You Can't Just Be a Picture: Expressionistic Memory and Trauma in "Lion in the Streets"

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2017

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
SANTA CRUZ

YOU CAN’T JUST BE A PICTURE:
Expressionistic Memory and Trauma in Lion in the Streets

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS
in
THEATER ARTS
by
Quest Sky Zeidler

June 2017

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ABSTRACT

YOU CAN’T JUST BE A PICTURE:
Expressionistic Memory and Trauma in Lion in the Streets

by

Quest Sky Zeidler

Non-naturalistic forms of theater are key to effectively representing psychic states onstage. Judith Thompson’s Lion in the Streets dramatizes the experience and recollection of trauma by blending reality, memory, and fantasy so the three become indistinguishable. Combining expressionism with a memory play, Thompson’s writing manifests internal states through external means to present the fractured, fragmented, and flexible ways in which the psyche recalls the past.

Using my production of Lion in the Streets (UC Santa Cruz, Experimental Theater, Winter 2017) as a case study, I argue the necessity for an expressionistic approach to directing that embraces the semiotics of the stage. I begin with an analysis of how Thompson’s script operates, explaining the relationship between expressionism and memory. Through an in-depth dramatic analysis of my choices as a director, regarding both design and direction, I prove the relevance of my stylistic approach to the medium in presenting narratives of trauma.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I wish to thank the cast and crew of Lion in the Streets. As my group of collaborators, their incredible talents (in acting, design, and tech) were absolutely instrumental in both developing and realizing my artistic vision for the production. Without them the production—and therefore this paper—would not have been possible.

I wish to thank Professors Kimberly Jannarone, Michael Chemers, Brandin Barón-Nusbaum, Danny Scheie, Patty Gallagher, Jim Bierman, Amy Ginther, and Gerald Casel, as well as instructors Dor Cosby Atkinson, Cid Pearlman, and Philippa Kelly. Not only have they been invaluable in crafting my ideas about performance and in constructing this thesis, but the support they have given me as a scholar and an artist has allowed me to achieve things I never could have foreseen.

Lastly, I wish to thank my loved ones who have helped me in the development of my research: my parents, my graduate cohort, Austin Kottkamp, Rory Strahan-Mauk, and Sarah Cowell.
SECTION 1: Introduction

The idiosyncrasies of theater as a medium allow for unique representations of psychic states, with performers enacting and embodying imagined narratives in the same time and space as the audience. This is the very substance of the medium, and the live creation and recreation of emotion onstage allows for an inside-outness not seen able to be presented within other art forms. An astounding example of this is Judith Thompson’s *Lion in the Streets*, a play virtually unheard of outside the playwright’s homeland of Canada, which therefore lies outside the theatrical canon of the United States. I first learned of the play’s existence in reading an article from *Theatre Research in Canada*; it was mentioned in a single sentence and never brought up again. The title alone captivated me, and upon reading it I found myself stunned. It was like nothing I’d ever read before, presenting an engrossing plot that I found hard to untangle and yet thrilling all the same.

The play’s main character, Isobel, a nine-year-old Portuguese-Canadian girl, finds herself lost in the community where she grew up. She silently watches as traumas unfold and envelop the people around her. Through her observation of others, she realizes that she is a ghost and that she was murdered 17 years prior to the events of the play. Eventually, she finds the man who murdered her and grants him forgiveness, allowing her to ascend to Heaven. Isobel’s story serves mostly as a framing device, a ghostly presence that exists within and around the narratives of her home; her quest becomes secondary to the interwoven tragedies of those still alive.
The intentional ambiguity of *Lion in the Streets* drew me in, as did its central theme of trauma. Through its dozens of characters and unrelated scenes, it presents and represents stories that often go unseen and unheard. Additionally, the modes of storytelling Thompson employs throughout the piece are unique, creating meaning through methods otherwise unexplored. By selecting this piece for my Capstone Project, I sought to oversee these qualities of the work by directing a production of it. In this paper I will address and explain my methodology in directing the 2017 Winter Quarter production of *Lion in the Streets* in the UC Santa Cruz Theater Arts Department Experimental Theater, focusing on the relationship between ambiguity and trauma on stage.

### SECTION 2. Key Terms

My methods of directing *Lion in the Streets* are embedded deeply within the uniqueness of theater as an art form, specifically through an understanding of its history and the formal ways in which it operates. More specifically, my interest lies in the deviation from artistic norms in order to make full use of the idiosyncratic nature of live performance, delving into the semiotic currency of theatricality within an expressionistic approach.

In the late 19th and 20th centuries, modernist arts created many new forms throughout a wide range of genres. A figurative monolith was erected within theater through the advent of realism, as theater practitioners became concerned foremost with the representation of real life “realistically” onstage, seeking verisimilitude.
Realism may be described as an illusory form of theater, attempting to maximize the willing suspension of disbelief and create an illusion of reality on stage. This can also be referred to as creating minimal aesthetic distance, allowing the audience member to be as completely submerged within the fiction as possible. An extreme form of realism took form in naturalism, in contrast with non-naturalist styles, founded on principles other than the accurate portrayal of real life. Non-naturalistic forms, of which there are many (expressionism, surrealism, dada, futurism, epic theater, absurdism, theater of the ridiculous, theater of cruelty, etc.) are far less concerned with being illusory and may often create greater aesthetic distance, keeping the audience aware that the events they are watching are not real and simply being enacted onstage. A major facet of maximizing aesthetic distance is the production’s theatricality. Theatricality, or the quality of being inherently theatrical, i.e. relating to live performance, is difficult to define on its own; I opt for an approach using Robert Nunn’s discussion of theatrical and filmic semiosis.

Semiotics is the study of signs and symbols, specifically how they work to create meaning in language and art. In theater the actors, design, and staging work in tandem with the narrative as a set of symbols on the stage, operating in specific ways to create a performance and convey some sort of artistic significance. Robert Nunn, in his article “Flickering Lights and Declaiming Bodies: Semiosis in Theatre and Film,” very clearly and non-hierarchically dissects the inherent differences of meaning-making between the stage and screen. He pinpoints presence as the divisive feature between theater and film, explaining how an audience’s observation of the projected
bodies of actors in film is founded on the illusion that these absent bodies are present whereas the audience’s observation of the symbols created through (and on) the live bodies of actors in theater is founded on the illusion that these present bodies are absent. Theatricality, then, is an essential quality of theater as a medium that involves the liveness of the performers and their presence in the vicinity of the audience.

Nunn’s theories are foundational to me as a theater artist. He notes how non-naturalism does not tend to operate well in film, which helps to explain the ubiquity of realism within cinema. Film, and therefore realism, is inescapable within contemporary culture, heavily overshadowing theater. The ensuing dominance of realism in theater, perhaps attempting to recreate the success of film, creates work in the theater that is does not make use of the essential qualities of the medium. Theatricality cannot be explored within realist works to the same lengths that it can in non-naturalist ones.

In the context of Lion in the Streets, the form of non-naturalism I will be focusing on is expressionism. At its core, expressionism is concerned with the portrayal of internal states through external means. Theatrical elements such as language, character, and plot forego any attempt at verisimilitude, instead becoming distorted to emphasize the emotional or psychic states of the characters. Julia A. Walker traces the history and origins of the movement in her book Expressionism and Modernism in the American Theatre. She notes its origins in the modernity and

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industrialization of the early 20th century, specifically how new modes of communication split the perception of bodies, voices, and words, allowing the three to become dissociated and disparate. Expressionism has often become synonymous with the specific strain of German expressionism, perhaps most famous in films such as *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920), and analysis of the modern impact of the movement as a whole has often been reduced to this faction. I find rooting an understanding of the movement in the stylistic idiosyncrasies of German expressionism an unnecessary diversion from the central tenets of expressionism as a whole and a limitation on an otherwise useful term.

Lastly, when discussing stylization, it is worthwhile to touch upon the very fraught notions of content and form. Though the division of these concepts has been problematized time and time again, most famously by Susan Sontag, I argue that expressionism is an intentional juncture of the two. The content of a dramatic work contains its narrative and themes; it may be thought of as the subject of the piece, the thing being depicted or spoken of. The form is the way the content is realized through the dramatic elements and structure. These two qualities are interconnected, because the means of conveyance (form) will inherently impact what is conveyed (content); the point of distinguishing them is a matter of identification and not of separation. Expressionism serves as a case in point: the external representation of the internal manifests itself as a formal representation of the content. That is to say, within

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expressionist drama the content determines the form because the dramatic structures are built around the theme and narrative being portrayed. Expressionism is a literalization of the figurative; it opts out of realism in order to further invest in theatricality and semiotic modes that prioritize the content within the form.

SECTION 3. Argument

In selecting a play for production, it is necessary to ask the question, “Why this play now?” *Lion in the Streets* speaks to me as a theater artist because of the way Thompson employs non-naturalism throughout the piece. She renders the past and present as indiscernible, as well as constantly bringing reality into question by blending it with memory and fantasy. These unclear boundaries operate through the theatricality of the work, proving live performance to be an essential quality to it. A small cast of actors is tasked to play an abundance of characters, each taking on multiple distinct roles. Referred to as a relay play, the narrative follows a different character from scene to scene, passing on the figurative baton to a lesser character or bystander from the previous scene. The script is flexible, allowing for a wide variety of approaches to realize it for performance.

The piece also has immense political relevance, which is always a very significant quality for me in selecting a play. Female playwrights, such as Thompson, are underrepresented; meanwhile the women in her play are well-developed characters and outnumber the men. She writes about characters who are queer or

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4 In the interest of length please refer to Appendix A for a full roster of characters and the actors who played them.
immigrants or disabled; she brings voices to groups that often lack voices because they are marginalized. The traumas they face are current issues; the Theater Arts Department selected my proposal to direct *Lion in the Streets* long before the 2016 election, but the sociopolitical material from which it draws has only become more relevant.

My reasons for selecting this play are instrumental in the methods I used to direct it. Here I will discuss the place of *Lion in the Streets* within the œuvre of expressionist theater, as well as this style as central to the depiction of trauma, before delving into the specifics of our production. In analyzing my own direction, I will argue that the expressionistic directing techniques used in *Lion in the Streets* allowed the production to fully utilize theatrical semiosis through an in-depth exploration of the medium. Furthermore, this approach brought forth modes of storytelling that hold a deeper relevance and meaning to the narrative being conveyed. I will divide the analysis of my directing methodology of the production into two distinct parts: the overseeing of design; and the realization of the performance through casting, physicality, and staging.

