the insight the actors showed into their characters.

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<sup>32</sup> Most of these meetings also included a discussion about the theoretical lens I was applying to the process, though none of the actors phrased it quite that way.

Three of the actors discussed how difficult and rewarding this activity was for them. In order to choose meaningful music the actors had to really understand their character. The comments the actors made about this activity, both before and after presenting their choices to the rest of the team, indicated to me that they, for the most part, enjoyed choosing the music because they had to incorporate everything they knew about the character from the script and rehearsal conversations. This activity did more to ground the actors in their characters than any technique I have used before, and it forced the actors to create their own character, instead of looking to me to answer every question about what I think the character is "like." The comments from other cast members and the stage management crew served to make everyone in the room responsible for the body of knowledge we were gathering, or creating, about each character, which helped to de-center the director's role as the only one with the correct character interpretation.

The fourth actor,  
the one I'd fought for,  
dug in my heels for,  
insisted I needed..



well, he essentially refused to participate in this activity. He was mostly silent during the discussions of other characters, not adding anything even when gently prodded. When it came time for him to share he just said his character listened to rock because "he just seems like that kind of guy." He did not have any specific songs in mind, nor did he reveal any deep understanding of his character's personality. He simply did not contribute, and with only four actors in the cast, his non-participation was obvious.

On the other hand, one actor's roommate told me that they had discussed the music exercise and they both planned on using it in their future work, whether the director suggested it or not. They appreciated that they could do it on their own. They had the agency and tools to do it themselves instead of waiting for someone else to direct them. If that isn't a "successful" feminist directing exercise, then what is?

### *Character Development: What's in your living room?*

Not every exercise was designed to help every actor. I had the actors work together to create Kyle and Zoe's living room. While everyone participated, the exercise was

mostly designed for the lead actor's benefit. He later told me that, although a living room is a simple thing, when you set about designing one from scratch, it becomes a series of "difficult" questions. Having to decide where the couch is, what color, where the television is, is it wall mounted or on an entertainment system...considering these questions and the others that I tossed out at them during the exercise forced him to think as his character.

Where do these characters spend their time?

How does their space reflect them?

What is important?

Although the living room isn't seen during the play, it was a very important room for Kyle and Zoe. Kyle's opening monologue includes snippets of a life that centered on the living room, so it was important that the characters have an idea of it, an idea they helped to create. After creating the living room, I had the actors improvise an informal evening at home, in character, in that living room. I think creating the space was more useful than the improvisation in the space, but the actor playing Kyle later told me that it made him "stop and think what it means to be Kyle."<sup>33</sup> In my opinion, if the actors can stop and think about what it means to be their character then

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<sup>33</sup> McFarland, Facebook message from actor. Date unknown.

they are prepared to start embodying that character on stage.

### *Character Development: Embodying the Character*

One activity that was already in my directing toolkit involved having the actors come up with four adjectives to describe the essence of their characters.<sup>34</sup> They then created an image to embody that characteristic. The images started off static, but then the actors added movement and eventually layered the physicalizations into a distinctive walk or mannerism for their character. The physical representations started off exaggerated, and then were pulled back into something realistic, but that might carry a hint of the exaggerated, a hint of the heightened reality that comes with conjured memory. Using this method, the actors could develop their own physicalization of the character. The intent was to have their character's movement be different enough from their own physical lives that at the end of the show each night, they could essentially hang the character on a peg and don their own physical selves again. I hoped to create a sense of difference in order to buffer the actors from the emotional

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<sup>34</sup> This activity draws heavily on image theatre techniques developed by Augusto Boal, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002).

trauma the characters endure in the play. I know this exercise has been useful to my actors in the past, and so I hope it served a purpose again.

*Am I doing this right?*

In an era of actors who have been, as Watkins put it, "nurtured on realism and Stanislavsky"<sup>35</sup> I sometimes had a difficult time prodding actors out of their comfort zones. Some actors crave the type of director that presents him or herself as the parent of the production and resist attempts to de-center the director's power.

I don't know what you want.

You are the director.

Just tell me how you want me to do it!"<sup>36</sup>

I hated hearing those comments in rehearsals and my collaborative, de-centered process should have eliminated them.

Right?

And yet I heard pleas for an autocrat.

Often.

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<sup>35</sup> Watkins, 187.

<sup>36</sup> Cece McFarland, unpublished production journal, 2006.

To be honest it generally came from one actor, the one I fought for, but he said it often enough for all the rest of the actors combined.

Was the actor scared?

Did he resent being asked to work in a method unfamiliar to him?

Did he think I was wasting his time?

Did he have a problem with a woman director?

Did I need to establish my authority as a director because I was a graduate student?

Did he feel threatened?

I have no idea.

His constant desire to be told how to "do it" ebbed away my confidence, leaving me feeling foolish as I refused to answer his pleas.

Are you going to give me any direction here?

No, go with your impulses and see what happens.

