UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
SANTA CRUZ

POLITICAL TYRANNY & ARTISTIC METACOGNITION

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THEATER ARTS

by

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June 2018

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ABSTRACT

POLITICAL TYRANNY & ARTISTIC METACOGNITION

By

Tanner Oertel

Political Tyranny & Artistic Metacognition is an investigative analysis concerning experimentation with a curatorial approach to artistic direction in education. With The BarnStorm Theater Company at the University of California, Santa Cruz as an exploratory platform, I will compare artistic ideology used within the professional industry to communicate my personal findings, successes and failures, apropos the abandonment of a traditional directing style in place of one aimed for curation.
Acknowledgments

I am grateful for the faces that flash before my eyes when I think about the big adventure I am on.
Introduction

Racism and discrimination have been foundational components for the development of the United States of America. Origins of slavery and genocide have altered the longevity of the nation. While there has been progression towards change over the decades, systemic racism is ingrained in nearly every facet of American culture, including the American Theater. While a plethora of mainstream theater productions have been auspicious in projecting themes regarding equality and cultural representation onto an international dialogue, it is important to acknowledge that racism, cultural appropriation, and other forms of discriminatory behavior are actively practiced within a variety of professional theater companies. It is equally as important to understand that these malpractices are not nearly as blatant as we historically perceive those like slavery or racial and gender inequality. Modern means of oppression happening in the American Theater are more covert because they occur as a result of decisions by individuals in power. At the Theatre Communications Group’s National Conference (2017), Isaac Gomez, the moderator for a panel called “Beyond Diversity: Casting & Cultural Appropriation in the American Theatre” (2017), further explains:

“The American theater landscape…very much does function on a hierarchical process…. We think artists… that’s sort of at the bottom, and then you’ve got your lower level staff, and then you’ve got your senior level staff of the company, then you’ve got your artistic director, your executive director, your board of directors, local funders, regional funders, and national funders.” (Gomez).

The disparity regarding equity among these positions is, as the Producing Director for the Playwrights Realm, Roberta Pereira, describes in the same panel, “a white supremacist paradigm, like America” (Pereira). Despite decades of change, a nation founded on colonialism cannot part ways from the tyrannical roots from which it grew.

Oppression in the theater occurs through a variety of different means and has varying levels of repercussions. Seemingly trivial artistic decisions made independently
can lack critical dialectical reasoning and result in unintentional adverse interpretations by audience or company members. Alongside these mishaps, are more serious circumstances regarding cultural appropriation, tokenism of minorities, or instances of microaggressions, which the Oxford English Dictionary defines as: “statements, actions, or incidents regarded as an instance of indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalized group such as a racial or ethnic minority.” Separate to these circumstances, but still vitally relevant, are direct and intentional displays of racism, sexual harassment, and gender discrimination. These injustices continue to exist as a result of the aforementioned power structures in the American Theater. Like managerial structures in bureaucracy, operational hierarchies ultimately restrict victims of abuse from coming forward over the fear of losing work in an industry where ‘everyone is replaceable’.

As a twenty-two year old director with limited experience working in collegiate and professional productions, I have witnessed firsthand a plethora of these forms of oppression. I watched a director publicly question a professional actor of color’s educational background in front of an entire company. I saw a director request an Asian-American actress to file another character’s nails in a Shakespeare play as a means of ‘stage business’, and giggle at her silent rage. I was present for a conversation between a visiting director and an artistic director of a company where they deliberated casting an Indian-American child only for the sake of “color points”, by which they meant tokenism.