**SECTION 4. Genre and Structure in *Lion in the Streets***

In her essay “Constructing Fictions of an Essential Reality, or, ‘This Pickshur is Niiice’: Judith Thompson’s *Lion in the Streets,*” Jen Harvie proposes that it is
possible to read *Lion* as a realist play containing situations that reflect daily life.\(^5\) This is a difficult claim, and I contest its accuracy. One may be able to explain Isobel’s paranormal presence by defining the piece as operating within the style of magic realism, in which the fantastical is accepted as part of the quotidian. (Magic realism’s origins in Latin American fiction and Isobel’s status as a Lusophone immigrant do make for a tempting connection; however, the style still must adhere to the general rules of realism and therefore I am arguing against it as well.) Even the possibility of magic realism fails to contain much of the piece: Harvie’s claim becomes more complicated in moments such as those between Sue and Antonio (Isobel’s Father), David and Father Hayes, and Christine and Scarlett. Antonio spontaneously appears while Sue is talking to Isobel; when his daughter approaches him to speak with him, his answers are minimal and non-sequitur. He disappears after Sue attempts to introduce herself to him, and Sue then swiftly exits as she simultaneously muses about him and forgets about Isobel entirely. Isobel quickly realizes her father is a ghost, but his behavior as a paranormal entity differs greatly from hers, which goes unexplained by Thompson. Later on, as Christine is conducting an interview with Scarlett about her cerebral palsy, Scarlett begins a story about her mysterious sexual partner, the “Midnight Man,” who enters while she speaks and begins to dance with her, something unnoticed or unremarked upon by Christine, despite its clear reality onstage. Most striking in context of Harvie’s claim of realism, however, is the scene

between David and Father Hayes. David enters confession with Father Hayes and
finds himself observing as Hayes recounts (and relives) his darkest secret and gravest
sin. Hayes reveals that he knew David as a child and failed to prevent him from
drowning. David himself struggles with this information, first insisting its falseness,
then forgiving Father Hayes and speaking as if the confession is true. Though
Thompson has already introduced the supernatural into the world of Lion through
Isobel, there is no clear answer whether David is alive, dead, or undead. After all, in
the scene prior to the one with Father Hayes, he appeared as a bartender and
interacted with characters as if he was present and tangible. David seems unsure of
the truth of his own reality, something that defies realism. While dissecting this
particular scene one of the production’s dramaturgs, Odessa Cross, noted the
impossibility of creating an internal logic for Lion in the Streets as a whole. Each time
we (the actors, dramaturgs, and myself) thought we’d nailed down the piece as a
whole by explaining one scene, the logic of the play fell out of place elsewhere.

Surely, portions of the play are rooted in a realistic depiction of everyday life,
in juxtaposition with the points which deviate from it wildly. Harvie explains that
Thompson’s work “may be seen to combine a powerful level of realism with equally
powerful deconstructions of reality,” a statement that holds more truth to Lion than
her claim that the text as a whole can be read as realist. Indeed, it seems to be
essential to Lion in the Streets that it refuses to be a coherent reflection of reality. The
central connecting factor between the aforementioned scenes is that they heavily
depend on memory: Antonio as a piece of Isobel’s memory, David listening to Father
Hayes remembering him, and Scarlett recounting her visits from the “Midnight Man.” Memory is a central component to Lion as a whole, surfacing in every scene in one way or another. Though the term has not been applied to Lion in the Streets, it is easy to see how it can be placed within the genre of memory plays. Typically memory plays, such as The Glass Menagerie by Tennessee Williams and How I Learned to Drive by Paula Vogel, follow a single narrating character as they recall and reenact past moments in their life, often with this narrator partaking in audience address throughout. Lion in the Streets, then, is what I call an explosion of the memory play; it does in its core fit the definition of a memory play but also serves to rupture and expand it. Isobel, after all, fills the role of a narrating character and speaks almost solely in audience address. She is not the piece’s sole narrator, though she is the only one aware (or, perhaps, unaware) of the fourth wall. As the piece’s other characters filter in and out, they bring their own memories with them, which are triggered within the action of their scenes and play out before them, Isobel, and the audience. In accordance with Harvie, the world of Lion in the Streets exists as both the real and the remembered, a memory play intertwining the present with recollections of the past.

The motifs Judith Thompson uses to explode the memory play can all be identified as expressionist techniques. That is, the way Thompson treats elements such as language, character, and plot are more evocative of characters’ internal states than they are attempts at creating an illusion of reality. Furthermore, by labeling the piece as expressionistic, we understand that the ways that Thompson defies realism are not arbitrary or purely stylistic, but that they serve a purpose in the creation of

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meaning within *Lion in the Streets* as a manifestation of the internal. George Toles notes about Thompson’s earlier works (as his essay predates *Lion in the Streets*):

Perhaps the most distinctive, and consistent, quality of her [Thompson’s] characters is their lack of a public, social self that monitors and limits the exposure of the private self. Thompson often establishes [...] a familiar social context [...] whose properties are generally understood, and then shows one character after another doing violence to decorum as images from their unconscious force their way into speech. (1)

The characters in *Lion in the Streets* are not simply unfiltered; their language often defies rational explanation. Oftentimes their speech slips from the everyday into parlance that approaches the poetic. Bill, for example, begins a monologue, “YOU turned your back on me!! You you—look at you in that… sweatsuit thing you’re not—I mean look at her, really,” and by the end it has transformed into statements like, “Your face is a drawing your body, lines,” and, “you talking and talking with all the mothers, storming, storming together your words like crazy swallows, swooping and pivots and… landing… softly on a branch.”6 By establishing the convention of the subconscious erupting forth, through poetry or brutal honesty, Thompson realizes the unreal, allowing characters to speak what would normally remain unspoken.

Language is not the only protean structure within *Lion in the Streets*, as actors are required to transform throughout the piece. Twenty-nine characters appear in *Lion in the Streets*, portrayed in the original production by an ensemble of six actors. Both

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In all quotes taken from *Lion* the punctuation and capitalization will be presented as published in the script. Thompson uses these writing conventions flexibly in order to reflect the intonation, pauses, etc. of speech; these are not errors and are ubiquitous in the text, therefore they will not be marked “sic.”
the ensemble and the audience are given Herculean tasks: the actors must each portray a wide variety of characters with clarity and precision, and the audience must follow the identities and narratives of these characters as the actors transform from one to the next. The transitions from scene to scene follow this dynamic as well, each scene reaching a climax of its own before rather unceremoniously flowing into the next. The audience is transported to the next scene with no foreshadowing of a change in time and location. Dialogue sporadically helps the audience locate themselves in space, but temporal changes are specifically left unclear, only ever hinted at by cause and effect or particular events (such as Sue and Bill’s divorce or Father Hayes’s death). These whirlwind techniques of ever-changing language, characters, and settings provide a general—and intentional—lack of clarity throughout the piece. Thompson blurs the line between the baseline reality of the piece, what the audience would consider “actually happening,” and where reality is intermingled with the remembered or imagined. The events themselves provide little clarity throughout, as evinced through the Lion’s intentionally foggy and fractured internal logic. The structures that compose Lion in the Streets, then, bear a great resemblance to the psyche’s recollection of remembered events. By putting the memory play in conversation with expressionist techniques, Lion in the Streets represents both present and remembered events, external and internal states in ways that reflect their inseparable natures.
SECTION 5. Expressionism and Trauma

For the intersection of the memory play and expressionism to operate in *Lion in the Streets* memory must be an internal state that can be expressed outwardly through the play’s structures. Rephrased, memory must be internalized, perhaps even part of the subconscious or preconscious, and therefore something that the characters may not be able to directly access. The text repeatedly supports this: when Rodney is at first unable to recognize Michael, a prominent figure from his tragic past; when Sue claims no knowledge of her husband’s telephonic infidelity; when Joan remains ignorant of Ben’s sexual abuse at the hands of her late husband; when David denies his own drowning. The factor that connects the memories (and the characters) throughout *Lion* is the traumatic nature of the remembered event.

Ann Pellegrini delves deep into the non-naturalistic representation of trauma as seen in Paula Vogel’s *How I Learned to Drive*. Written seven years after *Lion in the Streets*, *How I Learned to Drive* bears a plethora of narrative and stylistic similarities to it: both are expressionistic memory plays centered around young women who suffered tragedy at the hands of older men with power over them; both fragment the narrative structures, require actors to play multiple characters, and create a semi-permeable fourth wall. Most significant here is the way the plays operate with regards to trauma, rendering the commentary of Pellegrini’s article on Vogel’s work strikingly relevant to *Lion in the Streets*. It becomes clear why these pieces opt for similar modes of storytelling given the likeness between their content: “Of course, part of the problem with trauma is precisely its resistance to the literal, to the thing
itself, and it may be this resistance to the literal that also makes the literary and, yes, the theatrical such resonant sites through with to think trauma anew.” Vogel and Thompson both tend toward expressionistic stylization in their respective works in order to fully explore the trauma through the means of trauma. As discussed previously, they seek to match their form with their content.

SECTION 6. Expressionism and Design in Lion in the Streets

Within a theatrical production the director’s role includes overseeing the elements of design. By working closely with each designer, the director curates their creations to ensure stylistic unity and consistent meaning-making throughout. In order to support my expressionistic goals on Lion in the Streets, I pushed my designers to pursue an inside-outness with their designs: to represent the script’s interior workings of metaphor and structure instead of the more literal or realistic aspects of the narrative.

Upon walking into the Experimental Theater, the audience’s first interaction with our production of Lion in the Streets was their first glimpse at the scenic design. Thompson’s script gives a great amount of flexibility and autonomy for design, the stage directions giving little or no suggestion throughout. This blank canvas was intimidating; the production’s scenic and costume designer, Cody Lee, remarked

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early on that the simplicity provoked no mental images for them.\(^8\) The designer’s role on the production is to realize the vision of both the playwright and the director, and given little material from the former, Cody’s job was a difficult one. Thompson transports the audience from location to location instantaneously, a different place in each scene. Isobel further complicates the specificity of location. As a ghost and narrator as well as a real human being, she consistently occupies several spaces simultaneously throughout the play, with one foot in the scene, another in the audience, and her whole being in a supernatural and semiotic third space. It would never have been practical to render a different set for each distinct location, nor would it have served the text’s nonreal approach.

Thus, the scenic design became rooted instead in the iconic world of the play, materializing its themes and atmosphere. Allowing the problem of Isobel, both practically and within the narrative, to become the solution, I resolved to explore the meaning-making of her central needs as a character. Claudia Barnett summarizes Isobel’s objectives (her wants and needs within the narrative) in the first act: “At first, thinking she is lost, she wants someone to take her home; then, realizing she is dead, she wants someone to take her to heaven.”\(^9\) However, though Isobel is the central character, her narrative only operates through the struggles of others; she is absent as an active participant within the scenes, her theatrical presence therefore serving as a framing device for the stories of others.