I found myself wondering if I had crossed a line between de-centering the power of the director, and completely abdicating my responsibility to the production. I floundered as I tried to simultaneously foster collaboration and be in charge. The position of the director as the single person responsible for the ultimate

vision of the production goes against feminist goals to subvert the centralization of power. Sandra M. Bemis, in "The Difficulties Facing Feminist Theater: The Survival of *At the Foot of the Mountain*," states that feminism places emphasis "on the importance of the group rather than on the importance of the individual."<sup>37</sup> The directing style most commonly adopted places the emphasis on the director, an individual, instead of on a collaborative process that encompasses the entire group. I am not claiming that directors refuse to incorporate ideas generated by other artists, I simply mean that the director remains the final arbiter of power by retaining the "right" to make decisions. As Harold Clurman states in *On Directing* "[e]very director makes his own "law," depending not only on his own temperament or artistic inclination, but on the circumstances of production."<sup>38</sup> While several books have been published recently that emphasize a director's responsibility to foster collaboration in rehearsal,<sup>39</sup> Clurman's premise that the director make his, or her, own

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<sup>37</sup> Sandra M. Bemis, "The Difficulties Facing Feminist Theater: The Survival of *At the Foot of the Mountain*," *North Dakota Journal of Speech and Theatre* 1 (1987): np.

<sup>38</sup> Harold Clurman, *On Directing* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1972), x.

<sup>39</sup> Robert Knopf, *The Director as Collaborator* (Boston: Pearson/Allyn & Bacon, 2006) and Terry McCabe, *Mis-Directing the Play: An Argument Against Contemporary Theatre* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2001) being but two of them.

laws in rehearsals is a common practice in the theatrical world.

I came to realize that my insistence on rehearsing as a feminist director actually, in some ways, reinforced the idea of the director as the gatekeeper of power, even as I worked to subvert that power. We were working in a collaborative manner because I decreed we would. The rule of collaboration was still a rule, and I did my best to enforce my policy. If I had been able to foster a truly collaborative environment would actors still have been looking to me for the "right" answer? No, they would be more inclined to look to the group for an answer, not to the director.

As a feminist I wholeheartedly reject the idea of the director as the law in the rehearsal. Rather than expecting the actors to embody my vision of the play, I was more interested in developing a vision with the actors. As Watkins states in "The Feminist Director in Rehearsal: An Education" I wanted to develop a strategy for rehearsal "that would allow all parties access to the ideas underlying the production and offer students the opportunity to learn from rehearsal in various ways."<sup>40</sup> I tried to foster a joint feeling of responsibility for the

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<sup>40</sup> Watkins, 185.

show by frequently requesting the input of other cast members and the stage management team.

### *Staging the Play*

Our process became more difficult as we staged the show. Although that one actor had given me considerable resistance during the character development phase of rehearsal, I was wholly unprepared for the level of opposition he had during staging. We blocked the show roughly in order and I encouraged the actors to 'play' with each scene, rather than setting every cross in stone. It was particularly difficult to resist the urge to tell the actors what to do in the staging phase of rehearsal. Much of the staging evolved naturally, with actors moving in time with their impulses. Slowly we sketched out the skeleton of the play, with everything needed to make it come alive added later. Rather than giving many specific blocking notes, I used exercises to encourage the actors to think about proximity and how or why their character moved. Since Kyle views his world through the cosmos I had other characters run through scenes while maintaining an orbit around Kyle. The fixed distance between Kyle and the characters he conjures was then something we used in



staging to indicate that decreasing the distance between characters increased the stakes.

In some moments I gave in to the resistant actor's demands to be told what to do. And then he would not do what I asked. He demanded traditional direction and then refused it. He refused to participate, he refused to warm-up, he refused to consider that not every exercise was designed for his benefit. And he refused to take his hands out of his pockets.

### *Reflections*

I do not know that I succeeded in directing as a feminist on my production of *Touch*. I strongly felt the pressure to produce a good product because of my status as a graduate student. Watkins discovered "that relinquishing control in rehearsal is not always easy or wise, and that striving for a genuine collaboration can involve compromises that even a feminist director intent on decentering authority may be unwilling to make."<sup>41</sup> The need to prove myself as a "good director" was constantly creating tension with my desire to explore how to be a feminist director and de-center the director's power. Ultimately I was responsible for the outcome of the

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<sup>41</sup> Watkins, 186.

production and knew that, although I was not being graded on my process, I was being evaluated on my product. Late in the rehearsal process I slid back into the traditional role of director and gave notes after running sections of the play. I did not want my actors to feel as though I was abandoning them, or the quality of the show, in favor of a theoretical framework. I justified the choice to return to director as final decision maker by acknowledging that most of the detail work I was giving in notes came from choices the actors made earlier in the rehearsal process. I tried to take the place of the audience and identify slow or rough spots for the actors. Usually in my notes I simply noted a section that was not working and then worked collaboratively with the actors to find solutions to those problems. Through much of the rehearsal process I found ways to incorporate everyone's contribution, even when some cast members thought the activities were a waste of time. I developed activities designed to help the actors work together to determine who their characters were and what meaning our production should have. I was inconsistent with my attempts to de-center the director's authority, sometimes refusing to give direction, and other times insisting the actors incorporate my ideas.

