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Queer Temporality and Aesthetics in Taylor Mac's *The Lily's Revenge*: a Dramaturgical Exploration of the Play at UMass Amherst

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**QUEER TEMPORALITY AND AESTHETICS IN TAYLOR MAC'S *THE LILY'S
REVENGE*: A DRAMATURGICAL EXPLORATION OF THE PRODUCTION AT
UMASS AMHERST**

A Thesis Presented

by

GAVEN D. TRINIDAD

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

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Theater

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DEDICATION

To my parents for their support and love. Now that I have an M.F.A., I hope that I can shower you both in beautiful art in perpetual thanks for your sacrifices as Filipino immigrants. You afforded me so many opportunities and privileges in life, and I am forever grateful.

To all artists (dramaturgs and otherwise) who are inspired to create social justice art that foster community-building and inclusivity. May your art help us all imagine more loving worlds that we may one day live in. Keep creating. Shake up the system. Teach us new ways of how to love ourselves and everyone in the world.

To my little brother Avery. You're an amazing human being.

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I am extremely grateful to the creative team, cast, and crew of *The Lily's Revenge*, who dared to produce such a massive undertaking. It was from your sheer love of theater and its potentiality to create a better, queerer, and more inclusive world that helped me continue to work throughout the rehearsal process. I also want to acknowledge the generosity of theater artists Rachel Chavkin, Nina Mankin, and Nick Vaughan, original collaborators with Taylor Mac on *The Lily's Revenge*, for taking the time to consult with me and Onopa. To Jennifer Onopa, thank you for always being a such a collaborative director. I'm honored that I had the opportunity to embark on this journey and completing our M.F.A. degrees together. I am doubly honored to call you a close friend and artistic collaborator.

To Avery G. Trinidad, my little brother. I normally attend the theater alone. If I have to go see a production with anyone, I would always choose you first. Thank you for always supporting my artistic ambitions.

ABSTRACT

QUEER TEMPORALITY AND AESTHETICS IN TAYLOR MAC'S *THE LILY'S REVENGE*: A DRAMATURGICAL EXPLORATION OF THE PLAY AT UMASS AMHERST

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This master's thesis documents the dramaturgical exploration of the spring 2018 University of Massachusetts Amherst Department of Theater's production of gender non-conforming performance artist Taylor Mac's *The Lily's Revenge*. The thesis is separated into two parts. The first half focuses on my dramaturgical analysis of Mac's play and its exploration of queer temporality and queer embodiment, asserting the importance of queer aesthetics in American drama and its vital role in shaping the future of LGBTQIA+ politics in the United States. The second half includes reflections on rehearsal processes and performances, giving readers and fellow artists examples of the potential of queer dramaturgical practices that are products of LGBTQIA+ theater and politics in the United States. These reflections show the application of research to rehearsal processes into theatrical performances as directed, designed, and performed by graduate and undergraduate students at UMass Amherst Department of Theater, located in Amherst, Massachusetts, thus giving a trajectory of how the queer and feminist theories written into the play are manifested into a full production through collaborative design, movement, staging, and performance. Drawn from my discoveries while working on *The Lily's Revenge* as production dramaturg, I have shaped my own style of collaborative "queer

dramaturgy” with the director and designers, hopefully, opening new entry points of future explorations for queer dramaturgs to synthesize theory and practice onto the stage with collaborators from all disciplines and identities.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“Being queer means leading a different sort of life... It's about being on the margins, defining ourselves.” – *Queer Nation Manifesto*, 1990

Gender non-conforming drag performance artist Taylor Mac, who uses ‘judy’ as a gender pronoun, is a prolific performer, activist, and playwright, whose theatrical work centers the LGBTQIA+ body as a vessel and a canvas to initiate continued discourse on U.S. politics and history. Known for durational drag spectacles such as the five-hour *The Lily’s Revenge* (2009), Mac writes about the devastating effects of the gender binary, compulsory heteronormativity, and conformity to Western social practices such as marriage. Using the terms “queerness” and “queer temporality” as defined by scholars Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore and José Esteban Muñoz, respectively, Mac and judy’s artistic collaborators view queer time and embodiment as always pointing beyond current Western conventions of gender and sexuality.

Not to be confused with the now common usage of the word “queer” as an umbrella term for LGBTQIA+ communities, the definition of “queer” that Mac uses is not limited to sexuality, gender expression, or identity. As Sycamore and Muñoz propose, “queerness” is a philosophical, social, and cultural intersectional way of living that actively attempts to demolish all oppressive hegemonic structures that perpetuate sexism, homophobia, classism, ableism, etc. Embodying queerness therefore demolishes social structures and imagines future new worlds simultaneously. Mac’s work utilizes these ideas, understanding the value of how the LGBTQIA+ body on stage, such as judy’s, can better

help communities imagine this queer futurity where all oppressive structures are eradicated.

The way that the LGBTQIA+ body is utilized in Mac's continuum of theatrical performativity, in which dance, theater, protest, and pedestrian movement have become indistinguishable, creates new ways for "queer embodiment" and "queer temporality" to be seen and understood by those in the LGBTQIA+ community and by others outside of said community. In an interview, Mac shared: "I prefer to queer [American] history... instead of accept[ing] the status quo... There's no queer history. It's been written out of history. Forgotten" (L'Heureux). Mac's theatrical work not only acknowledges the erasure of LGBTQIA+ persons, but makes visible the existence of these bodies by orientating them as the center of Judy's theatrical narratives – a point of interest for contemporary dramaturgical study. How does Mac's exploration of "queerness" and "queer temporality" manifest itself on and off stage through Mac's own theatrical aesthetic?

Borrowing theatrical traditions from various forms such as Theater of the Ridiculous, musical theater, drag, and modern dance, Mac's theater captures this radical spirit found in queer thinking, and its relation to the body and to space and time. Mac's work as a gender nonconforming person and theater artist not only disrupts the regulatory framework of heteronormativity in American theater, but also questions the growing and exclusionary state of gay male politics in the country that have become more prominent in the mainstream. Taylor Mac's 2009 play *The Lily's Revenge* is an important subject of dramaturgical investigation as it melds all of Mac's queer aesthetic with Judy's own political and theoretical investigations.

The Lily's Revenge premiered in 2009 at the Off-Off-Broadway HERE Arts Center in downtown New York. judy's play follows the story of an anthropomorphic flower who is determined to marry a human bride against the wishes of the God of Nostalgia, portrayed by a personified stage curtain. In doing so, the Lily, the genderqueer protagonist, goes to great lengths to transition into a "man" to partake in the tradition of marriage. At the end of the play, the Lily wonders if the violence and trauma that have occurred against its body was worth having the privilege of matrimony and asks if there is way to imagine equality beyond institutionalized concepts of love, marriage, happiness, and belonging. The play critiques a gay assimilationist movement's push for marriage equality in the United States and challenges audiences to discover new potential meanings of being "queer" in the 21st century United States. In addition, the play welcomes all audience members to participate in radical acts of compassion and community building by inviting them to participate throughout the play as agents in the story-telling with the performers.

Mac's use of an anthropomorphized lily to explore "queer embodiment" in *The Lily's Revenge* proposes that defining the queer body must go beyond our limited understandings and current labels of gender and sexuality around human forms. By using a personified flower as an allegory of an LGBTQIA+ person, Mac asserts that the potentiality of embodying queerness, in the vein of Sycamore and Muñoz's definitions, in the 21st century not only fights against heteronormativity and homonormativity, but also resists the need to define queerness within existing structures of how we understand the world. The character Lily and its embodiment in performance confronts audiences with their struggles of defining "queerness." Mac's personified genderqueer flower and judy's investigation of the concept go beyond the human form and our understanding of

time and the physical world around us. As a dramaturg, I question if it is possible to define queerness beyond the human body. How does one embody this queerness and how (and why) does Mac create an anthropomorphic flower to make this gesture?

In this master's thesis, I will document Taylor Mac's queer aesthetic and Judy's exploration of queer temporality and queer embodiment in *The Lily's Revenge*. The following questions will be explored in discussion with concepts of queerness and temporality by theorists Judith Butler, José Esteban Muñoz, Sara Ahmed, and Lee Edelman:

1. Using drag and queer performance techniques coupled with queer and feminist theoretical approaches, how does Taylor Mac's *The Lily's Revenge* criticize, comment, or disrupt LGBTQIA+ politics in the United States through queer embodiment?
2. How does Taylor Mac connect queer cultures of the past and present as well as project a queer futurity in *The Lily's Revenge*?

Theories and Ideas of Exploration

These questions form the basis for the dramaturgical exploration for the spring 2018 University of Massachusetts Amherst (UMass Amherst) Department of Theater's production of *The Lily's Revenge*. In addition to the theoretical examination of the text, the thesis will also include reflections on rehearsal processes and performances. The reflections will show the transition of rehearsals into theatrical performances as directed, designed, and performed by graduate and undergraduate students at UMass Amherst. Ultimately, I am exploring how my theoretical research as a dramaturg manifests itself

physically in the production through design, movement, staging, and performance. I ask these questions:

1. Is there a method of dramaturging a queer theatrical aesthetic that is different from typical dramaturgical duties in a rehearsal room?
2. How does the show and its aesthetic influence production teams to queer the traditional theater-maker process? What are the effects at the UMass Amherst Department of Theater?
3. How do queer identities (or lack of) in the production team affect the creation process of this production of *The Lily's Revenge*? As a queer dramaturg of color, how do I work within these circumstances?

Structure and Methodology

The thesis is separated into theoretical and practical analyses of *The Lily's Revenge*. The theoretical chapter, "Queering Time & Imagining New Worlds," is separated into two sections. In "Embodying Queerness," I examine Mac's focus on the performers and their bodies in relationship to the audience, using Sara Ahmed's concept of queer phenomenology. In the second sub-section "Embodying Time and Nostalgia," I will interact with the ideas of Elizabeth Freeman, José Esteban Muñoz, Lee Edelman, and Mac's ideas of queer futurity and LGBTQIA+ U.S. history.

The following chapter, entitled "Queer Dramaturgy," documents the production and rehearsal processes of *The Lily's Revenge*, giving a clear trajectory of how the queer and feminist theories written into the play are manifested in a full production through collaborative design, movement, staging, and performance. Drawn from my findings while working on *The Lily's Revenge* as production dramaturg, I have discovered some ways to

conduct “queer dramaturgy” collaboratively with director Jennifer Onopa, scenic designer Anya Klepikov, lighting designer Tamara Harris, costume designer Christina Beam, and sound designer Nathaniel Gilsdorf, hopefully opening new entry points of future exploration for queer dramaturgs.

During our research phase, Onopa and I interviewed two of the original New York collaborators of *The Lily's Revenge*, discussing questions about the play's creation, collaborative process, and staging. Original production director Rachel Chavkin and the original production dramaturg Nina Mankin agreed to speak with us. Nick Vaughan, the show's original scenic designer, also visited the department per the request of Klepikov to share his thoughts on the show. Conversations with these three artists better helped frame the show's themes of imperfection, queerness, and community. These conversations were integral to our understanding of the play during the research phase of our production. Their words offered insight into the original production's approach, and their thoughts, primarily Mankin and Chavkin's are integrated into the second half of the thesis to illuminate my team's collective thinking.

This thesis is a dramaturgical study of LGBTQIA+ theater, particularly queer theater; however, this thesis is also a culmination of my work in graduate school as a queer person, as a person of color, and as a dramaturg. All the struggles and successes I have had in my life have strongly informed my artistry. I hope that in addition to providing future theater-makers entry ways to experiment with queer dramaturgical practices, I also preserve a moment of my growth as a person and artist. This is my own proof and self-affirmation as an artist; in a way, this thesis is my own manifesto, answering my questions

of belonging, of representation, and of agency over my identity as a queer brown Asian American theater-maker.

CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

Taylor Mac: Philosopher and Genderfuck Artist

Taylor Mac is known for outrageous gender non-conforming drag performances that use pastiches of New York's Off-Off-Broadway, avant-garde performance, the Theater of the Ridiculous, cabaret, and vaudeville. Born in California in 1973, Mac grew up in Stockton, described by Judy as “not a pleasant place growing up being queer” (Sauro). After a short stint in San Francisco, Mac moved to New York City to attend the American Academy of Dramatic Art in the mid-1990s and soon began writing and performing shows throughout the first decade of the 2000s in New York's cabaret, Off-Broadway, and Off-Off Broadway scenes. Amongst Judy's original shows are *The Young Ladies Of* (2005), *The Be(A)st of Taylor Mac* (2006), *The Lily's Revenge* (2009), *Hir* (2015), and *A 24-Decade History of Popular Music* (2017). Mac's writing and performances cover multiple genres of theater. They often explore ideas of queer temporality, queer embodiment, and identity politics. Judy has won accolades and international recognition, including a Pulitzer Prize Finalist nomination, the Kennedy Prize, a NY Drama Critics Circle Award, and a MacArthur “Genius” Fellowship. Mac occasionally performs in plays not written by Judy, but while writing this thesis, Mac is currently touring the United States Judy's *A 24-Decade History of Popular Music*, for which Judy performs 240 songs in a 24-hour-long performance piece (Sauro).

In addition to the spectacular nature of Judy's drag performance style, Judy's original writing and performance materials are heavily influenced by academic queer and

feminist theories that tackle contemporary LGBTQIA+ politics in the United States. In its 2015 New York production at Playwrights Horizon, *HIR* performed to rave reviews for its trans and gender politics and its deconstruction of the stereotypical nuclear American household. For audience members not familiar with feminist, queer, or gender theory, Mac and collaborators from Playwrights Horizon's staff filled the walls of the building, including its restrooms, with summaries of books by theorists such as Judith Butler, Michael Warner, and Matilda Bernstein Sycamore, who Mac either gives a nod to in the text or directly quotes in the play. This mixture of creative and philosophical thinking creates a queer aesthetic that – in appearance and in performance – is identifiably Taylor Mac's. judy is “never merely an object of study, but an interlocutor, for [Mac] is a theorist in [judy's] own right, a thinker who helps [fellow queer feminist thinkers to] imagine theory and practice (Muñoz 227). Taylor Mac's work helps illuminate ideas from “queer social theory because [judy's] performances themselves carve out space for social theory making through their analysis of heteronormativity” (227). judy's mix of artistry and embodiment of queer and feminist theory creates a site of inquiry on the meaning of “queer embodiment.”

Central to judy's drag performance is always the display of judy's body as a canvas to explore gender and its tie to queer history. The stage provides the opportunity for any subject to be gazed upon, with every facial and bodily movement scrutinized; however, Mac flips this on its head. Instead of the subject on stage being totally vulnerable to judgement by observers, Mac uses judy's body to shock and delight its audiences with costume designs by Machine Dazzle (né Matthew Flower) that resemble more like art installations or sculptures, often making illegible judy's humanly figure and silhouette. In

The Lily's Revenge, Mac is transformed into a lily flower, with petals, stamen, and all. The costume is bright, colorful, adorned with reflective material, various textures, and is androgynous. Lily is difficult for audience members to categorize and conceptualize within traditional modes of understanding gender expression and identity. Mac never adheres to the gender binary, and avoids gender signifying clothing or body modifiers, such as fake breasts and hip padding, that other drag performers traditionally wear. judy's approach to queer aesthetic and drag is eclectic, often employing costumes made with objects from everyday life such as garbage bags, bottle caps, recycled paper.

What is important to note is that Taylor Mac's drag often erases the legibility of judy's human body, wearing make-up styles that evoke images of extraterrestrials and costumes that create unrecognizable bodily silhouettes. In *The Lily's Revenge*, judy dresses as a non-human living thing, asking audiences to look at a queer body outside the confines of the human body as seen through biological, cultural, and social lenses. This artistic decision provides a lens to look at queerness as not just simply being non-normative. Seeing Taylor Mac dressed as the Lily and with the assistance of a theatrical space, audience members are dually watching a human being and a talking flower. This approach to drag performance orientates a queer body's belonging to space and time and its performativity and also positions how audiences read Mac and fellow cast members' bodies on stage.

In *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, theorist Sarah Ahmed wrestles with the relationship of the body to space and vice versa:

... the body is not itself an instrument but a form of expression, a making visible of our intentions... What makes bodies different is how they inhabit

space: space is not a container for the body; it does not contain the body as if the body were “in it.” Rather bodies are submerged, such that they become the space they inhabit; in taking up space, bodies move through space and are affected by the ‘where’ of that movement. It is through this movement that the surface of spaces as well as bodies takes space (Ahmed 53).

Ahmed suggests that the meaning of space and time is in constant negotiation with a body, its actions, and how we perceive its actions. A “queer subject within straight culture hence deviates and is made socially present as a deviant” because observers have been taught to recognize which spaces are safe or not safe of LGBTQIA+ persons (21). Ahmed’s framing of the body’s orientation to space and vice versa suggests that if we see an unrecognizable body in a space that may or not be recognizable to us, this is an opportunity for investigation of the potential of new meaning of a body and space. In this vein, if queer embodiment is always looking towards something undefined along a horizon, then a queer body and its actions in an unfamiliar or disrupted space – whatever space that may be— force observers of that queer body to create new meanings and understandings of the being in that world.

In addition, Mac’s process of world-creation centers on community building. Spending judy’s formative years in the 1980s, living three hours away from San Francisco, Mac was well aware of the devastation of gay and lesbian communities at the wake of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the United States. In an interview with National Public Radio (NPR), Mac shared judy’s inspiration for judy’s work in the theater:

In 1987, I went to the very first AIDS walk in San Francisco, and it was the first time I'd ever seen an out homosexual before... I was 14. And the first

time I saw an out homosexual, [there were] thousands of them all at the same time. So that kind of weird dichotomy of a community building itself and being introduced to that community for the first time, and the community is being torn apart from the epidemic. I thought I wanted to make a show about that (Shapiro).

In *The Lily's Revenge*, Mac centers community building as an instrument to create a better future. This future is queer and inclusive, and ultimately affirms everyone's differences. However, now knowing Mac's background, how does one understand Mac's place in the lineage of queer theater aesthetics?

Tracing the Influences of Mac's Theatrical Aesthetic

I believe that to understand Mac's aesthetic, one must first understand the meaning of the word "queer" as used by Judy. Having grown up during the HIV/AIDS epidemic, Mac was shaped by the radical politics of the time with the emergence of ACT-UP Fight AIDS and Queer Nation. Some members of these two organizations started calling themselves "queer," differentiating themselves politically from some of their gay and lesbian colleagues. To be "queer" was not just to identify as someone outside of the mainstream sexual and gender identities, but also to identify as politically and culturally radical.

