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THEATRE AS SACRED SPACE: AN EXAMINATION OF THE
INTERSECTIONALITY OF RELIGION AND THEATRE

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ABSTRACT

THEATRE AS SACRED SPACE: AN EXAMINATION OF THE INTERSECTIONALITY OF RELIGION AND THEATRE

By Amina S. McIntyre

Theatre as Sacred Space: An Examination of Intersectionality of Religion and Theatre is a thesis that considers theatre as sacred space with attention to ritual location (physical and temporal), ritual activity (performance sequence), and the presence of the sacred (social faith). The study first offers an argument for using religion to survey theatre by offering definitions grounded in sociology, anthropology, theology and performance studies. Using primary ethnographic studies conducted in local Atlanta theatres, this thesis offers theories and methods for studying the relationship between theology and theatre by discussing secularism and the sacred, how they complicate the theatre-theology dyad and possible limits to ethnographic research. Ultimately, this thesis contends that the use of ethnography is a potential method for studying theatre and theology through the lens of the theories presented.

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the
Candler School of Theology of Emory University
in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of
Master of Theological Studies

CANDLER SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
EMORY UNIVERSITY

2016

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project would not have been possible without my families: personal, academic and theatrical. Thank you:

To my parents and my family who willingly supported me on yet another academic endeavor.

To Dr. Nichole Phillips and Dr. Emmanuel Lartey willingly pouring over these words and encouraging me to keep pushing.

To Lorraine Campbell, Shaunesse Jacobs, Regina King, Kiko Lee, Nicole McCoy, Stephanie Milton, Darci Rodenhi, Estelli Ramos and countless others I cannot name who walked through this process with me.

To the local theatre companies, Horizon Theatre Company, Karibu Performing Arts, and Rising Sage Theatre, who allowed me to ask questions and use their resources.

To all the actors and personnel who allowed me to capture their stories: Tara Costello, Paris Crayton, III, Hannah Church, Elizabeth Dooley, Chaz Duffy, Allan Edwards, Anthony Goolsby, Marguerite Hannah, Kirk Henny, Carlus Huston, Nicky Khor, Julianna Lee, Stephanie McFarlane, Elissa Peragine, Arin Satterfield, Maria Rodriguez-Sager, Jennifer Studnicki, Kerwin Thompson, Justine Vadini and Abigail Williams.

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INTRODUCTION

As a minister and local playwright, I constantly balance theatrical and ecclesiastical roles. Upon entering seminary, I simultaneously embarked upon a competitive national theatrical apprenticeship program in playwriting at Horizon Theatre Company. After all, I assumed, the processes would be different enough that there would be no overlap in my worlds. This journey, however, revealed similarities between the spiritual endeavors of ministers and artists, particularly in the theatrical process. Accepted apprentices train to become professional theatre artists in some capacity, thereby transforming and molding their assumptions and ideas of themselves as actors, playwrights and stage managers beyond their knowledge gained at a traditional school or community setting. The intense nature of this hands-on, practicum based environment brought about a radical self-evaluation that has similarities to spiritual ruminations, at least from my self-reflexive observations. Moreover, it is similar to the Methodist Ministers on Trial process and Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE), which ministers take as part of their training and development.

As I went deeper into the seminary process, my studies revealed similarities between the origins of theatre and religious studies, with a significant overlap in foundation and philosophical principles. Having conducted three ethnographies based on my coursework, I will now offer a theory and methods thesis at the intersection of theology and the theatre arts. Paul Tillich, in *Theology of Culture*, discusses characteristics of religion as it endeavors to find itself in moral function, cognitive function, and aesthetic function. From his lecture in 1919, “On the Idea of a Theology of Culture”, Tillich’s work began an exploration of a common language and view of religion

and culture, with focus on art and philosophy. Of the aesthetic function, where art resides, he writes, "...the artistic realm answers, through the mouths of many artists, past and present, with an enthusiastic affirmative, and invites religion to join with it but also to acknowledge that art *is* religion"¹ (emphasis is Tillich's). Moreover, As H. Richard Niebuhr writes, "Whatever artistic, religious, or educational activities are not interpretable by reference to that center, either as illustrative of search for such truth or as contributory to it, are likely to be regarded as meaningless. Yet, their own activity, it is clear, is esteemed to be valuable because it participates in and serves the movement and community of empirical science."² Building on Paul Tillich, H. Richard Niebuhr, and Émile Durkheim, with a considerable focus on the theories of Victor Turner, this thesis then considers theatre as sacred space as surveyed through ritual location (physical and temporal), social faith, and ritual activity (performance sequence).

Connective Tissue: Theology and Theatre Arts

I contend participant observation, as the primary component of ethnographic research, is an instrument for evaluating the connection between theology and the theatre arts. The relationship between theatre and theology will be analyzed through my focus on three ethnographic studies I conducted during the 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 school years. The first ethnography highlights the role of ritual particularly Arnold Van Gennep's *rites of passage* in the preparation of a performance. The second ethnography examines the role of theatrical "call" narratives as exemplary of social faith. The third ethnography

¹ Tillich, Paul, *Theology of Culture*. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1959), 6.

² Niebuhr, H. Richard, *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), 22.

² Niebuhr, H. Richard, *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), 22.

attends to the spiritual discipline of prayer and meditation as a “call to worship” before entering the performance space as an example of ritual activity.

The chapters of the thesis are presented as sections of a theatre stage (proscenium style with audience facing the stage from one direction): backstage, upstage, downstage, and house. Backstage is the space behind the stage outside of the audience’s view. This area includes “the wings” (the actor waiting area of between black curtains), and is a residence space for props and costumes; the dressing rooms and green rooms maybe in this area. The best liturgical correlation for backstage is the sacristy and pastors study areas. The upstage is the further stage area seen on the stage by the audience. Lights and other design elements often take place in this area and allows for flexible use of the set. This correlates to the choir stand inside of a sanctuary. Center stage is where the principle actor’s blocking is more often situated. Even if there are major set pieces, this area is left open for flexible movement. This area in the sanctuary would be the pulpit. The downstage area is the closest stage area to the audience and is often considered the most intimate of spaces. This would be equivalent to the altar. The last is the House where the audience sits (equivalent to pews).

Chapter 1, “Backstage: Theatre as Religion”, using theories of H. Richard Niebuhr, Émile Durkheim and Victor Turner, considerations from Norman Bert, Dale Savidge and other theorists, delves into the idea of theatre as sacred space. This chapter sets a foundation for the thesis with a definition of “church” and “religion”. I will offer my thoughts and reflections on the theories and methods presented and the ways in which they may be used to examine other areas of theatre, and perhaps also other performing arts.

Chapter 2, “Upstage: The ‘Church’ as Ritual Location”, addresses the role of ritual, particularly rites of passage, in the preparation of a performance as examined in the ethnography, *30 Minutes to Places: A Consideration of the Role of Ritual and Worship in Theatrical Space*. My method of research was qualitative with the ethnography combining case study, participant observation and interviews. As a crew member of *The Waffle Palace* production, I engage in primary research through participant observation; after the production, I conducted interviews with several members of the show’s cast and crew.

The *Waffle Palace* cast was multiracial and multigenerational, allowing options for a wider range of acceptable insult for comedic purposes. There were 3 Caucasian men (two of whom play multiple characters), 1 African American woman, 1 Caucasian Woman (multiple characters), 1 Hispanic woman and 1 African American man (multiple characters). The African American characters in the script were related (mother-son).

I conducted a brief demographic survey, face-to-face interviews, and focus group interviews. The questions I asked the actors and actresses were geared towards pursuing the development of their craft of finding and performing the assigned character, and also reflected on the rituals and faith practices of the actors and actresses. After analyzing my data, I was able to apply Victor Turner’s theories on liminal space.

Arnold van Gennep introduces the liminal space as one of the stages of the *rites of passage*, the “rites which accompany every change of place, state, social position and age.”³ However, Victor Turner is celebrated for elaborating on what occurs in liminal space. *30 minutes to Places* discussed van Gennep’s three movements in a rites of

³ Turner, Victor, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing, 1979), 94.

passage: *separation, margin (or limen – threshold in Latin), and aggregation* that I place in conversation with Walter Brueggemann's theory about interpreting the Psalms through the lenses of orientation, disorientation and reorientation. In this chapter, I assert that the time frame of "30 minutes to places" for actors is *rites of passage*, similar to that of preachers on Sunday morning preparing for the pulpit.

Chapter 3, "Center Stage: The Social Confidence of 'Social Faith'", considers the role of theatrical "call" narratives as explored in the ethnography, *A Rose by Any Other Name: A Study of the Usage of Theatre as Religion in the Horizon Theatre Apprenticeship Company* and exemplifying social faith. Ministers deciding to follow their life's path to ordination train to wear the yoke and vestments. I explored the idea of developing practitioners of the arts, who are trained in residencies, apprenticeships and internships, within the family of a theatre company and larger community to explore their inner creative-selves. My formative theory/contention tested the ministerial trial process against the theatre apprenticeship process considering Norman Bert's and Dale Savidge's assertions that those who pursue theatre and the arts as a way of life actually pursue a calling.

I argue the trial and apprenticeship are similar processes in that they culminate and assist individuals in discerning their "call" narratives, yet in the case of the actors, unlike ministers, it would be a theatrical "call" narrative. In exploring the parallels between the two processes, whether developing ministers through the various trial processes requiring ministerial courses of study in the church or clinical pastoral education, or developing practitioners of the arts through apprenticeships and residencies;

I learned, regarding the actors, what factors brought the apprentices to theatre and the company, and in what ways the apprenticeship furthered their artistic discernment.

Employing the methods of participant-observation and interviewing, I was able to prove my contention that the theatrical apprenticeship model, similar to the ministerial trial process, allows artists to address their performance styles as artists, including their spiritual and emotional concerns, in order for them to discover their style of artistry and to consider the scope of their career as a theatrical artist—what I identify as a theatrical “call” narrative.

Chapter 4, “Downstage: Meditative Practices as Ritual Activity”, surveys the spiritual disciplines of prayer and meditation as preparatory ritual activities that actors participate in before entering the performance space as elements of a “call to worship.” These ritual activities are the focus of the ethnography, *Incarnational Sanctuary: A Consideration of the Establishment and Execution of Ritual around Prayer Practices in Theatrical Spaces*. The ethnography considered the impact of Gregor Goethals’ theory on ritual activity, Victor Turner’s theory about social drama and Elaine Ramshaw’s psychosocial view of ritualization on the incarnational ritual of assuming (getting into) a character. ‘Assuming a character’ often leads to transcendence experiences, specifically in African American theatrical productions.

Actors, like preachers, often establish and perform religious rituals with the understanding that “rituals and ceremonies are cultural mirrors, opportunities for presenting collective knowledge.”⁴ Performances are the actors’ and the theatre companies’ time to present a collective knowledge gained in rehearsals that would create

⁴ Myerhoff, Barbara, *Number Our Days: A Triumph of Continuity and Culture Among Jewish Old People in an Urban Ghetto* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1980).

experiences potentially eliciting response or emotion. I framed this study in a hermeneutical/phenomenological/constructivist paradigm and contended that prayer and meditation practices and/or points of reverence (“the quiet moments”) in African American productions are catalysts to experiencing the performance spaces, where performance—at the very least for the actors, at most for all involved—can be seen as a form of worship.

This ethnography used a mixed methods approach, which, in conducting ethnography, requires the inclusion of qualitative *and* quantitative research. My methodology in this ethnography included face-to-face conversations, semi-structured interviews, and focus group interviewing. I observed the rehearsals for the performance of *Brothers of Affliction*, and I participated in performance preparation (with specific attention to the “30 minutes to places” and talkback times).

I explored the religious affiliations of each of the actors, their faith journeys, their common practices, their practices of prayer and meditation in exploring how these spiritual disciplines influence their production choices, auditions, and roles. Moreover, I considered the parallels in each actor’s moments of transcendence (to use Turner’s idea) that occur in the preparation and play production processes (including rehearsals and performances).

In the Conclusion, I summarize the ethnographic studies and give a variation on my initial observations. Offering my self-reflexive musings as they relate to each case study, I ground my research and aspirations in Paul Tillich’s reflection on his desire for a more intimate intersection of arts and religion. I will critique my use of my current research methods for studying the relationship between theology and theatre by

discussing secularism and the sacred, how they complicate the theatre-theology dyad and possible limits to ethnographic research.

Ultimately, this thesis contends that the use of ethnographies is a potential method for studying theatre and theology through the lens of the theories presented. To be clear, I do not assert that theatre and church worship spaces are synonymous, only similar, as there is a dissonance in the intent of worship training and Spirit. However, it must be noted that artists often use ecclesiastical language to describe their theatrical roles, approach to script/process, and relationships.

CHAPTER 1

“BACKSTAGE”: THEATRE AS RELIGION

Instance 1: It is a second Monday of a random month when a notification is received on my phone alerting me to an email, whose subject line reads “Church Tonight.” The sender is neither a pastor nor a member of clergy, but a playwright who, with another playwright friend, formed a group of writers to workshop, test and critique plays in progress. “Church” named so because of their faith in the theatrical process, is a fellowship which takes place in one of the founder’s living rooms, requires “offerings” of either a play script or willingness to read and critique (even opinions for rewriting), and provides “sacraments” of snacks and wine⁵.

Instance 2: In the summer of 2015 backstage of a professional theatrical production with a predominately African American cast, I noticed the institution of prayer before each performance. Even members who were not professed believers in Jesus Christ, followers of a specifically Christological relationship or religious experience, all, including the stage manager, would gather for a word of prayer. All cast and crew were welcome to participate and would include opportunity for people to offer prayer requests and testimonies.

The above instances consider the lens of religious elements and ritual action as presented in a theatrical context, where ecclesiastical language is used. Theatre, in the Western Greco-Roman origin, cites its origins in the church with the passion play genre. Once theatre was deemed a way of worshipping the god of Dionysius instead of the divinity of the Hebraic God, a split occurred. However, the makeup of the performance

⁵ Kimmel, Hank, “Church Tonight” (March 10, 2016, email).

and its core elements remained. Philosophers, sociologists, anthropologists and theologians each consider religion and their connection with the arts, but most often the lens is from performance theory. Victor Turner originally contended there was a movement in entertainment “from ritual to theatre,” but that it could neither navigate fully from one element to another; further once a performance becomes theatre, it could never return to ritual. However, it does not account for rituals in non-Western societies where the distinction between sacred and secular is not detailed, as Turner later retracts⁶. This chapter posits that “church” and “religion,” as elements of theological studies, are lenses through which theatre can be viewed as a sacred space by its relationship to ritual, performance structure, and social faith (or what is deemed sacred).