I will continue to work toward developing a feminist rehearsal process. De-centering the director's power and empowering student actors are only the first steps along my journey. A corner of my mind still struggles with the entire concept of being a feminist director. To return to Sue-Ellen Case, "[s]ince most feminisms declare themselves to be leaderless positions, without a central organization or a 'party line,' they do not necessarily represent discrete ideologies or political organizations. Though these positions have become clearly distinguished from one another, many feminists embrace a combination of them."<sup>42</sup> If most feminists seek to cultivate leaderless positions, and the director is the leader in rehearsals, then how can a feminist director exist? I have offered one example of how the two concepts might intersect. In *Theatre and Feminist Aesthetics*, Laughlin and Schuler suggest that "[l]ike women's subjectivity, feminist theatre...should be understood as shifting and multiple, an example of the rich diversity and variety of the American drama of which it is a vital part."<sup>43</sup> My direction of Toni Press-Coffman's *Touch* was one way to bring feminism into the rehearsal process and de-center the power of the director.

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<sup>42</sup> Case, 63.

<sup>43</sup> Karen Laughlin, and Catherine Schuler, ed., *Theatre and Feminist Aesthetics* (Madison: Associated University Presses, 1995), 13.

Director Frank Hauser, in *Notes on Directing: 130 Lessons in Leadership from the Director's Chair*, claimed that the best compliment for a director is: "You seemed from the beginning to know exactly what you wanted."<sup>44</sup> I disagree. In an email, one actor told me recently that "[w]hat stands out to me now, years later, is the fact that you managed to find grace and truth with incredibly challenging material with actors who were not necessarily experienced enough (with life) to handle that content." She went on to say "*Touch* was emotionally taxing for all of us, I think. But as a director you never made rehearsal uncomfortable—just the opposite really. I felt you pushed us to certain places and we spent a lot of time on character exploration, but you never crossed the line." For three of the actors the experience was a success. It helped them grow as actors, and, I hope, as people. For the playwright, who came to see the show, the performance was a success, in that she was happy with it. For the audience...I can only hope that the show was a success and that they saw the grace and truth in incredibly challenging material. For me? If it was a success for the actors,

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<sup>44</sup> Frank Hauser and Russell Reich, *Notes on Directing: 130 Lessons in Leadership from the Director's Chair* (New York: Walker Publishing Company, 2003), 14.

playwright, and, presumably, the audience, then how could it be anything but a success for me?

Even though I appear to be working against the traditional role of the director, I am a director.

I am a new breed of feminist director.

## Chapter 8: Conclusion

Am I a good student?

A scholar?

Did I direct as a feminist?

Was I successful?

What is success?

Does it matter?

What roadblocks were because I was a graduate student?

What roadblocks because I'm female? What roadblocks  
because I'm a feminist?

Is it more important that I question my methods, or is  
the success of the product the measurement of success?  
Writing in my own voice earned me A's in classes. I  
presented them at conferences and won Top Debut/Contributed  
Paper awards. The show was, by all accounts, a "success,"  
despite the appallingly low attendance numbers caused by  
the worst snowstorm the town had seen in a decade.

With the accolades of my professors still ringing in  
my ears, how can I doubt the success of my work? Is it  
because I was socialized to be modest, to feel average, to  
not outstrip the "boys" at anything? In high school I  
watched my girlfriends succumb to the pressures to be less  
intelligent than the boys. Suddenly they stopped striving

to do their best, and did only enough to get by. Grades of C became their norms so that it was easier for the boys they flirted with to feel superior. They also became more helpless. I remember my father, standing in our kitchen, telling me that I would never keep a boyfriend for very long because I don't make them feel needed enough. Have I internalized the socialization I tried so hard to reject?

Or is this the insecurity that comes from focusing on the process, rather than the product, in a discipline tends to value only the product? I am a feminist director in my methods of working with the actors, not in the content or concept of the production, this time anyhow. I am interested in the gendered characteristics of communication, leadership, and directing, not in the gender of the communicator, leader, or director. I am interested in the process of communicating and leading and, therefore, directing. Or maybe I'm interested in the process of directing, and therefore, I'm interested in communication and leadership.

Gender identity...

gendered communication...

directing...

feminism...

all of these are complicated processes that are difficult to pin down. I am still working out what a feminist director should or could look like, especially in academia. If a director can adapt their communication and leadership tactics to suit the situation at hand, as Smythe and Meyer seem to suggest, then can their directing techniques be assumed to be any more stable?

What situations might influence the use of a feminist directing style?

Might directors alter their style based upon the needs of those he or she is communicating with?

And what kind of impact will that have on developing a feminist style of directing?

As we end our journey through my dissertation, I hope that I've managed to convey the importance of doing more research on feminist directing. Or the importance of doing more feminist directing. Studying gender and feminism has enabled me to recapture my voice and move away from the patriarchal power structure recreated in most rehearsal spaces. My process through these stages of research helped to inoculate me against the daily attempts of dominant culture to indoctrinate me into a masculinist directing style. In the future, I will be investigating feminism and



the academy through the experiences of a theatre scholar and practitioner.

