Drew University

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Devising Form and Content:

The Dramaturg as Performance Curator

A Thesis in Theatre Arts

by

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Abstract

This thesis explores the role of the dramaturg in devised theatre, defined as an essential curator. By examining the theatre-making process of the devising theatre company Tectonic Theater Project, Moment Work, this thesis seeks to comment on where an individual dramaturg should best work in the devising room. Through analyzing three Tectonic plays that successfully marry form with content—*Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde* by Moises Kaufman, *The Laramie Project* by Moises Kaufman and the Company Members of Tectonic Theater Project, and *Uncommon Sense* by Andy Paris and Anushka Paris-Carter—demonstrate that Moment Work is a viable process for creating innovative theatrical work. This is accomplished through process-oriented theatre-making, which explores form before content, instead of through a product-oriented system. This thesis also analyzes the dramaturg's role in devising a new Moment Work play in an undergraduate residency program. Ultimately, one established dramaturg should be present in the devising process from start to finish as a deviser, documentarian, and curator. The dramaturg does not exist in conflict with the director or writer(s) of a piece; rather, they are a necessary guardian of the visual and textual narrative of the play.

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Introduction

When I first heard the term "devised theatre" my sophomore year of college, I imagined bleak abstraction. I pictured people dressed in black leotards, moving silently around a bare, dimly lit stage while dissonant electronic music blasted a little too loudly. This imagined art piece had no clear story, palpable theme, or anything to emotionally grab onto; what I imagined as devised theatre lacked most of the things I seek and cherish as a theatre artist.

However, upon further exposure in my studies, I began to learn that *devised theatre* is an umbrella term. It is not one specific, easily-identified theatrical genre, such as a musical or a farce. You cannot look at a devised piece and say it is so. However, amidst this ambiguity, a "thrilling moment in American theatrical history" is being shaped (Qtd in Brenner et al 229). Devised theatre can loosely be defined as collectively created work, but as many practitioners of the form will point out, it's more intricate than that. Perhaps the most articulated voice belongs to Alison Oddey, who authored *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook.* In it, she defines devised theatre as needing "process (finding the ways and means to share an artistic journey together), collaboration (working with others), multi-vision (integrating various views, beliefs, life experiences, and attitudes to changing world events), and the creation of an artistic product" (3). These four core tenants constitute the heart of collective collaboration.

Devised theatre is also defined by what it is not. What it is not is what I call "traditional theatre-making." This is the process in which a playwright writes a script; that script is given to a director; that director casts actors and contracts designers who

work independently from each other during the rehearsal process; there is a brief technical rehearsal period where the group collaborates; and the show is performed. This rehearsal process typically takes three to six weeks, with productions running for as little as two weeks, and as long as twenty years. In this process, a clear hierarchy exists. The playwright is the sole voice who crafts the action in the play, and the director is the one who controls the visual and aural interpretation of the action. The designers and actors must craft their talents around what these two leaders set forth. This process is short, consumed by the idea of working towards a polished, marketable, palatable product.

In exploring the definition of this so-called "new" form of art, I became more curious about where devised theatre, as a form of theatre-making, fits into the theatrical landscape. Additionally, I was interested to better understand how the role of the dramaturg figures into this process.

In being presented the opportunity to study the method of a devising company, Tectonic Theater Project, I realized that I could also conduct some experiential research to try and answer these questions. By studying the theory and history of devised theatre, and then devising an original play with an ensemble, I would be able to dive headfirst into an unknown: an unknown to myself, but also to many other theatre artists. In the end, the process turned out to be one of the most personally fulfilling and artistically transformative endeavors of my career thus far.

Likewise coming to college, I did not have any idea what the job of a dramaturg was. The term had loosely been thrown around at my high school, but even then, I saw no active acts of dramaturgy. It was not until working in my university's theatre department

that I began to understand what dramaturgy was. I myself served as a rehearsal dramaturg my second year of study for two short plays. My role was that of a researcher, someone to help director, actors, and designers understand the text and to make informed choices in the production. Later in my college career as a director, I worked on a new play that was being edited and worked in the rehearsal room. The playwright worked closely with a third-party dramaturg, who assisted them in edits. I had never been exposed to this side of dramaturgy, except on paper in the dramaturgy class I had taken. Now I knew that dramaturgs were not just human encyclopedias for directors; they were people who challenged text, asking questions of characters, plot, structure, theme, and so on. This excited me. I could dive into a text (something that as an avid reader, I loved) and never hit the bottom. I could debate meaning, I could solve problems right at the table, I could help guide writers to their goals just by being a set of eyes to read, ears to listen, and voice to ebb and flow with. I now saw dramaturgy as necessary for the survival of new theatre.

Research Questions

This thesis seeks to investigate whether devising theatre, which explores form first in the creation of new work, leads to a more theatrically compelling product than does a traditional theatre-making structure. In addition, I investigate the unique contributions of the dramaturg within this process. I maintain that the dramaturg can be likened to the show's curator; the person with a critical eye who ensures the form and content work to clearly convey the play's main ideas to an audience. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, a "curator" is "one who has the care and superintendence

of something" and, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, its etymology "stems from Late Middle English (denoting an ecclesiastical pastor, also (still a Scots legal term) the guardian of a minor): from Old French *curateur* or, in later use, directly from Latin curator, from *curare*." My understanding of the role of the dramaturg in devised theatre fits with both of these connotations. The dramaturg supervises the development of the script and guards the of "sacredness" or "purity" of message: Is it true to the devisers' intentions, and are those intentions being communicated to an audience in a coherent and engaging manner? While all dramaturgs, even within a traditional theatre-making structure, protect the clarity and intentionality of the play, a key difference, as I will explore further, is that in the case of devised theatre, the play's narrative and central ideas, are heavily communicated through non-textual elements. As a result, a dramaturg must be a central collaborator before a script is even conceived. They must care for the play's forms as much as its content, and in particular, pay attention to how form and content work together to create meaning.

To illustrate these claims, I researched the devising company The Tectonic Theater Project and their method of creating original theatrical work. In evaluating the application of their Moment Work process in devising their plays, I also examine the role of the dramaturg in their shows. How successful is Tectonic's method of devising in exploring new forms, and creating original content? How effective are the forms in servicing the content of these theatrical pieces? If we deem that these plays are successful in their marriage of form and content, then how does a dramaturg exist in the process as a

curator? How might a dramaturg be best utilized? Is there merit to having an objective, outside voice to the writing and directing process?

In this thesis, I will be researching the devising company Tectonic Theater Project and their method of creating theatrical work. In evaluating the application of their Moment Work process in creating their plays, I will also be examining the role of the dramaturg in their work. How successful is Tectonic's method of devising in exploring new forms, and creating original content? How effective are the forms in servicing the content of these theatrical pieces? If we deem that these plays are successful in their marriage of form and content, then where does a dramaturg exist in the process as a curator and editor? Is there merit to having an objective, outside voice to the writing and directing process?

Methodology: Tectonic Theater Project and Drew University's NY Semester on Theatre

Tectonic Theater Project is a New York City based theatre company that devotes itself to creating new, original work. Arguably, Tectonic is at the forefront of devised theatre companies; they are the most familiar to a wide audience because of the commercial success of *The Laramie Project*, one of their first plays. Artistic Director Moisés Kaufman felt that devised theatre needed "a more rigorous definition" and sought to create a clearly laid out method that could be instructed (Qtd in Brenner et al 239). This method is known as Moment Work. Moreover, they have recently published a book outlining their process of moment-making, *Moment Work: Tectonic Theater Project's Process of Devising Theater*, which only makes their process more accessible. Because of

the clarity of their process, their clout in the artistic community, and the opportunity given to me to work with them first-hand, I have chosen to study their work and company model in this thesis.

Tectonic Theater Project offers residency programs, where teaching artists come into universities and schools, teaching students their methodology and developing devised pieces. Drew University's New York Semester on Theatre is a class newly integrated into the theatre arts curriculum, where students partake in one of these residences over the course of two semesters. I was a part of the inaugural class this year (Fall 2017-Spring 2018), working under the mentorship of Tectonic teachers Barbara Pitts McAdams, Scott Barrow, and Meyung Kim; and Drew faculty members Dr. Lisa Brenner and Christopher Ceraso. After a semester of learning the different levels of Moment Work, our class developed a theatrical piece that was performed in New York City and on the Drew University campus. I will be using my first-hand experiences as student and dramaturg to analyze the application of Moment Work on our play-making, and the impact of collective collaboration on our class.

Chapter One: Tectonic Theater Project

This chapter provides background information on Tectonic Theater Project. It is important to examine their history, mission, and leadership to subsequently understand their method. I will also outline the process of devising unique to Tectonic known as Moment Work. This type of devising comes directly from the experimental theatre movement of the mid-twentieth century and focuses on an exploration of theatrical forms. Knowing specifically about the Moment Work process can show us where dramaturgy can and should exist in a devised rehearsal process.

History and Mission

Tectonic Theater Project is an award-winning theatre company located in New York City, New York. Founded in 1991, the company is "dedicated to developing innovative works that explore theatrical language and form, fostering an artistic dialogue with audiences on the social, political, and human issues that affect us all" ("Mission & History"). Its founders, Moisés Kaufman and Jeffrey LaHoste, are still active within the company; Kaufman is the Artistic Director, and LaHoste a member of the Board of Directors ("Board of Directors"). So named because of a desire to "emphasize the company's interest in construction," Tectonic Theater Project seeks to reexamine theatrical form, above all else ("Mission & History"). They do this through taking a structuralist approach to developing work, as opposed to accepting plays in a traditionally-made fashion.

In the beginning, Tectonic produced published plays, fictionalized accounts written by singular authors. They were intently focused on the works of writers in the theatrical canon who pushed boundaries of form. Such playwrights include Samuel Beckett, Franz Xaver Kroetz, Sophie Treadwell, and Naomi Iizuka ("Mission & History"). By producing previously published work, Tectonic was subscribing to my definition of traditional theatre-making: playwright, director, actors, rehearsals, designers, tech, product.

Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde was the first original piece written and performed by Tectonic. Intently examining the relationship of text to his exploration of form, Kaufman created the piece by combining "transcripts, biographies, letters, and other found materials about the life and work of Oscar Wilde" ("Mission & History"). This use of found text (text that was not originally written by the playwright, in this case Kaufman) is a form of theatre-making; weaving these texts into narrative and simultaneously building performance around them was a new, innovative way to create something original. *Gross Indecency* was produced in 1997, after a newly structured writing, workshop, and rehearsal process (Kaufman 2). This piece began the definition of Moment Work, but it was in their next piece that the vocabulary became consistent.

Following the much-acclaimed Off- Broadway production of *Gross Indecency,* Tectonic produced its next work in 2000: *The Laramie Project*. This play centered on the town of Laramie, Wyoming following the murder of Matthew Shepard, a gay university student, in 1998. To this day, *The Laramie Project* is one of the most widely produced plays in America, held in esteem with other canonical American dramas (Loewith 179).

Shortly after the murder of Matthew broke into the press, Kaufman and ten company members made their way to "interview people in the town torn apart by the crime" ("Mission & History"). The piece is a culmination of a year and a half of interview transcripts; a docudrama of verbatim theatre which presents a dramatized account of a tragic hate crime. Following the acquisition of these accounts, the team then set about a workshopping process, in which "participants were encouraged to operate outside their area of specialization: actors and designers became writers and dramaturgs, directors became designers and actors" ("Mission & History"). By pushing artists to experiment in disciplines outside of their comfort zone, the formal process of Moment Work was born. Elements of the stage could be reexamined with fresh, curious eyes, and forged into new forms in which to make stories.

In our quest to understand their exploration of "form," it is necessary to acknowledge how this form is defined by the company. The roots of form come from the deconstructionist movement, which "sought to separate and analyze each theatrical element individually" (Kaufman and Pitts McAdams 14). However, Tectonic's goal is to see how all of these individual elements can combine and work in harmony together. As Kaufman describes it, form is essentially theatrical vocabulary; forms are the ways that narrative can be carried on the stage (Qtd in Loewith 184). For example, the use of interview transcripts is a form because it carries both the narrative of the tragedy and also the dramatic tension of knowing this is actual truth. Direct address to the audience, as used in both *Laramie* and *Gross Indecency,* is also considered a form.