These issues are similarly ingrained in theater education systems, including notoriously liberal universities, like that of the University of California, Santa Cruz or the Tisch School of the Arts in New York where similar power structures exist. Miranda Levingston, editor-at-large for the Washington Square News¹, explains of students at the Tisch School of the Arts that, “an amicable relationship with their teachers is crucial for financial wellbeing and success in the field,” because, “instructors are typically active in

¹ New York University’s independent student newspaper est. 1973
the theater industry and become their employers and references”. Unlike grading students work, power positions in theater-related academia also exist through intangible means; they are codified via social interaction. For student artists to achieve success in theater, both inside and outside of an educational settings, they must uphold unknown standards of behavior and possess qualities concerning likeability that are dictated by professors. Professors, on the other hand, have no reason to meet their students’ social expectations. The same is true within the spectrum of relationships that exist in the theater, which is why none of the events of oppression previously listed did not immediately receive blatant verbal objections. While I do not deny the commercial success of productions created through means that reinforce these power dynamics, I argue that in the case of education we need to ensure more safe environments by adapting these traditional models.

In her article, *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack* (1989), Peggy McIntosh explains, “To redesign social systems we need first to acknowledge their colossal unseen dimensions” (McIntosh 11). In the case of theater, these ‘unseen dimensions’ are rehearsal processes, casting meetings, and nearly every facet of theatrical crafting which the audience does not see. This thesis will explore several case studies that depict different attempts to extend the directorial and curatorial practices that comprise the Barn Theater. In rethinking aspects of the artistic process, I aim to fortify components of communication and community to further entrench aspects of diversity, plurality, and inclusivity to the BarnStorm Theater Company. While there are no instant remedies to absolve the heinous circumstances that these realities can make fester, it is necessary to nurture a community in which they cannot thrive. This thesis is a reflection of my attempts to foster such an environment as the Artistic Director of BarnStorm.
Part One

Wheels in Motion

"Where the influence of civil laws ends that of the stage begins."
-Friedrich Schiller

The thought that theatre has an obligation to create some kind of universal truth has long since been dismissed by the philosophical theory of moral relativism. This theory, as it is explained in Moral Relativism and Moral Objectivity (1996), argues that, “moral right and wrong (good and bad, justice and injustice, virtue and vice, etc) are always relative to a choice of moral framework”(Harman 3). He elaborates, “What is morally right in relation to one moral framework can be morally wrong in relation to a different moral framework. And no moral framework is objectively privileged as the one true morality.” (3). Moral framework is created from personal, lived experiences that occur throughout one’s lifetime and thus, they vary by individual. In relation to this, Thomson explains the theory of moral objectivity, which claims that a specific group of individuals can critique a statement of moral obligation by contextualizing it within specific communities and under certain circumstances (Thomson 67-68). While there is no guarantee that any two or more persons moral framework will co-align, the difference between moral frameworks allows a dialectical conversation and ultimately, personal growth.

Since its origin, theater has acted as a mirror to reflect the society in which it is being created. In fact, the term mimesis, from Greek mimeisthai ‘to imitate,’ is used to explain the imitation of the real world into art and literature. Through a variety of interpretations of this concept, theater philosophers including Friedrich von Schiller, Václav Havel, and Augusto Boal have argued the purpose of theater to be that of a moral institution capable of influencing social change. While their methods vary across the structure and form in which they present their work, the overarching goals remain the same. In his appropriately titled essay, The Stage as a Moral Institution (1784), Schiller explains that, “the stage only aids justice… it is... the handmaid of religion and
philosophy. From these pure sources it draws its high principles and the exalted teachings, and presents them in a lovely form” (Schiller 251). Schiller’s perception of theater’s role within any given society as a sort of moral compass is profound; however, it suits a mold for that of a rather utopian perspective in its assumption that religion and philosophy are altruistic devices. Furthermore in a capitalist society, like that of modern day America, these mediums are only subjectively pure because they also have been reinforced with hierarchical structures. Havel describes repercussions of capitalism in his book Disturbing the Peace (1990):

“Enormous private multinational corporations are curiously like socialist states; with industrialization, centralization, specialization, monopolization, and finally with automation and computerization, the elements of depersonalization and the loss of meaning in work become more and more profound everywhere. Along with that goes the general manipulation of people’s lives by the system” (14-15).