However, the definition of the word "queer" has changed since the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the 1980s and 1990s, during which concepts of gender and sexuality were often conflated. LGBTQIA+ activists and academics have now made distinctions between genders and sexualities. Mac has evolved with these concepts, but mainstream discourse continues to oversimplify these concepts. In her *The New York Times* article "When

Everyone Can Be ‘Queer,’ Is Anyone?”, Jenna Wortham comments that “‘queer’ has come to serve as a linguistic catchall for this broadening spectrum of [political, sexual, gender, and cultural] identities, so much so that people who consider themselves straight, but reject heteronormativity, might even call themselves queer.” Mac suggests something more politically radical and specific that still holds its meaning from the 1980s, but also posits a new understanding that continues to evolve with current discourses of gender and sexuality.

Counter to Wortham’s argument, Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore’s centers “queer” and “queerness” around LGBTQIA+ persons and their resistance to a gay white male-assimilationist agenda that is “narrowly focused on marriage and military inclusion, hate crime legislation, gentrification, consumerism and patriotism” (Sycamore). Sycamore writes for a 2013 editorial in *The New York Times*:

... the possibility of a trans or queer politic lies in using identity as a starting point for challenging the violence of the world around us, and building something else, creating more possibilities for everyone. I’m interested in a movement that fights for universal access to basic needs, as a starting point — housing, health care, food, the right to stay in this country or leave if you want to, a sex life that matters. I’m interested in gender, sexual, social and political self-determination... (Sycamore).

Sycamore asserts that “queer embodiment” must be defined outside of current Western conventions of gender, sexuality, and legal and political frameworks; after annihilating “all hierarchies and creating something else in the ruins, something bolder and more caring, communal and daring” may be imagined (Sycamore). In a similar vein, José Esteban Muñoz argues that queerness “must be viewed as being visible only in the horizon”

(Muñoz 12). Queerness is always pointing to possibilities of being beyond the structures that are currently used. It is about futurity, a realm of possibilities, which are always tied to concepts of embodiment and temporality.

However, some LGBTQIA+ bodies who were legible as “queer” twenty years ago are now under the protection of the U.S. government and the cultures that once vilified them, specifically gay white cisgender men of a certain economic privilege and gender presentation. This new homonormativity continues to exclude gender non-conforming persons, transgender folk, people of color, and other identities within the alphabet soup of sexual and gender identities. This new normativity perpetuates adherence to gender norms, and makes a clear distinction of who is “gay” and who is “queer.” Mac is particular when Judy says “queer,” and always differentiates amongst “gay,” “queer,” and “LGBTQIA+.”

Theater scholars also make these distinctions when discussing theater genres and styles. In his essay “Be True to Yearning: Notes on the Pioneers of Queer Theater,” scholar Don Shewey notes the difference between “queer theater” and “gay theater.” Unlike gay theater in the Western tradition, which has a rich history of playwrights such as Oscar Wilde, Tennessee Williams, and Lillian Hellman, queer theater “grew not from scripted plays [as per American-European tradition of realism] in isolation or from the championship of entrepreneurial producers...[but rather] from communities of people for whom theater was more than a career – it was a way to live” (Shewey 128). Formal American theatrical traditions, such as realism and the use of proscenium stage, a space in which audience and performer almost strictly do not interact, were rejected. Realistic theater often served narratives written by and for heterosexual cisgender white men, often perpetuating gender norms.

It is important that pioneers of queer theater “adhered to no coherent aesthetic, form, style, or content... A lot of their work sifted through the debris of pop culture – deranging it, rearranging it, exaggerating it...” through camp sensibility, which was then a “subversive strategy, cultural critique, and identity formation disguised as child’s play” (129). This aesthetic was not just disrupting – or rather queering – American theater, but for performers of non-mainstream gender and sexual identities, it was an aesthetic through which they had agency to shape their own representations of sexual and gender diversity on stage.

Theatrical performance lent itself to this discovery of self-representation and the recoding of the LGBTQIA+ bodies, developing forms of theatrical practice that created discourses of gender, sexuality, and their body. As dance scholar Susan Leigh Foster argues in *Corporealities: Dance Knowledge, Culture, and Power*, and as David Gere acknowledges in his book *How to Make Dances in an Epidemic: Tracking Choreography in the age of AIDS*: “... bodies [are not merely] vehicles or instruments for the expression of something else... bodies always gesture towards other fields of meaning, but at the same time instantiate both physical mobility and articulability... They develop choreographies of signs through which they discourse...” (Gere 10-11). A staged or choreographed movement, such as a jump or a walk, can signal thinking, moments of discovery, death, and even resistance. Genderqueer performers, who subscribed to neither gender in the binary, attempted to create a bodily language that was queering traditional gender signifiers and heteronormative gender expression through performance styles, such as drag, weaponizing their gender queerness against heteronormativity.

I trace Taylor Mac's aesthetics through some touchstones in Queer U.S. Theater. Though Mac takes influence from a variety of theatrical forms, such as Japanese Noh Theater, vaudeville, and musical theater, it is very clear which artists have greatly influenced Mac's artistry. Raised near San Francisco, Mac would have known the work of the hippie gender-bending Cockettes, who performed to sold out crowds in San Francisco and New York in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Mac's make-up and costume designs by collaborator Machine Dazzle look very similar to the work of the Cockettes, whose costumes were highly influenced by a conglomeration of burlesque, vaudeville, and drag, painting their bodies in make-up, glitter, and sequins. The Cockettes' drag also didn't adhere to the gender binary. As Filmmaker David Weissman, one of the creators of the 2002 documentary *The Cockettes*, said of the performance group:

Their influence was enormous... Their whole presence was completely new and garnered a lot of attention. Drag had not received anywhere near that degree of visibility, particularly in a cultural context, outside of the gay community, prior to the Cockettes... [their type of drag] was what came to be known as genderfuck, but it had not been done before (Cruickshank).

Mac follows this genderfuck tradition, a practice in which gender signifiers are exaggerated to blur the lines of the gender binary. The Cockettes also created shows that pushed the boundaries of sex, nudity, and obscenity on stage, and its members featured iconic LGBTQIA+ underground artists such as late drag performer Divine. This type of theater and performance making "proved an intervention in the perpetuation of [mainstream] problematic representations [of gay and lesbian bodies on stage and film]," such as the

“frivolous fairies, psychotic bulldykes, and suicidal queens” (David Román 6). Instead these artists brought to the forefront a celebration of fun, camp, and a queer avant-garde.

Mac’s often calls Charles Ludlum and his Ridiculous Theatrical Company major inspirations to Judy’s theatrical aesthetic. The company’s mission was to “fuse high artistic aspirations with lowbrow popular forms” (Shewey 132). Similar to the Cockettes, Ludlum and his theater company were “flamboyant performers with their highly theatrical voices, outlandish costumes, and extreme makeup,” but were situated in New York around the same time period. Ludlum produced his work in what would become New York’s downtown theater scene, where Mac would later cultivate Judy’s artistry. Ludlum, an openly gay artist, cast shows with non-traditional actors, such as drag queens and underground performance artists. His theater was made “by gay people, using elements of gay culture,” which Ludlum described as a “very sophisticated theater” with its company members “never dream[ing] of hiding anything about themselves that they feel is honest and true and the best part of themselves” (125). Known for upending theater classics such as *Camille* and *Hamlet* with drag, sex, and foul language, Ludlum adapted the works as a “subversive strategy, cultural critique” of contemporary politics and public discourse (129). Mac’s plays and solo work continue this tradition.

Another influence of Mac’s aesthetic is not another performer or company, but rather the activist groups during the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Even through the HIV/AIDS epidemic, when bodies were ravaged by illness, the theatrical pieces created by LGBTQIA+ artists and activists to articulate the physical and psychological oppression of their bodies by AIDS and by the Reagan administration manifested themselves onto stages across the nation, on the streets of New York, and even on the National Mall in

Washington, D.C. through plays, dances, visual art, and protests (Holleran 17). These activist-artists, some of whose bodies were “visibly ill with HIV, [had] much to tell... about living under the weight of homophobic and AIDS-phobic oppression” (Gere 11). To scholars like Gere, the performances of LGBTQIA+ persons on stage are very much like the bodies unfurling the AIDS quilt in Washington D.C. Both actions are gesturing “in the direction of the society and the syndrome that constrains them...” (11). It was through the negotiation of the body in performance on stage, on the streets, in clubs, and in the private sphere that queer theatrical aesthetics were developed. Whether it was ACT-UP Fight AIDS performing a die-in on the streets of New York, a genderfuck drag artist voguing in a small underground bar, or queer choreographer Bill T. Jones performing with his late partner Arnie Zane, who died of AIDS in 1988, multi-media erotic dance pieces in conventional concert hall – these very different modes of queer performance hold three basic features: communal experience, the constant transformation of the queer body as a tool for investigation of world-building, and the disruption of the traditional proscenium space. In an interview with NPR correspondent Ivette Feliciano, Mac shared judy’s thoughts on how the HIV/AIDS epidemic shaped judy’s artistry: “I think subconsciously all my theatrical work has been about that” (Feliciano).

Though there is a wide array of artists and companies in the rich history of queer theater and performance aesthetics in the U.S., it is clear to me as a dramaturg who Mac’s main influences are. Mac inspiration from particular artists, who have shaped and continue to shape judy’s artistry, dramaturgical thinking, social activist mind-set, and theatrical imagination. Mac uses all these influences to help straight audiences and LGBTQIA+ audiences alike to discover their own queer embodiment in relation to the past and present.

CHAPTER 3

QUEERING TIME & IMAGINING NEW WORLDS

Embodying Queerness

It is challenging to view the queer body in performance without thinking of the vast history of extreme public scrutiny, surveillance, suppression, and violence that has occurred on the queer body in United States. The first anti-sodomy laws started during the U.S. Colonial Era and continued through 1961 when all fifty states had them. The U.S. Supreme Court repealed the last anti-sodomy laws with *Lawrence vs. Texas* in 2003 (Brinkley). Many anti-cross-dressing laws in the country, which were instituted as early as the 1800s, are still technically in legal effect (PBS News Hour). Local governments heavily enforced these laws to arrest gay, lesbian, and transgender folk, which led to frequent raids of LGBTQIA+ meeting places in the mid-20th century until the Stonewall Rebellion in 1969. Currently 39 states have no state laws banning conversion therapy despite the fact that “every major medical and mental health organization in the United States has issued a statement condemning” the physically and mentally harmful practice of “treating” or “curing” homosexuality (Movement Advancement Project; Human Rights Campaign). Many LGBTQIA+ folks still lack access to appropriate health, which became most dire during the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the 1980s, and they continue to lack legal protection against discrimination. The aforementioned issues are only a few of the many instances of violence committed against LGBTQIA+ persons in U.S. history.

Despite U.S. mainstream media’s more seemingly accepting attitude toward LGBTQIA+ persons in recent decades, “nearly a fifth of the 5, 462 [reported] single-bias

hate crimes... in 2014 were because of the target's sexual orientation... [or] perceived orientation" with transgender women of color disproportionately targeted more than other marginalized sexual and gender communities (Park and Mykhyalyshyn). Though Mac's work is known for its outlandish campy style of excess and modern drag, Judy repeatedly returns to moments of violence and melancholia suffered by LGBTQIA+ in U.S. history. To know and understand this history is a component to Mac's queer embodiment. Looking closely at the arc of *The Lily's Revenge*, the audience witnesses the Lily grapple with the physical and emotional trauma caused by adherence to gendernormative roles. Mac doesn't shy away from explicitly referencing historical moments of queer pain by writing into the play real-life persons such as late President Ronald Reagan.

In *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*, theorist Heather Love describes this need for queer persons to examine these violent moments of U.S. LGBTQIA+ histories as actions of turning or feeling backward. Love shares: "Over the last century, queers have embraced backwardness in many forms: in celebrations of perversion, in defiant refusals to grow up, in explorations of haunting and memory, and in stubborn attachments to lost objects" (7) Love points out that some have argued against this turning backwards since the "association of homosexuality with loss, melancholia, and failure runs deep" and is seen as hindering LGBTQIA+ new narratives to find tales beyond the sadness (6). However in the same vein of thinking as Love, Mac integrates an outrageous queer aesthetic and examination of backward feelings, such as shame, depression, and regret, to imagine queerness that might "represent the eruption of the wholly new" – or imagined modes of existing as queer, in which the past and present are connected (8). Mac's turn to camp seems appropriate "with its tender concern for outmoded

elements of popular culture and its refusal to get over childhood pleasures and traumas, is a backward art” (7). This is where the queer body is key to queer aesthetics in theater.

Just as the “Queer Nation Manifesto” states: “How can I tell you. How can I convince you... that your life is in danger. That every day you wake up alive, relatively happy, and a functioning human being, you are committing a rebellious act... Every day one of us is taken by the enemy” (*Queer Nation Manifesto*). For an LGBTQIA+ person, particularly someone who queers gender and sexuality beyond the expectations of the hegemony’s norms, it is not just an act of rebellion and defiance, but also a hope for futurity to survive against all odds. It is not just radical to perform genderqueerness, but it is also radical to have queer bodies on stage performing, moving, dancing, and embracing their corporeality open to the criticism of audiences.

Mac knows that seeing a queer person inhabit a space carries the histories of other queer persons before them into the space. It is a communal ritual in which bodies of the past and present are in the room; a painful past that encounters the potentiality of happiness. *The Lily’s Revenge* affords audience members multiple opportunities to watch performing bodies. Seeing those performing bodies powerfully occupy the theatrical space allows them to turn backwards as Love suggests, but to also provide insight into the present.

Mac writes and performs in a style of meta-referencing, constantly adding lines that remind audiences that they are watching a theatrical performance. The opening monologue by the character of Time constantly reminds audiences that they are in a theater and there are performers in front of them. In the final act of the show, the Lily reminds the characters on stage that the audience needs to head home. In a way, Mac’s meta-referencing is a form of Bertolt Brecht’s alienation effect or *verfremdungseffekt*, a theatrical “technique... [that]

prevents the audience from losing itself completely in the narrative, instead making it a conscious critical observer” (Donaldson). This framing device in Mac’s piece encourages all audience members to think critically about the characters’ physical orientation to each other, on stage, and to the audience themselves. Audience members are also asked to reflect upon their own position in relation to the play’s themes and politics. Mac gives the audience multiple opportunities to have these moments of examination by instructing that each act has a distinctively different seating arrangement and scenic design.

Act I, entitled “The Deity: A Princess Musical,” is presented in a traditional proscenium space. Literally plucked into the play by the nostalgia and sentimentality of musical theater, the Lily becomes a part of the play and is determined to find happiness by marrying the Bride. Then the set changes to the round in “Act II, The Ghost Warrior: An Act in Iambic, Song, and Haiku,” in which all the action takes place within a circle. This allows the audience not just to observe the actors, but also to view fellow spectators' bodies. In this act, the Lily meets the Garden Flowers, allegories for the radical queers of Act-Up and Queer Nation, who oppose the upcoming nuptial. The Garden Flowers prepare for war against the Great Longing and the Flower Girls. The set then again changes into a “ceremonial space” in preparation for the play’s wedding in “Act III, The Love Act: A Dream Ballet,” with two separate sides of the room separated as “The Bride’s side” and “The Groom’s side.” The story then shifts to the Bride and her potential Groom as they struggle with societal pressures of heteronormativity, marriage, and monogamy. Act IV is “The Living Person: A Silent Film,” for which the theater space transforms into a cave: “Screens surround all four sides of the audience. A cave of technology. Audience members watch the act with their backs to each other” (Mac 196). Through a silent film, the audience watches Lily make the final physical

transition into a man. Finally in “Act V, The Mad Demons: A Pastiche,” the set returns to the original proscenium setting “only much larger... [in which] action can happen in the audience or on the stage” (196). Barriers between audience and performers break down, and the show then dismisses the Western theatrical convention of the fourth wall as audiences witness a wedding, a war, and a bacchanalian festival. The Lily confronts the Great Longing and the deity’s drive to force everyone into institutionalized narratives.

In addition, Mac instructs audiences between each act to leave the performance space completely so that they can see sprawling performances throughout the theater, allowing audience members to go to portions of the backstage to interact with the actors and technicians. They are expected to dance, interact, and speak with actors and technicians. In the original productions, all stakeholders interacted through some communal activity, such as eating a meal, discussing the themes of the play with each other, and reading books about the theory, art, and music that inspired the play to each other.

The five-part structure is crucial to Mac’s play and Judy’s exploration of queer embodiment. The framework allows audience members to examine performers and their characters’ bodies in five different modes of performance and in five different spaces. Judy encourages the audience to sit closely to the performers “whether in theatrical or non-theatrical circumstances—allow an unparalleled encounter with the [performer’s] corporeal form” (Gere 48). This interaction is instant even before the formal show begins. It is indicated in the script that there is a pre-show section, in which a personified white rose welcomes the audience into the theater explaining that there will be changing of set, space, and interaction with other audience members and characters:

(Right before the audience is let into the theater THE WHITE ROSE enters the lobby with a megaphone or her gong and a loud voice.)

WHITE ROSE. Hello Everybody! Gather round please... Get your booties over here. Ladies and Gentlemen. And gender ambiguous people! My name is the White Rose and I will be your guide throughout this evening... During intermissions, we ask you to leave the theater and hang out in the building... hang out with the cast in the open dressing room downstairs, enjoy the intermission performances that will be happening throughout the building, and above all talk with your fellow audience members. In fact why don't we practice that right now. Will everyone turn to the person on your left and say, "Hi, how are you?" (Mac 293).

The audience interacts with the White Rose, who encourages audience members to re-orientate themselves every time they find themselves in different spaces to interact with the cast, the characters, and with each other. In terms of the play, queer embodiment means always interacting with others. To be queer is to be a community-builder. This sets a precedent for the performers to change modes of performances, styles, and the way they embody their characters in different spaces. This allows the audience to see how Lily's genderqueerness is performed and perceived in the different sets made for each act, but also how the Lily adapts to each genre. For example, the way the Lily moves and speaks in the first act, "The Princess Musical," is not at all the same as in second act, in which all the dialogue shifts into verse and haiku forms. The Lily adapts to the genre while it transitions into a man.