It was after *The Laramie Project* that Tectonic's name took significant hold and clout. Following success in both the artistic and commercial community, Tectonic company members and Kaufman collaborated with Doug Wright to create *I Am My Own Wife*, the true story of a transgender woman struggling to survive in both Nazi Germany and the Soviet bloc. This production began as a workshop, utilizing interviews from Charlotte Von Mahlsdorf herself, eventually transferring to Broadway. It received the 2004 Pulitzer Prize for Drama ("I Am My Own Wife"). Returning to Tectonic-centric work, *33 Variations* was developed by Kaufman and company as a love letter to Beethoven. This piece received a regional premiere in 2007 in Washington D.C., but later transferred to Broadway. With the more commercialized nature of this production, only a few resident Tectonic company members were involved in the run of the show ("33 Variations").

There are several collaborative projects that Kaufman has worked on outside of the company, and it begs the question: what can be considered a Moment Work play or a Tectonic play? Moment Work can be applied to any play or process, not exclusively original devised pieces (Kaufman and Pitts McAdams 18). An example is the piece *I Am My Own Wife*. It was devised with Moment Work and worked on by Kaufman. However, it was written by Doug Wright and performed by Jefferson Mays, who are not a part of the resident company. Just because pieces are created through the company's process does not mean they are necessarily part of the company's body of work: for example, our Drew play *4320p: IMMERSION*. It is a Moment Work play, but not a Tectonic play.

More recent Tectonic pieces include *The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later, Carmen: An Afro-Fusion Jazz Musical,* and *Uncommon Sense*. Both *Carmen* and *Uncommon Sense* are technically "in the lab" at the moment, but *Uncommon Sense* has received several regional showings, as well as a production in New York in the fall of 2017. *Uncommon Sense* was the one major Tectonic piece in which Kaufman was not a head deviser; the leads on that process, unlike the aforementioned shows, were company member Andy Paris and Anushka Paris-Carter.

Moisés Kaufman

One cannot separate Tectonic's work from its inextricably linked founder and Artistic Director. Moisés Kaufman is considered to be "one of the best known and most important voices directing and writing in America's institutional theaters" (Loewith 177). His contributions to the artistic community are quantifiable: namely, his creation of a specific, recreatable process of devising and theatrical exploration. His background in experimental theatre, training in physical performance, and study of text and analysis copulate and make an artist who is perfectly equipped to put text in the corner for a while and explain how other forms can carry narrative.

Kaufman was born in Caracas, Venezuela. While still a young man in his home country, Kaufman was an actor with the Thespis Theater Ensemble, "one of Venezuela's pre-eminent experimental theater companies at the time" (Loewith 178). He later moved to New York City in 1987, where he began his studies at New York University. There, he became entrenched in the studies of the Experimental Theatre Wing. It was in this

program that the questioning of form, first approached at Thespis Theater, came to a head. Kaufman studied the greats of experimentation, such as Richard Schechner, Mabou Mines, and the Wooster Group. The common thread between these artists was their questioning of the relationship between form and content. Text, these ones believed, did not need to be central to theatrical creation (Loewith 178). Not only could these artists question the place of text in theory, but they also produced work that reflected this questioning. In 1991, Kaufman co-founded Tectonic Theater Project with Jeffrey LaHoste, his partner. After several years of producing published works, Tectonic began to create its own work; thus, branding itself as a devised company from then on out.

In the early stages of Tectonic's existence, Kaufman was utilizing exercises that echoed his postmodern and deconstructionist roots (Kaufman and Pitts McAdams 16). These workshops of particular textual moments would explore forms that they could impose onto the text. For example, when working on a piece called *The Nest*, Kaufman decided to make a small diorama of a lake shore with small puppets that would be wheeled onstage, instead of making a realistic set change contradictory to his concept (Kaufman and Pitts Mcadams 17). Eventually these explorations of form would morph into the process of Moment Work, which would in turn be used to create forms, followed by original content.

Kaufman is often viewed in the devising process as the combined director and uber dramaturg. This is largely because most of the Tectonic pieces have been his brainchild. He serves as the ultimate "editor in the room," someone to make the final decisions. In Tectonic's collaboration process, many voices come together, but there's

always “a single vision guiding the group” (Kaufman and Pitts McAdams 23). For *Gross Indecency*, Kaufman was the one to have the original hunch for the play, completed source material research, and then called together actor and designer friends (Kaufman and Pitts McAdams 161). For *The Laramie Project*, Kaufman was not the only company member to have the hunch or collect the source material, but he was ultimately the strongest guide of the hunch, the guide of the writers, and the director (Kaufman and Pitts McAdams 191). Kaufman was also the originating voice for *33 Variations*, and one of three moment-making voices for *I Am My Own Wife* (Kaufman and Pitts McAdams 218, 212). For *Uncommon Sense,* Andy Paris and Anushka Paris-Carter were the ones to have the hunch and conduct research on source material. Yet, Kaufman still served as a guide in the process, as Tectonic’s Artistic Director (Kaufman and Pitts McAdams 248). While Kaufman often has been the final editor, there have nonetheless been separate dramaturgs and other contributing writers in each process. For example, Stephen Wangh joined *Gross Indecency* as the dramaturg and his contributions were considered “invaluable” (Kaufman and Pitts McAdams 164). Leigh Fondakowski was the head writer for *The Laramie Project*, with Stephen Belber and Greg Pierotti serving as associate writers with frequent written collaboration with Kaufman (Kaufman and Pitts McAdams 191). Moisés can serve as the editor in the room well; he can write, direct, and dramaturg to great success, but should he be the only one making these collective decisions? Should there be some other objective figure making these calls, a second set of eyes? This is where I see the devising process benefitting from a completely separate dramaturg. It should not be a role occasionally present, but one present throughout.

Moment Work

As mentioned, Tectonic's method of devising is known as Moment Work. Moment Work has been the primary process used to "create all of Tectonic's [original] pieces, including *The Laramie Project Cycle*, *Gross Indecency*, *I Am My Own Wife*, *33 Variations*" as well as *Uncommon Sense* ("Our Process"). It was created by Moisés Kaufman, utilized firstly by the company in creating *Gross Indecency*, and is used to this day in both rehearsal rooms and classrooms. Kaufman has said Moment Work developed "out of a great sense of unhappiness with a lot of the work I was seeing...so much of it lacked theatricality" (Qtd, in Brenner et al 240). In an attempt to explore and discover how narrative can be created, the mission of their work is as follows: "Moment Work encourages participants to actively engage with the elements of the stage, enfranchising writers, actors, designers, and directors to collaborate in compelling and theatrical storytelling that stretches their creative capacity" ("Our Process"). At its very core, Moment Work lends itself to the devising community by asking its participants to remember that stories can be told through more than just words. Devised theatre is collective collaboration; by nudging artists into different areas of expression, they are in a dialogue with one another.

Moment Work is simple. It is a clear, structured way to explore a prop, a light, a theme, a piece of text, and more. Moments do not have to be complex or complicated. They are merely "a unit of theatrical time, a building block of theatrical narrative, or a structural unit of performance" (Kaufman and Pitts McAdams 43). Phrases of theatrical action simply start with "I begin," and when the collaborator is done showing what

happens (whether through gesture, movement, use of prop, etc.), they say "I end" (Qtd in Brenner et al 241). This provides company members with a specific, shared theatrical vocabulary, which is key. It is in this precision that their method of devising can be passed around, taught, and remain consistent.

As Kaufman and long-time company member Barbara Pitts-McAdams put it, Moment Work is a means of writing performance, not text (Qtd in Brenner et al 239). While it seems obvious that theatre would be instinctively performative and full of spectacle, it can often become repetitive and inhibiting in its use of text as the sole carrier of narrative. Elements such as costumes, lights, properties, and sound become simply means of illustrating a script; they do not tell their own stories. Using Moment Work to create a play encourages artists to explore "a technique to study the language of all the elements of the stage" (Kaufman and Pitts McAdams 43). In this way, the devised theatre that Tectonic champions challenges preconceived notions of what theatre has to be. With text no longer as the heart of a play, a play may not need text at all to tell its story in the most compelling way.

The desire to explore narrative potential in various elements beyond text, however, should not be taken as a disinterest in creating compelling stories. Rather, the goal of using innovative forms, discovered through Moment Work, seeks to remind the audience of theatre's uniqueness. It is a way of prodding thought towards, "what is it that this medium [theatre] can do that others can't?" (Loewith 184). Theatre exists in a three-dimensional, tangible spectrum. Everything that is created onstage is done so through the physical work of another: costumes are sewn, sets are painted, words are written, lines

are spoken. Tectonic does not seek to reject text; rather, they treat it as an equal alongside the other elements of the stage. Their method shows artists and audiences that these things are all equally important to creating a cohesive and compelling story, as opposed to just one over the other. This contrasts with traditional forms of theatre-making, where the text is the first element introduced and considered in production. In Moment Work, for example, the way a prop is handled by an actor can tell us many things: the relationship between object and character; the character's mood; the character's world view; the character's physical condition; and so on. Because of discovery through Moment Work, that prop now can serve as a significant motif of a character's journey, without the character needing to utter a single word.

Moment Work, as a method of learning, is divided into three levels, known as Level One, Two, and Three. My training in Moment Work through Drew University had us move through all three levels, from when class began in September to our production culminating in March. This process can be adapted to any sort of time constraints because it is "a flexible framework for theatrical discovery and experimentation" (Kaufman and Pitts McAdams 28). Typically, Tectonic has somewhat unlimited time to work on a piece, unlike our timeline of approximately seven months.

Level One of Moment Work focuses on the discovery of narrative building blocks. How can theatre-makers "tell stories that move us emotionally, viscerally, and sensory as well as intellectually?" (Kaufman and Pitts McAdams 29). The answer, Tectonic says, is in the elements of the stage. An "element" is considered anything that is used in the process of making a theatrical production, not a set list of things (Qtd in

Brenner et al 243). As mentioned before, text is an element; tangible things such as actors, lighting, costumes, set, theater space, and so on are also elements. Moment Work encourages exploration of an idea in an exclusively theatrical setting (Kaufman and Pitts McAdams 29). Thinking less in terms of theatrical spectacle, Moment Work also encourages a deviser to think of non-dialogue action. Some examples of this include dance, poetry, video and media, song, music, puppetry, and so on. Level One can be simply an exploration of these elements, especially if the devisers have no prior experience with Moment Work. A dramaturg can be extremely useful in keeping track of the elements, which elements seem to have the most heat around them, and what forms keep popping up from different moments.

Speaking as someone who came from a traditional theatrical education and training, Level One was key to breaking down my preconceptions of how a story could be told. Our class made a list of at least thirty elements of the stage on the first day, as shown in Figure 1. I kept these all semester as the dramaturg; we referenced back to them constantly. Some of these elements included atmosphere, repetition, and improv, to name a few (and these were present in the show). Perhaps these were things we considered noteworthy when creating work, but once the process began, the Moment Work teaches us to highlight them and consider them on equal footing with text. Knowing different elements that exist uniquely to the room, such as the ability to do gymnastics, can also contribute to a more uniquely specific way of storytelling: the people in the room can have a direct hand in what goes into the text (Brenner et al 245).

