

THE ART OF THE TECHNICAL DIRECTOR

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

The theatrical scenic design process does not end at a picture on paper or with the presentation of a scale model. The design must be translated to the stage. There are a myriad of questions to be answered and decisions regarding construction style, process, material choices, structure, safety, etc. that must be made in order to fully realize the design. In a common, contemporary American production hierarchy, the person that is most often responsible for this translation process is the technical director. Often, the technical director is stereotyped as solely a craftsman or a technician following a set of pre-established directions and not as an artist in his own right. Even I, as a technical director, am guilty of promoting this stereotype for the majority of my theatrical career. However, through reflection on my professional experiences in combination with my education and research over the last two and a half years, I began to recognize the art inherent in the field of technical direction. I have gained a greater appreciation for and understanding of the importance of the artistic contributions made by every participant in a theatrical production. The practice and research based journey chronicled in this document serves to move beyond stereotypes and expose the technical director as a conscientious, collaborative theatre maker and artist.

For my father...finally.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	viii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER TWO: THE TECHNICAL DIRECTOR.....	8
What is a Technical Director?.....	8
The Technical Director/ Scenic Designer Relationship.....	12
The Evolution of the Technical Director .....	14
CHAPTER THREE: THE THEATRE ARTIST .....	18
The Collaborative Art .....	18
What is an Artist?.....	21
Arts and Crafts .....	25
Leadership in Collaboration.....	28
CHAPTER FOUR: TECHNICAL DIRECTOR AS ARTIST.....	30
The Eye of an Artist.....	30
Analog World Versus the Digital World .....	32
Education and Training.....	36
CHAPTER FIVE: PRACTICING THE ART.....	41
Less Ego, More Collaboration .....	41
Summer 2012 .....	46
Summer 2013 .....	57
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION .....	63
APPENDIX A: 2012 PROCESS JOURNAL .....	66

APPENDIX B: 2013 PROCESS JOURNAL ..... 83

REFERENCES ..... 117

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CPS: Community Performance Series at the State University of New York, Potsdam

PM: Production Manager

SM: Stage Manager

SUNY: State University of New York

TD: Technical Director

WZZT: Radio station in musical *Hairspray*



## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The journey to the creation of this document has been a long and twisted road. When I returned to graduate school just over two years ago, I never would have predicted that the subject of my thesis would have anything to do with the world of technical direction. Being a technical director was a part of me that I thought I had abandoned years ago. I honestly did not think there was a way to go back nor did I think I had any desire to return to the field. Its funny how life tumbles along and we end up in the exact place we did not think possible.

I spent the better part of the last twenty-five years of my life working in the theatre. Until recently, the majority of my work experiences have been in the fields of technical direction and production management. During the bulk of this time, I never considered myself to be an artist. I worked in theatre production departments as a technician. I was part of a team and a process. But, in my mind, my contribution was not artistic. It was very practical. I facilitated the construction of scenery, managed budgets, crews and calendars. However, in the last few years, I quite hesitantly began to stick my toes in the waters of design. These explorations into what I readily accepted as the artistic side of the theatrical process in combination with countless hours of self-reflection and research, forced me to begin to acknowledge my potential role as an artist in the world of technical direction as well. At the same time, I was becoming more and more curious as to why I was so drawn to theatrical work yet had remained so reluctant to call myself an artist for the majority of my career. Did I miss something in my education and training? Was I accepting and even perhaps fostering a perceived stereotype of a technical director?

A student studying theatre history and theory is likely to encounter a bounty of information regarding the evolution of the text of plays, acting technique, theatre architecture

and the elements of design. What that student is less likely to stumble across is a vast quantity of theoretical and historical writings focused on the practices or processes employed by the theatrical technical director or the art of creating the actual scenery. There are several very practical how-to manuals that have been written in the last few decades. These books tend to discuss basic theatrical construction techniques, hardware and tools of the trade. This, of course, is all very relevant and useful information but, for me, something is missing from these resources. What is missing is the ‘art.’ Where are the chapters and essays on the art of the technical direction? Where are the articles on the role of collaboration in the scene shop? Where is the acknowledgement of the existence of a creative element in the field of technical direction?

In the semi-early stages of research for this paper, I was handed a copy of an article titled *‘A New Kind of Conversation’: Michael Chekhov’s ‘Turn to the Crafts’* written by Tom Cornford. While the article itself is primarily focused on Chekhov’s acting techniques and the actor as artist, it inspired me to do further research into the Arts and Crafts movement, which, in turn, helped open my eyes to my own definition of art and artist. The shadowy veils of confusion were lifted away and I found a new clarity about my own role as a theatre artist through the writings of artists and theorists of the Arts and Crafts movement. The words that had previously escaped me finally started to land on the page. I found validation for my own disjointed thoughts. I was an artist. I had always been an artist. Even more importantly, I finally realized the art was just as important as the ever-evolving technology in the world of technical direction. The art and the technology were not, nor had they ever really been, mutually exclusive. Why did it take me twenty years to finally come to this conclusion?

After finishing my undergraduate degree, I spent a number of years working as a theatrical technical director. I was young and brimming with confidence. I was comfortable with my skill level in almost all aspects of technical theatre. Looking back now, I realize that there was so very much I did not know. But, since I was successful at my job, I assumed it was because I was an excellent carpenter, engineer, problem solver and all around technician. I was happy being a technician and I got quite defensive if anyone suggested that I was using the job of technical director as a stepping-stone on a path towards scenic design. I would emphatically deny any interest in design or even creativity. That was someone else's job. A technician was a technician. Leave the artsy stuff to the creative team.

In the late 90's, I decided to pursue a graduate degree in technical direction. It was not that I was necessarily looking to improve my technical skills. But rather, I saw the MFA as a means to a job in a university environment. The degree was a formality. I was sure I knew enough to get a job (my ego was out of control); I just needed the piece of paper saying I earned an MFA. I was accepted into a program and returned to school. Then, life happened. My father unexpectedly passed away and I decided to take a leave of absence for a semester. My father was a painting contractor and it was my intention to finish up a few of the jobs he had started, help out my family, and return to school again the next fall. A semester as a painting contractor turned into years. The work was always there, and again, I was good at my job. The customers kept calling so I kept painting. The theatre became a distant memory. The further I got away from it, the more I felt it was impossible to go back. The confidence I had in my skills slipped away. When I would occasionally think about what it might be like to work in the theatre again, I would quickly stop myself because I always assumed that technology had passed me by. I had

not kept up with the latest trends and techniques. I was practically computer illiterate. I did not even have an email address. I only knew how to hand draft. AutoCAD and Vectorworks may as well have been words from a foreign language. I was stuck as a house painter. Like the early advocates of the Arts and Crafts movement who feared the changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution, I was bogged down in the fear that my skills had been rendered obsolete by the dawning of the digital age. I had been replaced by something newer and presumably better... or so I thought.

In late 2005, I was driving through Florida and stopped in Daytona Beach to visit an old friend at Seaside Music Theater. The company was preparing to move into a new theatre building. My friend was the production manager and we joked about my coming to work as his assistant on the inaugural show in the new building. I was very fond of this theatre company, as they had played a huge role in my development as a theatre technician. To this day, I am not exactly sure how it happened, but that joke became reality. I signed a short contract (only two weeks) and drove down to Daytona not having any idea of what I was getting into. At first, I felt like a fish out of water. I did not think I belonged in that world anymore. But sitting onstage, in the middle of the night, during tech week of *Disney's Beauty and the Beast*, something changed. I was home. I was confident that I belonged in the theatre. I did not need the years of technological developments that I thought meant so much. I realized there was more to technical theatre than I had ever considered. I began to appreciate the art.

It was not immediate, but eventually life led me back to the theatre as my full-time job. Although I may have found some peace with my insecurities, I did not attempt to step back into the role of technical director. I moved into the world of production management. I thought it

was a good fit for me. My work history as a technical director combined with my years as a business owner seemed like a good balance for the field. I occasionally did a few build projects for companies I worked for but I always called myself a production manager and not a technical director. I also began to realize that I never knew as much as I thought I did early in my theatre career. I began to wonder why I was good at the job of technical director if it was not due to an amazing wealth of technical knowledge and skill.

Finally coming to the realization that there was still much to learn in life, it became obvious to me that it was time to consider finishing my graduate degree. As part of the Theatre for Young Audiences MFA track at the University of Central Florida, I was required to complete a residency related to my field of study. I wanted to find a way to marry my theatre for young audiences track with my desire to continue to work on the production side of theatre. I received a phone call early in 2012 from the production manager of the Community Performance Series at the SUNY Potsdam offering me the job of technical director for their upcoming summer production of *Disney's Beauty and the Beast* (yes... the beast... again). I was a bit nervous because it had been well over ten years since I served as technical director on a large musical. But, the job met the requirements of my residency so I accepted. Thus began my return to technical direction. I consider that experience to have been a success. I discovered many things about myself during that first summer in Potsdam. I also began to more willingly explore my role as both artist and technician.

I returned to Potsdam again this past summer. This time I was technical director for productions of *Hairspray* and *Little Shop of Horrors*. In addition, I designed and built the Audrey II puppets for *Little Shop*. For me, the lines between the technical director and the

creative team had already become quite fuzzy and this experience served to make them practically invisible. I began to wonder if it was me who had changed over the years or if it was the technical director position that had evolved. When I was first hired as a professional technical director in 1993, my responsibilities were more broad. I was more responsible for managing much more than just the scene shop. I had a more active role in the coordination of the electrics, sound and props crews. It seems to me that the technical director's focus has narrowed toward the scene shop in recent years. Has this narrowed focus allowed the artist to bloom? Exactly what is the job of the technical director? Where does the technician stop and the artist begin? Where exactly do the technical director and the crews they manage fit in a collaborative theatrical process?

These are questions that I am still exploring today. For me, though it is sometimes difficult to put into words, the answers lie in my willingness to embrace the art, immerse myself in the artistic process and not get weighed down by the technical details and the unknowns of this digital age. I do not need to know everything. The conductor of the orchestra does not need to know how to play every instrument. As previously stated, there was a time that I thought I knew everything. Fortunately, I outgrew that foolish notion. It is not only an impossible task but also an irresponsible thing for me to try to do. I have specific areas of expertise and a broad and basic understanding of many other areas. And in some areas my skill level might even be considered weak. To be successful at my job and excel as an artist, I have to be willing to accept and even embrace my limitations. Theatre is a collaborative art. If I consider myself a theatre artist, I am accepting that I am part of a whole. I do not have to be the whole.

Through research into the historical evolution of the job and an exploration of ideas introduced in the Arts and Crafts movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in combination with my personal experiences, this document will explore the ‘art’ of theatre and collaboration specifically in relation to the role of the technical director. An attempt will be made to bridge the somewhat dehumanizing gap between the ‘art’ and ‘manufacture’ of theatrical scenery. What happens when the focus is taken away from the talents and skills of the individual and is shifted towards the talents and skills of a group? Who is the artist in a collaboration? The technical director will be presented as a creative problem-solver and a conscientious, collaborative artist working as part of a creative team instead of an assembly-line laborer working in isolation.

## CHAPTER TWO: THE TECHNICAL DIRECTOR

### What is a Technical Director?

The Oxford English Dictionary defines the word ‘technical’ as being “skilled in the formal and practical techniques of a particular field” (oed.com). The same source defines the word ‘director’ as “one who or that which directs, rules, or guides; a conductor” (oed.com). Taken together, one can assume the job should be defined as something akin to: the person who guides or directs the formal and practical techniques/ processes of a particular field. The book *Scenery for the Theatre* describes the job of technical director as thus: “Technical Director is in direct charge of all technical elements of production. Plans and supervises constructions and operations of all settings... Prepares and executes scheme for scene change and alternation of productions. Plans and supervises all changes in permanent technical equipment. Is the backstage efficiency engineer” (Burriss-Meyer 29). A letter of agreement I signed for a recent summer stock season gave the following job description: “You will be responsible for all duties normally falling under the scope of Technical Director... Duties include but not limited to supervision of shop staff, managing scenic budget, supervision of set construction, load-in, tech, backstage running, load-out, and restoration of borrowed spaces” (CPS 2013). These definitions do not paint the picture of an artist or member of a creative team but instead they create a portrait of a practical taskmaster who is following a set of pre-established rules and plans.

The term ‘technical theatre’ can be used to describe a variety of departments, job positions, and skill sets in a theatre company. Historically, lighting, scenery, sound, paints, costumes and props are some of the areas that might fall in the realm of technical theatre and



therefore would be under the purview of the technical director. However, in many contemporary American theatre companies and universities, the advent of the position of production manager has pushed the focus of the technical director much more towards scenic elements only. Today, company size and budget often determine whether the technical director's primary focus is on scenery or not. It should be noted that even companies that do not use the title of technical director have someone who fulfills the duties normally associated with the position. This thesis will use a mid-sized, contemporary American regional theatre company as a model. In relation to this document, the following assumptions should be made about this 'model' of theatre: the company has a full-time production manager; the company has a full-time technical director; the technical director's primary responsibilities are related to the scenic elements; and the scenic designers are not in residence, but rather they are hired on a per show basis.

It is becoming more and more commonplace to find statements like the following printed on the designer drawings/ plates that are submitted to these theatre companies: "These drawings represent visual concept and construction suggestions only. The designer is not an engineer and is not qualified to determine the structural appropriates of these designs" (Goldstein 1). This particular sample statement is one that I have seen on numerous sets of design plates in recent years. The theatrical scenic design does not end with a picture on paper. It must be translated to the stage. There are a myriad of questions to be answered and decisions regarding construction style, process, material choice, structure, safety, etc. that must be made in order to fully realize the scenic design for a production. If this common, contemporary American production hierarchy is considered, the person that is most likely left in charge of continuing the design process is the technical director. I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the fact that not all

designers lack technical and/or engineering skills. Many designers come from a technical or engineering background and are quite proficient in the field. But, in my experience, even if a theatre company has a resident designer, it is not the scenic designer's responsibility to design the build of a production. That responsibility is generally under the purview of the technical director especially in the production hierarchy being considered for this document.

The world of the technical director is a complex one. It requires a huge arsenal of factual knowledge. A technical director needs to have an understanding of everything from math, a wide array of materials, adhesives, solvents, and chemical reactions to the common dimensions of lumber and gauges of steel. Leadership and communication skills are a must. While it seems obvious that a technical director would need to have strong carpentry skills and a mastery of many common construction techniques, the technical director needs to remain a highly adaptable individual within these skill sets. Building scenery is different than building a house. When a contractor builds a house, there are a series of rules, permits, inspectors, foundations, and structural codes. There is not a lot of wiggle room in the pre-established codes and regulations. There is an expected quality and longevity that are presumed to be part of the final product. There are structural codes and common building techniques that are used in the creation of scenery as well but adaptability and creative problem solving are key. In addition to the common parameters of time and money that are shared with most non-theatrical construction projects, other variables like weight, size, and portability come into play when designing the build of a set. A house that is built for the stage may not just 'sit' quietly in one place. It might have to spin, fly, split in half or fold up into a smaller unit. The 'illusion' inherent in theatrical scenery often calls for a creative problem solving and research skills from the technical director.

The technical director must also have a willingness to be a life-long student. It is impossible to be a master of every field and technical discipline. An individual who fits the description in the figure of speech, ‘jack of all trades, master of none,’ may be the perfect candidate for a career in technical direction. ‘Master of some’ could work too. In my opinion, an individual with a broad, general knowledge and a willingness to constantly learn and explore new methods, materials, and techniques coupled with strong leadership, communication and collaboration skills makes the ideal candidate for the field.

One of the most common variables that the technical director must be able to adapt to is budget. Budgets for productions can vary greatly. Budgets can range from the multi-million dollar spectacles of Broadway down to the practically non-existent budgets of some community or school theatres. Whether the set budget is five thousand dollars or five hundred dollars, it is the technical director’s responsibility to do his best to honor and fulfill the artistic vision of the director and designer while producing quality work. The best solution to the budget problem is a willingness to embrace creative solutions and communicate. Exploring a multitude of material options, construction techniques, alternate sources for procuring materials (borrow, beg, barter) and the use of stock scenery are all solutions that can have a huge impact on the bottom line of a budget. A lot can be done with a little money if the build of a production is designed well and the technical director has the willingness to think outside the box.

The technical director of a theatre company is often seen as a practical-minded individual whose primary purpose is to follow a set of directions laid out by the scenic designer in the design plates and lead a crew of laborers who will take the scenery from a paper drawing to a fully realized production on stage. However, creating a definitive definition or job description for

the position is a seemingly impossible task. As stated, the variables are endless. Every theatre company has its own unique characteristics. The responsibilities that go along with individual job titles can vary greatly depending on company size, budget, the theatre's mission statement and even geographical location. There are plenty of fuzzy definitions and expectations floating around the theatre world regarding the definition of the technical director's job and the responsibilities that go with it. Surprisingly, even among students of theatre and some professional theatre artists, there is often confusion as to the definitions of the terms 'technical elements' and 'design elements.' Despite this all too common misconception, they are, in fact, not the same thing. The technical elements are the building blocks used to achieve the designer's vision. Put simply, looking through a traditional and somewhat stereotypical lens, the technical director can be seen as the person who chooses and arranges the appropriate blocks in order to achieve the artistic vision of another. But, in my experience, there is much more to it than that. There is an art to choosing, creating, and arranging the blocks.

### The Technical Director/ Scenic Designer Relationship

A relatively modern stagecraft book describes the technical directors role as such: "his [the technical director] oversight is always limited to practical matters, such as money, equipment and staff. He is *not* a designer and should never be put in the position of making design decisions" (Campbell 6). When asked in an interview for an article what his thoughts were regarding the relationship between a scenic designer and a technical director, designer Ming Cho Lee replied, "Without the technical director, all I do is draw pictures" (Adrian). These two quotes insinuate that the designer and the technical director are distinctly different entities

and, while the two may rely on each other to complete a project, their responsibilities do not cross. It should be noted that there are, in fact, small professional companies, community theaters, and schools that may combine the roles of scenic designer and technical director for financial reasons. But even many small companies out there do use both positions. The scenic designer/ technical director relationship and its common and presumed separation of powers discussed in this document is the type that is found in moderate sized, contemporary American theatre companies.

In his book, *Working Together in Theatre*, Robert Cohen states: “Rule Number One for a professional theatre artist is that *your success is determined by the production’s success – not the other way around*” (46). Cohen was speaking in general terms about all those involved in a theatrical production. I am using this quote specifically as a tool to discuss the scenic designer/ technical director relationship. Using the production hierarchy considered in this document, in order for a production to be considered successful, the scenic designer and the technical director must establish a mutual respect for each other’s artistic and practical contributions. Common misconceptions regarding scenery are that the designer ‘creates,’ the technical director ‘makes,’ and the two skill sets do not cross. The reality is that the two do cross. Both positions call for a combination of artistry and manual skill. When the audience sees a completed set onstage during a performance, they see the art of more than one individual. The obvious thing they see is the overall artistic vision of the scenic designer. The scenic designer choose the overall sizes, shapes, textures, colors, motion of elements, etc. that occupy the world of the play. The audience can see it. It is real and it is the designer’s art. But, scratch below the surface and there are many other layers of art. Walk backstage or turn the set around and it is easy to see the technical

director's art and design contributions. The technical director creates a work of art that is vital to and supports the art of the scenic designer. It is the unity of these artistic elements that brings the designer's vision alive for the audience and contributes to a successful production.