Often theatrical productions present a question and an answer in one nifty package. I believe that, just as we cannot reveal ourselves in a single label, neither can we solve any problem worth investigating with a single answer. In order to "not slavishly follow any one master narrative" I seek the input of everyone involved in a production. I am not just one thing. My actors are not just vessels waiting to be filled with my brilliance. My designers and stage management team have their own thoughts and opinions. By seeking the opinions of others I hope to avoid falling into the trap of directing my own master narrative. My own Truth. Discussing the themes in the script with the cast leads to a deeper understanding of the multiple layers of identity for the characters, as well as of the cast, and I hope the audience as well.

Becoming a feminist director is my way of avoiding the master's tools. I can once again find inspiration and support from Anne Bogart.

Many young directors make the big mistake of assuming that directing is about being in control, telling others what to do, having ideas and getting what you ask for. I do not believe that these abilities are the qualities that make a good director or exciting theatre. Directing is about feeling, about being in the room with

other people; with actors, with designers, with an audience. It is about having a feel for time and space, about breathing and responding fully to the situation at hand, being able to plunge and encourage a plunge into the unknown at the right moment.<sup>1</sup>

Bogart offers a different path to walk down, and she is not the only one. As I work to develop my own philosophy of directing I find courage in her example. There is more than one way. I do not need to take up arms against my actors, or designers. I do not need to shock them by how violent I can become.

Through the course of this project I have tried to track my progression as a feminist and theatre practitioner. I've maintained a level of transparency...I am *present* in my writing. I am performing myself in my writing. Jane Marcus sees in women's self-writing a "structure that insists on the reader's response and sets the writer in conversation with her own community."<sup>2</sup> I want the same thing in the theatre I direct. My productions should be a conversation with the audience, not an opportunity for me to beat them over the head with my message. I see many messages in dramatic literature, who am I decide which one is the "right" one? I know there is

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<sup>1</sup> Bogart, 85.

<sup>2</sup> Jane Marcus, "Invincible Mediocrity: The Private Selves of Public Women," in *The Private Self*, Shari Benstock, ed., (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 141.

no way to really teach someone how to direct. In my understanding most of it comes from inside a person, directing is what you see in your mind and how you find ways of making that vision a reality to the actors. I strive to incorporate what the actor sees, to predict what the audience might see, and challenge both to see a little more, if I see something different.

This is educational theatre, so we always have a responsibility to teach. But what are we teaching? And what are we modeling? When a director curses at their actors for bleeding their beats, or insists on giving line readings for each unit...what is that director teaching those actors about their art? Yes, teach responsibility and ownership. Teach critical thinking. Teach acting skills and communication skills. But also teach them how to be better human beings. Teach them to disagree with grace, to accept criticism and correction, to have humility, to have patience.

Teach these things by modeling them in the classroom.

In the rehearsal hall.

In the scene shop.

I want to know how you see life. John Powell once said "to understand people I must try to hear what they are not saying, what they perhaps will never be able to say."<sup>3</sup>

I have tried to say it.

I have tried to understand it.

This was my story.

How does it touch your story?

What can you learn from my actively remembered history?

What do you learn from how I used my past to shape my future?

You tell these stories because you believe they do something in the world to create a little knowledge, a little humanity, a little room to live and move in and around the constraints and heartbreaks of culture and categories, identities and ideologies.<sup>4</sup>

My story hasn't ended yet, and maybe our stories can dance together in the moonlight...if you'll only tell me yours.

We might have been spared the night's discomfort, but we wouldn't have known how the story would end. And stories have to end. Endings are the most important part of stories. They grow inevitably from the stories themselves. The ending of a story only seems inevitable, though, after it's over and you're looking back.<sup>5</sup>

Our eyes meet.

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<sup>3</sup> McFarland, quote collection.

<sup>4</sup> Adams, 109.

<sup>5</sup> Dennis Covington, *Salvation on Sand Mountain: Snake Handling and Redemption in Southern Appalachia* (New York: Penguin, 1995), 238-9.

"Not to offend anyone," his eyes drop, "but I *hate* that just anyone can call themselves a director, regardless of what they *do* in rehearsal."

Heat creeps up my face, burning shame.

Prickling scalp.

Silent.

I sit stunned and blushing furiously.

He is talking to me.

He is talking about me.

Why can't I answer him?

Maybe next time I will.