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\(^8\) Several personnel on this production, including Cody Lee, are gender nonbinary (a term defined within this paper). The pronouns “they/them/their” are used in a singular, gender neutral sense here.

The first step in realizing a scenic design for the production was deciding to use a unit set, in which a single design serves the whole performance with small changes to signify new settings. Given the number of locations visited throughout, the unit set would serve to reinforce the themes of the piece instead of depicting a specific space within which the actions would unfold. In other words, the scenic design would serve as a haunting presence, framing the scenes in a similar fashion to Isobel’s voyeuristic stance onstage. The ideas of death, grief, absence, detachment, and a sense of being misplaced crystallized into a scenic concept: the scenic design would suggest the interior of a funeral parlor (Figure 1).

The stage floor was painted to imitate old carpeting, pale coral and intentionally distorted to depict wear and tear. In the middle of the expanse of floor stood nine chairs, a couch, a wardrobe, a small end table, and a desk with a lamp. No two pieces of furniture matched, not in wood, upholstery, or period; these pieces were unified only through their antiquity and their muted, autumn/winter color scheme. Dominating the stage was a set of curtains at extreme upstage center, hung with fullness and elegantly pleated to evoke the ripplefold curtains that often background coffins in memorial services. A pair of Grecian columns flanked these curtains on their outer sides, each topped with an urn filled with flora. Though the scenic elements existed within the same thematic universe, they were simultaneously juxtapositional. The furniture selection and arrangement was inspired by the waiting areas within funeral homes; by facing these pieces away from the metaphoric funeral at the back wall, they interrupted a clear interpretation of the stage as a funeral in
itself. The dulled colors, the iconic imagery of the scenic centerpiece, and the presence of an audience facing the ceremony merged to complete the funerary imagery, while the multitude of furniture impeded the clarity of that narrative. Additionally, the primary symbolic feature of the iconic funeral, the coffin holding the corpse of the deceased, was notably absent.

Filling the negative space created between the curtains—not in the place of the coffin but instead emphasizing the vacancy—were hundreds of “MISSING” posters (Figure 2). Printed on white paper and affixed to the black surface of the back wall, images of Isobel’s face stared back at the audience, each beneath the word “MISSING” in a large typeface. This mass of papers disrupted the symbols being put forth by the rest of the scenic design, defying any attempt to interpret the play as a literal funeral and instead directing the audience to read these icons as a metaphor. The closure of a memorial service (note the linguistic tie back to “memory”) is rendered impossible and in its place the lack of the deceased body is emphasized. From the audience’s first glimpse upon entering the theater, the question is implanted, “Something awful has happened, but what exactly, and to whom?” The psychology of the production, its themes of trauma and loss, were foregrounded within the scenic design through its use of the poetical instead of the literal.

The way costume design operates onstage differs greatly from the workings of scenic design, meaning that, as designer of both, Cody was working simultaneously in drastically different media. Where scenic design literally and figuratively

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backgrounds the whole performance, creating a constant atmosphere for the performers to exist and create meaning within, costume makes its meaning both with the actors and on them. The body of the actor is one of the many sites of theatrical semiosis, but the clothing that body is wearing creates its own meaning both about and through the body wearing it. Furthermore, scenic design has the advantage of acting upon the stage’s blank symbolic canvas—or, rather than blank, it is always already charged as a space for the theatrical event, both literally and semiotically. The stage is an inherently extra-daily space, to borrow a term from Eugenio Barba, meaning that it is essentially beyond the ordinary or pedestrian in order to achieve theatricality. Costume, on the other hand, requires greater momentum as a signifier to transcend its utilitarian and quotidian function. More specifically, while costume is rich for indicating external information about the play (period, location, temperature, weather) and its characters (gender, age, economic status, occupation), the barrage of these realistic indicators may overwhelm any deeper symbolism attempted within the design. Lion in the Streets has a wealth of characters to swiftly introduce and establish to the audience, each of these with various different identities, backgrounds, and personalities that are most easily and efficiently brought forth through social and cultural codes embedded in their clothing. Adding the further semiotic work of depicting these characters’ psychic and emotional states through the materiality of their costumes may become burdensome.

As a means of stylization, Cody sought to color-code the actors, so to speak: each of the eight actors was first assigned a color (Ashley, white; Natalie, yellow; Gwyn, dark blue; Noah, violet; Celeste, light blue; Alyssa, green; Emmet, red; Keegan, orange). This color was then intended to appear in each of their respective characters’ costumes as an accent, ranging in hue from character to character but rooted in this initial base color choice associated with the specific performer. The goal here was to create stylistic unity and greater aesthetic distance, drawing attention to the actor as a consistent body throughout the piece by repeated use of a single accent color. In practice, however, this technique was ineffective. The use of color was often haphazard, the hues not being close enough to translate as a consistent motif and often being too understated to be noticeable. At times, certain characters lacked the performer’s trademark color completely: Father Hayes was completely devoid of green, Edward bore no orange, and Scarlett wore scarlet instead of blue. Additionally, the semiotic value of accent colors in costume pieces was simply too weak to be picked up on by the standard audience member. Clothes and their colors are an omnipresent part of daily life without any overarching artistic vision guiding it, and while the audience may pick up more external information communicated by clothes, as discussed above, this color-coding was too particular to be noticed. Therefore, it is easy to disregard and overlook color symbolism in costuming unless the coloration achieves extra-daily status. Perhaps more effective within the costume design overall was the generally formal aesthetic used throughout, with strong use of black and grey, to further the funerary motif. Though similarly subtle, this facet of the
design was not an attempt at meaning-making of its own but instead a means of supporting the semiosis of the scenery, allowing the themes to transcend the built environment and pervade the bodies of its performers.

Where Cody’s scenic design existed in the realm of the expressionistic, their costumes instead fell into a more realist aesthetic. The attempt at connecting an actor’s various characters through color lacked the scale and follow through to make it a significant aspect of the production; a stronger costume design may have been achieved through tying their meaning in further with that established by the scenery. Regardless, the juxtaposition of realism and expressionism was not an errant quality of the production, as noted earlier in Harvie. By creating a costume design that plays into the qualities of *Lion in the Streets* that represent the external instead of the internal, showing what the characters may be wearing in actuality instead of presenting their psyches on their sleeves, the production played into other structures Thompson set in place.

Further juxtaposition was created between the apparel of the many ensemble characters and the costume design for Isobel. As she was only constant character in the piece the audience had more time to interpret and digest Isobel as a symbol, therefore her clothing was able to bear more semiotic weight. In fact, the translation of Isobel’s circumstances through a more literal or realistic costume design would be a fraught enterprise. Her phantom presence is both fantastical and metaphoric, as Barnett says of a character in Thompson’s *Sled*, “she is both memory and ghost.”

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Isobel’s psychic states and figurative role within the play are of greater significance than the external factors clothing may usually translate. In establishing a design for Isobel, Cody and I decided that the central function behind Isobel’s costume would be to locate her as existing in a different world than the rest of the characters.

Where other characters’ costumes became more literal, Isobel’s was founded largely in metaphor. Cody approached me with images of dying flowers (predominantly roses) as inspiration for a dress, hoping to emphasize concepts of camouflage and decay. Where the other actors’ costumes would signify them as participants within the funeral of the scenery, she would be tied more directly, almost a piece of scenery in herself, the constant watcher in their midst. Isobel would be one of the flowers atop the columns, imperfectly preserved. The association of flowers and decay reminded me of a garment I’d seen designed by Alexander McQueen, a dress with fresh flowers affixed to it as a memento mori. Cody’s design began using the shape of an upturned rose for the silhouette of Isobel’s skirt, but due in part to the need to make the piece maneuverable and, perhaps more chiefly, Cody’s lack of experience as a costume designer (this was their first production as such), this silhouette was ultimately unrealized in the finished product.

In certain respects, Isobel’s dress functioned in a literal fashion, or at least plausibly within the piece. Off-white with a tight collar, cuffed sleeves down to the elbow, and the skirt at mid-calf, it almost looked like something a girl Isobel’s age might attend church in (Figure 3). It could believably have been her burial gown. Its details, however, brought it out of the world of the strictly realistic. The sleeves and
an accessory layer over the skirt were sheer, evoking ghostly translucency. A belt of artificial flowers in tones matching the foliage on the columns looped around Isobel’s waist, often shedding pieces of itself across the stage during performances; akin to the McQueen dress in its runway debut. To add an otherworldly aspect to Isobel’s appearance Cody instructed Ashley to apply yellow makeup on her temples, creating a connection between her flesh and the aged fabric she wore to render her entire being as the figurative dying flower. By sheer chance, the metaphor was multifold and polysemic, imbued with multiple, simultaneous meanings. The yellow makeup was applied from the Ben Nye Bruise & Abrasions Wheel, a matter of pragmatics that brought further meaning to the surface: within the narrative of the play, Ben bashed Isobel’s face in with a brick. These yellow marks became more than a tie-in to the floral motif, now signifying bruises. Similarly, her skirt was lightly dyed in an ombré fashion, a light wine-stain color at the top to an aged yellow at the bottom. Again, this was inspired by the images of roses Cody had been working with, but created further connection with discolored wounds of the flesh. As a character detached from any realism within the play and wholly constituted of a non-naturalistic body, creating a more expressionistic and therefore symbolic design for Isobel was more possible than for other characters, allowing a reciprocal relationship of meaning-making between herself and her attire.

In comparison with scenic and costume design, lighting and sound are both literally and metaphorically much less tangible. Within the context of realism, they both operate to further the illusory aspects of the work. On the contrary, within a non-
naturalistic setting these elements serve a similar function in the creation of a non-real or metatheatrical world of the play.\textsuperscript{14} Due to the simultaneous artistic and pragmatic purposes of lighting for the theater, expressionistic lighting mainly functioned in Eric Liu’s design for the production as a means of demarcating remembered, imaginary, or supernatural moments within the play through use of color and isolation. This specificity helped guide the audience’s understanding of these intense moments in which internal expression becomes intertwined with the material of the narrative without explicating what exactly is real or true. Several of these lighting moments happen during the scene between Scarlett and Christine. As Christine entered Scarlett’s apartment, the stage was filled with warm general light. Once Scarlett began talking about her “Midnight Man,” the lights dimmed at a glacial pace, so slowly the audience barely registered that anything was changing, isolating Scarlett in center stage and Christine on her armchair. As Scarlett danced with the “Midnight Man,” she was plunged into silhouette, almost reaching the edge of the lit area (Figure 4). This darkness functioned as a rather transparent metaphor, bringing midnight along with the “Midnight Man,” but also forced the audience into a perspective similar to Scarlett’s within the remembered (or imagined) event. Their visibility of the action became limited, though not impossible, echoing Scarlett’s role in the situation: “My midnight man is my midnight man, get it? You can’t SEE night, you can’t SEE when there’s no moon why?”\textsuperscript{15} Christine’s probing questions caused

\textsuperscript{14} Metatheatricality is a dramatic technique that calls attention to the nature of the performance as a piece live theater; it is a self-awareness of the art piece.