In *Cruising Utopia: the Then and There of Queer Futurity*, Muñoz writes about the connection between queerness and a queer performer's corporeal form, which he terms "gesture." He writes that "so much can be located in the gesture. Gesture... signals a refusal of a certain kind of finitude" (Muñoz 66). He suggests that queer bodies in performance, from even the most miniscule gestures, are already disruptive of hegemonic systems. Setting his research in the gay male and drag club scene of New York, Muñoz shares that the "dance floor increases [an audience's] tolerance for embodied practices" (66). He continues: "It may do so because it demands, in the openness and closeness of relations to others, an exchange and alteration of kinesthetic experience through which [audience members] become, in a sense, less like ourselves and more like each other." Particularly in the second act of the play, Mac describes the set in Judy's stage directions to be in the round. In this physical construction of the space, Mac directly references the same gay male and drag club scenes as Muñoz, setting up a space for communal dance and observation of the character of the Garden Flowers to strut down a catwalk reminiscent of the drag balls immortalized in the 1989 documentary *Paris is Burning*. In "Act II, The Ghost Warrior: An Act in Iambic, Song, and Haiku," the Lily, determined to transform into a man, finds itself in a garden inhabited by wild organic flowers. These flowers speak in verse and challenge the Lily to a haiku off which becomes "as vociferous as a vogue-off" (Mac 242). Mac gives the audience lines to read and opportunities to interact with the characters. Unlike the first act, in which the audience is seated facing towards one direction, the audience is in closer proximity to each other and they watch other spectators around the circle, a shape conducive to communal listening, sharing, and inclusion. This physical

transformation of the space reorients how the performers are perceived by the audience. This kinesthetic experience is fundamental to the storytelling.

Mac's way of depicting violence onto queer bodies subverts many previous LGBTQIA+ narratives. Judy uses a mix of humor and drama to add nuance to the melancholia often found in these particular narratives. Mac suggests that sadness and pain isn't a core experience that defines experiences of LGBTQIA+ persons, but rather is part of a range of emotions and experiences. Historically, the physical and emotional pain often portrayed in LGBTQIA+ narratives on stage, film, and literature through dramatic stories were often tragic. These narratives documented moments in American history in which certain non-normative sexual identities and gender expressions were severely policed. Early 20th century American plays, such as Lillian Hellman's 1930s play *The Children's Hour*, often had the sexual or gender deviant die after failing to conform to societal and cultural expectations of gender and sexuality. Later gay and lesbian plays of the time of the Stonewall Rebellion began to diverge from this trope. Plays such as Mart Crowley's 1968 Off-Broadway play *The Boys in the Band* revealed in the pain and self-loathing of being a non-normative sexual and/or gender identified person. No one killed themselves, but they still sought acceptance from a larger heterosexual community. When the HIV/AIDS epidemic was at its peak in the United States, the physical and emotional pain could be visibly seen on performers deteriorating from the disease. Tony Kushner's *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes* unapologetically asked what was to become of these queer bodies. Regarding these LGBTQIA+ performers, scholar Gere says that they "gesture in the direction of the society... that constrains them, begging for a closer reading of [their] corporeality... of action and bodiliness, in a time of profound injustice and

cruelty” (Gere 11). He adds that these artists and performers “also exist in a world of their own remarkable cognition, shaped by their own physical forms and communicative capabilities” (11). Mac acknowledges this pain and melancholy continue to exist in being queer in contemporary American politics, but as Gere suggests, there is a greater self-awareness also to the possibility of living past the pain. Mac sees that instead of asking for acceptance from a heterosexual hegemony, the answer to alleviate this queer pain is to celebrate queer difference. Mac doesn’t hide the pain that the Lily and other genderqueer characters endure, but adds a layer of comedy to subside the initial violence to also point to a futurity that celebrates difference.

In *The Lily’s Revenge* the line between violence and comedy is blurred to an extreme in which the two categories are indistinguishable. Throughout the five acts of the play, the character of the Lily goes through horrific bodily and emotional harm to marry a human bride. In the first act alone, one of the Lily’s petals is cut off with scissors by another character and this violent act is repeated four more times throughout the play until no petals are left. As an anthropomorphic flower, Mac writes explicitly in the text that the character Bride Deity publicly cuts a petal off the Lily at the order of The Great Longing. Mac doesn’t mince words to explain the sheer violence of the act and its effect on the Lily emotionally, physically, and mentally. It is traumatic:

(THE GREAT LONGING opens and the BRIDE DEITY is revealed holding scissors. A slasher movie sound cue.)

LILY. Amelia?

BRIDE DEITY. I’m sorry Lily.

(She cuts a petal off of the LILY. It is truly horrible. The LILY is in great pain.)

FLOWER GIRLS DEITY. Again! Cut it again! (Mac 224).

Despite the violence, the thought of a flower in pain is funny and makes the act of the petal removal comedic with the addition of the “slasher movie sound cue” as indicated in the script. Comedy is always at the expense of a party that is being observed; audiences can look at the work of Charlie Chaplin and the Three Stooges and find themselves laughing at the expense of their characters’ pain from their slapstick vaudeville routine. Though this *schadenfreude* seems perverse and backwards, Mac does something extraordinary in this act of staged violence. Judy uses comedic violence to expose the queer body’s constant endurance in the face of abuse. Judy doesn’t make less of the gravity of the violence; instead, the simulated violence repositions the audience into actors of radical compassion and empathy for not only the flower Lily, but also the queer actor whose body is simulating these actions. It’s in these moments of comedic violence that the audience can critically grapple with intellectual conversation of the embodiment of queerness. One moment they can laugh at the Lily’s pain, but a second later they shift to relating this violence to actual living communities. The violence throughout the play remains digestible for the audience due to the outrageousness and the ridiculousness of Mac’s queer aesthetic. Moreover, the action of portraying the Lily is not just an allegorical one, but a temporal one. As stated before, a queer performer carries the histories of other queer persons before them into the performance space. The performer who plays Lily is usually a self-identified queer or gender non-conforming person (in three of the four professional productions of the play, Mac performed as the Lily). The power of the queer body receiving and surviving

that moment of physical and emotional violence recalls acts of violence against LGBTQIA+ persons in the past and now, asserting that this queer embodiment is making known the violence that continues to occur particularly to those within the LGBTQIA+ community who perform gender against the normative. This reminds audience members that beyond the homonormative and gendernormative queer folk who are now seeing more mainstream representation and legal protection, many other LGBTQIA+ persons are still marginalized.

The transition of the Lily into a man follows the trope of the gender misfit being forced into hegemonic gender expectations. The audience observes and interacts with the Lily and other characters as the Lily loses its petals from the first to the fourth act before revealing its final transformation to the audience and all the other characters in the play in Act V. In the first act, the musical, the Bride cuts one petal off Lily; and in the second and third act, the Haiku/Vogue-Off and dream ballet, respectively, the character of Wind accidentally blows off two of Lily's petals. In these moments, the Lily is physically standing, singing, dancing, and performing in front of a live audience, sometimes just a foot away. The fourth is a silent film, which can be interpreted in productions in multiple ways, as in live-feed or pre-filmed and/or with live bodies or puppets. For this act, most productions have chosen to create silent films using a mixture of animation, dolls, and puppets. There is further distancing between the audience and the queer body while simultaneously providing closeness and intimacy with the intense close-up capabilities of a camera. There is simply an additional critical lens through which the audience sees and interacts with the queer bodies – now puppets and dolls—in performance. Most of the more violent acts against the Lily occur in this film: the Lily is peer-pressured into weight lifting,

drinking protein shakes, plastic surgery, and electroshock therapy. The violence that the puppet Lily “physically” endures escalates throughout the act and finally makes the Lily into a man. If the single cut of the petal in the first act was traumatic for the Lily then the trauma occurring in the fourth acts pushes the queer body to its limitations. At the end of the film, the act ends with a live scene between Lily and the Dirt, a personified allegory of nature. The audience finds the Lily, now again portrayed by actor, recovering from its surgery:

DIRT. Lily! Lily wake your ass up.

...

LILY. What happened?

DIRT. You let the Great Longing’s triumvirate give you electric shock treatment so you could become... a man.

LILY. I don’t feel like a man.

DIRT. I don’t imagine you would (Mac 270-271).

The genderqueer Lily physically transforms into a “man” by the end of act four. The drag costume and make-up are off, and now the actor playing Lily dons a tuxedo. The audience sees the fantastical plant genderqueer exterior muted to a man, an idea that Lily cannot embody. However in this sadness, the Lily has an epiphany:

LILY. ... the institution of marriage is so large.

DIRT. Like looking up close at the skin of an elephant and trying to figure out what it is?

LILY. Yes. So large with its billion dollar industry and century-old traditions... I couldn’t possibly understand it. And it is so small,

DIRT. As an atom.

LILY. So small in its thinking, so limited, exclusionary, and sexist... And the miniature and the gigantic together create a felt lack. A lack that is essentially...nostalgia.

...

DIRT. Lily, what would it be like if you stopped equating love with equality?... What would it be like to stop equating love with loving? (271).

Though Lily has taken the shape of a “man” and now can participate in the act of marriage, the Lily rejects marriage and rejects the new identity of “man” and all its privileges. Mac’s queer embodiment rests on this rejection of compulsory heterosexuality and heteronormativity. However, if Lily rejects the expectation of a wedding, then how will the play end? What is beyond that horizon?

At a certain point in U.S. history, LGBTQIA+ communities found it very difficult to see what was beyond that horizon. The HIV/AIDS crisis ravaged queer communities throughout the 1980s and 90s; a time which author Andrew Holleran describes as “a war [in our nation] and not some fatal flu” (Holleran 17). The U.S. media’s criminalization and shaming of victims of HIV/AIDS through constant fascination of the physical deterioration of their queer bodies cemented decades of discrimination against LGBTQIA+ persons, blaming homosexual promiscuity as the cause of HIV/AIDS transmission. Butler notes that the “drive for gay marriage is in some ways a response to AIDS and, in particular, a shamed response, one in which the gay community seeks to disavow its so-called promiscuity, one in which we appear as healthy and normal and capable of sustaining monogamous relations over time” (Butler 115).

The HIV/AIDS epidemic came a little over a decade after the Stonewall Revolution and the rise of LGBTQIA+ movements throughout the United States. The epidemic stopped the LGBTQIA+'s progress on undoing heteronormative structures, such as marriage and monogamy. More than thirty years after the first official diagnosis of AIDS in the United States, the landscape of HIV/AIDS isn't at all the same as it was – to be diagnosed with HIV is not considered a death sentence. However, the trauma of the HIV/AIDS crisis still lingers in the artistic communities in the U.S., as it ravaged an entire generation of LGBTQIA+ persons. Mainstream media continues to rarely depict queer sex as a pleasurable, emotional, all-encompassing experience.

In *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, Lee Edelman asserts that American hegemonic fantasy of the future rests on the “image of the Child” as it is “the perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics, the fantasmatic beneficiary of every political intervention” (Edelman 3). Queer bodies are not seen as producers of this hetero-fantasy, and are automatically seen as “not ‘fighting for the children,’ the side outside the consensus by which all politics confirms the absolute value of reproductive futurism” (3). Taylor Mac exposes the devastating physical and psychological effects of compulsory heterosexuality, heteronormativity, and assimilation through the performance of the queer body in sexual pleasure. Mac refuses to indulge in the comedic trope of the marriage, and the expected marriage is interrupted by an unexpected bacchanalian orgy on stage. Mac revels in the idea of *No Future* and instead calls for the entire cast to participate in a queer bacchanalian ceremony in which pleasure is prioritized – something that is important to discovery of the queer body in the 21st century post the HIV/AIDS crisis of the 80s and 90s.

At this point of the story, the Lily violently modifies its body to physically become a “man,” so prescribed by the institution of Nostalgia, in order to marry a human bride. Now seeing the possibilities of other forms of love, sexual pleasure, and community, the Lily initiates the bacchanal. The characters of the play inhabit the role of Edelman’s sinthomosexual, a queer agent who disrupts reproductive futurism, through their sexual explosion. There are ways to experience sexual pleasure without shame and outside of the frameworks of heteronormativity. This leads to the defeat of The Great Longing (or the God of Nostalgia). The stage directions say:

(The Great Longing falls to the ground revealing the naked actor behind it and the whole cast having an orgy... and that a multitude of sexual preferences are represented including multiple partners, and a masturbator and someone simply amidst it all reading a book or crocheting...) (Mac 287).

It is in this act of Lacanian *jouissance*, a fantasmatic escape, that “tears the fabric of Symbolic reality as we know it, unraveling the solidarity of *every* object...” (Edelman 25). Mac refuses to “affirm normativity’s singular truth” and echoes words of the Queer Nation Manifesto: “Being queer is ‘grass roots’ because we know that everyone of us, every body, every cunt, every heart and ass and dick is a world of pleasure waiting to be explored. Everyone of us is a world of infinite possibility. Every time we fuck, we win” (*Queer Nation Manifesto*). Again, Mac uses the queer body to explore its place in history in the past, present, and future. Sex is important in the understanding of how the queer body is coded in American hegemony. Queer sex is threatening to the foundation of American capitalism; queer sex doesn’t produce a future for the country’s workforce. The

bacchanalian festival, which includes sexual contact between flowers and humans, counters what is often found in early queer literature and American film: being queer and having non-heteronormative sex or non-normative gender expression would lead to mania, depression, extreme pain, or even a tragic death.

Edelman's Symbolic, his word for the culmination of institutionalized heteronormative power, attempts to reset the disruption so the hegemonic structure is again in full control; the original wedding story returns to its institutionalized narrative with Nostalgia returning. While all the characters are pleasuring each other, the characters are interrupted mid-orgy by another institutional figure, the Pope:

ALL. "Yes! Relativism has won the day." (*Enter THE POPE with a machine gun.*)

THE POPE. NEVER!

(*THE POPE fires its bullets into everyone. Fabric blood (red for the people and green for the FLOWERS and red and green for the LILY) sprays everywhere. It looks like Christmas.*)

...

THE MARYS DEITY #1. Didn't the Pope die or resign or something?

TIME. He's a stock character; one pope passes and another pope pops up in his place.

TULIP. But what are we to do? We're all bleeding to death.

(*Everyone suddenly feels the pain of getting shot*) (*Mac 287-288*).

Even at moments of triumph by queer persons, old adversaries, such as the Catholic Church, attempt to reinstate the heteronormative's narrative. The grand ending to this play

never gets resolved. The queer bodies in sexual pleasure never reach an orgasmic climax. A wedding is disrupted, and the orgy is ended in the most violent way. In a sense, this reminds the audience that any societal troublemaker will always be under some sort of scrutiny, whether as regulated by law or social and cultural practices. However, the tone of the script is still triumphant. Mac scripts all the characters to perform a campy pageant of song and dance despite inevitably dying.

Even in the face of discrimination and death, the queer body continues its resilience in the face of any sort of threat; the queer body can feel multiple forms of pleasure despite the violence it has endured. By the end of the play, the characters and the audience form a community and celebrate their queer existence.

Mac's *The Lily's Revenge* defines "queer embodiment" partially through the exploration of the meaning of life and death outside of mainstream social structures. In Aristotelian fashion, it finds a way for the audience to experience catharsis by having the Lily approach the audience and ask it a question:

LILY. ...So with my dying breath I'll sing the final verse, pop the question, the lights will go dark and you will do what you will do (Mac 291).

Muñoz analyzes Miranda Joseph's critique of futurity regarding performance, be it theatrical or ritual:

In Joseph's lucid critique we see that performance is the kernel of a potentiality that is transmitted to audiences and witnesses and that the real force of performance is its ability to generate a modality of knowing and recognition among audiences and groups that facilitates modes of belonging, especially minoritarian belonging. If we consider performance

under such a lens, we can see the temporality of what I describe as utopian performativity, which is to say a manifestation of a ‘doing’ that is in the horizon, a mode of possibility (Muñoz 98-99).

By the end of the play, Mac has asked the audience to interact with the characters and the actors who portray them in the show’s storytelling in some fashion – witnessing and communally exploring queer embodiment throughout the play’s narrative. In addition, the audience has absorbed the story through five different genres of theater. Their participation forms a community and a physical bond with the performers, technicians, and the characters of the play. They become stakeholders in theatrical story-telling and are responsible to continue on the narrative. There is a “doing” and “being” by these spectators turned agents that makes this mode of possibility happen. But how?

This outreach to the audience reminds me of the 1990 New York Gay Pride Parade when members of Queer Nation were directly handing out their manifestos to passersby on the street. Like the Lily, these activists presented ideas and let the readers decide how to respond. I see this direct outreach to a community as an act of utopian performativity. “Performance, seen as utopian performativity, is imbued with a sense of potentiality” (Muñoz 99). The Lily’s final words present a queer potentiality to the audience that they are responsible for. Lily’s outreach “is something like a trace or potential that exits or lingers after a performance... [it] suggests a futurity”, a new embodiment of queerness, which at its core is actively living radically compassionate for all beings and things (99).

Embodying Time and Nostalgia

The temporality of storytelling in *The Lily’s Revenge* is fragmented and speaks to Mac’s idea of a queer temporality that has been erased from mainstream narratives. Queer

time as presented in the play is within the framework of extended periods of action and sudden moments of interaction amongst members of the audience and artists during intermissions. The world of *The Lily's Revenge* is ahistorical despite being tied to LGBTQIA+ politics in the U.S. Time within the play continues to run according to rules not of the human world. Jack Halberstam shares similar sentiments about Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot*, and describes *Godot* as a "defamiliarization of time spent" within a performance space in which "the future... becomes[s] diminished... and the experience of duration makes visible the formlessness of time" (Halberstam 7). Spectators gradually begin to see the duality of the outside world and the spectacular gender-bending world of *The Lily's Revenge*. It is at every impasse that the temporality of the outside meets with, clashes, and compliments the queer temporality of *Lily's* world.