## APPENDIX A: UNCUT JOURNAL ENTRIES

May 4, 1990:

Gail and I got into a fight. She was being a real snob and Erin told her that I was mad at her and when she came and asked why she wasn't very nice. Actually, she was being a snob, so I told her so. She snorted (sort of), stuck her nose up in the air and walked away—more snobbish. I've wanted to yell at her for a long time but I always worried about what she'd say about me. I don't regret what I did but we have a campout this weekend. I'll probably apologize tomorrow as soon as I see her. Maybe I should wait and see how she acts first. No, if I do that then I'll never say I'm sorry.<sup>6</sup>

May 8, 1990:

As soon as I got to camp I sat down next to Heidi and looked at Gail, she wasn't looking at me. I apologized and she said fine and then Heidi said something about how she knew that we'd be friends again...and now we act like it never happened but if she gets real SNOBBY again I'll tell her. Next time I think I'll yell. It really makes me mad when she treats me badly.<sup>7</sup>

May ?, 1990:

Gail and I are in another fight. I got tired of her making me feel like everything I say and care about is unimportant but everything she says is WORLD NEWS and should be put up in lights.

May 23, 1990:

Today, before school, I went up to Gail and asked her if she knew why I am mad at her and she said "No, and I don't care!" then she walked away...I can't guarantee that we'll get back together as friends ever again, especially since she doesn't even care about why I'm mad at her. All she has

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<sup>6</sup> McFarland, personal journal (May 4, 1990).

<sup>7</sup> McFarland, personal journal (May 8, 1990).

to do is find out why I'm mad at her and say she's sorry. She doesn't even have to mean it. At least not THIS time. I'd like it more if she did mean it or at least sounded like she meant it.<sup>8</sup>

May 28, 1990:

Today Gail and I made up. I called her and said that I thought we should talk and she said that she was going to make up before but...then there was a long pause and then she said... "but I never got around to it, just kidding." We talked for a while and I told her that on Wednesday I was going to apologize for being mad but then she said that she didn't care why I was mad and that made me madder. She said that she didn't feel like being friendly just then. She also asked why I was going to apologize for being mad. I said "Because I don't usually get angry at people, I just put up with them but I couldn't stand it any longer." She said then that I just take the way I feel and put it inside me and don't say anything, then it all comes out at once.<sup>9</sup>

January 2, 1992:

...I need to get out of this house! It is destroying me! ...It is impossible for me to really relax...thanks to Ryan and Dad I don't feel as though I can have my own opinion or let people know when I'm angry. I don't want to grow up believing in the things Dad has been teaching the past couple of months...[I] told [Sean] how scared I was but I also told him how I felt a little guilty because my problems aren't really all that bad. I mean, they aren't abusing me. Sean said that in a way they are. With a family like mine I can't trust them, I barely like most of them. I'm scared to trust people. I build so many walls to keep people from hurting me that I'm scared to let people through again...Trust is so

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<sup>8</sup> McFarland, personal journal (May 23, 1990).

<sup>9</sup> McFarland, personal journal (May 28, 1990).

important to me because there are so few people I trust enough for me to do *anything* for.<sup>10</sup>

January 5, 1992:

Why am I so scared of dad? Because when he gets mad he becomes violent.

Why does he become violent? It must run in the male McFarland blood. Dad gets violent, Ryan gets violent,...and now so does Kevin...Someday VERY soon they're going to be surprised. Extremely shocked at how violent I become. I am tired of always having to carefully monitor what I say, my tone of voice, when I say it. I am tired of being careful not to provoke them in any way. I am tired of not letting my feelings show, just so they don't know they got "under my skin," as mom puts it...The sooner I leave this house the better!<sup>11</sup>

December 1994:

...I went along with [Gloria's] explanations that I'm jealous of them both because it's so easy for them to joke and flirt with guys. I went along with it all for the sake of peace...I apologized for saying things that might have hurt her and that I thought if I'd been saying thoughtless things that they would have told me—didn't they know I'd never hurt any of them on purpose? ...I'm not jealous and I wouldn't ever have hurt any of them intentionally or knowingly—though they've done it to me (Gail seems to have a history of it). So I ended up making up with them both less than 24 hours before [I left for a year in Germany]. They both made it to the airport and acted like nothing happened.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> McFarland, personal journal (January 2, 1992).

<sup>11</sup> McFarland, personal journal (January 5, 1992). I didn't ever get violent, I still don't, although I've been told I'm scary when I'm angry. I'm not violent, but I'm very intense and it's too strong of a contrast from my normal even-keeled state. I also didn't get out of the house. I lived there until I graduated from high school, and though I managed to avoid going home for most summer breaks in college, I've moved back in with my parents twice since high school.

<sup>12</sup> McFarland, personal journal (December, 1994).



October 6, 1995

For the past two and a half years I have gone by the name of C.C. It stands for Candy Cane. Growing up I had very little self-confidence or self-respect. In fact, I didn't like myself at all. I was so shy I couldn't talk to anyone, not even my friends. I let people walk all over me and never stood up for myself.

The summers after my freshman and sophomore years in high school I was a counselor-in-training (CIT) at a Girl Scout Camp. All the CIT's had to have a camp name and I chose Candy Cane. Both summers I worked hard to change myself into the person I wanted to be. It was a very difficult and emotional process but I succeeded. When I returned home to start my Junior year I insisted everyone call me C.C.—which is what Candy Cane got shortened to. Now only my grandparents and people who don't know me call me Carla.