\textsuperscript{15} Thompson, \textit{Lion}, 46.
the lights to restore to their initial brightness and warmth, pulling Scarlett out of her memory and the narrative back to the present. Later in the scene, as Scarlett began taunting Christine with visions of Hell, the stage descended into a red wash, playing with iconic imagery associated with the infernal. Again, this was a moment of the imaginary, Scarlett extrapolating or divining a future characterized by a fantastical, religious departure from reality.

Nina Mostowfi’s sound design enacted similar expressionistic functions to the lighting, reinforcing moments of memory or imagination. Several of the monologues were underscored, with appropriate music or sound effects playing underneath the characters’ speech. The sound supplied that which was not present, allowing absent bodies or images to occupy auditory space as a means of manifesting themselves. This embodiment of the figurative was rooted in motifs from the text, sometimes arising where music or sound was called upon in the stage directions and at other times where it was not. Sue’s striptease for Bill played out over classic burlesque music (“The Stripper” by David Rose & His Orchestra); Maria narrated Antonio’s death with Portuguese guitar in the background (“La Partida” by Marta Pereira de Costa); waves crashed while Father Hayes recalled the day that David died; a chorus of frogs croaked as Rodney asked, “Am I a frog or am I a toad?”¹⁶ In each of these moments sound was delineated clearly from action, connecting what is said, what is seen, and what is heard, as well as creating a simultaneous distinction between the

¹⁶ Ibid., 55.
emotions or images evoked through the sound design and the reality of what is happening onstage.

**SECTION 7. Expressionism and Direction in Lion in the Streets**

With the script as a blueprint, the director’s chief role in a production is creating, defining, and polishing the action that takes place on stage. Though the narrative is outlined and established through the playwright’s work, it is the job of the director to realize and animate it by collaborating with the actors. I worked with my cast to fill the body of our production with the same inside-out quality as the design that would surround them. During early table-work sessions, discussing the script with the performers and dramaturgs, I noticed that the cast often struggled to rationalize the events of the play, attempting to ground an interpretation within a realistic context. As memory, imagination, and reality intertwine with no clear distinctions between them, the strands often contradict one another, troubling the reader/spectator: “The audience partakes in these various [mutually exclusive] realities without necessarily knowing which reality has a stronger truth claim.”

In Spring 2016 I assistant-directed on Kirsten Brandt’s production of *A Dream Play* by August Strindberg in the Experimental Theater. Strindberg’s *A Dream Play* is seen as a precursor of expressionist theater, and as such this script presented similar difficulties to that production’s performers as *Lion* did to mine. Kirsten’s method of guiding the actors through this challenge was to help them pin down the script, to

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17 Harvie, “Pickshur,” 53.
define real situations out of the surreal ones presented to them. As someone who finds the accuracy of Strindberg’s depictions of dream states the most compelling feature of the work, the introduction of realistic parameters to *Dream Play* was a tactic that failed to make sense to me. In watching the finished product, I found the production often stunted in its contradictory attempts to root the narrative in this way.

As mentioned earlier in a statement from Odessa, our production found that nailing down an internal logic for *Lion in the Streets* would be an impossible task. In their task to embody the text, the actors were faced with the challenge of creating characters whose realities were unclear, and coming from schools of acting dominated by realism, they sought to clarify the play’s intentional lack of clarity. Instead of trying to solidify the play’s fluid depiction of reality, memory, and imagination, I encouraged the actors to embrace it, to approach the script by looking at the characters’ internal states and how they create the work’s narrative structure. In directing *Lion in the Streets*, I rendered the internal states of the play through the external modes of casting, physicality, and staging.

**SECTION 7A. Casting and Gender**

Casting a production is the director’s first step to creating the corpus of the performance; one needs bodies in order to construct the body of the work. My experience in directing four full productions at UC Santa Cruz, as well as assistant-directing three more alongside faculty directors, has formed a specific opinion of casting. The casting pool within our Theater Arts Department has a strong majority of women. However, the dominant body of dramatic literature—and, therefore, most of
the productions put on within the department—does not provide representation for these women. In recent years, plays with majority male casts have even been selected, such as *The Normal Heart* (Experimental Theater, 2014), *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* (Barnstorm, 2014), and *Loot* (Experimental Theater, 2015). Productions with even numbers of men and women still fail to reflect the casting pool and it is difficult to find scripts with casts of mostly women. Thus, the female majority within the department has to work harder to get a smaller number of roles while the male minority is repeatedly rewarded regardless of talent. Even more difficult is the steadily growing number of transgender students, whose gender identities do not match those they are assigned at birth. Most transgender students within the department are nonbinary, meaning their gender doesn’t align with either binary gender (male or female). Representation of the transgender community is nearly nonexistent (though slowly increasing) in media, especially in the theater, and casting nonbinary actors into binary roles is a difficult process.

Because of these issues of gender and casting, I have begun to practice what I refer to as “gender conscious” casting, inspired by recent dialogue around “color blind” and “color conscious” casting. Gender conscious casting acknowledges the difficulties women and nonbinary people face in being cast while also taking into account the meaning that is made through the portrayal of gender onstage. For example, when directing Georg Büchner’s *Woyzeck* (Barnstorm, 2016), I decided to point out the misogyny in the 19th century script with an all-female cast. By putting women in these roles but maintaining the characters’ genders I hoped to create
commentary on patriarchal structures. In contrast, working on The Big Antarctic Ghost Hunt by Emily Schneiderman (Chautauqua, 2015) I knew it was integral to maintain the same-gender romance within the piece and therefore cast actors to match the genders of the characters.

Much is to be said of the connections between gender and trauma, especially within Lion in the Streets. Thompson enacts a “sexualization and feminization of violence” within the piece, as the majority of characters who encounter their own trauma are women: Isobel, Sue, Laura, Maria, Rhonda, Joanne, Christine, Scarlett, Sherry, and Joan.18 The remaining traumatized male characters are all feminized in one way or another. David, Rodney, and Michael all experience same-gender attraction, David proclaims it explicitly (“I’m gay, Father”19) while Michael and Rodney enact it in their remembered encounter. Father Hayes’s gender is repeatedly troubled: first in his own words, “Everyone laughed laughed the men, the men drinking beer, watching me, sure they’re thinking, ‘Watch him carve like a woman,’ most men hate priests, you know this is a fact,”20 and later in Ben’s, “He was an old fruit. [...] he talked like a fruit; he walked like one too.”21 Even David implies Father Hayes as being closeted (“I always got the impression that you were looking at me much more than you looked at the other boys am I right?”22), though Hayes’s inability to meet societal gender standards seems to stem mostly from his Catholic

18 Helene Vosters, "Diamanda Galás and Amanda Todd: Performing Trauma's Sticky Connections" in Theatre Research in Canada 36, no. 1, 97.
19 Thompson, Lion, 36.
20 Ibid., 37-38.
21 Ibid., 64.
22 Ibid., 36.
celibacy. Ben, whose masculinity is quite concrete, suffers from the trauma of his childhood sexual assault at the hands of his adoptive father, an act that can be seen as emasculative.

Gender, like other structures in *Lion in the Streets*, is problematized and fluid. Harvie uses it as an example for the play’s purposeful juxtaposition:

As a critic concerned with issues of cultural heterogeneity, the reason this combination of the apparently real and the real problematized interests me is because it seems to allow for the mimetic depiction of contemporary social realities—realities, say, of age, gender, class, and race—at the same time as it deconstructs our ideas of reality, problematizing the objectivity with which we may think we perceive what seems ‘obvious’ and positing reality not as essential, homogeneous, and therefore static, but as provisional, heterogeneous, and changeable. Informing a reading of gender issues, this combination might allow us to recognize gender as, in one respect, ‘true,’ and, in another respect, socially constructed. (48)

It follows, then, that in my expressionistic approach to *Lion in the Streets* the depiction of gender may be used as one of the sites that separate the work from reality. Thus, I cast the production conscious of the semiotics around gender, and gave most of the actors at least one role that contradicted their own gender identities: Natalie as Scalato and Bill; Gwyn as Timmy; Noah as Lily; Celeste as Ron; Alyssa as Father Hayes; and Keegan as Edward. Part of my goal here was simply to give the actors roles they may otherwise never have a chance to play—I have been unable to find another production of *Lion in the Streets* that has used cross-gender casting.

The more significant statement I sought to make through cross-gender casting in *Lion in the Streets* was to further the play’s fragmentation. As an expressionistic
memory play, *Lion* “captures the work of memory as it recomposes a life but not necessarily in the self-same order,” to borrow from Pellegrini. 23 “Order” here is intended in the chronological sense, but this statement could easily apply to “order” as the antithesis to chaos; *Lion in the Streets* presents its remembered events within a different framework of reality, substituting the logic of the outside world for the changeable one found within the text. Thus, almost like a dream, an event could be recomposed with characters who are not who they appear to be, in this particular instance failing to match up exactly due to a dissonance created between the perceived gender of the performer and the one enacted for the character.

As outlined by Harvie, then, gender in the performance can be defamiliarized as a social construct, made to seem strange or even arbitrary to the audience. By witnessing an actor step outside their daily gender role for an extra-daily performance of gender, the audience may experience greater aesthetic distance in the performance: “The experience of the body of the actor—while enacting a character—and awareness of it, should be conceived as a metatheatrical device indicating theatricality, particularly when s/he has a known history, theatrical or other.” 24 In this sense, the “known history” is rather an assumed history: the perceived gender of the performer in relation to the gender of the character they are playing.

In creating a heightened awareness of gender through this juxtapositional practice, I sought to “deconstruct the substantive appearance of gender into its

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24 Rozak, “Corporeality,” 207.
constitutive acts,” heightening its performed aspect by defamiliarizing it on stage.25 In her seminal work *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler dissects gender as something human beings perform in their daily lives. In accordance with Rozak’s thoughts on the semiotics of the actor’s body, Butler discusses how an increased awareness of gender in theatrical performance (she writes about drag, specifically) serves to disentangle its multiple facets: “If the anatomy of the performer is already distinct from the gender of the performer, and both of these are distinct from the gender of the performance, then the performance suggests a dissonance not only between sex and performance, but sex and gender, and gender and performance.”26

In addition to the overarching political discourse aimed for through the convention of cross-gender casting, the specific instances of it within the production created specific statements about the characters in *Lion in the Streets* through their semiotics. I discussed Father Hayes’s gender issues within the text earlier: he is unable to achieve masculinity in the eyes of those around him, especially from the male perspective. By casting a woman to play Hayes, this specific conflict is made clearer, as no matter how convincing her performance as Father Hayes can be, the disconnect between Alyssa as the actor and Hayes as the character will always hold him back (Figure 5).