### The Evolution of the Technical Director

Since the goal of this document is to explore a shift in the field of technical direction from practical, assembly-line technician to a contributing and collaborative artist, the historical relationship between the creative team and the technical director needs further definition and exploration. In order to establish the historical presence of the technical director and to give a more accurate portrayal of the evolution I see in occurring in the field, I will begin by examining the past. I start by offering a brief investigation into the origins of the position.

However, before delving too deeply into the history of the technical director's relationship to scenery creation and fabrication, I will note a few things regarding the study of theatre history and history in general. First, theatre history is often subjective. The question of 'who wrote the history and what was the motive for the original writing' is one that I always try to remember and consider while conducting research. Second, theatre is an ephemeral art. The actual event of 'theatre' is temporary and happens in a fleeting moment. This temporal nature of the art makes its study that much more difficult. Finally, a theatre history book usually only discusses the high points and major innovations. Because of this, there is a vast quantity of missing information. In my research, I have found that in regards to technical theatre, the parts of history that are most often missing relate to the process of how the scenery is transformed from the design drawing to the fully realized set on the stage.

As long as there have been scenic designers drawing pictures, there has been somebody building or assembling the scenery. There is not a great deal of information available that specifically discusses the people who built scenery throughout theater history. There are plenty of books, articles, drawings and the like that discuss the scenery itself starting with the Greeks and moving forward through history. The role of the designer/scenographer and their relation to scenery and theatre architecture begins to be well documented from the late Middle Ages and into the Italian Renaissance and beyond. These early scenographers not only designed all the elements of a production, but many of them designed theater buildings or performance environments as well. These scenographers were all initially artists from other disciplines. Many were architects, engineers, or visual artists. Designing for the theatre was an additional avenue of employment. While it appears that some of the more modern technical director duties, such as producing working drawings, may have been handled by the scenographers themselves or their apprentices in the past, there had to be some form of master carpenter, technician or manager behind the scenes making sure everything was successfully built and in working order.

References to the technician may not be as bountiful in theatre history books as they are for other disciplines of the theatre, but they do exist. In his book *Technology, Guilds, and Early English Drama*, Clifford Davidson gives numerous examples of the existence of the theatre technician. He mentions “the Toledo Cathedral records for Corpus Christi in 1493 which list payment to a man whose job it was to set off the rockets in Hell” (Davidson 85). In another section discussing pageant wagons from the early 1500’s, he says, “guilds not only spent considerable amounts of money for payments to actors but also paid for technical assistance and for various items from other guilds to prepare their plays for presentation before audiences”

(Davidson 2). Even as early as the Greeks, there is mention of stage machinery. The origin of the phrase ‘deus ex machina’ which we use in theatre to describe an ending to a play that is neatly wrapped up by the appearance of a God-like figure or authority can be traced back to the use of a scenic ‘machine’ that was employed to lower in or raise up a character in an ancient Greek drama. If there was a machine, there was a technician.

In 1638, Nicola Sabbattini, an architect and engineer, wrote *Practica di Fabricar Scene e Machine ne’ Teatri (Manual for Constructing Theatrical Scenes and Machines)*. This work is formal, detailed written acknowledgement of the legitimacy of the field of technical theatre. This treatise covers everything from building scenery, lighting the stage, perspective and scene painting techniques to how the audience area should be arranged. Sabbattini did not invent or design all of the methods and techniques discussed in his text. He studied the way stage machinery worked both historically and in his time. He combined all his research to create a guideline or theory for technical theatre. “Sabbattini’s *Practica* is important not because it introduced innovations but because it describes in detail the practices of the Italian stage in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, practices which other architects borrowed and introduced through-out Europe, and for the most part did not bother to explain” (Hewitt 42). Though he was a ‘designer’ and architect himself and his target audience most likely consisted of other architects, artists and engineers, Sabbattini did, in fact, write what might be the first theoretical treatise and practice manual for technical directors all in the same book. The existence of this manual began to give some credibility to the role of a theatre ‘machinist’ which can be considered an early substitute for the title of technical director. The information regarding the existence and importance of the technician and technical theatre in these earlier times was far



from comprehensive but it is there. In *The Noble Mirror of Art* written in 1663, Joseph Furtttenbach writes “For this work an expert in mechanics who knows the means of drawing machines across and of raising objects can be of great assistance. Without a good craftsman it would be difficult to carry out these things satisfactorily” (Hewitt 220). This statement implies the need for collaboration between the designer and a technical director type position in order for the proposed ‘art’ to be achieved.

Somewhere in history, perhaps it began with the publication of Sabbittini’s *Practica*, the duties that are now usually assigned to the scenic designer and the duties that are now most often assigned to the technical director began to split from the domain of one individual to two. The scenic designer took responsibility for the artistic side of the process while the technical director was left to take care of the more practical aspects of the relationship and implement the designer’s vision.

As time has passed and the theatre itself has continuously evolved and morphed as an art form, so have the roles of the collaborators involved. The pendulum swings back and forth and ‘corrections’ to the collaborative process are always being made. The responsibilities that once belonged to one individual may now be split between four people. And the thing that may have been previously done by committee may now be under the sole jurisdiction of one individual. A position that was once thought of as highly creative may have evolved into that of a manufacturer. It is my opinion that in the world of technical direction, the pendulum is now swinging towards imagination and collaboration. Comparing my historical investigations to my personal experiences in recent years, I have formed the opinion that the technical director is becoming less of a ‘scenery maker’ and much more of a ‘theatre maker.’

## CHAPTER THREE: THE THEATRE ARTIST

If an audience member opens the playbill of a current American production, they will usually find a list of all the other people who worked on the production in addition to the actors on stage and musicians in the pit. Often, that list is divided into categories. These categories are often labeled: Creative/Artistic, Production, Administrative, Front of House, etc. This paper focuses specifically on the relationship between the Creative/Artistic team and the Production team. The creative or artistic heading is usually used to describe the director, choreographer, music director, scenic designer, lighting designer, costume designer, sound designer, and perhaps a few other specialty designers (video, etc). Under the production heading, one will find the production manager, technical director, carpenters, electricians, painters, props crew, and the like. There is a clear division of responsibility in production process. It is not a free for all. It would not work if it were. Every individual involved in the process has their own set of responsibilities and production objectives. But, why are some positions so easily accepted as imaginative or artistic and others are not?

### The Collaborative Art

Theatre is a collaborative art. It is collaborative on many levels. Not only does theatre marry a multitude of individual artistic disciplines but it forces those involved to find a way to set aside giant egos and competitive personalities and be humble and respectful in order to merge their art with that of all others involved in the process. Who is the artist in collaboration? For me the answer seems simple. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines collaboration as: “United

labour, co-operation; *esp.* in literary, artistic, or scientific work.” This insinuates that a collaborative art would require the participants to be united in their artistic endeavors. And if all participants are part of making the ‘art,’ they are all artists. That, however, is my opinion. Not everyone would agree with this statement. Some would argue that the playwright is the true artist while others might claim that it is the director. In an essay from the book *The Alchemy of Theatre*, playwright Edward Albee has the following to say about who the artist is in a collaboration:

I dislike the term ‘collaboration.’ No one collaborates with me on a play because I am not writing the play with them. The process of working with directors and actors after I’ve written the text may be termed ‘collaboration’ by them. But, they aren’t creating anything. When they try to ‘create,’ it’s destructive creation, usually, unless the play is terrible. Let us call it ‘having my play done properly’ rather than ‘collaboration.’

There are two parts to doing a play: ‘creation’ and ‘interpretation.’ I prefer those terms. Play writing – ‘creation’ – is something I do, alone. ‘Interpretation,’ on the other hand, is something I do with others. Or, more correctly, something others do with me.

The process of interpreting is essential, it is exciting and wonderful – just as long as we know that it’s not a creative act. (Viagas 20)

In contrast to the above Albee statement, in a chapter from the book *Creators on Creating*, playwright Tony Kushner discusses the dangers of the ‘illusion of individualism’ especially in what is so readily considered a collaborative art. He writes:

Way down close to the bottom of the list of the evils individualism visits on our culture is the fact that in the modern era it isn’t enough to write; you must also be a Writer and play

your part as the protagonist in a cautionary narrative in which you will fail or triumph, be in or out, hot or cold. The rewards can be fantastic; the punishment dismal; it's a zero-sum game, and its guarantor of value, its marker, is that you pretend you play it solo, preserving the myth that you alone are the wellspring of your creativity. (Barron 146)

Kushner goes on to summarize his article by saying "Marx was right: the smallest divisible human unit is two people, not one; one is a fiction. From such nets of souls societies, the social world, human life spring. And also plays" (Barron 149). These quotes offer two quite different perspectives on the artist in collaboration. Together they represent a struggle between artists and ego that I have seen repeatedly in production processes. I hold with the idea that in a collaborative art, the individualistic ego can do irreparable harm to the production process.

I recently led a conversation with a group of undergraduate theatre students. The group consisted of a mix of performance, design, and technical students. I asked them who they thought was the 'artist' in the theatre. At first, there were numerous nervous murmurs saying that everyone was an artist. A few seemed to firmly believe that was true but it appeared that a large percentage were holding back. I pushed a bit harder and asked for honest answers. I understood the hesitation; after all, they knew the person asking the questions was a technician. The answers began to vary more and more as the conversation progressed. Someone said the director was the real artist. Someone else said the actors. And yet another claimed the playwright. The designers are artists. I purposely poked and prodded and played devil's advocate. One student said that someone who is only following directions is not an artist. The specific example given was that a painter mixing a paint color is not an artist. The painter is merely following a pre-established set of rules or directions to achieve the desired color. The participants in the conversation began to

get more passionate about their opinions and there was clear tension in the room. Finally, the word collaboration began making its way into the conversation. What is it? Why is it? How is it done? Where and when does one learn it? Once collaboration was introduced and some of the ego tamed, the conversation began to circle back to the same murmurs that started it. Did they really believe we are all artists? I do not know. But, I hope the conversation planted a seed for understanding and appreciating all parts of the theatrical process.

I believe the most accepted assumption is that those who are listed as part of the creative/ artistic team in the program are the true artists and innovators of the theatre. The rest are craftsman and laborers whose purpose is to follow direction and achieve the vision of the true ‘artists.’ Only once in my twenty-five year career have I been listed under the ‘artistic’ heading in the playbill while I held the title of technical director. My immediate reaction was that someone made a mistake when the program was compiled. What is it that determines whether a job is labeled as ‘creative’ or ‘artistic’ especially in a field where the final product is considered ‘a collaborative art’? Is it possible to participate in a collaborative art and not be an artist? To answer this, I need to explore the definitions of ‘art’ and ‘artist’.

### What is an Artist?

In order to fully explain my rationale for writing this document, I needed to find the ‘right’ definitions for ‘art’ and ‘artist’ so the reader could better understand the source of my ideas and assertions. It seemed odd to me that I had such strong convictions about the technician as artist but I was incapable of putting my justifications into words. Perhaps a large part of my problem lay in the subjective nature of art itself.

In my research, I have run across a multitude of definitions for both ‘art’ and ‘artist.’ I believe it is safe to assume that, quite simply, the term ‘artist’ can be defined as someone who creates art. But, what is art? What makes one thing art and another thing not art? Art is incredibly hard to label definitively. What I call art and what the next person calls art will likely be two different things. “What is art?” is one of those questions that can spark heated conversation and debate without ever really providing an answer that will completely satisfy all parties involved. In the book *Art and a Changing Civilisation*, Eric Gill defines an artist as thus:

All sorts of people have fine ideas, all sorts of people wish to serve their fellow-man by supplying them with things which please them or minister to their physical convenience, every man is potentially what is called an artist, but the fact remains, the artist is the person who actually has the skill and actually uses his skill to make things, to make, to bring into physical existence the things which abide his mind. An artist is not simply a person with ideas. He is the person who has the skill to make his ideas manifest. (Gill 4)

William Lethaby said “A work of art is a well-made thing. That is all” (Lethaby). In the book *A Basic History of Art*, the definition given is “Art is an aesthetic object. It is meant to be looked at and appreciated for its intrinsic value... Not all art is beautiful to our eyes, but it is art nonetheless” (Janson 11). There are countless other definitions. I could go on for pages and pages giving a multitude of different definitions to the words art and artist. But what is important to me in the context of this document is more specific discussion about defining the art of the technical director.

In order to spotlight the art of technical direction, it was suggested that I consider discussing a play such as *Noises Off* by Michael Frayn. The idea was that this play could be used

as an example for introducing the ‘art of construction’ to my thesis. My first reaction to that suggestion was one of agreement as I am fond of saying that the scenic designer designs the front of the set and the technical director designs the back. Upon further reflection, I began to change my ideas of how I would use this play to discuss the art of construction. The plot of *Noises Off* involves a play within a play and audience sees both sides of the set at varying points in the production. While I firmly believe that there is a definitive art to the construction of theatrical scenery and the technical director is one of the predominant artists of this style, I do not think this play displays the technical director’s art to the audience. What the audience sees during a production of *Noises Off* is a scenic designer’s interpretation of what the art of the technical director looks like. How is that for a twist? The fact is the scenic designer does not draw the back of the set unless the audience sees it. And in that case, it is just another ‘front’ of the set. Just like the scenic designer’s ‘art of design,’ the technical director’s ‘art of construction’ involves the use of imagination and creation. In addition, both types of ‘art’ have an audience with expectations. What are these ‘expectations’ of the art of construction?

Using the *Noise Off* example again, when the audience ‘sees’ the back of the set, what makes them accept this vision as the scenic designer’s art? Is the acceptance because this ‘view’ of the set is framed by the proscenium or confines of the stage? Is it because this ‘view’ has been designed for this particular audience in the hope of evoking some sort of emotional response? Though this particular play may showcase a designer’s interpretation of the backstage world, a point can still be made in defense of the art of construction. If the backstage area is ‘framed’ as art, it is accepted as art. As this document is attempting to put a ‘frame’ on the technical director’s art, my next question is: Who is this art being framed for? Who is the audience for

technical director's art? Who is going to have an emotional response to my art? The technical director's art has a more limited direct 'audience' than that of the scenic designer. If the technical director's work exhibits fine attention to detail and quality construction techniques, the work is not likely to be noticed by the average audience member because it is doing its job in supporting and realizing the designer's vision. It is my opinion that the average audience member is more likely to acknowledge poor construction and a lack of care in the technical director's work than the good. The audience who most often directly 'sees' the technical director's art in pure form are the performers and backstage personnel working on the production. When I walk backstage in a theatre, I have expectations of what I will see. I expect to see certain standards in construction techniques. I expect to feel safe as I enter the world of the set. I expect quality and function. I get excited when I explore the back of an unfamiliar set. I see the beauty in the back of scenery. I am both a practitioner and patron of the art of technical direction. I am intrigued by the design choices and the varied construction techniques. However, on more than one occasion, I have walked backstage and my expectations have not been met. I use these occasions as learning experiences. Sometimes I am left asking: why didn't I think of that? And other times I am left thinking: What the hell is actually holding that set up? It seems to me that if I see and feel these things, others do as well. If my art does not meet the expectations of the actor or stagehand, how does that effect the production process? If the actor perceives an unsafe environment backstage, whether it really is or not, have I hurt the performance? If my work requires creativity and skill, has an audience, and is capable of evoking an emotional response; it seems like art to me.



As I stated earlier, in trying to formulate my personal definitions for ‘art’ and ‘artist,’ I was drawn to the writings of the artists and theorists of the Arts and Crafts movement. For me, the creation of art has always been more than just imagination. The ‘doing’ or ‘making’ is as important as the thought. In this next section I hope to explain how the innovators of Arts and Crafts movement helped me to solidify my definition of art as equally including imagination, humanization, and manifestation.

### Arts and Crafts

One man’s thoughts can never be expressed by another: and the difference between the spirit of touch of the man who is inventing, and the man who is obeying directions, is often all the difference between a great and common work of art (Sommer 6).

– John Ruskin, 1893

The Arts and Crafts movement first began to emerge in England in the mid to late 1800’s. The movement was, in part, a reaction to the Industrial Revolution. The early advocates of this movement believed that industry was ripping the life and individuality out of art and design. Today, the mention of the term ‘Arts and Crafts’ calls to mind an art movement or artistic style. But, in its prime, the movement was considered to be more of a philosophy and a way of life than a specific style of art. William Morris (1834-1896) is thought of as the founder of the Arts and Crafts movement. He embraced theories on aesthetics and social issues that had been previously advocated by the art critic and social reformer John Ruskin and merged them with his own Socialist ideas.

The basics of the ideas articulated by Morris are as follows: He held the belief that machines were dehumanizing. Not only did machines take the life out of a process and product, but they were insulting to the skilled worker because they stripped away the dignity of the individual. He thought that machines should only be used for tasks that are repetitive and potentially degrading to a skilled worker. Second, he advocated for reforms in working conditions. He believed that workers should be able to take pride in their work and have a sense of ownership over a project. He felt that workers should feel like they are part of the whole and not an insignificant piece of the puzzle. And finally, he believed that the designer and the craftsman should be one in the same. The craftsman designs and the designer crafts.

The goal of embracing some of the ideals set forth in the Arts and Crafts movement is not about determining who is the greater or more important artist in the theatrical process but rather an acknowledgement and form of establishing respect for the artistic contributions of each member of the collaborative team. It should be recognized that not only is every member of the theatrical production team an artist in their own right but they are craftsmen as well. The scenic designer's job is not void of technical aspects and the technical director's job is not void of artistic aspects.

Humanity played an important role in the philosophies of the Arts and Crafts movement. Humanity is a vital element in theatre and all forms of art. Theatre is created by people for people. In the article, *Art and Workmanship*, William Lethaby states "Art is the humanity put into workmanship, the rest is slavery." It is not possible to have art that is void of the human touch. As random as they may first appear, even the ready-made art of Marcel Duchamp can be seen as having a human touch. The ready-made can be defined as "a commonplace prefabricated

object isolated from its functional context and elevated to the status of art by the mere act of the artist's selection" (MOMA online). The artist's selection and theoretical 'framing' is what transforms the ready-made into art. This selection adds the human element.

How is the human element infused into the scenery for a theatrical production? Whose hands mold the art? In addition to paper design plates, a scenic designer will often provide a scale model of the scenic design. Like the design plate, the scale model offers a visual representation of the scenic designer's imagination. When the designer crafts the model with his hands, he infuses life into the work. The spirit of the artist becomes part of the art through touch. However, based on my own experience, it is not unusual for a theatrical set to be completely built and loaded into the theatre before the scenic designer physically touches it. Who, therefore, has breathed life into this artwork? The answer, in my opinion, is the production team who actually physically created it. The technical director has carefully chosen a series of materials, building techniques and assigned individual artists responsibilities in order to orchestrate the manifestation of the scenic designers vision. As each board is cut and each bolt is tightened by hand, life is breathed into the set via the human touch. The scenic designer starts the artistic process, the technical director and his crew join the process in order to design the build and create the physical art, and then the combined team of the scenic designer and technicians work together to put the finishing touches on the final product. By acknowledging and honoring each participant in the production process as a contributing artist, it becomes more and more apparent to me that the 'real' art of theatre is the collaboration.