In Mac's play, traditional signals for the beginning of a play are absent. Unlike typical Western performances within proscenium spaces, there is neither a musical interlude nor dimming lights. There is no formality. Instead the play's first act begins with a disruption as the house lights are still on. The play begins with a personified lily in its pot entering the space late. It is only when Lily finds a seat and apologizes to audience members that someone on stage begins to speak. The character Time, described as a "person" dressed in drag with various time instruments such as a cuckoo clock and an hourglass, suddenly awakes "as if from a fever dream" (Mac 203). Its normal sleep has been disrupted by something in the space:

TIME. (*a gasp of air and then:*) THIS! PLAY! IS! LONG! (*She looks at the audience and speaks a dire warning.*) No, really. LONG. In fact this play will be much longer than ADVERTISED. It is so long you may

actually FORGET YOUR NAME. My name is Time. So trust when I say, this play could very well last the REST OF YOUR LIFE! (203).

Time, the character, is seen on stage with bridesmaids who have aged and are in deep sleep. Time soon introduces its child The Great Longing, also known as the God of Nostalgia. Time warns the audience:

TIME. My eldest child, the malicious Great Longing Deity, God of Nostalgia, has trapped them in this cock-and-bull story with institutionalized narrative. INSTITUTIONALIZED NARRATIVE! Little by little they have turned from lively questioning individuals, like you, to cliché crones of mediocrity. Woolgathering junkies of wistfulness. Escape now or the telling of this tale will reduce *you*, like these Flower Girls, to an addicted coagulation of nostalgia and hope (204).

Within the first several minutes of the show, the character of Time presents itself as a gender ambiguous character, unidentifiable within the gender constraints of the outside world. It's this disidentification with our world that allows the audience to enter the world of the show. The world of the show is not controlled by Time, but rather its child. In a panic, Time, like a truth-teller, warns audience members that its child Nostalgia is the real ruler of the stage and its world. The monstrous Nostalgia would seduce the audience and trick them into staying in the theater with its promise of a wedding:

TIME. ... when they play starts, The Great Longing will use the promise of a climax. A climax in the shape of the most banal and contemptible contrivance of all: The Wedding. [*... the performers on stage begin to stir ...*] Shhhhhh! It will use a wedding to nail you to this benighted narrative.

Flee. I beg you. Make your escape now, in this moment, or this moment will be no more. No. Really. THE EXITS ARE WHERE YOU ENTERED! Any takers? I BEG YOU! (204).

Time explains to the audience that Nostalgia has debased her.

TIME: ... once *I*, Time, was the *teller* of this tale. I was the *star* and played *all* the parts: the seasons, the shades, the *windy day*. I spoke the lines of a face, the drips that made the canyons, the philosophical arguments ‘tween Hegel and Kant... But as The Great Longing Deity gains power I, and my thoughts, are reduced. Shrank to serials. Vaudevilles disguised as... culture. MUSICAL THEATER! Now I, *we*, are forced to play *stock* characters. Time is fixed to the atomic clock. I am captured in the hourglass. Trapped in the cuckoo clock and digital phone. Treated as something to be checked and put aside. A time piece. A side kick. But there is a last vestige. Part of me remains. Free. Essential. Inside of here. (*Listening to the heart of an Audience Member:*) Bubum. Bubum. Bubum. That is me. Hidden from view. Leave this place, now, before I am drained from you completely. I BEG YOU! (205).

No one in the audience leaves; Time then declares the play will begin. The weathered and battered bridesmaids who are addicted slaves to Nostalgia, an allegory for sentimentality, tradition, and compulsive heteronormativity, take their spots on stage and sing a campy ritualistic song to the deity. Nostalgia, a personified stage curtain, awakes. Its red cloth overlooks the entire stage menacingly, overshadowing its parent Time and all who dwell under it.

In this campy beginning, Time acknowledges itself as a character, but also describes itself in the third person. Time's self-reflection as a being and as a concept interrupts the notion of action always moving in a forward motion. It asks audiences to whether stay or not before agreeing to Nostalgia's seduction of a wedding, a symbol heteronormative futurity and tradition. Time begs the audience to consider if that is what they truly want. In such urgency, Time pleads with the spectators and performers alike to acknowledge their own complicity in Nostalgia's reign, and in turn, their complicity in upholding hegemonic structures of the gender binary and heteronormativity.

As mentioned before, *The Lily's Revenge* not only responds to the context of the growing exclusionary gay politics of the late 2000s, but also references older conversations between queer radicals' and gay assimilationists' concerns on marriage post-Stonewall. According to Michael Warner: "Queer thought both before and after Stonewall... called attention to the mythology by which marriage is idealized" (Warner 88). Though later LGBTQIA+ organizations would include the "expansion of marriage in their vision of change after Stonewall, they usually contextualized it as a part of more sweeping changes designed to ensure that single people and nonstandard households, and not just same-sex couples would benefit" (90). Warner continues: "Those [who identify with the LGBTQIA+ community] who now advocate gay marriage have not shown how doing so is consistent with this tradition. They have induced widespread amnesia about it" (90). This history is encapsulated in Time's opening monologue. Time talks to deaf ears about when it was in power, with no limitations on thought and on being. Only later did Nostalgia, with its promise of assimilation, weddings, tradition, and heteronormative order, begin to dictate

the world in which they lived. Time's own history as a deity seems to have been forgotten, as were the radical politics of sexual and gender liberation.

In this first scene, Mac explores queer time's past and contemporary and possible future. The characters of Time and Nostalgia are portrayed as deities that are in constant conflict which gives the framework for Lily to negotiate where and when belonging is possible as a genderqueer flower. A gender-ambiguous figure embodies the character of Time, who has lost its power to Nostalgia. Though Time is often thought of as omnipotent, in this play, Nostalgia and the humans who are addicted to its promise of institutionalized narrative control Time. On the other hand, nostalgia embodies what Warner calls "the mythology by which marriage is idealized" (88). It is inferred from Time's dialogue that Nostalgia came into power only when humans began to support it. When the play begins, the audience becomes part of the institutionalized narrative that Nostalgia commands to be performed on stage.

It is soon revealed in the play that Time has two children, Nostalgia and Dirt. Dirt is the God of Here and Now, an allegory for nature. Time scolds Nostalgia when the personified Lily is dismissed by Nostalgia: "*You* don't grow it, you force your sister, The Dirt, to grow everything for you... You've made my baby a slave" (Mac 211). The Great Longing, or the God of Nostalgia, continues its threatening, monstrous, and villainous reign over nature. The longing for Western cultures to adhere to heteronormativity and reproductive futurity rests in nostalgia's promise of consistency. Nature with its fabulous endless number of queer creations cannot fit within the institution that Nostalgia has placed on its creatures. Nature's creations must be controlled for Nostalgia to continue to gain power. Marriage, citizenship, and other legal structures dictate who participates in this world.

Mac understands queerness as a disruption of the hegemonic construct of time and history. Mac's personification of Time and Nostalgia provides a constant allegorical conflict between the concepts of time and tradition, allowing audiences to critically analyze their own belonging to place, temporality, and traditions.

CHAPTER 4

EXPLORATIONS OF QUEER DRAMATURGY

What is “Queer Dramaturgy”?

In *Queer Dramaturgies: International Perspectives on Where Performance Leads Queer* (2016), editors Alyson Campbell and Stephen Farrier attempt to define “queer dramaturgy” in a larger theoretical understanding of dramaturgy. They emphasize how bodies in performance can lead “queer- in the sense of the possible *directions* in which located queer performance can take queer ideas”; noting how “bodies in performance [were not] always dealt with in early queer theorizing” (Campbell and Farrier 4). Campbell and Farrier and the collection of essays that they’ve gathered define dramaturgy as a discipline through which artist-theorists can analyze and reflect on the corporeality of queer performance (2). Inspired by their work, I investigate the art of queer dramaturgy as an artistic practice with these questions: Are queer dramaturgy practices different from those of a typical production dramaturg? What in my own research or my methodology will assist all artists towards the direction of queer embodiment?

As the production dramaturg, I found *The Lily’s Revenge* daunting, as it forced me to radically re-examine my own dramaturgical processes. Taylor Mac’s play centers on queerness that strips down social structures. Thinking of the hierarchy of power within theatrical teams, I had to radically imagine with the creative team how we can collaborate to subvert the existing structures of power amongst a director, dramaturg, and designers. Throughout the production process, I also had to find ways to queer the hierarchies of power that perpetuate white male hegemonic power in our department. This meant that my

collaborators and I had to tirelessly negotiate how we worked not only within our creative team, but also within the larger structure of the department to create this queer theater piece. In addition, if queerness is also about futurity, I was not simply dramaturging a production with a scheduled closing date. I had to actively think of how the piece's queerness would live on beyond its performance dates. This idea of queer futurity, coupled with this sense of social activist work, challenged me to find ways to instill this consciousness in all persons involved in our production and in all aspects of our artistic decision making. Lastly, Mac's exploration of queer and feminist theory in the play is expansive and dense. Translating Judy's theoretical concepts into tangible artistic choices challenged me intellectually and artistically in ways I had yet to be challenged as a production dramaturg.

The following chapter documents my work as a production dramaturg on *The Lily's Revenge*, and my queer dramaturgical contributions to the artistic choices made throughout the creative process. The first section documents a history of the UMass Amherst production. A section entitled "Creating Common Language" follows. In that section, I examine specific ways my queer dramaturgical research, methods, and interventions came into practice in certain aspects of the creative process, such as designing and staging the play. I end the chapter with reflections on my role as marketing material designer and as a community engagement person, sharing how my dramaturgical lens was vital in those two aspects to the production. Through this chapter, I document and expose the challenges of queering the practice of dramaturgy when collaborating on a queer play, such as *The Lily's Revenge*; and I also reveal what methods I used in my artistry to help the creative team and cast fully explore ideas of queer temporality, aesthetics, and embodiment as presented by Mac.

Staging of the UMass Amherst Production

In November 2016, directing candidate Jennifer Onopa, with whom I had worked on Ping Chong and Talvin Wilks' *Collidescope 2.0: Pre and Post Racial America* and Quiara Alegía Hudes' *The Happiest Song Plays Last*, approached me to co-sign a proposal to produce Taylor Mac's *The Lily's Revenge*. Onopa's directorial work throughout her time at UMass Amherst centered on themes of social justice, racial equality, ensemble work, and community building.

She submitted *The Lily's Revenge* for consideration for inclusion of the following theater season around the time of the 2016 United States presidential election. The proposed team of M.F.A. Theater students for the production were: Jennifer Onopa as director; myself as the dramaturg; M.F.A. candidate Christina Beam as costume designer; and M.F.A. candidate Tamara Harris as lighting designer. Given that there were no M.F.A. candidates in scenic and sound at that time, no one co-signed the proposal in those positions. Though she had submitted the play before the election, the play's themes of inclusivity resonated with Onopa. She shared with me: "I want to put on a show in which we celebrate life. I want to have a big dance party!" Other factors that played into Onopa's submission of the play for consideration of a mainstage production were our collective concerns of what fellow colleagues needed in our portfolios for post-graduation careers. Onopa wanted to explore work that she found challenging and "almost impossible" to stage, while I wanted to venture into queer theatrical aesthetics. Knowing how design heavy the show would be, Beam and Harris signed onto the project quickly. For Beam, the show's drag aesthetic gave her opportunities to build costumes from scratch, an opportunity

she had not yet had in the program. The show's multitude of opportunities for world-building with light enticed Harris.

In March 2017, the UMass Amherst Department of Theater announced the inclusion of *The Lily's Revenge* in the 2017-18 theater season. Informal production meetings began in April 2017 to discuss the larger themes of the play. The four aforementioned creative team members were present for those meetings. Separately, Onopa and I decided to read the play ourselves to make sense of the action and timing of the entire piece in early May 2017. Over two visits to The Black Sheep, a small deli and bakery in Amherst, MA, we read the play to map out the characters' actions, arcs, and movements throughout the piece.

As a queer dramaturg of color, I hoped to guide Onopa to basic understandings of LGBTQIA+ cultures and theories before the start of our production meetings in the fall. It was my top priority for her to know: 1) general LGBTQIA+ history in the United States; 2) the various aesthetics of drag; 3) popular cultural references within LGBTQIA+ cultures that are present in the play; 4) the difference between "queer" politics and mainstream "gay" politics (and within that begin to understand the intersectional issues of race, class, ability, and access within the LGBTQIA+ communities); and 5) various definitions of love, family, and community in LGBTQIA+ contexts. In hopes of better understanding the theory and the queer cultures that the play referenced, Onopa met with UMass Communications Department Professor Kimberly Perez before the start of the summer to organize an independent study on queer theory for the following fall semester. To prime her for her studies with Professor Perez, I gave her a list of suggested LGBTQIA+ books and other media to study during that summer. The book list included theorists Judith

Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies that Matter* (1993), Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* (1986), Elizabeth Freeman's *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (2010), José Esteban Muñoz's *Disidentification* (1999) and *Cruising Utopias* (2009), Mattilda Sycamore Bernstein's *That's Revolting: Queer Strategies for Resisting Assimilation* (2005), and Lee Edelman's *No Future* (2004); as well as documents by ACT-Up Fight AIDS and Queer Nation. Among the films and other pop cultural media, I asked Onopa to watch some documentaries and iconic LGBTQIA+ films such as *The Celluloid Closet* (1995), *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), *Grey Gardens* (1975), *Paris is Burning* (1990) and John Water's *Pink Flamingos* (1972). As Onopa examined all of the material as best as she possibly could during the summer, we spoke via phone so that I could better flesh out her understanding of LGBTQIA+ politics and cultures found within the listed materials. I left Onopa the responsibility to delve into more complex theory with Professor Kimberly Perez, who had the authority as a scholar-activist-artist and professor to help Onopa synthesize the more complex theory. I didn't want to overwhelm Onopa and I never pressed her to read all of the listed materials. She had stated previously that she often feels overwhelmed when interacting with theory. In an independent study with Professor Perez, Onopa would at least have the opportunity to carve out a safe space for herself to wrestle with the theory at her own pace.

While immersing herself in the theory that summer, Onopa wanted to also explore the physical aspects of the world. Act III of the play seemed very challenging to Onopa as she was neither well-versed in the dance styles that Mac references, nor did she find it easy to visually imagine the act as she read it. Onopa visited Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, where I interned at the time, to attend a performance by Eiko Otake, a Japanese

performance artist who takes inspiration from Butoh. In addition to her research of Butoh-inspired movement and dance, I introduced her to the work of downtown experimental New York choreographer Faye Driscoll, who was the original choreographer and director of Act III of *The Lily's Revenge* in New York. Onopa stayed a day to research the archived work of both Otake and Driscoll. With my knowledge of dance, I sat down with her later that the day to unpack the two dancers' styles of movement. For my own benefit, I took workshop classes with both Otake and Driscoll at Jacob's Pillow that summer to better understand their dance philosophies and dance vocabularies with the hopes that I would use the knowledge gained for rehearsals.

One of the major challenges for our production was that instead of five directors (or theatre companies) collaborating to direct the five-act play as previous productions had done per preference of Mac, we had a single director at the helm. The previous productions allowed multiple voices, who were versed in different aspects of queer performance or the other aesthetics in the show, to openly collaborate and assist. Though Onopa's directing style was open to collaboration, the director's knowledge and experience of LGBTQIA+ politics, aesthetics, and cultures was key to understanding, designing, and staging the play as she was to make the final decisions. To better understand how to approach the massive play, I suggested to Onopa to attend queer performance artist Diana Oh's *{my lingerie play}* in New York City in Fall 2017, so that she could see how other contemporary queer artists were attempting to disrupt space and reclaim space. I also arranged for Onopa to speak with director Rachel Chavkin and dramaturg Nina Mankin, who were original collaborators on the 2009 New York production of *The Lily's Revenge*, in order for Onopa to gain insight to how she could direct the show.

More formal production meetings started to take shape in Fall 2017. New Scenic Design Professor Anya Klepikov, Stage Manager Elizabeth Diamond, Musical Director Anthony Ferreira, Sound Designer Hampshire College student Nathaniel Gilsdorf, and Assistant Director Gabriel Harrell joined the team. In September, the creative team began discussing visual research for the show; particularly Klepikov and Onopa were narrowing ideas of design concepts for the sets and the movement of the piece between UMass Amherst's two theaters, the Curtain Theater and the Rand Theater. More collaborators joined our team, particularly undergraduate dramaturg Afrikah Smith to assist me with dramaturgical tasks.

During the fall preparations, I distilled my extensive research of queer aesthetics and the play's larger themes in a way that was accessible for everyone in the team. To build a common language around the play, I stayed active in all design conversations Onopa was having with all the designers. Over the summer, Onopa kept referencing how much she loved the documentary *Paris is Burning*. She shared with me that the drag presented in the documentary was not simply a performance aesthetic, but rather a raw tactic by a community to bond and explore the possibilities of living. In comparison, Onopa was not drawn to the overly manicured drag as presented in reality television competition *RuPaul's Drag Race*. As dramaturg, I strategically began to introduce *Paris is Burning* to the entire design team, emphasizing how "queering" theater is to take space or material and use it in unexpected ways, going against the expectations of an audience or the product's makers. The documentary became the entire creative team's entry point into our design of the production. With that knowledge, the design team began to create renderings of the worlds of the play by the end of the semester. By the end of October, Onopa and I spoke with both

Chavkin and Mankin. Nick Vaughan, the show's original scenic designer, also visited our department by invitation of Klepikov to present his work on the original production.

The creative team presented preliminary designs to the department in the Rand Theater in December 2017. The team solidified several key choices about the production by then: 1) the audience would travel from the Curtain Theater to the Rand Theater. Onopa would stage the first two acts of the play in the Curtain, while she would stage the last three acts in the Rand; 2) Act IV would be a puppet show. While puppeteers performed live, a cast member would simultaneously use a projector to present a filmed version of the puppet show; 3) costumes, lighting, and scenic design would follow ideas of transforming space in unexpected ways, keeping in mind the audience experience; 4) in addition to my dramaturgical work, I would act as the production's choreographer; and 5) most importantly, the show would respond to the needs of the local community, prioritizing LGBTQIA+ communities. The play pushes LGBTQIA+ characters to the center of the story-telling, and by doing so, acknowledges and affirms their existence.

Leading up to the auditions during the week of January 30, 2018, I designed a logo and website for the production to serve mainly as a marketing tool (see Appendix Figure C). However, in its development I realized that the website would not only provide community members outside of the UMass Amherst campus the opportunity to learn about auditions and the show, but would also serve as a dramaturgical resource for the cast. The website was published about a month before auditions, and was shared throughout the department's social media pages. Onopa required all auditioning performers to come prepared with both a contemporary monologue, a classical monologue, and a song to perform. In addition, Onopa required all potential cast members to have read the play before auditions as a way to clear confusion on the sexual content

and LGBTQIA+ themes of the show.