Religion and Church

Both “religion” and “church” have been understood as spiritually based terms, however their definitions are much broader. Norman Bert defines “religion” as “the creation and reenactment of myth for the purpose of realizing - in both senses of the word as ‘perceiving’ and ‘making actual’ - and celebrating the relationship of human beings with supra-human, spiritual forces”.⁷ While myth is a strong descriptor of a spiritual movement, there is traction in the idea that our present belief in, and our practice of,

⁶ Turner, Victor, “Foreword” to *Between Theatre and Anthropology* by Richard Schechner (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1985), xii. Victor Turner writes, “Schechner also brought to my attention the indigenous theorizings of non-Western theater, themselves rooted in religious and ethical world views unfamiliar to the tradition deriving from Athens-Rome-Jerusalem, which encompasses our Euro-American outlooks and articulates the texts, scenarios, *mise-en-scenes*, training, and symbolic codes of our familiar cultural performances from film, telescreen, to stage. In this book he goes into great detail, in inter- and cross-cultural terms, as to how ritual and theatrical traditions become enfolded in performance and in their dynamic incarnation act as a reflexive metacommentary on the life of their times, feeding on it and assigning meaning to its decisive public and cumulative private events.” xxi.

⁷ Bert, Norman. Bert, Norman, “Theatre is Religion” in *The Journal of Religion and Theatre* Vol 1 No 1 (Fall 2002). 2

religion is based on legacy – specifically oral and written text of our ancestors – and its interpretation in current times.

Moreover, there is the presence of ritual both in theatre and religion; training is a mandatory component to administer both in professional settings. Dale Savidge writes, “Theatre of the avant-garde is inherently religious, sacred, holy – but not theocentric. It is centered on the presence of a higher power of consciousness – but not an identifiable “god” and certainly not the God of the Bible....A ritual may or may not have a religious component, though most examples of formal ritual are connected to the worship of immaterial forces.”⁸ Theatre is not a replacement of God and religion, but maintains elements of the sacred in production.

Ritual location is also determined by the relationship and connection to the community. Tom F. Driver contends, “Not all rituals are religious; some religious communities are hostile toward ritual; and some kinds of ritual and religion turn away from social action. At a deep level, however, they are all connected.”⁹ Similarly, Dale Savidge writes in *Performing the Sacred* that, “A ritual may or may not have a religious component, though most examples of formal ritual are connected to the worship of immaterial forces”. Theatre and religion, then, have in common myth, legacy, ritual and the sacred and holy.

Similar to religion’s broader consideration is Émile Durkheim’s definition of “church”, described in *The Elementary Form of Religious Life* as “a society whose members are united by the fact that they think in the same way in regard to the sacred

⁸ Savidge, Dale, "A Survey of Christianity and Theatre in History" in *Performing the Sacred: Theatre and Theology in Dialogue* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 47.

⁹ Driver, Tom F, “Ritual, Theatre, and Sacrifice” in *Liberating Rites: Understanding the Transformative Power of Ritual*. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 79.

world and its relations with the profane world, and by that fact that they translate these common ideas into common practices.”¹⁰ “Church” relies on localized communities (ritual location) and social groups to enact “religion”, but, as with denominations and local churches, reflect the larger institution. The “sacred” and the “profane”, then, not only coexist, they utilize similar tools that manifest into cultural entities, separated only by the question of faith.

H. Richard Niebuhr, theologian and ethicist, specifies “Theology must attend to the God of faith if it is to understand faith no less than it must attend to the faith in God if it would understand God.”¹¹ Practitioners and participants in a religion must be attentive to their roles, their confidence and beliefs, and their faith in the ability to live within their call. H. Richard Niebuhr further writes, “...faith is to be distinguished from religion. We express it in our religion, to be sure; but also in all our other social decisions, actions and institutions.”¹² “Religion” and “church” are then platforms for ritual, performance sequence and the exploration of the sacred to occur.

Ritual Location as Physical and Temporal Space

Ronald Grimes, in his chapter, “The Notion of Ritual” in *Readings in Ritual Studies* considers that “The social scientific study of ritual is no less vested in its interests than the theological study of ritual; the difference lies not in *whether* it is invested but in *where* the investment is located.”¹³ Ritual location situates “religion” and “church” in the belief of the community. Durkheim describes religious beliefs as “...representations

¹⁰ Durkheim, Émile, *The Elementary Form of Religious Life*. Trans. by Joseph Ward Swain. (New York: Collier Books, 1961), 59.

¹¹ Niebuhr, H. Richard. *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture*. (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1960).

¹² Niebuhr, H. Richard. *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture*,

¹³ Grimes, Ronald. “The Notion of Ritual” in *Readings in Ritual Studies* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1995), 263.

which express the nature of sacred things and the relations which they sustain, either with each other or with profane thing.”¹⁴ The space deemed the ritual location gives permission for the events to occur and to all who participate, who are members of the community.

With this in mind, I, first, give credence to Norman Bert’s consideration that “if theatre is religion, if scripts are myths, if a production is cultic, an act of worship, then the best plays embody and use ritual. The point of ritual is to involve the audience at levels beyond rationalization, a level that involves cognition, rational processes, feelings, lusts, and needs but that engages all of these in an experience that can be described as spiritual.”¹⁵ This recognition and awareness of the actors and audience form both the physical and temporal ritual location, with their presence and participation in the production being the commitment to the “religion.”

Given this determination, Horizon Theatre Company is used as a ritual location. Horizon Theatre Company is a professional theater company located at 1083 Austin Ave Atlanta, GA in the Little Five Points Community Center near Inman Park. Founded by Lisa and Jeff Adler in 1983, the Horizon Theatre is a pillar in the local theatre community actively involved in the livelihood of Little Five Points and is a partner of the Atlanta Intown Theatre Partnership.¹⁶ Little Five Points is a middle-to-upper class community that is predominately white. Known for its “odd” and liberal shops, the area is close knit. Their goal is “to connect people, inspire hope, and promote positive change through the

¹⁴ Durkheim, Emile. *The Elementary Form of Religious Life*. Trans. by Joseph Ward Swain. (New York: Collier Books, 1961), 56.

¹⁵ Bert, Norman. "Theatre is Religion" in *The Journal of Religion and Theatre*. Vol 1 No 1 (Fall 2002), 10.

¹⁶ The Atlanta Intown Partnership is a group of Theatres in Atlanta that vowed to support each other and fundraise a specific amount of money each year for productions and other programs.

stories of our times.”¹⁷ Additionally, Horizon has specific interest in developing new plays and unknown theatre artists in the Atlanta Area, where the artist can be involved in artistic production and staff capacities. Horizon Theatre’s season goes from January to December, but the apprenticeship covers the academic year to accommodate recently graduated students.

Horizon Theatre is housed in a community center and spread along three and a half floors on the southern wing of a former school building. There is one main stage performance space (on the mezzanine or “half level”) where each production is held unless there is an off campus collaboration. The mezzanine level is where the actors’ backstage area is housed, directly behind the audience space. There is an “equity room” with a bed that serves as a resting place during most shows or as an extra dressing room. There is one woman’s dressing room and one men’s dressing room beside it, separated with a wooden wall. The rooms have lights and mirrors, and are often decorated by the cast for the performance. In front of the men and women’s dressing room (between their doors) is a wooden staircase to the props loft; on the side of the stairs is space for the Call Board and equity information posted on a cork board, and a long table below. In the dressing rooms and around the Call Board is the preparation area for the actors and where apprentices (as crew) remain during the show to assist. When it is time for the performance, actors leave this space for the “wings” a darkened space between the dressing room and the stage to await for places to the booth.

The case study *30 Minutes to Places*, as presented in Chapter 2 of this thesis, goes beyond the physical description of the Horizon Theatre location, considering the rites developed and adhered to by the actors in the “30 minutes to Places” time frame.

¹⁷ Horizon Theatre website. www.horizontheatre.com

The Sacred and Social Faith

Secondly, this thesis investigates the sacred as “...the implicit or explicit faith that underlies our ethos and ethics [as a] social faith whose god (value-center and cause) is society itself. From this one source we derive whatever unity there is in our evaluation and our behavior,”¹⁸ highlighted in the ethnography *A Rose by Any Other Name*, in Chapter 4 of this thesis. Social faith is that element that unifies, reinforcing the belief of the parties involved in a communal process; social faith is one defining feature of a theatrical “call” narrative. An intangible moment of social faith, discussed by H. Richard Niebuhr as ‘radical monotheism,’ happens “when we examine our longings, we often discover that what we yearn for is the security of the closed society with its social confidence and social loyalty.”¹⁹ This faith is what drives the belief in religious strivings; it is also this idea that one cannot live without participating in theatre.

Richard Schechner discusses the experience of theatre artist as “two realms of experience: the only two realms performance ever deals with: the world of transcendent existence as ordinary objects and persons and the world of transcendent existence as magical implements, gods, demons, characters.”²⁰ Theatre artists participate in a certain religiosity in their enactments, but also are away when a performance is larger than their own understanding. “Spectators are very aware of the moment when a performance takes off. A ‘presence’ is manifest, something has ‘happened.’ The performers have touched or moved the audience, and some kind of collaboration, has happened in the collective,

¹⁸ Niebuhr, H. Richard, *Radical Monotheism* 27.

¹⁹ Ibid. 31.

²⁰ Schechner, Richard. *Between Theatre and Anthropology*. 6.

something special in theatrical life.”²¹ The “flow”, or the “intensity of performance” is what a theatre artist is groomed to, and hopes to experience in their pursuit of a career.

At the Horizon Theatre Company, their residential Apprenticeship Company is a place where chosen artists (actors, stage managers and playwrights) actively participate in the managing of a professional theatre company. The competitive Apprenticeship at Horizon is a 10-month-intensive, hands-on experience of working as a professional theatre artist with an established company. Apprentices are from around the country and contractually commit to the process. The Apprenticeship company, which in 2014-2015 comprised of 4 playwrights, 1 stage manager and 8 actors, met 3 times a week on Monday and Tuesday evenings and Saturday mornings in 3-hour time blocks. The Apprentices are also required to complete one backstage crew assignment and one box office assignment for the duration of one full performance “run” (about 6 weeks). It can be argued that theatre, for the apprenticeship company, is their religion of choice for the year and even life, with strong dedication to the artistic process.

Ritual Activity and Performance Sequence

Thirdly, I justify through my ethnographic studies Norman Bert’s assertion that “theatre shares with religion the same kinds of accoutrements, the same approach to creation of and modification of myth, an identical setting in community, a similar immediacy, a parallel scope of attitudes toward super human forces, and an identical effect on its devotees”²². The performance sequence is “training, workshops, rehearsals,

²¹ Schenker, Richard. *Between Theatre and Anthropology*. 10.

²² Bert, Norman. "Theatre is Religion" in *The Journal of Religion and Theatre*. Vol 1 No 1 Fall 2002 PDF

warm-ups, performance, cool-down and aftermath.”²³ The full “religious” and “church” experiences would encompass the entire sequence, not just a portion in the way of scholars and theatre personnel²⁴: “Just as the phases of the public performance itself make a system, so the whole ‘performance sequence’ makes a larger, more inclusive system.” The entire performance sequence should be engaged with the community, for it cannot happen if the community does not embrace the activities. Durkheim defines “rites” as “the rules of conduct which prescribe how a man should comport himself in the presence of these sacred subjects.”²⁵ The rites are specific to the designated location, whether it exists physically, temporally or otherwise.

In the case study *Incarnational Sanctuary*, explored in Chapter 4, I observed the ritual activity of the *Brothers of Affliction* cast as elements of a “call to worship”. *Brothers of Affliction* by P. Crayton (32, an award winning local playwright, actor and director) was the final production of Rising Sage Theatre Company’s 2015 season. Rising Sage is²⁶ a small, African American theatre company in Atlanta, GA. Originally founded in 2012 as 3 Hill productions, after an administrative reconfiguration, Rising Sage was born in 2013. Committed to producing provocative new works by playwrights, its shows have included several by Artistic Director P. Crayton III and one guest writer. The guest writer was the winner of the first Rising Sage playwriting competition. Two African American males staff the company including the aforementioned P. Crayton III, and K. Henny, Managing Director. Henny, 43, is an actor and works at the Center for

²³ Schechner, Richard. *Between Theatre and Anthropology*.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Durkheim, Emile. *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*.

²⁶ Since the time of this production and culmination of this project, the theatre company is on hiatus.

Disease Control.²⁷ Rising Sage is a mobile company with no permanent stationary address or home, often partnering with Performing Arts Centers and Festivals to offset the costs of rental overhead.

This study considers the performance sequence in the ritual activity of preparing for a performance, most specifically I examine how the spaces for prayer and meditation practices are established through a sequence of “training, workshops, rehearsals, warm-ups, [and] performance,” which translate into components of a “call to worship.” The chapter details also the ethnographic study of the “cool down” and “aftermath,” yet not for the purposes of analyzing specific ritual actions.

Ultimately, this thesis advances the argument that, in the most basic of views and values, people both retain an innate religious integrity and ritual in theatrical space. By the consideration of ritual location, the sacred (social faith), and ritual activity (as performance sequence), this work considers, what theologian Paul Tillich determined as the ways how “Religion is the substance of culture [Theatre] and culture [theatre] the form of religion.”²⁸

²⁷ Note that most artists are bi-vocational. This is significant to note because within this rehearsal process, Henny was in Liberia from the Monday after auditions to the second week of rehearsals.

²⁸ Tillich, Paul. “In the Sacred Void: Being and God” in *Paul Tillich: Theologian of the Boundaries*. Ed. Mark Kline Taylor. Fortress Press. 1957. 87.

CHAPTER 2

UPSTAGE: THE CHURCH AS RITUAL LOCATION

“This is either a form of creation with God or we are prostitutes,” says M. Hannah, while standing in the Horizon Theatre foyer, “We are making ourselves vulnerable onstage and we can’t care who’s watching. But they will either love or hate us. The point is that we are very vulnerable.”²⁹ In February 2015, during the production of *The Waffle Palace*, conversations such as these occurred often between the actors, crew members and others involved with the production. One of the actors, M. Hannah, mentioned there not being a separation of God and the work she does. For her, it requires a certain awareness and acknowledgement in order to prepare for the encounter and experience, especially in the theatrical space.

This is reminiscent of Paul Tillich’s discussion of the resistance of religion to declare itself art, which, I believe bifurcates the sacred and the secular, thus maintaining the division between religion and art. However, there is mutuality, a plane where the two can coexist in “artistic honesty,” for example when the arts “express the real situation of the artist and the cultural period to which he belongs.”³⁰ This artistic honesty can happen only when art and religion are surveyed through each other: religion through art *and* art through religion. While religion has certainly been viewed through the perspective of art, the reciprocal is required, art needs to be viewed from the perspective of religion and in this particular instance, the theatre arts.

Both preparation for a worship service and preparation for a theatrical production require intentional planning and execution for the congregation or audience to have a

²⁹ Hannah, Marguerite. Conversation at Horizon Theatre. Atlanta, GA. 2/21/15

³⁰ Tillich, Paul. *Theology of Culture*. 48.

fulfilling experience. For worship, one prays for spiritual guidance, considers relevant themes for the liturgical season and chooses the most relevant scriptures and auxiliaries to facilitate an encounter with God. For theatre, the process is similar, where plays that will appeal most to the audience, a particular season of the year and the best actors to guide the audience through the character's development – and subsequently their own journey – are carefully selected. "Theatre may indeed approach the realm of ritual, where something more than representation of character and story occurs in the room shared by actors and their audience."³¹ While "30 Minutes to Places" takes place backstage, the actors often position themselves in upstage locations at rise of the show. This chapter explores theatre as sacred space within a production examining the role of ritual location, particularly rites of passage, in the preparation of a performance.