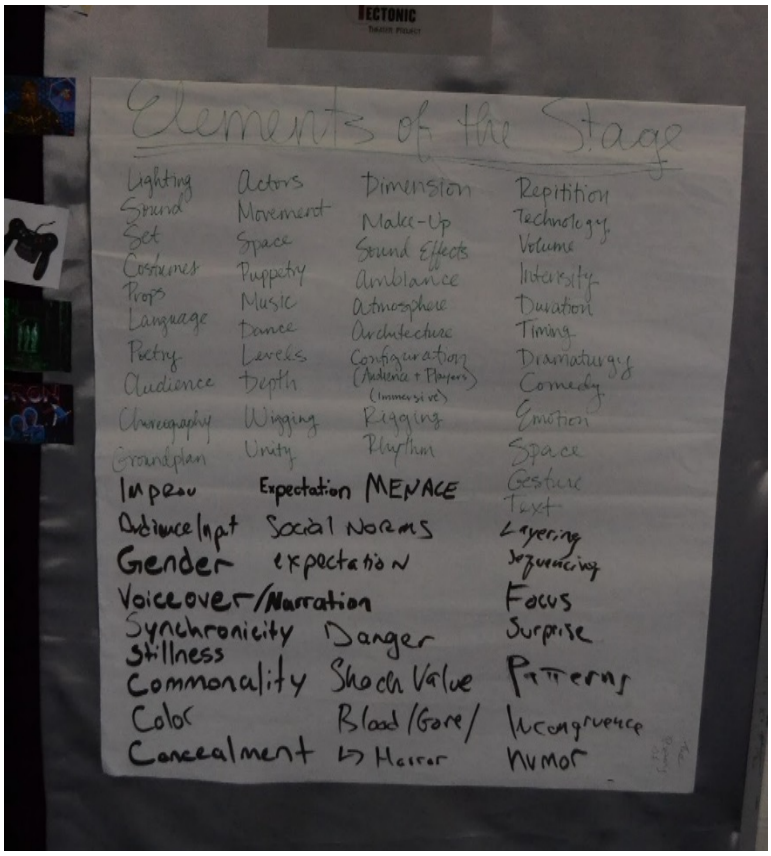

Fig. 1: List of elements of the stage created by the Drew New York Semester on Theatre class. [Photo by Zoe Camp]

Level Two of Moment Work further deepens the discoveries begun in Level One. Level Two has devisers stringing together longer, more intricate moments. They are structured, layered and sequenced, to create short narratives (Kaufman and Pitts McAdams 124). If Level One can be considered a phase of creation, Level Two is a more refined phase of creation. It is here where there is not just pure discovery, but organized, mutated creation. In our classes, Scott Barrow called Level One "excavation" and Level Two "construction." As Kaufman and Pitts McAdams write, "First we create narrative;

then we sculpt it" (125). At this point, text is allowed back in the room as an element to be explored. The powerful tool of context is explored, and prescribed onto moments through use of found text, order of action, and so on. Moments, with all their built-in context and tension, will draw audiences in and keep them engaged in the narrative (Kaufman and Pitts McAdams 139). It is in the Level Two stage that a dramaturg could be keeping detailed records of the moments and sequences to look back on. This is made easier because of the process of naming moments; each sequence receives a creative title to jog the devisers' memories.

Level Three is the culmination of work from Levels One and Two into a final performance product. The process in Level Three is creating long form narrative, "a play, complete with plot, structure, and dialogue" (Kaufman and Pitts McAdams 153). There are a few components Tectonic uses in crafting work in this stage. The hunch is the "point of departure, and inspiration, a source" for the piece and exploration (Kaufman and Pitts McAdams 154). It something that the devisers in the room are curious about: for example, in our Drew process for making what eventually would be *4320p: IMMERSION*, our class was interested in the idea of the "curated self," and how technology and social media interact in creating our modern identity. Moment Work is "a process to explore a hunch theatrically" (Kaufman and Pitts McAdams 154). We could have just sat in a room and talked about the different ideas surrounding social media, but instead, we made a play. We explored the hunch using the elements of the stage.

Another benchmark used in Level Three is the gathering of source material. This is what your piece will use as a basis. For example, *Gross Indecency* used the trial

transcripts of Oscar Wilde's court appearances as source material (Kaufman and Pitts McAdams 154). *The Laramie Project* used interviews from the townspeople of Laramie, and the journals kept by Tectonic company members. *Uncommon Sense* was a fictionalized narrative, but used information from different interviews. It is noteworthy to mention that in making *4320p: IMMERSION,* we explored various potential source materials: origin stories, mythologies, creation myths, articles, songs, and self-reflections. Our piece ultimately did not use any of these source materials explicitly; it was completely fictionalized, inspired by moments.

The final piece of Level Three is a combination of two things: the organizing principle and throughlines. This comes after a great deal of exploration of moments. An organizing principle is drawn from the exploration of the hunch in Moment Work and conversations about how the story should be presented. It is defined as "the pressing question that will help us generate the story and also determine how that story is told." (Kaufman and Pitts McAdams 157). It is the "logic by which we will critique our moments and structurally arrange them into a narrative." (Kaufman and Pitts McAdams 157) For example, *The Laramie Project* had the organizing principle, "How did the town of Laramie change as a result of Matthew's murder?" The Tectonic company answered this question with throughlines: moments made through the exploration of form that answer the organizing principle as a specific narrative strand (Kaufman and Pitts McAdams 158). A throughline is a sequence of moments that is long enough to contain larger parts of a story. A play, then, is a group of moments made around the idea of a

hunch, chosen and organized within the parameters of an organizing principle, constructed into throughlines. It's no small feat!

By utilizing Moment Work as a specific method of devising, Tectonic makes sure that all types of theatrical experience are being considered. Minds of actors, designers, directors, writers, and dramaturgs are all given equal consideration when going through the process of Moment Work. Everyone is a theatre artist, generally, first. That is what helps create such interesting content through more diverse forms. It was in the implementation of this method that Tectonic Theater Project shifted from a product-based company to a process-based one. For this reason, Kaufman cites that they are a laboratory company. He does not want the consistency of a subscriber base, space, and set season; those would hinder the process, and orient goals towards product over theatrical exploration (Qtd in Brenner et al 244). By allowing an environment where discovery is the mode of operation, work that is more theatrically rich and inclusive can be nurtured and thrive.

Chapter Two: The Relationship of Form and Content

In this chapter, I am looking to analyze how the Moment Work process generates impactful content. Because the radical idea of Moment Work is to focus on process instead of rushing towards a production deadline, I feel it is important to assess the product came out. A successful product made through Moment Work is one in which the form and content serve one another. First, I will break down the presence of forms in three major Tectonic works, looking at notable forms and how they relate to content. Then, I will look at the implications of their methodology for writers and dramaturgs.

Major Works

As mentioned, I will be looking at three of Tectonic's pieces: *Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde, The Laramie Project,* and their most recent work, *Uncommon Sense.* While there are several notable works by the company including *33 Variations, I am My Own Wife,* and *One Arm* (all of which were made utilizing the Moment Work process), I have chosen these plays as case samples of Tectonic's work for various reasons. *Gross Indecency* is the first original piece that Moisés Kaufman created with the company; *The Laramie Project* is arguably their most successful and internationally known show; and *Uncommon Sense* is their most recent production. I also had the privilege of seeing *Uncommon Sense* at its run in New York City, the privilege of working with Barbara Pitts McAdams, who frequently shared insight into *The Laramie Project*'s process, and the privilege of working with Scott Barrow, cast member of *Uncommon Sense*.

Form and Content

One cannot study Moment Work without knowing intimately about theatrical form and content. This is explicitly referred to in Tectonic's mission statement, which states that they are "dedicated to developing innovative works that explore theatrical language and form" ("Mission & History"). They are a company guided by structuralist thought. According to their website, "Tectonic refers to the art and science of structure and was chosen to emphasize the company's interest in construction — how things are made, and how they might be made differently" ("Mission & History"). As previously discussed, Moment Work revolves around structure and how building a play involves both form and content. When making moments during the process, exercises are done to inspire thoughts around the content of the piece and thoughts around the theatrical forms that they can shine through (Kaufman and Pitts McAdams 22).

Form and content are entwined, not exclusive. For example, in our New York Moment Work process, we made a moment at a large windowsill with three shades, all adjusted to show various amounts of the outside world. This led us to the discovery of the form of a god-like figure who controls the perceptions of the other characters; a lot of the class' questions around this moment focused on who dictated the view of the outside world, and how those rules came to be. The form of the window created the notion of a god-character, which is content. As Kaufman says, "The way we think about it in Tectonic is that we want form and content to copulate. We want the offspring of that copulation to be the play" (Qtd in Brown 51). You cannot have one without the other.

Form and content become important to the writing process because writers are not solely focusing on text as a way to tell the story. Form refers to any element used to convey a story (lights, costume, props), and content being the story itself (a play about the identity influenced by social media). Either can be anything; content is shaped around the organizing principle but is also shaped into a story by the forms of the moments that are made. Writers then become authors of performance, using different moments as building blocks, containing many forms, to communicate a narrative. But even then, the writers are not the sole dictators of the piece; every artist, whether self-defined actor, designer, or director, becomes instead a theatre maker (Kaufman and Pitts McAdams 24). Any theatre maker can create forms or generate content. Because there are different individuals contributing in different ways, form and content will begin to morph uniquely based on the identities and skills of people in the room. For example, if you have a room full of singers, song may become a key form in creating narrative. If these singers are Tibetan monks, then that will undoubtedly have an impact on the content. Moment Work then bends itself fully to the people in the room, allowing the work to be the most truthful to the artists making it.

As Rich Brown discusses, Moisés Kaufman used questioning of practiced theory to create his treatment of form and content. In studying the Six Viewpoints, Kaufman began to adopt a "horizontal approach" to dramatic structure (Brown 53). However, because so many elements are being worked into a script with this approach, Kaufman believes that playwriting then morphs into a collaborative endeavor with multiple voices (Brown 54). *Gross Indecency* had people reading through library collections; in writing

The Laramie Project, the entire company travelled and conducted interviews with residents of the town; *Uncommon Sense* had Andy Paris and Anushka Paris-Carter conducting interviews and writing the script (Kaufman and Pitts McAdams 24). It may sometimes be one or two folks doing research on the hunch on their own, like Kaufman, but they always return to present their findings to the group. Then, the Moment Work begins. However, I believe that an external, established figure is still needed to watch over the group's progress. This should not be one of the writers, the director, or people conducting research; it should be someone with no single stance or formal production concentration, so they can have an equal footing everywhere. This way, it is easier to have clarity on the hunch, organizing principle, and throughlines.

Analysis of Forms

Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde

Written by Moisés Kaufman, *Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde* is the first original work made by Tectonic Theater Project. Its hunch came in the form of a gift to Moisés in 1995, the book *The Wit and Humor of Oscar Wilde* (Kaufman and Pitts McAdams 160). After years of development and writing, *Gross Indecency* was produced in New York City in February of 1997 and published in 1998 (Kaufman 2). It is interesting to note that Kaufman is credited as the sole authorial voice for this play, compared to that of *The Laramie Project*. However, he does give credit to "the many actors who participated in workshops and staged readings… they helped shape this play" (Kaufman xi).

The story follows, as one could imagine, the three trials of Oscar Wilde in 1895. The first act examines the first trial, in which the Marquess of Queensberry, Lord Sholto Douglas, is charged by the Crown for publishing "a false and malicious libel in regard to Mr. Oscar Wilde" (Kaufman 12). The libel claimed that Wilde was a sodomite and had committed acts of "gross indecency." The second and third trials are the Crown against Wilde himself, arrested for committing acts of gross indecency with several men. In the end, he is sentenced to two years of imprisonment and hard labor.

For *Gross Indecency*, the actual transcripts from Oscar Wilde's trials were among the driving source materials for the piece. The company also used "autobiographies, academic writing, and works by contemporary theorists" (Kaufman and Pitts McAdams 154). This verbatim source material served to create dramatic tension: many of the transcripts and accounts were in conflict with each other. In using this documentary form, Tectonic company members capitalized on these discrepancies. The facts were presented in different ways, depending on which account was looked at (Kaufman and Pitts McAdams 165). This began shaping the content of the play; instead of trying to depict a biography of the piece, the artists were now trying to make a statement about truth and its mutability (Kaufman and Pitts McAdams 164). The documentary form, verbatim, would allow the audience to see the inconsistencies for themselves; the content of the story then becomes deduced, as opposed to presented.

A notable form in this piece is the evolution of costume. The characters of the "rent boys," male prostitutes accusing Wilde of indecent behavior, stand out as a particular marker of how costume can carry narrative. As you can see in Figure 2, they

are costumed in Victorian underwear. This explicitly comes from research brought in by Kitty Leech, the costume designer and one of the moment-makers. Once the research was presented, “Kitty’s understanding of the customs and behavior of the period as exemplified through these articles of clothing was immediately absorbed into our theatrical vocabulary” (Kaufman and Pitts McAdams 170). The entire second trial takes place with the prostitutes in their underwear, in order to underscore how scandalous their testimony was. This choice also “created a surreal space that mirrored Oscar Wilde’s state of mind” (Kaufman and Pitts McAdams 171). The content was heightened by the form.