It was important for Onopa to have people of LGBTQIA+ communities to be in the show, particularly in the role of the Lily. We saw that this production was an opportunity for LGBTQIA+ actors to take the stage as many straight actors are still favored in LGBTQIA+ roles in commercial theater and Hollywood. A recent example is heterosexual cisgender Andrew Garfield as the gay protagonist in the 2018 Broadway revival of Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*. Examples in mainstream Hollywood films are more abundant (ex. Sean Penn as Harvey Milk in *Milk* (2008), Hilary Swank as transgender man Brandon Teena in *Boys Don't Cry* (1999), and Heath Ledger as a gay protagonist in *Brokeback Mountain* (2006)). For ethical reasons, Onopa and I did not ask anyone their gender identity nor their sexual orientation. Instead Onopa asked that on all actor audition forms, all potential cast members write on their form their reasons for auditioning for the show or why they found the play meaningful. It was through these opportunities to share that some of the actors, many of them openly identifying with the LGBTQIA+ community in their answers, stated their positionality to the piece and how their identities played a role in their decision to audition for the show.

During callbacks, all potential cast members were called in for a one minute dance combo, which was choreographed and taught by me and my assistant Smith. All persons called back were asked to sing and to read roles from the show. After two days of deliberation, Onopa, myself, Harrell, Ferreira, Smith, Beam, and Diamond were able to bring the cast down to a total of 30. The casting process challenged the team to be conscious of who and what identities were represented on our department stages. As a queer person of color, I discussed with the team the importance of being conscious of how we were representing bodies, particularly historically underrepresented bodies on our

stages. What did it mean to cast heterosexual cisgender men as women in the show? What does it mean for a queer identified person of color to play the role of the Lily? Onopa and team took the time to consider these difficult questions to create our final cast. In the lead roles, the team cast undergraduate student Steve Folmar as the Lily, first-year undergraduate student Elizabeth Castellon as Time, and undergraduate student Lucas LaGuardia as the God of Nostalgia/Great Longing. The entire cast was composed of students from the UMass Amherst community, with students who openly identified with the local LGBTQIA+ community and other underrepresented identities. Our conscious casting helped create a cast which was fairly diverse in representations of sexual orientations, gender identities, expressions, and racial and ethnic identities.

Rehearsals started on Monday, February 12, 2018, and continued until the day before the official opening night on Friday, April 20, 2018. During the rehearsals, we asked speakers from the Stonewall Center as well as graduate student alum Finn Lefevre to lead the cast in seminars around gender and sexuality. The first seminar conducted by the Stonewall Center was about an hour and half, and was supposed to present basic concepts of gender and sexuality so that everyone working on *The Lily's Revenge* had the same core knowledge of and sensitivity to LGBTQIA+ issues. The cast and team filled out pre-screening forms concerning our prior knowledge of gender and sexuality. Onopa gave the Stonewall Center staff a copy of *The Lily's Revenge*. Despite this preparatory work, the two undergraduate speakers were not aware of the issues of the play and the general make-up of the cast. The cast and those from the department who attended felt that the speakers were condescending and cut off any possibility of asking any questions at that workshop. To help facilitate a more conducive learning environment around gender and sexuality, Onopa reached out to Lefevre because of their extensive work as a sexual

and gender workshop facilitator at the Stonewall Center. Lefevre's workshop was held after Spring Break, and all participants found Lefevre's seminar more friendly and accessible. This allowed those in the cast who were new to gender and sexuality conversations to participate in a safe and judgement free environment, while those who were well versed in these discourses were able to continue building their knowledge.

Professors Christopher Baker, Julie Nelson, Penny Remsen, Yao Chen, and Gil McCauley visited rehearsals and design runs to give feedback on the production's progress. During technical rehearsal, most advisors were present throughout the week. Technical rehearsals started a week before the show had its first preview performance due to the show's length. All technical designs and issues were resolved before the preview performance on Wednesday, April 18th. The production had a successful opening on April 20th, with few changes made to the show since its preview performance. A diverse crowd of LGBTQIA+ community members and artists around the Pioneer Valley attended the sold out run of the production. The show closed the following week on Sunday, April 29th, with a closing ceremony toast taking place in the Rand Theater lobby the same night.

Creating a Common Language

As a production dramaturg, one of my roles in the production was to help facilitate a discussion around the team's overall design concept. What was challenging coming into rehearsals was the daunting task of introducing queer U.S. cultures, histories, languages, politics, theories, and theatrical aesthetics to the team. As a queer person of color from New York, not only was I familiar with the drag and queer scenes throughout New York and the LGBTQIA+ historical references in the play, but I live the queer narrative in the play. How could I translate something that is personal to me and in my corporeality to a team who openly identifies as persons not from LGBTQIA+ communities? How can my

artistry as a queer dramaturg help them not just be educated in LGBTQIA+ history and politics, but help them physically manifest these into the overall design and staging of the play?

First and foremost, as a queer person of color, I wanted the production to resonate most with local LGBTQIA+ communities. Without introducing the creative team to my heavy theoretical research, I attempted to condense my examination of queer theatrical aesthetic in a way that explicitly laid out the commonality amongst the various LGBTQIA+ resources, books, and media shared with them. It was important though that Onopa was studying the denser queer and feminist theoretical concepts with Professor Perez. In my emails (see Appendix Figure D and E), I broke down queer performance aesthetics simply by defining queer theater as a disruption of mainstream Western forms of theater with some of the following elements:

- 1) Queer performance focuses on community building. There is a communal experience that goes beyond just witnessing the action performed. Sometimes this manifests in interaction between audience members and performers, and vice versa;
- 2) There is a history of queer performance disrupting everyday spaces. A key element of queer aesthetic is making a space not intended for performance into a performance space; or to create new spaces and configurations out of already existing performance space;
- 3) Queer performance is inherently political, as it disrupts Western conventions of performance;
- 4) Some queer performance follows a “do-it-yourself” (D.I.Y.) visual aesthetic,

sometimes taking an everyday object and repurposing it in an unusual and/or unexpected way; and

- 5) Failure in performance, such as a trip, fall, or even singing off-key, can bring more to the performance than perfection. Mac shares in Judy's manifesto: "I believe failure on stage is one of the great art forms" (Mac). Failure marks the humanity in queer performance.

In addition to these five elements, I shared basic LGBTQIA+ history with the group to explain how these elements of performance are used and seen in daily living practices of LGBTQIA+ communities. The designers had to understand how these theatrical practices utilized in LGBTQIA+ communities to create communities, events, and other rituals outside of theater. Queerness, according to Muñoz, is "world-making." So how then can the team create space, lighting, costumes, movement, and music that would both properly use the techniques of queer theater and create a production of *The Lily's Revenge* that responds to the LGBTQIA+ community in and around the Five College Consortium?

Scenic and Lighting. Crucial to the experience of seeing *The Lily's Revenge* as an audience member is being immersed in transformative spaces. Director Rachel Chavkin and dramaturg Nina Mankin shared that a key element in their production was that each of the five acts had its own unique scenic design. Original set designer Nick Vaughan, too, shared Chavkin and Mankin's sentiments. It was through changing set and seating configuration constantly that challenged audiences to not only experience the Lily's epic hero's journey in different genres, but also forged a community by having them experience the entirety of the play together.

“In a university environment, you can do so many interesting things in terms of making the audience really part of what’s going on. The first act is intentionally fourth wall, but there is a lot of [potential beyond] what we did,” Mankin shared with us at her home in Amherst, MA. She continued, “... think about in really creative ways of using the space [or spaces], but also creative ways of making the audience experience it.” With the opportunity to use both the Rand Theater and the Curtain Theater, Onopa and the team had the opportunity to invite audiences to travel throughout the physical spaces of the department, where much of the public had never had access before. In a way, we were inviting people in the local community to become intimate with our department by allowing them to travel through both of our mainstage spaces and parts of our backstage halls. This supported Mac’s goal of community-building as we were asking audience members to spend several hours in spaces which we, the department, called our theatrical home. It was through this realization that the creative team had to decide in what sequence would the audience travel the spaces? Do we start in the Curtain or the Rand? These were important questions to consider as the journey of the audience through the spaces critically shaped other aspects of the show, including the staging, design elements, and particularly the team’s own design approach to queering these spaces.

In answering these questions, it was imperative that we would use the spaces in non-traditional or unexpected ways. We had to “queer” the spaces with combined usage of scenic, lighting, sound, and costume design. Chavkin reiterated how usage of space was key to creating a successful production of the play:

I think that the experience [of movement of the audience through space] in my own words is very ‘comprehensive.’ Taylor was interested in the feeling of having gone through a journey... and the idea that [the audience] would

build a community... All of that was tethered to the idea of space.

It's not just how the audience physically travels between spaces, but also what they experience in the spaces that makes the show meaningful. In what spaces do we perform particular sections of the play? Chavkin also stressed how the overall production design should not be so polished. She commented:

This [idea] is tethered to the central themes of the play: revolutionizing our sense of partnership, our sense of ownership, our need for sort of stricture and binaries and categories and perfection. Taylor's primary assault... is an assault on the idea of perfection and how oppressive that is on really every level of what the perfect marriage is, the perfect human is... that is the subject of the play. There is this "symbolicness" of the audience having to move their ass every hour that is core to that form of sloppiness. It's core to the meaning of the play.

It was very clear from both Chavkin and Mankin that though audiences should be immersed in the worlds of the play, there is no need to hide the theatricality and/or imperfections of the production. Not all seating arrangements needed to be perfect nor should audiences expect perfection as the play wanted to celebrate quirkiness, difference, and imperfection. Mac's play and its style must also be reflected in the spaces themselves. In Mac's world, it's fine that things don't always look like they are in their proper places. A hallway can still be a hallway, but it is what one creates and or does in the space that transforms the hallway into another world. Mac's queer aesthetic attempts to expose the mechanics of the theater and hopes that the performers and audiences can fill in what is scenically missing with their own imagination and bodies. If the "sloppiness," as Chavkin calls it, can be captured physically in the space and in the actual journey through the

spaces, we can more fully disrupt political and cultural structures.

When devising how the audience was to first travel the spaces, Onopa shared with the team that she wanted the audience to have an intimate experience throughout the play. She envisioned the audience constantly interacting with actors, crew, and fellow audience members. This impulse first led her to only wanting to use the Curtain space; however, myself and Klepikov convinced Onopa to use both spaces. When mapping out the movement of the audience, I was drawn to the idea of using the space to reflect the Lily's journey. I first proposed to Onopa to use the Rand for Act I because of the sheer massive overbearing space of the proscenium, and stage all of Acts II, III, and IV in the Curtain. In this movement track, I wanted to emphasize the internal struggle of the Lily's journey. By moving the audience into a more confined and intimate environment, I hoped that we were more physically aware of the corporal, mental, and physical trauma of the Lily. After the internal battle within the intimate space of the Curtain, Lily would then bring the audience back to the Rand for a grand finale.

Klepikov proposed something radically different, with the desire to track the use of space by the genre of each act. This approach then asked the audience to move from the Rand to the Curtain to the Rand, the Rand lobby or the Curtain, and back to the Rand. Before the end of the fall semester, Onopa proposed the third and final movement track for the audience.

Wanting to start the show as an intimate experience, Onopa requested that we started the play in the Curtain. She felt strongly that despite the bigness of some of the characters, such as Time and Nostalgia, she wanted the audience to be close to the action. Focused on the community-building aspect of the play, she wanted the intimacy of the physical space and the physical closeness amongst audience members to help facilitate

the audience's physical, mental, and emotional journey. The decision to start with the Curtain still worked dramaturgically, but for radically different reasons from the track I had proposed. By starting the show in the Curtain, we were still "queering" the expectations of the audience by guiding them through a back hallway to the floor entrance of the theater. I said to Onopa that this mirrors how a lot of LGBTQIA+ cultures and communities were literally underground, such as bars and clubs. We would keep the second act in the Curtain, but we would then reconfigure the space differently from Act I to force audiences to re-orientate themselves to the space. This would give time for the crew to prepare the Rand theater and lobby for the third, fourth, and fifth acts. By ending the show in the Rand, the audience would then leave out of the main entrance of the UMass Fine Arts Center.

In this final movement track, the journey of the audience is from a small space to a bigger space, mirroring their growth as a community. When they first enter the Curtain, the experience of walking into the production should evoke some confusion and bewilderment with its darkness and cramped spacing. After journeying through the department with the Lily and fellow characters, audience members leave together as a community from the massive UMass Fine Arts Center lobby where there are bright lights and ample space.

Referring to my earlier discussion of queer theatrical aesthetics, Klepikov and Onopa were drawn to the ballroom scenes as depicted in the documentary *Paris is Burning*, which follows the ball scene of Harlem in the 1980s. The ballrooms were old union halls and make-shift stages made fabulous by everyday party supplies, such as streamers and balloons. Klepikov and Onopa wanted to capture in every act the sense of intimacy and community as depicted in the documentary, while still keeping in mind how

each set should also correspond to the genre of the act.

I advised Onopa to consider how the scenic design can physical transform the space and question if maybe we see the mechanics of the scene's transformation. Maybe the audience does see a stage be physically taken apart. Similar to many queer shows I've been to in New York, many queer artists don't hide the mechanics of the event. Onopa continued conversations with Klepikov and decided to explore this option. Considering the financial means of the department, Onopa and Klepikov decided that multiple sets would be simple and transformative, with the ability to be broken down and be brought to different spaces. Onopa also really liked the idea of taking nontraditional spaces, such as the outside of the Fine Arts Center, the FAC Atrium, and the Rand lobby and using them as performance spaces. She felt that this use of space allowed the Department of Theater and its performers to make known their presence in an academic institution, in which the arts do not receive as much financial support as do the sciences and business departments. She essentially saw this as a political-artistic action that was both communal and life affirming for all participants. In addition, we both felt that we were further queering the theater traditions by consciously bringing the show outside of the physical theater, showing that theater is not bound to a traditional stage.

By using these non-traditional spaces, three political statements were being made: 1) queering of any type of space is possible; 2) bodies who inhabit any space gives meaning to the world around them, and not necessarily always the other way around; and 3) theater can happen anywhere and by any means. By exiting the FAC building, we were also defying the expectations of the campus of where our bodies as theater artists were contained.

In regards to these alternative performance spaces, particularly the lobbies of both

theaters and the backstage hallway, my assistant Smith and I designed and decorated signs with foam board and finger paint to guide audiences along the kyogens, small comedic performances during the intermissions between the acts of Japanese Noh Theater (see Appendix Figures H, I, and J). Dramaturgical information regarding marriage, weddings, and queer politics adorned the walls. In addition, I advocated as the production's dramaturg for the creation of gender inclusive restroom signs that would be featured at all restrooms made available to the public in both Curtain and Rand spaces. This further pushed the queer politics to the forefront of the production and established a gender inclusive atmosphere, allowing audience members to choose a restroom that best fits their own gender expression and/or identity. With the current political turmoil in states such as North Carolina, in which a 2016 bill defined and restricted access to public toilets by transgender individuals, it was important to state openly the queer politics of the show and where we as artists stood on the issue.

Similar to the scenic design, Harris had to configure not just the Curtain and the Rand, but also design lighting for the backstage hallways and lobbies through which the audience would venture during intermissions. Taken by our discussion of D.I.Y. and the aesthetics of *Paris is Burning*, Harris showed me her research for her designs. She was trying to find a middle place between using her traditional theatrical lighting and her D.I.Y. lighting, which consisted of holiday lights and lanterns. Harris would not just successfully light two completely different theaters, five different scenic and environmental designs, but also all the lobbies and hallways between these spaces. The end result not only made the show seem magical and intimate, but the constant intertwining of light as scenic and environmental pieces allowed audience members to be constantly immersed in the queer worlds of the play. Harris also paid close attention to

the genres of each act and how different lighting styles and practices better literally and metaphorically illuminate a genre's aesthetic. Particularly for Act III, Harris successfully used dance light techniques such as side lights and a cyclorama to create interesting silhouettes and shapes created by the dancers on stage. The arc of the lighting design was driven by the emotional journey of the Lily. As audiences entered the world of the Great Longing in Act I, a lot of the lights were monochrome or were harsher white light. As the Lily successfully completes a journey of self-discovery, Harris lit the worlds with more colors until it all again fades at the end.

The integration of set and lights allowed audiences to physically enter a world that was different from the one outside of the theater. In discussions of queer temporality as found in the works of Freeman and Muñoz, there is often a distinction between straight time and queer time. Time also signifies space, and in that case, when the audience enters the play they are entering a queer world that has its own rules and possibilities. We created spaces and time in which the characters, the audience, and the artists can collectively build a community.

Costumes. Collaborating with Beam was essential in our world-making process for the production. In our production, we were faced with the challenge of discovering how the costumes could help extend the body of the performer to embody queerness. I explained to Onopa and Beam early in our research phase that queer embodiment is about the reclaiming of space and the defining of space with the body. Though the worlds of scenic design and lighting created complex spaces, they were mostly sparse. The team had to mostly rely on the bodies of the characters to help create the setting of the multiple worlds and anchor people to the story-telling and the politics of the play.

Mac uses a hybrid form of drag that borrows elements from various sources. Beam was not well versed in drag history, and so we had to thoroughly discuss the politics of gender and representation in one-on-one conversations. It was important to Beam that we respected the work and the aesthetic of LGBTQIA+ artists through the costumes. I redirected Beam to think about drag outside of what is presented on the television show *RuPaul's Drag Race*, which was her entry point into any kind of drag aesthetic. Instead I pointed to other forms of drag: genderfuck drag, an extreme blurring of the gender binary; and the drag presented in the documentary *Paris is Burning*, in which the drag artists of color created self-made costumes that had elements of New York drag fashion and haute couture. Both types of drag forms allowed the drag artist to make conscious statements as to who they were politically, sexually, and socially through their costume. In addition, these two forms invited theatricality and spectacle as a way to better reflect the inner person. I noted that *RuPaul's Drag Race* is a commercialized form that celebrates a narrow vision of drag artistry.