The relationship between capitalism and political power structures in the United States has had a significant impact on our country, however the negative repercussions of this fusion became paramount most recently in the 2016 US Presidential Election. Misogynistic and racist comments made by Donald Trump throughout his successful presidential campaign have shed light on standards of American morality. First lady Michelle Obama responds to a specific account in a 2016 speech: “This was a powerful individual speaking freely and openly about sexually predatory behavior… This isn’t about politics. It’s about basic human decency. It’s about right and wrong”. The perpetuation of this patriarchal, white-supremacist model in such blatant means displays an inescapable model of political tyranny. This model is a macrocosm of the oppression occurring in the American Theater Landscape.

As a nation, the struggle to align our moral framework has oftentimes been propelled alongside demands for change in public policy; this is true in the case of the American Civil War (1861-1865), The Civil Rights Movement (1954-1968), and same-sex marriage (2015). The success of these movements, however, does not equate to an
ethically united society; perhaps such a thing cannot exist merely because of the mathematical chaos it renders in catering to 325.7 million people. Changes to adjust the system at hand would need to be monumental. In his biography, *To the Castle and Back* (2009), Havel describes the necessity for, "a kind of general awakening, an emphasis on seeking an alternative to the established… an emphasis on the development of an open civil society and on the reconstruction of transparent human communities as an instrument of human solidarity and self-regulation" (ch.6). In response to Trump’s presidency and the roots of oppression which it represents, communities have come together in solidarity for resistance.

On the forefront of addressing post-civil rights era issues on a national level is the campaign #BlackLivesMatter\(^2\). Their website describes: "The grassroots #BlackLivesMatter movement emerged in the wake of the death of Trayvon Martin back in 2013 and has since become a full fledged civil rights campaign against police brutality and the targeting of black men and women.” Social media enabled the rapidfire development of this campaign and allowed individuals across the country to instantaneously share their personal experiences regarding their struggle for racial equality. Other events that inspired solidarity in the face of oppression include the MeToo movement (or #MeToo) and the 2017 Women’s March. Among the results of these campaigns were a national dialogue about the challenges faced by communities of color and an acknowledgement of the spate of sexual assault and discrimination embedded in American culture.

In theater, dialectical conversations are held amongst audience members after the show in terms of their personal reception to the work. This can be seen through their opinions on iconic dramatic characters, much like audiences mixed reception of the character Nora in Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* (1879), or the title character of Euripides’

\(^2\) A trending hashtag on social media which emerged from ongoing police brutality in the United States toward people of color
ancient Greek classic *Medea* (431 BC). These plays and characters were a catalyst for much larger conversations regarding issues of women’s rights and xenophobia that were relevant to the societies in which they were created. While there may never be a unanimous agreement about the moral qualities of these characters, challenging one’s perspective in order to understand another person’s point of view about a certain topic results in a collaborative learning experience in which everyone’s preconceptions can alter. For this reason, the means through which we tell these stories and the perspectives we use to navigate them is of utmost importance. However, within a theater culture saturated in hierarchies and histories of oppression, how do we as artists ensure that the stories we tell respectfully reflect the society in which we live?

Joseph Haj, the artistic director of the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis, Minnesota since 2015, has dramatically extended the role the theater plays within the community it exists. He reiterates one of the Guthrie Theater’s guiding principles in their 2016-2017 annual report: “A theater and its community should be meaningfully and inseparably linked” (Haj 3). The relationship between community and theater is a vital link that can cultivate ethical development and even ensure longevical success of any given company within a geographical region. It is not just this emphasis on community, however, that has ensured the Guthrie’s success in an industry overall facing declining audience numbers. *Theatre Facts 2016: Theatre Community Group’s Report on the Fiscal State of the U.S. Not-For-Profit Theatre Field* categorizes survey responses and financial statements from professional nonprofit theater companies. They acknowledge this decline between 2012-2016: “Main series attendance began the period at its highest level, dropped annually until 2015, then had a 0.7% uptick 2016 for an overall 5-year decrease of 3.6%.” (Voss 10). Despite these averages, some theaters like the Guthrie have managed to increase their audience numbers and complete their fiscal years with an operating surplus. The increase of these numbers is likely due to the Guthrie’s initiative to consistently grow their community partnerships. Haj lists that educational outreach and discounted ticket prices
were several factors that represent, “the vital intersection of theatrical endeavor and community engagement” (Haj 3). He also reiterates an emphasis on their, “commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion”(3), like many theaters are starting to do. At the same time, some theater practitioners are not so easily convinced that adjusting statistical values regarding representation is enough action given the social and political tensions throughout the US.

