Shattering Visual Narratives through Lighting Design: A Reflection of Taylor Mac's The Lily's Revenge

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Shattering Visual Narratives through Lighting Design:
A Reflection of Taylor Mac’s *The Lily’s Revenge*

A Thesis Presented
by
TAMARA K. HARRIS

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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THEATER
Shattering Visual Narratives through Lighting Design:
A Reflection of Taylor Mac’s The Lily’s Revenge

A Thesis Presented

By

TAMARA K. HARRIS

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____________________
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Gina Kauffman, Chair of Department
Department of Theater
DEDICATION

To those who believe in the power of art;
who open their hearts to listen;
and who struggle to create art;
who want to love and be loved.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank Taylor Mac because without judy, we would not have this project. Thank you for creating a work that reminds me of my own humanity and the power art holds. Thank you for teaching me to create my own narrative.

I would like to thank Penny Remsen for all the times I’ve come with questions, for guiding me through the design process and listening to me talk through everything. Thank you for being my advisor. You have shown me my potential and taught me how to use it.

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Thank you Margo Caddell for advising me my first two years at UMass. I have learned so much from you and still think of you through this project.

I would like to thank Jennifer Onopa for coming to me and trusting me to be a collaborator with you on this project. I admire your talents and direction.

I would like to thank The Lily’s Revenge team for all the creativity, tears, and sweat that went into creating the world of this play and for your advice and work that went into realizing this play. Anya, thank you for the beautiful and creative set design; Christina, for your extraordinary costumes; Nat for your exquisite sound design and to the entire team for making this production come to life.

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Many thanks to Erin MacDevitt for being my associate on this project. Thank you for never complaining, always smiling, and doing whatever needs to be done to make this design possible. Thank you for taking a chance and agreeing to go on this epic extravaganza with me. Thank you for all the late hours you have put in with me to experiment and to design this show. Thank you for showing me the beauty of espresso.

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Thank you to the electrics crew for all your hard work and readiness. I couldn’t have done this without you.
ABSTRACT

SHATTERING VISUAL NARRATIVES THROUGH LIGHTING DESIGN: A REFLECTION OF TAYLOR MAC’S THE LILY’S REVENGE

MAY 2018

TAMARA HARRIS, B.F.A. TARLETON STATE UNIVERSITY
M.F.A. UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

Directed by: Professor Penny Remsen

The following thesis will explore and evaluate the lighting design behind Taylor Mac’s *The Lily’s Revenge* produced by the UMass Amherst Department of Theater as part of their 2017-2018 season. It will cover the entire lighting design process from reading the script to producing the world on stage. It will reflect early conversations, the collaboration process, design goals and executions, and the successes and failures reflecting on our art.
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CHAPTER I

SYNOPSIS

*The Lily’s Revenge*¹ is an experience created by Taylor Mac inspired by Noh Theater practices. *The Lily’s Revenge* is a five-part play based on Deity, Ghost Warrior, Love, Living Person, and Demon. The play also incorporates different mediums of storytelling: musical theatre verse, film, toy theatre, dance, installation art, and audience participation. Within each act, the traditional narratives of theatre are broken, bringing the Lily closer to the ultimate wedding and revolution.

*The Lily’s Revenge* begins in a traditional theatre, narrated by Time who warns the audience the play is long and includes institutionalized narratives and oppressed characters. Interrupted by the band, Time is forced in the corner as the flower girls awaken and the Great Longing, the God of Nostalgia manifested into a grand theater curtain, is introduced. Lily, a five-petal flower and audience member, is excited and eager to be a part of the story but is excluded by the Great Longing. Despite the Great Longing’s declaration to not break the fourth wall, Lily takes the stage and joins the flower girls. Great Longing sets the audience up wanting the Bride’s story, reinforcing the idea that wedding stories and love are usually meant for the bride. Lily falls in love with the Bride and is ridiculed by the party and is told flowers and brides are forbidden to marry. Meanwhile, the Great Longing’s malicious attitude towards Time is shown throughout the play and Lily learns that The Great Longing has trapped Dirt, the God of Here and

¹ See appendix 1.
Now, in a factory Farm. The Lily is sent on a journey to become a man to marry her beloved, free Dirt from the Factory Farm, and defeat the Great Longing.
CHAPTER II
THE INSPIRATION/THE GIST

Taylor Mac, a Queer activist and artist wrote the play in response to ‘Proposition 8’, a ballot and a California state constitutional amendment passed in the November 2008 general state elections. The proposition was created by conservatives fighting against gay marriage. It defined marriage as a union between a man and a woman. The proposition set back the court decisions to recognize same-sex marriage. Taylor Mac began The Lily’s Revenge project before the proposition was declared unconstitutional and same-sex marriage laws were passed. Inspired by the uproar and discrimination against the queer community, Mac created the story with the concept of discrimination, nostalgia, and using the aesthetics of nature to inspire the characters.