On the other hand, Lily may have become the most feminine character in the play through Noah’s depiction of her. The text gives her a lot of feminine charge to

26 Ibid., 137.
begin with: her sexuality is a core facet of her as a character, which then involves her sublimating herself to a man. Noah, a man with a beard, had a lot of semiotic work to do in order to convey this character, over-performing actions that the audience would read as feminine, such as the delicate ways he gestured with his hands or the attention he brought to his hips. Assisted greatly by Cody’s costume design, the sheer amount of work that Noah had to put forth as a signifier in order to become Lily then transformed her into a character with the most prominent and flamboyant displays of femininity (Figure 6).

Likewise, Bill and Edward are very masculine men, translating their gender through acts of power over the women around them: Bill publicly humiliates Sue as he leaves her for another woman (Lily) in front of their friends; Edward abuses his fiancée, Sherry, by forcing her to recount and relive her sexual assault at the hands of another man. Whereas putting Noah, beard and all, in a dress, tights, high heels, and lipstick easily signified Lily’s gender to the audience, costumes would never suffice for Natalie and Keegan; women wear clothing that is traditionally “men’s” all the time in daily life. Thus they translated the gravity of their characters’ masculinity into their physical beings, Natalie “manspreading” with her legs to take up as much space as she could (Figure 7) and Keegan imposing into her scene partner’s personal space in order to intimidate and terrify her (Figure 8). Masculinity, for these characters, became synonymous with attacking those around oneself and asserting power over

27 “Manspread” is a neologism which refers to the tendency in men to occupy a surplus of physical space, usually by the extension of the limbs (eg. spreading one’s legs while sitting) and especially in the context of public places. It is often used as an example of everyday toxic masculinity and male privilege in society.
them, framed through the technique of cross-gender casting. Echoing Father Hayes, neither Bill nor Edward would ever be able to truly fulfill masculinity, and therefore their acting out also became rooted in personal insecurity, Bill standing on a chair at one point to tower over Sue and therefore overcompensate for Natalie’s short stature.

Finally, Sue’s gender became troubled through the cross-gender casting around her. Timmy, played by Gwyn in a nod to the convention of young boys being played by women, was the first character to appear with a gender mismatching that of the actor portraying them (Figure 9). Sue’s son and husband were played by women while her husband’s mistress was played by a man. In this scenario, her world was out of order and she couldn’t seem to quite fit into it. In an attempt to catch up to the gender dynamics around her, she first challenged the roles of masculine and feminine in the situation, becoming an attacker herself and slapping Lily across the face; Lily maintained her passive status by refusing to slap back. Failing this tactic, Sue then imitated the gender expression put forth by Lily, sexualizing herself to the point where she stripped down to her underwear. In the matrices of body, gender, and performance put forth in the production, Sue nearly broke the fourth wall in revealing herself as female in the barest means she could: the body of the performer (Figure 10). She failed to win Bill back through this action; the ties between gender and the body were not absolute enough within the semiosis of the production, she cannot out-perform Lily in this arena. The relations between body, gender, and performance laid out through the cross-gender casting within *Lion in the Streets* add new dimensions to the internal conflicts within the script that may not be realized in other productions.
SECTION 7B. Physicality and Viewpoints

Physicality is a critical skill for performers, especially in less realistic styles of theater. The popularity and ubiquity of more internalized styles of acting, such as those derived from Stanislavski, have overshadowed techniques rooted in the body. After all, the sheer theatricality of physical acting is too over the top for the realism of contemporary film, evoking the camp sensibility of 1930s character actors. As a director I have found the techniques of Viewpoints to be eye opening in creating distinct, detailed characters for the world of the play. Detailed by Anne Bogart and Tina Landau in *The Viewpoints Book*, the technique was initially developed for dance by Mary Overlie, born out of the postmodern movement.\(^{28}\) It is “a philosophy translated into a technique for (1) training performers; (2) building ensemble; and (3) creating movement for the stage.”\(^ {29} \) The fundamental concept is the Nine Physical Viewpoints: tempo, duration, kinesthetic response, repetition, shape, gesture, architecture, spatial relationship, and topography. These divide up the more abstract ideas of movement and space into specific, identifiable qualities that can then be described and used by the theater artist.

I used the first few days to train the actors in Viewpoints, spending half of rehearsal on table-work to break into the written word and the other half honing their physical vocabulary. Moving forward from there, we began many of our rehearsals with exercises to build character bodies. By creating strong physicalities at the core of

\(^{28}\) Anne Bogart and Tina Landau, *The Viewpoints Book* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2005), 3-5

\(^{29}\) Ibid., 7.
the four characters each actor played, I was able to ensure that these characters would read to the audience as distinct from one another. Akin to their costumes, the actors’ respective character physicalities often served to express more literal and external factors, such as age and gender. The means through which I guided them to add an expressionistic element was through the specific Viewpoint of gesture.

Bogart and Landau define gesture as “a movement involving a part or parts of the body; Gesture is Shape with a beginning, middle and end.”30 They then split this element into two distinct types called behavioral gesture and expressive gesture: “Behavioral Gestures are those that belong to everyday life, that are part of human behavior as we know and observe it. [...] Expressive Gestures are those that belong to the interior rather than the exterior world (of behavior); they express feeling or meaning which is not otherwise directly manifest.”31 Behavioral gestures are pedestrian or quotidian, expressive gestures are evocative or poetical; the former is literal and the latter is expressionistic. When working with expressive gesture I ask actors to create based on their characters’ super-objectives. Originating from the work of Stanislavski, the super-objective is the ultimate want, need, or desire for the character within the body of the play, described as a transitive verb. The expressive gesture of a super-objective is not a charade or tableau of that verb but a more dancerly interpretation, however they can envision to convey this extreme motivation.

Because of the intensity of the driving force from which the expressive gesture is derived, I find the best use for it is when words will not suffice to translate

30 Ibid., 9.
31 Ibid., 49.
the character’s circumstances, when the need to communicate becomes a visceral, instinctive necessity. The monologue Maria gives to Laura is an extremely challenging moment of the script. This is one of the first instances where the events of the play cannot be understood as reality: Maria describes the death of her husband as she witnessed it first-hand, directly through his eyes. The difficulty for her to explain this unreal experience is complicated by the language barrier, as English is clearly her second language, and Laura mistakenly interprets Maria’s flustered state as simply due to the limits of her knowledge of English instead of the limitations of language in itself (“MARIA: (gesture indicating self or soul) / LAURA: Sure, you go on automatic—I—32”). I illustrated this problem of the spoken word by working with Celeste to create a physical vocabulary to accompany the text, at first intertwined through visual metaphor and then slowly becoming more abstract as the ideas became more fantastical and the language more poetic. Thus Celeste began by gesticulating with her hands, indicating the spread of food on the table, folding clothes into separate piles, blocking the sun from her eyes, and was then built into her hips, spine, and knees as well, making sweeping movements up and down that may have in part depicted the literal but more importantly imparted the unintelligible grief experienced through the initial event and its retelling. The imperative need communicated in this moment was Maria’s need to communicate, to retell, and in doing so, to understand.

An alternative use of expressive gesture from the series of movements used during Maria’s monologue was a repeated pose enacted by Isobel throughout the

32 Thompson, Lion, 18.
piece. Isobel’s struggle, trying to understand what has happened to her, is interwoven through the fabric of the play; however, peering in on the scenes around her to solve her inner turmoil gives her little room to communicate her needs. In this intermediary state it is easy for her passive observation to overwhelm her active objective; the problem Isobel faces is the reason she is watching in the first place, therefore the two must be linked. Thus gesticulation arose as the perfect medium for her to portray this anguish as other scenes played around her. Ashley and I looked at the script to find a common theme for Isobel throughout that could be expressed in a non-realistic gesture. We decided to focus on her death, allowing the specter of her own fate to haunt her as she listened to the stories around her, triggering this memory over the course of the play as she tried to untangle it: “telling trauma’s story becomes the working condition of coming to know it.”³³ (This could also be said of Maria as discussed above.) Ashley and I worked together and found a position in which her hands grasped at her throat with her elbows pointing outward at uneven angles, one heel lifted off the ground, and one hip cocked to twist her torso and spine. The creation of tension in her body through engagement of these various body parts expressed an active need, rendering her a participant in scenes even if she was silent. We found a twofold meaning to this gesture: on one level it was Isobel recreating the moment she needed to resolve, the ever-present problem of her purgatory state; on

another level it was an expression of her inability to know, and therefore tell, her story through a metaphor of breathlessness and wordlessness.\(^{34}\)

Isobel’s expressive gesture gained further relevance as we found all the instances in the script that explored this same motif of choking. The gesture first appeared through the action of another character, during Isobel’s fight with Scalato in the first scene. Noah Luce, who served as the production’s fight choreographer, and I decided to end the altercation with Scalato straddling Isobel and choking her before Sue entered and pulled them apart (Figure 11). It surfaced again during Maria’s monologue, triggered by the line, “I am his throat, tight, cannot breathe enough air in my body.”\(^{35}\) Rhonda provoked it next by saying, “You’d never find the [dress] in the picture, Jo, it’d be too tight at the neck,” right before Isobel’s realization that she is dead.\(^{36}\) The dance indicated in the script at the end of Act I involved a moment in which each actor performed an expressive gesture for one of their characters, all in unison (Figure 12). The final time the action occurred was the end of the play as Ben recounts her murder in her own words, with Isobel and Ben both recreating this moment independently at opposite parts of the stage (Figure 13). As a character at the center of the work and simultaneously bound to its margins, the use of an expressive gesture throughout the production allowed Isobel’s quest to remain relevant without derailing the other narratives being told. Each time her chokehold appeared it signaled a transformation: her slow realization that something is not as it should be;

\(^{34}\) Ibid.  
\(^{35}\) Thompson, \textit{Lion}, 19.  
\(^{36}\) Ibid., 31.
the epiphany of her death; her desire to go to Heaven; and finally, the revelation of
the circumstances of her murder. Isobel’s narrative is the driving force of *Lion in the
Streets* as it is told through the stories of others; the use of a repeated expressive
gesture from her throughout the production allows these to intertwine and to reveal
the piece’s inner story. By giving the actors physical training through Viewpoints
with an emphasis on expressive gesture, I allowed both them and myself to find ways
to physicalize internal states throughout the production and therefore render these into
the fabric of the piece.