While promoting aspects of equity, diversity, and inclusion should be a fundamental component of any environment, significant restructuring of the operational means through which the American Theater Landscape functions should be considered. In the aforementioned panel “Beyond Diversity: Casting & Cultural Appropriation in the American Theatre” (2017), Roberta Pareira suggests: “We need to start building anti-racist organizations, which is different than just talking about E.D.I. (equity, diversity, inclusion).” Joanie Schultz, the artistic director of WaterTower Theatre in Texas, questions the system in which productions are produced: “I’m wondering if we should be thinking more deeply about the shows that we’re doing earlier on...We generally partner with a director and say ‘go do this thing’, but should we be partnering with actors earlier in the phases and sitting down with people and talking with them”. It was ideas similar to this and that of Haj, in tandem with my personal belief that theater has a moral obligation, that steered my course as the 2017-2018 Artistic Director for BarnStorm at the University of California, Santa Cruz.
Part Two

Metacognition in the BarnStorm Theater

“We are living within our own dialectical dance of truth and lies”
-Paul Wilson

The BarnStorm Theater Company at the University of California, Santa Cruz plays a vital educational role that expands beyond the experience of the Theater Arts department. The BarnStorm syllabus describes its function as a “class … for students to gain practical, intensive experience working in a theater company” (Oertel 1). The class acts as a model to integrate students into a synergistic ensemble. The fact that BarnStorm is a student-run and student-operated theater further emphasises the need for community by creating a working environment made up entirely of peers. As a theater company, BarnStorm has historically been run within ‘poor theatre’ conventions established by the Polish theatre practitioner Jerzy Grotowski. In his essay Towards a Poor Theatre (1965), Grotowski explains the performance aesthetic as “trying to avoid eclecticism, trying to resist thinking of theatre as a composite of disciplines” (Grotowski 1). This theology is counterintuitive to a space meant to experiment with interdisciplinary means of production. Grotowski describes his ideal actor’s training assiduously:

“Everything is concentrated on the ‘ripening’ of the actor which is expressed by a tension towards the extreme, by a complete stripping down, by the laying bare of one’s own intimity - all this without the least trace of egotism or self-enjoyment… This is a technique of the ‘trance’ and of the integration of all the actor’s psychic and bodily powers.” (1).

Submersion into such a rigorous process could prove to be complex, if not unfathomable, for the beginning actors who regularly embody the majority of the company. Even for experienced actors, such a process could seem to be an unrealistic goal within the ephemeral span of the three-month-long quarter system. Furthermore, such a process would call for an acting instructor, a position not provided by BarnStorm at this time. Ultimately, there are conventions of ‘poor theatre’ that are counterintuitive to a classroom setting that explicitly welcomes “artists of all kinds, at all levels of experience: performers, directors,
writers, designers, technicians, and all who desire to learn, grow, and to build a strong community through working in the theatre” (Oertel 1). Contrary to these past directors, I would argue that BarnStorm must continue to try to cater to the community of students enrolled in the course at any given time, which ranges from 30-80+ at any given quarter. In my time as the artistic director for BarnStorm I sought to create a flexible array of performances that would adhere to the demands of the larger performing community.