“Aesthetics are politics. Drag is the story that you’re telling the world…what kind of story are you telling? On stage the drag isn’t a costume but something I’m exposing as myself; it’s what I look like on the inside.”² This quote was taken from a HowlRound interview between P. Carl and Taylor Mac about judy’s³ art and the experience of working as a playwright-in-residence at HERE in New York City. Taylor’s point of view of aesthetics speaks to the choices judy made in creating the world behind The Lily’s Revenge.

There are two main groups of defined characters in this play: the wedding party and the garden flowers. The wedding party represents the conservatives who live in nostalgia and are trapped by traditions and a narrow-minded view of morals. The revolutionary garden flowers represent the queer community. Taylor expressed how

³ Taylor Mac’s preferred pronoun is judy (all lowercase), after the late Judy Garland.
flowers suffocate in multiple ways: plastic, bound to form bouquets, petals ripped from them, altered with no consideration of pain, etc. The garden flowers live in the here and now, riled up and ready to take charge and inspire change to recognize all forms of love and narratives.

The journey of the Lily introduces the audience to a world beyond their own. They’re having fun and watching a show that is absurd and extravagant with stock characters and larger than life flowers, but with themes real to our reality. Mac wants the audience to reflect and to be willing to adapt to the here and now, rather than to deconstruct ourselves to uphold the heteronormative standards of happiness.
CHAPTER III

THE DESIGN PROCESS

Director’s Point of View

“In The Lily's Revenge, we follow the journey of a flower who wishes to become a man and wed a human bride, as it transforms from naive and headstrong courage, to a willingness to accept not one but two hero's tasks, to a painful physical transformation, to a final surrender and acceptance of its identity and inner desires for love. The journey of the lily serves as an allegory to others who struggle with acceptance of who they are, or who face some form of ostracization from the mainstream. The play bucks against institutions which shape these feelings of being an outsider, among them the institution of marriage. I am most excited by the play's message of expanding past the social barriers that constrain how we view love, intimacy, and sexuality.”

Jennifer Onopa, director of The Lily’s Revenge, sent this statement as an initial response to the play. In response to racial and identity barriers on the rise and a lack in diverse narratives, Jen chose The Lily’s Revenge in hopes to inspire and break institutionalized narratives by telling a story rarely told.

Jen admitted that The Lily’s Revenge as initially a huge undertaking and a project that scared her. She had set it aside and was going to submit a different play for the season proposals. The 2016 presidential election was the final straw in deciding to propose The Lily’s Revenge because she felt our country needed a deep healing now more than ever. In doing The Lily’s Revenge, we could protest and stand for love, freedom, our beliefs through the best way we knew how: theatre and showing narratives not often told.

---

4 Jennifer Onopa, directing statement to the team, November 2017.
In addition, this production would be a huge undertaking and our team was excited and knew this was the perfect show to challenge ourselves.

*The Lily’s Revenge* deals with bigotry and institutionalized narratives head on while defying theatre tradition. Jen was excited to work on the play because “it explodes traditional narratives and stimulates audience engagement through unconventional ways”. *The Lily’s Revenge* is also a product of queer theatre and Jen used queer aesthetics to help form a guide in approaching the context of the play. Gaven D. Trinidad, our production dramaturg, set the tone for our production by reminding us that “to be queer is to disrupt” in our early conversations. Jen embraced queer aesthetics in her approach to the play as well as encouraging us to embrace our own identities and personalities in creating this extravaganza. We embraced this play knowing failure was inevitable and that there isn’t a set path we must follow.
Dramaturgy Response

The Lily’s Revenge is an extravaganza immersed with multiple narratives and elements. It is a product of Queer Theater, an aesthetic known for disruption. Gaven began to share with the design team his research and information of queer aesthetics and history.

Queer Aesthetics take many different shapes and can be defined differently within art communities. For our production of The Lily’s Revenge, we focused on five common points in approaching the world of the play: first, it is community-based and often breaks the traditional ‘fourth wall’; second, it disrupts everyday spaces; third, it is a form of activism and politics; fourth, it showcases a Do it Yourself or “DIY” aesthetics; and last, it celebrates failure or marking their own humanity within their work.

In addition to the research behind Queer Theater and Aesthetics, Gaven came across Taylor Mac’s manifesto called “I Believe” about judy’s first AIDS walk in the 1980’s. It inspired much of Taylor’s writings and beliefs and set the tone for The Lily’s Revenge and what judy’s emotional reality was in creating the play. Taylor’s manifesto inspired our own system and understanding to creating the world of our production by allowing us to find our own connection.
Scenic Design Response

In Fall of 2017, Anya Klepikov joined our team as the scenic designer and immediately thought about space and how the disruption of space could support Taylor Mac’s deconstruction of traditional narratives through the different genres. Her approach to support the deconstruction was to provide spaces which are native to different genres and then transform them during the show. When talking about the spaces for our production, Jen had proposed an idea about having the audience go on a journey through the different acts. Our team loved the idea of being in an intimate setting then transferring to a large, traditional proscenium and disrupting it somehow during the act or between the acts. Anya asked specific questions in response to the idea of moving the audience: How does using the space reflect the Lily’s journey or perhaps reflect internal conflict? How does the audience’s journey reflect the Lily’s own journey? Thinking of Anya’s questions when approaching the physical space, it brought back the third point of Queer Aesthetics: to disrupt everyday space. Our goal with *The Lily’s Revenge* is to surprise the audience and disrupt their past theater experiences by uprooting them and forcing them to move between spaces and to engage with the characters and each other. In addition, Jen spoke about intimate relationships between the audience and the actors; between the actors and the space and how the different relationships support the genres for each act.