Case Study I: 30 minutes to Places: A Consideration of the Role of Ritual and Worship in Theatrical Space

This chapter, based on the ethnography *30 minutes to Places*, considers Arthur van Gennep's and Victor Turner's ritual theories to examine the actors entrance into liminal space once the stage manager calls "30 minutes." That is the same amount of time the audience is allowed to enter into the world of the production (similar to ministers gathering before worship while the congregation enters the sanctuary). Between this "30 minutes" and "places", the actors experience a *rites of passage* where they don their costumes and make up, then run lines (similar to ministers putting on robes and reading over their sermons one last time). The space becomes tangible once the stage manager calls "places", and the audience is encouraged to respond (similar to "call and response"

³¹ Savidge, Dale. "A Survey of Christianity and Theatre in History" in *Performing the Sacred: Theatre and Theology in Dialogue* by Todd E. Johnson & Dale Savidge. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 19-50.

and congregational replies in ritual). This chapter reflects on proximate parallels between the arts and Christian theology providing a correlation between preparation periods before theatre performance and worship experiences. Using primary, qualitative research this ethnography presents Victor Turner's concept of liminal space, Arnold Van Gennep's *rites of passage* and Walter Brueggemann's psalm interpretation to consider the 30-minute theatrical preparation period as religious ritual based on reflection from the cast and crew of *The Waffle Palace*.

The Theories: 30 Minutes

The concept of "30 minutes to places" originates with the stage manager who "calls the show," meaning he retains the order and operates the production, to signal the time for the performance. Julianna Lee, the American Equity Association Stage Manager for *The Waffle Palace* (AEA or "Equity"), shared via interview, that the origin of the count stems from "the Union Handbook".³² "30 minutes" is temporally one half hour before the "curtain speech," the speech introducing the production and presenting courtesies such as location of exits, silencing of cell phones, and running time.

"Places to the booth" signals to actors the stage manager's departure from the backstage area and the time to prepare for opening blocking (director choreographed movements) occurring at the "top," or beginning, of the show. Additionally, it is the moment the "house" (seating area) opens and the audience is allowed into the theatrical space. The Stage Manager calls in the following order: 30, 15, 10, 5, and Places to the Booth³³. "30 Minutes to Places" is the temporal space in which a *rites of passage* or

³² Lee, Julianna. Interview at Horizon Theatre Company, (Atlanta, GA: April 4, 2015).

³³ "Calling more often", Julianna Lee mentions in her interview, "will make the actors more anxious." She further goes on to discuss the usefulness in maintaining a regular count for the actors and often writes deviations in her performance notes, particularly if more times is necessary for the actors or box office.

psalmic interpretation can occur; what is deemed as ritual, or as James Roose-Evans defines as ritual, “– not to be confused with ceremony –...a journey of the heart, a rite of passage, which enables us to arrive at a deeper understanding of ourselves and others”³⁴ is established and performed in this time frame.

The theories tested for this overarching study were Victor Turner’s liminal space as derived from Arnold van Gennep’s *rites of passage*, the “rites which accompany every change of place, state, social position and age.”³⁵ This chapter specifically discusses Arnold van Gennep’s three movements: separation, margin (or *limen* – threshold in Latin), and aggregation comparing the stages to Brueggemann’s psalmic interpretation as orientation, disorientation and reorientation.

Arthur Van Gennep’s *rite of passage* phases are defined in *The Rites of Passage* and in Victor Turner’s essay “Liminality and Communitas” in *The Ritual Process*. Separation requires “detachment of the individual or group”³⁶ from normalized societal life (the patterns which one has come to experience, or “a ‘state’”³⁷). This may include a detachment from family, friends and the world as it has typically been known. Margin refers to the “limen” or “threshold” where the participant’ (“passenger”) status is “ambiguous.”³⁸ This space (physically or psychologically) dictates the standard rules and norms for the designated temporal frame. Aggregation (“reaggregation or reincorporation”) is where “the passage is consummated.”³⁹

³⁴ Roose-Evans, James. “Foreward” in *Ritual Theatre: The Power of Dramatic Ritual in Personal Development Groups and Clinical Practice* by Claire Schrader (Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2012)

³⁵ Turner, Victor. *The Ritual Process*. 94

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid. 94.

³⁸ Ibid. 94.

³⁹ Ibid. 95.

Subjects return to the world they knew with the knowledge of the margin added to their experiences. The concept of *rites of passage* is often observed during major transitions, for instance graduations, weddings, and ordinations. It is also indicative of “movement from one role to another that prepares individuals for a new social identity and a new social status.”⁴⁰ At the finalization of the process, the “ritual subject” operates within the bounds of the new status.⁴¹

The *rites of passage* parallels Brueggemann’s cyclical interpretation of the psalms as detailed in the book, *Spirituality of the Psalms*, where he presents The Psalms as appropriate for seasons of life, a movement from orientation to disorientation to reorientation. Orientation is parallel to “songs of guaranteed creation”; disorientation to the “songs of disarray” and reorientation parallels the “songs of surprising new life”.⁴² Brueggemann directs discussion towards the movement between the stages. He asserts that one move is from orientation to disorientation; it “may be an abrupt or a slowly dawning acknowledgement. It constitutes a dismantling of the old, known world and a relinquishment of safe, reliable confidence in God’s good creation.”⁴³

Emotional expressions often occur in the transition, a cathartic reaction to the movement. The move from disorientation to new orientation “entails a departure from the ‘pit’ of chaos just when we have suspected we would never escape. It is a departure

⁴⁰ Phillips, Nichole. “Ritual Theories Chart” from Class Lecture Notes. (Atlanta, GA: Emory University, November 20, 2013)

⁴¹ Turner, Victor. *The Ritual Process*. 359. “The ritual subject, individual or corporate, is in a relatively stable state once more and, by virtue of this, has rights and obligations vis-à-vis others as a clearly defined and “structural” type; he is expected to behave in accordance with certain customary norms and ethical standards binding on incumbents of social position in a system of such positions”. This is concept becomes increasingly important for both the actor and audience members if they are to uphold and maintain the world created by the production itself.

⁴² Brueggemann, Walter. *Spirituality of the Psalms*. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Press, 2001) 12.

⁴³ Brueggemann, Walter. 10.

inexplicable to us, to be credited only to the intervention of God.”⁴⁴ Also a transition, its goal is to reveal the transformation, where a more positive, uplifting movement will occur. Equivalent to Van Gennep’s *rites of passage*, Brueggemann’s move from orientation is similar to separation, the margin (or *limen*) is equal to disorientation, and reorientation is aggregation. This chapter asserts that the time frame of “30 minutes to places” for actors is a *rites of passage*, in the ritual location of the theatre, similar to that of preachers on Sunday morning preparing for the pulpit.

The Opportunity: 15 Minutes

As a 2014-2015 Horizon Theatre Playwriting Apprentice, I was granted the opportunity to experience the inner workings of the full professional production of *The Waffle Palace*. *The Waffle Palace (Smothered, Covered and Scattered 24/7/365)* by Larry Larson and Eddie Levi Lee is an original play that was commissioned by Horizon Theatre Company. First developed and produced in 2012 as part of the New South Play Festival, this production was the third remount. Horizon Theatre’s Co-Artistic Director Lisa Adler, in her nightly curtain speech for what she called “The Waffle Palace 3.0,” introduced the play as having developed out of conversations at the Young Playwrights Festival one year when Larry discussed the process of gathering play ideas. She would further mention that they both “read newspaper articles about the Waffle House and thought it would be an interesting story.” The official description of the play, as listed on Horizon Theatre Company’s website reads:

⁴⁴ Ibid. 11.

“From births to marriages, to police chases and lottery wins, anything can happen at 3 AM in the Waffle Palace. Inspired by amazing real life events at Waffle House restaurants, Larson and Lee let loose with this roller coaster of humor and imagination in which John Pickett and his staff battle to keep their Midtown diner open against heavy odds. The Waffle Palace: a place where everyone is welcome, and the only unforgivable sins are throwing waffles and under-tipping.”⁴⁵

This comedy is one of the most popular shows with Horizon’s patrons.⁴⁶ The third remount took place from January 24-March 8, 2015 with previews on January 22nd and 23rd. The typical patron for this show was a non-theatre goer interested in a comedy; this show was often the first theatrical experience for audience members. The feedback was often positive amongst patrons and was accessible because of its interactive and culturally relevant nature.

The Study and Methodology: 10 minutes

The method of research for the ethnography was qualitative combining case study, participant observation and interviews. As a crew member of the Waffle Palace production, I engaged primary research through participant observation. After the production, I conducted interviews with several members of the show’s cast and crew. The cast was multiracial and multigenerational, allowing options for a wider range of acceptable insult for comedic purposes. There are 3 Caucasian men (two of whom play multiple characters), 1 African American woman, 1 Caucasian Woman (multiple characters), 1 Hispanic woman and 1 African American man (multiple characters). The African American characters in the script are related (mother-son). The interview

⁴⁵ Horizon Theatre Company website.

⁴⁶ This is determined both by audience review and financial success. Revenue from *The Waffle Palace* is used to offset expenses of other shows in the season, particularly new works.

questions are both demographic and discuss the craft of finding and performing the character⁴⁷.

Waffle Palace: 5 minutes

On any given night, the actors were required to arrive 30 minutes before “places”, though they were allotted warm up time and space for the actors, each as scheduled on their own. If there was a special call (microphone check or “fight call”)⁴⁸, the actors arrived as much as an hour before time. The play itself was a comedy and did not require exercises to enter into “dark spaces,” but required specific special effects including fog and dry ice. This chapter centers around the three actors who originated the characters and each of whose solitary role was to perform as an actor in the show: M. Hannah, A. Edwards and M. Sager, with supplementary commentary from the stage manager from *The Waffle Palace 3.0* will also be utilized in the discussion.

M. Hannah, “Connie”, in the production, is an African American woman who did not train formally as an actress and serves as the company business manager/apprenticeship company director. A. Edwards, Hugo/Waffle Blues Guy/others, a Caucasian male, holds an MFA in Acting and is considered a formally trained actor; he is a frequent actor at Horizon Theatre. M. Sager, “Esperanza Bernstein” is a trained director (Bachelor’s Degree) who has acted professionally for 12 years. All returned for the third iteration, having performed as M. Sager mentions, “146 shows”, and have specific preparations on performance day.

⁴⁷ See Appendix A for interview question.

⁴⁸ Waffle Palace Rehearsal Schedule 2015.

A. Edwards, who played the guitar in the production, would come about an hour before to tune his guitar, playing songs like “Danny’s Song” by Loggins & Messina and rehearsing the “Waffle Palace Blues” sung during the play. Of his process, he wrote in response to his interview questions:

I do like to do the same routine before each performance of the same play, but each play creates a different routine. This routine is made up of a sequence of tasks that reassure me that I have all my costumes and props in order, that I have used my voice in the specific space of the theater so as to “tune” the sound to the space, and that I have rehearsed any complex or dangerous choreography (as in stage combat). Once the routine is established (usually during tech rehearsals), I try to follow the same sequence for every performance throughout the run of the play. This is a purely pragmatic strategy, but it tends to have the psychological benefit of focusing my attention on the performance and away from any day-to-day stresses that might interfere with concentration and energy.

I can tell when I have achieved the necessary focus and energy when my voice is clear of tension and my body is relaxed.⁴⁹

For Edwards, the *rites of passage* occurs mentally long before the thirty minutes. During this time he would check his props and perform a microphone check, a way of extending the process so that he was more grounded before the other actors’ arrival. In a way, he performed a double “separation” – out of reach of the world and even the cast. His liminal preparation had an ideal time, however, it was unpredictable and varied based on the others around him. Edwards dressed physically in the Rocker outfit for the top of the show; he considered this his reincorporation into the post-production world.

M. Hannah, in our conversations in February 2015, mentioned that even though this production did not require the same mental preparation, she held the 30 minutes call time “sacred.” Her performance as “Connie”, the longest running waitress of 25 years and mother/nurturer to many who frequented the diner, was not so different from her

⁴⁹ Edwards, Allan. Questionnaire (see appendix)

professional role as mentor and director of the apprentice company, though different from her career as the Business Manager. Even though she was not technically trained (through a theatre program), M. Hannah has her Equity card (is a union actress), and values a particular pattern to begin her transition from Business Manager, because of its sensitive nature. This was proven backstage during one of the March shows, where one of the other actors requested a business matter during that thirty minutes, while M. Hannah was putting on her costume. She specifically requested, despite his persistence, to have the conversation post-show so as to not interfere with her pre-performance “30 minutes to places” ritual.

She required a mental movement from orientation to disorientation, a total separation of roles to embark upon her journey. For M. Hannah, getting into character was a process of making herself vulnerable because true acting is authentic. It is as Savidge writes, “The actor-priest uses ritual as a ‘technique to influence a supernatural power’. This process involves a self-exposure and self-sacrifice in public by the actor.”⁵⁰ M. Hannah’s dedication to her process relied upon circumventing distraction within the margin to make room for the embodiment of her character.

M. Sager, in our interview, discussed her approach as an actor being slightly different from how she viewed her role through a director’s lens (given that much of her training was as a director). She sometimes created a playlist to listen to twenty minutes before the show starts, or to carry things from the week into the performance, depending on character. During the show process, M. Sager committed to “the same vocal and physical warm ups” and was often found brushing her teeth or washing her hands one last

⁵⁰ Savidge, Dale. "A Survey of Christianity and Theatre in History" in *Performing the Sacred: Theatre and Theology in Dialogue* by Todd E. Johnson & Dale Savidge, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009) 47.

time before entering the wings. For *The Waffle Palace*, the final moment, when “Places to the Booth” was called, M. Sager, before going onto stage, is found writing out a check for the character, Ralpie, whom “Esperanza,” her character in the play, serves in the first scene (see appendix)⁵¹.

Embodying “Esperanza” proved interesting for M. Sager who has been recognized in the grocery store or walking down the street as the character, Esperanza, outside of the physical ritual location. Understanding the overlapping of the physical and temporal ritual location had an impact on her process while in character because she “houses all of it inside of [her] so that it is available throughout the show.”⁵² In the stages of reorientation and reaggregation, Maria retains these experiences and is reminded of them when returning to the post production world and even when she embodies other characters.

The “30 minutes to places” is a specifically sacred time where even seasoned actors are in specific conversations only with their cast or crew as they retain individual processes for accessing their characters. Yet, what is interesting is actors might make a playful, or not quite so playful request such as “call the understudy” or feigning distress just before performance time,⁵³ a typical trait for M. Sager. However, when the 30-minute mark arrives, there is no return; the actors are contractually bound to complete their duties, regardless of their doubts, physical ailments or other concerns. The impact of the thirty minutes, the preparation, is beyond what any of the actors, M. Hannah, A. Edwards or M. Sager can anticipate.

⁵¹ The checks, which are given to John (L. Larson’s character) are on a duplicate pad. The carbon copy is placed on the wall as a tally of the shows.

⁵² M. Sager Interview. (Atlanta, GA: Horizon Theatre, 2015)

⁵³ According to the Actor’s Equity Handbook, understudies must be given at least a 2 hour notice.