I learned I would be the Artistic Director of the Barn in Spring of 2017. As a result of my close knit undergraduate experience in BarnStorm, I knew to anticipate few proposals for the following Fall quarter. My predictions were correct and six proposals emerged. From these six, only two enabled casting opportunities. These proposals included dance, improv, sketch comedy, and a musical theatre revue. While I was elated to use the Barn platform to engage with such a variety of performance genres, the reality that no plays were proposed in a department with an immense pool of actors emerged as a challenge. With mixed feelings, but mostly fervor, I began looking through my personal library for a play to direct that would meet, if not surpass, the expectations of our student body. Keeping within the framework established by Haj at the Guthrie Theater, I wanted to direct a production that correlated with the specific interests and demands of the UCSC Theater Arts Department. I would briefly describe these demands as eclectic, non-traditional, tragic, absurdist, non-classical, politically relevant, philosophically engaging, and containing elements of dark comedy. Continually, the election of Donald Trump as President resulted in an ongoing palpable desire to bring issues of misogyny, capitalism, and racial tensions to the forefront of the stage.

**Case Study: The Memo (2017)**

Following World War II (1939-1945), the communist Soviet Union seized control of Eastern European countries during the Cold War (1947-1991). *The Memorandum* (1965) is a cautionary tale written by Vaclav Havel while he was under Soviet surveillance in Czechoslovakia. The central action of the play discusses the invention of an artificial language, called “Ptydepe” and follows it’s introduction into a non-specific corporate
megastructure. While the perceived goal of this new language is to increase precision in office communications, the harsh complexities of Ptydepe result in utter chaos for the office, especially the Managing Director, Mr. Gross. Ultimately, the play is a dark comedy regarding the dangers of capitalist enterprise and bureaucracy. I chose to direct Paul Wilson’s translation *The Memo* (2012) because it, “differs from *The Memorandum* (1965) in ways that are not substantial, but which… make the play as accessible as possible to twenty-first century non-Czech-speaking audiences” (Wilson 13). Comprehension for audience and cast was an absolute necessity considering the absurdist style of Havel’s work. Here, he seeks to define absurdist theatre in *Writing for the Stage* (1986):

> “These are not scenes from life but theatrical images of the basic modalities of humanity in a state of collapse… They cannot be taken literally; they illustrate nothing. They merely point to the final horizon of our common general theme.. [absurdist theatre] merely reminds us of how we are living: without hope. And that is the essence of its warning.” (qtd. in Gerould 487).

I sought to make this significance of representing society onstage as a critical educational point within the rehearsal process.

I began the callback by reading from Havel’s 1990 *New Year’s Address to the Nation*. The speech depicts a shockingly truthful representation of a post-totalitarian Czechoslovakia. Havel’s remarks about a country made economically, socially, and politically weak as a result of communist oppression were refreshingly honest for that of a politician. After addressing the problems of the state, Havel describes a republic that is economically prosperous and socially just. This admirable dream became the ideological framework for the Czech Republic. After reciting the speech, I began to communicate my goals for the process of directing *The Memo* (2012). I explained my intentions for the artistic process to be one rooted in curation, as opposed to traditional forms of directing so that the ensemble could share their ideas and more actively contribute to the production. I elaborated that this project would require a highly collaborative and interdisciplinary learning environment because design elements and directorial ideas would be determined among the ensemble. I wanted the
experience of the rehearsal process to replicate aspects of devised work in order to break
down hierarchical structures and further reinforce the importance of community within
theatrical crafting at BarnStorm.

As is typical in the Barn Theater, shortages in stage management and technical
designers during Fall Quarter 2017 contributed to a non-traditional production process for
*The Memo*. The need to break down traditional rehearsal structures and technical positions
would ultimately allow the ensemble to have an interdisciplinary approach to the work based
on their own interpretation of the text. I abandoned traditional means of dictating blocking
behind a table in place of creating tableaus, hosting viewpoints, and inciting questions about
the way in which an audience perceives spacial dynamics. Open conversations regarding
technical design (lighting, costumes, scenic, and sound) were held throughout the process
and ideas from the ensemble were compiled within rehearsal reports. Production meetings
with designers emerged as group discussions among the ensemble during rehearsals. Cast
members or myself would provide a piece of stimulus (photo, sound, personal experience,
etc) for the group to spark inspiration. Due dates for completing designs and sharing ideas
were not established in order to let the creative process be ongoing. This was true even of
the opening performance, after which the cast and I collectively decided to restage the ending
of the play. What originally concluded with an innocent worker being fired from the
organization became all of the workers leaping at her with forks and knives, to portray the
vicious animosity at the root of bureaucracy. The cast’s ceaseless desire to improve the show
revealed a personal obligation to the work. This passion emerges from a multi-invested
means of participation throughout the process that is atypical to traditional collegiate
rehearsals in my experience at UCSC.