Anya spoke about the audience and Lily’s journey through the play. The audience will start in our Curtain Theater lobby, be escorted by the character The White Rose into the Curtain Theatre space for Act I (a false proscenium theatre), then move into the backstage hallway where they may participate in the different Kyogen performances. For Act II, the audience returns to the Curtain Theatre where it has been transformed to the
Garden inspired by a fashion runway. Then, the white rose and the cast will take the audience on a parade walk around the building into our Rand Theatre, a larger proscenium theatre, for Act III. When the third act ends, the audience moves into the Rand Lobby for concessions and the viewing of the filmed puppet show of Act IV, with the final journey back into the wedding extravaganza in the Rand theater for the final act.

Anya embraced the DIY aesthetics when designing the world of the play, which I will speak to further later.
Costume Design Response

Christina Beam, costume designer, really attached to the emotions behind the characters, specifically the Lily. In an early design meeting, we talked about our own connection to the story and the oppression of identities and the traditions held over different people. Christina spoke out about the cost of transformation and the pain of conforming to fit society’s standards. The Lily was ripping her petals out and being stripped away to become a man to be able to marry the beloved bride. The journey of the Lily became the focus for Christina in her early stages of costume design. How can the deconstruction of the Lily happen without disrupting the flow of the play? How does the Lily affect the space? As the Lily loses the petals, Christina talked about the relationship of color between the Lily and other characters; and the characters with the space.

Christina’s initial approach to the design of the costumes began with two main points: the relationship between set and costumes and the transformations; With the set, Christina talked about the Great Longing, Time, and the uprooting of the flowers. How does the Great Longing character play within the physical curtain? Is it a costume or a scenic piece? What are the colors and textures of the world? The costumes and set should be in the same aesthetic. Anya embraced the DIY aesthetic and Christina designed her costumes in a fabulous but similar fashion. For example, with the garden flowers Christina creatively used recyclable materials in creating the costume pieces. With Master Sunflower’s costume, Christina designed the leaves to be made of green plastic forks and the Pink Lady Slipper’s costume was made from painted coffee filters. Though the costumes and scenery embraced the DIY aesthetic, they both designed it in a way that would look sexy and attractive. Christina decided that just because it was a DIY aesthetic,
also known to be poor quality sometimes, she made the costumes to be grand and beautiful.

Last, there are many characters in this play and an abundance of moving parts. Christina not only had to design the costumes to be grand but also flexible to allow time and comfort for her actors. Christina’s approach reminded me of Taylor’s comment about drag in judy’s HowlRound interview with P. Carl—“drag isn’t a costume…it’s what I look like on the inside”. Christina designed the characters in a way that balances the DIY aesthetics with her vision and informs our audience who these characters are.

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5 “The Art in the Room: P. Carl talks with Taylor Mac”. See bibliography.
Sound Design Response

Nathaniel Gilsdorf, the sound designer, wanted to create a sonic world that navigated us through the different journeys and guide us through the emotional context of the play. Through music, Nat attempts to keep the audience connected to the play through manipulative underscoring while supporting the score Mac provided.

A concern Nat brought in early is the idea of camp music being incorporated in the show, specifically in Act II. He thought camp music was dangerous because it feeds into the misrepresentation of Queer Theater and disorients its emotional complexity. As an alternative, Nat brought in early 1990s and 2000s acid pop, but was concerned it would read as insensitive. He finally could construct a compromise between the two genres that created the sound of the world. With the music scores of *The Lily’s Revenge*, Nat wanted to make sure the music underscoring would not overpower or be lost in the live music. Later, Nat brought ‘The Secret Life of Plants’ by Stevie Wonder and Plantasia music and suggested people would play them to make their plants grow faster. As a design team, we fell in love with this concept being used in the show but felt only a small group of people would understand and connect with the music.
Lighting Design Response

The lighting supports the different worlds and emotional narratives Mac has deconstructed and reconstructed within the Lily’s journey to become human and wed the Bride. The lighting is presentational and supports each genre. In addition, the lighting supports the Lily’s disruption of the narrative and the emotional journey. When Jen and I first met to speak about the play, we discussed how the arc of the lighting design should follow the Lily’s journey and the transformation from a lily to a man. About halfway through working with the scenic design and developing conversations with my team, I discovered that the lighting needed to support the genre in addition to the Lily’s emotional and physical journey to successfully complete the world of each act.

Initial concerns I had about *The Lily’s Revenge* echo what Anya expressed concerns about: space and the functions of each space. I knew I needed to embrace the Queer Aesthetics and use my resources to think outside the box and create the world of the play in collaboration with the team.