I asked Beam to imagine her costumes without thinking about the gender or specific body type of the performer, but rather think of shapes of the characters. What emotions do these shapes evoke from an audience member? If queer embodiment is about the reclaiming of space and the defining of space with the body, then what space (and/or maybe how much space) is this costume taking? If these non-human anthropomorphized characters were seen walking through the door, what is the statement being made about who they are by the shape of their body? What is their orientation to the space? This is why drag is so important to queer artistry. An artist has the autonomy to create themselves to be whoever they want to be, doing away with all visible gender signifiers. This also allowed Beam to engage with the camp and spectacle that is in the tradition of queer

aesthetics as she now had free reign to imagine these characters in whatever way she felt.

Beam agreed to go in this route to design the costumes; however, it was a method she was not familiar with. In January 2018, Beam asked to sit down with me and Onopa to write down adjectives for each character per her process in costume design. When we three collaborated on costumes of *The Happiest Song Plays Last* the year before, we had used the same collaborative exercise to better understand who the play's characters were. Onopa and I knew very well that this exercise helped Beam to imagine the textures, fabric, colors, and worlds of the characters. In our meetings for *The Lily's Revenge*, we three individually shared ideas of the characters' personalities and how they participated in the play's actions. In keeping to the queering of time and worlds of the play, Beam began to imagine the characters being heavily influenced by different fashion periods. She hoped that this would create a beautiful dissonance on stage, but that the elements still complemented each other. The Bridesmaids were rooted in 1980s bridal fashion, while the God of Nostalgia was influenced by 1920s and 30s burlesque and cabaret scenes. Dramaturgically, we hoped it would give this sense of oddity to the entire production that would help audiences also find the absurdity in the piece.

Taken by the idea of the D.I.Y. aesthetic, Beam also wanted to repurpose everyday household items and integrate them into the costumes in unexpected ways, particularly with the Garden Flower characters. We had noticed in the costume work of both the Cockettes and the drag artists in *Paris is Burning* that these artists often used garments and everyday household items, such as little trinkets that they had already owned or had thrifted, to create their out-of-this-world looks. I also shared with Beam my experiences growing up in New York's East Village in the 1990s, in which remnants of the punk and artist community continued to thrive. In vein of the D.I.Y. drag aesthetic, I described how

neighborhood artists took garbage, such as empty Coca-Cola cans from the sidewalk, and turned them into wearable art pieces. These artists were queering spaces with what they were wearing by upending the objects' expected use and making them into something new. With that Beam was determined to use both everyday materials and older discarded materials in the costume shop to make some of the Garden Flower costumes.

In the process of designing, the only major drawback was when the design advisors commented that the costumes for the Garden Flowers were too haute couture. In discussions concerning design around the Garden Flowers, I explained to Onopa and Beam that these characters were proud of their resourcefulness and creativity. Similar to the drag houses and their design styles in *Paris is Burning*, Beam wanted to approach the Garden Flowers as fashion forward self-designers of their own bodies and world, but use cheap material and found household objects. The artistic team was to continue to find ways to queer everyday objects by using them in unexpected ways. These decisions inspired Beam to go for an experimental couture style for these particular characters. However, an advisor suggested to make them more “raunchy” for a comedic effect. To Beam, the Garden Flowers were powerful and self-respecting, and she feared that if she would go for a “raunchy” effect that this would fuel the stereotype of oversexualizing queer bodies. I shared my thoughts with Onopa and Beam that if we do use the drag houses as our inspiration for the Garden Flowers, we must remember that these LGBTQIA+ persons never dressed “raunchy.” Whatever sexy and fabulous costume they made with their own hands only accentuated who they truly were inside. I pressed on that the Garden Flowers should have their moment in the spotlight when they walk the runway in Act II. Onopa, Beam, and myself agreed that the comedy would come from the performer and not from the costume. The costume must be other worldly, fabulous, and radically

different from the world of the God of Nostalgia, which is about conformity. Beam pressed on with her initial impulses, and she defended her more D.I.Y. couture looks for the Garden Flowers. This led her to use a mesh laundry basket as the basis of the character of Baby's Breath, plastic forks in the body of Master Sunflower, and zip ties to create the headdress of Poppy. The Garden Flowers were fabulous, resourceful, and capable of embodying their revolution of love.

Unlike Mac and Dazzle's drag style, Beam didn't want everyone's faces to be in a style of drag make-up that covered them completely. For our production, we had many persons who identified at the intersections of race, gender, and queer sexualities. In collaboration with undergraduate make-up designer Melissa Smith, Beam created drag make-up designs that would also highlight the natural skin tone of the performer, yet add materials such as glitter and flowers to their face. It was important for the team to celebrate queer difference in all its variations, and make it legible that queer people of color were integral to this story. Though the play doesn't explicitly interact with discussions of race, with many queer people of color in the cast, Onopa, Beam, and I thought that costumes and make-up were ways to celebrate these complex intersections. At the end of the day, the costumes were eye-catching and so detailed, and brought audiences into the worlds and identity politics of *The Lily's Revenge*.

Music and Sound. Sound Designer Gilsdorf and Music Director Ferreira had the daunting task of filling our multiple spaces with soundscapes, underscoring, and live music. When the music scores arrived from the publishing house, Department Production Manager Julie Fife was taken aback to learn that there were no instrumental and vocal arrangements to the music, but simply a piano score. This first challenge forced Ferreira to consider having to make original instrumental and vocal arrangements for the show,

but given the constraints of time and money, we decided to use a piano as the primary instrument in the production. Onopa, Ferreira, and Gilsdorf decided to set a keyboard in the Curtain and a baby grand piano on the Rand stage. The previous productions and the original cast recording of the show featured a band, but the stripping away of a band helped with musical and acoustical issues we might have faced since most of our cast were not singers. Queer dramaturgical research supported this decision as Onopa and I were drawn to the idea of recreating the intimacy of an underground piano bar. With some assistance from myself and a lot from second Assistant Director Olivia Holcomb, the cast learned to speak on pitch and in rhythm similar to that of some cabaret artists who are not known for their singing, but rather their acting and dramatic interpretation of a song, such as German artist Lotte Lenya. Many of the actors were not singers, but had the ability to act a song. Mankin advised me and Onopa, “Don’t try to make it good. If you have something to say... make sure we get there.” Instead of focusing on the limited vocal talents of the cast, we instead focused on training the cast to dramatically interpret the song despite sometimes singing off-pitch. What was more important to Onopa was that the singing conveyed genuine emotion.

To further fill the space with an element of other worldliness, Gilsdorf was very insistent about having a soundscape inspired by Mort Garson’s 1976 electronic music album *Plantasia*. Gilsdorf first introduced Garson’s music in an early dramaturgical meeting with the creative team in September 2017. With a good ear for setting a certain tone of drama, suspense, and camp, Gilsdorf – like Mac – took sonic inspiration from not just Garson, but Stravinsky, Tchaikovsky, and the Carpenters. Gilsdorf designed the certain sonic aspects of the show in a way that the music can follow the audiences from the theaters to the hallways; signaling to them an arrival of a new world. Gilsdorf was

also very vital in setting the campy vibe to the show, using 1950s surf music and 1970s alternative music as inspirations throughout the production. I had few brief conversations with Gilsdorf during rehearsals about how important it was for the audience to simply laugh whenever they had the opportunity. With a good ear and knack for queer aesthetic, Gilsdorf, with the musical direction of Ferreira, created multidimensional and multisensory experiences with sound and live music.

One thing that Onopa was struggling to comprehend was camp humor, a queer performance trope. She said early in the process that camp wasn't something she was drawn to and didn't necessarily find funny. As a queer person and as a dramaturg of the show, I knew how vital camp, particularly low-brow humor, is to the show. To help her understanding of the wide variety of camp, I introduced her to the work of queer filmmaker John Waters, whose humor is strongly influenced by the Cockettes. Instead, Onopa approached the humor via clown performance. To enhance the physical comedy, the music and sound helped flesh out this particular element that the production seemed to lack. Gilsdorf and Ferreira knew how music and sound effects would enhance the comedy and the queerness of the worlds.

In the final rehearsal before opening night, Gilsdorf had an idea to add some sound effects and new staging to Act V to add campy fun into the staging. As the brides and grooms enter the empty stage, they would mime opening and closing an invisible door. Gilsdorf added door slams that would accentuate the movement. This little detail made the entire team laugh, and Onopa agreed to keep it in for the production even though she later admitted to me that she still didn't understand why it was funny. Either way, Gilsdorf understood that queerness of the space is intertwined with the soundscape and created an eclectic soundtrack to the entire show. Throughout the five acts, Gilsdorf and Ferreira

created distinct sounds for each world. They made live music, canned sound effects, surfer and electronic music into a cohesive soundscape. These seemingly disparate soundscapes became one and, in a sense, enhanced the queerness of the worlds of the play.

Puppetry and Film. A key dramaturgical discussion about Act IV, the silent film, was whether or not we would film live bodies. Based on my dramaturgical research, all of the previous productions used either animation or stop-motion animation with dolls to tell this part of the story. Each production avoided filming live bodies. My initial instinct was that this could not have been a coincidence. If it was a deliberate decision to not film live bodies, I asked why? What did this say about queer embodiment? Or why use anything but a live human body to comment on the human body? Klepikov, assuming that we were filming live bodies, was eager to examine potential film locations. She brought Onopa and Beam to particular areas in the Five College Consortium, such as the Botanical Garden of Smith College as early as September 2017. As a dramaturg, I pulled the conversation back to the possibility of not filming live bodies.

Act IV of the *The Lily's Revenge* is very violent when you take into account all the physical trauma that the Lily experiences in its transition to become a "man." As a queer dramaturg, I discussed with Onopa that maybe the experience of watching the trauma might be too overwhelming for an audience member when a live body simulates experiencing the violence. I was concerned that simulating trauma on a live body might retraumatize those in audiences who might have experienced similar narratives in their own lives. I asked her to consider abstracting the violence by using puppets. This abstraction from an actual human body might help audiences see the politics more clearly.

Onopa, having been an associate with Redmoon Theater, was interested to look into using a live toy theater and live stream it onto a projection screen for Act IV. Klepikov

was at first skeptical of the live toy theater idea; however, she came on board when Assistant Director Harrell suggested that we pre-film the puppetry. As the film was projected above them, actors would use the same puppets and miniature sets to act the story. One of the performers would have a working camera to give the illusion of live-streaming the puppetry. This gave opportunities for the team to play around with audiences' perception of reality, sometimes asking the actors to do something different with the puppets than what was happening in the projected film. Harrell, with the assistance of undergraduate actor Callum LaFrance, began designing and building the props, sets, and puppets for the silent film in February 2018. UMass Amherst Undergraduate Filmmaker Tristan Donohue filmed the entirety of the puppet show with the team in mid-March in a single session.

During the editing phase, Harrell thought it was important to include a montage of images from LGBTQIA+ American history to add context and connect the pain experienced by all queer persons caught in the stricture of the heteronormative binary. This addition to the film was not indicated by anything in the script, but came from the dramaturgical research and queer dramaturgy that I had used. Core to my dramaturgy was openly acknowledging with the cast the history of LGBTQIA+ activists and artists who had come before us.

Harrell took the lead in building a collage of images of LGBTQIA+ persons in U.S. history. He would send me emails of these images for approval and guidance. We knew that within the representation of LGBTQIA+ persons, we had to be conscious of the representation of women, transgender folk, and persons of color, many of whom had been silenced from mainstream retellings of LGBTQIA+ U.S. history. When a final edit was

completed, Onopa approved the inclusion of the final montage and the overall film.

Choreography. In addition to my work as a production dramaturg, I was assigned the task of production choreographer. As a former musical theater performer, I had some training in several forms of dance, such as tap. During my previous summer spent at Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival as an Archives/Engagement Intern, I took daily dance classes and workshops with the dance companies that came through. With my familiarity with several dance forms and devising methods, I proposed to Onopa early in the process that I choreograph. Originally, Onopa wanted to co-choreograph the play; however, Onopa then gave me the assignment when she realized that directing and choreographing was too overwhelming a task. Not only did I choreograph all the musical numbers throughout the show, but I also collaborated with Onopa on the direction of Act III, the dream ballet.

As the dramaturg-choreographer, I was hyper aware of the violence inflicted upon LGBTQIA+ bodies as depicted in Act III and of the sexual content throughout the entire play. Mac utilizes dance as a way to explore queer embodiment in relation to an individual, to space, and to others during moments of violence, joy, and sexual pleasure.

During the summer of 2017, I had the opportunity to attend a workshop by choreographer and stage director Faye Driscoll, who was the original director of Act III of the New York production of *The Lily's Revenge*. Driscoll's work is rooted in the experimental dance and theater worlds. Driscoll bases her choreography on dramatic explorations of human emotion. Driscoll runs her dance workshop almost more like a drama class than a dance class. She often asks her dancers to physically manifest different emotions in deceptively simple and pedestrian movement. Her performers can

simply walk across the street, and with a simple twinge of a shoulder, hand, or ankle, they begin to dance and physically manifest the emotion of frustration. Faye Driscoll dancers can switch seamlessly between dance and pedestrian movements, blurring the fine line that differentiates them. What is important to note about Driscoll's work is that the body is always telling a story. It can move in extremely grotesque or in pedestrian ways. It's this extremely large movement vocabulary, which is sometimes undefinable to one mode of dance or theatre performance, that makes her type of dancing "queer." There seems to be no strict boundary to what the body can accomplish within her style of dance, unlike a more traditional ballet that follows a stricter set of performance rules.

Taking inspiration from her and the aesthetic of Theater of the Ridiculous, I began choreographing Act III on the second day of rehearsal in a similar approach as Driscoll. With the exception of one or two actors, none of the cast members had formal dance training. Some had taken physical theater classes, and that was enough for me to begin choreographing Act III. In the script, Mac only suggests ideas of movement by simply stating a dance name and its overall theme. It is up to the choreographer to interpret the meaning of Mac's words. For example, Mac would simply state that a "dance of impatience" takes place between two lines of dialogue. There is no indication of what kind of music to use, general movement, or tone of the choreography. This gave me the freedom to explore how I wanted to use choreography for storytelling.

In queering choreography of the dream ballet, I wanted to up-end the audience's expectation of seeing a traditional dream ballet, such as Agnes DeMille's iconic dream ballet in Rogers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma*. I didn't want the performers to feel beholden to strict rules of any dance forms. For some of the Act III choreography, I asked for performers to generate some basic movements with me. Though I had choreography

already sketched out in my notes, I wanted the performers to feel that they had ownership of these movements. What also queers the story-telling in the Act III ballet is the presence of the wide range of body types dancing in the production. Ballet and many forms of dance often feature certain types of bodies; however, Mac's ballet gives choreographers freedom to employ dancers and non-dancers of diverse body types to move. To choreograph a queer dance piece is to be inclusive and celebratory of all dancing bodies.

Another challenge was that Mac and Rachelle Garniez, the composer of the play, did not indicate any particular soundtrack or music for the entire dream ballet act. Knowing that I wanted to choreograph in different styles of dance movement, such as ballet, modern, contemporary, clown, and burlesque, I collaborated with Gilsdorf to create a soundscape that showed that variation. The soundscape of the ballet had to also reflect the mix-matching of the dance styles. Music is part of this queer world, accentuating the aesthetics' camp, drama, and emotion. Gilsdorf's varied music selection showed how eclectic queer aesthetic can be.

An aspect of direction and choreography that made Onopa nervous was staging both the violent and the sexual acts in the play. The fight choreography was made by guest artist Ryan Winkles with skill and precision. Having worked on other productions within the department, Winkles had a pre-existing relationship with almost all of the cast and the cast enjoyed his presence. With that solved, Onopa worked with me and my assistant dramaturg closely on how to scaffold the process of choreographing the sexual acts. Taking into account the historical sexual violence enacted on women, LGBTQIA+ persons, and people of color on and off stage, Onopa and I wanted to consciously find productive ways to discuss consent to touch bodies in the rehearsal room with our cast and crew. Onopa and I were hyper aware of how forcing actors to do these violent and

sexual acts without their full understanding and their consent was abusive, exploitative, and potentially traumatic. As a queer dramaturg, I suggested that we use trust exercises disguised as acting games; however, we must be explicit that the end goal was to stage these sexual acts. Onopa and I agreed that we set up basic rules of communication about personal space, appropriate touching, and giving and revoking consent to be touched. If any actor did not wish to participate in the staging of any of the sexual acts, they had the right to drop out of that particular moment in the play. In addition, we asked all designers and any outside observers to not visit these particular rehearsals in order to keep a safe private environment for the performers. As a dramaturg-choreographer, I ensured the cast that we had a sex-positive space and that sexual desire is a very human (and sometimes silly).

At these particular rehearsals, Onopa and I modeled how to politely and explicitly ask for this consent from a fellow dance/movement partner. I suggested to Onopa to not just go directly into choreographing the sexual acts, but rather do partner-based exercises that explore abstract and stylized movement. The process had to be scaffolded to allow the performers time to build trust with each other. I would first write a random string of words that the cast had to physicalize. An example of a phrase I had created was “upside-down swinging helicopter.” My Assistant Dramaturg Smith and I modeled how we interpreted the movement: I spun in circles as I was holding Smith upside-down while they had their hands outwardly stretched. The movement was visually ridiculous, and lightened any tension and nervousness in the room. After modeling the phrase, I asked the actors in groups of two or three to then physically interpret the phrase. In this choreographic exercise, actors became physically comfortable with each other, and they started to explore physical movement in the vein of the Theater of the Ridiculous.

After more rounds of this exercise, we asked the performers to recreate one of their self-choreographed movements. This time, Onopa instructed them to gradually add moments and sounds of elation while they danced. She would then ask them to find nuances in this “joy” and vocalize them. The end result helped us find the ridiculousness of the bacchanalian scene, and with further staging, several groups consented to (and many volunteered) simulating more recognizably explicit sexual acts. It should be noted that performer Tristan Lewis-Shurter, a minor in the cast, was explicitly asked not to attend these rehearsals given his age. He was typically asked to leave the space when any of the more sexual scenes were rehearsed.