**SECTION 7C. Staging Trauma**

Staging is what separates the literary body of the play’s text from the live
body of performance. Judith Thompson is not particularly steadfast in the realization
of *Lion in the Streets*; stage directions are generally light throughout the script, giving
the director a great amount of creative autonomy. In the act of bringing the play to
life my goals were to emphasize the theatricality of the piece, explore modes of
meaning-making to make evident psychic and internal states, and combine these two
to frame the work’s fluid treatment of reality, memory, and imagination.

The first action seen onstage in our production was a piece I decided to add
for consistency. Thompson calls for a dance at the end of Act I, and at the close of the
play as a whole she calls for two songs to be sung by the actors. With these highly
theatrical/metatheatrical moments at the middle and end of the play, I felt like an
added sequence at the beginning would create better cohesion. In rehearsal, I split my
cast into four pairs and assigned each duo to create a Composition, a facet of Viewpoints work. “[Composition] is the act of writing as a group, in time and space, using the language of the theater. Participants create short pieces for the stage by putting together raw material into a form that is repeatable, theatrical, communicative and dramatic.”37 Each pair choreographed a short sequence, about a minute long, expressing an atmosphere of being lost and isolated. Due to a shortage of time, I asked all the groups to perform their pieces in succession, each part overlapping with the ones before and after it. The order and timing was arbitrary but chance served as the ultimate choreographer, as the pieces fit together perfectly, combining the timing and spatial relationship of the moment with the workings they already created. In the finished product, this composition combined a sense of play (Emmet and Keegan pushing their hands against one another; Natalie and Alyssa drumming on furniture) and fear (Gwyn wandering away from her partner into an empty expanse and crying out). The stage and its players glowed under a red light with the fluttering violins, thrashing guitar, and lyrics (“H-E-L-P / Help me / Help me”) of St. Vincent’s “Marrow” playing underneath; this added introduction brought forth the atmosphere and conflict of the play’s first scene, preparing the audience for the script’s symbiotic relationship between what is felt and what is experienced.

A similar method was used to create the dance at the end of the first act. Thompson makes no specifications for this dance: style, genre, meaning, or even music. In accordance with my own choreographic strengths and my Viewpoints focus

37 Bogart and Landau, Viewpoints, 137.
for the production, I decided a more postmodern approach was appropriate. Again, I
 tasked the actors to originate movement for this piece, splitting the cast in half and
giving them looser parameters. I then stitched their work together, finding meaning in
the compositions they created and curating them into an amalgamated whole. This
composition, much like the beginning and ending of the act, contrasted the former
greatly. It was gentler, the sound of waves giving way to the ambience of
“Straumnes” by Sigur Rós, cool lighting shining dimly on the actors as they enacted
tableaux: gentle caresses, glances Heavenward (Figure 14), fatal collapses followed
by resurrection, finger snaps to evoke the sound of rain, deep breaths, a danse
macabre (Figure 15), and expressive gestures of super-objectives. As Isobel’s frantic
search for home gives way to a more somber desire for salvation, so does the script.
In order to express this transformation, the movement depicted on stage transformed,
bringing forth images and feelings that transcend the temporal and spatial events of
the script. These composed sequences served to call attention to the flexibility of
reality within the play: the play depicts narratives that are real and unreal and
moments that are illusory and purely theatrical.

In addition to these overlapping and changing ideas of what is real and what is
narrative within the play, where the performance starts and ends is a flexible matter as
well. Isobel may be described as “sprawled diagonally across the invisible barrier
between illusion and reality,” borrowing from Julie Adam’s description of a character
from Thompson’s The Crackwalker, but this is not the only boundary Isobel refuses
to acknowledge.\textsuperscript{38} The fourth wall of \textit{Lion in the Streets} is a semi-permeable membrane of which Isobel is fully unaware, acting as both performer and spectator, at times bringing the audience’s role into question. She speaks directly to them most of the time, aware that they are watching and addressing them, “Hey! Boys! Girls! Looka this!”\textsuperscript{39} She demands information from them: “Hey! Who gonna take me home? You? You gotta car? What kinda car you got?”\textsuperscript{40} Though the audience does not answer back, she has raised a bigger question: where does she stand if she is both performer and spectator?

Adam answers: “She functions chorally as prologue/narrator, and although physically she moves through the action, conceptually she exists in a zone between stage and auditorium.”\textsuperscript{41} Isobel is a repeated breaker of boundaries: not only does she exist between actor and audience, as a ghost she exists between alive and dead, present and past, real and fantastical. She defies boundaries of here and there, aligning herself both with and against “us.”\textsuperscript{42} Her presence throughout the play is metatheatrical, and yet it is not, as she simultaneously exists in the play and out of the play, in a third space. This use of the gaze, in which the actor looks not within the illusory realm of the action but looks at it from both inside and outside, is an inherently theatrical act. For some scenes she has no lines and no stage directions, it

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[38]{Julie Adam, “The Implicated Audience: Judith Thompson’s Anti-Naturalism in \textit{The Crackwalker, White Biting Dog, I Am Yours} and \textit{Lion in the Streets}” in \textit{Judith Thompson}, ed. Ric Knowles, 41.}
\footnotetext[39]{Thompson, \textit{Lion}, 20.}
\footnotetext[40]{Ibid., 16.}
\footnotetext[41]{Adam, “Audience,” 45.}
\footnotetext[42]{Michael Chemers, “Boo” in \textit{The Monster in Theatre History: This Thing of Darkness} (Routledge: Oxford, 2017), 121-22.}
\end{footnotes}
is simply implied that she is still watching: “Her repeated act is, in fact, inaction.”

By repeatedly watching, repeating the (in)action of the audience, she serves as a reminder that the spectacle before the spectator is a work of theater.

In her seminal essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” Laura Mulvey deconstructs the dynamics of observation and power through a feminist lens. She denotes the binary construction of the audience and the performer (specifically within film) as a one of active/male and passive/female. The theater is able to rupture this binary, as Isobel does, thus not only defying the binary of spectatorship but also one of gender, refusing to be a simple female theatrical object. Thus, throughout our production Isobel wandered as she wished in relation to the action, watching from the stage or the audience, coming near the other actors when drawn in (Figure 16) and fleeing when pushed away (Figure 17), at times even becoming more interested in the details of the scenic design or her own costume than the events of the play. Meanwhile, no matter where the actor’s gaze was, her face remained omnipresent within the scenic design. Hundreds of paper Isobels stared back at the viewer from the posters at extreme upstage center. As the protagonist and therefore main recipient of the look, Isobel “returns the gaze through her combined presence and absence,” borrowing from Helene Vosters’s analysis of Amanda Todd’s mediatized presence. Her gaze is inescapable, as is her embodiment of the actor-spectator, refusing simple dichotomy and therefore embracing the theatricality of her own existence.

45 Vosters, “Diamanda Galás,” 95.
This constant idea of watching and its impact on the relationship between audience and performer arose in other moments of *Lion* as well. Actors came into the audience aisles several times during various scenes, including Rhonda’s response to Joanne’s Ophelia monologue, Michael’s recollection of Rodney’s bedroom, and Joan’s proclamation of Ben’s childhood innocence; all moments where reality and memory or fantasy are at odds. At the beginning of the dinner party in Act I each of the four characters (George, Bill, Lily, and Laura) addressed a different section of the audience as the recipient of their dinner conversation, evincing a disconnect in their communication; the script directs, “The conversation is simultaneous.”\(^\text{46}\) Much of *Lion* is monologic, specifically as characters recall their own traumas with others onstage with them, causing the aforementioned dinner guests to watch Sue, Laura to watch Maria, the Sugar Meeting attendees to watch Rhonda, Rhonda to watch Joanne, Edward to watch Sherry, Joan to watch Ben. I decided to push the ubiquity of watching even further, adding additional moments of observation. Sherry came in at the end of Rodney’s monologue as a means of illustrating her overhearing his breakdown (“Rodney had some kind of fit today, [...] he was yelling and screaming at nobody all afternoon”\(^\text{47}\)) and without a physical confessional David could watch Father Hayes confess. At times these watchers were actors without specific characters, instead playing ambiguous mourners, watching Joanne imagine her funeral and later witnessing the entirety of the final scene between Joan, Ben, and Isobel (Figure 18).

\(^{46}\) Thompson, *Lion*, 8.
\(^{47}\) Ibid., 57.
The scenic design served to complicate the dichotomy of observer and observed in several ways. As discussed previously, the collection of chairs facing the audience instead of the funeral stage resisted an easy interpretation of the stage as a space of one-way spectatorship, further enhanced by the mass of photographed faces at the back of the stage. Most crucially, however, was the arrangement of seating within the space. The Experimental Theater is a flexible space, meaning that its seating banks can be moved into different configurations. It was very important to me that the scenic design utilize three-quarter thrust seating, with seating banks surrounding the stage from three sides. This configuration was a challenge for me as director, requiring my staging to be aesthetically pleasing from a wider variety of angles, but it was also a challenge for the audience. Mulvey discusses the necessity of audience separation and isolation in order to present a “voyeuristic fantasy” that is “indifferent to the presence of the audience,” something rendered impossible in a seating configuration in which the audience faces not only the action, but also one another.\textsuperscript{48} In attending every performance of the show I noticed that the audience immediately filtered into the center seating bank, from which one could see the other seating banks the least; the convention of being faced with their fellow spectators—or even being subject to their gaze—was something to be avoided.\textsuperscript{49}

Adam notes: “Audiences experience different forms and varying degrees of discomfort when the action enters the auditorium and they become involved, perhaps

\textsuperscript{49} Alternatively, the center seating section in a three-quarter thrust seating arrangement may also be perceived by audience members as having the best visibility of the stage. However, in directing Lion I frequently viewed the action from various angles to ensure all banks had even vantage points.
even implicated, in the plot. This discomfort results from emotional, intellectual and moral uncertainty in experiencing changes in distance between life and art.” The audience in these side sections did certainly enter a sort of “splash zone,” perhaps most dangerously when Bill and Lily stood among them on opposite sides of the theater from one another as they loudly recalled their phone sex, each spectator suddenly aware of the physical presences of the actors and the rest of the audience. In furthering the dissolution of the fourth wall and more deeply problematizing the voyeuristic act of theater, stemming from Isobel’s presence in the text, the unsureness of what is real and what is not was allowed to transcend the narrative and leak into the auditorium.