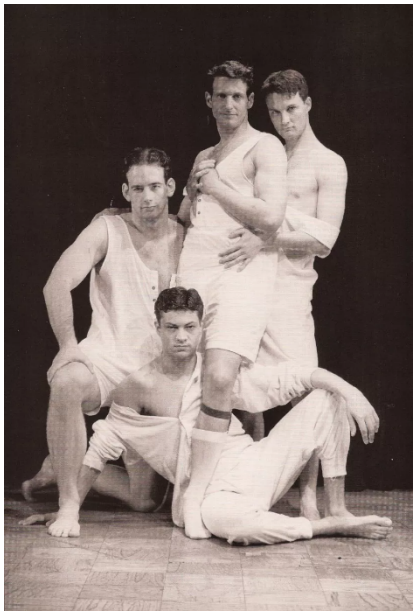

Fig. 2. The Rent Boys costumed in period Victorian underwear. [Photo taken from tectonictheaterproject.org]

Another form frequently used in this piece is direct address. Before each quoted piece of writing is presented, an actor playing a Narrator announces the source it is from. For example:

> NARRATOR 3: From *The Autobiography of Lord Alfred Douglas*:
>
> DOUGLAS: These men were warned that unless they testified against Oscar, they themselves would be taken to court. (Kaufman 47)

Directly presenting the source material is a way for the artists of the piece to "convey the disjointed nature of the story" (Kaufman and Pitts McAdams 167). All of the accounts are able to be seamlessly included this way. This form also introduces the idea of the role of the audience as witnesses. A person sitting and watching this piece is having varying accounts of truth presented to them, and they must decide for themselves what to accept. The form of address keeps the metatheatrical theme of performance, which "objectively [distances] them from Wilde's story (Brown 55). With critical distance, the audience is able to actively draw conclusions on their own rather than having the message dictated to them.

The Narrator characters serve as a sub-form within this structure. They are both the means in which the direct address form is enacted, but also a window for the audience to peek through into the construction of the world and truth. The Narrators are objective, merely announcing titles and introducing pieces. However, there is yet another form at work: the form of double-casting. By seeing actors play both "objective" Narrators as well as actual figures in the trials themselves, the line between what is truth and what is not is even more blurred. Their "double dipping," so to say, tells the audience that no one has one clear version of the truth, and that no one is ever just a bystander.

The Laramie Project

Hailed as Tectonic's biggest success, *The Laramie Project* is a culmination of a year and a half's worth of visits to Laramie, Wyoming in an attempt to tell the story of Matthew Shepard, a young gay man brutally murdered there in 1998. After hearing of the incident on the news, "five weeks later, Moisés Kaufman and fellow members of the Tectonic Theater Project went to Laramie and..conducted more than 200 interviews with people of the town" ("The Laramie Project Cycle"). These interviews were transcribed by members of the company and then crafted into a dramatic work, headed by artistic director Moisés Kaufman. Company members, comprising the cast, writers, and dramaturgs, included: Stephen Belber, Leigh Fondakowski, Amanda Gronich, Mercedes Herrero, Sarah Lambert, John McAdams, Maude Mitchell, Andy Paris, Greg Pierotti, Barbara Pitts, Kelli Simpkins, and Stephen Wangh (Kaufman et al 10). The play premiered at the Denver Center Theatre Company in February of 2000, moved to New York City shortly after in May, and then was taken to Laramie itself (Kaufman et al 14-15).

The Laramie Project follows the story of the town residents of Laramie, Wyoming following the murder of Matthew Shepard, a young gay man. Within the story, we meet numerous townsfolk, as well as the members of Tectonic Theater Project themselves who conducted the interviews. The piece collects accounts of people who knew Matthew personally or of only the crime, their reflections on the murder, and on the town of Laramie itself. With more than seventy characters in the script, audiences get a wide scope of thought and opinion. However, the focus is not just on the hate behind or

surrounding the incident, but the environment of a place where this could happen in an America on the brink of a new millennium.

This was the project where Moment Work truly became a craft and theory. Kaufman's hunch for the show lay within the crime against Matthew Shepard; out of all of the hate crimes committed against the gay community, why was this one receiving so much national attention? (Kaufman and Pitts McAdams 178). In following this hunch, travelling to Laramie, and gathering all of these interviews, the writers were able to craft different textual through lines that carried narrative, as well as build narratives from other theatrical elements. The writers of the piece, credited as Moisés Kaufman with Leigh Fondakowski (Head Writer), Stephen Belber, Greg Pierotti, and Stephen Wangh (Associate Writers), used Moment Work specifically to craft the play's text. In the introductions to *The Laramie Project* script, Kaufman writes, "When writing this play, we used a technique I developed...It is a method to create and analyze theater from a structuralist perspective" (Kaufman et al 19). This acknowledgement of Moment Work's existence was not present in the text of *Gross Indecency*, and I take this as two things. Firstly, I think that this marked the first time that Kaufman was formally instructing people in how to use Moment Work to write, as opposed to using it as just a rehearsal exercise; and secondly, that it was yielding helpful staging material.

The primary form operating in *The Laramie Project*, once again, is its documentary nature. This time writers directly used interview transcripts, accumulated over many trips out to Laramie. In their book, Kaufman and Pitts McAdams acknowledge that this was one of the few times they could account that a play using transcripts had

been written as a group; while many solo writers used this form, they found something unique about having it be written and worked on as an ensemble (Kaufman and Pitts McAdams 179). However, whilst everyone was a contributing artist in the sense that anyone in the company could go into town, conduct interviews, or transcribe interviews, there were more clearly defined roles once they returned to New York. Yet even in New York, everyone was still a Moment maker and character advocate first, then actor, writer, etc. (Kaufman and Pitts McAdams 186). I believe it is this multivariate perspective and group dramaturgy that makes this form work so well; with so many eyes on different arcs and throughlines, the interviews do not become confusing or overwhelming. The form works to show breadth and volume, as well as construct a truthful narrative.

Another poignant example of form is the configuration of space. Most of *The Laramie Project* takes place in a bare space. All of the set pieces and such are minimal. However, that does not mean they can't deliver an emotional narrative. Figure 3 shows the moment known as building the fence. As *Moment Work* mentions, actors begin setting out chairs with lines of "distancing text" in between each chair placement. Then, eventually, there are "performers sitting in a straight row of chairs on the middle of the stage," which they then exit. In their wake, the chairs sit, illuminated; an actor returns to describe this as the fence where Matthew Shepard was found (Kaufman and Pitts McAdams 200). Without literally creating the fence, the performers have made a theatrical representation of a key part of the story. Spectators are then tracking the chairs for the rest of the play: how are they used? What is the effect unique in each situation? Yet the use of the chairs as the fence construction leaves one with the feeling that almost

any part of Laramie could be the fence: a piece of hatred and grief that will always exist, no matter how small. That narrative is only crafted through this form.

Fig. 3. The form of building the fence. Each member would come up and place their chair. [Photo from tectonictheaterproject.org, by Betsy Adams]

Other forms at work in the script are not necessarily as apparent to the eye. For example, with so many characters, there would need to be costume pieces, gestures done by the actor, and so on, that differentiate the actors' roles. Albeit, these changes do not need to be intense; they should suggest at characterization, not literally represent each person (Kaufman et al 19). Metatheatricality is also a form at work in the piece. In the introduction to the script, Kaufman writes, "costume changes, set changes, and anything else that happens on the stage should be done by the company of actors" (Kaufman et al 19). By acknowledging that the bodies onstage are creating a story, right in front of the audience's eyes without hiding it, the theme of storytelling itself (suggested already by the use of transcripts) is reinforced. The company members are piecing together this narrative for you to witness, just as they actually did in Wyoming. That in and in of itself

is another form at work which constructs a throughline: their diary entries reflect the desire of the New York company to make the story of this town heard. We as an audience go through the same process they did, which creates both an active discovery, and empathy.

Uncommon Sense

Uncommon Sense is Tectonic's most recent piece out of their development lab. Written by Anushka Paris-Carter and Andy Paris, this story focuses on the day-to-day lives of four people living on the autism spectrum. This is one of the few Tectonic pieces not written by Moisés Kaufman but was still overseen by him as Artistic Director. After an extensive five years of workshopping at the University of Northern Iowa, it made its premiere January 21, 2017 at the Gallagher Bluedorn Performing Arts Center in Iowa. The New York City premiere run, which I attended, took place from October 25-November 26, 2017 at the Sheen Center for Thought and Culture. Paris and Paris-Carter's hunch centered around the question of what it's like to experience autism. As discussed in *Moment Work*, "we set out to create a theatrical language that could more fully express the experience of living on the autism spectrum" (Kaufman and Pitts McAdams 243). The elements of the stage had immense potential to do so.

The play follows four individuals on the spectrum: Dan, Moose, Lali, and Jess. Dan and Jess fall more to the Asperger's end, high functioning, whilst Moose and Lali are non-verbal. We not only witness the experiences of each of these people, but also understand the experiences of the people in their lives who do not have the condition. Such plots include Moose's parents, Emily and Gabriel, and their conflict over whether to

put him in a living community; Lali's mother Ajalaa and her attempts to get Lali to communicate verbally; Dan's flirtations at romance with Sarah; and Jess' navigating of college and her tutee, Alex. Through fictional, woven tales and sensory experiences, audiences begin to gain an insight into the struggles and joys of living within the autism community.

In order to service the idea of creating the theatrical experience of autism, it is fitting that this play is full of visual forms. Most notably, projections take front and center stage. These are used not only for moments of illustration of talking points, such as when Jess uses her World of Warcraft character to demonstrate facial expressions, but also to create ambient movement onstage, such as when "*DAN is playing the piano while the mathematical formula for the bell curve floats out of his head and onto one of the panels*" (Paris and Paris-Carter 28). Another visual form heavily used is props. There are many props in the play that carry story, most notably rice that Lali frequently plays with, an eggbeater that Moose plays with, and Lali's iPad. We see Lali's rice as a source of comfort because of the amount of time we see her playing with it, and the fact it's taken away by Ajalaa when she won't speak.

An interesting intersection of forms occurs when sound enters the picture. Often, discordant sounds are paired with a visual cue. One place this happens is when Anjalaa is doing dishes, while speaking on the phone to a speech pathologist. Note the stage directions:

> *AJALAA puts away a fork.*
>
> *An actor stands behind [LALI] with a large metal pot full of silverware.*

> *As [AJALAA] puts a piece of silver down, the actor shakes the metal pot near [LALI].*
>
> *It is an excruciating sound.*
>
> *Throughout the following, [Anjalaa] hears a small clink, and [Lali] hears a Crash.* (Paris and Paris-Carter 16)

The visual image of Ajalaa doing dishes serves to signify a common activity, but the sound of the crashing represents the uncommon experience that Lali hears, given her aural sensitivity. Another instance of this is with Dan being overloaded by Sarah's snoring. The stage directions read, "*She is snoring, loudly and violently, with her whole body, in time with a sousaphone, which is being played upstage of her by the actor who plays MOOSE"* (Paris and Paris-Carter 49). We see and hear an exaggerated version of a common activity, but Dan perceives it otherwise.

Perhaps the most striking visual form this play uses is puppetry. In a scene where Emily is frantically trying to calm him down, Moose is throwing his mother's laundry, completely in a world of his own. As in Figure 4, we eventually see that the shirts are, in his mind, jellyfish; beautiful puppets them glide onto the stage as the lights shift to blue and we hear calming music. Another striking visual image was that of Dan and Sarah having their Noodle Night date, as seen in Figure 5. Dan cannot stand the tactile sense of holding a fork, and when he sees that Sarah is accepting of this, begins to eat the pasta with his bare hands. However, this sequence takes place without any dialogue, but rather with instrumental Italian music playing while projections inform the audience about the date.

Fig. 4. The use of puppets shows the audience what Moose is seeing, without needing to use dialogue to say so. [Photo by Joan Marcus]

Fig. 5. Dan hates forks. [Photo by Joan Marcus]

The form of the play's writing itself is an episodic, non-linear structure. *Uncommon Sense* does not follow typical Aristotelian structure of rising action, climax, resolution, and so on. Rather, it is much like the creative process itself: an exploration,

with characters and moments dwelling. Paris and Paris-Carter created a fictional text that was a composite of many years of interviews (Kaufman and Pitts McAdams 243). By using interviews to create characters not based entirely on one person, as with *The Laramie Project* does, they are able to more successfully capture a range of people living on and around the spectrum. If this piece was a formal documentary, they would be obligated to create a verbatim narrative and adhere to real personas for characters. This in turn begs the question, why did they not use verbatim theatre, as with *Gross Indecency* and *The Laramie Project*? Every show merits its own creation process and its own "theatrical language" (Kaufman and Pitts McAdams 243). With this piece, perhaps it was because verbatim collections would likely not have worked; not all of the people on the autism spectrum are verbal, like Moose. In the message of the play, think in ways that are "uncommon"; the visual, aural, sensory experiences of the stage could better provide their narrative. The whole exploration of this piece is to give the audience an empathetic experience of what it is like to be or connect with someone who is on the spectrum. The play needed to include forms that spoke to that best.