Nick Vaughan, the scenic designer for *The Lily’s Revenge* when it premiered, came to visit UMass to speak about his design for Hartford Stage’s *Seder* and his work as an installation artist. He described how everyday objects can inspire a connection with the audience. He shifted my focus from theatrical units to using unorthodox lighting to create the world of the play. In the end, I did not go this route because I realized the lighting emitted from the unorthodox source would not be enough visible light.

Another challenge I knew ahead of time was that I would have to experiment with color. Knowing the scenery and costumes would be designed in vibrant color pallets and
textures, I would have to design the lighting carefully to not flatten or lose the texture or vibrancy of the costumes and set.
CHAPTER IV
LIGHTING DESIGN PROCESS

Act I

Synopsis

The Deity (Act I): The Princess Musical takes place in in a vaudevillian theatre space. The play opens with an introduction to Time who tells the audience that the play is long and they must leave if they wish to remember their names when it is all over. A parade of aging flower girls laying on the stage, the flower girls awaken the Great Longing. Lily, the five-petal flower sitting in the audience, gets excited and breaks the traditional fourth wall by declaring that she wants to be a part of the story and inserting herself in the narrative. The Great Longing, the malicious theatre curtain, is in an uproar and yelling to the deteriorating flower girls to not look at the audience, but they bring the Lily onstage anyway. The Great Longing tells the story of a wedding, the Bride’s story, and implying that only the Bride is important. Lily falls in love with the Bride but is ridiculed by the Great Longing and is told that only a man can marry a bride. Overwhelmed with the desire to be loved and challenged by the Great Longing, Lily is determined to become a man and wed the Bride.
The World of the Play

Act I takes place in a proscenium theatre and is described as a “Princess Musical” by Taylor Mac. A princess musical is a form of theatre developed in the late 1920s to create an intimacy between the audience and the story. It is not a Broadway show-stopper, but rather a cabaret that introduces the audience to the world of The Lily’s Revenge. It is the home of the Bride, the Great Longing, Time, and all the deities who are affected by nostalgia and institutionalized narrative. While there is a deteriorating aesthetic to the deities, Lily wants to be in their world and have a role in their story.

After research of different traditional theatres, Anya presented an image we all were drawn to for Act I. She created a traditional proscenium and stage based on vaudeville western theater: a singular wooden stage, chandeliers, linear bulbs to create the elongated perspective, and a dusty but vibrant red theatre curtain. She reflected her design in the Act I model. While UMass Amherst does have a traditional proscenium space, called the Rand Theater, we decided to stage Act I in the Curtain theater, our black box to be more intimate.

The flower girls are all in distressed variations of pastel pink clichéd bridesmaid dresses. Christina felt soft pastels would fit the color scheme for the bridesmaids, allowing a contrast between them and the garden flowers. She presented this design for the flower girls and immediately, I knew that I would need to choose my colors carefully to separate the pinks from the giant, deep red background of The Great Longing.

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6 See Appendix 2
7 See Appendix 3
Lighting Design Approach

The lighting for Act I is presentational and traditional to vaudeville theatre performance which includes a bright, shadow-less performance space. Act I also includes musical theater aesthetics by using follow spots on key characters in different moments. The audience walks into a curtain softly lit, dim lights over the stage, and warm house lights filling the space. Time comes in a follow-spot and is playing the role of the pre-show announcer. She introduces the audience to what is assumed to be a traditional play.

To emphasize traditional theatre storytelling and practices, the lighting is bright and warm, and has specific use of spotlights from the front to pop key characters in specific moments. For example, the Lily has a monologue and the spots are at a high intensity on her while the lighting over the rest of the scene has been brought down creating a traditional form of visual storytelling.

The lighting follows a simplistic guideline of design: key light from the front and sides, warm top light to fill in the shadows; the stage is washed in soft, warm light; in the background is a vibrant red curtain lit from the sides to highlight its fullness. The world is warm, pretty, and picture-perfect setting the narrative and initial response to the play.

Christina, Jen, and I went into our lighting lab and had a dress parade with the Act I costumes. Christina gathered the different fabrics for the flower girls and for the Lily and Great Longing and we looked at them together under the lights. Originally, I wanted to use a pale pink and lavender to emphasize the colors on the costumes and varying skin tones on the stage.
Act II

Synopsis

The Ghost Warrior (Act II): An Act in Iambic, Song, and Haiku takes us to the Garden, described as a revolutionary meeting place. The Master Sunflower, an elder amongst the flowers, introduces the prophesy of a five-petal lily who is destined to free Dirt and lead the revolution against the Great Longing and put an end to the oppression. The Lily lands in the Garden and is met with other garden flowers during their plotting to take down the Great Longing. The Master Sunflower comes to realize the Lily is the prophesized flower and encourages her to go to the Factory Farm, release Dirt, and lead the revolution against their oppressor The Great Longing, the God of Nostalgia. The Lily and Wind leave the Garden and make their way to Ecuador.
The World of the Play

We go from the Act I proscenium theatre and immediately transition to the round. Creating a flower runway, Anya created a simple, yet effective design to accommodate physical space and a revolutionary place within budget and time. She was determined to find a balance between *Paris is Burning*, a documentary directed by Jennie Livingston, shared with us early in our meetings, and Ru-Paul aesthetic in this act. In *Paris is Burning*, cheap materials and minimal effects were used by the drag houses mostly due to financial limitations. Ru-Paul’s Drag Race, however, features over-the-top costumes and sets on a successful television show budget. It was important to keep this world less commercialized than our society’s standards and more organic in its creation. Anya’s final creation of this act\(^8\) resulted in a single runway platform, a flowerbed, the organic painted shapes on the floor and the sagging patio string lights.