Analysis: (Holding for Another) 5 minutes

The ethnography considered the Christological parallels of the “30 minutes to places” *rites of passage* to the garden of Gethsemane detailed in the synoptic gospels (Matthew 26: 36-46; Mark 14: 32-42; Luke 22:39-46), where Jesus Christ goes into prayer before the commencing of the Passion. Let us consider the Passion was a dramatic tragedy for which psychological preparation was required. In this place, Jesus has 3 disciples, Peter, James and John (a cast), in the garden while observing prayer. They had separated themselves, according to van Gennep’s *rites of passage* stage theory. Brueggemann can also be applied here because Jesus’ prayer is reminiscent of the psalms, and Gethsemane is the epitome of the lament psalm. Gethsemane, Greek for “oil press”, has become synonymous with the moment where inner turmoil meets outward duty.

The “30 minutes to places” can be seen as a time of lamentation because grief and loss are involved with the departure from the actor as a person to the actor as a character. The precedent of diminishing the self as a human vessel to embody a greater role is a divine process. Just as “Actors who accept in full their spiritual and physical existence and understand, through theology, the connectedness of the spirit and body can explore in depth that connection as they incarnate characters in plays,”⁵⁴ they become similar to Jesus who fully embodies the role of God; yet does so by choosing to depart from his divinity and assume humanity. At this point, the duties of the actors must take precedence similar to the actions of Jesus. In the biblical narrative, Jesus begins to pray at Gethsemane, focusing on the eschatological weight of the next leg of his journey. While

⁵⁴ Savidge, Dale. "The Christian at Work: Being an Artist in the Theatre" in *Performing the Sacred: Theatre and Theology in Dialogue* by Todd E. Johnson & Dale Savidge, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 114.

being humbled by the Gethsemane experience, placing Jesus in liminal space, doubt emerges. Jesus demands from his Father to “take the cup from me,” making this an uncontrollable and vulnerable moment for him. Christ’s attention to an unresponsive God allows him to have solitary (focused on character) yet communal conversation for the experience is uniquely his own and cannot be passed on. Yet, this simple prayer request is peppered with interruptions (it could be argued whether Jesus was both stage manager and actor).

An intrusion into Jesus’ own “30 minutes to places” can be marked with the following scriptures: “With you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet not what I want, but what you want” (Mark 14: 28) which I count at as “15 minutes” to places; “If you are willing, remove this cup from me, yet not my will but yours be done” (Luke 22:42) “10 minutes” to places; “If it cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done” (Matthew 26:42), “5 minutes” to places. After Jesus’ third request and prayer, he states, “the hour has come” (41), with no way to escape the role he is contractually bound to (“places to the booth”). This final declaration not only marks Jesus symbolic “places to booth” but also signifies Van Gennep’s reaggregation and Brueggemann’s reorientation stages. While Jesus’ countdown ensues, the mob, or “the audience” in theatrical vernacular, awaits Jesus’ opening curtain – resurrection.

Conclusion: Places to the Booth

In considering Van Gennep’s *rites of passage* and Brueggemann’s psalmic interpretation as related to “30 minutes to places”, this chapter addresses actors’ sacred spaces (physically, mentally and socially) when preparing to perform a role. If art is ministry and actors are then priests in the facilitation of a worship experience of

performance, the result is an understanding of the spiritual connection within the creative process. H. Richard Niebuhr asserts that “fidelity, whether practiced in church, home, profession, or nation-state, always has the same general form; it is always a set of mind, a habit of devotion to the cause and a disciplining of actions in service to a cause.”⁵⁵ The actors are set and focused on the transition, and on accessing the theatrical ritual by engaging in the physical and temporal ritual by, as M. Hannah suggested, her interview making themselves vulnerable to the process.

If we consider the aforementioned Paul Tillich’s assessment of “artistic honesty”, the sacristy of the theatrical space is perhaps this vulnerability. One could determine then that ritual location is a gateway to the divine. Gethsemane was for Jesus a preparatory space, what we identify in the theatrical world, a “30 minutes to places,” a liminal space where God can reside before a major event; the sacredness of preparation is the only way the divine can be accessed.

⁵⁵ Niebuhr, H. Richard. *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture*. 65.

CHAPTER 3

CENTER STAGE: THE SOCIAL CONFIDENCE OF “SOCIAL FAITH”

Introduction

In the “Introduction,” Paul Tillich’s words were presented on the artist’s aesthetic function and the place where art resides, specifically the consideration of the “artistic realm”. In order to gain access to this realm, it can be argued that a certain measure of “social faith” is required to pursue theatre as a profession. This social faith rests on the journey of the principal artist, placing them in the center. Many persons graduate college from theatre programs or having been groomed as a theatre artist since their youth, find their hard earned skills are often used for free productions or in teaching arts to communities. Artists often mention that they would “not be an artist if [they] did not feel called to it”.⁵⁶ This dedication to art is what H. Richard Niebuhr defines as a “standard by which [the artists] judge [themselves] and [their] deeds, [their] companions and their actions, by which also [they] know [themselves] to be judged, [which becomes] the standard of loyalty to the community,”⁵⁷ often processed in their theatrical “call” narrative. This chapter considers theatre as sacred space through the exploration of faith and the idea of developing practitioners of the arts, trained through residencies and apprenticeships, not just through internships, within the family of a theatre company and larger community to explore their inner creative-selves and reflective of a theatrical “call” narrative.

With respect to this ethnography, I contend that the theatrical apprenticeship model, similar to the trial process, allows artists to address their performance styles as

⁵⁶ McFarlane, Stephanie. Interview. (April 2015).

⁵⁷ Niebuhr, H. Richard. *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture*. 25.

artists, address particular spiritual and emotional concerns; discover their distinct artistry and consider the scope of their career as a theatrical artists. The chapter explores the proximate parallels between developing ministers through the trial process (course of study) or clinical pastoral education (CPE) against practitioners of the arts through apprenticeships and residencies. Thus, I ask: Are there professional, practical and spiritual correlations between these two processes that are similar, though not synonymous? In what ways can the apprenticeship encourage and inspire a conversation and discernment of faith and the creative process?

*Case Study II: A Rose by Any Other Name: A Study of the Usage of Theatre as Religion
in
the Horizon Theatre Company Apprenticeship*

An interpretive/phenomenological/constructivist paradigm framed my ethnographic research, considering that the apprenticeship company model in comparison to the CPE processes and/or trial process, as there are professional, practical and spiritual benefits for the persons involved. My formative theory for this ethnography was that the theatrical production process is similar to preparation for worship and ministry as it encourages the exploration of self, creates opportunities for fellowship with other similar minded individuals, and contributes to ministry by ritual action. I offer in this chapter an ethnographic study with comparative and developmental questions. This study evaluated pastoral care models and minister-on-trial courses in relationship to theatrical apprenticeship and based on processes lasting for a particular length of time and training meant to produce practitioners of the field. The developmental question considered the outcome and the evolution of the apprentices as a result of the apprenticeship's programmatic influences.

This project's perspective was emic and used a mixed methods ethnographic approach including: interviews; email correspondences; attending Apprentice Company Classes on Monday and Tuesday evenings and Saturday morning; Front of House Duties and Crew Assignment; Opening Night Receptions; Strikes after show closings; and rehearsals for the One Act plays that take took place on April 21, 2015. This ethnographic study explores the inspiration of each Apprenticeship member to sacrifice to attend the apprenticeship, since many move from out of the state to volunteer for the year, while examining what has been gained in their professional and personal lives as a result of their dedication.

I drew information from participant observation as a playwriting apprentice for the duration of 54 days, serving in the Front of House capacity for the run of the production *Grand Concourse*, working Opening Night and Production Strike, and as writer for the Apprentice Presentation of the One Acts. I also conducted one-on-one interviews with the apprentices keeping written and audio notes. My specific observations for this ethnography centered on the One Act play production process.

Cultural Context: The Apprenticeship Company

The Horizon Theatre Company Apprenticeship Company is “designed for early career theatre artists interested in specific areas of directing, playwriting, acting, stage management, and design”⁵⁸. The apprentices must apply during the spring of the year they desire enrollment into the program, and have an audition in person (or via Skype, as was the case with Nicky) with the Director and the Director's Assistant. The 2014-2015 company comprised 3 men and 10 women. Racially, there were 2 African Americans

⁵⁸ Horizon Theatre Company Website. www.horizontheatre.com

(one an actor, the other a playwright), one Hispanic and one Asian American. 9 originally were from outside the state of Georgia, 2 were from outside the city of Atlanta, but were from the state of Georgia. 6 relocated for the purposes of this apprenticeship, with no previous connection to the city and no job. The ages ranged from 22-32, with me being the oldest (see *Demographics* in the Appendix). Each comes brings a variety of talents, having been trained in collegiate programs, internships, and professional touring groups.

The One Act Play Showcase was chronicled as social and religious practice. Four original One Acts were produced, each approximately 20-25 minutes long, written by the playwrights and performed by the actors. The apprenticeship process required course times on Mondays and Tuesdays evenings, and Saturday mornings, similar to group study and classes for the CME Bishops course of Study or a ministerial training process that requires specific and designated times for professional development. There were “ministry development” opportunities for the actor including Front of House, Crew Assignments and Unified auditions; fellowship in the Opening Night Reception, Festival Assignments, and Strike (breaking down the set, stage for a new show). In addition to class times, apprentices were faithful to email correspondences with constant details of events, auditions and opportunities to attend theatrical productions in the Atlanta theatre community.

Social Analysis

For the ethnography, I interviewed 9 of the 13 apprentices: Abigail (actress), Chaz (actor), Hannah (PW), Stephanie (actress), Nicky (actor), Liz (PW), Justine (actress), Jenn (actress) and Arin (actress). The remaining 4 were unable to be interviewed in the time frame around their apprenticeship, school and work schedules. From their narratives

and my observations, the following is a recollection of the main project from March-April 2015. In this section, I recount patterns found in the classes (Writer's Lab and Company Classes) and focus largely on the One Act Play Process.

Foundations: Classes - Writers

The Writer's Lab, meeting Tuesdays, typically in the Blue Room away from the actors, encouraged the individual playwrights to find their ideas and their approach to their script. Each person found synchronicity and ritual in their writing while building confidence. Playwrights first emailed their drafts before class to the entire group, which determined the order each was read. Addae Moon, the playwright mentor, led the playwrights into the following questions about their play after and facilitated critiques of the drafts. Three regular questions were asked: 1) what struck you? 2) what questions do we have? and 3) possibilities. This particular way of working with the plays allowed the playwright to be able to grow with the draft in addition to the writing itself. The playwrights are similar to ministers in that ministers toil over sermons and discover new ways to exegete the Word onto paper. Hannah, playwriting apprentice, mentioned, "My writing has grown. Actually in class, last Tuesday, I gave them a sample of a play I started working on 4 years ago and they say that the writing is wittier, the dialogue is sharper, so it has grown."⁵⁹ The playwrights started writing their plays in January for the April One Act show, then performed subsequent revisions until auditions.

For the Actors, the Unifieds⁶⁰ preparation process for the actors was about discovering the monologues based on their own types. The requirement was to find two

⁵⁹ Hannah. Interview 4/18/2015.

⁶⁰ The Annual Mass Atlanta auditions offered by the Atlanta Coalition of Performing Arts (ACPA), where actors present, as Suehyla El-Attar writes in her article "Thank You. Next! A Look at the Atlanta

monologues, or a monologue and a song that best displayed their abilities, Nicky recounted, “We spent quite a bit of time working on the monologues – a really long time.”⁶¹ Abigail mentioned, “At first I wasn’t sure why we had to do it, but I started to feel more comfortable with the audition process.”⁶² Their walk through the memorization was more than just the delivery – it started in October with choosing appropriate, age related monologues. They then were broken down by length, progression and speed, and making sure there was a proper “button,” or a sharp, memorable ending. Often when actors come out of undergraduate programs, they are cast into roles that they would never have been cast in professionally. Stephanie recounted, “When I was in undergrad I would be cast in roles like Rose from *Fences*.⁶³ But I can’t do that at Unifields. I’m not nearly old enough nor have the experience to play that character. And so I had to find other monologues.”⁶⁴ Classes for the actors consisted of encouraging them to find their best talents by discerning their theatrical niche.

The March process focused largely on polishing the monologues and learning audition etiquette. One class was devoted solely to entrances, with actors walking in, visiting the “musician” if necessary, and being in ready pose for their acknowledgement to start. Actors chose information and material around a subject or idea of the playwrights (preacher). The actors’ performance decisions were informed by research of cues and information given in the script. This particular script analysis assisted in

Unifields.” She defines the audition material as “a comedic and dramatic monologue, or do a monologue and sing 16 bars of a song”.

⁶¹ Nicky. Interview. 4/27/2015.

⁶² Abigail. Interview. 4/13/2015.

⁶³ “Rose” is a woman in her mid-fifties whose husband cheats on her and produces a young daughter.

⁶⁴ Stephanie. Interview. 4/19/2015.

ushering in a specific experience for the audience (congregation) and reaction to the material, which transfers into the One Act Play Rehearsal process.

One Act Play Process in Action

The One Act Plays were a way of commingling the worlds of the actors and playwrights, facilitated by the stage managers and producers. I surveyed the One Act Play production process of the Horizon Theater Company apprenticeship company (starting with the writing of the play) against the ministerial training process to study my contention. The One Act Plays were one of the requirements of the apprenticeship company; the date for the showcase was typically set about six weeks out for the production process. These dates are in addition to their assigned Front of House and Crew Assignment duties, and were decided with the producer, the Writer's Lab director as well as the playwright. The directors for the One Act plays were most likely hired from outside of Horizon; it is typical to have one outside director (with a proven reputation) and possibly maybe one inside director.

After writing several drafts of the plays and the end of the show, *The Waffle Palace*, in which Marguerite, the producer, was a principal actor, the playwrights gathered together to decide the date for the showcase. Addae, lab director, helped to inform Marguerite how far the playwrights had come in the process and if the plays were "performance ready." This is similar to a minister selected for an appointment or on in CPE given their site specific duty. In the middle of March, the actors were randomly cast to "cold read"⁶⁵ the plays for the playwrights in order for all to hear aloud and for the actors to have an idea of which roles were available for audition. Following this, the

⁶⁵ With not prior reading or preparation. The actor is literally handed a script when either when they walk in the room and told their role or just before walking into the room.

playwrights made small corrections before passing the scripts along to the directors to select “sides”⁶⁶ for the audition. The playwrights and the producer held the conversation about casting; and the director did not assist in this casting process. In contrast to a professional theater company, where the director sits both in the auditions and is over the decision making process for casting as well as the producer, the producer does have the final casting say in the apprenticeship process.

Prior to the auditions, the actors were emailed sides of every play because they were to audition for each show, regardless of the role in which they wanted to be cast. This is different from Unified preparation because much of the patterns from the auditions are repeated, particularly room entrance etiquette. This is similar to a regular production process where actors have no control over the roles in which they are cast.