A violent act in the show that was difficult for Onopa to stage/choreograph was the mass shooting at the end of the play. Given the number of shootings in the United States in the past several years, Onopa didn’t want to take the moment lightly. Chavkin shared her thoughts about that action of the play:

Look at Pulse, which I’m sure you have. There has got to be that dissonance there to understand the urgency of the act of doing this show. And at the same time, I can say for the [original production], it didn’t stop being a Theater of the Ridiculous show when it came to that cruelty. It wasn’t like ‘we’re now in a serious play’, you know?... And it’s not the final act of the play. Everyone has to get up again... The play is clear that it’s still ridiculous. The resonance [of the moment] will be there.

In the final staged moment, Onopa directed the character of the Pope to come onto the stage with a water gun in one hand and a Twinkie in another. When the Pope shoots the characters on stage, the audience doesn’t hear gun shots, but rather the sound of fireworks being shot into the sky. When the fireworks burst, the performers on stage

pantomimed being hit by bullets with red or green ribbons symbolizing their blood. This choreography played both to the gravity of the action, but also the absurdity of the circumstances in the play. It was important to see how LGBTQIA+ bodies negotiate the different forms and genre of each act. Movement only accentuated the corporeality of the performers, celebrating their differences and individualities as people, and affirming both the pains and joys that they experience as LGBTQIA+ persons.

Mindful Marketing

As part of my responsibilities as a production dramaturg, I designed the logo and posters for the production and designed the overall marketing design (see Appendix Figures A and B). Early in the process, the team thought to create wedding themed invitations for audiences as marketing material. Though I understood why their initial impulses went into that direction, as a queer person of color I strongly felt that by using the premise of the wedding as the basis of our marketing design erased the queer story in *The Lily's Revenge*. I argued that the marketing should reflect the queerer content of the show. Stage director Chavkin shared with us that “most people want to know a bit of what they are coming in for [so that] they can get ready for anything so long as they kind of dig it.” The wedding idea was limiting as weddings and marriages have historically been only made available to heterosexual couples; the queer message of the show is to overturn this notion of compulsive heterosexuality. I proposed a logo and poster design that showed not only the aesthetic of the show, but also captured the queer hero’s journey central to the play.

Inspired by Mac’s exploration of queer pasts, I wanted to commemorate the old (and disappearing) neon signs of the underground LGBTQIA+ clubs in New York City’s

East Village. What I love about these old neon signs is that they read as mysterious, tacky, and sleazy simultaneously; however, when one finally enters these underground clubs, one discovers a queer sanctuary. It was in these queer sanctuaries where pre-Stonewall queers found refuge, community, and moments of freedom to be themselves. I wanted to draw parallels from these LGBTQIA+ experiences to the experiences of the audiences.

In regards to casting, we had a large representation of artists of color from the LGBTQIA+ undergraduate community. As a queer dramaturg of color myself, it was important to showcase these particular LGBTQIA+ narratives that we were presenting in our own production. I decided as the marketing designer to push for a simple poster featuring our own Lily, a sophomore named Steve Folmar. As he rightfully said in a rehearsal, “As a black queer, I interpret Mac’s politics differently. I will perform the text in a way that is true to the spirit of Mac, but also true to my own realities.” I wanted to capture the essence of what he said in my portraits. The photoshoot was produced in collaboration with the production’s director, lighting designer, costume designer, and make-up designer. The costume worn by Folmar in the portrait is not the design for the Lily’s costume. The costume department had yet to build the costumes for the show at the time of the photoshoot.

Two versions of the posters were designed. As a designer and dramaturg, I wanted one vertical poster and one horizontal poster to add variety of the show images seen on campus. With the rainbow colored font above the logo that I designed, I made clear that the show was LGBTQIA+ themed. Public Relations Director Anna-Maria Goossens and her undergraduate marketing class devised the press release and marketing campaign. Despite the challenges of selling a three and a half hour show, the success of the marketing

helped the show sell out completely for its entire run. A lot of the show's audience members proudly dressed to show their pride and identification with LGBTQIA+ communities.

As part of our marketing campaign to broaden our audience, I created a show advisory text featured in our press releases, social media pages, and on signs in the Curtain Theater lobby during performances (see Appendix Figure F). I wanted to make aware to all audience members who may find the content triggering to be emotionally and mentally prepared for the show's violent and sexual content. In addition, I used the advisory language to positively highlight the LGBTQIA+ content and comedy of the show. By using campy humor in the language of the show advisory, I helped set the tone of the play. Though it did have violent and sexual content, the play is mainly queer, humorous, inclusive, and sex positive. To also visually capture the queer aesthetic of the show, I purposefully used different fonts throughout the show advisory text. The usage of different fonts and humorous language helped me convey the quirkiness of the show and how it departed from that of other UMass Amherst mainstage productions.

For our production, Onopa and I decided that all show programs would be distributed after the show to allow audiences to immerse themselves in the spaces. We wanted the audience to have the idea that they were entering a world and not necessarily a show. In lieu of distributing traditional show programs, Onopa and I wrote a welcome note to audience members acknowledging the work of the cast, crew, and all who supported us throughout the production's creative process. We wanted to help frame the show as a community celebration, in which audience members would participate in various ways. The welcome note (see Appendix Figure G) was printed on a half-sheets. To further foster the community aspect of the show, ushers distributed these welcome notes individually to

audience members when they picked up their tickets from the Will-Call booth. In line with our queer dramaturgy, we wanted each individual who entered the space to feel that they were accounted for and welcomed into our family.

Community Building as Part of Queer Dramaturgy

A key component of queerness is to dismantle hierarchies of power. The team faced the challenge of working from a top-down hierarchy of theater that was part of the structure of our department. We negotiated how we could collaborate equally, but still be able to satisfy the needs of the department's own processes. Onopa's typical directing style is similar to that of a devised theater ensemble, in which opinions and artistic creation derive equally from all participants. The collaboration amongst designers, dramaturgs, cast, and crew were more free flowing than it typically would have been if the team were assigned to do a realistic play. To ensure a safe space for collaboration, Onopa and I scheduled twenty minutes of our first rehearsal with the cast, stage managers, and other production personnel to compose community rules. As a queer-feminist dramaturg, I believed it was essential for all involved to feel that they had input in the world building of the play and in a space that was safe for them to artistically experiment with each other. The rules made by the entire group were extensive, but main points to note were rules about how to respectfully collaborate; how to resolve conflict within our community; and how to ask for consent with scene partners when staging simulated violence and sexual acts in the play. This emboldened the entire production team to create a community in which everyone felt respected, safe, and empowered.

As a queer dramaturg in this production, not only did I sit with each collaborator to help build each design element, but I played a vital role in ensuring the play's integrity and

Mac's message were accessible throughout all aspects of the production. Onopa gave me opportunities to speak with the cast and crew about LGBTQIA+ history and queer politics. I led these chats throughout our rehearsal process. In these moments, I would instruct all cast, crew, and designers who were present to sit down in a circle, like a family. What was important about using a circle was that it equalizes everyone in status, and the shape made everyone in the circle visible to each other. I deliberately used the circle as it queers the hierarchy of power amongst the director, production's cast, crew, and designers. It called into the room a sense of comradery and community, and the circle produced a feeling that we were all working towards a certain goal together. It was so effective that Onopa and I started every rehearsal with the cast and crew in a circle.

Unlike other shows, I specifically asked Onopa if I could conduct several "self-care circles" as a way to gauge how the cast, crew, and designers were feeling throughout the process. I saw that the driving force of this production was social justice oriented, and in many of my queer and feminist studies courses, I learned that self-care was essential in any kind of activism. Some cast members shared their challenges learning the material. Others, such as myself, found the process to be emotionally and physically draining as the themes of the show were very personal. I never expected as a dramaturg that I would take this type of leadership role within the rehearsal process, and I wonder if I would have gone to great lengths to have these group rituals if I was not working on a queer play. Through this particular production, I learned that this practice is something I find necessary in my own dramaturgy.

As a queer dramaturg, I centered a lot of dramaturgy around familial and communal experience amongst cast and crew. It was important that this aspect of queer performance

was understood by all involved. Is queer dramaturgy different from a typical Western mode of dramaturgy? I would say ‘yes.’ As a queer dramaturg, I am always looking into a future of possibility, of community building, and world-making. What I am focused on is not just what is presented on stage, but the effect of performance on a community to create new worlds. The team’s collaborative process was forced to adapt to this queerness by softening the structures of power that have historically supported mostly heterosexual cisgender white men in theater. We subverted these structures by having a more fluid collaborative process within the design team; actively affirming the identities of all cast and crew; and inviting all within the department to participate in the creation of the piece in some way. For a queer dramaturg, there is never a final product, but rather a constant investment into community-building and future of inclusivity.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

When the Curtain Falls

As an artist, I never truly know the impact of a production until after the cast bows in front of a live audience. I need to hear and see how an audience reacts. A year's worth of research and artistic collaboration, in addition to almost eight weeks of rehearsal, are manifested in a preview performance and six performances. Excitement for our production went beyond our department, and on the Tuesday of the week of opening, the creative team, cast, and crew learned that the entire run of the show was sold out.

The audience was a relatively good mix of students from the Five College Community and our own department. The reception was enthusiastic at the preview performance on Wednesday, April 18th; however, many of the audience members didn't know how to understand the play's multi-genre aesthetic. Some audience members asked me during intermission if the play was interactive. This form of theater was clearly challenging our local audience members to examine closely how they think theater should be experienced. It was clear though that audience members were focused and were invested in the performance; lightly chuckling at jokes and staying silent to listen closely to the story unfolding. People happily participated during the intermission kyogen performances and during the show.

Opening night, April 20th, had another sold-out crowd, notably attended by members of UMass Amherst Stonewall Center. The reception was overwhelmingly enthusiastic. Slowly throughout the weekend, we learned that the play enticed community

members who knew of Taylor Mac's work to attend the show, which included members of local theater communities, such as Serious Play Theater Ensemble, Paintbox Theater, Real Live Theater, and professors from other theater departments. It should be noted that original dramaturg Nina Mankin and Mac's partner Patt Scartlett both attended performances during the run of the show; Rachel Chavkin and Nick Vaughan unfortunately could not attend and instead sent me and Onopa short emails wishing the production well. By the second week of performances, the cast strengthened their performances and tightened comedy. The show ran a little more than three and a half hours with two short ten minute intermissions. The show played its final performance on Sunday, April 29th, to a very enthusiastic sold-out crowd.

Central to the play was Mac's need to build a community, and it seemed that our outreach and marketing had successfully gone beyond our department. Not only did we see diverse audiences attend the show, but particularly LGBTQIA+ folk attended the show. The sense of community amongst our cast, crew, and creative team had taken a whole new meaningful form. Unbeknownst to myself, Onopa, and Beam, we became characters in our own production. Unlike other productions that we had done at UMass Amherst, we felt obligated to attend every performance. We three started to wear our own costumes to every performance of the show, finding moments where we helped gather, usher, and entice the audience to participate throughout the play. To substitute for the traditional post-show conversation, I made myself available at all intermissions to audience members who wished to chat about the show. I carried a sign that stated: "I'm the production's dramaturg. Please feel free to speak with me now or during intermissions." Two dramaturgical stations were set upstairs in the purple lobby and downstairs in the backstage hallway of the Curtain

Theater; my dramaturgy assistant Afrikah Smith and I would roam the hallways. The first weekend of performances, I wore a flower suit; for the second week, I wore a “leather daddy” outfit with leathers chaps, a harness, and leather sleeves, particularly for our PRIDE Night performance; and for the final performance, I wore a traditional Filipino Barong, a traditional Filipino wedding attire. Luckily, people approached me and felt comfortable to speak with me no matter what outfit I wore. Onopa wore multiple outfits as well, all adorned with flower prints, with the exception of a red sequined dress very similar to that of Jessica Rabbit’s in the film *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* With her accordion, she helped lead our second intermission parade to the front of the Fine Arts Center. Beam attended every performance, and during every transition into Act V, Beam and I would slow dance alongside the characters Lily and Dirt. After dancing with each other, we encouraged audience members to slow dance. This transition continued until the arrival of the Garden Flowers for their surprise take-over of the Bride and Groom’s wedding. To create a space for a community to be themselves and grow, myself, Onopa, and Beam learned that we had to actively perform in the piece with our actors and crew. We felt that we couldn’t leave them to simply perform because we knew that this show cannot simply be performed; it needed to be embodied. At every show, actors and technicians were performing for several hours in front of audiences, making themselves very vulnerable. Inspired by the work of LGBTQIA+ performers and activists, we joined them in solidarity. This was the manifestation of my research of “queer embodiment”; we were creating a family by actively participating in the show with a family that we had chosen and built. At every performance, the production team, crew, and cast came prepared to wear matching rainbow

pins to welcome people into the department to make audiences feel that they were part of the show and our larger department family.

The final performance was memorable for the creative team for two reasons: 1) cast members gave nuanced, energetic, and sharp performances; and 2) the creative team had the last minute task of filming the show. Traditionally, archival footage would be filmed on preview night by Public Relations Director Anna-Maria Goossens, but an undergraduate filmmaker volunteered to film the entire season. He had successfully filmed all of the past productions, but had a track record of changing filming times last minute. During our second to last show, it came to my knowledge that the student filmmaker had neither attended the show nor filmed on the two days he had originally scheduled with Anna-Maria. Around 9 pm the night before the final performance, I coordinated a film team to document the entirety of the show. I made preliminary assignments for wide-shots and close-ups with a team composed of myself, Onopa, Goossens, Smith, Harrell, and fellow graduate student Vishnu Barve. Stage management teams were updated throughout the night by phone and email, and plans were finalized after a quick meeting about an hour and a half before curtain. Harrell, Barve, and I acquired filming equipment from the UMass Amherst Library's Digital Media Center. To complete this, we followed a detailed schedule of rotating filming responsibilities that I had devised. Given the nature of technology, some of the cameras overheated and/or their batteries were faulty, leaving some of equipment useless in the middle of the filming. I luckily made the contingency plan to have at least three or four cameras filming from different angles simultaneously in the case of said circumstances. Thirty minutes before curtain, the student filmmaker did arrive with his DSLR camera, but since he wasn't aware of the length of the show and immersive and

roving nature of the production, his camera died halfway through the show. In addition, he arrived late for Act III due to a parking violation he had to address. Despite the challenges of the day, the cast gave their absolute best performance, the audience was generous, and we successfully captured footage of the entire show.

Post-Production Reflections

This thesis began as a theoretical exploration of queer temporality and aesthetics in Taylor Mac's *The Lily's Revenge*, and what I've discovered about intimate research and artistic projects similar to this is that I was actually defining my own queerness and my own place in queer history as a queer Filipino American artist. For my work as a queer dramaturg of color, I have discovered how to better navigate my role as dramaturg while affirming and taking my intersectional identities as valid ways of approaching my own research and artistry in the rehearsal room. The way that I entered the piece was not through a formal European-centric method of dramaturgy – looking at the text, structure, and tone of writing - but through a physical and emotional response that I felt resonated with my emotional experiences of my intersectional identities. When reading the play, I heard and felt the words and the music. This helped me understand how Mac's queer worlds belong to the bodies of those marginalized. These marginalized communities that Mac is writing for understand the worlds of *The Lily's Revenge* more aptly because Mac unapologetically writes the play with a queer inclusive lens. It is no wonder why Judy bases Judy's work in community-building. Mac is always actively reaching out to those who are on the outskirts of society, and Mac, belonging to some of those communities, brings them into the center of theater creation and story-telling.

As a dramaturg of multiple historically marginalized identities, I knew that my own version of queer POC dramaturgy centered on two concepts: 1) embodying and affirming one's own personal history; and 2) allowing these complex individual identities to inform the text, design, direction, and performances. Though the actors are portraying characters written in a script, they as individuals are going through their own hero's journey in rehearsal and at every performance. That is something key in Mac's aesthetic that I didn't realize until weeks after the show closed: We are not just watching the characters, but watching the performers – the human beings behind the characters – endure the long physically and emotionally demanding performance.

On the first day of technical rehearsal, Onopa gave me the task of doing a check-in with the entire cast and crew. Inspired by the rituals of past LGBTQIA+ groups, I led a ritual of the entire cast and crew writing affirmations to each other on pieces of paper that I called "petals." Throughout my research on LGBTQIA+, creating community and family was essential in embodying queerness, as queer people have created for themselves the ability to make their own families outside of traditional understandings of what that is. I wanted the cast to embody the themes of the play, which I hoped they would then transfer over onto the stage and beyond in their personal lives. On the closing night, many of the cast members publicly shared stories of how the show helped them discover for themselves ways to embody new identities of sexuality and gender, and newfound interest in social justice work. As Muñoz suggests, "queerness should and could be about a desire for another way of being in both the world and time, a desire that resists mandates to accept that which is not enough" (Muñoz 96). People who participated in the creation of the production started to articulate a desire for structures of love, relationships, even shifting

theater administrative hierarchies, in order to embody their newfound queerness. These revelations of queerness, particularly those of the undergraduates, reminded me of my own discovery of LGBTQIA+ history through my classes in my undergraduate career.

What I've learned from my experience working on *The Lily's Revenge* is that queer dramaturgy and queer collaboration are full-body experiences. In addition to providing historical and contextual background for the play, queer dramaturgy and collaboration required me to be immersed in the artistic creation of the production more so than I usually am for shows. I was actively making conscious decisions with my team that would create not only a full-rounded production of this five act show, but also create an atmosphere in the rehearsal process and in the performances for the cast, crew, and audience to think politically of what they were doing for a queerer and more inclusive world. As a dramaturg, I kept thinking how I would accomplish this on a daily basis. I decided to attend almost every rehearsal, actively moving around and making staging decisions with Onopa, designers, and cast members. The mental, emotional, and physical investment was not all for naught, as we modeled for cast and crew how we could work as artists with social justice, feminist, and queer lenses.

Completing my M.F.A. studies with *The Lily's Revenge*, I feel that I have come full circle in my own discovery and exploration of my own queerness. This production has opened a futurity of more exploration when I graduate. I have a better grasp of my place in queer history and time, but also how my body – with the history I carry as a person of color, a queer identified person, and as an artist – allows me to imagine and manifest a futurity on stage in a way that is unique to me. I will try my best to embody this queerness every day.

CHAPTER 6

AFTERWARD

A Letter to a Queer American Theater-maker of Color

Dear Queer Theater-maker of Color,

You may be at your wit's end, and I am sure you are. Trump is in the White House, patriarchy is still running amok, you are writing this thesis as best as you can within the time frame assigned to you, and you are now entering the world with your Master of Fine Arts degree with no sure plan of what will come next. Despite all of the stresses that are cluttering your brain, take a moment to breathe and hear only your voice. Your voice is the key to help you remember why you create theater and why it is the medium through which you feel most alive.