Christina really brought vibrancy and shape to the Garden Flowers. Originally when I thought about this act, I knew I wanted to introduce colors, but after seeing the costume color pallet for the Garden flowers I knew I would need to choose the colors wisely to not diminish the vivid design of the costumes.

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\(^8\) See Appendix 4
Lighting Design Approach

For Act II, the world of the Garden is soft, wild, colorful, and bright. The Garden takes place in the round. Beginning with Master Sunflower’s entrance, the stage is washed in hues of warm light washing over Master Sunflower as he enters the Garden. Master Sunflower brings the Garden to life, string lights coming up and washing the round with warm white light from all directions.

Originally, I envisioned the world of the Garden to be colorful, soft, and dynamic. While experimenting with my lighting paint brushes, I discovered by using warm white light from all directions, the lighting pops the costumes and scenery in a way that brings the vibrancy of the colors and shapes out. I used follow-spots to carve out key characters and played with intensity and direction of light to shape the Garden.
Act III

Synopsis

The Love Act (Act 3): A Dream Ballet is the Bride’s story. Trapped in this nightmare, the story is unfolded in a series of dances. The dream begins with romance, later twisted with forms of betrayal, abuse, angst, drugs, and twisted truths. The Curtain disrupts the ballet, shrinking due to the near success of the Lily. Once the Curtain is nearly naked, Prime Deity quickly takes a red cocktail napkin and one by one, with cocktail napkins written of dreams and hopes, the wedding party begins to build the curtain back to its former glory. The act ends with Lily joining the dance and finally making it to the Factory Farm.
The World of the Play

Act III takes place in the proscenium with an open stage with legs, borders, a black scrim and a cyc. Because the bride and groom are introspective characters, a bare stage felt important to the storytelling and supported the ballet and dance genre.
Lighting Design Approach

We chose to have the Love Act in the Rand Theatre space because it provided a clean proscenium with wing space that allowed for side lights, and a cyclorama, or cyc, in the background. The Lily and Wind come in and do a slow Butoh-style walk against the cyc while the dream ballet unfolds downstage.

In the beginning, the ballet begins with a romantic number between Bride Love and Groom Love. In front of a vibrant blue and pink lit cyc, a pale lavender painted floor, the Bride and Groom are lit with white sidelight to carve out their figures. In this way, it is lit as a traditional ballet. When Bride and Groom acknowledge the audience, the act transforms to fit the reality of their relationship. With each different dance, there is a different mood and story being told. I will change the color of the cyc and floor, the angle, color and direction of lights on the actors to fit the moods of the dance.
Act IV

Synopsis

The Living Person (Act IV): The Silent Film is an act where we separate the audience from the narrative through technology. At the start of the act, The Lily has finally made it to the Factory Farm and meets up with the White Rose. This Act is the Lily’s final step to becoming a man by way of electrocution. The film ends and the screen is ripped down revealing the Lily, petal-less and in a black tux. After being freed, Dirt arrives and yells at the Lily to wake up. As the Lily and Dirt talk, the Lily learns that what she desired was love and having her story told. Dirt and Lily make their way to the wedding to defeat the Great Longing and finally bring the journey to an end.
The World of the Play

Set in the Rand Lobby, the audience sits down to enjoy refreshments and the wedding decorations and watches the film installment of Act IV: The Living Persons Act. The film itself is a form of toy theatre, a genre brought to the team by Jen and her direction team. The disruption of the film comes with Dirt’s entrance and declaration to “wake your ass up” and revealing Lily asleep behind the projection screen. Dirt and the Lily speak to each other over the audience, ignoring their presence. Finally, the Lily and Dirt make their way into the Rand Theater to hide among the audience for the wedding.
Lighting Design Response

There are two elements to Act IV: the film and the showing of the film. The film was pre-recorded but shown live during the performance as part of our installation art genre. I lit both the film and the Rand Lobby in collaboration with Anya.

I spoke earlier about Nick Vaughan’s inspiration to my original idea about everyday lighting and thinking of sources outside the theater realm. I also latched on to his comments about installation art being a form of protest and visual storytelling. This act is the place our team could explore that.

The film of this act to be shown during the performances was done early in the process. In the beginning, I experimented with using saturate colors and directions of light, but found the video camera was not picking up on the lights as well as it looked in person. Eventually, it became my purpose to light the models well and allow for Tristan Donohue, our film director, to use Photoshop and video-editing software to manipulate the visual world of the film.