I even had C.C. put on my high school diploma. In changing my personality I changed my name. This makes it easier to separate C.C. from the Carla I was. I am much happier about who I am now and have a lot of confidence about what I can and cannot do. I'm much more friendly and outgoing. [sic] I contribute more to class discussions. I have a better attitude about myself, to others, and the world in general.<sup>13</sup>

August 27, 1996

Feminism

Feminism is not a topic I often think about. I don't consider myself a feminist, by the definition often implied by today's media, but I firmly believe in equality...The media, by which I refer to television, newspapers, and any other reporting devices, have given me the functional definition of the concept of feminists. According to this view all feminists are hard-core man haters. Most are lesbians and there is something wrong with all of them. They are so

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<sup>13</sup> McFarland, journal for English I (Huntingdon, PA: Juniata College, October 6, 1995).

radical that they want to call themselves womyn, or something like that. There can be no distinguishing between the sexes at all...feminists are never good mothers and usually have no children at all and that is abnormal.. They are cold, frigid, unfeeling, uncaring, robots, moving through society trying to undermine the strong, perfect male...

According to the model of feminism presented to me by society I am not a feminist. If, on the other hand, being a feminist means believing in the fact that women are equal to men in every way, though different in many, then I am a feminist. I feel that men and women are equal and that a woman should not be treated differently than a man in any situation.

My dictionary (Webster's New World Compact School and Office Dictionary, pg 160) defines feminism as "the movement to win political, economic, and social equality for women" so I guess a feminist would be someone who supports that movement. If this definition is used then I am most definitely a feminist for it reinforces my own views on women's place in society—right next to the men.<sup>14</sup>

September 24, 1996:

People have been telling me for years that I am very mature for my age but I could never see it (since it is so hard to look at oneself objectively). All I knew was that I didn't fit in, not even with my friends. They were gossipy, into flirting and boys, and just plain silly. I swear they let their grades slip on purpose so that no one would think they were smart and they acted like such airheads in an attempt to get all the boys to like them. I don't think I've ever been ditzy on purpose. I feel that people should like me for who I am, not who I pretend to be.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> McFarland, Women in Literature course (Huntingdon, PA: Juniata College, August, 27, 1996).

<sup>15</sup> McFarland, journal for Women and Literature class (Huntingdon, PA: Juniata College, September 24, 1996).

November 29, 1996:

My father was extremely insensitive today (nothing new there). Rather than help with things in the kitchen or clean the house (we have company coming Saturday) he decided to order a movie off TVN. He made a big deal out of "show time" and called me in to watch it with him and my younger brother. I declined and helped my mother with the dinner instead. It never occurred to him that she might need help.

She didn't even want to make dinner this year. She would much rather have gone to her mother's house in State College and helped her out. But no, he declined the invitation without even asking my mom. I think he decided that because his mother (who also lives in St. College) was spending the holiday in Pittsburgh with her sister.

Talk about traditional gender roles. He doesn't even do the "male" things around the house. He ignores the cars, leaving all maintenance to my mom, does nothing with the yard. Doesn't attempt to fix anything and doesn't call for plumbers or other handy-men. The only things he deals with are the entertainment system and his darkroom.

When he gets back from training events (he's a Boy Scout leader/trainer) he leaves boxes and boxes of "stuff" piled in the living room. My mom vows not to put anything away for him "this time" but it always ends up driving her crazy and she puts them away. And he's the one who really wants the house to be kept clean. Most of the mess in the house is caused by or related to him.<sup>16</sup>

January 15, 1997:

I started taking theatre because I was so shy, I used theatre to help come out of my shell, to become C.C. It was difficult for a long time. I only started to be really comfortable last semester. Before that I never really let go of ALL the shit, just some of it. It helps that

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<sup>16</sup> McFarland, Women and Literature class journal (Huntingdon, PA: Juniata College, November 29, 1996).

nobody here knew me as Carla, so they don't have any preconceived notions about how I should behave...Part of what I want/need out of theatre is the feeling of unity. For most of my life I got that through dancing or singing but I don't do either of those anymore. In high school I didn't fit in with my peers and I've never felt like I belonged in my family—though things are better now. Last year I didn't give myself the time to fit in, and I don't again this year except for where theatre is concerned. I have a very strong idea of who I am, which sets me apart from a lot of my peers. I *know* what I'm doing and I'm determined to do the best I can at everything I try to do. I don't give up easily on myself or others. I set high expectations for myself, but all I expect is my best. Theatre makes me feel even more in control of myself and my character. There are so many things in our lives that we have *no* control over, shouldn't we take advantage of things we can *control*?