For me, the word collaboration implies a sense of community. The art that we as theatre artists accomplish together transcends the art of each individual in the process. The production

team works together toward a common goal. The production process usually begins with a director introducing a vision. Once that vision has been introduced, the ownership of the vision is transferred to the entire production team. The individual becomes less and less important as the production process continues. I do not wish to diminish the art of any individual in the production process but rather embrace the collective art of the community. In my interpretation, community implies the idea of participation and promotes responsibility for the art.

### Leadership in Collaboration

The image of collaboration that I have presented thus far seems to paint a picture of a big happy theatre family where everyone is treated as an equal and always gets along. However, this little utopian picture is far from reality. The typical theatre ‘family’ is just like any other family. We do not always get along and sometimes we are more than a little dysfunctional. Even in collaboration there is a need for leadership and hierarchy. The leadership roles in theatre help guide the production process and keep the ‘family’ from fighting. The leadership roles ensure forward motion in the production process.

Every department in a typical theatre company has some form of a hierarchy. For example, in the scene shop, the hierarchical set-up is often more than just the technical director and a few carpenters. In addition to the technical director, the following collaborators may also be found in many scene shops: an assistant technical director, master carpenter, scene shop foreman, carpenters, and carpentry interns or apprentices. The scene shop itself may also house a paint shop, a props shop, and storage for other production departments. Each of these other ‘shops’ or departments has a built in organizational structure amongst the team members. Every

role in each of these hierarchies comes with a set of responsibilities. Again, responsibilities vary from company to company. Sometimes, the paint charge or the props master may report to the technical director. Sometimes the same positions may report directly to the production manager. And in other cases, they may seek immediate guidance from the scenic designer.

While it is easy for me to say: “this person is in charge of this person who is in charge of this person, etc,” it is never quite that simple in a theatre production process. No matter who is at the top of a hypothetical hierarchical ‘pyramid’ for a production process, all of the participants are still collaborators. In a community of collaborators, the divisions of responsibility are not always clear-cut. The layered nature of the art can create confusion and chaos at times. In my experience, the leadership roles in the theatre are the ones who are the most vigilant about keeping their eyes on the big picture. The leaders are responsible for ensuring that the collaborators do not get lost in their individual arts. It is my opinion, that the leadership positions in a theatrical process are not about who has ‘power’ but rather they serve as a conduit for communication and as advocates for forward progress in the production process.

## CHAPTER FOUR: TECHNICAL DIRECTOR AS ARTIST

He must know all about the ware he is making and its relation to similar wares... He must be allowed to think of what he is doing, and to vary his work as the circumstances of it vary, and his own moods... He must have a voice... Such a man I should call, not an operative but a workman. You may call him an artist if you will, for I have been describing the qualities of artists as I know them (Petts 34). - William Morris

### The Eye of an Artist

Just as the theatrical style and culture evolve and morph as time passes by, so has the role of the technical director. In my opinion and experience, the modern technical director cannot hide behind the drafting table or isolate in an office overlooking a scene shop anymore. Participation in the artistic process is crucial. The technical director must have a willingness to be invested in the fleeting moment that is a theatrical production. The temporary nature of the theatre calls for a greater initial investment in the art. The art of the process is as important as the art of the product. If the collaborators in the production process are not invested in and inspired by their own contributions, the quality of the final product of the collaboration is diminished.

In the contemporary American regional theatre, it is not uncommon for designers to only be contracted in for individual productions. Even a 'resident' designer may not actually be on-site in a regular staff position. I have worked with theatre companies that list a specific individual as their 'resident' designer yet that person lives and works hundreds of miles away. In

those cases, the 'resident' title referred more to a right of first refusal on designs and served as a general artistic advisory role. It is far more common for the technical director to be a full-time staff member of a theatre company than it is the scenic designer. In the last six years, in addition to a handful of smaller companies, four mid-sized regional theatre companies have employed me as either technical director or production manager. In each of these scenarios, the scenic designer usually arrived on-site sometime in the week before the start of technical rehearsals. Prior to that, due in part to budgetary limitations and the advent of this digital age, all meetings and communications were limited to the computer and the phone. Because of this long-distance design process, the technical director has to be willing and able to serve as the scenic designer's surrogate eyes when the designer is not on-site.

As technical director, I am not the substitute scenic designer but I have to be able to understand and speak the language of the scenic designer in order to effectively communicate the details of what I see happening during the production process. I am a strong advocate for not compromising the artistic integrity of the designer's work. It is not my job to make design choices on behalf of the scenic designer. It is my responsibility to honor and support the scenic designer's designs with my own art. The scenic designer and I each have our areas of expertise and responsibility in our art and design processes. Though it is sometimes difficult to do, a mutual respect and trust must be built between the technical director and the designer. In my experience, the best way to achieve the necessary trust has been by clear communication. There are a number of scenic designers that I have worked with repeatedly over the years. Through multiple collaborations, we have established an understanding and trust. It is not always perfect, there are times I curse them and, likewise, I am sure there are times they are cursing me. But, the

important thing is that while we may quarrel like siblings at times, we have built a mutual respect for each other's art. There is an understanding that we are making this 'theatre art' together.

It is always more of a challenge to start the production process with a previously unknown design team member, especially in this modern world of the long-distance design process. How does one collaborate effectively with the disembodied voice on the phone or the floating head on the video conference call? How do we restore and maintain the human element if all the humans are not present in the room? Communication and finding a way to trust in each other's artistic abilities and eye are the answer. I have worked in more than one scene shop that had an 'us versus them' mentality between the shop crew and the design team. This attitude is poison to the production process. As technical director, it is my responsibility to work with the scenic designer and not against him. Instead of the first answer to a new challenge being 'No,' I need to begin a discussion of how or why can we meet the current challenge. If I as a technical director show respect for the scenic designer's work and a willingness to think outside the box, I am much more likely to get the same treatment in return. If I respect the designer as an artist, I am far more likely get respect as an artist as well. Not always ... but the chances are much greater if I try.

### Analog World Versus the Digital World

Nothing is now done directly by hand; all is ruled by calculated contrivance...the living artisan is driven from his workshop (Sommer 6). - Thomas Carlyle, 1829

As I discussed earlier, a major impetus for the Arts and Crafts movement was society's shift towards mechanization and a perceived dehumanization in the manufacturing process



created by the Industrial Revolution. In more recent history, our society entered a ‘digital’ revolution. Does the use of computer-aided drafting, video as scenery, printing backdrops instead of painting them, and using a 3-D printer to build a scenic model diminish the quality and artistic value of the finished set? Does losing the human element make us lose touch with the art? While I am certainly an advocate for using programs such as Vectorworks as a means of saving time, we are fast losing knowledge of and appreciation for some of the ‘technical’ arts. When we rely on the machine to do our math and solve our problems, we are taking some of the human quality out of the process. Theatre is human so we need to continue to teach the humans how to create and problem solve. For me, when I sit down at a drafting table and draw each line by hand, I am making myself part of the art. The size and shape of each piece of wood or steel or foam is thought out in my mind and experienced with my hand. I am becoming part of the scenery and it is becoming part of me. I am invested in the process. The new challenge faced by the technical director is discovering how to not lose the human element in the art as our field becomes more and more entrenched in this ‘time is money’ digital age.

I have only used Vectorworks for the last two years. While it has many great uses, it takes some of the thinking out of the process. It is too easy to cut and paste a designer’s elevations onto a new plate and fill in the blanks with no real thought or connection. This creates an irresponsible, ‘built as drawn’ philosophy. This process diminishes and dehumanizes the technical director’s artistic process. In contrast, physically holding a designer’s drawings, measuring, calculating, and creating a new set of drawings by hand is magical. I become connected to and responsible for and with the art. I am not advocating for the dismissal of CAD or Vectorworks in theatre but I am most certainly an advocate for teaching hand drafting for

technical directors before teaching computer aided drafting. I believe in feeling the art, being able to use your mind, and understanding the process before taking the shortcuts. If I can teach a student or intern to feel, respect, and appreciate the art early in their education and career, perhaps the respect and skill learned will not be lost as they move on to the fast paced commercial world where speed frequently trumps quality.

There is a unique dialogue between the scenic designer and technical director during the process of translation from design plates to working drawings to realized scenery. Some is spoken. Some is not. Some is just a transfer through drawings and interpretation. Back in the day (yup, that makes me sound much older than I feel), I would receive design plates in the mail. Often, they were pencil or pen originals. Holding a designer's original drafting in my hand, gave me a greater feeling of respect for the art. This was their art and I was entrusted with it. These were drawings done by hand with a pencil on the very page I was holding. These were not drawn with a keyboard, sent via email, and printed on a piece of paper that the designer never saw or touched. The responsibility that comes with holding the art of another with your own hands instills a sense of reverence that is often missing from this electronic world.

If I have respect for the art of the designer, I will want to pass that respectful feeling down the line. I want to care for his art while I create my art. I want to be part of the artistic journey not just a stop on the assembly line. I want my crews to share that same journey and excitement. I want each and every member of the production team to be invested in the art. I want each carpenter, painter, props artisan, etc. to have some sense of ownership and pride in the process and production.

How do we capture the magic now in the age of computers? What do we have to do to keep the human element in the production process? I cannot even count how many times I was asked questions similar to the following over the last two summers: What's this measurement? What's this angle? Can you tell me how long this line is? If I did not provide every little bitty measurement on a drawing for my crew, there was an uproar of dismay and confusion. The crew was provided with scale drawings with notes and all major measurements included. I am perfectly willing to admit that I do make mistakes in drafting just like everyone else, but most of these questions had nothing to do with mistakes. These questions and actions (or lack thereof) were about ease, laziness, and lack of interest in the process. These were not inspired artists wanting to learn, experience and explore. These were little robots who could only do what they were explicitly instructed to do. Why would you do any of the math if you have a computer program? I say doing some of the math helps me better understand how and why the unit is being built the way it is. If I am forced to think about what I am working on, I am more invested. I want the to create a high quality final product. The more I respect the project and the product the more I allow myself to become responsible to and for the art. It is this passion and respect that I want to share with my fellow scenic team members. I do not want to help create little machines. I want to help mold artists. In addition to having skill, artists need to think and feel.

### Education and Training

Collaboration is a fascinating thing. Nobody talks about it as a separate discipline, but it's the best thing for a young person to learn. It's like many gifts put together. As a group you can come up with something that no one of you could have thought of (Viagas 203).

- Scenic designer Robert Wagner

In this document, I have stated that as a technical director, I need to embrace the artist within. Based on my personal experience, I believe that this is, in fact, crucial to my future success in the field of technical direction. But where do we learn the art of collaboration? How do we become artists? It has been many years since I completed my undergraduate degree in theatre. But I still recall details of many of my theatre related classes. What I do not remember is a specific classroom experience that taught me about the art of collaboration. Is it even possible to teach or learn collaboration in a classroom environment? Or, is it something that we only learn through practice?

My time in graduate school has certainly given me a greater appreciation for the classroom along with a growing desire to teach at the university level. But I would be doing future students and myself a disservice if I did not push them toward practical experience in the professional world as a balance to the classroom. There are often opportunities to work on productions in the educational environment, but educational theatre is much like the classroom. While it serves a multitude of positive purposes, it also creates a sense of security and complacency that can be dangerous in the 'real' world. In the educational world, there is often someone watching or supervising. There are professors and advisors that form a safety net of sorts if a mistake is made. They may let us fall but they do not often let us fail. The rules and expected collaboration

etiquette are often pre-established in an educational setting. These are not bad things but they are ‘safe’ things. The professional world allows us to fail. There is not always someone to guide us. We learn by doing. We learn by trial and error. We learn to adapt. We learn to communicate. Most importantly, we learn to collaborate.

I am a product of my experiences, both educational and practical. While I value the classroom as a means of teaching commonly accepted production techniques, a broad view of general theatre practices, theatre history and literature; I cannot put enough emphasis on the importance of practical experience. As an undergraduate student, I was not required to complete an internship as part of my degree. However, we were strongly encouraged to attend conferences such as the Southeastern Theatre Conference in order to interview and apply for summer stock positions. I was fortunate enough to find theatrical employment every summer of my undergraduate career. I was also able to arrange an internship during the spring semester of my junior year. As a student of the theatre, these summer experiences were invaluable. For me, the classroom inspired interest in the art and taught me to understand the terminology, but the practical, professional experience taught me to be an artist. Every production I have worked on in my career has had and continues to have an effect on my growth as a collaborative artist. My formal education combined with my professional experiences has molded me into the collaborative artist I am today.

I will now introduce a few examples from my professional experiences that taught me how to be a better collaborative artist. In the summer of 2007, I worked as production coordinator on a production of the musical *Nine* at Seaside Music Theatre in Daytona Beach, FL. My role was an odd position that landed somewhere between technical director and production manager. To

this day, I see that production as the pinnacle of collaboration thus far in my career. More members of the production team in that company were fully involved in and committed to that production than I have ever seen before or since. There was palpable pride in the work the shop produced. The designers and the director were able to infuse such a sense of passion in their art that it became contagious and ran rampant through the production staff. The same crewmembers that seemed so disconnected and uncaring on other productions in the same season were deeply invested in the artistic process. Opening night was a joy because so many people wanted to be part of it. It was one of those nights that I could say, “This is why I do theatre.” As a collaborative group we presented the audience with the gift of ourselves in our art. We put ourselves onstage in every aspect of that performance. There was a palpable artistic energy and a visible level of quality in the work of every production department. I try to feel that with all shows but sometimes it falls flat for me.

My next example is from this past summer. The season consisted of two musicals and the two collaborative processes could not have felt more different. To me, the *Hairspray* production process felt much more inclusive and artistically complete. It seemed like most participants, from performers to designers to crew, were fully invested in the project. Even though it immediately followed *Hairspray* process and energy, the *Little Shop of Horrors* process did not create the same result. The crew was the same. The designers were the same. The director was the same. There was a new cast but there were even some repeats from *Hairspray* there as well. So what was different? Specifically, what did I do differently as the technical director? I separated myself from the process more because I was building puppets in every semi-free moment I had. By the time we got to load-in the show, the crew had been physically separated from *Little Shop of*

*Horrors* because they did a significant portion of the build prior to the *Hairspray* load-in. Then, they were forced to bounce between the remaining *Little Shop of Horrors* build and the *Hairspray* load in, tech, and show run. Did they lose touch with *Little Shop*? Did they lose touch with that emotional connection that makes you care and want to be a part of? I need to reflect on what my shortcomings were in the *Little Shop of Horrors* process in order to learn from them and try to avoid the same mistakes in the future. When we separate ourselves from the process and stop short of the end goal we have failed as theatre artists.

These production experiences combined with many others from my career served to teach me important lessons about how to be a collaborative artist especially within the confines of the scene shop. What is my responsibility to my crew? How do I collaborate with them artistically? The technical production process often starts in the scene shop, which is one of the primary domains of the technical director. As technical director, it is one of my responsibilities to ‘set the tone’ for the scene shop. If I do not inspire and encourage my crews and show them respect as artists, they are less likely to be interested in being part of the overall creative process. If I fail in this part of my job, I run the risk of having a shop full of workers who only want to look at and their one little section of the assembly line. Once the ‘part’ that the carpenter has been instructed to work on passes by, the job is done. The carpenter is less likely to care what happens next in the production process. The perception of ‘done’ is what becomes important. But, is done good? Not necessarily. For example, if the carpentry crew does not have pride in their work and do not feel invested as artists in the overall production they may not care if their scenery is done well. They may quit short of the goal. And if these same carpenters pass the questionably ‘done’ scenery onto the paint crew, animosity might begin to grow between the two crews. When crews

stop working with and for each other and respecting each other's work, the collaboration begins to crumble. Again, these are the things that I did not learn in the classroom. I want to teach future theatre artists. I go back and forth on where I would be of the greatest service. Is the classroom or the scene shop the best place to train the technical director to embrace his art.

So, as for the future technical directors, should we be training artists or engineers? The answer is not black and white. As technical director, I need qualities of both. How is the proper balance discovered? Just like the definition of art itself, the answer is subjective. What works for some will not work the same for others. For me personally, the scales tip towards training artists. If I am trained to be a conscientious artist who is both physically and emotionally invested in the artistic process, I will inherently have the willingness and desire to learn and explore the technical and engineering aspects of the job. This can work both for and against me depending on who my fellow collaborators are. Perhaps the ideal educational situation would consist of equal parts classroom and equal parts professional experience. I say it is possible to learn the practical technical elements and the art in either the classroom or the scene shop but the combination of both will create the more effective, collaborative artist.



## CHAPTER FIVE: PRACTICING THE ART

The highest reward for a person's toil is not what they get for it, but what they become by it.

- John Ruskin

### Less Ego, More Collaboration

How do I do what I do? I am egotistical but I am not an egomaniac. I believe that I need to exude a certain level confidence in order to be a successful manager. I am good at being a technical director. But if you ask me why, it is sometimes hard to put into words. I like to work alone yet I am inspired by collaboration. I am not a 'know it all' nor do I pretend to be. I have no desire nor do I feel a need to become a master of every conceivable technical element in the theatre. There may have been a time that I thought this was necessary but fortunately I outgrew that foolish notion. It is not only impossible but an irresponsible thing to try to do. I have specific areas of expertise, which are combined with a broad and basic knowledge and respect for all other production elements. While I need to be willing to accept and even embrace my limitations, I still need to be able to figure out a way to get the job done well. How can I do the job properly and effectively if I have not mastered every aspect?

I have to hire smart people. I have to have the willingness and the humility to hire people who are smarter than me especially in the areas where I have the least amount of knowledge and skill. It is sometimes easy to fall into the trap of hiring less skilled employees because human ego has difficulty handling perceived competition. When I allow myself to fall victim to this psychological trap, I limit myself as an artist. I paint with people. For me, this is one of the most

exciting elements of the job. There is a thrill in thinking of your crews as part of your artistic medium. I am incorporating other artists and their skills into my own art. There is a mental game to play. Who will work better with whom? My concern is not limited to who gets along with whom but whose skill sets will compliment those of another and inspire a high quality artistic collaboration? I have to watch, look and listen in order to deduce which individual should be working on each project and who should be teamed up with whom.

When I, as technical director, have my first sit down meeting with the scene shop staff in order to review the design plates and working drawings, I watch to see who displays an emotional attachment to each of the various units. I do not believe "damn that's cool and will look really good in my portfolio" is a valid emotional response to a scenic element. It may be true that a project may be 'cool' but it does not necessarily make me think the project is right for that particular carpenter. Cool things can indeed be fun to build but a carpenter should be able to tell me why it is 'cool'. What makes 'cool' special? Will a carpenter do better quality work on a 'cool' project than a more 'boring' project like stock flats or 4x8 platforms? Why might a carpenter think one unit of scenery is more important than the other? Why should the things that may be potentially used season after season not be given the same care and respect in the build process? If I were forced to choose between the two, I would probably give the greater effort to the stock pieces. These units can become the backbone of a shop especially when trying to work within the parameters of budget and time. Often they are the pieces that physically hold the rest of the scenery in place. They form the structure and shoulder the weight. During the design of a build, stock scenery can become an important tool and artistic medium for the technical director. So why would these units be less important on build day? They should be more important as they

are what we leave behind. Little physical evidence remains after a production has closed. The stock is the history. This is part of the past magic. The large spinning gazebo with built in pyrotechnics may have been really cool to see and build but we do not often save these things as they eat too much storage space and tend to not be needed in many other productions.