The space the film is being shown is decorated as a wedding bar lobby. Using Christmas lights, Chinese lanterns, tea lights and installing lighting décor to represent a wedding lobby, Anya and I used installation art as the inspiration for this act.
Act V

Synopsis

The Mad Demon (Act V): The Pastiche is the final act of *The Lily’s Revenge*. The Garden Flowers have made it to the wedding and hidden in the audience watching as the wedding party enters the space. Lily and Dirt have been liberated, joining the wedding party along with the Garden Flowers who revolt against the wedding party and defeats the Great Longing! Nostalgia is dead but then in the middle of celebration, the pope comes out and shoots everyone. With her dying breath, the Lily sings a song with the ensemble asking the audience to *think* about marrying everyone and everything leaving the audience with an unsatisfying ending to the epic story.
The World of the Play

Jen talked about Act V being an explosion and being a collage of aesthetics. It is a rebirth, destruction, celebration and tragedy all in one. At one moment it is intimate, and another explosive. It’s a grand gesture while being pulled back. There are cosmic possibilities to this story because it’s not just the Lily’s story anymore or the Bride’s—it’s everyone’s story. It is liberating and it is a celebration of life and taking part in our own narrative and freedom.

Anya created the world of the set to fit a Pinterest view of a wedding. It needs to be commercialized and over-the-top. Keeping time and budget in mind, Anya designed the scenery to include all elements necessary for the storytelling. Her model\(^9\) allowed for an explosion of wedding décor and keeping the grand beauty of the wedding. She also left in the cyc from Act III and added in chandeliers upstage of the Great Longing to really create a large wedding venue.

\(^9\) See Appendix 5
Lighting Design Response

Walking into the space, Act V is a beautiful, picture-perfect, Pinterest approved, commercialized wedding space with white streamers intertwined with warm white Christmas lights in different directions, chandeliers softly glowing, and a warm rose-gold background tying together the soft pink touches of the scenery and costumes.

During the revolt and the craziness of the battle, the lights shift in color and angle of key light. Shadows are cast through the streamers and enhance the craziness of the space. The Great Longing is lit with a vivid red, highlighting the cocktail napkins and the space has been disrupted.

The final step is when the pope comes in and shoots everyone. Lights freeze. Directional, harsh white light hits the wedding party and garden flowers with side light and a wash of red and green highlighting their streamers while the Pope is in a spot light shifts the story. The flowers are pulling green streamers out of themselves while the wedding party are pulling out red, a representation of their blood and life leaving them. For the final song, the lights dim and focus to Lily for her monologue. The lights build during the chorus when all the cast join hands, singing the final verse before fading to black and ending the show.
CHAPTER V
PRODUCTION

Technical Rehearsals

“I believe self-consciousness kills creativity. So we must work together to create environments where we can kill self-consciousness first…I believe designers should be in the room every day, playing, not just sitting and taking notes…I believe sometimes we confuse what the audience needs with what the artist wants. I believe authentic failure on stage is one of the great art forms.”\(^\text{10}\) As I have mentioned previously, Taylor Mac’s outlook to theater practice inspired the guidelines to our collaborative process and approach to the play from the beginning through its opening. Our design conversations and trials with color palette and shape paved the road to a smooth technical rehearsal process.

On the first day of tech rehearsal we worked through the first act. Originally, I was using a variation of pale pink and lavender to help model the actors but found it didn’t work within the world of the play because the colors did not work with the warmth of the patio lights and the vision of a vaudeville performance. I anticipated needing the color to help bring the costumes out against the warm environment of the space. The gel also made the overall scene look pink rather than a warm white. I discovered by pulling all the color and using intensity and choosing the direction of light carefully provided a more modeled and attractive look that worked with both the scenery and costumes. Layering in the scenic design, I used a warm down wash to highlight the wooden tones of the stage and a vibrant red gel from the sides to bring out the color and fullness of the

\(^{10}\) Quote is from Taylor Mac’s “I Believe” manifesto with Under the Radar Festival, 2013.
Great Longing. By bringing down the intensity of the lights and using a follow-spot to pick out key characters, I could create a unique but presentational look for each of the songs. Overall, the technical rehearsal went as planned and led to a successful design\(^\text{11}\).

With the second act, the cueing was instinctual and consistent through opening. As the abused Daisies enter the Garden\(^{12}\), a down light cut to the runway platform slowly fades up. With the Master Sunflower’s entrance, the warmth of the Garden comes to life: the patio lights slowly fade up, warm and bright light from the four diagonals come up on the runway platform while a wash of pale rose gold light washes over the entire garden. \(^{13}\) In addition to the key light and washes, I used down light specials for the runway and the green geometric shapes of the Garden to pop its color through the key light. In addition to conventional units, I used the follow-spots in this act to help pick out key actors and to set up the fashion show aesthetic by having a hard edge spot on the flowers as they enter. As the revolutionary song begins towards the end of the act, the Garden builds and becomes brighter and almost blinding until an instant blackout ends the act.