Gauging Success

Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde

Right off of the bat in its opening run, *Gross Indecency* was a hit. Ben Brantley of the *New York Times* described the play as "the must-see sleeper of the Off Off-Broadway season" (Brantley). It opened on February 27, 1997 at the Greenwich House Theatre in New York City, and was supposed to have a very limited engagement (Kaufman 2). However, it was extended into April, and Brantley praised it as "definitely [deserving] a

more permanent home" (Brantley). Following critical acclaim, the production transferred in June to an Off-Broadway venue, the Minetta Lane Theater (Kaufman 2).

In terms of the success of form and content, critics embraced and devoured the direct address and documentary style. Brantley picked up on its significance straightaway, writing: "Quoting or reading from a variety of sources -- from biographies to contemporary newspaper accounts -- they establish an ever-shifting mosaic of perspectives." (Brantley) Critics were right on the nose about Kaufman's intention of a multi-varied depiction of the trials. Additionally, critics highly praised the performances of the ensemble, most notably Michael Emerson. *Variety* also made note of the dual nature of the piece, hailing Kaufman's writing as unflinching "from presenting the writer's arrogance and deceptions that pave the way for his downfall" (Evans). In the following year, it became one of the ten most popular plays to produce in the United States (Kaufman and Pitts-McAdams 176). Tectonic's audience shifted from downtown New York to nationwide, which not only boosted morale of the company, but also gave them funding for future projects; namely, *The Laramie Project* (Kaufman and Pitts-McAdams 176). It was a good time to be a part of the company.

On the other hand, Kaufman and *Gross Indecency* were critiqued for their simplicity, as well as their lack of depth into scholarly research. William Cohen, in his review of the Minetta production writes that "A significant flaw comes at the opening of the second act, however, when the play breaks out of its historical frame and an actor representing the playwright consults a scholar, a grotesque parody of the academic as jargon-laden and repressed." (Cohen 530).

The breaking of form and structure takes the audience out of the constructed world of history. This does the story of Wilde a disservice; what would it have been like if the modern implications were drawn on their own by the audience? Cohen also claims that there is a lack of clarity about the sources' inconsistencies. This is a valid point; if people believe that what they are seeing is completely true because they've bought into the presented idea of the documentary format, there's the risk of them missing the nuances of the piece. If Kaufman wanted to point out fallacies in the writing, he'd need to make it explicitly clear so that the point of muddled truth rings through.

Considering the context in which the play was written also attests itself to the play's success. Looking at the United States in the mid-1990s, LGBT communities had become more vocal, in the shadow of the AIDS/ HIV crisis. The policy commonly referred to as "Don't Ask Don't Tell" had been signed by Bill Clinton in 1993, which prohibited openly gay men and women from serving in the military (CNN). Three years later in 1996, Clinton signed the Defense of Marriage Act, which banned federal recognition of same-sex marriages and reinforced the concept that a marriage is "a legal union between one man and one woman as husband and wife" (CNN). In a world where gay people were being tolerated at the fringes of society, this play serves as a poignant reminder that even one hundred years later, persecution based on sexuality still exists. The content was relevant and had forms to make it so.

The Laramie Project

The Laramie Project is deemed one of, if not the most, commercially successful Tectonic piece. One questions how much of this is because of the innovative, bold forms

within the work. The documentary style of the piece was hailed by Ben Brantley of the *New York Times* as "[an] enormously good-willed, very earnest and often deeply moving work of theatrical journalism," and I cannot help but agree. The form of verbatim delivery is hailed as thought provoking and effective. Anecdotally, *Moment Work* mentions the opening night performance in Denver. The audience did not react much, until a specific line about the Wyoming weather (Kaufman and Pitts McAdams 211). It was something the audience could relate to; this is the power of verbatim theatre. They are seeing themselves onstage, and that creates a deeply emotional theatre-going experience. On the note of the transcripts, Brantley writes, "the production's translation of transcribed interviews and documents may directly recall the methods of the performance artist Anna Deavere Smith...But *Laramie* -- which gives credit to a team of a dozen writers and dramaturgs...feels less clinical" ("Theatre Review: A Brutal Act Alters Town"). This form succeeded only because a group of unique people collaborated, devised, and brought it to life. The multivariate perspective and collaborative writing was essential in creating such a powerful experience.

Visually, the piece was also striking to audiences. In a review of the original Denver production published in *Theatre Journal*, Debby Thompson writes, "The piece captures... the hyper-reality of the media frenzy during the trials by doubling the stage and screen images of television reporters" (644). This success is explicit: the form of the double staging helps articulate the content of the characterization and tone of the reporters. She also makes a specific mention of the design, writing that "the visual images of the piece were stunning and sensitive, with the minimalist set and stark lighting

matching the Wyoming landscape and the vast starry Laramie sky" (Thompson 645). The elements of set, light, and architecture contributed to the themes of

Given that *The Laramie Project* still endures, it is undoubtedly a dramaturgical success. If the company were not clear with all of their forms, the content could have been grossly misconstrued. A piece meant to heal a community mourning in the face of hate could have easily caused even more hurt by misrepresentation. Even if the show wasn't a commercial or critical success, it was being made with a specific group in mind; that subject must be respected with a quality product. Tectonic came together in the time coming upon the tenth anniversary of Matthew's death to make a consecutive piece, *The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later*. This time, the company came out to Wyoming reflecting on a similar hunch: how had the town changed since the crime, but also how meaningful was that change? (Kaufman and Pitts McAdams 236). Throughout the process, the organizing principle became the question of how communities and individuals construct narratives? (Kaufman and Pitts McAdams 238) This second exploration of the same central event could not have happened if *The Laramie Project* had not touched enough hearts through its content; this content could not have been made without the thorough exploration and clear honing of forms and throughline.

Uncommon Sense

Uncommon Sense was overflowing with beautiful, innovative forms. Having seen this piece whilst in the throes of Moment Work training, I can attest that the play did leave me curious about the experience of living with autism. However, I did leave the piece with mixed feelings: I was left wanting more narrative, to be able to see how the

things I was seeing connected more explicitly to the plot. In retrospect, I think I felt that way because there didn't seem to be any overarching plots; all of the events seemed unconnected and isolated from other characters, who had uncertain stakes. Now, with time to sit and think more about the piece's composition, I feel differently. In line with my understanding of Moment Work, I feel that *Uncommon Sense* had successful marriage of form and content.

In Jesse Green's *New York Times* review of the Sheen Center production, he wrote: "Or perhaps [the idea of incoherent characters] is just the perspective of a neurotypical observer — a perspective that the play implicitly asks us to question. When the sound of silverware being sorted makes Lali miserable, "Uncommon Sense" helps us understand her discomfort by having us hear an avalanche of grating metal" (Green). He specifically cites this moment as effective: the content, her aural sensitivity, is heightened by the form of the amplified silverware sound. Another form that he points out, the set design pictured in Figure 6, is successful in articulating the content. Green writes, "on a cramped multi-platform set by John Coyne, there is too much information pressing in from all sides. Neither the eye nor the mind is comfortable anywhere. Which, on second thought, might be the most powerfully mimetic gesture."

Figure 6. John Coyne's set design boasted of numerous platforms and doors, a swing, and a trampoline. [Photo by Joan Marcus]

In a review on TheaterMania, Hayley Levitt writes that the piece is "so effectively theatrical that you'd almost rather do away entirely with the heavy-handed text, which puts a lead weight on what could otherwise be a delicate piece of theater" (Levitt). Levitt praises nearly every element of design, but does critique the writing, saying, "the episodic style of the play produces isolated chapters of a docudrama rather than a fully integrated narrative." However, I challenge this, and maintain that isolation is a repeated theme in the piece: Lali can only focus on her rice, she and Moose are nonverbal and cannot commute that way, Dan and Jess have their habits and sensory sensitivities that make it difficult for them to be around people. An episodic structure of the play, in that case, favors the content and organizing principle of the piece.

Regardless of critical opinion, the forms that Paris and Paris-Carter used to guide their piece were successful. However, how could their process have been aided with the skills of a dramaturg? I feel that with a specific person dedicated to dramaturgy, Paris and

Paris-Carter may have been able to have the help restructuring throughlines more clearly, while still maintaining the forms that serve them. Yet still: one could argue that even if the piece was deemed flawed and commercially lukewarm, it still gave a voice to a marginalized community. Representation of autistic stories on the stage is extremely lacking. By showing this piece on a stage, a piece about multivariate situations and relationships to the autism spectrum, content is being given in an appropriate, new form to the people who need and deserve it. When the need for content calls, it should be answered; luckily, Tectonic decided to step up to the plate to do so in a uniquely creative way.

Dramaturgy

As mentioned earlier, Tectonic believes that each artist working on a piece eschews their identity as actors, designer, etc. for a time. Eventually, they take on roles in production, but in the beginning of Moment Work all are equal contributors. In a later part of *Moment Work*, Tectonic company member Jimmy Maize writes on the idea of "a team of dramaturgs" (Kaufman and Pitts McAdams 271). He believes that team dramaturgy is essential to making a piece effective, because everyone is capable of "narrative intelligence" in the rehearsal room (Kaufman and Pitts McAdams 272). However, his piece speaks less to dramaturgs specifically and more to how each artist involved in a Moment Work creation process should embrace democratization.

It is the nature of devising, specifically at Tectonic, that any artist on the team can be a theatre maker. Eventually, people become committee heads, with one person in charge of the entire work (usually Kaufman), and leaders for individual areas of design,

choreography, etc. However, everyone is encouraged to be a dramaturg of sorts, advocating for the play-making that shows their area of expertise best (Kaufman and Pitts McAdams 274). This was the case for making *The Laramie Project*; the actors Amanda Gronich, John McAdams, Maude Mitchell, Andy Paris, Barbara Pitts, and Kelli Simpkins were all credited as dramaturgs ("The Laramie Project Cycle"). Yet in *Gross Indecency*, *The Laramie Project*, and *Uncommon Sense*, there was no credited, designated dramaturg. There may have been consultors, there may have been group dramaturgy, but there was a missing opportunity there. For example, in looking at the critique of *Uncommon Sense* for having strong forms and weaker content: how could the plot have been strengthened from having someone objective looking at the work writ large? While I believe everyone should embrace personal dramaturgy in their production roles, I think that there should be an established dramaturg in the room from the beginning of the process. This will ensure clarity from start to finish.

Directors, designers, and actors all fall into place in a devised production, but I think a dramaturg should be set aside as well. I strongly advocate for a standalone dramaturg, who records moments, conducts research, works with the writers in the writing room and director in the rehearsal room during staging; all of this to the end of curating the visual and textual clarity of the play. One person should remain slightly more objective than the others to ensure that the most meaningful story should be told. The leader of a devised piece should not be a director or writer, someone too close to the work; it should be someone with curatorial distance.

While everyone is encouraged to be a dramaturg, I believe it's too hard to separate yourself from something and kill your darlings for the good of the production. As we can see in the above works, form and content must interact. Everyone needs to consider how to make the best forms to service the best content, and vice versa; however, one dramaturg should be in place to ensure that it all is working well. Tectonic may be able to make this work (and work very well, I may add), but that is not the case across the board. They have succeeded without consistent standalone dramaturgs, but I believe this is because of the leadership of Moisés Kaufman, who shows a great love and appreciation for dramatic structure. I maintain that there should be a head dramaturg on each production made with Moment Work. There's value in having an outside influence, especially when devised plays rely so heavily on non-textual elements to carry narrative.

Chapter Three: Madison to New York; New York to Madison

In this chapter, I will be looking at the devised piece created by my classmates and myself, *4320p: IMMERSION*. As with the previous Tectonic pieces, I am looking to analyze how successful the Moment Work process was in making impactful content. I will be supplementing my own experiences with testimony from various students from the class, whom I interviewed. I feel it necessary to assess the process and product in which I participated to show how effectively dramaturgy can exists. While it may be subjective, my assessment reflects on my first-hand experience rather than relying on secondary sources. First, I will be discussing the process of Moment Work training we went through, unique to our residency. Then, I will assess my role as dramaturg and the dramaturgy of the show, made with Moment Work. Finally, I will be evaluating the product we created, analyzing and tracing forms discovered through the process. In this chapter, I argue that through using Tectonic's method of devising, exploration of form helps create engaging, theatrical content. Furthermore, a dramaturg is an essential company member in ensuring that the combination of form and content best serves the final product.