Another thing I love about theatre is the trust. I've had my fair share of sorrow and betrayal. I *know* these people are trustworthy (maybe not with intimate details of my life—some really like discussing other people) but I can trust them close to me. I can trust what happens in Oller Hall, on stage. They want me to do my best, and I want them to do their best, so we help each other.<sup>17</sup>

January 30, 1997:

...I was named Carla Marie by my parents but I don't go by that name anymore. C.C. stands for Candy Cane...During the course of the two summers [that I spent as a counselor-in-training(CIT) at a girl scout camp] the other CITs shortened it to C.C. This was also a time in my life when I was working very hard to change who I was. There wasn't much about me that I liked and I didn't feel as though my family loved me. If they didn't love me how could anyone else, including me? I actually started changing (or trying to)

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<sup>17</sup> McFarland, Acting journal (Huntingdon, PA: Juniata College, January 15, 1997).

in 9<sup>th</sup> grade by taking a theatre class. I was so painfully shy that even those "friends" who I spent the most time with couldn't tell other people much about me. I figured Theatre would help me come out of my shell.

My transformation was so difficult that I made a conscious decision to separate myself from the person I had been. To facilitate that I started asking everyone to call me CC instead of Carla. This happened in 11<sup>th</sup> grade. It took some people a long time to make the change but these days only my 90 year old great-grandmother and some old acquaintances call me Carla. I don't really even answer to my given name anymore and lots of my friends don't even know my real name.

Forcing myself to change over those few years really shaped who I am today. Because I consciously molded my personality I think that my parents and environment have had a minimal effect on me. Those are the things that created the shy, self-hating obedient thing I had become.

There are some remains of the old me. I still get embarrassed fairly easily and am often quiet in new situations where I'm not sure what is expected or acceptable. I enjoy spending time alone and can amuse myself for hours. I still find solace in nature, especially with animals, and by writing.

I have come much farther than I ever dreamed possible. I have a very positive self concept. I like who I am and feel I deserve my best. As a result of that I always do my best-at everything I attempt. However, if something adds more frustration and stress to my life than it's worth then I drop it. I'm comfortable with how I look and move, which makes other people's opinions less important. I will never, and have never, given in to peer pressure. The more someone tries to change my mind the less likely I am to do what they want. If they're trying to persuade me then they don't have enough respect for me and my decisions.

Honesty is the most important thing to me in any relationship. I don't lie if I can ever help it and expect the same from others. I don't make promises I can't keep-ever. I will promise to

TRY to do things but that's no guarantee that they'll get done.

I love children and animals, to read, to bake. I clean when I'm upset, or go for a walk. I'm honest about my feelings. I can be blunt (too blunt for others' comfort sometimes) and I can talk around a subject—hinting at my meaning. I enjoy discussions when they don't turn into trying to convince each other to change their minds. I can usually see both sides of an issue and can argue both. I strongly believe that there are two sides to every story and the truth is somewhere in between. I don't judge people quickly and am awful with names.

I am definitely a heterosexual. I haven't dated extensively but that doesn't bother me. Usually when I like someone I keep that interest for a long time regardless of how things work out. I thought I was in love once, but it was really the relationship I loved, not him. He and I are still good friends and I still know he thinks I'm special. We were comfortable being ourselves with each other, regardless of what face we showed the outside world...

...I am very determined and stubborn. I have perfected my own self-discipline and set exceptionally high expectations/goals for myself—and usually achieve them.<sup>18</sup>

Fall 1997:

...I have found that I enjoy playing strong female characters. For example—Nessa. She doesn't let anyone push her around. She knows what she wants and how to get it. She wouldn't be the type of person to stand around screaming (as so many female characters do in movies and on TV) she would do her best to solve the problem herself—not let some strong man come in and rescue her. Those types of characters drive me crazy—probably because they encourage the opinion

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<sup>18</sup> McFarland, Acting Class journal (Huntingdon, PA: Juniata College, January 30, 1997).

that women are all weak, helpless beings who need to be protected and taken care of.<sup>19</sup>

Date Unknown: Probably 1998:

Mom doesn't think I can "make it" in theatre. She told me that to my face. Well, I asked her...So I guess they wouldn't pay for grad school if I get an MA in directing. But if I went on in education I think they would. That isn't right. I grew up with them telling me I could be anything I wanted to be if I worked for it. I guess that only counts if the career I choose meets with their approval. As long as I have enough money to survive then I don't care about being successful. I want to be happy...I had hoped that receiving the only theatre award at Juniata would give what I do more validation. Apparently that isn't the case. I really would like the support (and faith) of my parents but as Antonio said—it isn't their life. I know that. I know that I have to do what's best for me. I need to make sure that theatre is it. At the end of last semester I wanted to keep theatre as my recreation. I didn't want it to be something that I "need" to do. It is though. When I'm involved with theatre I feel like I'm doing something—my life has purpose. Otherwise I'm just existing. Going from day to day without really breathing in the sweet air or seeing the colors that surround me.<sup>20</sup>

June 4, 2003:

I re-blocked 2/3rds of the show. I'm terrified. I'm excited. I feel like I'm listening to my original impulses, even though I don't know where they came from. I thought I'd have trouble re-blocking but it is actually exciting, invigorating. My heart has been racing all day and I could feel the adrenaline flowing through me.

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<sup>19</sup> McFarland, Acting class journal (Huntingdon, PA: Juniata College, 1997).

<sup>20</sup> McFarland, personal journal, date unknown.