Act III challenged me as a designer and taught me how conversations prep us for a successful tech process. At this point, our design team had only touched base about the visual concepts for each dance, but had not fully flush it out until tech rehearsal. I had the paintbrushes I needed to design the dance: high sides, side light, down light, back diagonal washes, color changing down light, and color changing front diagonals washes, and down light specials. Upstage of the action, I had the black scrim, white cyc, and a bounce lit by a ground row of cyc light units (with a no-color, saturate pink, and a

\(^{11}\) See Appendix 6.  
\(^{12}\) See Appendix 7.  
\(^{13}\) See Appendix 8.
saturate blue) lit above by color changing cyc light units. After collaborating with Nat and his plan for sound designing this act, I made the choice that each action of the play would be a different look. During tech, I realized how unrealistic and unnecessary this was and I thought it meant everything needed to change. Penny Remsen, my lighting advisor, reminded me that my research and my design is what inspired the creation of the plot. Tech was the time to experiment, to have fun, and paint the stage. Even though my original vision for this act was changing, it did not mean the tools weren’t useless. I threw away my fear and put away my script and watched the actors and allowed the choreography to inspire the cues and set the tone. In the beginning, we are introduced to a beautiful ballet between Bride Love and Groom Love\textsuperscript{14}. Then, the beauty of the Bride Love and Groom Love’s story is interrupted by the absurd reality of their relationship: abuse, drugs, adultery, hatred, etc. I used direction of light and shadow, color, and isolation as elements to consider from cue to cue. While Act III is set up as a dance, there are spoken dialogues and shifts between emotion and sound to move the story along but it was my goal to tie the different shifts together.

Act IV did not require much technical rehearsal time since it was an installation piece, but I did separate out the act in three cues: the film, the electrocution of the Lily, and the disruption of the film with Dirt and the Lily. The installation\textsuperscript{15} consisted of warm, low wattage bulbs with white Chinese lanterns, wedding bar décor, Toy Theatre station\textsuperscript{16}, and the bright white light for visibility on the Lily and Dirt\textsuperscript{17}.

\textsuperscript{14} See Appendix 9.  
\textsuperscript{15} See Appendix 10.  
\textsuperscript{16} See Appendix 11.  
\textsuperscript{17} See Appendix 12.
I prepared myself for Act V to be challenging but it was much simpler to cue. I found during the tech rehearsals that I ended up deleting cues because it complicated and distracted from the storytelling. There were two major shifts I wanted to accomplish with this act: a beautiful Pinterest-Style wedding\textsuperscript{18} and a shift when the Great Longing comes in\textsuperscript{19}, foreshadowing the battle ahead. My challenge was balancing the pink of the background and overall lighting color pallet with the pink of the flower girls’ costumes. I used the color changing front diagonals with a saturate lavender and the down lights with a warm amber and used the lower front diagonals with no color on top of it at a low intensity to bring out the white of the costumes. The approach come from my experiment in the light lab with various garden flower costumes. I discovered that putting a saturate color that brings out the costumes and using a different angle incandescent allowed me to layer in visibility and contrast. I found during the tech rehearsal that this act was particularly difficult to reach a point of satisfaction. Part of it was due to cueing, to calling, and fine-tuning what the visual story needed. It was important to us to remember that Act V is a collage of all the genres into one act, therefore didn’t truly need to be unique in its design. While Act V was an explosive extravaganza, I had moments inspired by each act throughout the act. Overall, it is presentational, colorful, soft, comforting, never stark and rarely shadowy, and inspired by the emotions on stage.

\textsuperscript{18} See Appendix 13.
\textsuperscript{19} See Appendix 14.
The Final Design

When I think of the word shatter, I think of glass breaking violently and how I will never be able to put it back together again. I think of a jaded view being colored by life; I think of trauma affecting innocence and happiness. When I read The Lily’s Revenge and researched Taylor Mac, I thought about narrators and their stories, artists and their expression through their art. It dawned on me that only those with privilege often have their story told. As a society, we tend to not be attracted to stories that fit outside our narrow view: a beautiful bride marrying the love of her life and having a grand wedding and a romantic ever-after, a story used by the Great Longing to entice the Flower Girls and the Lily. Stories have changed to inspire individuality and freedom. The story that touches our soul is one that shatters our view and forces us to reassess our own life, our purpose, and our surroundings. In theatre, the successful stories affect our sight, touch, emotions, smells, thoughts, and our hearing. With The Lily’s Revenge, we disrupt that experience as a team by shattering the audience’s expectations of the genre repeatedly through the journey.