My portfolio and the portfolios of many theatrical carpenters are full of images of magical, lovingly built scenic units that once existed but will never be seen again after the show has closed. More times than I can count, I have hauled beautifully constructed and unique pieces of scenery straight to the dumpster when a performance closed. But in the scene shops, trap rooms, and storage facilities of countless theatres, there are flats and platforms that were hurriedly constructed with no excitement or passion yet there they sit, carefully preserved for future use time and time again. I am forced to ask the same tired series of questions each time: "Who built these?" "Why do these platforms never line up right?" What is my legacy if I am directly or even indirectly responsible for the creation poor quality stock scenery? My legacy becomes shoddy construction and breeds resentment from my peers. Each new carpenter, technician, and actor that trips on the same rough spot or has to try to bolt together two simple, stock platforms and ends up needing four strong guys, a ratchet strap, three pipe clamps, a really big hammer and hours of cursing things or says "whoever built this must have been an idiot." It is my responsibility to inspire my crews to take pride in their work and treat each scenic element with the same reverence and artistic inspiration despite how menial the task or scenic unit may appear. I communicate, think, understand, discuss, execute, continue communication and finesse every element until the show opens. Quality is a priority and a constant. All parts are equal in the collaboration.

A scene shop should be aware of the entire process. If carpenters only ever see one small page of working drawings at a time, how can they visualize the beauty of what they are a part of? The difference between handing a carpenter drawings of single flat after single flat after single flat not only seems incredibly boring but it keeps that carpenter from knowing what they are working towards. It is my responsibility as technical director to insure that each and every member of my crew has all the information and inspiration they need to be an active participant in the collaborative process. Every scene shop crewmember should have a firm grasp on what the overall goals of the shop are. How can a carpenter be expected to be part of the process if that carpenter does not know where the process is going? If the carpenter sees how the seemingly countless flats fit together in a ground plan, elevation, or model, he might not so willingly dismiss them as an irrelevant part of the art. To achieve this goal, I think it is important to share everything I know about the set with the crew. I like to start a show by going over the design plates page by page with the carpenters. If there is a model available, I like to make sure they see it before they begin to build. When I assign a build project to a carpenter, I show them the design plate that corresponds to my working drawing. Not only does it give the carpenter a better idea of what we are trying to achieve, it opens a dialogue between that carpenter and myself. The carpenter can ask questions, make comments and suggest alternative solutions if they see a need. This is where my collaboration with the carpenter really comes into play. I have to be just as willing to listen to and communicate with them as I do with the designers. I also need to be very aware of the idea that I am modeling collaboration. The crews that I supervise are observing me as I collaborate with the designers and other production departments.

They learn from observing me just like I learn from observing them. The need for collaboration works in both directions.

As artists of the scene shop, we often help achieve the goals of the designer and director's visions by sculpting these visions in the materials we know better. "The artist studies his materials and methods in order to gain the greatest possible control over his manipulations, so that he may bring out the best characteristics of his chosen technique and express of convey his intentions properly" (Mayer v). The arrangement of the flats is an art unto itself. Sure, the designer establishes parameters that we must work within. But inside these parameters, I have plenty of leeway to let my art speak. Who makes what unit? What materials will be used? What will the build process be? What edges do we see? How do we secure the units? Do we make a puzzle out of stock units? How do we frame it? How do we finish it? Do we put joint compound on seams? Do we sand? Do we have clean edges and seams? These are the things that show we care. These are the things that allow me to embrace my imagination. These are some of the many things that make us collaborative theatre makers and artists. We have to be conscientious about our part and know where the unit is going next. When a piece of scenery leaves the scene shop floor, whose hands will it go to next? What is the next step in the artistic journey? Part of being a conscientious and collaborative artist is being aware of what is happening before and after the art passes through our hands.

The next two sections of this chapter will delve specifically into my experiences as a technical director over the last two summers. I have included my complete journals from both summer seasons in appendices A and B of this document. I have chosen to highlight the particular aspects of each summer here that best reflect my hands-on reintroduction to the field

of technical direction. The first section deals with the summer of 2012. In this section I focus more on my early prep work and the beginning of the season. The majority of my biggest lessons learned happened early on in the process. The 2012 season reminded how to establish collaborative relationships with the entire production team. My experiences in the first few days in Potsdam reminded me why I had to keep an artistic eye on the production process. The final section of this chapter discusses the summer of 2013. In contrast to 2012, the 2013 taught me lessons on art in collaboration in a completely different way. Most of my lessons learned came with hindsight or nearer to the end of the season. Did these two summer seasons help me to grow as an artist? The answer is a resounding yes. Together, these experiences have served as a major impetus for many of the topics, questions and suggested answers that have been explored thus far in this document.

### Summer 2012

The summer of 2012 was my first summer as technical director with the Community Performance Series at SUNY Potsdam. This summer left an impression on me. I learned a great deal about the art of technical direction and gained a better understanding of my own artistic processes and why they work so well for me. As mentioned in the introduction, this production of *Beauty and the Beast* was my first real large-scale foray back into the world of technical direction. Since my full-time return to the theatre in 2006, I dabbled in technical direction here and there on smaller productions but my main focus was production management. Though I was comfortable with my carpentry and management skills and I was beginning to embrace my artistic side more than ever before, I did not claim to be a technical director anymore.

When the production coordinator for CPS first called to offer me the technical director position, I was a bit hesitant due to multiple factors. First, I was familiar with the musical and I was aware that it could be a very large and technically challenging production. And while I had plenty of experience as a technical director on large-scale musicals, it had been many years since the last one so I naturally had a bit of fear. Second, the job offer came out of the blue. I did not apply for it. People I had worked with in the past recommended me for the job. Apparently three different people had recommended me for the same job without my knowing a thing about it. Again, this scared me a bit. People I had great respect for were putting their names on the line for me. The recommendations coupled with my fears about not having done this kind of work in such a long time put me on edge. I was worried about living up to the expectations of those who recommended me. Third, I was older and out of shape. I had done many seasons of summer stock in my late teens and my twenties. They were long, hard days and I loved it but could I still keep up now that I was in my forties? And finally, could I justify taking a job with such a low salary? Was the experience going to be worth the sacrifice? Once I realized that I could combine this potential return to summer stock and technical direction with my need to complete an internship for my degree, the deal was done. The money factor was far less important to me than the completion of my graduate program requirements. I looked at it as an adventure. I was a student and as a student, I was willing to take the leap of faith. If I failed, I would learn from it.

I began to participate in design and production meetings via phone calls. As it turns out, there were a few familiar people on the production team. I worked with the lighting designer and the director on past productions with other theatre companies. I was familiar with the scenic

designer's work through other colleagues, but this was my first time collaborating with her. The designer and I had a few separate phone conversations early on as well. We were both new to this theatre facility and company. That allowed us to form a bit of camaraderie as we tried to figure out the puzzle of the Community Performance Series' facilities, personalities and processes.

The Community Performance Series is a producing organization that is housed on the campus of the State University of New York at Potsdam. The scene shop used by CPS for summer productions is part of the department of theatre but the performance space is part of the Crane School of Music. The two facilities are on opposite sides of the campus. CPS had been producing summer musicals as part of their season on and off for a number of years. The performers and the production staff were locals. It was quite literally community theatre. The summer of 2012 was a new experiment for CPS. They decided to raise their production quality and hired professionals to work in tandem with the locals. The most significant changes from past seasons were the addition of an outside director, design team, technical director and a limited number of paid performers.

Going into the season, I was not completely aware of how very 'new' this company was. For all intents and purposes, this was season one of a transition from a community theatre to a professional summer theatre company. I knew the company was small. I knew the budgets were low. I just did not realize how small and how low things really were. The year-round staff of CPS is made up of a very small group of incredibly enthusiastic, ambitious and kind individuals. They were all wearing multiple hats. They were fully invested in making the production a success. But, there was a certain newness to this group as well. The production manager was



also the stage manager. He had numerous years of experience as a stage manager but this was the first time as production manager. This was the beginning of the first of the challenges that I would face throughout the summer.

Since, I was feeling a bit insecure about stepping back into technical direction, I wanted to gather as much information and do as much prep work as possible before I set foot in Potsdam. I asked for drawings of the theatre space and various inventories. The drawings provided were a ground plan and a section of the stage. The house was not included in either plate. As it turns out, these were the same drawings provided to the scenic designer. No house in the drawings equals nobody is checking sightlines. I will get into the details of that little speed bump later. Once I received preliminary plans from the scenic designer, I began asking more specific questions. How many stock platforms? What is the state of the rigging hardware inventory? Is the scene shop well equipped with tools? What material suppliers were used both in town and out of town? Some of the answers I received were more helpful than others. I was told the scene shop was stocked with all the 'standard' tools so there should be no problems there. I was told that the theatre department had a substantial stock of rigging hardware. I was told the ground plan and section of the theatre had been updated recently and reflected all obstacles. I was given partial inventories of stock soft goods, platforms and flats. The information was not perfect but it was enough for me to start planning.

An early challenge that presented itself was the size of the scenic budget versus the size of the preliminary scenic design. Based on the information I was provided about available hardware and stock, I was able to determine that we would be approximately \$2500 over the \$4000 set budget if things remained as they were. Through course of many phone conversations

and emails between the scenic designer, production manager and I, we began to formulate a series of solutions to the budget problem without compromising the scenic designer's vision.

The set included a gigantic curved platform unit. In addition to the curved downstage platforms and steps that would need to be custom built, the unit needed the equivalent of twenty-four standard 4 x 8 platforms. The Potsdam theatre department only had a few usable platforms so that was not much help. We began a search of other local high schools, colleges, and producing organizations to see what they might have in stock. This process was complicated by the fact that I was in Florida and had never set foot in or around Potsdam in my life. The production manager and I began to form a decent working relationship without ever having met each other. I had to rely on the production manager to be my eyes and help steer me toward local contacts. We were told that another local university had thirty plus platforms in stock and we could borrow what we needed. That saved a chunk of money.

The next budget hurdle was scrim. The set was designed with three portals. Each portal was approximately twenty feet high and forty feet wide. The headers were four feet high and the legs ranged from six to eight feet wide. The portals were Hollywood style flats faced with lauan. The lauan of all three portals and all the walls of the main castle unit was cut out in a lace-like pattern. All of these openings were to be backed in black scrim. We needed around two thousand square feet of scrim to complete the task. Through research, phone calls and a little bit of luck, we were able to purchase remnant scrim from Syracuse Scenery for ten cents a square foot. The time we might have lost attaching a series of small pieces of scrim versus large sections was worth it if we could keep within the budget. Between the borrowed platforms and the incredibly cheap scrim, the major budget worries seemed to have been conquered.

My next step was to create the working drawings for the set. The real adventure was that this was the first time I ever used Vectorworks to create a set of construction drawings. I had done one small scenic design a month earlier but I also built that show so I really only drafted the set for myself. Since the final designs were not approved until shortly before I was supposed to travel to Potsdam, I did not have much drafting done before I arrived in town. Although I felt I was starting the job less prepared because of this, it ended up being a blessing in disguise since things changed significantly when I arrived in Potsdam.

I arrived in Potsdam late on a Saturday afternoon. I would not have a crew until Tuesday morning. The next day I met the technical director of the theatre department at the scene shop to take a tour. I have to admit; I went in with certain expectations of what the scene shop would be based on my earlier emails, conversations and standard assumptions. Never assume anything. I never seem to remember that when I should. I was in no way prepared for the reality of what I found. The shop was packed. There was no more than a hundred square feet of free floor space and that was not all in one spot. There were stacks of scrap lumber, old scenery, racks of lights and cable, cabinets, mountains of broken items, wrecked bicycles hanging from the ceiling, trash everywhere, dirty paint brushes and half dried out paint cans. The department guy I was meeting was very pleasant and casually told me that he just did not have time to clean things up and he hoped it was not a problem. I was at a loss for words but smiled and nodded and mentally added a few things to my to-do list. As we were not officially in the shop until the next day, there was not much else I could do at that point except go back to the apartment and draft.

On Monday morning I met with the production manager to take care of some paper work and take a tour of the performance space. We did not have full access to the venue until our

load-in but I wanted to take a peak and grab a few measurements to confirm a couple off stage clearances and such. As it turns out, that ‘recent’ ground plan was not so recent. First, there were many large obstacles that were not in the drawings. There was an air-conditioning duct that ran from off stage left to off stage right on the upstage wall. It was only about fourteen feet off the deck and stuck out seven feet from the wall. This was in direct conflict with the sixteen-foot wall sitting on a two-foot high platform that the scene design called for in the same area. In addition, I noticed a few anomalies with the fly rail. The line-set numbers did not seem to match up with what I remembered from the drawings. In addition, after taking a look at the layout of the house, I was growing worried about sightlines. I took a series of notes but all my drawings were at the apartment so I was unable to see how bad things were right away. Later that night I was able to sit down and assess the challenges we had ahead of us.

The line-set schedule provided to us by the school was wrong. And, it was not a ‘little’ wrong. Some lines were up to two feet off from the drawing. Even the overall number of line sets was off by four. Two line sets were actually dead because they were the controls for the side tabs and not attached to a regular batten at all. The electrics were on different lines than stated in the drawings. I informed the production manager that we had some issues and I called both the scenic and lighting designers to give them a heads up. The next day I asked to be let back in the theatre to take accurate measurements of line set and obstacle locations onstage and sightline measurements from the house. Of course, I had to go buy a hundred foot tape measure and a laser level to do accurate house measurements because the theatre department had neither of these things. Many more phone calls, emails, and quick drawings followed. The designers and I worked to solve the problems the best we could. I had become their eyes in Potsdam. I think

these early challenges helped to bond us even further as a team. While there was certainly some cursing and frustration from all involved, we really just wanted to solve the problem. And to do that the scenic designer, lighting designer, and myself worked together. We bounced ideas off of each other and made alterations and corrections until we created/found solutions that did the least amount of harm to either design. The scenic designer changed the overall dimensions of the main castle walls and shifted the main platform downstage a couple feet. These changes solved all the problems related to backstage obstacles and line set measurements. As we learned a little later in the process, they improved but did not solve the sightline issues.

It surprised me how much I enjoyed the challenges of what was happening. Even more, I was encouraged by my ability to help solve them. Some of the hesitations and fears I arrived with in Potsdam were beginning to disappear. And, they were not disappearing because I was an engineering marvel or a brilliant problem solver; they were disappearing because I was collaborating. I was building a trust with the design team and I was allowing myself to become invested in the artistic process.

My next hurdle was the crew. I had to teach them to be carpenters, hide my frustrations, and try to inspire them to get invested in the process with me. I was told I would have two carpenters and two part-time interns as my scene shop crew. The two carpenters and one of the interns were local college students. The local intern had never worked in a scene shop before and the other was doubling as the sound intern. My two carpenters had never done any technical work outside of school. One considered himself an electrician and not a carpenter and the other was an acting major. So, we did what I knew to do. We talked. We sat down as a group and looked at the design. We discussed some of the obstacles that had come up in the previous few

days. We discussed my preliminary build plan and I tried to figure out what they knew and did not know about building scenery. I let them tell me their thoughts and ideas. Then, we tackled the scene shop. If we were going to be a little family for the next six weeks, we needed to claim our home and get the shop in working order together. Respecting the place we needed to work everyday for the next few weeks was crucial to our success. I wanted the guys to feel ownership over their workplace then we could move on to the set. Start small and work towards the big.

It was not easy the first few days. Here I was, this strange woman who was twenty years older than the entire crew, coming into the shop that they were more familiar with and taking over. Complicating that was the fact that my poor, dear carpenters did not realize they were inexperienced. They had never seen an actual working drawing. They did not realize that a 1x16 might not be exactly sixteen feet long. They did not understand that saying something is 'done' does not make it good or right. They truly had no concept of quality. Oddly, they had no problem taking pride in their bad work. For the most part, these guys were polite, respectful, enthusiastic and quite smart. They were just lacking any practical experience in an organized scene shop that was part of a professional organization. If our collaboration was to work I needed the guys to learn to trust me and my experience and, in turn, I needed to trust them and their potential for success as well.

The carpenters and I were not alone in the scene shop. We also shared space with the paint crew and the props master. All of these individuals were local and had worked with CPS on past productions. The biggest challenge in establishing a relationship with the paint charge and the props master was their lack of understanding about collaboration. Because they had never worked with an outside designer, they did not really understand the process. They were

used to making some fairly major design choices without consultation or conversation with any other team members. Unlike my crew, they were both older than me and rather set in their ways. For them, a scenic design was more of a suggestion than an actual goal. This fact caused me to fall into the role of referee quite often in those first couple weeks. There was a lot of animosity from those two crews towards the scenic designer early in the process. We had to have countless conversations about expectation and collaboration throughout the summer. I had to make sure they were communicating with the designer and myself on a daily basis. I really had to work at establishing my relationship with them. I had to make them trust me so that I could help them understand why they should trust the scenic designer. I was not completely successful in this task. I did end up having a good and respectful working relationship with both of these crew heads but I was never able to completely remove their distrust in the scenic designer. It was progress not perfection.

The budget also continued to rear its ugly head throughout the process. I made a few mistakes. First, I made a few assumptions about prices. I based some of my estimates on what I wrongly assumed were standard prices. As it turned out, Potsdam is literally in the middle of nowhere and prices are higher there. There were a couple of local lumberyards and a Lowes but that was it. The nearest home depot was forty-five minutes away and the nearest big city was in Canada. I had become spoiled by the choices I had in Orlando and was ill prepared for the isolation of Potsdam and its effect on material acquisition. In addition, that answer about rigging hardware that I had been given weeks ago proved to be a very bad answer. One of the first things I did was take inventory of what was available to me in the shop. The rigging hardware was horrifying. It consisted of a huge quantity of pre-cut lengths of 1/16" aircraft cable, a

handful of hanging irons and hardware store bought, not rated for overhead use, made in China turnbuckles and quick links. The design for *Beauty and the Beast* called for some very large, very heavy flying units. There was no way I was going to use any of this garbage to hang this scenery. So I had to play the safety versus budget game. And in my world, safety always wins. We were forced to make a large purchase of rigging hardware and that pushed us well over our budget. Budget aside though, the most disturbing part of this rigging discovery was that this was what my guys had been taught to use at this college.

All of the following things were the medium that I had to use to create my part of the art that summer: the shop was a train wreck with the poorest selection of tools I had ever seen; there was no readily available truck to get materials; the theatre was nothing like the drawings I was sent, we had an inexperienced production manager and crew; there was a lack of collaborative spirit in other crews; the budget was quickly going to hell; Potsdam was in the middle of nowhere and materials were not easy to find. I loved it. It may seem odd, but these are the types of situations I thrive in. For me the art and adventure are in solving the puzzle. And solving the puzzle calls for a willingness to work and collaborate with others, embracing my creativity and that of my crew, and being prepared to constantly change course and adapt. This was my art for the summer of 2012: the art of people and process.