As a result of these changes, I was pleased to have a directing experience unlike any
other in that it was a curatorial experience. Ideas of all sorts were buzzing throughout the
process, however, there are two specific contributions that dramatically altered the
production. The first of these decisions was by the actor Teddy Morse, who played the
antagonist, Mr. Ballas. He was inspired to base his portrayal of the character on Roy Moore, a former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Alabama. This decision was informed through costuming, physicality, and an enhanced southern accent. Morse’s development of his caricature-esque depiction of Moore was done by, “playing off of the southern tropes that Moore presents as himself everyday” (Morse 1). This choice in context with script depicts an archetypical ‘southern gentleman’ as the main proponent of mischief through means of manipulation and falsified information. While Morse’s similarities to Moore were not pertinent to plot comprehension, it was significant in anchoring this production within the scope of a modern American society. This choice brought a sense of clarity to the rehearsal process and enabled us to reach a point where we could more thoroughly and coherently develop the world of our production.

Another decision involved an actor who insisted on playing their character’s gender by means described in the script. At the start of the production I suggested that all of the characters’ genders in the play were subject to interpretation and reinvention in order to foster inclusion for actors who embrace non-traditional gender roles. The actor playing the protagonist, Mr. Gross, insisted on playing the role as a man. I believe this decision ultimately hindered a broader dialectical conversation regarding gender politics. I had not even considered the significance of the protagonist’s gender until Morse brought his idea for Roy Moore into the process. A change to play the role as a woman presented the opportunity to
reference discussions about gender politics initiated by Hillary Clinton during the 2016 Presidential Election. I thought it was important that this conversation propel into the scope of our production in order to expand our understanding of the role of sexual harassment and misogyny in relation to bureaucracy and systems that enable oppression. When I discussed the possibility of the actor playing the role true to her own gender, she was dismissive to change. After several discussions and attempts at reconsidering, the actor played the role as a man. My stance as a curator opposed to a traditional director limited me to force change; however, to surrender total artistic control is to enable a more in depth artistic collaboration for the ensemble.

To make drastic changes to rehearsal processes presents a multitude of challenges. Among these include confusion among cast members, scrambling to prepare things for a performance, and a general strain on resources. These challenges, however, already exist within the scope of peer collegiate directing and the benefits of change can be monumental. In-depth discussions about how to pragmatically design technical elements and an emphasis on the collaborative effort in which we as a working ensemble create those things are merely among the educational merits of such artistic metacognition at the collegiate level. Other benefits include newfound levels of artistic engagement with the work that revitalize the actor as a key player within a modern theatrical model. A booklet of letters, a cast member shares: “Thank you for bringing me out of an incredibly dark time in my life. Being cast in your show and working it it all these weeks has reinvigorated my love for theater and for life” (Anonymous 6). Another one recounts, “I used to think that an actor needed a speaking role to make a difference. Thank you for helping me to see otherwise” (2). Sentiments like these portray the ability of a collegiate theatrical model to extend beyond that of an educational setting and into that of community building.