On Audition day, all apprentices were present: the playwrights were allowed to sit inside of the room while the actors entered two at a time. The stage manager facilitated the “transportation” process. Actors did not have to perform monologues, but read from the scripts provided with a scene partner. Playwrights requested certain actor combinations, often as a result of ability and compatibility on stage. When the actors finished with their auditions, the producer and playwrights sat down to cast the shows, addressing ability, compatibility and personality. This process seemed very close to what ministers must experience in their discernment of spiritual gifts, where the fit is based on various factors, especially what will lead to the most cohesion on a given group and script.

The next step in the rehearsal process was for Marguerite to sit down with the individual casts to discuss how to work with directors (similar to a mentorship class

⁶⁶ “Sides” are about 2 to 3 pages of the script for the actors to see and get a sense of the characters for which they will audition.

group reflection in CPE). Actors read the scripts then discussed questions they had with Marguerite about the specifics of the script or even their own characters for their character work (based on information from interviews with Arin, Justine and Stephanie). In addition, at least one of the playwrights met separately with the actors to assist them in getting acquainted with the script.

During this process, there were certain tensions residing with the actors particularly those with Crew or Front of House duties. Those crewing *Grand Concourse* were backstage Wednesday through Sunday evenings as well as on Saturday afternoons. Saturday mornings before their call time, Nicky, Justine and Stephanie were in class or rehearsal; this also included some Sunday mornings. The rehearsals were Monday and Tuesday, which meant they were at the theatre every day outside of their regular jobs. For those performing Front of House duties, Arin and I were responsible for operating their particular rehearsal schedule around the assignments.

Directors met with actors to discuss plays and receive their blocking (choreographed, directed movements that were to be repeated during every performance, its own ritual). Other actors sat in on different rehearsals if they were over other aspects of the production. The apprentice company members often pulled double duty in the One Act process (if they had multiple gifts). Arin and Hannah assisted with props, Jen organized and executed marketing, and Abigail and Nicky assisted with costumes and props. This was reminiscent of Ministers on Trial and those completing CPE that may be simultaneously in seminary, working full time jobs or otherwise not solely focused on the trial process as a full-time job.

Rehearsals often started with Director's notes, then playwright's notes with minor script changes or blocking inquiries; playwrights were not to make major overhauls once rehearsal started, however, they could add or cut sentences. For the actors, there is a constant search for moments, for greater understanding, a way of allowing the audience to relate to what the actors understood about their characters. "Just as the dramatic script is written to be enacted, so too the Scriptures were written to be interpreted in life"⁶⁷ Actors rehearsed to bring about an enlightenment for themselves and a full view into the conversations of their characters; every prop and movement was intentionally considered in terms of the driving forces for actions.

Toward the end of the rehearsal process, there were two technical rehearsals for the show. The first is to add lights and sound elements to the show, with the directors and actors moving "cue to cue", or through each light and sound moment as they occur in the script. The second technical rehearsal on Monday is longer and runs the technical elements with the acting all together. Going through every aspect of the rehearsal is similar to the functions of a Worship Committee that meets the day before Sunday worship services to survey, go through every step of the program, and fine tune all aspects of the service to ensure the service flows smoothly and without foreseen interruptions. Actors are in costume and crew members, assigned duties via pre-organized Shift Plot, were required to be in place for the transitions. During the second rehearsal, all of the shows were run twice, about two hours each. Each play's run time was about 20 minutes; two were performed, followed by a 10-minute intermission, and subsequently followed by two other shows. Those actors not onstage would wait

⁶⁷ Johnson, Todd and Dale Savidge. "Introduction: Todd and Dale Go to the Theatre" in *Performing the Sacred: Theatre and Theology in Dialogue* by Todd E. Johnson & Dale Savidge (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009) 47.

backstage; playwrights were able to be audience members if they did not crew between the shows. During their actual play, playwrights were able to watch their show; at the end of the performance of their play then come down to take a bow.

It was customary to wait until the last technical rehearsal to practice the curtain call. The date of the show there was one final line-by-line run through of the One Act play, this was during a time where tensions mounted and actors reacted. Marguerite, the producer allowed a “speed through”⁶⁸ with intentions of finishing in half the time. Actors who knew their lines could stumble under the weight of the expectation. However, even for those who buckled under the weight, at show time, everyone was in their proper place and performed well, with accolades from the audience. At the end of the plays, the audience greeted and fellowshiped with each other and the theatre artists who performed, before striking, which ends the rehearsal process.

Theological/Anthropological/Religious Analysis

For this analysis, I start with Victor Turner’s ritual theory of liminal space. The apprentices, similar to Jesus in the wilderness and ministers on trial, must leave their loved ones in order to immerse themselves into this new experience. The process requires focus and strips people of everything. Awards, recognitions, other acting and playwriting experiences are irrelevant. “It is in theatre in which there is no distinction between professionals and amateurs, or between a good or bad performance, and, in which everyone is equal.”⁶⁹ 6 of the apprentices moved from other places and relocated for the purposes of the apprenticeship; some worked professional theatrical positions, others

⁶⁸ A “speed through” is a running the dialogue and soft blocking of the show were performed in an accelerate time frame.

⁶⁹ Schader, Claire. “Introduction” in *Ritual Theatre: The Power of Dramatic Ritual in Personal Development Groups and Clinical Practice* (Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2012).

only recent college graduates. Liz mentioned, “It was scary. I don’t know any one, and I am on my own here. I scared my family when I decided to leave home, but this was important to me so I did it.”⁷⁰

Apprenticeships are often necessary for artists to obtain gigs, especially when starting out. They need somewhere they can work and prove themselves – a place where they can receive guidance and mentorship, as well as a reference. This is similar to having a church home, a place where you trust to be taught lessons about being a minister while making connections to go out into the outside ministerial world. The draw back was that during certain times, Crew Assignment especially, having a job was difficult to maintain because of the hours worked, leaving the apprentices exhausted. Jobs for the apprentice, in general, must be flexible, because Horizon does not pay (“the experiences are payment”⁷¹). Most of the apprentices live below the poverty line during this time; others have full time jobs that they hope will not leave them too exhausted throughout the year. Those who are doing Crew Assignment, and to a lesser extent, Front of House, have particularly low energy in the One Act Technical Rehearsal and performance. All apprentices mention that performing is an irreplaceable experience and, in many ways, they become like, “lilies in the field” and cease to worry about how they will be provided for. Theatre, eventually, will pay off.

As mentioned, wilderness experiences and liminal space define the apprenticeship and the One Act play rehearsal processes. The typical apprentice is like Jesus, or a prophet, from the perspective that they often come to the program immediately after committing to their call and by graduation, experience “baptism.” Apprentices, like

⁷⁰ Liz. Interview. 4/27/2015.

⁷¹ Horizon Theatre website. www.horizontheatre.com.

disciples, are sent out after graduation to start in entry-level positions in the Horizon Office so that they can better acquire the learning and skills of a master actor. Ministers on Trial, particularly those being admitted, must start as a basic lay person learning about the church. They have to learn how their ministry will reflect the image of God. Likewise,

“...theatre has theological content: not just the content of the performance but as an art form, theatre uniquely reflects the *imago dei*, the image of God, the image of God imbued into humanity. We view theology as a way of knowing about God and as a way of knowing God as disciples and as God’s children, and it is our premise that theatre can be understood through the lens of theology.”⁷²

The apprenticeship and ministerial journey is meant to assist the practitioners with finding the image of God, while in the wilderness, so that when their ministry starts, they are aware of their foundations, foundations laid by God.

I specifically asked the apprentices about faith on their journey even though some were in the midst of struggling with their beliefs. As Brown writes, “When a play or production works, and I mean really works, one’s spirit is uplifted and all that is confused seems clearer. Call it a cliché, but the experience of great theatre is religious.”⁷³ Social faith is in the coming together, the moments when everything works and there is an inexplicable richness in a performance. Stephanie states, “I’m a Christian and I absolutely believe God is in this. There are times when I’ll be onstage and make choices about a character and I know they did not come from me.”⁷⁴ Justine and Jenn, both whom were questioning their faith, agreed with this testament.^{75 76} Bert writes: “Theatre may indeed approach the realm of ritual, where something more than representation of the character

⁷² Johnson, Todd and Dale Savidge. “Introduction: Todd and Dale Go to the Theatre” in *Performing the Sacred: Theatre and Theology in Dialogue* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 47.

⁷³ Brown, Lenora Inez. “Writing Religion: Is God a Character in Your Plays?” in *American Theatre* (17:9 November 2000) 29

⁷⁴ Stephanie. Interview. 4/19/2015

⁷⁵ Jenn Interview. 4/25/2015

⁷⁶ Justine Interview 4/26/2015

and story occurs in the room shared by the actor and their audience.”⁷⁷ Nicky mentions, “You can’t explain it, that moment, when I do believe something else is happening outside of this.”⁷⁸

Patterns in the Practice

There are several patterns across the apprentice assignments; the apprentices were steadfast in their dedication. Even after an incident the day of the program when tensions were paramount and the air was difficult, “the show went on”, which is similar to “praising in spite of”. The “worship” still occurred because it was the appointed time and hour. There was faith – everyone was there on time for worship. There were not assigned seats, but people did sit in certain spaces. For example, for the playwrights, Liz always sat on the couch. Ricardo typically sits in the chair closest to the cabinet, and Hannah alternates between comfortable areas.

For the Crew Assignment, crew members gathered together every evening an hour and a half before the curtain to prepare the ritual. This was reminiscent of the stewardesses who prepare the table for communion, who deliberately and with care place the elements and set the table for in preparation for one of the church’s “high” rituals. In this case, the props were the “elements” for the actors who were the celebrants for an audience (congregation) who came for the same reason – to have an experience, and encounter with the transcendent, regardless of their belief systems. At Front of House, there are greeters and hospitality providers, much like the greeters at the Church. The Ushers at theatre productions are gatekeepers, much like ushers in the church.

⁷⁷ Bert, Norman. "Theatre is Religion" in *The Journal of Religion and Theatre*. Vol 1 No 1 (Fall 2002)

⁷⁸ Nicky Interview. 4/27/2015.

What is most interesting is the practice of discerning spiritual gifts. For the One Acts, discernment is similar to the young adults or the youth of a church, through a process of discernment, presenting what they have learned. With guidance through the audition process, actors are placed in certain roles that are amenable to their development. There was even one moment where Marguerite prevented Hannah from re-auditioning an actor for a specific role that dealt with suicide. When asked why, Margaret simply stated, “life experiences” or that the actor may not be able to handle the role. Playwrights learned the limits of their administration and creation. Moreover, with the patterns, “the performer and the preacher share a responsibility to understand and address the issues of humanness - those aspects of being human that are shared by all in the preacher’s congregation.”⁷⁹ When this happens, the apprenticeship process moves from craft to “calling.”

I proved my formative theory on one level. There is some similarity in the ministry on trial and apprenticeship processes. Connecting both processes to the biblical wilderness experience and conversations around programmatic planning of “worship” in the One Acts, in particular, translates to the cause of winning souls. “In this case, theatre becomes an analogy by which to understand human history in relationship to its author.”⁸⁰ However, I failed to observe and prove how specific events in the trial process based on the intensity of doing ministry and living life, matched the production play process since my focus on the play production process was only a couple months as compared to a five-year ministerial process. There are visible and invisible incongruities.

⁷⁹ Sennett, Hebert. "Preaching as Performance" (A Preliminary Analytical Model) in *The Journal of Religion and Theatre*. Vol 2 No 1 (Fall 2002).

⁸⁰ Johnson, Todd and Dale Savidge. “Introduction: Todd and Dale Go to the Theatre” in *Performing the Sacred: Theatre and Theology in Dialogue* by Todd E. Johnson & Dale Savidge. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009) 47.

Discussion

My interest is in the idea of developing practitioners of the arts, who are trained through residencies, apprenticeship, not just through internships, within the family of a theatre company and larger community to explore their inner creative-selves. The Apprenticeship model, similar to CPE, allows artists to address their styles as an artist, attend to any spiritual and emotional needs, discover the distinctiveness of their artistry, and consider the scope of their career as a theatrical artist. Using Victor Turner's concept of liminality ties the two processes together. It is as Bert writes:

The myths executed in the theatre take the form of plays, and they are performed through spoken word and action - dialogue and business, which parallel religious liturgy and ritual. In place of clergy, the theatre uses actors who wear the vestments we call costumes and utilize props in place of tools of religious ritual. The whole performance takes place in the presence of, and constructed for the purpose of - the temple of the religious endeavor.⁸¹

If ministerial training purposes to move toward a public display of religious reenactment and theatrical rehearsal process moves to toward "religious endeavors", then it could be argued that they are parallel. However, I need more time and definitive study to argue for the commensurability between a ministerial course of study process and the apprenticeship model. For example, if the course of study is over several years and the apprenticeship is only one, to which year is the apprenticeship similar? Are there specific assignments to parallel these processes that may further solidify the findings?

Grounded Theory

⁸¹ Bert, Norman. "Theatre is Religion" in *The Journal of Religion and Theatre*. Vol 1 No 1 (Fall 2002).

My grounded theory was that there is religiosity in the apprenticeship company similar to the ministerial training testing process. My contention speaks to the development of spiritual experiences in both processes and for the discernment that occurs in play production process. Let us apply Victor Turner's efficacy-entertainment dyad to both processes. In applying Victor Turner's efficacy-entertainment dyad, or the spiritual to secular spectrum, I argue that the apprenticeship company teaches actors, playwrights and stage managers to operate more on the efficacy portion of the spectrum than the entertainment portion because they are learning to become practitioners of the arts not simply purveyors of the craft, which opens the way to transcendent experiences.

The play production process is "the time for building trusting relationships among a group of persons who need to become an ensemble in order to offer up the production as an oblation that does justice to the script."⁸² A sacrificial and sweet offering, it requires an ultimate trust in the group, which develops over the course of the year.

It is transformational time, personally and artistically so that the production will be able to transform the playwrights, characters, actions, and idea contents into a meaningful relational dance. It is a time to transform the page to the stage: a time to transform the words into a song, the rhythms and ideas into pictures, and the actions into dancing. The transformational aspects of the theatrical process are enhanced by the quality time spent consciously building an ensemble. In such a construct it is a transformation that is truly incarnational in ways that can become a microcosm of what Capon suggests is the eventual goal of the macrocosm: the loving community of God, which is both "with us" and "not yet" in its fullness.⁸³

Arthur Van Gennep discusses the process of *rites of passage* in three stages: separation, margin, and reaggregation. The apprenticeship company follows in that space but the longest portion of the time is spent in the margin, which Victor Turner defines as liminality, or liminal space.

⁸² Scranton, George in *The Journal of Religion and Theatre*. Vol 4 No 1 Summer 2005 PDF

⁸³ *ibid.*

A particular company's task is to form a physical, mental and spiritual space where theater artists "reside." Turner, in his second definition of liminality states, "The second, which emerges recognizable in the liminal period, is of society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *communitas*, community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders."⁸⁴ The artists were allowed to be themselves, messy and unpolished, similar to preachers who must also face their life's mirror, in liminal space. Schrader, quoting Steve Mitchell, discusses " 'a quest for self-cultivation'... the notion that participants are able to contribute more effectively to the society in which they live."⁸⁵ This discovery of a safe environment allowing a better transition into the professional roles of their ministries.