Before going to Potsdam in 2012, my biggest fears and insecurities were related to time that had lapsed and technology changes that had happened since I last served as technical director on a large musical. I was worried about whether or not I would be able to provide all the needed answers. I had a bit of a martyr complex going into the season. In my mind, I was taking on much more responsibility than I needed to. I was making the process more about me than the



art. Once I arrived onsite for the summer, I had to loose the ego. I had to make the production the center of the circle, not myself. Once I remembered to do that, the rest fell into place. It was not always a smooth or easy process through the summer but in the end, despite the challenges, we came together and created a successful production.

### Summer 2013

The summer of 2013 had a few key differences from the previous summer. The season included two musicals, *Hairspray* and *Little Shop of Horrors*, instead of just one. I was familiar with the facilities and their challenges. I was familiar and friendly with the CPS staff. I was aware of the limitations of working in the isolation of Potsdam. The scenic designer and director were new to CPS but I had a previous work history with both of them. I had expressed the need for a skilled assistant technical director and one had been hired. I was being paid considerably more money. And finally, I took on more responsibility by agreeing to design and build the Audrey II plants for *Little Shop of Horrors* in addition to my technical director duties.

I had expected *Little Shop of Horrors* to be the show process that I would enjoy more and feel more inspired to participate in because I saw *Hairspray* as meaningless fluff. But, in fact, it was *Hairspray* that felt more like the complete production and a more pure collaborative process and was therefore the more artistically inspired process. At times, I am curious if it was in part due to my only having one role on that production and was therefore able to focus and invest more. But it was really more than that. It was bigger than just me. It was as if something was missing from *Little Shop of Horrors*. As hokey as it sounds, there was a little magical spark

missing. The connection was not made. If the artists are unable to connect with their own creation, how can the audience be expected to connect to it?

Just like the previous summer, I began participating in both design and production meetings many months prior to arriving in Potsdam. Only this time I had the dual role of technical director and puppet designer. It was my intention to have the puppet construction well under way before I went to Potsdam so I would not have to split my focus as much during the season. Unfortunately, I did not follow through with this plan. Not doing enough pre-summer puppet building was my one of my biggest mistakes of the summer. I was never satisfied with my own personal commitment and investment in the *Little Shop of Horrors* process.

Though I do not consider the season to have been a failure, this summer left me drained both physically and emotionally. The first thing that I readily admit is that I volunteered to do too much given the less than ideal situation that I knew existed in Potsdam. I was being negligent by relying on an ideal situation in order for the summer to work. I convinced myself that I would be able to do more puppet work for *Little Shop* while directing the creation of the scenery for both shows as well. I should have known that my slightly obsessive personality would not allow for that. When I am working on a show (especially summer stock) I have a hard time not being around at all times. I feel the need to come in before all the crews and leave after them.

Countless times this summer, I said “ I’m going to go back to the apartment to work on the puppets” and then I would not leave the shop until everyone else was gone even if it was hours later. Or I would decide that I had to build certain scenic units so that I could be sure they would get done in a timely fashion. Compounding that, I really could not effectively build during the day while the crew was working because there was so many other responsibilities to address

such as supervising, drafting, answering questions, scheduling, coordinating, meeting. This meant I would stay at night or come in on the crew day off and build by myself. I really needed to let go and trust my assistant technical director and crew but it was really hard for me to step away from this group this summer. My ego does not allow me to leave the room sometimes and that can be a big problem.

Another misstep in my collaborative process this summer was not fostering a professional and respectful environment in the scene shop early enough in the season. There was a level of professionalism that was missing from the production crews the first couple weeks. I love to laugh and I love to joke. But, I think the appropriate level of seriousness and professionalism has to be established first and then we add the laid back part to it to make it more fun and bearable. But the casualness and blatant inappropriateness in which new people were introduced to this company this summer was sometimes appalling. I was not completely innocent in this process either. I made my share of occasional snarky or mildly inappropriate comments. I like to think that I choose to time my commentary well but it is a dangerous game to play. When even I am caused to gasp and try to dance to cover someone else's inappropriate comments, we have a problem. And when this commentary is coming from the production manager and other crew chiefs on day one, it really does damage to the season and crew dynamic from the start. I should have stepped in then and there but I did not. I think our early collaborations, especially in the scene shop, paid a price because of it.

I did attempt to start the carpenters and painters off the same way I had done the previous summer. We sat down and examined the entire design packet. We had the design plates for both shows and the paint renderings for *Hairspray* on that first day. There was no model for either

show this season so we were missing one of the visuals that I like to use in that first meeting. I had designed a preliminary build schedule for both shows and we talked through that plan. We discussed quality and speed. The assistant technical director, the two carpenters and my part-timers all seemed quite enthusiastic and committed that first day. Despite the uncomfortable and disrespectful commentary from other departments, I was actually encouraged and excited about the potential for this team and the season.

I did learn quickly that my crew was once again not as qualified as had been advertised but we quickly adapted. How is it that I always end up with actors in the scene shop? It is considerably more challenging to encourage a crew to be invested in the artistic process if they are working in the wrong art. If my carpenter is only dreaming of being onstage, then they are not fully invested in creating the scenery. There was a period of about two weeks where this really became a problem with one particular carpenter. We had to have quite a few frank conversations about why this person applied for the job and what we could do to inspire a commitment to fully participating in the experience. It really took a series of baby steps to encourage understanding of the importance of what we do in the shop and how we work better together. In the end, I think we both grew a little more because of it. My carpenter had a better appreciation for what we do behind the scenes and I learned to have a little more patience with actors in the scene shop.

I tried to place people with assignments that would both fulfill and intrigue them personally while meeting the needs of the production. It was not always perfect and I had more than a few frustrating days but we made do. The assistant technical director was indeed a blessing. I think we made a very good team. Our strengths and weaknesses complimented each

other very well. This relationship was a prime example of how hiring people smarter than you can pay off. Our ability to work together on the production process was one of the highlights of my summer. When collaboration works naturally, it is a beautiful thing.

As mentioned earlier, the *Hairspray* production process felt like more of a complete, artistic, and collaborative process. With the exception of the few personality, paint and career choice hiccups early in the process, the *Hairspray* build was relatively smooth. Due to the limited availability of the scene shop, our *Little Shop of Horrors* build overlapped the tail end of the *Hairspray* build. The goal was to load both shows into the theatre space at one time. *Hairspray* would go on stage and *Little Shop of Horrors* would be stored in various off stage locations. I was so intent on making this process run smoothly, that I took my eye off the puppet build yet again. I kept telling myself “I will have time this weekend” or “I will have plenty of time next week.” Weekdays and weekends came and went and I pattered on puppets late at night but once *Hairspray* was loaded in the space, I was in the high stress “oh my god, I have to get this done” phase of the puppet design/build. There were many repercussions to my procrastination. The obvious one is that the puppets never achieved the quality level or state of completion that I desired. The puppets were completely functional and met the needs of the production but they lacked artistic polish in my opinion. The real harm caused by my last minute puppet frenzy was that I lost touch with the rest of the production. I was not as invested in creating the scenery as I should have been. On some levels, I abandoned my crew. It is odd that I started the season in an obsessive-compulsive work mode regarding the build of scenery and ended the season in a completely opposite fashion. The set for *Little Shop* was completed on time, under budget, and it functioned properly for the production. But, just like my puppets it

lacked that magical polish that comes more from within. The spirit of touch and human concern was missing. Perhaps the audience never even noticed. I did though. And I believe many others felt it too. The biggest difference between *Hairspray* and *Little Shop* was the way we collaborated. The *Hairspray* process was much more cohesive whereas the *Little Shop* process felt fragmented and broken.

Complacency is a dangerous thing in art and collaboration. Fear of the unknown kept me alert in my first season in Potsdam. I felt much more comfortable going in to my second season so I let my guard down. There were more familiar faces and I expected to have a few more experienced folks on the team. I convinced myself that I would have plenty of time to complete the puppets. I had unrealistic expectations of myself and others. To the best of my knowledge, both shows were successful from an audience perspective. But for me, one felt much more like art than the other. Ironically, it was *Hairspray*, the production in which technical direction was my sole responsibility, that felt more like the more satisfying and complete artistic journey to me. I personally felt more connected to my artistic side in the role of technical director than I ever did in the design role.

## CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

The concept of collaboration has fascinated me for years. Experiencing the production process from beginning to end is one of the reasons that I continue to be drawn to technical direction and production management positions. Using my imagination and hands as the tools that will help to transform the scenic elements from the designer's drawings on a page to the fully realized production on the stage has always fulfilled me in a way that was hard for me to explain. I understood and readily accepted that theatre was a collaborative art and process, but I did not realize or accept that perhaps being part of a theatrical process made me an artist. My summer experiences in Potsdam combined with the research for and the writing of this paper have forced me to reflect on and appreciate my role as a collaborative artist in the production process. Even more importantly than that, I have learned to appreciate the artistic contributions of my fellow collaborators.

In more than one section of this document, I have painted the picture of a somewhat utopian theatrical process. While my experiences have taught me that I may never find this perfect utopian place in the theatre, I will not stop striving for it. I have always found a degree of satisfaction in working with less experienced carpenters in the scene shop. As it was proven to me in Potsdam, it is easy for me to get frustrated when I assume that I will have a skilled crew and that does not turn out to be true. But, once I understand the background and skill sets of whom I am working with, I love the challenge of teaching the art of technical theatre and attempting to inspire young technicians to embrace our art of process and construction. The past two summers have served to reinforce my desire to teach the art of collaboration to young technicians. These experiences have also reinforced the notion that as a technical director, I will

never stop bouncing back and forth between being the student and being the teacher. If I stop being a student of my art, I will become a less effective teacher of that art.

For years, especially early in my career, I saw myself as a technician only. I did not claim to be an artist. I viewed the crews I collaborated with and those I managed the same way. We were the machines that produced the art of another. I accepted and even embraced that role. I helped to perpetuate the stereotype that I now wish to shatter. In my mind, I represented the practical part of the production process. What I have discovered since is that if I am not invested in the art, the production process is not nearly as fulfilling. Why would I want to continue to do this job if it had no real meaning? Perhaps this is why it was so easy for me to step away from the theatre for the years that I had. At that point in my career, I did not yet understand the importance of the art. I did not realize that the art was the thing that drives me.

My experience in Potsdam is the story of two very different seasons. One season was about being overly prepared and intensely involved and the other was an experiment in the dangers of complacency and procrastination. I learned valuable lessons about the art of collaboration both years. I was able to acknowledge and explore some of my own weaknesses. Taken together, I believe both summer experiences make me a more conscientious and collaborative artist. I discovered that I do not have to label myself as either a technician or an artist. All of us in the theatre have elements of each. The technical director and the scenic designer each share some of the same artistic and technical attributes of the other.

As technical director, if I am going to treat my crews as fellow collaborators, it is important to communicate with them. How can I make assumptions about speed of the build if I do not share all the information? If I do not share my concerns about progress and quality, how



do I expect things to improve? I do not want to micro manage or judge but I do need to be willing to offer constructive criticism in order to improve the efficiency and quality of work in the shop. I also need to be just as willing to take the same constructive criticism from my own supervisors and from the crew itself. If I want my crew to respect me as a collaborative artist, I have to give them the same respect.

Theatre is a collaborative art. In my opinion, all the participants are theatre artists. Collaboration is not always easy. At times, it even appears to be an insurmountable task. But, with the good leadership, inspiration, communication and communal participation, anything is possible. For me, as a technical director, the art is the collaboration.

## **APPENDIX A: 2012 PROCESS JOURNAL**

6/23/2012:

I arrived in Potsdam today. I was met in a parking lot by the production manager, given a key to my apartment, and left alone to get settled. He seemed like a nice guy. After unpacking my car, I explored the town and discovered just how small it is. There is supposedly a Lowe's somewhere but I didn't see it. This is a tiny town. Finding materials should be an adventure. I am anxious about this adventure I am on. I prepped as much as I could before I got here but I a bit worried that some of my scene shop skill sets are a bit rusty. I still am amazed that I was even willing to accept this job. I surprise even myself sometimes with the occasional leap of faith.

6/24/2012

Today I was more or less left to myself to explore the campus and get settled. I stopped by the scene shop and briefly met with the theatre department's technical director. We are using the theatre department's scene shop but the theatre space we are using belongs to the music/opera department. The scene shop is currently a train wreck. It is a mountain of clutter with zero floor space. I have to say I was rather shocked when the door was opened. I have never seen anything like it in my life. Even more shocking was that nobody I met today seemed to find the state of the shop unusual. I suppose some reorganization will be our first priority when the crew arrives. I also took a quick look at the actual theatre space (Snell) with the production manager. I do believe that there are some significant issues with the ground plan, section and line set schedule. I did not have all my paperwork with me while I was in the space but things seemed a bit off from what I remembered seeing on paper. Once I got back to the apartment, I did confirm that apparently we were all given bad information. I will begin re-measuring and

redrafting tomorrow. I am also working on a calendar and build schedule. Tomorrow is my first day with the crew. I will be honest; I am more than a little nervous about starting this thing off.

6/25/2012

Today was day one with crew. They are an inexperienced lot but they all seem to have pretty good attitudes and that makes up for a lot. The guys had a short day due to lack of information from the scenic designer and questions about the drafting that was provided by school. We cleaned up shop and made room for a lumber order that I had placed before I left Florida. Once the lumber was in the shop, I sent the boys home for the day. I went back to the theatre with the production manager to take official measurements and pictures. Back at the apartment, I redrafted and re-labeled the line-set schedule. Some line-sets were off by as much as two feet. Now I need to have the scenic designer make some changes due to that bad information. Things will not fit in the space as originally planned. Nothing like being the bearer of bad news on the 2<sup>nd</sup> day I am in town. But, we will fix it and move on. I am trying to remain optimistic (at least on the outside). We are still searching for platforms to borrow to save some money on the main deck construction. I thought this problem was addressed already but apparently there is still some visual confirmation to be done. I am continuing to work on calendar and build schedule.

6/26/2012

I sat down with the crew this morning and we went over the information that I have so far from the scenic designer. I am told there is a model somewhere but I have yet to see it. I would like to share it with the crew so they can see what the big picture is on this show. I really want to try and inspire the crew to feel like they are an important part of the production process. It is

going to be a challenge since they know so very little about theatre. There is a weird disconnect between them and art. I have never had a crew that just did not seem to have any concept of general theatre hierarchies or responsibilities. The crew began projecting and cutting lauan for all portals, walls, etc. I estimate that we will need to project patterns on and cutout roughly 80 4x8 sheets of lauan in the next week. Fortunately, I have one of the painter's on my carpentry for the next week. She seems smart and has a firm grasp on how precise the projected units need to be. I expect the boys will become very good friends with the jigsaw in the next few days. I am happy that I brought two jigsaws with me. The shop here only has a really cheap Black and Decker model that barely has power to cut through 1/4 lauan. I met the paint charge and the props master for the first time today. Paint charge is an older fellow who apparently does not actually paint much himself. He just guides the crew (this should be interesting). The props master is a local woman who has done props for CPS for a few years as well as area high schools. She seems nice enough but I predict there may be some issues with her and the scenic designer in the coming days. She has apparently never really worked with a designer. She just gathered what she thought was needed. She seemed surprised when I suggested she might want to send pictures to the designer before making any big purchases. Again...could be interesting. I continued tweaking my master project list.

6/27/2012

Continued projecting and cutting of lauan. I expect this to take a good portion of the week. Again, I am glad I have one of the painters on my team for now. She is young and inexperienced but she seems to understand directions well and grasps the importance of accuracy and quality. She is currently leading a couple the boys on the lauan projection/layout. The other

two guys are just jig sawing away. I also have use of the sound intern for two weeks. Once the painters start painting next week and Joe goes to sound, I will be left with two carpenters and one carpenter intern. I am madly working on creating transparencies for the projections. It seems like this should be a simple task but it is quite complicated when I have no access to a printer at the shop. I am trying to foster a work environment that creates quality work but I am crashing into obstacles at every turn. Fortunately, I brought a printer with me and have it in my apartment. It works but it is a pain in the ass to run back and forth between there and the shop if I need to print a revised transparency. I would bring the printer in to the shop but I need it at night in the apartment as I am drafting working drawings and doing paperwork. I explored two of the local hardware stores and Lowe's today to try and get a feel for what suppliers had in stock. I might be a little scared. I briefly chatted with design professor from the school about rigging and such. I think it was a warning. I need to locate the rigging stock soon and see what I am up against. I have not been able to find this mystery stock yet. There are a series of mysterious locked rooms.

6/28/2012

Project and cut, project and cut... the story of the week. So I was finally given access to the storage room with the rigging stock. It was horrifying. I was told that there was plenty of hardware for rigging. Clearly, they do not really rig here and when they do, it is clearly not safe. According to the theatre technical director, he hasn't used the stuff in over a year. Hope he didn't hang anything heavy when he did. All cables are pre-made lengths of 1/16 aircraft cable. I am going to be hanging some huge pieces of scenery. I would have to use a hundred lines per unit if I used this crap. There were only 2 shackles and they are unrated and made in china. "Not

rated for overhead use” is stamped on all the turnbuckles. This is going to blow the budget out of the water. I informed my superiors and now I need to do some research on what we need and where to get it. I went with the production manager to see the platforms at St Lawrence College that we will be borrowing for the main deck. They are huge and heavy with 2 x 6 frames but they match. They are going to work...but they are going to be damn heavy. It looks like Syracuse Scenery may be the answer to some of my rigging woes. I will finish my research tomorrow. I need to get this all figured out soon and get an order placed. I cannot afford huge shipping costs on top of the added hardware costs. The same company also had the great deal on the scrim remnants so they are already on my good side.

6/29/2012

Damn. Ran out of lauan already. They tore through it with projections. Apparently I misjudged my order or the crew's speed. The production manager borrowed a pickup truck from a car dealership he knows and got some more lauan. I need to pay careful attention to lumber supplies since there is no vehicle readily available for our use. If I am going to consider technical direction a viable option in my future, I need to consider getting a pick-up truck again. Driving a Toyota Camry is not very helpful when I need 4x8 sheet goods. The same truck he borrowed today is apparently what we will be using for load in as well. Loading a large musical across campus in a pickup truck should be fun... or not. At least it has a rack on the back that might help support the longer flats and such. Seeing this truck makes me realize how creative I need to be as I decide how to break apart these units for travel to the theater. Magical technical director design 101... How big is the truck? How big is the door?

6/30/2012

Lesson learned: be careful what you say and whom you say it to. I listened to an individual kind of throw one designer under bus to another designer. It was not cool and caused a bit of a stir. I had one designer texting me wanting to know what was going on while this individual was still on phone with the other designer. This is not an example of effective communication or collaboration. I have made similar mistakes in my past and it never ends well. To me, it seems that one of the designers is not overly acquainted with the design. It really feels like the assistants have been doing this one for her and it is too big for their skill level if she is not watching. I should have studied the actual theater space and the scene-by-scene ground plans earlier. The production manager and I had to measure for sightlines this morning, as they are not indicated on any of the drawings. In order to do this with relative accuracy, I had to buy a one hundred foot tape measure and a laser level. Not so shockingly, the scene shop did not have either of these tools. I suppose I should not be surprised that there is no house drawn in the ground plan and section that were send to the design team. I cannot fathom why the scenic designer did not ask for this information. If I had paid better attention, I would have caught it sooner and asked myself. How was this show designed with complete disregard to sightlines? I see more design changes in my future.