The actors are fighting me a bit but they're trying. One is having an especially difficult time. I warned all of them in an email last night that I was going to take things in a different direction. I can understand their hesitation—I'm asking them to go against their instincts.

They did tell me that they think it's better this way but that doesn't make it easier for them to change. I hate the fact that they're fighting me. I don't feel like they don't trust me—just that they are scared. We don't train in anything but realism so I understand. And if I'm scared then how could they not be?<sup>21</sup>

June 2003:

The single most helpful thing I experienced in rehearsal was probably to trust my instincts. Sometimes they were wrong but most of the time things felt right. My impulses usually made things better, they make the scene zing. That's especially true when I'm talking about connections between characters or when I think one character is referring (consciously or not) to another part of the story. When those connections come to me they seem to really work and they are things the actors haven't thought of. I think of it only as script analysis but sometimes they seem to come from somewhere else. Those are the ones that I found I needed to listen to the most closely. It's almost like these ideas are just floating out there in mid air, swirling around me, and sometimes they jump into my head just when I need them; spears of inspiration at the appropriate moment. These were instincts that seemed to come more from the heart than from the head. Sometimes I couldn't understand what my insight was trying to tell me, I only knew that the scene needed something different, a new twist...I have to admit that those moments were the best in the play. They were

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<sup>21</sup> McFarland, personal journal (June 4, 2004).



also when I got the most excited and enthusiastic during rehearsal.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> McFarland, reflection paper (Villanova, PA: Villanova University, June 2003).

## APPENDIX B: POETRY

### Feline to Fear

A cat slinking in the alley  
cold dark eyes  
unflinching, unfeeling  
she darts this way  
an arrow of ideas, morals  
I recoil in horror  
those eyes  
dead, slitted in hate  
claws rip my still beating  
heart from me  
this devil's helper devours my life  
my will, dreams, hope  
spitting out aspirations  
as though they're putrid  
last she feeds on love  
those eyes  
ecstasy at my pain  
DIE feline!  
as I have died.<sup>24</sup>

Silence Seeps in  
cold  
dark  
unfeeling  
soothing away emotion  
she stops, speaks  
broken silence  
corrupt  
violated<sup>23</sup>

I finally got something to say  
for once I don't want to listen  
but no one hears a single word I say  
Hello!  
Will you listen  
Where is everyone who said  
I'll be there for you  
    You can count on me  
        I'm here whenever you need me  
I need you now  
Can't you see that?  
Look at me  
at my eyes  
They're pleading for release  
are you BLIND  
are you DEAF  
I have problems too

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<sup>23</sup> Cece McFarland, personal journal (May 1993).

<sup>24</sup> Cece McFarland, personal journal (May 2, 1993).

I turned your hurt and anger into sympathy and forgiveness  
do the same for me  
I haven't any more room  
I'm drowning in emotion  
dying alone  
and scared  
sound the alarm  
Please, don't look away  
Loneliness will not save me  
But you can<sup>25</sup>

Surrounded by you  
contained in your comfort  
I am an intruder  
My outward calm betrays  
the inner storm  
Let the winds howl and the  
thunders roll  
The rain needs to fall  
But I'm scared to let it out...  
Out of my control  
it could become anything  
turn me into anything  
or nothing<sup>26</sup>

Feel the loneliness  
eating you alive  
gnawing at your soul  
sucking out your dreams  
Life fades away  
Leaving hopeless despair  
and never ending pain  
The agony of loss  
or  
the torment of loneliness  
choose now  
for eternity  
no love  
no trust  
no hope  
no happiness  
every path leads down the same trail  
every choice full of hate  
for yourself for him for me  
battle the inevitable  
broken piece by piece

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<sup>25</sup> Cece McFarland, personal journal (date unknown).

<sup>26</sup> Cece McFarland, personal journal (date unknown).

drown in your own tears  
sledgehammer to the heart  
sedative to the mind  
fade into oblivion  
choose—refuse to try  
    attempt and lose  
either way you die<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> McFarland, personal journal (date unknown).

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## VITA

Cece Marie McFarland was born in Rochester, NY. After graduating from high school she spent a year in Germany as a nanny. While attending Juniata College in Pennsylvania, she completed three years of an Elementary Education degree before switching to Literature and Drama. She graduated *magna cum laude* and on time in 1999. In 2003 she completed a Master's Degree in theatre from Villanova University, also in Pennsylvania. At the University of Missouri she was the assistant director of the MU Interactive Theatre Troupe. She helped to develop scripts, cast and train actors, oversaw the day-to-day operations of the troupe, and facilitated countless performances for students, faculty, and deans. Through interactive theatre she also worked on an NSF ADVANCE grant and the Ford Foundation Difficult Dialogue grant. McFarland also performed with the MU Troubling Violence Performance Project and directed shows both on and off campus. She holds a Ph.D. minor in College Teaching and attended the LaMaMa International Directing Symposium in 2005. Her research interests include performance studies, feminist theatre, interactive theatre/theatre for social justice, and interdisciplinary approaches to acting, dramatic literature, and theatre history classes.