While there is opposition to the idea of theater as religion because of its inherent secular origins, there are particular exceptions to the performance of ritual. As stated before, this is the idea of entertainment where persons who dabble in the crafts for fun purposes and entertainment differ from persons who pursue the craft as a "calling." For those persons who pursue theater and the arts as a way of life, it is a calling, as discussed by Bert and Savidge. Just as churches have members who might occasionally attend, perhaps on Christmas, Mother's Day and Easter, the church experience is different for those persons who are actively involved in ministries and have gone through confirmation or even ordination to be a practitioner of the ministry.

Conclusion

⁸⁴ Turner, Victor. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago, IL: Aldine Publishing, 1969).

⁸⁵ Schader, Claire. "Introduction" in *Ritual Theatre: The Power of Dramatic Ritual in Personal Development Groups and Clinical Practice*. (Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2012).

In reflecting on this ethnography, I contend that “social faith” connects the experiences of ministers on trial and playwrights, particularly in the training process. As practitioners feel called to develop and walk through both processes, “something” beyond the confines of ministry and the theatre arts occurs – an experience of the transcendent that draws both actors and ministers more deeply into a process that is akin to a “calling.”

This thesis, then, purposes to consider that if the process offers discernment, then perhaps the discussion of religion and art must undergo its own “call” process and establish its narrative. With specific focus on Paul Tillich’s “artistic realm”, where the act of creation occurs, and can be guided, the call must be present before a trial or an apprenticeship can begin. Moreover, the vulnerability of the artist to accept the “call” (to be aware of their internal ritual location) is an imperative before discerning or giving voice to their call narrative. Even after this, the details of the ritual cannot be determined until all that is learned is used in process.

CHAPTER 4

DOWNSTAGE: MEDITATIVE PRACTICES AS RITUAL ACTIVITY

When an artist locates their work and develops their call narrative, it must be along the order of ritual action and activity. Their actions, however, are specific to their upbringing and traditions in their personal journey as artists. The “artist realm,” mentioned by Paul Tillich, invites H. Richard Niebuhr’s social faith to manifest itself becoming a sacred ground to maintain, sustain and further develop. The “artistic realm” rests on the downstage, on the margins between the center stage and the house, the closet location to the audience without being a watching member. This is where the theatrical experience calls for ritual activity, which in this ethnography examines the prayer and meditative practices of the actors as elements of a “call to worship.”

Gregor Goethal considered that ritual activity is: 1) “rooted in a propensity for order, rhythmic patterning, and play, a propensity not exclusively human but observable in other creatures as well” and 2) “ritual presupposes a mystical or supernatural dimension.”⁸⁶ For actors to dissect their scripts and establish their ritual for the show, understand their ritual action, and how it could function in the performance space is essential. Goethal further writes,

“Ritual activity, play and patterning motifs acts as both stabilizing forces and means of introducing novelty and flexibility. On the one hand, ritual organizes, confirms, and conserves; it operates as a kind of adhesive, binding people to each other and to modes of living that have stood the test of time. On the other hand, the play of ritual opens up new ways of being and thinking. Ritual activity can incorporate revolutionary elements.”⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Goethals, Gregor. “Ritual: Ceremony and Super-Sunday” in *Readings in Ritual Studies*, ed. Ronald Grimes (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1996), 256.

⁸⁷ *ibid.* 259

In this chapter, I explore the play production process and examines the impact of Gregor Goethals' ritual activity, Victor Turner's social drama and Elaine Ramshaw's psychosocial view of ritualization of prayer and meditative practices on the incarnational ritual of assuming (getting into) a character, that could lead to transcendental experiences, specifically in African American theatrical productions.

Actors and Preachers: The Link between Theatre and Theology

For this survey, elements of O. Wesley Allen's preaching series were fused as a way of articulating a ritual. In the series, it shows preachers, in preparing to assume a role are aware of their theology ("thinking theologically"), choose, or are given a periscope ("knowing the context"), exegete a passage ("interpreting the bible"), consider the relevance to the audience ("determining the form"), prepare for delivery ("delivering the sermon") and evaluate the response of the Holy Spirit and the Congregation. Likewise, actors aware of their acting experience, are cast in a role, exegete the play, research the characters/scenes/background, ask how to make it relevant to the audience, prepare to get into the character, and evaluate the performance based on the audience. Actors, like preachers, establish and perform rites with reverence, understanding that "rituals and ceremonies are cultural mirrors, opportunities for presenting collective knowledge."⁸⁸ The performance is the actors' and the theatre companies' time to present a collective knowledge that may elicit response or emotion.

Case Study III: Incarnational Sanctuary: A Consideration of the Establishment and Execution of Ritual Around Prayer Practices in Theatrical Spaces

Thinking Theologically: Definition of Ritual

⁸⁸ Meyerhoff, Barbara. *Number Our Days* (New York, Simon & Schuster, 1980).

This chapter surveys an ethnographic study from the etic perspective using a mixed methods ethnographic approach, which included: interviews; attending rehearsals of *Brothers of Affliction*; and attending performances (with specific attention the “30 minutes to places” and talkback times) of this show. I explored the religious affiliations of each person involved, their faith journey, their common practice if any, the practice of prayer, and how this influences their production choices, auditions, and roles. For the purposes of my study, I considered paralleling the moments of transcendence (to use Turner’s idea) that occurs in the play process, either in prayer practices for the performance, in the actors’ preparation or in rehearsal—with the preparation or “call to worship” in the church experience. An interpretive/phenomenological/constructivist paradigm framed my study, where I contended (i.e. my formative theory) that the usage of prayer or points of reverence (“the quiet moments”) in African American productions act as a catalyst to experiencing the transcendental space, where performance—at the very least for the actors, at most for all involved—can be seen as a form of worship.

Over the course of the production process, I interviewed a total of five people: the three actors, the artistic director and managing director. I conducted seven interviews including individual ones with the aforementioned, and two focus group interviews with only the actors (one informal during a rehearsal and one follow-up one week following closing night). I asked questions about their processes and rituals for assuming a character when first approaching a play (from “line” and “blocking” memorization) as well as the process utilized in this production. It was during those times that I decided to focus my work on the actors. Although the Artistic Director and the Managing Director offered some assistance and insights into understanding some forms of ritual, I found it

more useful particularly in this iteration, to focus only on the actors and their process because I felt that their work was closer related to the priestly experience of sermon delivery.

Knowing the Context: Description of Ritual Context

Brothers of Affliction was the first show produced by the company under 3 Hill Productions, originally starring P. Crayton (who also directed), K. Henny and one other actor. It was mounted in Atlanta at 7 Stage Theater, at the Orlando Fringe Festival and accepted at the DC Fringe Festival. *Brothers of Affliction* takes place at Chris Owen's home over the course of one evening following a bar fight involving his brothers Tyriq and Shane. Common sense holds them simultaneously hostage and in sanctuary in the living room space, where the secrets of their family's past serve as both the shackles and the key for liberation.

This iteration of the production included R. J. Connor as the director and the cast of A. Goolsby (as Tyriq Owens), C. Houston (as Shane Owens), and K. Thompson (Chris Owens). R. J. Connor is a director who also owns a theatre company in Atlanta, GA. A. Goolsby, is a Canadian born, Decatur raised Atlantan who acts, writes and produces film and voiceovers for actors in the Atlanta area. He is the oldest of three children, and a divorced father of one daughter. One who studies his craft extensively, during the run of the show, he took acting classes at a local improvisation company and is an Uber driver. C. Houston is an Alabama native who relocated to Atlanta after college (over 18 years ago). The middle child of three boys, he is married and the father of five girls. A former

minister, his undergraduate studies were in theatre and he currently works in corporate America, specifically consulting with hospitals and mental health patients⁸⁹. K. Thompson is an Atlanta local actor who recently returned to the craft and also an Uber driver. Previously a mechanic and liquor store owner, he is the oldest of three, with one brother and sister.

The rehearsals took place at New Manchester High School, the work place of the director.⁹⁰ The rehearsals began with a table read⁹¹ as a reminder of where the previous rehearsal left off. The rehearsals made room for breaks within 5-hour increments. The director administered their blocking, intermingled with acting techniques and theatrical knowledge indicative of his profession as a teacher. The actors, outside of rehearsal, met to run lines and hang out to build their brotherly camaraderie and because the timeline of the rehearsals required extra meetings. Technical week took place one week prior to the show, however, due to scheduling conflicts, the set was built and struck (taking down) every night. No actual technical rehearsal took place before the first performance or during the duration of the run of the show⁹².

The production took place at the West End Arts Center for three weekends, as a co-production. Rising Sage does not own a building and produces in partnership with the center to assist in keeping costs low. From October 11- November 22, 2015, approximately 6 weeks, data was collected from formal (with director, cast, and stage

⁸⁹ Like Henny, Houston is considered bi-vocational for the purposes of this production.

⁹⁰ Typical of mobile theatre companies, the rehearsals were not in the location of the production.

⁹¹ A “table read” is a close reading of the script by the cast. It gives time for the actors to delve into the minds of the characters.

⁹² This became a point of frustration for the actors and was a layer in the foundation of the social drama. The actors mentioned this again from in their exit interview on November 30.

manager) and informal (actors) rehearsals, individual interviews, performances and talkbacks.

Interpreting the “Bible”: The Rituals

For this process, I considered the rituals related to assuming character, specifically during the “30 minutes to places” time frame to establish how they become part of a theatrical “call to worship.” During this time period, actors will get into costume, put on necessary make up, and set an atmosphere according to what they and their characters need as encouragement. This includes listening to soundtracks, walking through lines, specific times after any line through⁹³ or fight calls where the actors are on the stage rehearsing. These rituals are extradiegetical - actions that do not exist within the script itself, but are choices actors make in order to interpret their approach to the script. However, once established, ritual reiteration via the Stage Manager assists in ensuring the consistency of the production value, and the messages rendered to and received by the audience, or in the case of ministry, the congregation. My lens for observing was prayer or meditative practices that occurred either individually or as a full cast and as exemplary of a “call to worship.”

“Calling” by the stage manager is comparable to liturgical behavior and is “symbolic action in which a deep reciprocity, sometimes in the form of meditative rites or contemplative exercises, is cultivated.”⁹⁴ C. Houston was a Baptist minister for several years, serving until about 2012, when he decided to stop praying.⁹⁵ He also expressly mentioned in his interview that he would not participate in a corporate prayer if

⁹³ A “line through” is the actors saying the lines of any portion of the script (most often selected scenes, sometimes the entire play) for better memory.

⁹⁴ “Ronald L. Grimes” in *Foundations in Ritual Studies: A Reader for Students of Christian Worship* ed. Paul Bradshaw and John Melloh. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 141.

⁹⁵ Houston, Carlus. *Interview*. October 31, 2015. Audio

it did happen backstage of the sets. I found that while observing C. Houston, his typical “meditative practices” would be to come in about an hour and a half ahead of show time to walk the stage, to take a nap on the couch that was used for the set, then to the back and sit in a corner on stage left where he made his own space.

C. Houston’s space was outside of the main dressing/green room area, in the wings of stage left. Here, he would sit down and read over his notes, re-walk through his lines as needed. He would get dressed, do his push-ups and then take “quiet time” and not do anything. This “quiet time,” for the purposes of this ethnography, is considered equivalent to the other actor’s prayer time. C. Houston mentioned, in the exit interview,⁹⁶ there was a time when the stage manager would interrupt his space but the stage manager became more deliberate about not bothering C. Houston after a while. In fact, C. Houston says, that the stage manager would come and turn his back to C. Houston out of respect so that he could maintain the privacy of the “quiet moment”.

K. Thompson would start off by playing his soundtrack, often with his headphones on sometimes without, coming from his computer and making a cup of “Throat Coat” tea. The list consisted of Nirvana, Maxwell, Billie Holiday and Nina Simone. K. Thompson would also warm-up with stretches, some push-ups and acting vocal warm-ups as well. On Saturdays, his between show rituals were slightly different, and included watching college football such as the University of Oklahoma Sooners. Sometimes, after dressing, yet before K. Thompson would go on stage, he would brush his teeth and take a few minutes out in pray. In the corner, on one of the backstage couches, K. Thompson would hold his arms to his side, palms up and eyes closed, to observe prayer.

⁹⁶ Goolsby, Anthony, Carlus Houston and Kerwin Thompson. *Exit Interview*. November 30, 2015. Audio.

A. Goolsby's "call to worship" ritual was fluid over the course of the production and changed quite a bit. While he still observed particular rites, the space and the timing of his ritual changed every week. The basic ritual he observed was coming in, walking through his space and then dressing in his costume. He also watched a Ray Lewis inspirational video, sometimes laying on the floor, face up, arms outstretched at 30 degree angles, his legs slightly parted. Lastly, in preparation for the production, a rite he developed was to put on the blood and lipstick over his cheekbone for the bruised eye that he would eventually suffer during the play.

During the first weekend, he did his ritual in the dressing room or green room he shared with K. Thompson, however, during the second weekend, A. Goolsby switched to the kitchen. In the exit interview, he mentioned he changed because the kitchen had more light and he felt the need to develop his own space. Moreover, the house music was an appropriate soundtrack for his character Tyriq, which contrasted K. Thompson's character. During weekend two, A. Goolsby started to walk the stage more as part of his starting ritual that continued throughout the play's run.

Collectively, the cast was able to fully establish a communal ritual by the end of the show's run. Even though they did not pray together, there were things they still started doing together around the second and the third weeks that they did not do the first week. Initially, the *Brothers* ran lines the first week of the show; yet they did not do other things that would establish them as a company and a cohort. During the second and third week, they started to play music before the house music consisting of various genres from Miles Davis to Latin music. The one thing that was consistent between the three actors, even if they did not all observe or participate in communal prayer, was the space

within the “30 minutes to places” where everyone got quiet or sat down in their place—a process similar to “a call to worship” in preparation for the start of church. During this time, I sat in the room with each of them, sometimes moving around to the other rooms to observe each one. However, I noticed that if I walked into the room with either of them, they would break out of their silence and actually interact with me (an experience the Stage Manager did not have). This caused me to limit my movement, so as not to alter their ritual action.

A consistent ritual I observed at the top of the show before “30 minutes to Places” was that K. Thompson, C. Houston and A. Goolsby ran lines and scenes they felt needed some refreshing. They checked their props, especially the rolled blunts (e-cigarettes) or checked the alcohol bottles (iced tea) and the cocaine (powdered sugar). There was also a collective moment of silence that happened between the 15 minutes and the top of the show that enabled them to experience transcendence and similar to the moment before a preacher starts into worship or enters the preaching moment.

Determining the Form: Thick Description

The presence of prayer and the quiet moment⁹⁷ are a part of the reiteration of ritual. The actors assume a type of incarnational evangelism, where they simultaneously take on the role of the minister and messenger to be delivered by the character they play. In this process, there is a sense of reverence that is almost theological. The quiet time is a space that is respected by all, particularly when the stage manager counts down “30

⁹⁷ Focus Group Interview 11/30/2015

minutes to places.” No one is allowed backstage except authorized personnel so that the actors are able to prepare themselves for their “theatrical” offering.

While each production varies as it relates to cast, crew, theatre company (either community, equity, non-equity, MAT eligible, Suzi eligible or LORT), a new ritual is established with each new play production because elements of each culture are different; rites that are created by production crews are also temporary because they can never be repeated in the same way except during that run of the show.