7/1/2012

New month. Crew off. I went in to shop by myself for a few hours today. I decided to finish facing and framing village header so it is done for painters tomorrow. Sadly, one of the boys apparently assumed that the 1x 6 x 16 was really 16 feet long and did not measure. Needless to say, two of three units were rather screwed up. I adapted but it just added more ugly seams. We will have to chat tomorrow about good old measure twice and cut once and the goal



of clean seams and such. Re-doing build schedule this evening because I got us off track from the original when I became concerned about further castle redesign.

7/2/2012

My painter turned projecting master has moved back to paints today. Things got a bit more crowded now that both the carpenters and the painters are sharing the same space. I think they have plenty to paint for a while. Most of this set is one color with a few sprays on top. Blue, blue and more blue. The paint charge and I have formulated a plan for all these cutout pieces. They are going to prime and paint all the sheets of lauan cutouts before we frame the any of them. The vast majority of these eventual flats are going to be backed with scrim. The scrim will be attached directly to the lauan. In many cases, I need the scrim attached before the framing. I have created a big fat jigsaw puzzle but I think it will work. Right now we just need more space. There are eighty plus pieces of lauan to prime and paint and that takes up a lot of floor space. I think I like the paint charge. He is grumpy but it's my kind of grumpy. I am not convinced he really knows what he is doing but I am not convinced I know what I am doing half the time so I who cares...

7/3/2012

Things are moving along today. The curved parts of the main platform and steps are taking shape. It took a little longer than I would have liked to get the shape plotted out but in the end I think it turned out well. The platform itself and the full-stage step that leads up to it is a giant s-shaped curve that runs from stage right to stage left. We are building the curved sections and will add the borrowed platforms to finish the deck. Then the whole unit will get masonite. The platforms we are borrowing are not pretty at all so there is no choice but to masonite the

whole thing. I am finally beginning to have more trust in my crew. I have more or less figured out who knows what and who has an artistic eye and such. I am now able to assign projects better. This process has taken a little longer to figure out than I would have liked but I have not done this in a long time.

7/4/2012

I only made the guys work half day today. It is the Fourth of July so I did not want to be a complete jerk. I don't think we are in bad shape as far as schedule goes. I am now the proud owner of about two hundred tiny keystones if anyone needs some. A note on communication, when you know that you have an inexperienced crew, be sure to communicate clearly. I had assigned one of the carpenters the task of cutting a stack of keystones and corner blocks. He started with corner blocks and did just fine. He then stuck his head in my makeshift office and asked how 'wide' to make the keystones. I said two and one half inches. He said 'ok' and went on his way. A little while later he came back in with this stack of cute little pieces of ¼ ply and wanted to know where he should put them. I asked what they were. Apparently they were keystones. They were two and one half inch by two and one half inch keystones. Hmmm... Note to self: be very clear and listen very carefully. At least I got a laugh out of this one.

7/5/2012

We had to do another lumber run today. We have this 'deal' set up with a local lumber company but its really not working out well in my opinion. I think they are raising the price every time we go and they do not have much of what I need. I would honestly rather go somewhere else at this point. Today was a Lowe's run. Even the Lowe's up here is a bit lacking sometimes but it is more reliable than the other place. Shop life has settled into a decent routine.

My relationship with the boys continues to improve. We are all gaining a bit more respect and trust for each other. Today we worked on framing the two large tree units and the castle door. I had to get one of the guys to re-project a few of the portal #3 lauan sections because of design alterations. Once again the sightline issue has reared its ugly head. We got the last few castle walls projected as well. We had to cut a foot out of the castle unit height because of the sightline problem in combination with the air conditioning duct problem upstage. Juggle, juggle, juggle... that's what I do. I hate to say it but I am actually enjoying this. I am settling back into the job and I am not sure why. All my fears and uptightness have lessened. I still have a bit of hesitancy about load-in but I am not there yet so I will try not to worry. But the rigging of some of these units is weighing heavy on my mind. I have an inexperienced crew and I haven't flown and really large scenery in a long, long time. I need to be prepared and calm.

7/12/2012

We had a production meeting today. The big topics were rope light and load-in. Apparently there are supposed to be miles of rope light in this set. This mysterious rope light is not mentioned anywhere in the scene design plates. I am not a mind reader. So this afternoon the PM and I were scrambling to find and test rope light to see if it would even produce the desired effect. There are still no designers in town so I had to mock a unit up and see how it looked. I took pictures as well but they did not really do the 'light' or lack thereof justice. Rope light cut. Check. I also discovered a discrepancy in the castle staircase. They did not get adjusted when the rest of the castle did so the designer and I had another one of our daily communications to solve that problem. Other than that, we are still framing away. The portal legs will have to wait for scrim and attachment to their frames until we get to the theater. The required scrim

through areas and framing needs make it impossible to get these units to the theatre on a pick-up truck if we build them now.

7/13/2012

We are close to load-in. I am giving the crew tomorrow off. We begin load-in on Sunday. After that I do not expect to be able to give the boys a lot of time off until this bad boy opens. The painters are going to linger in the shop for a couple more days but then we are all kicked out for theatre department summer camps. Any building we still have to do will need to be done in the theatre. Again, I am glad I brought a lot of tools. I am feeling ok about where we are. There is a lot of scrim and frame assembly work to be done but we have five full days from load-in until the start of tech rehearsal. I have created my load-in schedule for the week. The master electrician and I have been planning together to assure that we will not be on top of each other all week. I will probably need to share my crew with him occasionally. He has a couple local high school volunteers but other than that, he is a one-man crew. And he can't set foot into the theatre until Sunday as well. One of our first tasks on Sunday will be getting the meat racks of lights and cable across campus so he can start hanging while the carps and I do truck trips.

7/14/2012

Today was a relatively quiet day in the shop. The painters were in but the carps were off. I was in all day continuing prep for load-in and helping out with some prop build things. Tomorrow is going to be a big day. In addition to moving all of the scenery we have built over to the theatre, we are moving a bunch of lighting equipment and we have to go pick up all those big, heavy platforms from St. Lawrence. It's going to hurt. My goal is to get everything in the

space tomorrow. We will start assembly first thing Monday morning that way electricians can have the stage all day tomorrow to hang and circuit.

7/15/2012

Load-in began. It was a long day of carrying heavy things. We had the pick-up and were able to borrow a second flat bed pickup from the college. We started with the electricians racks. They weighed a ton and there was a drop off at both docks from the truck. If it was up to me we would have unloaded the damn things but the electricians guy wanted to keep everything on the racks so we wasted a lot of time struggling to get them in and out of the truck. It was not the best way to start the day. But after that, things went better. We got everything I wanted to move out of the shop before lunch. Then I split the crew. I left a couple people with to work with electricians and the rest of us took the two trucks and went to get the platforms. Did I mention that the platforms are stored outside in a field? Well, they are. Therefore, not only were they incredibly heavy, but some were covered in mud and/or spiders. Just amazing. Somehow, we managed to get them all in the two trucks and back to the theater. We unloaded them and organized all of our piles in the wings and upstage. We could not do much more without getting in the way of electricians so we called it a day at a relatively normal hour. Electricians is staying late so they will be clear of the deck for us in the morning.

7/16/2012

We got to the theater this morning to find that the onstage electricians were not yet circuited. So we will have to continue to bounce around electricians because I couldn't wait for the stage anymore. It was time to go. We had to share the playground and it wasn't too bad. There were one or two tense moments when I let my impatience show. But we need lights and a set for this

show not just one or the other so I had to back off. I was not being a good collaborator. We started by doing a major soft goods shuffle. We had to move every leg, border, and two full stage blacks. We hung the scrim. We started to rig portal headers and get them in the air. I decided to rig and fly the headers first and then we will add the legs later. The legs are some of the biggest units that needed to be framed in the theatre so they will likely not go up until Wednesday afternoon or Thursday at the earliest. In all honesty, we really do have lots of time. This show does not open until the 31<sup>st</sup> and it's only the 16<sup>th</sup>.

7/17/2012

Well, just when it seems like things are going well, mother nature strikes. Of all things, we had a tornado in Potsdam, New York today. I left the theatre to drive across campus to the scene shop. When I got outside I noticed that the sky was incredibly black in the distance and assumed a thunderstorm was brewing. I got to the shop and the wind was picking up and the weather felt weird. I went inside but it had gotten so dark that I stepped back outside to take a look. I stepped off the dock and looked around the corner of the building. It was windy as hell and I saw a line of garbage cans and other loose items rolling down the road toward me. I went back in the shop and called the guys over at the theatre to give them a heads up. I waited a few minutes and decided to try and head back to the theater, which was stupid. The power had gone out as well. I managed to get out on the road but could not see through the rain. So I turned back to the shop again. I had to wait about another ten minutes until the rain subsided. Once the rain was gone I could see how many trees were down right next to the shop and along the road I had attempted to travel. I managed to weave my way back to the theatre. Everyone was fine. They were all sitting on the loading dock looking at downed trees. There were emergency lights in the

theatre so we decided to finish hanging the one unit we had been working on before we knocked off. After all, there really is only so much you can do without power. As we worked, we began to get reports of damage around town. Unfortunately, we found out that the roof had been blown off one of the carpenter's apartments. Obviously, he left for the day immediately upon hearing that news. We finished our unit and drove over to check on the carpenter. He said he would let us know if he needed help with anything. So, a big group of us decided we would go get dinner. We ended up driving forty minutes out of town to find a place. We laughed and had fun. It had been a surreal adventure. On the way back to Potsdam, there was a bizarre frog incident. The road was covered with frogs. There were literally thousands of frogs. And we had to drive over them. We must have killed hundreds. Pop, pop, pop. It was horrific and hysterically unbelievable at the same time. I was really just waiting for the locusts to appear next. When we got back into town, we decided to try to find our homeless carpenter again. He and his girlfriend we going to temporarily move into company housing and we were going to help them get their stuff out. So to end the day, we trudged all of their belongings down three flights of stairs with only flashlights for light. But we all worked together to help out. That is the beauty of the theatre family. We care about each other even when we have only known each other for a few weeks. What a day. Thank God its over.

7/19/2012

Things are getting back to normal. We have most of the big units in the air. The portal legs are still down as well as a tree. We started the deck today. It went fairly well. My little stud wall plan seems to have worked out. Sometimes I even please myself. Tomorrow we will get masonite on this thing. Of course, there was not enough masonite in the town of Potsdam to

do the job so the PM is driving to pick the rest up forty-five minutes away. And we are stuck using the extra thin stuff. I guess ¼ inch would have been too much of a luxury. I hope we don't have bubble problems. We have to screw it down. No glue since we don't own most of the platforms.

7/29/2012

Today is my birthday. I gave the boys the day off. The actors had the day off as well. We are in good shape. I did a few notes and organized backstage a bit. I hinged the jail cell door and did a little masking work. I was able to spend a little time talking to Julia today. She came in to do a few small things too. I was able to gain some insight into her thoughts and intentions for the design of this show. It was actually quite an enlightening conversation. I may have judged her too harshly at times during this process. I need to look at my part in that. And I need to remember to get all sides of the story before I jump to conclusions and buying into the bullshit of others. I should know better.

7/30/2012

The scenic designer left town today. She was in and out in a week. The boys and I came in this morning and did our last few notes. I released them at lunchtime until show call. I did a bit of gaff tape art to solve a few small masking issues. The last few remnants of scrim were also finished. I had a meeting with the executive director and the lighting designer to discuss future collaborations. These are good people here. They inspire me to want to be a better theatre artist. It is encouraging to find an artistic community that is so welcoming and accepting.

7/31/2012



The show opened. What a relief. We made it. A great pressure is off my shoulders. I still have to run this thing for the next few days but this feels good.

8/1/2012

This was my first day of real rest since I arrived in town. The show opened last night. It was a successful opening. I spent the day focused on prep for school and a bit of quiet reading. I have a show to run tonight. I have a lot to reflect on in regards to this summer. I really could not have asked for a better re-introduction to technical direction. Despite all of the hiccups, this was a great group of people to work with and we had the luxury of time so I could experiment, explore and re-learn along the way.

8/2/2012

Worked on my syllabus for Survey. Ran performance. Everything went fine.

8/3/2012

I created detailed scenic strike plan. I ran the show. There was a bat, yes a bat, in the house after intermission. Eventually, it flew into the pit and the drummer knocked it out of the air with his drumstick. It was then captured and released...oh, the joy of live theatre.

8/4/2012

Final performance was delayed a bit by a fire alarm issue. Apparently the fire system was not properly disabled so the hazer set off the fire alarm just before places. We had to evacuate audience and were delayed by about forty-five minutes as the fire department and campus safety went through their processes. The cast played the hokey pokey in the parking lot in full costume and the patrons fought off a hive full of bees in front of the theatre...again, the joys of live theatre. It certainly keeps it interesting. After the show, we began strike process. We

struck the dressing and prop stuff. For some reason, there are three days of strike built into the schedule. I would love to cut that down if we can but I don't know how that will affect final checks. I need to inquire tomorrow.

8/6/2012

I'm just saying...whoever set this original schedule and built in a 3-day strike plan should be whipped. Talk about dragging it out...good lord this is almost painful. And since its what was in the contracts, nobody seems to want to speed it up. Personally, when I strike a show, I want it stuck. Do it fast, clean and safe. This 'doh dee doh' drag your feet thing is crazy. Even though I have planned the scenic strike to go fast, electrics, sound and paints are in no rush. They even planned time off built into strike. This is just an odd new world to me. I have been able to maintain a relatively positive attitude throughout most of this production process. But this strike plan makes me angry. Deliberate slowness is insane. If I come back next year, this is going to change.

8/8/2012

I drove out of town today. I am going to take a few days to head back south. I will probably be back. I am a glutton for punishment... but the people and the passion for art are inspiring.

## **APPENDIX B: 2013 PROCESS JOURNAL**

May 20, 2013:

I had a phone conversation with the scenic designer today. We went through all the prelims for both *Hairspray* and *Little Shop*. They are both big builds for such a small crew. In addition, we build in less than ideal conditions. But, I remain optimistic at this point. My summers at Seaside have prepped me well for dealing with large-scale musicals. However, going through the drawings, it became clear that certain things were not going to work as drawn. Ken had a few large units drawn that would have needed steel construction in order to achieve the desired look and function. Sadly, we do not have welding capability in the Potsdam scene shop. We discussed alternatives and Ken is going to make changes to the design.

I also addressed some of my budgetary concerns. It is easy to assume that a university theatre department might have certain items in stock. I discovered last summer not to make any such assumptions about the stock at SUNY Potsdam. I would rather assume the worst about their shop and stock at this point so I am not simultaneously shocked and screwed as I was last year when I arrived. The rigging hardware was terrifying and the caster stock was practically useless. While we did, in fact, greatly improve the rigging situation with our *Beauty and the Beast* purchases, the caster situation remains dismal as far as I know. There are numerous rolling units in *Hairspray* and the entire flower shop (16' x 32') tracks upstage/downstage in *Little Shop*. As the necessary caster purchases could indeed eat the entire set budget, Ken and I discussed sources for borrowing, begging and stealing.

Ken and I also chatted a bit about the Audrey puppets. There was a bit of confusion earlier in the process due to the fact that Ken was not made aware of the fact that I was designing the puppets for *Little Shop*. Because of that, there was a short period when we were both

working on ideas unbeknownst to each other. Once we figured it out (do not get me started on apparent need for better production communication...), we discussed each of our ideas. The shape and function of the Audrey's are staying true to my design. But, I am going to adapt my color scheme a bit more in the direction of what Ken suggested because I do believe he is correct in his thoughts about the puppet color popping against the set colors.

May 21, 2013:

Got a text from Amy asking if I was free to talk. Apparently the university is going to shut off power for the full campus for 8 to 10 hours on July 21. There was great concern as this is in the middle of a very tight tech schedule for Hairspray. Amy was looking for alternate dates or other ammunition she could take to a meeting about this issue. I suggested we just do an evening rehearsal and adjust our schedule. The day in question is still two months away. We have time to plan our tech better. I hope I don't want to kick myself in the ass over this positive attitude come July 21<sup>st</sup>... After our lights out discussion, I mentioned my caster concerns to Amy and suggested that CPS begin creating its own stock of materials and hardware if the summer season is going to continue to grow as it has been.

June 6, 2013:

I started my drive north today. I am spending a couple days in South Carolina before I head to New York. It took much longer than I planned to get the truck packed this morning. I tried to remember everything. In addition to my puppet materials, I am bringing curtains and drops as well. And tools, I am bringing lots of tools. After last year, I cannot trust what might be available in the shop. I also know we are going to be in Snell for a longer period of time and we might not have any access to the theatre department's tools at that point. I get so damn

worried about finding the puppet materials I will need in Potsdam as well. In Orlando, I can find most things close by. In Potsdam, I am lucky if I can find the appropriate materials within a three-hour drive. If Lowe's and Wal-Mart don't carry it, you are out of luck.

June 22, 2013:

I left Charleston this morning. Spent my day driving towards Potsdam in a ridiculous looking truck. I feel a bit like I belong on the *Beverly Hillbillies*. I am a bit anxious over the current state of my puppets and all of the new unknowns I am going to face in the scene shop. Last season went ok in the long run and people seemed to think I knew what I was doing. I sincerely hope I can live up to their expectations this year. I do like to worry.

June 23, 2013:

I arrived in Potsdam late this afternoon. I met the company manager and got my key. I am living off campus this year in a sub-let apartment. I was a bit leery of my potential housing situation before I got here. When I walked into the apartment today, I was quite relieved to see the little porch on the back. That porch will make a great puppet building location. I have a lot of work to do this summer outside of my regular shop duties and having a location at 'home' that will allow me to complete some of these tasks without trashing someone else's house is honestly a huge relief. There is also a large covered carport out front so I have somewhere to store all this foam and the giant aluminum frame that came up on the back of my truck. I hope the neighbors won't mind my working late at night on puppets.

June 24, 2013:

The theatre department chair asked to be part of a shop walk-through this morning before we move in to the shop and start work. We had a few scuffles last year over the state of the shop

when the summer camps moved in last year. Last summer, the department seemed to be under the impression that we had walked into a clean and organized space and not a giant pile of trash with zero floor space. I am glad we (the theatre department chair and technical director, production manager, CPS executive director, the assistant technical director and myself) walked through to clarify the state of things on day one this time. The shop is actually in considerably better shape than last year. That is not really saying a lot because last year it was a train wreck. I think there are less working tools now but the space is more open. We discussed the need to build on the Saterlee stage and maybe stick paints up in the black box this year. That way we will have room to build two shows and the painters can start with the two drops, WZZT wall and portal upstairs. Last year this space was used for rehearsal but everyone seems to agree that production needs it more this year. On the down side, the department has left the black box full of risers and chairs so we have to strike them before the painters can set up shop. It's just a way of making it our responsibility to restore them before their summer camps instead of them. It sucks but, in all honesty, it sounds like a game I might play too if I was them.