**Case Study: FemmeProv (2017)**

While the larger scope of responsibilities as Artistic Director for BarnStorm is broad, meeting the demands of the artistic community is of utmost importance. As Haj is
“committed to ensuring that the Guthrie is a theater that belongs to the community it is charged to serve” (Haj 3), I believe the Artistic Director of BarnStorm must meet the demands of the student body. When I received a proposal for a performance titled *FemmeProv* (2017) at the end of Fall Quarter 2017, I recollected the general success of improvised performance throughout the history of the Barn Theater. A show by Someone Always Dies just weeks prior had been the first show in years to fill up the entire 150+ seated venue. Furthermore, the ability to provide a platform for a conversation discussing femme-identifying individuals (opposed to exclusively women) in relation to comedy. Tina Fey, who has worked professionally in comedy since her premiere in *Saturday Night Live* (1997), is notorious for discussing gender politics in comedy. In an interview she explains, “the boys are still getting more money for a lot of garbage, while the ladies are hustling and doing amazing work for less” (qtd. in Schilling). Makayla Johnson, echoes similar sentiments in her proposal for *FemmeProv*: “The comedy community has been a boy’s club for years, but femmes prove time and time again that being funny is not restricted to one gender identity.” (Johnson 1). She elaborates that, “comedy is a form of expression and can be very liberating; it is a way to put our voices out there” (1). She proposed a one day workshop in which collaborators, “would talk about shared experiences and issues [they] have run into in the comedy community due to [their] identities and backgrounds,” (1) and afterward, they would perform an improvised comedy show open to the public. Events that host conversations

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3 UCSC’s premiere improvisational comedy team

Fig. 3: *Cast of FemmeProv*
about socially relevant matter, like that proposed by Johnson, encourage discourse that
can influence change within the communities where the work is being presented.

Fifteen femme-identifying performers emerged from the BarnStorm company to
participate in the event. *FemmeProv* (2017) proved to be successful because it connected
individuals with similar experiences and allowed them to share their stories with each other,
describe their issues within the larger UCSC community, and create support systems.

Johnson’s event was additionally successful in completing a goal she set out in her proposal:
“For everyone involved to walk away feeling more confident to take up space in this world,
and feel they have an inclusive community they can come back to for years to come” (2).

Proposals that are inclusive in nature and reap large numbers of support, like that of
Johnson’s, are consistently the most smoothly operated and community oriented
performances in the Barn Theater.

The prosperity of any given show oftentimes correlates to the number of
collaborators it has because BarnStorm is unable to consistently provide technical
accommodations. Voids in technical production, and even casting, prove to be a great
challenge for many students seeking to direct for their first time. Individuals who can fill
these deficits are highly sought after within the community and, as a result, are regularly
overworked or unable to collaborate with the BarnStorm Company. Planning student
partnerships for shows ahead of time and proposing productions with collaborators
already in mind are simple ways to ensure a supported project. With a plethora of
productions happening in the UCSC Theater Arts Department in Spring
2018, I encouraged directors for the 2018 Chautauqua Festival to seek out collaborators
early on. I also provided tips to help them establish their own rehearsal process within the
confines of the festival.

**Case Study: Chautauqua 2018**

*Chautauqua* is a student-written new works festival hosted by BarnStorm every
Spring Quarter. It enables student playwrights to see their work develop into full stage
productions. BarnStorm is an excellent host of this event because it’s model allows for an experimental learning environment that encourages risk without the fear of failure. Over the past years Chautauqua has experienced a decline in the amount of proposals it has received from students both inside and outside of the Theater Arts Department at UCSC. Fewer numbers of student actors and playwrights within the department were significant in the artistic planning of Chautauqua 2018. Alongside Brianna Grabowski, the Managing Director of BarnStorm, I explained my thoughts about expanding the realm of work we produce for the festival to extend beyond that of just student-written plays. I wanted to accept proposals for devised work, art installations, and other multimedia projects. In doing this my goal was to expand BarnStorm’s network of communications and ensemble collectively. In breaking down confines previously established within Chautauqua, I sought to open up the space to further engage with more than just text based means of performance.