In my opinion, by opening night the lighting was successful in shattering narratives represented by each act, but in a much subtler way then scenery and costumes did. While in the beginning I aimed to shatter the genres more dramatically, I found embracing the genres to be a stronger approach. I shattered the tactic, and twisted it ever so slightly to create the vision for each genre. A dramatic shift in design was not necessary because the story itself shattered the institutionalized narratives.
Reflection

Designing *The Lily’s Revenge* has taught me to embrace failure, have fun, and to just paint the world. Sometimes I find myself fixating and trying to make the perfect cues, but I learned that is where crappy art and terrible mistakes happen because you’re not reacting as an audience member and an artist. There were moments where I had to step back and breathe, but I finally figured out how to design. My production team and I connected on a level that allowed us to lower our guard and in doing so, we created some of our best work. Through our mistakes, we discovered the thing that worked—the thing that would ultimately become the base of our design.

During Act III tech, there was a moment where I accidently had Isaac, my board operator, bring up the color changing front diagonals to a green, a color I never planned to use during the show. It brought a shock to me because it was the effect I desired for the Groom’s nightmare ballet. It created a sinister look and Jen immediately fell in love with it. I never intended on using the front diagonals during Act III, but I used it in almost every scene and altered intensity and color. There were several discoveries I found in just turning systems on and off and seeing how it affected the costumes and bodies onstage. Penny Remsen told me to never stop turning lights on, to never stop painting and I truly didn’t understand why until I was doing this show. I thought she was implying that I was missing something, but I learned that by constantly turning lights on, ideas sparked that I hadn’t thought of before and I was visualizing what the lighting accomplished.

Another aspect of designing this show that I found challenging in the beginning was having an associate. To this point, I had never worked with an associate before. Erin had a different take on the play and her own ideas, but she became my second hand in
this process and I truly could not have executed this design without her. As I mentioned, Erin originally had a different take on the play that contradicted mine and I felt unsure of how to work with it. I was constantly second-guessing my own choices, but I learned that everyone has their own view of the world. Success is a product of true collaboration and I believe Erin was the perfect associate to work on this project with me. When I explained what I was trying to accomplish and what I envisioned, she and I sat down together and drafted out the ideal plot to accommodate my ideas. She brought a second eye to everything and asked questions about my choices. The Lily’s Revenge was an all-around crazy experience and lesson for me as a designer, collaborator, and lead. It allowed me an opportunity to design five different kinds of performance, to work with two sets of stage managers, three different directing styles, work and design in multiple spaces with their own constraints and capabilities, and having someone who had a different view of the play work with me. By letting go of my own personal insecurities, I designed a show I am proud of and I learned how to collaborate and delegate. I learned that when there is a strong cohort, the passion comes through the design. It is an experience that will remain a high standard for the future designs to come.

“Because I believe we almost always stop before we’ve truly finished.”20 In some cases, I am satisfied with the design that opened, but I feel that there were still changes and discoveries to be made. Art is never perfect, nor should it be. If I were to do this project again, I would fight harder to have footlights on the proscenium stage of Act I to further paint a vaudevillian theatre. I would continue implementing cues in Act III and refining my color choices for each dance, and I would continue layering in the lighting

20 A quote from Taylor Mac’s Manifesto I Believe.
through the streamers and on the stage to romanticize the wedding more. In Act V, I would come up with something different for the Pope shooting and I would bring together the distinct genres for the final song through the lights. I would continue to have fun and embrace the process rather than worry about success or failure. I would continue to design through the end, never stopping or becoming satisfied before it’s finished.
APPENDIX 1

THE LILY’S REVENGE PRODUCTION POSTER BY GAVEN TRINIDAD

Book, Lyrics, and Concept by
Taylor Mac
MUSIC BY
Rachelle Garniez
DIRECTED BY
Jennifer Onopa

"Taylor Mac's meta-theatrical 'The Lily's Revenge' is a great big fantastical epic, and it calls for celebration... In its bravery, scope, creativity, extremity and sheer generosity of spirit, (the play) surpasses any American theater in New York." – Adam Feldman, TIME OUT NEW YORK (2009)
APPENDIX 2

ACT I SCENIC MODEL BY ANYA KLEPIKOV
APPENDIX 3

FLOWER GIRLS COSTUME RENDERINGS BY CHRISTINA BEAM
APPENDIX 4

ACT II SCENIC MODEL BY ANYA KLEPIKOV
APPENDIX 5

ACT V SCENIC MODEL BY ANYA KLEPIKOV
APPENDIX 6

ACT I, PRODUCTION PHOTO BY DEREK FOWLES
APPENDIX 7

ACT II OPENING SCENE, PRODUCTION PHOTO BY DEREK FOWLES
APPENDIX 8

ACT II GARDEN, PRODUCTION PHOTO BY DEREK FOWLES
APPENDIX 9

ACT III OPENING BALLET, PRODUCTION PHOTO BY JON CRISPIN
APPENDIX 10

ACT IV BAR DÉCOR, PRODUCTION PHOTO BY DEREK FOWLES
APPENDIX 11

ACT IV TOY THEATRE, PRODUCTION PHOTO BY DEREK FOWLES
APPENDIX 13

ACT V WEDDING, PRODUCTION PHOTO BY DEREK FOWLES
APPENDIX 14

ACT V SHIFT, PRODUCTION PHOTO BY DEREK FOWLES
BIBLIOGRAPHY