Isobel’s liminal status is due to both her narrative function, as touched upon by Adam, and her paranormal status, described by Michael Chemers in his book *The Monster in Theatre History: This Thing of Darkness*. In discussing the theatrical behavior of ghosts I prefer to translate “here and not here” into presence and absence, putting the specter in direct conversation with Nunn. Onstage, the ghost is either physically embodied by an actor (present) or indicated by the actions of performers or through technical elements (absent). The ghost creates a paradox of presence and absence: the ghost that is present on stage is semiotically rendered as absent in order to create the illusion of invisibility or intangibility; the ghost that is absent on stage is semiotically rendered as present in order to create the illusion that it is there in the first place.

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50 Adam, “Audience,” 41.
Isobel is a contradiction of her own. Her immediate acknowledgement of the audience and complete disregard for the fourth wall establishes a self-conscious presence, proving to herself and her spectators that she is present. For the entirety of the first scene she does not behave like a ghost as she proves to be both visible and tangible, at first to children (who are often liminal enough to coexist with the supernatural) but then to Sue as well (Figure 19). After Sue exits in the first scene, Isobel “starts to behave like a conventional, invisible ghost.” Barnett lists the characters who acknowledge her in the text: the children, Sue, Sherry, and Ben. These interactions are often fleeting and self-contained: the children mock and fight Isobel at the beginning of the show; Sue speaks with Isobel in the first scene of Act I and again at the beginning of Act II; Sherry and Isobel walk one another to the graveyard for the final scene; and Isobel approaches Ben to attack him at the end of the play (Figure 20).

In her analysis Barnett emphasizes that, after the children, the only people to notice Isobel’s ghost are those who have experienced trauma. Within our production we added several small moments of interaction with additional characters. The stage directions specify that during Maria’s monologue, “ISOBEL falls on an imaginary track in front of her mother.” In this moment Isobel stands in for another ghost, that of Antonio. By playing her father in this moment, Isobel turns the situation on its head, momentarily equating both the loved ones Maria has lost (Figure 21). In our production, Maria noticed Isobel at the end of her monologue, allowing her to defy

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52 Thompson, Lion, 19.
the temporality of the memory in which she appeared, and face the horror of her murdered daughter in place of her deceased husband. The other interactions with Isobel were performed by characters struggling with their own deaths. As Isobel asked Joanne, crouching at her feet, “We are both pictures now. WHO WILL TAKE US? WHO WILL TAKE US TO HEAVEN, HA?” Joanne diverted her gaze to the specter in front of her, facing their mortal similarity.\textsuperscript{53} The approach was the reverse with David, who directed his lines, “It was neat, so calm, as I slipped underneath I wasn’t scared, I’ll tell ya. I wasn’t scared a bit. The water was so… nice!!” to Isobel, who warily approached him before setting her hand on his shoulder, expressing a commiseration and a connection.\textsuperscript{54} Isobel’s presence is apparent to herself and to the audience, but once she becomes absent to the characters onstage she can only be seen by those who have reason to recognize her: those who have experienced trauma.

The paradox of Isobel’s presence and absence was also enhanced by the scenic design. Through our depiction of \textit{Lion in the Streets} within iconic imagery associated with funeral homes, the production as a whole became centered on the memory of Isobel as much as it was on her act of trying to remember. As a ghost, Isobel is a relic of the past within the present, referred to by Chemers as “a memory with an agenda.”\textsuperscript{55} An active participant within the work, there is no debate whether Isobel has an objective, as she makes it quite clear several times throughout. Her reappearance in the world is signal of something wrong, the necessity to acknowledge

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 31.  
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 39.  
\textsuperscript{55} Chemers, “Boo,” 122.
an unresolved and unaddressed issue. Pellegrini says of sexual violence, “trauma results not from the initial violating event, but from the refusal or inability of others to recognize the wound or blow to the body.”

Perhaps Isobel is not the only one who needs closure for her trauma, but the surrounding community as well. Her absence in the eyes of the characters with whom she shares the stage is all the more dramatic; this becomes less about standard conventions of ghostliness and more about unresolved trauma. The funeral stage depicted in the theater must lack a coffin, as the negative space left in its wake is a more appropriate signifier for Isobel, which she only recognized upon realization of her death (“missing, missing, my face in the TV and newspapers, posters”). The posters of her face filling the void went unnoticed by the other characters until the final scene: the group of mourners, who relinquished their active status to observe the scene, each took turns placing a hand on the wall of posters, as if visiting the absent coffin; then, as Joan recalled Isobel’s picture “in the papers on all those posters” she crossed upstage to them as a white light slowly rose to full intensity. Isobel’s memory is the central component to the structure of Lion in the Streets as a play. To borrow from Barnett’s summary of Peggy Phelan’s Unmarked: The Politics of Performance, Isobel, “in her absence, acquires more presence than the living beings, who find themselves defined by her.”

In a play where the manifestation of trauma renders the structures of memory and imagination often indistinguishable from reality, the performance brings to light

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57 Thompson, Lion, 31.
58 Ibid., 72.
the semiotic intermingling of these psychic states and their dramatization. Rhonda gives quite the insight into her mind at the Sugar Meeting, delivering a dense monologue that takes up over a full page.\(^\text{60}\) It is hard to tell where it departs from reality; the script’s clearest indicator is when the language transforms from quotidian to poetic (“I for one… I… for… your eyes, eh? Your eyes are all the same colour and shape like a picture”), but if one reads the script as depicting internal states externally then perhaps the answer is as soon as the monologue begins. The language shows Rhonda’s attempt to retain her composure but her frequent decline into more vernacular speech, not to mention moments of free expression unlike Sue’s earlier on, which seem too private to be said in such a setting. In staging this massive monologue I created a gradual shift, employing various methods to translate the text as an inner expression instead of the reality of the scene. Rhonda’s target switched from her scene partners to the audience as she selected a spectator to be “Cathy,” expanding the Sugar Meeting to include the whole audience as attendees. Her focus soon shifted to be much more self-contained, so focused on herself that she didn’t notice as the other actors onstage rose from their seats and approached her, encircling her as she tried desperately to escape them (Figure 22). These visual metaphors, first expanding the scene to include the audience, and then retreating it into Rhonda’s head to incorporate the other actors as symbols of the social pressure being exerted on her, contrasted with one another but worked in tandem to reveal Rhonda’s internal state.

\(^{60}\) Thompson, Lion, 23-24.
Following this scene, Rhonda and her best friend Joanne go to a bar where Joanne reveals that she’s been diagnosed with terminal leukemia. She then slips into a near dream state, remembering a picture from her childhood of Ophelia from *Hamlet* and asking Rhonda to assist her in committing suicide in an attempt to recreate that image. In staging this monologue, I decided to highlight the intertextual relationship created by Thompson in this scene and create visual representation of the icon in Joanne’s mind. Upon disclosing the state of her health Joanne asks Rhonda for a cigarette; as Natalie’s Joanne entered into the realm of the imaginary, envisioning what it would be like to be Ophelia, she immediately dropped the prop cigarette from her fingers in order to sever her internal, idealized self from her external, dying body. At one point she took off the jacket she’d been wearing, draping it over the back of her chair to reveal the fabric of its lining: a brightly colored floral pattern. As Joanne traveled across the stage, describing this exquisite death, Isobel followed her, draping long strands of flowers over her shoulders and placing a garland onto her head (Figure 23). For a moment, Joanne became the Ophelia in the image, and in her head.

The problem of David and Father Hayes, as touched upon before, is confusing. Their respective realities cannot both be true, and therefore it is tempting to try and determine whose is accurate and whose is false, or to determine that one character is real and the other is imaginary. That interpretation of the script, however, is just as fraught: David is seen as a bartender interacting with Rhonda and Joanne in the prior scene, meaning he should be as real as either of them is; meanwhile Father Hayes is mentioned afterwards by both Edward and Joan, corroborating his existence.
Their stories cannot both be true, yet both characters are definitely real; the audience must grapple with their mutual exclusivity in searching for what is “true.” In this scene it is unclear what is remembered and what is imagined, therefore both must be rendered as equally true. Instead of imitating a confessional through staging, the idea was evoked by having the confessor pray on his knees behind the end table at center stage. David quickly rose to his feet again as he recalled his sins, treating each of the various empty chairs around him as a person in his memory. Through this use of visual metaphor, chairs standing in for people, David translated a sense of specificity for each person he spoke of, giving the audience a glimpse into his life and rendering these mentioned characters as real, defined beings; they are the people David knows, therefore he is real and alive. Later in the scene, however, David acted out his own childhood drowning, Isobel pulling him down to symbolize the waves as they dragged him under (Figure 24). Father Hayes narrated the moment, as he watched in resigned horror from the opposite corner of the stage, unable to help as he ran in slow motion. David took part in both of these mutually exclusive narratives as the audience witnessed them, raising the question of, “Where am ‘I’—where is the ‘I’—in relation to the concussive event?” The answer is left unclear in Thompson’s writing, and therefore by staging both narratives as equally real or equally imagined the audience is left with the same lack of clarity.

In contrast with many of the character physicalities, which were intentionally over the top (for example, Lily, as discussed earlier), Scarlett’s physical being was

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treated with sensitivity and precision. Professor Michael Chemers assisted Celeste in developing an accurate physicality and articulation for a person with cerebral palsy.\textsuperscript{62} As memory and fantasy enveloped Scarlett throughout the scene, she discarded her movement disorder as a means of expressing her internal self, the self that is not impeded by her physical reality: “I can MOVE when my boy comes.”\textsuperscript{63} As designated in the stage directions, Scarlett was joined by her “Midnight Man,” who danced with her. In our production, the “Midnight Man” was a character of multiplicity, performed by all actors not already involved in the scene (Natalie, Noah, Alyssa, Emmet, and Keegan). Combined with the use of silhouette in the lighting design, the abundance of “Men” served to emphasize his anonymity. Tango music playing in the background, the actors held and caressed Scarlett as they danced together (Figure 25), at times using gestures that evoked the male dancers in “Diamonds are a Girl’s Best Friend” (from the 1953 movie \textit{Gentlemen Prefer Blondes}) with Scarlett as their Marilyn Monroe.

The scene between Rodney and Michael has a feature that sets it apart from the rest of the play: when other scenes slip into clear moments of memory (Laura and Maria, Scarlett and the “Midnight Man”) they are unremarked on by other characters; the flashback is only apparent to the character who experienced it. The text makes clear, however, that though the audience saw Michael, he was not there in actuality,

\textsuperscript{62} This is the same Michael Chemers as in the citations for \textit{The Monster in Theatre History}; in this example he was acting as a faculty advisor for the production and is therefore referred to as “Professor Michael Chemers” to denote this event as separate from the influence of his writing cited elsewhere in this paper.