About the Play

4320p: IMMERSION takes place fifteen years in the future, where virtual reality has become the mainstream form of media consumption. Entertainment technology conglomerates, such as Velocity Tech, are buying up all of the other non-VR media platforms: namely, the "Interweb," which gives users access to platforms such as YouTube, Netflix, etc. Our story follows three different YouTube teams: the Q&A host

Jay, the monologist Meredith, and the web series director/ writer duo of Casey and Sapphire. They have been tapped to compete on *Are They EDGY Enough?*, a show on Velocity Tech's inGenuine server hosted by an artificial intelligence humanoid, KYA. By being on this show, each contestant is competing for a chance to win a three-year contract for their show to transfer over to the inGenuine server, a money prize, and unlimited access to all VR servers. However, if a contestant loses, they are permanently banned from VR servers and any other Velocity Tech-owned media platforms.

Each contestant exhibits a sample show to a panel of three god-like mentor judges: Soledad, Oakley, and Sam. Jay takes on real-time VR guests, which come with their own array of quirks and issues. Casey and Sapphire exhibit snippets from different web series episodes, all of which are designed to warn people of the dangers technology can have on the body. Meredith uses her platform to educate her viewers about important issues, such as environmental concerns. Their results are calculated by reactions from the audience: the show with the best feedback wins the round, so it is essential to have engaging content and presentation. After the second round, each contestant receives a mentor who coaches them in real time. Over the course of the latter two rounds, Jay crumbles into Oakley's manipulation and sells out; Sapphire cheats in order to win and get the prize money, which she plans to use to pay for Casey's cancer treatments; Meredith completely rebels and gets into a physical battle with trolling live commenters during her round. To everyone's shock, Meredith wins the show, meaning Jay and Sapphire are banished from the grid forever.

Meredith is now inGenuine's newest server star. However, Meredith does not want these corporate mentors to curate her image. In their contract negotiations meeting, Meredith refuses to let them have control over her content and brand. When they do not budge, she leaves, sentencing herself to a life off the grid without her platform of speech. Left scrambling without a star the public was promised, Soledad, Oakley and Sam figure out a way to hack into Meredith's VR persona, her avatar, and control it. Sometime later, Meredith is walking around the street and sees a commercial for her upcoming VR show: one that she is not actually on. As she protests in confusion and anger, two goons enter, punch her, and take her away. Meredith is out of the equation, and Velocity Tech can continue to give the people what they want, uninterrupted.

The Process

Timeline

Our process began in March of 2017, when the newly admitted members of the New York Semester on Theatre class met in the Directing Lab of Drew's Dorothy Young Center of the Arts. There had been classes similar to this before, but this was the first time that we would be working over the course of a year with Moment Work, going into the city for workshop-classes, and making a show to be performed in New York City as well as Drew. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss the logistics of the new program, but also get a pulse on what content we would want to explore. Dr. Lisa Brenner and Chris Ceraso, the professors of this class, asked us to anonymously answer four questions:

- What's something you want to see on stage?

- What's something you want to understand?
- What's a story you need to tell?
- What's something you fear?

We then read the responses out loud and discussed common themes. Sitting as a group, we came to the conclusion that there was heat around the idea of conflicted identity; we had fear and anxiety that our lives weren't as fulfilled as other people's as we saw them through social media. We identified that we had the knowledge that their lives weren't perfect, but we couldn't help but compare ourselves to that standard. Students spoke of the judgement they constantly feel and the lack of control over their identities. From this, the idea of "the curated self" emerged: the manipulated persona that we have online is much different from the person we are in real life. This is the hunch we settled on exploring.

In the fall, we attended workshops in New York City once a week. We moved through the three levels of Moment Work with three mentors: Meyung Kim, Scott Barrow, and Barbara Pitts McAdams. Meyung worked with us on Level One, the exploration stage. We began first by creating an extremely detailed list of different elements of the stage. Then, over the course of four weeks, we explored our bodies and how they dwell in space; architecture of a space; ground plans and set pieces; light and shadow; different sources of light; color; props; and sounds. We explored these elements in various exercises, but most notably by seeing the world through new eyes. A beer bottle wasn't just a bottle; in an aural moment that I made, I blew across the top and made "music." It became an instrument of sound, repurposed. We did not concern

ourselves with text, or with what story was being told necessarily as much as exploring the full theatrical potential of elements of the stage.

Level Two, led by Scott, came in after four weeks. It was here that we began to come back to the idea of narrative. With this, we also brought back in our "hunch," the idea of the curated self. We were assigned homework to make moments (outside of class) around ideas of identity, social media, isolation, and so on. We were told to bring in found texts, something that wasn't explicitly a script. These would be tested as source materials. For example, I brought in excerpts from *The Bell Jar* and *Fahrenheit 451*, while others brought in news articles and textbook readings. Then, we began layering and sequencing these texts with moments we'd worked on. A little beyond this point, writers began to emerge bringing in original work to layer. We were doing all this with the goal of seeing how text could be a more meaningful element that could intersect with the forms that we created, not the loudest element that would dictate how these forms would be utilized. We "auditioned" texts to see which texts resonated with the group and provided compelling moments. Scott ended Level Two by asking us to work in small groups to determine an "organizing principle" that had emerged from our work thus far that might shape our narrative. Each group sequences a string of moments into a mini-narrative around that principle. Two of the groups chose the idea of gods who control us, while the third group chose the idea of concealment (our need to hide who we are).

Entering the last three weeks of the semester, Barb came into the picture, gearing us towards beginning Level Three. We did more layering and sequencing of moments and texts and came up with more moments and forms. Forms were generating inspiration

for content, and content was in turn inspiring forms. For example, a student brought in a myth of the gods' creation, and some other students and myself created gestures, light forms, and architecture forms to explore this text. We later focused on scenes that writers had brought in, table-reading them and giving feedback. There was still a great deal of heat around the idea of technology, advancements, and the loss of identity, so that was the mission of the writers to complete over break. It seemed to feel like a more conventional process at this point, at least to an extent; everyone in the ensemble now had their roles, and we were reading scenes with the potential of staging them as a play.

In an ideal Moment Work process, the organizing principle is fleshed out in Level Three. As mentioned earlier, the organizing principle is a central question the play seeks to investigate. With *4320p: IMMERSION*, we seemed to hit upon an organizing principle of "how do the 'gods' of technology control our identities, and how do we respond?" However, we didn't have enough time to fully explore this organizing principle through layering and sequencing moments. We felt pressured to get to our product, and ultimately as a group choose a starting point with which writers and I would tackle a script. The writing process of this show was much like group television writing, with each writer tailing an arc and myself looking at the overall picture. Had we had more time, the script might have developed in a less conventional way, with more input from Moment Work in the room. This tension points to the fact that devised theatre takes a significant amount of time. There is a special challenge to balancing the time between process and product. In our case, with the premiere date already set and a theatre booked, we had to turn our attention to product and thus, part of the process was sacrificed.

The timeline coming back to school was therefore very condensed and intensive. The writers and I collaborated over break and, in the end, had gone through four drafts before coming back! Barb, Scott, Lisa, and Chris all gave us feedback. Once back at Drew, the script continued to be worked on until mid-February, when it was locked in. The show was cast in early February, and designers were beginning to have production meetings. We had rehearsal and class frequently, gearing us to tech early and go into the city. Even up until the point of performance, we were still editing the script with cuts, word changes, and the occasional add-in. Perhaps the largest difference between the New York production of the play and the Drew production was the final "negotiations" scene. After much back and forth, we decided to keep that scene in, but heavily rewrite it. Meredith's character is much different in that scene: at Drew, she came into the meeting to actually negotiate with leverage, while in New York, there was no incentive for her to say yes. Thus, even though we resorted to our traditional roles as we produced the play, we still continually worked as an ensemble to revise, discover, and adjust the play—focusing not only on the text but the forms we had discovered. For example, we explored when and how we could tell our story, using projections as seen in Figure 7, sound effects, or movement, rather than simply text.

Fig. 7. The projection screens were used to show results from each round, the time bar, and show logos. [Photo by Lynne DeLade]

Challenges

The biggest challenge of this process was the time constraint we were under. We only had the structure of a semester to work. Most traditional professional shows have approximately four to six weeks to put a show together, and we had approximately five full weeks before tech. However, with us being students, we had to attend classes, work jobs, and fulfill other commitments. This consideration being accounted for, we did not collectively have that much time to write, build, and stage this show. All we can do is imagine how different things may have been with a full eight-hour rehearsal day!

Additionally, with this program being a class, our funding came from a university administration. Because of that, we had less funding than professional companies often have access to. In comparison to other Drew shows, we had deeper pockets, but it still was not to the extent of a professional company. Though it can be argued that using a smaller budget is educational and instructional for being resourceful, the technical demands of this show could have been much better executed with more funding. For example, we were once toying around with the idea of individual projectors on each pod to display results and images but could not accomplish this because of the expense. Additionally, although our student projection designer was highly qualified and accomplished a great deal, with more funds it could have been possible to hire a professional designer. Because it is an element of the stage that our department isn't used to using, it could have been a large learning moment. Again, all we can do is imagine how production could have been different with more technical elements!

Moment-making

Despite these challenges, this Moment Work process was a great success. Numerous moments and themes that we discussed and created during class in the fall still made it into the final production! As the dramaturg, I can attest that there were some bits of the script written with specific moments in mind, but largely we were not operating with a checklist of "must-haves." It was shocking looking at my dramaturgy board and seeing how many forms we had written about, left away, and then circled back to after

writing the script. Student C[1], one of the head writers, found Moment Work and the exploration of forms first particularly helpful because "it tickled the senses" and "[the elements are] like a lot of things we wouldn't think of if we were just doing a realistic play." However, they also acknowledged that we were not consciously writing these forms into the play all of the time. Yet somehow, a form like concealment (or its opposite, exposure) still "was actually a huge thing that made it into the [play], since the contestants were pretty much seen the entire time."

Student D, another head writer and designer, stated that "it makes sense" to go back to form first, and also added that when they began moving as a designer into a new production, "there's so many things that I would want to do but couldn't because we didn't have those elements in the room yet." Student E said that Moment Work really helped them think outside of the box "Because we weren't inhibited by text. When you have a script, it's always like 'You have to do what the script says and make it theatrical that way!'" This recognition also re-emphasizes Tectonic's point that text can and should be considered an element of the stage, just as one that doesn't overwhelm others. Moreover, the default style in our department (as in the American theatre) is realism. Many of us predominantly seen or performed in realistic plays. These comments, and my own experience, suggest that starting by experimenting with form freed us to create a non-realistic play that addressed our themes in provocative ways.

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[1] I have attained IRB consent for these testimonies, and students' names are kept anonymous as part of this consent.

All of the students that I talked to relayed that Moment Work had an explicit hand in creating our content, which was deemed more interesting than if we had just written a realistic play. When asked to trace a moment back from class to the production, every student could think of a different example. Student A cited the Moment entitled "Identity Thief" as "the whole play." This was a Moment created in class where one god-character would go to other stoic bodies in the scene and remove jewelry from their person. Student A compares the god-character in that Moment to the judges Soledad, Oakley, and Sam: "literally the gods…although they aren't physically with the contestants taking stuff off of them, they are actually like taking out parts of their personality and parts of their show." Without this Moment-making way of creating the play, we would not have had these characters, nor the story, nor the dark gladiatorial/ dystopian feel of plot.

The god-character form is perhaps the most prominently threaded form in our play. This god-character is not just seen in one moment from the process of Moment Work, but several. As noted in the discussion above, it became a frequent enough motif for us to merit it a form worth singling out, eventually becoming an organizing principle. In the show, this form was played out and re-emphasized in a few different elements. As you can see in Figure 8, the judges are physically above the contestants: these are the elements of architecture and placement. The judges also have specific gestures that other contestants do not, such as the gesture for muting. Props also carry the god narrative; Oakley eats blue foods, Soledad and Sam drink sumptuous blue liquid. They are at leisure, nourishing themselves, while the contestants are struggling to gain the audience's approval. They mute the contestants, trap them on their pods, and to some extent, control

their content. All of this stemmed from the one form we felt heat around: a form that would not have existed the same way without exploration.