Among the results of these changes were two proposals of exceptional merit. Both Mariposas (2018) and Appropriating Shakespeare (2018) were proposed as devised work and intended to explore the experience of people of color in a modern American context. Director of Mariposas, Max Karpecki explains of the two person show: “I plan to incorporate lighting and home-video projections… to bring to light the struggles and narratives that I and my family members have experienced living in the U.S. as femmes of color.” (Karpecki 1). Karpecki’s piece emerged alongside the one acting collaborator it called for, allowing their process to begin immediately. Costume, sound, and media design by the performers alleviated them the strain of finding designers and ensured unity throughout their rehearsal process. Director of Appropriating Shakespeare, Rey Cordova explains of his five person show: “We will recreate Shakespeare in our own image and stand upon the pedestal that has been built for him as a means to eradicate the feeling of inferiority… experienced while performing Shakespearean text.” (Cordova 1). Cordova’s piece was proposed with three cast members and two interdisciplinary
designers. Without a script at the beginning of his process, Cordova and his collaborators managed to develop a piece constructed of spoken word and Shakespearean monologues that explored cultural appropriation in contrast to people of color performing Shakespeare. Both processes, which diverged from the traditional confines of Chautauqua, were able to address subject matter relevant to a multiplicity of students. To enable opportunities and to diversify the voices seen and heard in BarnStorm at the University of California, Santa Cruz is a crucial responsibility of the Artistic Director.
Conclusion:

Easy as Pie

The steps toward creating a more inclusive environment are not difficult at the collegiate theatre level. Simple changes to allow for a more devised rehearsal process, incorporation of performances based in dialectics, and explicitly expanding the limitations of traditional events were among the methods I employed in fortifying aspects of inclusivity within the BarnStorm community. These changes, while specific in their relationship to the Barn Theater, are exemplary on a conceptual level for the American Theater Landscape. Now is the time for the theater to address discrimination-based issues and oppression that plague our industry and our nation.

In the case of BarnStorm, the development of artistic communities is the only true gauge of success. The work produced will always be subjective, but communities created upon standards of equality and inclusion will continually produce positive life-experiences and education benefits that surpass constructs of artistic merit. Karpecki explains: “providing a voice for the Chicano community will further my passion to share experiences to an audience willing to relate to the struggles of fitting into a mold shaped by oppressive, heteronormative standards.” (Karpecki 2). Her quote embodies one of the essential goals of BarnStorm, which is to propel artists forward in crafting dialectical conversations. From these conversations we are able to support, learn, and grow from one another's experiences. This is the closest we will be able to endeavor in a search for universal truth.
Appendices

Chautauqua 2018 Director Proposal Form:

BarnStorm Theater Co. Presents...

**Chautauqua 2018 Proposal Form**

**DUE:** March 1st by 5pm via BarnStorm Mailbox in the J Building
or email ad.barnstorm@gmail.com

Name __________________________ Phone # __________
Email __________________________ Grade: 1 2 3 4 5th year Graduate

Title of Piece/Working Title: __________________________
Style of Work: play (drama, comedy, musical, devised), short film, devised concept,
other, explain: __________________________

*Length of work may vary from a minimum of 3 minutes to 45 minutes. May be a work in progress.*

Is the script completed? Y / N  If not, please attach an outline of future scenes

Total Number of characters _____ Specific Gender Requirements?: __________________________
Approximate running time for the script? _____ Note: the performance may not exceed 45 min

Do you have any collaborators? (actors, directors, designers, etc)

If so, list them:

Aside from rehearsal/performance spaces, what other needs do you anticipate from BarnStorm?
Lights, Sound, Director, Costumes, Props, Videographers, Stage Manager, Set, etc.

*Attach a brief summary of your work and a resume*

Notes:
- You must email a PDF copy of your script to ad.barnstorm@gmail.com by 5pm on March 1st
- Hard copies of the script will not be returned
- If your play is selected, you will be required to enroll in the 5-unit Chautauqua course Spring Quarter. As per the class, you will take on a second job (design work, stage management, publicity & ushering, crew, etc.)
- Only work submitted by enrolled UCSC students will be considered

**Questions? Email us!**
Artistic Director, Tanner Oertel ad.barnstorm@gmail.com
Bibliography:


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Havel, Václav. The MEMO. Translated by Paul Wilson, Theater 61 Press, 2012