For *Brothers of Affliction*, this was especially true because the three actors were the second cast of the show and were part of the second time the show was being performed.⁹⁸ In an ideal setting, rituals of preparation like the “call to worship” are established during the rehearsal process, and altered as new elements are introduced into the play production process, including costume, set, make up, props and technical directions. Having the set available, even if not in the performance home, and knowing which spaces are available for actors to prepare themselves during the preshow is an important element of the play production process. However, in the case of *Brothers of Affliction*, erratic rituals developed causing frustration for the actors because of the lack of consistency with securing a pre-production set.

Victor Turner’s socio-cultural drama shaped and impacted the actors’ abilities to fully establish and control the outcome of their rituals. As a result of the frustration, a weekly reestablishment of ritual occurred on the first day of the show each weekend, which is atypical for a production. The first and final Thursday performances were canceled; one was due to a scheduling conflict that can be blamed on owners of the

⁹⁸ Different iterations of the play have varying rituals and outliers of influence.

performance space, the second was caused by a conflict with one of the actors. The director also only watched the play in its entirety on Opening Night (and partially closing night), which is not customary for professional directors.

Ritualization, according to Elaine Ramshaw “is a much wider phenomenon, including all the aspects of our biosocial behavior that are patterned, repetitive, conventionalized”.⁹⁹ It helps to handle ambivalence by: 1) “reinforcement of a preferred emotion” and 2) “contain[ing the] expression of the unwanted conflicted emotion.”¹⁰⁰ The talkback facilitated the actors’ ability to come out of character and to reengage with themselves, as well as to alleviate the frustration of the overall production.

The Rising Sage talkbacks at the end of each performance operated as a form of pastoral care, allowing the audience to engage in conversation with the actors as well as with perhaps a playwright in regard to what was witnessed. For the *Brothers of Affliction* production, the talkback was often the place where the audience members were in tears allowing them to process emotional and dramatic moments. The most common questions from the audience concerned what were the actors actually doing on stage, what they were drinking, what they were smoking, and what they were snorting (what material was used for the drugs on stage). Other times questions concerning the process of getting into character were asked by audience members. The idea of “sanctuary” was addressed during the talkbacks, identifying black women as sanctuaries and their role in relationship to an all male production.

In the exit interview, K. Thompson shared he started decompressing during the final scene because at that point his character has died. For A. Goolsby and C. Houston,

⁹⁹ Ramshaw, Elaine. *Ritual and Pastoral Care*. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Publishing, 1987).

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

decompression began after they walked off stage and after they wiped their faces down. When the Managing Director and Artistic Director came out to present everyone, the cast and crew to the audience, the cast would have had about 3 to 5 minutes backstage to wipe off their faces in order to cool down but not enough time always to change clothes. A. Goolsby would often change his shirt but the others did not, typically change their clothes for the talkback.

Delivering the Sermon: Discussion/Conclusion

In this ritual process, temporal and spatial considerations impacted the ability to establish rituals that can lend itself to the transcendent experiences. By examining the rehearsal period as a means of crafting ritual and “30 minutes to places” as the time to execute the ritual, the actors create and perform in their own church and “call to worship.” Each night the play is performed, the actors become aware of the impact of their devotion to their ministry on the audiences their audiences. Their ritual actions determine their ability to perform, which is why a type of “call to worship” is necessary in the play production space. The entire company was self-aware of the importance of the dramatic moment and what can and cannot seep onto the stage; sociocultural drama is dealt with outside of the confines of the “sanctuary”. Even in the talkback, once when a member confessed to being moved to rededicate herself to writing, A. Goolsby replied, “bring it to the altar,”¹⁰¹ reminiscent of Ramshaw’s articulation of the healing nature of aspects of theatre.

Ritual activity invites a conversation about behavior in Tillich’s artist’s realm alongside the formation of H. Richard Niebuhr’s social faith, otherwise hard to reach

¹⁰¹ Talkback on 11/20/2015

concepts. When working together, they establish theatre as sacred space, with an artist's aesthetic based on "artistic honesty." Ramshaw's ritualization, especially with respect to the talkback, became cathartic for the audience members as a way of book ending the play production experience. This process both allowed the actors to get out of character while offering a collective moment of transcendence, by creating a space for the wisdom of the actors and audience to interact and meld. Outside of the pre-show, the "call to worship" space, which can be seen as "artist realm," also facilitates transcendent moments in the theatrical space, those collective and worshipful experiences that end with the blessing of the audience, more formally known as a benediction.

CONCLUSION

HOUSE: THEATRE AS SACRED SPACE

Instance 3: During the writing of this thesis, I was invited to a new Facebook event sponsored by Catalyst Arts Atlanta, called “Church”. The event, a summer special which takes place at 11:00am on first Sunday mornings is a special networking opportunity for artists, companies and individuals. The description reads, “inspired by the fellowship and family aspects of Sunday services, Church rejuvenates the mind, body and soul of performers through peer lead training sessions, community conversations, and artistic practice.”

This thesis sought to explore the ways in which theatre can be interpreted and understood through theology. H. Richard Niebuhr’s words once again resonate, as I consider theatre as a sacred space is a location for expressions of “faith” to occur, physically and spiritually, particularly by locating each as backstage, upstage, center stage, downstage and in the house. Each chapter commenced with a reflection on Paul Tillich’s religion-culture dyad and H. Richard Niebuhr’s discussion of social faith, grounding the theological conversation. Next the chapters built upon the Durkheimian definition of religion and ritual studies to provide a platform for the discussion of theatrical experience and articulated a variety of Victor Turner’s ritualistic observations. Ethnography is a useful and insightful tool to understand the ways in which theatre personnel described themselves and their relationship to the art. While the time limits did not allow for extended research on the artists involved, the studies provided me with some considerations of theatrical processes. Interviews, in particular, and with respect to pastoral care, were often cathartic and facilitated artistic introspection. Overall, the thesis

considered a potential method in praxis of studying religion and art in contemporary spaces.

Summary

Chapter One offered a foundation of sociological, anthropological, theological, and performance studies definitions of “religion” and “church”. Specifically defining each term, the chapter considers the theories of Émile Durkheim, H. Richard Niebuhr, Norman Bert and Richard Schechner to develop a method of relating theatre to ritual action.

Chapter 2 focused on ritual location and the impact of the temporal and physical space on an actor’s process. Most specifically was the consideration of “30 Minutes to Places” as a sacred space for *rites of passage*. Arthur Van Gennep’s, Victor Turner’s and Walter Brueggemann’s theories were used to articulate this possibility.

Chapter 3 considered the place of “social faith,” in the theatrical apprenticeship company. Specifically, I surveyed Victor Turner’s ritual theory of liminal space, Van Gennep’s *rites of passage*, and Turner’s efficacy-entertainment dyad to talk about the role of “social faith” in establishing theatrical “call” narratives. Moreover, the chapter contends the apprenticeship is proximately parallel to the pastoral trial process and a way of conceptualizing the “call” of theatre.

Chapter 4 engages the development of ritual activity as elements of a “call to worship” in the pre-production phase of a theatrical performance, specifically using prayer and quiet time as opportunities for transcendence in the play production process. Again, considering “30 minutes to places”, this ethnography surveyed the sequence of

“training, workshop, warmup, production” as part of the pre-show phase, (and to a lesser extent) the cool down and aftermath phases of a play production process to display the importance of transcendent moments. Elaine Ramshaw’s ritualization and Victor Turner’s social drama were the theories used for discussion of the ethnographic results.

Self-Reflexivity

In my reflections, I pondered my ability to enter into conversation with theatre artists about the intersection of theatre and theology since there are many questions I had in surveying each of the ethnographies, many of them integrated into the studies themselves. At the beginning of the “30 minutes to places” research, I wondered, do all the actors participate in this sacred ritual of “30 minutes to places”? Also interesting are relational rituals such as to how M. Hannah, an African American actress, and M. Sager, a Latino actress, would never leave without each other as accountability partners, similar to the biblical author’s later request of the disciples that they not go out to do ministry by themselves, but rather with one another. This was particularly important because in the Atlanta area the amount of women, especially those of color in equity roles, on stage remains a limited amount.

Exploring the performance sequence, I wondered, What about the experiences of the audience members? How did those experiences shape and impact audience members’ relationship to the theatrical space and translate into their everyday lives? Had I more time, I would have also explored the crew and audience participation, and the ways in which this connection may or may not enhance the theatrical experience as similar to that

of the relationship between church staff (choir, acolytes, stewardesses) and the congregation.

With respect to the sacred, I thought my position as a researcher would conflict with my vocation as a playwright and therefore would affect the theatrical preparation and process more. In being self-reflexive, I witnessed the days that being a researcher, minister, student, and playwright converged. My status as a playwright would often overwhelm my status as a researcher especially regarding the amount of the correspondences I received on any given day. Between March 8-April 27, 2015, I received 65 emails from the Director, other playwrights, the Coordinator, actors, and the Playwriting Mentor, most of which required responses. This was in addition to completing classes at Candler School of Theology and the Front of House assignments (and typewritten notes), as a playwright.

More than any other items, this has taught me more about finding God in those small quiet spaces that may not seem to be the whisper. My own liminality often caused me to feel as if I was reading onto the situation things that I felt should be organic. Because I was tired and exhausted many days, I wondered: Did I overlook some aspects of the theatrical process that would have been beneficial to my studies of the intersection of the theatre arts and theology? I also do wonder, what is the place of theatre in seminaries and in the development of preachers, as well? And how can both be navigated and the two formative and professional processes be more intertwined yet stand alone on their own merits?

For the Rising Sage Production and the survey of the ritual action, I learned the difficult task of studying people in my immediate circle and being a neutralizing force. I

often felt my boundaries being crossed and became, in some senses, a mediator and pastor between cast and crew. By the middle of the run, I was recognized nightly as a special assistant on the show by the managing director. Yet at the close of the production, I still am not entirely sure that the actors and the crew completely understood the purpose of my project and how I fit into their theatrical world. I was given a small stipend, flowers and wine from the company for my help and a bottle of tequila from the cast.

Also, I was in a position to lend my artistic experience, especially as it related to the memorization and recall of the blocking; but I often felt as if I was the person prompting ritual reiteration. Some days, I would prompt a fight call, notice blocking was out of place, recognize when particular mistakes were made on stage and observe where props may have been out of place and their impact on the production process. I also was allowed to give notes at the end of the shows and during intermission. These moments were noted in my self-reflexivity journal, not the field notes as a defined separation of the work. Since my work in this ethnography was etic (the outsider's perspective) not the emic (the insider's perspective), with my performing certain tasks I could have compromised the dynamics of the study and the integrity of the research.

The largest part of the conflicts that emerged regarding my position as a researcher, artist, and student was the challenge of maintaining my objectivity and not searching for a specific religiosity or hyper-Christology backstage. Once I realized that C. Houston was no longer practicing any form of religion, I often found myself watching and trying to catch moments where there was an indication of some ritual observance. C. Houston, aware of my staring (all the actors were at one point or another) would wave at me, breaking his ritual. There was also one time where I asked him about his time as a

minister and about a scripture I was struggling with. He simply mentioned that he remembered “nothing” about the book I had questions about. Admittedly, this was baffling to me because I never encountered someone who was previously a preacher who no longer prayed even, especially because his inner schism seemed more due to the social constraints in religious practice and less about his actual encounters and belief in God.

The reflection I wrote most on, perhaps, was my recognition of my sex and being in an all-male space. I never had to defend my stance on religion. As a matter of fact, especially during the last weekend when I was attending more religious events, the actors would often ask questions about the events and my role in them. They found intriguing a preacher who lived life normally because I did not have a problem with them smoking or drinking and I would even sometimes share a drink with them. I also did not force my views on any of them, aware of how it could alter the conversation. I was once asked directly by K. Thompson, “What do you sound like when you preach?” I gave my assessment and invited him to hear me preach in person when an occasion arises.

Final Reflection

Tillich introduces a proposal for integrating the full scope of culture into religious dialogue and vice versa. What has manifested itself, even today, is an analytical and, most often, theoretical conversation, typically compartmentalizing performance studies. Performance studies have been dissected philosophically, anthropologically, sociologically, and theologically, many times without considering overlap between theology and the theatre arts. Even with performance studies view of the sacred through ritual and performance, opposing the idea of a return to the sacred leaves the conversation

undone. My hope is that this thesis brings forward a hermeneutic that examines the sacred while not imposing a specific belief on any ritual activity or function.

For future considerations, I would like to consider the exploration of ethnography without having a prior rapport or connection with the actors, moreso from an etic than emic perspective, from the beginning of the performance sequence (training) to the end of the run of the show (afterward). Moreover, I would like to diversify the theoretical conversation with studies from women and people of color assessing these spaces from their cultural perspectives. I believe this contribution could perhaps yield more knowledge about the intersectionality of theology and the theatre arts by viewing the intersection via religious lenses, opening a conversation Tillich desired to have about religion and culture when he presented his own theology and culture proposal almost 100 years ago.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

APPENDIX B

APPENDIX C

APPENDIX A

Amina S. McIntyre

February 26, 2015

Directed Study – 30 Minutes to Places

Questions for the Cast of Waffle Palace

Name _____

Gender _____

Length of Time Acting _____

Formal Training _____

Informal Training _____

1. What steps do you take in creating and developing your character?
2. Do you have specific rituals, customs or habits or processes that prepare you to get into your character for a specific performance (especially 30 minutes to places)?
3. What is your role in Waffle Palace? How long have you performed in this role (were you in all three installments)?
4. Did you research for your role in the Waffle House?
5. Has your role performance evolved over the run of the show?

Amina S. McIntyre

February 26, 2015

Directed Study – 30 Minutes to Places

Questions for the Cast of Waffle Palace

Name Allan Edwards _____
 Gender _____
 M _____
 Length of Time Acting 40 years more or less _____
 Training (formal) BA English Literature and Western Philosophy;
 MA English and American Literature; MFA Acting
 Training (other) _____

1. What steps do you take in creating and developing your character?

This is a pretty broad question. I have a core process that can be tagged as American Method Acting, with considerable eclecticism. I have studied LeCoq neutral mask technique formally, and I have learned a kind of “physical-psycho imaging” technique which is basically using the body as a way to inform the imagination. An example might be to physically imitate an animal that seems to have some affinity for a character to see what images and emotions the physical imitation evokes. Ebenezer Scrooge, for example, might be explored as a buzzard. Richard III as a spider. That kind of thing. Different roles and styles seem to require different methods.

2. Do you have specific rituals, customs or habits or processes that prepare you to get into your character for a specific performance (especially 30 minutes to places)?

I do like to do the same routine before each performance of the same play, but each play creates a different routine. This routine is made up of a sequence of tasks that reassure me that I have all my costumes and props in order, that I have used my voice in the specific space of the theater so as to “tune” the sound to the space, and that I have rehearsed any complex or dangerous choreography (as in stage combat). Once the routine is established (usually during tech rehearsals), I try to follow the same sequence for every performance throughout the run of the play. This is a purely pragmatic strategy, but it tends to have the psychological benefit of focusing my attention on the performance and away from any day-to-day stresses that might interfere with concentration and energy.