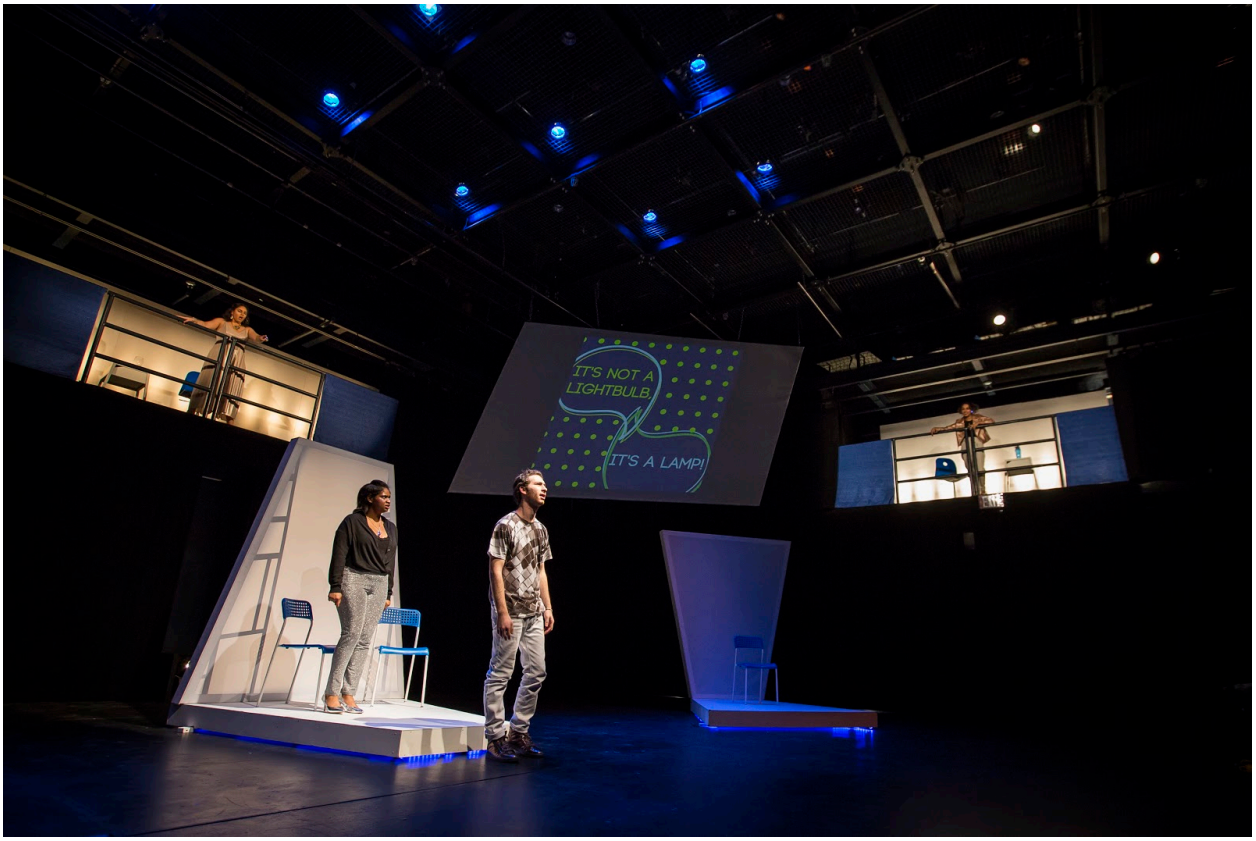

Fig. 8. The judge characters (Soledad, Sam) remain on the tech balcony for the majority of the play. [Photo by Lynne DeLade]

Assessment of My Process

My professor, Dr. Lisa Brenner, describes the dramaturg as being the gatekeeper, or curator, of the story of a play. As dramaturg within this process, it was my duty to take on several projects. Firstly, I was responsible for organizing the writers. There were five writers in this process, and I would give each of them assignments to complete on the characters or script for certain deadlines. Each writer wound up having a "track" to write for: a student would write for Meredith, another for Jay, another for prep time scenes, and

so on. Naturally, there is a great deal of overlap and collaboration for dialogue, but that's where I stepped in with a more editorial hat. I would read everything to make sure the voices sounded consistent, arcs were being followed through, and the plot made sense. I also would be responsible for helping articulate line changes, cuts, and additions to the team. I was keeping each draft as up to date as I could.

Moving out of the writers' room and into the rehearsal room, it became my job to make sure that the way the play was being staged was representative of the story being told. This aspect of my job was especially critical because of the nature of the world that we had created; so much of our play takes place in the uncharted future, so our world had to be extremely clear to an objective audience. Some of these challenges to articulate were that we had created a virtual landscape unlike anything we can compare current technology to; we had intricate rules to the *Are They EDGY Enough?* competition; we had vocabulary that was unique to our play and made-up by the writers and me; we had to consider the way avatars would look in VR and how bodies would look in reality, and so much more. It was not my job to prescribe what the designers should make or how the director, should communicate that world, but rather offer the parameters and rules by which elements had to abide. For example, I said that it was unlikely technology devices could exist in the VR grid, so the actors and director had to come up with an alternate way to communicate that they were using a "device" to access information. That is how the gesture of the "heads-up display" was born; it makes logical sense, in this universe, to have your avatar be able to access an array of tools via a personalized display. That became a consistent form.

My last task was to tackle audience outreach. It was essential to us (or, at least myself) to have our audience have a rich context walking into our play. I wanted to educate the audience about the immediacy of the topics we were discussing. I knew I wanted a lobby display that would be just as immersive as the world of the play feels. Thus, my concept became that of turning the lobby into Velocity Tech Server Studios: the audience would arrive to Velocity Tech to witness the live "porting" of *Are They EDGY Enough?*. Audiences were greeted by interns of Velocity Tech, who would give them their "ports" for the evening- stickers with a QR code to access the play program. They could wander the lobby and look at news articles, put into a sample heads-up display that would (in theory) be what an avatar's head display would look like. As you can see in Figures 9 and 10, I also had information about Moment Work, Tectonic Theater Project, our class' list of forms and Moments, a sample 360-video and Google Cardboard viewer, the history of VR, and sketches from the designers. I also organized a post-show discussion with a Drew professor of Media and Communications, where she discussed real-world connections our play made. It was my goal to give the audience as much information about our process and the topics we touched on as possible.

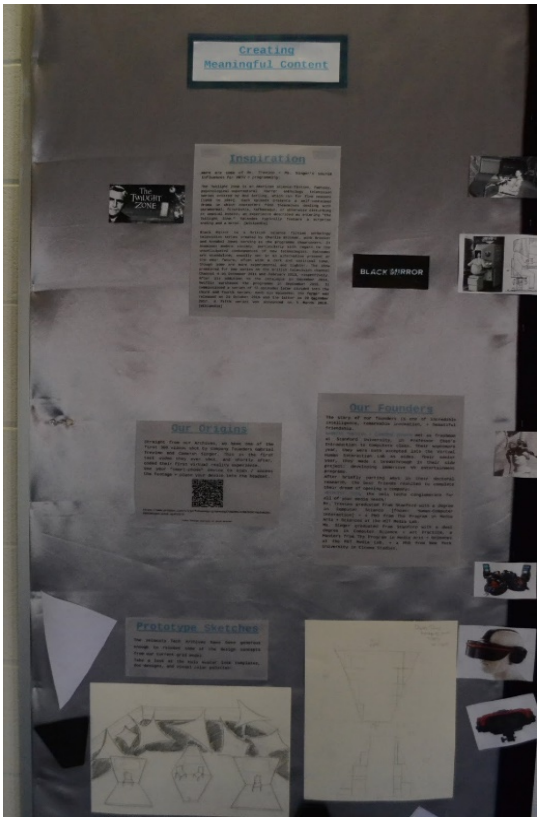

Fig. 9. This part of the board showed designer sketches, fictionalized information about the founders of Velocity Tech and information about *Black Mirror* and *The Twilight Zone*, two inspirations for the class. [Photo by Zoe Camp]

Fig. 10. Larger part of lobby display board, which had stills of each character, as well as relevant news articles disguised as a "sample" heads up display. [Photo by Zoe Camp]

Professors Lisa Brenner and Chris Ceraso primarily gave me feedback on the script, but Tectonic members Scott Barrow and Barb Pitts McAdams also had many hands in the guidance of the structure of the piece. The faculty and professional mentors' input on this process was likened to that of producers: they would see our work and recommend ways to improve it or make it better. I served as a mediator, channeling the feedback through to the individual artists. As a dramaturg, it was useful having several pairs of highly experienced eyes on the drafts as well as my own, but as a student, it was invaluable to be able to work with mentors with such incredible analytic skills.

In examining my role as a deviser and practitioner in this process, I felt using Moment Work was extremely creatively rewarding. This process lends itself particularly well to collaboration, because one is essentially looking at the potential of what anything can become on the stage. For example, a banana doesn't just have to be a banana; that prop can become an imaginary parrot friend sitting on your shoulder- and what kind of story does that tell? This type of work requires varied perspectives, and thus having many people's voices is beneficial in these first stages of exploration. From a dramaturgical standpoint, creating work in the early stages is better with more people because you can really explore theatrical expression from multiple perspectives and talents; eventually, it will work towards fewer voices having authority on the world of the play.

However, it is important to note that this theory does not necessarily hold up into the later points of the process. Having many points of view is great, until you get down to

the wire and decisions need to be made. As Tectonic explains it, there is a time for the creator(s) to be in the room, and a time when you need to bring in the editor. This was perhaps my biggest challenge in the process. Whether that be in writing or staging, I was a pair of objective eyes to ensure that our story was clear to an outsider and true to the intention we wanted. In the Tectonic world, this person is known as the "Joe X": can this person come in with no context, and understand the sequence of events? (Kaufman and Pitts McAdams 140).

Of course, my more objective dramaturgical input is bound to occasionally be in conflict with everyone else's opinions on where the story should move toward. Navigating my voice in this collaboration was difficult; I wasn't sure when some problems were for writers to fix, me to fix, the director to fix, a designer to fix, or for an actor to fix. I feel that I should have, in harmony with the director, been the one to connect all the threads, but it didn't always play out this way. For example, I felt strongly that lines should be cut, to clarify things and make the story smoother. But then actors would weigh in with why they should be kept in, writers thought that they should be the ones to make that call, designers weighed in on how that affected their choices, and so on. In a collaborative process such as devising with Moment Work, it is bound to be messy and confusing. It is therefore, perhaps not surprising that, as mentioned earlier, Moisés Kaufman served as director and de facto dramaturg/editor for Tectonic's most successful shows. In the devising world, this figure is often referred to as the "lead deviser." As Rich Brown discusses in his piece on Moisés Kaufman, "Since the process leads to him needing collaborators to create a piece, while also needing to control the

direction of the work's overall development, tension arises regarding both authority and authorship" (61). While a single authority is not necessary to make ultimate decisions, the company does need to have a clear structure in this regard. In my estimation, having a distinctive dramaturg as part of the decision-making team is critical.

In talking with several members of the ensemble, I wanted to question how impactful the role of a dramaturg was on the process. I wanted to get a breadth sampling of how different roles on the team were affected by my role. Student E, an actor, stated that a dramaturg was helpful in this process because of "clarifying the world, because the world was so foreign to all of us" and that "being able to translate [the script] into something that was stageable, feasible that the actors could pull off" was something crucial they gained from my presence. Student A, on the production team, stated that "You were always the way to have a center in the process…you would always settle [any conflict of ideas]." I found this comment noteworthy, because traditionally directors are seen as the decision-makers in the room, or the stage manager as the conflict-resolver. They also compared me to "the dictionary of the show" and someone who didn't have a favoritism "stake in the production." I could offer insight to design, characterization, etc. without bias to something I myself had written, created, etc. While that may sound like a dramaturg needs to be less emotionally involved, the opposite spin is true: you must have a wide and equal emotional involvement.

The writers I interviewed, Students C and D, cited my presence in the writers' room as essential. Student D said that "it honestly helped so much for structure and keeping us all on the same page… but also, it was hard communicating with all the

writers, and the dramaturg really helped us stay on the same page." Student C stated that "It was definitely helpful to guide it because there were so many voices in the room." The organizational presence that a dramaturg can provide was clearly desired and necessary in the writing process! Transitioning into the rehearsal room with a director, Student B said I the dramaturg was "extremely beneficial" because "you were at the center of it. If I needed clarification, I knew I could go to you as this gatekeeper of the world." In rehearsal, I provided the earlier-mentioned support of being the "options" person: someone who could lay out what was logical and sensical for this world. Student B also mentioned that they found my input in casting essential; with "so many of the characters in flux for a while…it was like, 'If this character is going to be different two drafts later, what do I do?' So to have someone really all-in-purpose, knows literally all about the world and the script, it was really beneficial."