In addition to the Saterlee walk-through, we took a little field trip over to Snell to see what had potentially changed there and to pick up Scott's tools that were being stored there. Pitt rented some lighting and sound equipment to us. Amy went to pick it up and she also grabbed Scott's tools. He brought a ton of stuff. Between the tools he brought and the tools I have in my truck, I think we may actually be in good shape for the summer. Especially after we are booted out of the shop. I did notice a few new potential issues in the space. I am including a copy of the email I sent to the scenic designer to explain:

“I wandered into the theatre today to see if anything had changed. There are two permanently installed cabinets (sound, lights, etc) in the wing space DSR. There is a third sound cabinet against the far SR wall just before the wall turns back into that US nook area. The DS cabinets may pose a bit of a problem for the living room. The cabinets begin 9'-8" from the proscenium opening and the footprint the cabinets block is about 8'-0" x 5'-0". The 5'-0" measurement is from the proscenium wall moving upstage. In addition, there are other small obstacles (pulleys, misc electric boxes) that block a 2'-0" deep swath along the back of the remaining SR proscenium wall wing space (from proscenium opening to start of cabinets). Does this make sense? I can draw if needed. I am free to talk anytime tomorrow. That is the only big uh-oh that I have noticed on day one.”

Once we were all done touring and exploring, we headed back to Saterlee to set up shop. PM and I began to set up a production office in the green room. After we discussed a basic plan of attack, Scott worked on scene shop cleaning and organizing. He inspected the shop's tool inventory and began to make a list of things we will need in order to get things moving. I asked Pm if he could find a printer that would take 11x17 paper so I could print working drawings. I brought my own printer last year but there just was not room in the truck this time and I do not think it is an unreasonable request. Last year he claimed there was not one available but I fail to believe that. Surely, there is one somewhere on this college campus. A few other production crew members showed up in town this afternoon. They are not actually supposed to start work until the day after tomorrow but they stopped by the shop to drop off more of our borrowed triple swivel casters. They stopped on the way north to grab them. Borrow, beg and steal... It's all part of the job.



June 25, 2013:

Scott, Bill and I started off the day by meeting Amy at Bicknell lumber to buy a few supplies and set up a charge account for the season. Bill ordered some paint and Scott and I grabbed a few shop basics like saw blades and such. Once we got back to the shop, I continued working on my summer build schedule, materials orders and all my day one lists. I inventoried the rigging hardware, estimated what we needed and placed an order with Syracuse Scenery. I was hoping we wouldn't need much after last year's purchases but we were still a bit short so there goes a couple hundred bucks out of the budget. The carps and painters start work tomorrow. Amy found a printer for the production office so we are in pretty good shape there now. Scott continued to clean and shuffle things around the shop.

The most disturbing part of today was listening to an educator say he had given up on teaching. Sad. I walked into the shop while Scott was calibrating the table saw. This individual had been hanging around talking while Scott worked. He said he used to do things like that (the saw maintenance) but didn't bother anymore. He said that he let's the students figure out how to do things themselves because why should he bother teaching them any real skills if they are only going to get a job at some local high school or something. He actually named a school. I have to admit I was so appalled by his comments I had to leave the room. I was speechless. More appalling was that a student was actually in the room for some of that conversation. So this kid hears a professor say he is not teaching him any useful skills. I pray I never reach that point in my teaching career and if I do, I hope someone slaps the heck out of me. I am really bothered by this conversation on many levels.

We also began the great backdrop debate today. The paint charge has apparently not painted too many backdrops in his career. *Hairspray* has two full-stage drops, one full-stage wall, and one huge portal. There was much discussion on how he should begin the drop painting process. Should he starch? Should he have a frame? Should he use paper? Etc... Since we are using the black box as the paint studio, it was decided that we would lay down paper (what kind was a whole different debate). I asked PM to find a couple floor dryers and I told the charge I would build him a couple bridges so he could get air under the drops. The paper should be in tomorrow morning so the painters can start their day by taping it down and stretching the first drop. I have to admit the endless questions and concerns about how to paint a drop from the paint charge have me more than a little nervous.

By the way, where is Sue? I am curious where the props master is? Oh.. she's on vacation. Really the first week and she will be gone all week. And she's in Florida. This seems a bit ironic since I left there a few days ago.

June 26, 2013:

Today was the first day for the carpenters, painters and stage managers. In addition to Scott and myself, there are two carpenter interns, one general production intern and the sound engineer working in the shop this week. The sound guy was here last summer and worked with us in the shop for a couple weeks then as well. He is a bit slow as a carp but he understands quality and that means a lot to me. We started out the day by having a brief meeting with Amy, PM, company management and such. I then had a meeting with just the carps and the painters to discuss general shop etiquette, safety and how we were splitting up spaces, etc. After the painters left to set up the black box, I met with just the carpentry crew. I wanted to get a feel for what

they knew and what they wanted to do in life. Oddly, none of them want to be carpenters. This is a bit disturbing. One wants to be an actor or designer and the other wants to be an actress. Neither seems to have a great deal of experience but they do at least seem very enthusiastic at this point. As a group, we went through the design plates for both shows. I wanted them to all get a good feel for what was coming down the pike. I think it is important for everyone in the process to have an understanding of the big picture. As our series of meetings wrapped up, our first big lumber order arrived. We unloaded, sorted and stored the lumber and then got to work ripping down 1x and completing cut lists.

The first project I assigned was the portal flats. They did manage to get them all framed after lunch. They are not perfect but we will work on that. I had to stay a bit hands off so I could see what they knew how to do. The portal flats are simply a series of 4'-0" x 16'-0" Hollywood style flats. We have to explore language too. Different schools teach different terminology so we all have to get on the same page. What I call a 'standard' flat, many others call a 'Broadway' flat. If we don't learn to speak the same language we are more likely to make mistake or misinterpret drawings and notes. I need to remember to make a consciences effort to explain myself and make sure they understand what I am saying. I need to remember to not make too many assumptions but not micro manage either. Oh the delicate balance...

While the carpenters seemed to get off to a fairly decent start to the season today, we experienced the great drop debacle upstairs in the black box. I have to admit I did not check in with the painters too much today but after all yesterday's questions, I probably should have. Initially, the reports that were trickling downstairs were all good. Paper was down. Floor dryers arrived. Lines were snapped. Drop was stretched and stapled. Base coating was going to happen

before the end of the day. And then it happened... “Hey Tori, can you come upstairs for a minute?” The drop had been base coated, the bridges were in and the dryers turned on. The part that was apparently neglected was tape. Yes, tape. The paper was not actually really taped to the floor or itself. And much to their shock and surprise (insert excessive sarcasm here), when the floor dryers were turned on, the drop didn’t rise up and float above the paper. Instead, the paper and the drop floated above the floor together. And when that happens, they dry together into a nasty mess. Sadly, this little mess wasn’t discovered until things were mostly dry. By the time I was summoned, they had unstapled the drop and flipped in on its face and were trying to peel paper off the back. The charge was terrified I was going to flip out since he didn’t know yet if they had ruined the drop and wasted a ton of time. I wasn’t mad. I just wanted the problem solved. I went and got Hudson sprayers with warm water and scrub brushes. And then I sat down on the drop with the two paint interns and we slowly and methodically removed all the paper while the charge watched. It is not easy for the charge to get down on the floor so he was unable to participate in the paper removal. We were there late and it was a huge test of patience but the paper was removed. This was not a good start. I hope the two paint interns are not completely dejected about the rest of the summer after their rough day one.

June 27, 2013:

Again, we started off the day with a group meeting with both the carpenters and the painters. I want to start each day like this so we know what we are trying to accomplish as a team. Once the painters made their way upstairs, I discussed a few more details about the day’s expectations with the carpenters and everyone went to work. I am continuing to tweak my build schedule and I am drafting working drawings.

Drop debacle day two: So the paper was all removed last night and the drop was left on its face to dry from all the water and such from the paper removal process. The first task of the painters this morning was to flip the drop and re-staple it so they could start cartooning it. Just when I thought the drop problem was behind us, I was again summoned up to the black box. The painters were gridding out the drop and had some discrepancies in measurement. As it turns out, in addition to the paper fiasco of day one, the drop had also not been stretched properly before it was base coated. The top of the drop had apparently been stapled along a straight line but there was no real rhyme or reason to how the other three sides were stapled. They just stretched and stapled where it landed. Needless to say, there is now one fucked up shaped drop lying on the floor upstairs. Another drop is not in the budget money-wise or time-wise so we are going to have to figure out how to make this one work. I see a small black skirt in this drop's future. I really want to punch someone about now... Just saying.

The carps had an ok day today. Scott is working on platforms and the rest of the crew got all the flats framed for the WZZT wall today. There are 22 flats in the unit. It is a big damn wall. These flats will all be covered in muslin tomorrow. The painters are going to be buried in drops for quite awhile but I really want to have this wall and the portal ready for paint as soon as possible so we can stay well ahead of the paint shop. The last thing I want is for the painters to have to wait on us.

June 28, 2013:

I am drafting, drafting, drafting... I really do wonder about Vectorworks at times. While it does seem to make drafting simpler, I feel a separation from my work. I do not feel as intimately attached to what I am drawing. When I am asked questions, I have to refer back to the

drawings more than I used to because I let the computer do some of the work for me. It's a weird experience. As much as I hate math at times, letting the computer do it for me takes some of my personal connection out of the project.

I arrived a couple hours early this morning to try and get a jump on the crew. I like to arrive first and leave last. I become a bit of a workaholic sometimes when doing TD or PM work. I am not sure why. I think part is that I like to be prepared for the day, part is the quiet time and part is probably my ego. We started with our meeting and went to work. Scott is working on the main platform since it has some fairly wicked curves and I am not sure the crew is up to that skill level quite yet. It was my plan to have the rest of them put muslin on the frames they built yesterday.

Muslin debacle Day 1: How long does it take to cover a flat in muslin and how many staples should you use? I am guilty of assuming too much sometimes. Part of what I like about TD work is trying to put the right person with the right job. But I also have certain expectations of basic stagecraft knowledge that I associate with the job title of 'carpenter.' I have to remember not to make such assumptions. If I did not hire them, talk to their references or speak to them prior to day one, I should not assume they have certain skills. My interpretation of 'theatre carpentry skills' might not align with another's definition of the same position. Warm bodies are not always the solution. Since I had four people, working in two teams of two, assigned to covering the flats in muslin, I had hoped they would be done by lunchtime. Oh boy was I wrong. I make too many assumptions about speed. Experience makes you faster and I did not calculate the lack of experience. I assumed that they would cover a flat like I would and in the same amount of time. By lunch, they had only covered 6 of the 22 flats. It wasn't what I wanted but I

was ok. It was only day 3 and they did not have much experience. I figured it would pick up after lunch since they knew what they were doing now. After lunch, it actually seemed to slow down. I think the problem wasn't so much that they didn't know what they were doing but that they didn't fully realize the need for finishing the project that day. Even though they had seen the complete design package, I had not explained the need to stick to the build schedule well enough. I need to work on my clarity in our morning meetings. I tend to have a very relaxed attitude at times and sometimes I think that may give the wrong impression. I have to remember that these kids can't read my mind. I decided to join the crew on stage mid afternoon to motivate and challenge them in a way. It wasn't so much to show off (which I guess I kind of did in the end) but it was to show them what was possible. I grabbed a staple gun, a piece of muslin and a flat and covered in by myself in less than 10 minutes. Then I did another and another. By my third flat, they had all changed their tactics and were picking up speed. The two teams were becoming much more efficient and all flats were covered by the end of the day without working late. I also don't ever want a crew to think I won't come out of the office and pick up a tool.

June 29, 2013:

Day began with morning meeting. Things went ok today. The platform is still growing and the rest of the crew got a good jump on walls for the living room, bedroom, and Har-dee-har wagon. I am still up to my eyes in drafting. *Hairspray* is coming along but I haven't really touched *Little Shop* yet. And the puppets, I really need to get more done on those. I have set up shop at the apartment now but I have not actually done too much work. I am too busy being technical director and don't have time to step away and be puppet builder. I am already regretting that I did not spend a lot more time on these puppets before I came up here this

summer. I have got to figure out how to make at least an hour or two of time each day for the puppets.

June 30, 2013:

Day started a little later for the carps. I came in a couple hours early to get a jump on the day and inspect what we have accomplished thus far. Crew started at noon but still had our regular shop meeting to begin the day. The crew finished framing and facing the Har-dee-har walls, building all the parts of Maybelle's counter, and build the base platforms for the jail bars. Scott is still plugging along on the main platform units.

The *Hairspray* cast arrived today, as did the two master electricians. Apparently we got two for the price of one from the same school. There is also an electric intern so we have made some progress since last year when the electric's 'crew' was one person.

There was a bizarre company meeting at 9:00 pm in a very small, hot common room in one of the dorms. A. I do not understand why you would have a meeting that late in the day when so many people have traveled all day and just want to get settled and those of us who have been here have been working all day already and just want to go home. B. Of all the places on campus, why would someone choose a room with seating for about 6 people when there is a meeting of 30 people? That's one hell of a weird welcome to Potsdam. On top of that, there were a few really odd and somewhat inappropriate introductions by some of the crew. I like to joke around and play just as much as the next guy but I really feel like some lines are being crossed. I need to think about this and figure out how to nip this before it goes to far.



July 1, 2013:

I am trying to figure out when we are going to get the rest of our lumber order. We are getting a great in-kind donation from a local lumberyard but unfortunately they did not have everything we needed in stock. I guess there isn't a huge call for lauan up here in the North Country. We will go through hundreds of sheets this summer and I guess they don't get that up here much. I already had to go get some from Lowe's so we could keep moving on projections and such for the flying units. The problem is that it is not free from Lowe's. The 'free' stuff from Bicknell's still counts against my budget so it might not seem important but the reality is, if I have to go to Lowe's I am using real money that has to come out of CPS's pocket. Unfortunately, I can't wait too much longer for some of this stuff. And with the 4<sup>th</sup> of July coming up I am even more worried about potential deliveries. I am not sure Bicknell's really knows when and if they will get the materials this week.

July 2, 2013:

Well now I am officially building prop furniture. I saw it coming but was hoping I would find a way to avoid it. I have a lot on my plate already with my normal duties and a pack of puppets breathing down my neck. Velma's table was requested in rehearsal yesterday so I built it this morning. I couldn't afford to pull any of my crew off the projects they were working on so I built it. I will end up building more furniture too but the materials are not coming out of my set budget. I am too tight there already. I see three rolling vanities in my future as well. And this little gem came in an email from Amy: Episode Seven (Sorry, I Can't- It's Tech Week): Film Date: July 23rd (2:00-3:00pm) and Episode Nine (Audrey 2: Growing up at CPS): Film Date: July 30th (10:30- 11:30am). Are you serious? On top of everything else, now I have to do

videos? Arghh. That's what I have to say about that. If I wanted to be on camera, I would have been an actor not a technician. Grumble. Grumble. I understand the need for advertising and participating when I can but this stuff just makes me uncomfortable. I will end up worrying about some stupid interview instead of my job.

July 3, 2013:

Velma's table went to rehearsal today. It seems to have worked well. I think I will eventually need to find different casters. I was trying to keep them relatively low profile and all I had in a small size were very low quality casters. I suppose we will see how long they last. I all honesty, I am a little surprised they made it through the day.

July 4, 2013:

It's the Fourth of July. The kids had the day off today. I was asked to stop by rehearsal and meet with the director and SM. They had a few questions/concerns about a few units. I helped interpret a few drawings and we came up with a few ideas/questions for Ken about the dance collage and vanity window locations. Director also asked if we could have a rose petal 'drop.' This is not difficult technology but she wants the petals to fall in the pit instead of onstage. That may pose a problem or two logistically. Problem one is where to drop from and problem two is that there is an orchestra in that pit. We will see. I also agreed to let Donna and a few actors come to the shop tomorrow and give the apartment unit a test drive. I guess we need to get that finished as soon as possible in the morning now that I opened my big fat mouth. All in all it was a fine meeting but it was a little odd. I felt like I was answering questions that should have perhaps been going to the production manager instead of the technical director. Our lack of clear channels of communication and production meetings is muddying up the process. In

addition to my meeting, I went in to the shop for a while but my main goal was to get a little puppet work done. I did make some more progress on the two small guys. I am still re-adjusting the framing for the big puppet. I am trying to find the sweet spot for operating this thing comfortably. It really is a big game of trial and error right now. I am not sure this is the most effective use of my time. I need to make some damn decisions about this puppet and stop changing every three minutes. Time is slipping away.

July 5, 2013:

We had our apartment spinning party on the shop's stage today. It all actually worked out quite nicely. The crew did a good job getting it together in time. I am glad the actors were able to put their hands on it before tech. I know where I need extra support, handles for the Dynamites and such now so all is well.

We had an odd crew twist today as well and I have to admit I am still a little baffled by it all. I guess I am just old and bitter. One of the electricians decided to leave today because of personal issues. While I understand situations like that are not easy or comfortable, I admit my first thought is don't ruin your reputation by being a quitter. The theatre world is too small to quit a job after only one week without good reason. I know...I'm mean. Fortunately, we had two electricians so the other one is taking over. I don't think we will be too screwed in the long run. However, I may lose my ATD for a day or two during *Little Shop* tech since the now missing electrician was supposed to step in to assist the lighting designer while she went to a wedding. But in all honesty, if I still need the ATD to be building at that point in the process, we are screwed anyway...so I think all will be well. I really need to quit worrying about the choices

some kid is making in his life and career and mind my own business and focus on what we need to get done here.

On a side note...why am I up at four o'clock in the morning to get this from the designer? "... It's been a while since we talked about it... but the *Little Shop* counter is in the Har-dee-har shop. We can simplify it if need be. Welcome to my head at 4." (Yup... that's a.m... and I am up too...why oh why?) Fortunately, I did remember that and I even built it and its twin myself already. Go me. Now go to bed, Tori.

July 6, 2013:

After our morning shop meeting I tried to spend some time in the shop building but I always allow myself to get so distracted when I build alongside the crew. I get involved in every other project that is happening and never manage to finish my own project in the time I planned. Sometimes I really want to micro-manage and it kills me not to when I watch the crew work at times. I struggle to find that balance between teaching and dictating. I sometimes also struggle with the fact that it is me who needs to learn and not the carpenter doing the project. I also spent some time behind the desk doing some paperwork. I began putting together my ideal load-in schedule. I need to chat with the ME to make sure my plan works with his. I really want to try and avoid the load-in train wreck from last year when it was a constant battle for stage time.

July 8, 2013:

So I have been here just over two weeks and we had our first official production meeting since I have been here today. I hate that I sound so fussy and judgmental in this journal but I just do not understand why we would not be meeting regularly. And, the meeting itself was a joke. Although she was in town, the director was still only in the meeting via a phone call. The scenic

designer and lighting designer were also on the phone. I really need to remember to explore the influences of technology (phones, face time, digital meetings, etc) on the production process when I get around to writing my thesis. The meeting was weird. The production manager essentially just read from the production calendar and asked the designers if they had any questions or needs. All production department heads were essentially ignored. I have never been in a production meeting that did not go department by department to get updates and discuss any and all issues that are occurring or upcoming.

I worked on my near constant updating of the build schedule. I tinkered with the load-in schedule for *Hairspray*. I am hoping that we can get the *Little Shop* process fully underway in the shop by Thursday at the latest.