\textsuperscript{63} Thompson, \textit{Lion}, 46.
as quoted from Sherry above. Michael is purely a figment of Rodney’s memory and imagination. Much of Michael’s presence on stage was indicated as dreamlike through technical means, purple light and an acoustic love song (“Heartbeats” by José González) as he walked Rodney through their childhood friendship, both cutting out into isolated white light and silence as Michael began physically attacking him. The most telling sign of Michael’s imaginary status was a pair of contrasting actions. Once Michael touched Rodney’s tongue with his own, the two began kissing passionately. He then halted the action, reached into the end table beside him and pulled out a knife, which he handed to Rodney; as Rodney slit Michael’s throat, a visual metaphor for severing the memory, the stage was flooded with red light (Figure 26). These extreme actions were framed as a departure from the scene’s reality through elements of design, embracing a greater level of theatricality and stylization as they moved further from reality.

One of the most powerful moments of memory within our production of Lion in the Streets was also one of the scenes with the starkest staging. As discussed earlier, Edward is emotionally abusive toward Sherry, using his knowledge of her trauma to hurt her. Their lines imply that this is a repeated act (“Please, Eddie. Please please, I am asking you... I can’t do this again”64), in which case this is trauma within trauma. The staging was intentionally simplistic, allowing the acting and text to do the heavy lifting: Sherry crossed the stage in a straight line, from extreme downstage left to extreme upstage right. Her tempo increased and decreased with the story being

64 Ibid., 61.
told in the memory, her body affected by the presence and actions of an invisible attacker. In the baseline reality of her situation, she is being forcibly haunted by her memory, so by using a minimal approach to tie her past and present together the moment was rendered more powerfully on stage.

As the production’s opening composition served as an introduction to the atmosphere and themes, and the dance at the close of Act I portrayed a transformation, the ending sequence presented closure for Isobel and the audience. The rest of the ensemble rose from their seated positions onstage as mourners and approached Isobel at upstage center. Celeste, enacting functions of Sue and Maria as mother characters, placed a veil on Isobel’s head, crowned with flowers. With a sudden revelation of space, the “wall” of missing posters opened up as a pair of doors, white light radiating from behind them as Isobel ascended from the known space of the theater to the now revelatory space signifying Heaven (Figure 27). The complex relationships between reality, memory, and imagination in *Lion in the Streets* require staging that portrays these unfixed relationships. This flexibility is crucial in the storytelling of trauma, which defies clear boundaries itself, and therefore the theatrical world presented to the audience through aesthetic means must reflect this essential fabric and structure of the play in itself.

**SECTION 8. Conclusion**

Helene Vosters describes theatrical representations of trauma as telling the untellable; she quotes Ann Cvetkovich’s argument that “trauma puts pressure on
conventional forms of documentation, representation, and commemoration, giving rise to new genres of expression." Lion in the Streets depicts trauma through its own specific means as an expressionistic memory play. Its structure is determined by internal states; the ways that reality, memory, and imagination blend echo the psychic trauma undergone by its characters. The piece is fragmented, provisionary, and blurry, because that is how trauma is lived and relived.

New forms of theater have historically emerged where old ones no longer sufficed. Expressionism initially formed as a reaction to the innovations of the industrial revolution. Non-naturalistic exploration has historically emerged and innovated to tell stories the extant forms are unequipped to relate, to tell the untellable—in this sense not for lack of knowing but for lack of appropriate means. The development of new styles by Luis Valdez, Suzan-Lori Parks, Tony Kushner, and Caryl Churchill revolutionized theater in finding ways to realize stories that could not have been properly told before. Though underappreciated in the theatre of the United States, Judith Thompson’s developments serve similar means in depicting trauma as it never had been before; “Of course, part of the problem with trauma is precisely its resistance to the literal, to the thing itself, and it may be this resistance to the literal that also makes the literary and, yes, the theatrical such resonant sites through with to think trauma anew.”

The treatment of the interdependent content and form within *Lion in the Streets* through an expressionistic directing approach allows for the fullest realization of the script. With the self-conscious treatment of theatricality and theatrical semiosis, our production resisted the ubiquity of realism and rejected any attempt to be cinematic. The inherent differences of theater are essential to its creation, and even more so in the context of this work, where theatricality is a key quality in representing trauma. Expressionistic directing achieves two important things: it allows for a deeper exploration of live performance as its own medium and therefore to fulfill its semiotic potential; it enables theater artists to create and develop modes of storytelling that portray internal, psychic states as inseparable from the events around them, and therefore holding a greater relevance for narratives in this vein.

As a theater practitioner, I do not foresee realism subsiding in prevalence or dominance in the United States anytime soon. Its ubiquity, however, is exactly why I find it necessary to see the specific value of non-naturalistic forms. My exploration into manifesting an inside-outness onstage through *Lion in the Streets* has enabled me to view greater possibilities. The momentum of social progress brought forth by the social movements of the 20th century has collided with a new wave of conservatism, bringing forth new conversations about the place of underprivileged minoritarian groups. My quest as a director is to bring these dialogues to the stage: presenting and representing that which has been unseen and unheard. Moving forward, I anticipate exploring and developing new methods of directing, adapting techniques to what best suits narratives that have yet to be told. It is essential to understand how theater
operates artistically and semiotically, and that the omnipresence of realism does not indicate its superiority but rather its status as a dominant narrative. Only time will tell what new forms will arise to tell the stories from the margins; my ambition as a director is to embrace the styles yet to come.

“You can’t become a picture, do you know what I mean?” Rhonda asks of Joanne, “I mean you can’t… BE… a picture, okay?” Theater is not a still image, theater is not a motion picture. It is not static; it is live, happening right in front of an audience, and always adapting. It is a medium of its own, liminal and indistinct, like the foggy, painful memories of trauma.

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67 Thompson, Lion, 31.
## APPENDIX A

### Roster of Characters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ashley Brown</th>
<th>Isobel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gwyn Foley</td>
<td>Nellie, Timmy, Jill, Christine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie Farrell</td>
<td>Scalato, Bill, Joanne, Sherry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noah Luce</td>
<td>Isobel’s Father, Lily, David, Michael</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celeste Marvin-Strong</td>
<td>Sue, Maria, Ron, Scarlett</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alyssa Pierce</td>
<td>Rachel, Laura, Father Hayes, Joan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emmet Storms</td>
<td>Martin, George, Rodney, Ben</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keegan Vernon-Clay</td>
<td>Rose, Rhonda, Ellen, Edward</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Character Descriptions

(Note: Names in all capitals are characters that appear onstage. Scene numbers are not designated by Thompson within the script and were devised for this production by myself and stage management)

ISOBEL (all scenes) - “a deranged and very ragged looking [ghost of a] nine-year-old Portuguese girl,” daughter of MARIA and ISOBEL’S FATHER (ANTONIO), sister of Maria, Romeo, Luig, and Carla

NELLIE, RACHEL, SCALATO, MARTIN, ROSE (1.1) - a group of children who bully ISOBEL

SUE (1.1, 1.2, 2.1) - a thirty-eight year old woman in a grey sweatsuit, TIMMY’s mother, BILL’s wife

ISOBEL’S FATHER (1.1) - named ANTONIO, husband of MARIA, father of Maria, Romeo, ISOBEL, Luig, and Carla

TIMMY (1.2) - SUE and BILL’s son

68 Thompson, Lion, 3.
LAURA (1.2, 1.3, 1.4) - SUE’s best friend, GEORGE’s wife, friend of MARIA, mother of twins, attendee of Sugar Meeting

BILL (1.2) - SUE’s husband, TIMMY’s father, having an affair with LILY

LILY (1.2) - possibly a phone sex worker, BILL’s mistress

GEORGE (1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 2.1) - LAURA’s husband, father of twins, attendee of Sugar Meeting

MARIA (1.3) - ISOBEL’s mother, wife of ISOBEL’S FATHER (ANTONIO), mother of Maria, Romeo, ISOBEL, Luigi, and Carla, friend of LAURA

RON (1.4) - attendee of Sugar Meeting

JILL (1.4) - attendee of Sugar Meeting

RHONDA (1.4, 1.5) - nursery school teacher, friend of JOANNE, married, attendee of Sugar Meeting

JOANNE (1.5) - friend of RHONDA, married to Frank, terminally ill

DAVID (1.5, 1.6) - bartender, gay, Daniel’s ex, was an altar boy for FATHER HAYES
FATHER HAYES (1.6) - priest, set to officiate SHERRY and EDWARD’s wedding, friend of JOAN, dead (at end of play)

CHRISTINE (2.1, 2.2, 2.3) - reporter for The Telegraph, mother of Emma, interviews SCARLETT, adopted daughter of JOAN, adopted sister of BEN

ELLEN (2.1) - friend of CHRISTINE, mother of Leo, pregnant

SCARLETT (2.2) - woman living with advanced cerebral palsy, interviewed by CHRISTINE

THE MIDNIGHT MAN (2.2) - CHRISTINE’s secret lover

RODNEY (2.3) - research assistant for CHRISTINE, childhood friend of MICHAEL, gay

MICHAEL (2.3) - childhood friend of RODNEY

SHERRY (2.3, 2.4) - works with CHRISTINE and RODNEY, EDWARD’s fiancée

EDWARD (2.4) - SHERRY’s fiancé, out of work actor
JOAN (2.5) - BEN and CHRISTINE’s adoptive mother, friend of FATHER HAYES, wife of Walter

BEN (2.5) - ISOBEL’s killer, adopted son of JOAN, adopted brother of CHRISTINE, the lion in the streets
APPENDIX B

Production Images

Figure 2. Isobel in front of “MISSING” posters. Lion in the Streets. February 26, 2017. Experimental Theater, UC Santa Cruz. Ashley Brown (performer). Photo Credit: Austin Kottkamp.
Figure 6. Lily. *Lion in the Streets*. February 26, 2017. Experimental Theater, UC Santa Cruz. Noah Luce (performer). Photo Credit: Daniel Escudero II.

Figure 9. Timmy and Isobel. *Lion in the Streets*. February 26, 2017. Experimental Theater, UC Santa Cruz. Gwyn Foley, Ashley Brown (performers). Photo Credit: Daniel Escudero II.
Figure 10. Sue’s striptease. *Lion in the Streets*. February 26, 2017. Experimental Theater, UC Santa Cruz. Celeste Marvin-Strong, Natalie Farrell (performers). Photo Credit: Daniel Escudero II.
Figure 13. Isobel’s expressive gesture. Lion in the Streets. February 26, 2017. Experimental Theater, UC Santa Cruz. Ashley Brown, Celeste Marvin-Strong, Emmet Storms (performers). Photo Credit: Austin Kottkamp.
Figure 20. Isobel threatening Ben. *Lion in the Streets*. February 26, 2017. Experimental Theater, UC Santa Cruz. Ashley Brown, Emmet Storms (performers). Photo Credit: Daniel Escudero II.
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