With all of these things swirling around, I ultimately come to the conclusion that there should be a set, designated dramaturg in the room. There needs to be one person who lacks a bit of creative stake; they don't need to decide what looks best, they just need to be there to clear the options. A dramaturg must be able to synthesize criticism from different voices, and that cannot always happen when the dramaturg is one of the vested performers, designers, or even director. One person should be objective to ensure clarity of the world, for in the clarity of a world comes success. When form and content inevitably come together, someone will need to ensure that this same clarity is present in both areas. In the case of Tectonic, Moisés Kaufman often serves as both the director and de facto dramaturg. I believe that this is possible when someone is so experienced as he,

but not in an academic, undergraduate setting. Devising through Moment Work, as mentioned previously, is a collaborative, multi-vocal process dedicated to the exploration of the work. Ideas become better when they are adapted, mutated, and built upon by many workers. However, there needs to be a distinct person who ensures that these multiple voices harmonize. A dramaturg's hands are an essential pair in this process: essential to ensuring the clarity in the relationship of form and content.

The Product

As mentioned previously, the students of the program were immensely satisfied with the role Moment Work had in the piece. A recurring theme of their reflections was that they enjoyed going back to the building blocks of what makes theatre. Student E stated, "we didn't have the inhibition [of the script] so oh, we can just make whatever we want and have fun with it!" There was a true freedom and lack of pressure to make something "good." Student B also reiterated that "it opened up our minds and our limits... it was almost like a sandbox that we could go outside of what we usually do." By forcing us to abandon what we know and were taught about the "right" way of theatre-making, rehearsal, scripts, and staging, we were able to embrace the new, which is scary. Some of that courage comes from an individual attitude of open mindedness, but there also needs to be a cultural environment in the lab setting that is open to new work and this process. The devising sandbox cannot be played in if no one wants to have a sandbox.

I earlier hypothesized that through Moment Work, we as a class would create richer content at the hands of more effective theatrical forms. Had we worked from a

traditional play-making structure, we would have chosen a script written by one of our student writers. A student director would then have cast the show, and eventually designers would have been brought on to dress up the text. My role as dramaturg would have been to try to clarify the authorial intent of script once it was written, ensuring that the world, the characters, and the dramatic action was clearly delineated; I would have done a lobby display and tried to arrange panel discussions or talkbacks to engage the audience. However, there would be no development of text in the room, and I would have had no input. In this devised production, I did all those things, yet I was engaged in the creation of the product with my peers from the start. As an ensemble we discovered salient, meaningful forms that we could then translate into theatrical language for our play.

Earlier, I mentioned the form of the god-character. Another form we discovered was audience interaction. During our Moment Work, we created several moments in which the audience was called upon to participate in the action, sometimes simply just being conscious of their position as voyeurs, and sometimes more explicitly, such as in one moment in which actors only moved when audience members clicked on a light. We built this form into the content of our show. The audience was given the role of the live studio audience of the VRTV show. They were prompted to applaud on several occasions by projections and actors, and were informed that their responses would help determine the show's final outcome. Throughout, the audience was also directly approached and asked which contestant they were rooting for. The lights came up on the audience at these times, and the show host KYA physically entered into the space of the audience.

Although the audience would not actually determine the outcome of the play in this iteration, it nonetheless compelled the spectators to feel as if they were complicit in the menace that they and the Interweb stars were experiencing. The form of audience participation, present from our very early explorations of elements of the stage, helped convey a theme of control: how complicit are we in allowing media/corporate "gods" to have control over identities? How do we participate in a culture of judgment for the sake of entertainment?

The Drew administration responded extremely well to our show. From a logistical standpoint, the program was approved for the following year and will continue to be funded. In terms of interest among the students, plenty of applications for the next academic year rolled in. Yet the largest gage of responses came from the audience. Showing this piece in New York City proved to be successful; a select number of Drew students who saw it in the city claimed it was unparalleled to anything they'd seen before in the department. Audiences who saw the show at Drew also raved; one professor, with whom I had organized a dramaturgical workshop for one of their classes, simply emailed, "Wow!" Members of the Tectonic Theater Project were especially impressed by the high-quality production values. Anecdotally, their Director of Education and Community Engagement, Laurie Lathem, commented that the production level of the show was on par with a Tectonic production. Another theme in the feedback I heard was how clear and consistent the world was. As a dramaturg, I took this as the strongest indicator that we'd done well.

Considering the fact that this was a devised piece, student mounted (devised, written, directed, etc.) with professional mentorship, most people didn't know what to expect. Would it be amazing? Would it flop? As members of what was essentially an autonomous devising ensemble, we had a duty to provide our audience with a quality product to enjoy. The mentors had slightly more stake in the game; the professors needed this piece to adequately show the potential of this program, and the Tectonic mentors had their names associated with the product. However, the overwhelming praise we received proved that our hard work didn't fall flat. In terms of the university reception, the reception by our peers, the reception by Tectonic's administrative staff, and the reception by the audience, I say that our piece was a production success, as well as successful in its integration of Moment Work.

On a personal note, I also found Moment Work life-changing, and that's no hyperbole. One of the aspects of that process I find the most artistically engaging is the perspective it makes you take. Following my work on this show, I found myself wondering when I'd be able to make a show with this type of process again. But then I realized that the rediscovery of how elements of the stage can tell stories is a curiosity that I will always carry with me regardless of the creative process. I will always be more aware of sound now, for example, than I was before. I also believe that serving as the dramaturg was a crucial turning point for me, coupled with adopting this new method of theatre-making. A dramaturg has to be the curator of a story; who better to curate than the person with the widest perspective? The structuralist point of view that Moment Work guides you into taking truly reshapes the way you see theatre.

Conclusion

As Dr. Lisa Brenner once said in a meeting with me, “In art, there is always a product for an audience, and we [as artists] have a responsibility to them.” Theatre is a unique medium because it is a synthesis of the human experience. An audience is simply people coming into a dark room, wanting to be enchanted by stories for an hour or two. These stories are told by people, made by people, and are about people. Theatre cannot exist without an audience; it is a constant give and take, a shared consciousness. Therefore, it is artists’ duty to make sure that the content of their work is something that the audience can connect to, engage with. That is not to say that product is the end-all-be-all, as traditional theatre-making methods condition their practitioners. Product is important, but so is process. Process leads to illuminating discoveries about content; yet content is nothing without form.

Water takes the shape of whatever container it is given. We assume the containers that water is put in (cups, pitchers, bottles) are the right type for water to be put in, because we have been conditioned and told that this is what is correct and natural. However, what if we question that design? What were to happen if the container wasn’t the thing imposed on the water, but the other way around? The water could be held in something designed with its qualities specifically in mind. It may be more beautiful, it may be more functional, and the water could breathe. The consumer of that water may appreciate that container just a little more than something traditional. The water might even just taste better.

I use this metaphor to provoke thought about art: specifically, the type of theatre we have come to accept as "right." Devised theatre seeks to remedy the issue of forms feeling old, stunted, unable to truly showcase the content that is within. How much differently could a story about a family struggling for the American Dream be told, to use a story like Arthur Miller's as an example, if not chained to the dusty form of a three-act kitchen-sink drama? Content, especially new content bursting at the seams in our rapidly-changing world, needs new forms. Tectonic Theater Project is among the devised theatre companies today specifically trying to explore form not only to exist in service of the content, but to generate something new. Moment Work is thrilling because it doesn't just write speech on paper, it writes performance. Performance, true performance, exists when plays show content in its most theatrical form. These devised plays are successful when they marry form and content in a way that is thrilling. Consider your most memorable experience at a play: Tectonic's teachings have taught me that nine times out of ten, it's not words that affect you, but rather other elements carrying narrative.

Art always needs a curator, especially when it is fledging. All theatre, not just devised pieces, exists because of its collaborative nature. Nonetheless, it is helpful and essential to have a designated person with a widely critical eye. Where better to have a solid voice of clarity and vision than in a dramaturg, a curator who can exist alongside writers, directors, and writer-directors? Two heads are always better than one. It benefits the work, the work owed to the audience, to have someone outside of a direct creator ensuring it is the highest-quality product. A dramaturg must be able to synthesize criticism from multiple voices. They should be the guards of the world of the play,

whether created through Moment Work, another devised process, or just written on paper. If we accept that devised theatre is a more alive, engaging form of theatre, a dramaturg must be present to ensure the clear curation of the work from start to finish. Dramaturgy is critical to this process because they are one voice, a non-dictatorial voice, to guide the many. A dramaturg has the sacred duty of making sure a play is its most true form: true to its creators, but also true to an audience. We cannot, as theatre artists, just make work for ourselves. We must be in constant communication with our fellow humans about what is the best way our stories should be told.

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Appendix A

Structural analysis of select moments from the rehearsal process. These were taken from January 21, 2018.

MOMENT: Leaving VR

Group One (John, Aliyah, Angelle, Maddie, Chloe)

- Chloe on balcony, announcing winner is Meredith
- John, Aliyah, and Angelle lined up upstage
- Lights focus on center, Aliyah steps forward into light
- Curtains rattle
- Lights go out, curtains still rattle
- Fluorescents come on, all actors are still in places of beginning

Group Two (Mary, Alize, Haviland, Serena, Emily)

- Mary and Emily jump USC, saying they're on trampoline
- Phone goes off
- Emily walks away, lays down on ground
- Mary continues to jump on trampoline
- Alize (laying on ground, gets up catches breath) gets up and starts moving
- Serena (laying on ground, gets up catches breath) gets up and starts moving
- Mary lays down and goes silent

Group Three (Filetti, Nate, Aaron, Nathan, Madeleine)

- Madeleine and Aaron sit on balcony
- Stage is lit with PARS
- Filetti and Nate emerge from wings with sticks
- They battle each other with the sticks, in a slow motion fight
- Blackout, clatter of sticks
- Fluorescents come on - Nate and Filetti are crumpled on ground
- Madeleine accuses Aaron of using cheat codes to beat her

MOMENT: End of Play

Group One (John, Alize, Serena, Aliyah)

- John on balcony
- Alize center stage facing John
- Alize says "No" to having a show
- Serena and Aliyah pull back the curtain, presumably revealing an avatar
- John and Alize both state "I'm Meredith and this is WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE WORLD?" in unison

Group Two (Mary, Nathan, Maddie, Chloe)

- Mary center stage, neutral

- Chloe and Nathan come in and groom her, fixing shirt and hair and hands and jewelry
- Mary's face is put into a smile
- Nathan and Chloe leave
- Maddie comes from audience and puts on belt
- Maddie says "Holy shit" after finishing putting on the belt, then goes into audience, sits, and watches
- Mary introduces herself as Meredith

Appendix B

This is a copy of the rules of the world, which I led the discussion on. This was made in an effort to ensure that all of our company was on the same page, in terms of defining what virtual reality meant in this particular play. This document was made approx. January 26, 2018.

The World of VR

Fifteen years from now.

- **What goes in to defining VR?**
  - A digital landscape, like our Internet. A way to experience life in a more advanced, vibrant way.
  - 4D, experiential through a simulated you (an avatar)
  - Like the matrix: if you are affected in real life, you are affected in VR
    - When in VR, your physical body in reality can affect the VR avatar

- **How is VR accessed?**
  - It is the primary form of mainstream technology.
    - It is absorbing the Internet, television, video games
  - Anyone can get into VR.
    - It is accessed through a "port" (object) on the body. The equivalent of our head-device.
  - Access is free-flowing, like the Internet, but people can upgrade to better "experiences"
  - You do not need to be in the same room with the people you are experiencing it with
    - People can port in from different states, countries
  - It is a first-world technology
  - Different servers provide different experiences (EX: travel server, sport server, entertainment server)
    - Like different "channels"

- **What is other technology in VR that can be used/ experienced?**
  - Heads up display of messages, videos, stats, etc.
  - Some people have power on the servers to create content others can only see
    - EX: making objects appear in VR
  - VR is used as a technology in institutions, not replacing the institutions

        - EX: VR does not replace classrooms, but is a tool used in classrooms

- **Other Things to Consider**
    - "Porting" is entering in to virtual reality
        - "Porterless" means being in VR without a person behind their avatar
    - Contestants and judges are in the same HQ room to port into the competition together
        - Anyone else can be anywhere
    - The audience leaves VR when Meredith exits VR
    - Everything is a live body onstage, using elements of the stage to indicate shifts between VR and reality