July 9, 2013:

One would not think that finding some chain link panels would be so difficult. The really disturbing thing is that they are all over campus on the construction sites but nobody seems to think they have any available. I see stacks sitting around every time I drive through campus. The best are the ones sticking out of dumpsters locked inside the construction areas. It makes me want to steal them. Amy tried to track down other loan sources but has been striking out. We have tried rental places as well but they are 'all out'. Sometimes being in the middle of nowhere can be really detrimental to building a show. Things I have taken for granted for years become huge obstacles up here. And everything and I mean everything costs more. It just seems a huge waste of time and money to build frames and buy chain link when it seems like such a common thing.

July 10, 2013:

I found three out of five needed chain link sections on Craig list. Jared is going to have to drive two hours each way to get them but at least we are finally headed in the right direction.

Oh hey...let's add some more scenery since we are not done with what we have yet... oh yeah we have no money either...Oh wait... I happen to own some curtains...dammit. The lavender sheers seem to have made it into yet another CPS summer production. I hope there is room in the air for them. And I hope they don't need chain in the bottom because I tore that out while having a minor fit last summer.

The great jail bar welding project has begun using the smallest welding studio in the world. Scott has been teaching John to cut steel and weld. He is filthy dirty and sweaty but smiling. It does make me happy when someone gets to learn something new and seems to be enjoying it.

July 11, 2013:

It's been a day about jail bars. I need to get those things into rehearsal soon but things were going painfully slow today. The platforms are casted and ready for bars but they had not appeared yet when I left the shop. Once the frames get done, they need pvc bars added and they need to be bolted to the platforms. I was told frames would be ready first thing in the morning.

When fence sections were picked up today, the guy had more so he threw in two more panels for no extra cost. One issue solved. Now, if we could only get the answers we need from the school on keeping the steps between the house and the stage when they take out the pit cover, I would be the happiest girl on the planet.

July 12, 2013:

ATD had to go back to the doctor today for the odd arm swelling. This is starting to worry me a bit. I sincerely want him to feel better but, the truth is, he is the brains and the muscle of the carpentry crew so I cannot afford to lose him for too long.

On a more positive note, we got the damn jail bars into rehearsal today. It has been a slow process but I am glad John was excited about learning to weld. To be honest, his excitement makes up for my stress. I think it took longer for the others to get the things pvc'ed and bolted on the platforms than needed. It's that kind of stuff that makes me crazy. I am used to crews getting less focused if they are tired but I really don't think these kids have been overworked. I think I am beginning to experience the downside of having a crew made up of people who have no desire to do this for a living. There is no passion or desire to improve and grow. I am a bit baffled on how to deal with this at the moment. Slowly, slowly...with patience.

July 13, 2013:

I spent a good chunk of the day fixing my own mistakes on the giant spray can's door. One really should use the tape measure when building a door for a twelve foot high hairspray can. I tried cutting corners by building directly from the design plate. And now the door is screwy and has an ugly masonite seam that needs to be fixed. When I create working drawings, I am experiencing the build on paper. I see what is happening before it happens in a three dimensional way. When I skip that step, I run the risk of missing something. I know this. I knew this. But I still made the mistake. Live and learn...again. Crew had the day off so I was able to get my work done without a thousand interruptions. Too bad I wasted so much of my

time on my own. I was able to get a few large sections of foam on the big Audrey this evening as well so the day was not a total loss.

July 14, 2013:

Today we started loading *Hairspray* into Snell. The electricians had the stage today so we stuck to the hallway and offstage areas. We took everything over except Maybelle's header, the two buildings, the giant spray can and the finale step. The painter's are still working on Maybelle but they said she would be done tomorrow.

We worked late tonight because we had to get the last two walls and the finale step banged out before we left. The step still needs facing and the walls need trim detail but at least they are much closer than they were earlier today.

July 15, 2013:

Today we began by getting all the softgoods/ masking shifted around. The bad GP's bit us in the ass again. This time it was pipe lengths. There is not a uniform batten length in Snell. In all honesty, I do not really remember this causing a problem last year so it had completely fallen off my radar. Unfortunately, almost every pipe that we needed to hang a leg on was considerably shorter than it needed to be. Some were so short that the desired onstage edge of the leg would not be on the pipe. In addition, there is little to no decent pipe available in stock for safe pipe extensions and even if there were, the extensions cannot be that long due to cable swags and side tabs. I should have paid closer attention to these details when I walked the space a few weeks back. I knew the drawings were incomplete or wrong in so many other places. I should not have missed this. We will do what we can for extensions. I will talk to Ken about shifting things a bit if it won't screw things up. I think the side tabs may end up being the saving



grace for masking in this show as long as we can get assistant stage managers to keep them shut during the run.

July 16, 2013:

Finally, we had another production meeting. But honestly... it might be too little too late. Essentially, the designers if they had anything and then the meeting ended. Thank god the rest of us get along and are willing to talk to each other afterwards because that was a meeting about being talked to and not communicating.

July 17, 2013:

Today was a shocking day. We had a serious rigging issue. The guys were hanging the last two sections of fence and I happened to be on stage and I am not sure why but something just didn't look quite right. Something about the Crosby's just seemed off so I picked up the cable and asked for a nut driver and the nuts were hardly hand tight. I asked who had rigged this point and got blank stares. I explained that it was loose and could have seriously hurt someone. My first reaction was that this has to be an anomaly and maybe someone was distracted but...I decided to check the others on the unit. All loose. Not just a little loose but scary loose. I am in disbelief. I usually remain relatively calm but I let them know that this was beyond dangerous. It was literally deadly. I yelled. I cleared the deck of all other crews. I kicked everyone else out of the theatre. I was horrified and in shock. Partially because I could not believe they didn't know better and partially because I thought I had taught them better and didn't check behind them sooner. I asked Scott if he had checked behind them on the first big unit they did (portal) and he said yes. I wrongly assumed that had continued. I failed there. I remained very angry and very firm as we flew in each and every unit that was in the air (a lot) and we tightened every line.

Countless were loose. It is only by the grace of God that nobody was hurt in the previous two days. I have never seen anything like it in my career. We did fix the problem in a relatively short amount of time and the crew definitely saw the seriousness of the problem. Unfortunately, another department head came into the theatre while we were in this process. He heard I was angry and came to see for himself since I apparently rarely display that emotion in public. He did not seem to grasp the seriousness of the problem. He remained in the theatre for a while half joking, half 'helping'. As we neared the end of tightening things, he went off and essentially screamed at the crew and told them they were stupid and even he with his stage manager background could have done better. He belittled them and called them names. There was not one ounce of constructive criticism in his comments. I finally managed to get him to stop and leave the stage. His ill-timed and poor attempt at 'management' was almost as appalling as the rigging problems themselves. I found out later that one crew member immediately filed a complaint and to ask to be moved because he found the tirade so offensive and inappropriate. I had already handled the situation and we were moving through the solution. It was disgusting. Hours later, at the end of the day, I sat the crew down (all who were present for the whole incident minus the manager) and we discussed the events, SAFETY, our responsibilities and the reactions we all had to the experience. I told them that we failed as a group, myself included...and that we all need to remember this through our careers. I, for one, will remember this day each time I rig something or assign someone else a job to rig something. And thank the good Lord that nobody was hurt today. If I still drank and smoked, tonight would be a good night for a few drinks and a couple packs of cigarettes.

July 18, 2013:

Things are going better with load-in. The safety issue seems to have unified the crew a bit more. There was a design run tonight. I peaked in a few times but was not able to watch the whole show since I am trying to squeeze in a few moments with the puppets whenever possible. I got some work done on them but I honestly am beginning to doubt I will ever be able to live up to my own artistic standards on this show.

July 19, 2013:

Electrics had the stage for a good chunk of the day cueing and such. There was also a quick-change rehearsal in the middle of the day. We were still able to finesse a few of our notes and I was able to get a little puppet time in.

Power on campus is supposed to be shut off in the morning because of some maintenance upgrade on campus. They say it should be back on by afternoon but the whole thing makes me a bit nervous. The truth is I also am looking forward to the outage. It frees me up to work on the Audrey's at the apartment without interruption. If there is no power then I have no worries about not being at the theatre. I will be able to focus on one project without worrying about the other. It's a rather freeing thought at the moment.

July 20, 2013:

This was supposed to be a day of puppets in the morning and a possible tech in the evening with little pressure because the power was going to be out. Instead, the power outage was cancelled because of a storm last night (funny right?) so we all sort of scrambled to work once we got the word that the lights were actually still on. It is good in the sense that we have stage time but bad in the sense that I put off the puppets again. I was really looking forward to

being absolutely unable to work at the theatre and I was rather hoping that the outage would last longer than planned so I could focus on the Audrey's without worrying about *Hairspray*. I have not done a good job of prioritizing my time between the build and load-in of *Hairspray*, the build of *Little Shop* scenery and the puppet build. The two set builds have been mostly on schedule and reasonable but these damn puppets are really throwing a wrench into my sanity. I really feel like I made a big mistake by taking on all these tasks at one time. I should have built these puppets sooner. I know I have said that and thought it a thousand times but I just keep coming back to it in my mind. I need to shake off that haunting feeling and get the job done. I can't allow myself to freeze up because I am wasting my time juggling all the 'what ifs'.

July 21, 2013:

Today was a 10 out of 12. Why is it that that a 10 out of 12 is always much more like a 16 out of 16 in reality? The evening run was first dress. I sat in the back of the house and worked on puppets. I am not getting a ton done but every little bit helps me a bit. *Little Shop* begins rehearsal tomorrow. I am stressed about the puppets because I said the puppets would be available day one a long time ago. At this point, I am hoping to have the small ones in Tuesday and parts of the big guy by Wednesday or Thursday. I am feeling the pressure. Theatre camp also begins tomorrow so we are supposed to be more or less out of the scene shop. A few of us are allowed to go in for the next few days but we have to wear badges at all times and be out of the shop during certain hours. Just another layer added to the circus.

July 22, 2013:

Today was final dress for *Hairspray*. It was also day one of rehearsal for *Little Shop*. So, basically, its here and I am not ready. Thank God they are starting with music for a couple days.

I know the director wants to start banging out blocking with puppets present but I am not quite there. I allowed myself to become so invested in the *Hairspray* process that I really have ignored too much of my puppet responsibilities. Final dress went fine I was working on the plant puppets in the back of the house. There are only a few minor notes to do on this show. I need to get the guys back in the shop tomorrow to focus on the next show and cleanup. We have a very limited window of scene shop time left.

July 23, 2013:

The crew worked for a few hours in the shop today. We are trying to bang out a few last *Little Shop* projects before we are kicked out. *Hairspray* opened. I did not watch the show from the house. I lurked backstage and peaked a few times. There was a momentary sense of relief that one show was up and running but it didn't last long. The puppets are looming and they need a hell of a lot of work.

July 24, 2013:

Today was the last day the crew is allowed in the scene shop because of the upcoming summer camps. I guess we can't be trusted around kids. Actually, I understand there are background checks and such. I will have to sneak into the shop after six at night if I want to use the big stationary tools. Its not the end of the world but it is certainly inconvenient.

I sent the two small Audrey's into rehearsal today. They are unpainted and not completely tricked out but they are functional. I pulled them out after rehearsal and continued work. I spent most of tonight with the upper jaw. I need to get that in the room next. I have bolted and unbolted the harness frame so many times it hurts my head. But I think I am closer to having it right. This is all about trial and error right now.

July 25, 2013:

I did manage to get the upper jaw into rehearsal this morning. I got notes from the operator at the end of the day. I need to move the handle so it is easier for him to balance. I may be doing him a disservice by giving him the top jaw without the bottom jaw. It is helping me to see the movement though. I worked on the bottom jaw foam during the day and then worked on both together this evening when I snagged the upper jaw back after rehearsal.

July 26, 2013:

Met with a group of department heads to discuss a plan of attack for strike and load-in schedule for little shop. The dynamic is weird because we did the meeting without the PM. We have a meeting to schedule load-in and tech for a show and we do not have a PM at the meeting? I did mention to him yesterday that the LD and I were meeting this morning to discuss schedule. I did not specifically invite him but I thought it was just the LD and I making our ideal plan. Instead we have the SM and the big boss too. Apparently the LD had mentioned that we were having a meeting just like I had mentioned it to the PM but she asked details and asked if she could come. Once that happened we had a much more official meeting and the PM should have probably been invited. At the same time, as PM, he should have called a similar meeting before now. It is the day before strike of HS and somebody had to make a move to plan this next week.

July 27, 2013:

Today was a two show day for *Hairspray* followed by strike. We got everything out of the way for the electricians. We did leave the WZZT portal and wall in the air since they do not conflict with any flying units for *Little Shop*. We will strike those at final strike for the season when we have more time. One of the boys from last summer showed up part the way through

strike. Its funny, last summer I complained about the lack of skill in the shop. Now I am occasionally missing that same group. What can I learn from that?

July 28, 2013:

The crew started late in the day today so that the electricians could have the stage. They had to move a couple of the onstage electrics for the next show so the crew did not come in until four. We started to move the flower shop from the rehearsal room/ storage space to the stage. The unit did get castered and bolted together. The carps worked late to get it done and I left to work on the puppets. I still feel weird about leaving them but I really have no choice at this point. I should have been doing this weeks ago instead of catering to my own ego and staying in the shop all the damn time.

July 29, 2013:

Assembled walls, installed windows, began to add final trim detail to the shop. Oh and its my birthday. On a weird and uncomfortable note, I watched form stage as two supervisors had a heated argument. It was hard to miss and I was not the only one who saw it. I guess they didn't realize that every one onstage can see into the office window. It's complicated. How do I end up being the person being vented to about someone being so berated for doing a poor job? We all need to keep our own side of the street clean. I do not like having too much information on a situation that I have no control over. It's an oddly delicate situation. I need to think about all this more. It is getting too reminiscent of the other rather unpleasant past situations. Neither gives me a very warm fuzzy feeling. I just want to work on puppets. They need fabric and paint and pretty things...

July 30, 2013:

Scott is going to pop back into the welding studio tonight to weld handles for the shop unit. It moves relatively easy for something that is so large but we need to be able to be consistent and safe. And steering is important so the handles should make a difference. It's a good thing that nothing is ever really locked in Saterlee. If this were any other place, this place would have been stripped bare by now. Thank god for honesty in Potsdam. The lack of door locking sure makes my life easier at times.

July 31, 2013:

I was building big flower pots in the shop into the wee hours of the morning. I have to go in at night since we have been officially kicked out during the days for camp. It is hard to build without a shop or the appropriate tools. I can do a lot at the theatre and the apartment but the shop saves time since it has most of what I need ready to go in one place.

August 1, 2013:

Little dead people foliage headpieces built during tech/spacing rehearsal. I made a mess in the house but dammit they are done. I just need something to block the bodies. Maybe a clump of leaves and a shawl-ish cover for actor top half? Maybe, maybe? Built the dead people slide after tonight's rehearsal. It was another very late night in the shop for me.

August 2, 2013:

There was another tech rehearsal tonight. We worked the slide into the big plant and it worked fine. I need to make a couple neck adjustments but it's getting there. I am still plugging away at the big Audrey final details. The power outage that was supposed to happen during our Hairspray process was rescheduled for tomorrow. I guess no matter what we have to deal with it



during a tech. Just like last time, I am hoping to get some puppet detail done in the morning at the apartment before the lights come on. It is going to be a morning about leaves for the big plant. I need to produce something for that finale bit when the eaten folks are part of the big plant. My goal is to cut everything I have left into big leaves and get a coat of paint on them before I go in to the theatre.

August 3, 2013:

The power was indeed out this time. The only problem was there were no emergency lights but then it was all back by noonish so it all worked out. I decked out the big plant with back leaves and mouth lining on the loading dock. Built skirt for 'neck' out of scrim and the meshy stuff I got in Orlando. It was sort of a fun process. I sometimes solve problems better under pressure. But then I wonder how good it could have been if I hadn't been frozen for so long with taking the first step. I have a really hard time taking that first little leap of faith artistically. It is one of the reasons I procrastinate. I like having all the answers ahead of time especially when I am making artistic choices. Its weird, I will experiment with build techniques with someone else's designs but I freeze with my own and I am more afraid to experiment.

August 4, 2013:

Today was a dress rehearsal. I am still tweaking finale pieces and fabric. The set is in good shape. It really is down to the puppets. It's a puppet frenzy. I need a new arm for the middle Audrey. It looks like crap.

August 5, 2013:

Tonight was final dress. I need to lighten up on myself with these puppets. I am my own worst critic. The puppeteer has been amazing and he makes the big Audrey come to life.

August 6, 2013:

It's open. I finished up the last couple notes. Nothing major just a few fabricy things. I do not feel like I ever really finished any of the puppets but they work. I am not happy with the fabric on the large plant either in the mouth or on the neck. It is better than it was three days ago. I am not overjoyed with my process on this one but I am glad it is done for now. There is a lot of work to do before these things are rental ready. Zack has done a great job with puppeteering 1 and 3. He really does make the plants look better than they are and I am grateful to him for that. I do not think I am going to watch the show tonight.

August 7, 2013:

Packaged purple sheers and silver screen curtains *Hairspray* for shipping. I decided to leave drop in CPS storage until a future date. It is not rentable in my opinion and I am a bit bitter over that and I just do not know what to do about that yet. So I choose to ignore it for the moment. I am tired. I am ill prepared for school this fall. This summer hurt.

August 8, 2013:

The show is barely open and I spent the day prepping for strike. I did a lot of organizing and sorting of all the damn hardware and lumber. Backstage is still a bit of a train wreck and I want to get it sorted out before final strike. There is no need to wait until the last minute when I have these days to take care of it.

August 9, 2013:

We spent a few hours re-arranging Amy's garage. In an attempt to be a bit more fiscally and environmentally friendly, we are saving a few pieces of scenery. The temporary and wasteful nature of the theatre is horrifying at times. Budgets are tight, materials are scarce and

yet we fill up a dumpster at the end of each show. Waste, waste, waste. It really is shameful. We found dead things. That's always fun. I watched the show again tonight with my friend Guerry. It still kills my soul a bit. This whole show feels a bit unfinished to me. It's not just the plants. People seem to like them and do not seem to see what I see but I am still having a hard time being ok with my 'finished' product. Amy's story from the photo session the other night made me laugh though. As he walked up to the plant to get his picture taken, a kid told his mom "if this thing eats me, its on you." Amazing.

August 10, 2013:

*Little Shop* is closed. Strike lasted until about 2 am. Had one arbor jump its track with a shit ton of weight on it but we got it back in place with no real problem. This fly system really is shitty and installed poorly. If I come back here again (lord help me...) they are going to have to make some serious adjustments and inspections to this system. It is getting scarier and scarier. I'm tired but we are that much closer to done.

August 11, 2013:

*Little Shop* strike continues. We moved a pile of flats to storage in Amy's garage. Sometimes I don't care. The desire to be done overpowers the desire to do it wisely and well. That is dangerous and irresponsible. But, I would rather put it in the dumpster today than load it on a truck and take it across town. Moved puppets back to apt... gathering all my things (at least those that I can find).

August 12, 2013:

*Little Shop* strike is finished. I returned the sawhorses to St. Lawrence and the windows to Bill's house.

August 13, 2014

I packed the truck. I cleaned the apartment. I began getting sick. I started to drive. I had to stop within an hour and take a nap in the truck. I have a horrendous cold. I only made it a few hours before I stopped at hotel. This summer hurt me.

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