I can tell when I have achieved the necessary focus and energy when my voice is clear of tension and my body is relaxed.

*The voice is the best reflection of a focused and relaxed Allan. If my voice is cloudy or tense, I know I need to spend a little more time on the routine. As an example, I will give a detailed description of my routine before Waffle Palace, below.**

3. What is your role in Waffle Palace? How long have you performed in this role (were you in all three installments)?

I do the “Hugo-Bubba-Hank-Roadie-Waffle Blues Instrumentalist” line. I have been with the show from the last workshops before it was finally produced. So I have been in all three installments and in some of the late development work. Always doing the roles that I started with, and some others that were eventually cut. Vivien at first was only one of several drag queens . . .

4. Did you research for your role in the Waffle House? If yes, how?

No, not really. I had to check some dialect sources (Hugo speaks with a Minnesota accent, Bubba with an Appalachian accent, Hank with a suburban southern accent). I had to come up with some simple guitar music for the Waffle Blues. The rest I just guessed at. I believe that research is an essential part of preparation, but Waffle Palace is a show that is about a lot of stuff I already knew about, so I didn’t have to work as hard on the research as I might have. I even have lived in Minnesota for five years, so Hugo wasn’t way outside my experience.

5. Has your role performance evolved over the run of the show?

Sure. The show has evolved significantly over my time with it. There is also a significant element of improvisation even in the rehearsed performances, and that improvisation has developed the occasional new piece of business, new line of dialogue, and even new attacks on already scripted business and dialogue. My rule is that I introduce nothing new that doesn’t occur spontaneously in performance. In other words, no new elements are rehearsed; they must happen naturally within the parameters of the show as rehearsed. Not all plays are appropriate for this kind of improvisation. Waffle Palace, though, is. It is also a new show, and actors who originate roles are always looking for ways to make the moments work. A lot of what happens in Waffle Palace is simply a way to make a moment work. Hugo’s “Buenos noches al Palacio de los Wafflos” was just an attempt to come up with a line to justify his entrance. If you look closely, the only reason he is in that scene is to help with the “Pancake Nightmare.” The question was how to get him on stage. Of course he would be there to see Esperanza, so it made sense that his first line would tell that story. It was an ad lib line at first. As was “Did I black out for a second there?” And that’s about all he says in the scene.

*Allan Edwards’s preparation routine for *Waffle Palace*:

I always arrived at least one hour before curtain. Assuming the curtain was a 8:00, the routine went like this:

7:00 Arrive, walk across the stage to stage right exit, pass prop shelves stage right and retrieve one \$10 and one \$20 bill. Go to dressing room, drop off belongings at far end of dressing room table, and place the prop money in Hugo’s black wallet, making sure that the bills are face up when the wallet is unfolded, the \$10 bill on top. This was necessary because when Hugo uses the bills to pay for his meal on stage, he is mesmerized by Esperanza and goes through the motions of paying without ever looking at the money.

It's funnier is the tip is \$20 for a \$10 meal than the other way around. Leave the wallet on the dressing room table.

7:05 or so: Take Bubba's flannel shirt and run the sleeves into his camo jacket (so that the two can be put on at the same time. Take the camo jacket-flannel shirt combination and Bubba's camo hat, Bubba's camo pants, and the guitar (from under the dressing room table) in its case to the stage left quick change area, walking back stage (now I have walked the entire backstage circuit so if there is anything odd I would have noticed. Place the guitar in its case on the bench off stage left. Hang the hat, pants and shirt/jacket combo on hooks just off stage left. Now the first quick change is set up.

7:10 or so: Take the guitar out of its case. Take the guitar microphone (attached to the guitar strap and packed in the case) out and with the guitar walk onstage, leaving the guitar case open on the bench stage left. Place the microphone and strap on the stage right table (the one that is part of the set) and sit down to tune the guitar. While tuning, I would play the same couple of songs (they involved the right amount of fingering to warm up my fingers, and the right key to sing to to warm up my voice).

7:15 This is the scheduled time for a mic check. I would try to be tuned and read for the mic check by 7:15 every night. If I was early, I would sing until Julianna got ready for the mic check. For mic check, I would put on the guitar strap with the mic, attach the guitar to the strap, turn on the mic and check the battery indicator to make sure the battery was still fresh. I would report the status of the battery to Julianna (it had only run low once during the run, and that time we took a moment to replace it). Then I would stand center stage and play the chords for the "Waffle Palace Blues" one time through while Julianna and I listened for the sound in the theater. Having decided the sound was good, I would turn off the mic, take the guitar off the strap, and sit down and play some more songs until I was sure the guitar was tuned and my voice was warm. Then I would place the guitar under the counter on stage on top of a cushioning blanket, making sure it would not tip over. Then I would walk around to the cash register end of the counter and check to make sure the musical spoons were in their place. I would play the spoons a little, replace them, then ring the service bell once to make sure it was in the right place and was adjusted to ring clearly. By this time it would be close to half hour when house management expected to open the house and have all actors back stage. I would take the mic and the guitar strap with me back to the dressing room. Only once did I forget this, and Julianna, fortunately saw the mic on the counter and brought it to me. This was in the last week of the run, and was a little wake up call to double check my concentration.

7:30: Half hour, and I am in the dressing room, putting on my first costume (the Roadie) and laying out the first act costumes in order on my dressing room chair. The order from bottom to top: Hugo's vest, Hugo's shirt, Hugo's pants, Blues Guitarist's shirt, Bubba's deer T-shirt (worn under the Blues Guitarist's shirt to facilitate the quick change. While placing Hugo's shirt, I would check to make sure that his poem (a blank piece of notebook paper, folded up) was in his left shirt pocket (over his heart). This set up meant that between scenes, I would come into the dressing room and my next costume would be the one on top of my chair. I did this in the early runs because I was not always sure what my next scene was, and there was no time to check the script or to get it wrong. By the third run of the show, this was more or less just a way to make my changes convenient. With my first costume on and my first act costumes set up (including Bubba's quick change hanging stage left), I was ready to organize my hand props.

Hugo's wallet would have its money, and I would place Hugo's glasses beside the wallet on the dressing room table. I would put in the Roadie's earring. I would put the Waffle Blues guitarist's strap and mic on the dressing room table next to the wallet and the glasses. I would make sure the Waffle Blues guitarist's (I think we named this guy Cletus) bandanna was in his hat sitting on the dressing room table. I would make sure Hugo's back brace and hat were on the table next to Cletus's hat and bandanna. I would double check Bubba's second act hat and devil sunglasses and place them on the table out of the way since they would not be needed until the second act. Having done all this, I was reassured that I had everything, and that the things I needed would be in plain sight when I needed them, which would also, in the heat of performance, remind me what scene was coming up.

The last thing I would do is put on the Roadie's wig and sunglasses.

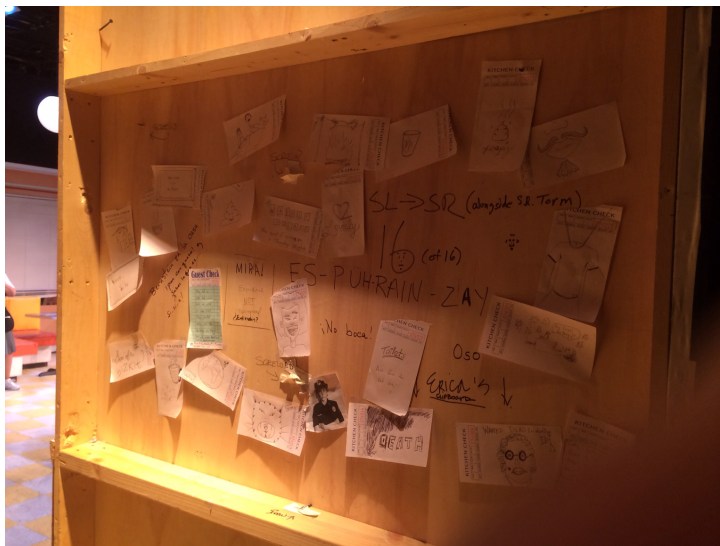
7:45 I almost always had time by this point to chat with Eric and Dane, and this interaction was very important. It was a way to check on energy levels, get some teasing in, and pre-heat the kind of on stage back-and-forth the play required. Not that this was done intentionally (in fact if it was too intentional it would have seemed forced and awkward). But I am sure that this interaction would never ever be omitted. Sometimes Maria or LaLa or Marguerite would check in with the boys, and at times we wandered over there, and this was all an essential part of the preparation ritual, though it was always casual, free and un-intentional in its details, though I guess we all knew that we needed to be open to interaction and that we needed to contribute as a way of letting everyone (including ourselves) see that we were alert, cheerful, glad to see each other, and looking forward to the performance. We would kid each other (the play is a comedy) and we would take the opportunity, if necessary, to address some issue in performance ("Could you give me a little more time to [insert stage business here] before saying your line" for example).

This part of the routine would keep going up until "places" was called. So the start of the show was really, at least for me, a continuation of the camaraderie we were enjoying and intensifying back stage right up until the moment the show began.

The only variation to this routine occurred on Wednesday nights when time was made at 7:00 to review the food fight and the tango. On those nights, I would arrive 15 minutes before 7:00 and start my routine, interrupting it for the fight and tango review, then picking up the routine from wherever I left off.

Wednesdays always felt, in retrospect, a little awkward and out of sync. I think because my routine was not the usual one.

Some Pictures from Back Stage



Top left: E. Mendelsen with me in his “Big Foot” suit; Top right: the hallway between backstage and onstage. Bottom left: Esperanza’s Ralphie Ticket wall; Bottom right: Close up of tickets.

Other Pictures: Prezi Link: <https://prezi.com/i9os2smrlcom>

APPENDIX B

Social Maps

Interview Questions

SOCIAL MAP

Horizon Theatre Company occupies four levels in the little 5 Points Community Center. On the first level bottom floor is the Blue Room and the Horizon bathrooms for patrons. The Blue Room is sometimes a secondary lobby for concessions when there are oversold shows. If you turn right and climb up the first landing upstairs, you will reach the Mezzanine level which has the Box Office and the entrance to the theater. The Box Office/Concession décor is a muted Lisa Frank coloring, a fuchsia with black outlined stars and teal doors. Coming up another short flight of stairs you will reach the first level where Room 101 is to your left; this is the audition room, the practice room and sometimes a rehearsal space. Going up to short flight of stairs to the next landing you reach the Horizon Offices, Room 201. All of the offices including the Co-Artistic Director, the Business manager and all but the Technical Positions are housed in that room.

Back on the Mezzanine level, where the theater space is, once walking in the door there is the concessions area with a refrigerator cabinets and space to house coffee candy containers etc. for concession. When you turn right, there is the entrance, teal green double doors to the theater. Immediately to your left, before entering the complete theater space are a cabinet for storage particularly of the cookies a little further back is a wreck that houses other concessions items including the popcorn wine cups or any other napkins Lacroix things that might need to be restocked during the show. This space is also an Actor's Alley¹⁰² in the back so that if you are able to walk down the aisle you can go all the way to the other side of backstage of stage right¹⁰³. If you continue forward from the front door, you can turn either left to go up the stairs to hit the high seating area or go toward the rights and straight into the actual stage going to the stage gives you an opportunity to look up and see which seats are closest to the front and choose accordingly. It is a standard Proscenium style (with the audience facing the actors straight on) stage however because it is a little more intimate there is no separation between the stage and the audience. Patrons often compliment the theater on this intimacy (ushers, 3/29/2015).

At the entrance of the theater to the right is the second portion of the Actor's Alley. When going through that doorway turning right you can go up the stairs to the stage managers booth which also has the technical items found in the light boards are there in addition to other items necessary to round the technical aspect of the show. Turning left of actors alley door away will take you down the hallway to the back door. At the back door there are you will be on the landing and you can either go up or down going up takes you backstage going down takes you to the back door facing the parking lot. Outside of that back door, when you walk up the stage under the awning there is a small sitting area complete with iron outdoor benches where actors often sit and

¹⁰² The Actor's Alley is the place actors can move freely back stage without being seen to get to the next location on stage.

¹⁰³ Stage right, left, etc are the opposite direction of the audience – they are the directions for the actors on stage to take their blocking.

have conversations during their break times. One floor down is the technical directors offices with a kitchen a bathroom with a shower and also space to store and house costumes and props as well as building area for the next show.

Backstage art to dressing rooms there are also is also some storage space from some old for some of the recurring shows, especially Madeleine's Christmas, The Waffle Palace and Santaland Diaries. There are two dressing rooms which are described by McIntyre:

On the mezzanine level is where the actors backstage area is housed, directly behind the audience space. There is an "equity room" with a bed that serves as a resting place during most shows or as an extra dressing room. There is a woman's dressing room then the men's dressing room beside it, separated with a wooden wall. The rooms have lights and mirrors, and are often decorated by the cast for the performance. In front of the men and women's dressing room (between their doors) is a wooden staircase to the props loft; on the side of the stairs is space for the call board and equity information posted on a cork board, and a long table below. In the dressing rooms and around the call board is the preparation area for the actors and where apprentices (as crew) remain during the show to assist. When it is time for the performance, actors leave this space for the "wings" and all black space between the dressing room and the stage to await for places to the booth.

Also backstage in that area is another bathroom which cannot be flushed during the show otherwise it will make noise. The props loft with other storage area and the wings for the show the entire room is actually a full circle which can be accessible by walking around in through the doors.

GENERAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Name

Gender:

Hometown:

Age:

Type of Apprentice

Collegiate Program:

Where do you live (in Atlanta):

- 1) How did you come to Horizon? Why this apprenticeship?
- 2) What were you expecting in the experience professionally, personally, artistically?
- 3) How have you found the apprenticeship helpful or not helpful professionally, personally, artistically?
- 4) How have you changed and grown during this past year?
- 5) Do you find there to be a spiritual connection to your creative/artistic process (can it be translated in to god-language)? Has it been shaped by this apprenticeship?
- 6) What are your future plans? Have they been shaped by the apprenticeship?

Other typical follow up questions were:

What were your Front of House and Crew Assignments?

What Ten Minute play and One Act play were you involved with?

What was your preparation process for Unifields? What have you heard back from them?

APPENDIX C

SOCIAL MAPS

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

GENERAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Demographic Questions

Name

Gender:

Hometown:

Age:

Faith Belief/Affiliation (if any):

Family Life:

Role in Play:

Theatre Training:

Where do you live (in Atlanta)?:

Questions

- 1) Have you worked for Rising Sage before? In what capacity (and show(s))?
For admins, what is the background on the theatre company?
- 2) What attracted you to this play/role?
For playwright, what caused you to write it?
For administrators, what made you choose this work for this audience and time period?
For director, what made you decide to direct the show?
- 3) What is your normal preparation process for a character? How has that happened with this role?
- 4) Do you find there to be a spiritual connection to your creative/artistic process (can it be translated in to god-language)? Has it been shaped by this your experience in theatre? Have you participated in prayer before, during or after a performance?

Post Production Followup interview:

What was your process before the show getting into character?

What was your process after the show for getting out of character?

Other typical follow up questions were:

Why pushups?

Why a playlist?

Why in isolation?

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