As someone who's at the intersections of multiple identities, yes, the world may seem very difficult and overwhelming to navigate. It's perfectly fine to have days to simply lie down and relax; you don't need to fight the patriarchy, capitalism, homophobia, and all the injustices in the world every waking moment. If that voice in you says to take time for self-care, then follow that impulse. How can you create a better, queerer, and more loving world if you are all burnt-out? When you do have the strength, always use that strength towards the direction of love and community building. A world cannot be made on the shoulders of one person, and there are souls out in the world who share the same pains, joys, and dreams. Reach out to them because they are reaching out to you, too.

Never forget the people who will see your theatrical work who may need to see it. Think about the 10-years-old kid who has never seen another queer person and/or person

of color on stage; think about the adult who needs joy in their life for an hour or two. Always remember that your work, dear queer theater-maker of color, is meaningful and necessary in the world. You can make the world shine with glitter and rainbows, and do it as much as you want. So you don't want to do realism and write a play about white folks in the Hamptons. That's perfectly fine! Write your crazy impossible play with giant drag queens and erupting volcanos of sequins. You don't have the money to do it? That's fine, too. You can always make the impossible happen in theater even with just a penny.

Your mind, body, and artistry are special, so treat yourself well. As you have learned, happiness can be obtained when you find time to stop and listen to your own voice. Drown out the voices of haters and follow those artistic impulses. As playwright Dustin Chinn said: "Just let your light shine. People will be drawn to you if you let yourself shine. Sometimes you think people aren't there to support you, that's not true. People will always be drawn to your light, it might just take time for them to get there." People love you, your work, and the relationships you create. Continue because who else can do the things that you do?

Love,

Queer Theater-maker of Color

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

VERTICAL PRODUCTION POSTER

Original logo and poster designs by Production Dramaturg Gaven D. Trinidad.
Photography by Gaven D. Trinidad, Costumes by Christina Beam, and Lighting by Tamara Harris.



APPENDIX B

HORIZONTAL PRODUCTION POSTER

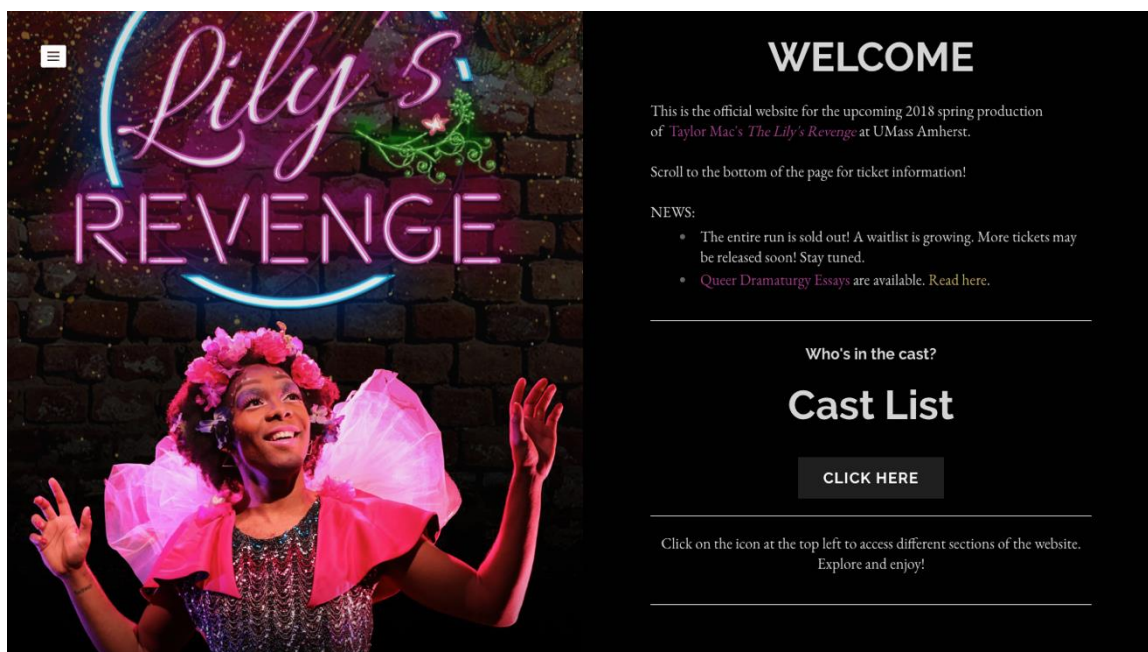
Original logo and poster designs by Production Dramaturg Gaven D. Trinidad.
Photography by Gaven D. Trinidad, Costumes by Christina Beam, and Lighting by Tamara Harris.



APPENDIX C

SCREENSHOTS OF PRODUCTION WEBSITE

The website was created in January 2018 by Production Dramaturg Gaven D. Trinidad. The dramaturgy team of Gaven D. Trinidad and Assistant Dramaturg Afrikah Smith created content for the website. The website is live and continues to live on as an archive of the production. It can be accessed at umasslilysrevenge.weebly.com.



APPENDIX D

EMAIL CORRESPONDENCE 1 WITH CREATIVE TEAM

Subject **Lily's Revenge Dramaturgy: Queer 101 and Princess Musicals**

From Gaven Trinidad <gtrinidad@umass.edu>

To Jennifer Onopa <onopaj@gmail.com>

Cc Afrikah Smith <afrikahsmith@umass.edu>, Anya Klepikov <anya@anyaproductiondesign.com>, Christina Beam <cbeam821@gmail.com>, Gabriel Harrell <gabrielharrell@gmail.com>, Nathaniel Gareth Gilsdorf <ngg14@hampshire.edu>, Tamara Harris <tamarakaylynn@gmail.com>, Tyler DiBenedetto <tylerdibenedetto@gmail.com>

Date 2017-10-28 07:15

Priority High

Dear Lily's Revenge Family,

Sorry for the long email - but it's difficult to explain dramaturgical things via email.

I am in the middle of creating a dramaturgical website for us so that we have common understanding of the word and ideas of "queer" and other ideas/themes of the play. It should be up before Thanksgiving - I am just in the midst of dramaturging and producing Play Lab and writing my masters work for the UMass Women, Gender, and Sexualities Department. Jenn and I have been having a great time speaking with original directors and other collaborators on the original NYC production for dramaturgical research, such as Rachel Chavkin, Nick Vaughan, Nina Mankin. Next week, we'll be talking with a Japanese Theater scholar and some time soon Faye Driscoll.

Queer

When I was 17, I was introduced to the Queer Manifesto: <http://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/queernation.html> It's a fun read, and a great intro to the re-emergence of the word "queer" as a political, creative, sexual, and gender identifier in the wake of the AIDS crisis and murders of LGBTQIA youth. It is also a required intro reading to many Queer Studies course. Note: Queer does not mean gay, as gay usually meant only male bodies of a certain class and race. When reading the document, also note the urgency in their writing, how they are disrupting a silent political system, and their sense of community. It is often noted by queer historians that the AIDS epidemic was the catalyst for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and trans communities to come together. (Though Stonewall was in '69, many sexual movements continued to separate communities by orientation, gender, and race. As seen here, trans rights activist Sylvia Rivera is treated poorly by a white gay male crowd during Pride in '73 as she is giving a speech concerning gay liberation: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q_GZUwMniBA)

Taylor Mac often refers to Judy's first AIDS walk in the 80s as the influence of all of Judy's writing: <http://www.taylormac.org/i-believe/> Please watch Taylor's manifesto! It still holds true to a lot of the ideas in the Queer Manifesto and explains much of Judy's politics.

Also if you haven't yet, please watch these as reference as they are often brought up in our meetings:

1) Cockettes <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TDHmgGHzDW0>

2) Paris is Burning <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hedJer7I1vI>

I've been going to queer performance stuff since I was 16. There is a specific sense of community and aesthetic. I'll send you all up-coming queer community happenings in the Pioneer Valley and in NYC so that maybe we can have a little field trip. My favorite queer outings are the burlesque shows in Northampton! It's so body inclusive and queer driven and just loads of fun. And as Nina kept pointing out... a majority of the 40 person cast didn't come from theater, they came from the burlesque scene of NYC.

Princess Musicals

I did some 2 am research and knowing that Taylor LOVES obscure things, I had an inkling that princess musicals weren't what their name suggests. And after speaking with dramaturg Nina Mankin, who developed with Taylor a lot of Judy's earlier work, she hinted that it was something obscure, but important to the aesthetic (style, space, sound, design, etc.).

A princess musical is a proto-musical theater comedy that emerged in the 1910s and 20s in a small New York performance space called the Princess Theater. When built and opened by the Shuberts and other producers, the theater only sat 299 audience members. Unlike the exuberant and extravagant Ziegfeld Follies (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R5Z3urJk9sI>) on Broadway, the musical comedies written for the Princess Theater had to accommodate for its intimate size. Since audience members were so close to the performers, the musicals written for the space focused on characters and storylines more so than the musical spectacles on Broadway (keep in mind that Broadway musicals then didn't follow a formulaic and fully integrated book structure until - as many white Western male scholars would say - the musical "Oklahoma").

The size and intimate space of the theater affected the dramatic writing and musical composition. What made the Princess Musicals legendary? The answer: composer Jerome Kern. Before making it big on Broadway and in Hollywood, Kern would write these so called parlor musicals/comedies. The most famous that played at the Princess Theater was *Oh Boy!* If you listen to the first several songs of *The Lily's Revenge*, they nod to Kern's style.

Songs from *Oh Boy!*:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E64RjnV4RGg>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rNKuPaakPYc>

More about Princess Musicals:

<http://www.musicals101.com/1910bway.htm#Theater>

Ok, I'm heading off to Jacob's Pillow for the day to do some writing about dance dramaturgy and history!

Love,

Gaven

APPENDIX E

EMAIL CORRESPONDENCE 2 WITH CREATIVE TEAM

Subject Lily's Revenge Dramaturgy #2: Queer Aesthetic, Queer Body, and Queer Temporality, oh my!

From Gaven Trinidad <gtrinidad@umass.edu>

To Jennifer Onopa <onopaj@gmail.com>

Cc Afrikah Smith <afrikahsmith@umass.edu>, Anya Klepikov <anya@anyaproductiondesign.com>, Christina Beam <cbeam821@gmail.com>, Gabriel Harrell <gabrielharrell@gmail.com>, Nathaniel Gareth Gilsdorf <nng14@hampshire.edu>, Tamara Harris <tamarakaylynn@gmail.com>, Tyler DiBenedetto <tylerdibenedetto@gmail.com>

Date 2017-11-09 15:38

Priority High

Dear Lily's Revenge Family,

Here is Dramaturgy email #2. I am in the midst of writing my article and thesis concerning Queer Aesthetics in American Drama for the Theater Department and Women, Gender, and Sexuality Department.

Today I will give you highlights of my findings.

Queer Aesthetic

Queer Theater in its name is a disruption of mainstream theater. Queer Theater in the United States has multiple origins from activist work, the drag subcultures, the avant-garde, and performance art. From Act-Up Fight Aids, Queer Nation, Paris is Burning, Kyle Abraham/Abraham.In.Motion, to Diana Oh's {The Lingerie Play}, Queer Aesthetic take many shapes; however, share key elements:

1) Community-based - The queer performance aesthetic centers on audience experience in a space with performers. There is a communal experience that allows (for most part) a break of the "fourth wall." From the Cockettes, to drag subculture, to activist work, performers perform in spaces that allow audiences to join them on a journey. The space typically allows performers to speak directly to the audience, vice versa.

2) Disruption of Everyday Spaces - From early Queer performance to contemporary, a key element is taking a space not made for performance into a performance space; or to create new spaces and configurations out of already existing performances space. The Cockettes and performance artists of the 60s and 70s took over abandoned warehouses, store fronts, apartments, art galleries, streets, alleyways, etc. for performances. ACT-UP performed their protests not only in front of government buildings, but on streets, highways, etc. Their protests can be seen as installation art, including their advertisements that were pasted on the sides of NYC buses. Famed Gender Studies theorist Judith Butler has written extensive of the queer performance of ACT-UP. Diana Oh's recent protest/installation work often takes place in public spaces in NYC. Even when the installation was brought into a black box theater in

downtown NYC, Oh and the team covered every inch of the theater with art work they have created, lyrics to songs, etc.

3) Activism//Political - Queer work is inherently political. To be queer is to disrupt. There is always a call for all participants in acts of radical empathy, love, and compassion. There is an urgency to work for a future of inclusiveness, and to connect to queer persons of the past. Sometimes this political element is explicit, and other times, it may be done through

4) D.I.Y. - For the most part, queer political organizations do not receive lots of support/funding. Central to the queer aesthetic that many artists hark to is the D.I.Y. style. Nothing ever truly looks polished, but can still look fabulous. As Nick Vaughan has shared in his visit here, it's perfectly fine to see the mechanics of art. It's the ephemeral nature of these objects that make it queer.

5) Failure - Failure is not a bad thing as Taylor Mac might share. Mac shares in Judy's manifesto:

"I believe authentic failure on stage is one of the great art forms. I believe I sometimes fail at my job and I sometimes succeed and that humanity exists in both. I believe if I want my audiences to experience the range of their humanity, and I do, then I must reflect back at them, authentic success and authentic failure."

Failure marks the humanity in the art work. Nick Vaughan's work is affected by people, bugs, and other environmental factors, and the fact that the piece changes is part of this susceptibility to failure - that nothing can always be perfect and pristine. Queer performance artist Diano Oh often improvises during live performances and often goes off script. Oh never truly knows what might happen, and if something "fails," Oh acknowledges and points out the humanity of the moment. Even the Cockettes believed a similar philosophy. Many of the Cockettes were not trained singers, actors, dancers; however, with their might they performed. The "ugliness" of failure and finding joy in failure is usually what queers a performance.

Queer Body and Queer Temporality

Gender is a performance. Sexuality is fluid. The queer body is often used a canvas on which the artist creates their art; in addition, the queer body also carries its own histories. In a public presentation at Amherst College in Sept. 2016, Dr. Ninoska Escobar spoke about the dance work of African-American dancer Pearl Primus. In description of Primus, she coined the term "Auto-body-graphy," an idea that a marked body carries the history of a shared community. She said that Primus's body when in dance carried not only the story of her body as a black woman dancer, but her movements carried also the history of former slaves, the pain, and emancipation of the black body in the United States. The body is tied to its contexts within multiple histories. Escobar's theory can be applied also to the queer body. The queer body has often been heavily (and continues to be) under surveillance and scrutiny under governments, medicine, and organized religions. The queer body and mind is resilient and continues to survive no matter what terrors. Queer bodies to perform on stage is a subversive act, and to also perform in celebration of queerness is a radical.

APPENDIX F

SHOW ADVISORY NOTICE

The notice was made by Production Dramaturg Gaven D. Trinidad.

SHOW ADVISORY

The Lily's Revenge is a *fabulous show*.

Period. There are bright lights and lots of sequins.

(Distracting, no. Beautiful, YAAAAS.)

The show is a collision course of drag, music, and dance, exploring themes of **QUEERNESS** and **INCLUSIVITY**.

There's some explicit language, burlesque, acts of violence, and suggested sexual acts.

(There are also talking flowers, fart jokes, and disco. I know! It's exciting.)

THEATER IS A POWERFUL AND PROVOCATIVE TOOL FOR SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION.

With this work, the collaborators are asking for all who enter our rainbow-filled world to be **generous** and **loving** to all artists and audience members.

Let's be merry and jive to the groove. Feel free to cheer, laugh, cry, and *flirt*.

We're all family here. Come as you are! SHOW YOUR PRIDE!

APPENDIX G

NOTE FROM DIRECTOR AND DRAMATURG

The production note was printed on half sheets, and were given to audience members at the beginning of the show. Below is the joint Director and Dramaturg's note on the production by Jennifer Onopa and Gaven D. Trinidad:

When graduate directing candidate Jennifer Onopa first proposed *The Lily's Revenge* for our mainstage season in the fall of 2016, it was the week of the presidential election. In a discussion about how we as department of collaborative artists can counter the divisive and discriminatory rhetoric in our nation's politics, Jen explained why the play was meaningful to her: "I want to put on a show in which we celebrate life. I want to have a big dance party!"

Taylor Mac's *The Lily's Revenge* originally premiered at HERE Arts Center in New York in 2009. In this explosive play, a torching-singing anthropomorphic Lily is determined to wed a human bride against the wishes of the God of Nostalgia. Gender non-conforming performance artist Taylor Mac's play disrupts traditional theatrical storytelling and invites audiences to participate in radical acts of compassion and love. With a large cast and live music, the audience is brought into this five-part extravaganza of sequins, queer celebration, sexual positivity, and flower power.

What first drew us to this play was Mac's inventive multi-genre structure, which involved five different directors for the first production. We are attempting this show with one director and as far as we understand, this is the first university production of this show. Most importantly, the show addresses and affirms LGBTQIA+ narratives that are not often

presented on stage. The play is an affirmation of the lives of queer-identifying folks in our community and inherently embraces community-building and inclusivity.

Early rehearsals explored the heightened reality of the worlds of the play, including explorations into Theater of the Ridiculous, Noh performance, drag, and queer politics. We had the opportunity to speak with artists of the original production, Rachel Chavkin, Nick Vaughan, and Nina Mankin, who shared their thoughts on the play. The UMass Stonewall Center shared expertise around gender issues with our cast and crew. Alum Finn LeFevre G'17 also held a workshop concerning politics of representation of gender and sexuality. Professors, production staff, and countless others have given time to build *The Lily's Revenge*.

Mac's play has been both an artistic challenge and a joy to create and produce. The play reminds us that love comes in many forms, that the institution of marriage does not need to structure our thinking of love, and that it's truly okay and necessary to be your own beautiful, unique self. We invite you, the audience, to come with us on this theatrical journey, and have fun in this wild extravaganza of life together.

APPENDIX H

KYOGEN SIGNS 1

They were made by Gaven D. Trinidad and Afrikah Smith. During performances, the signs were hung along the walls of the Curtain lobby and the backstage hallway between both theaters.



APPENDIX I

KYOGEN SIGNS 2

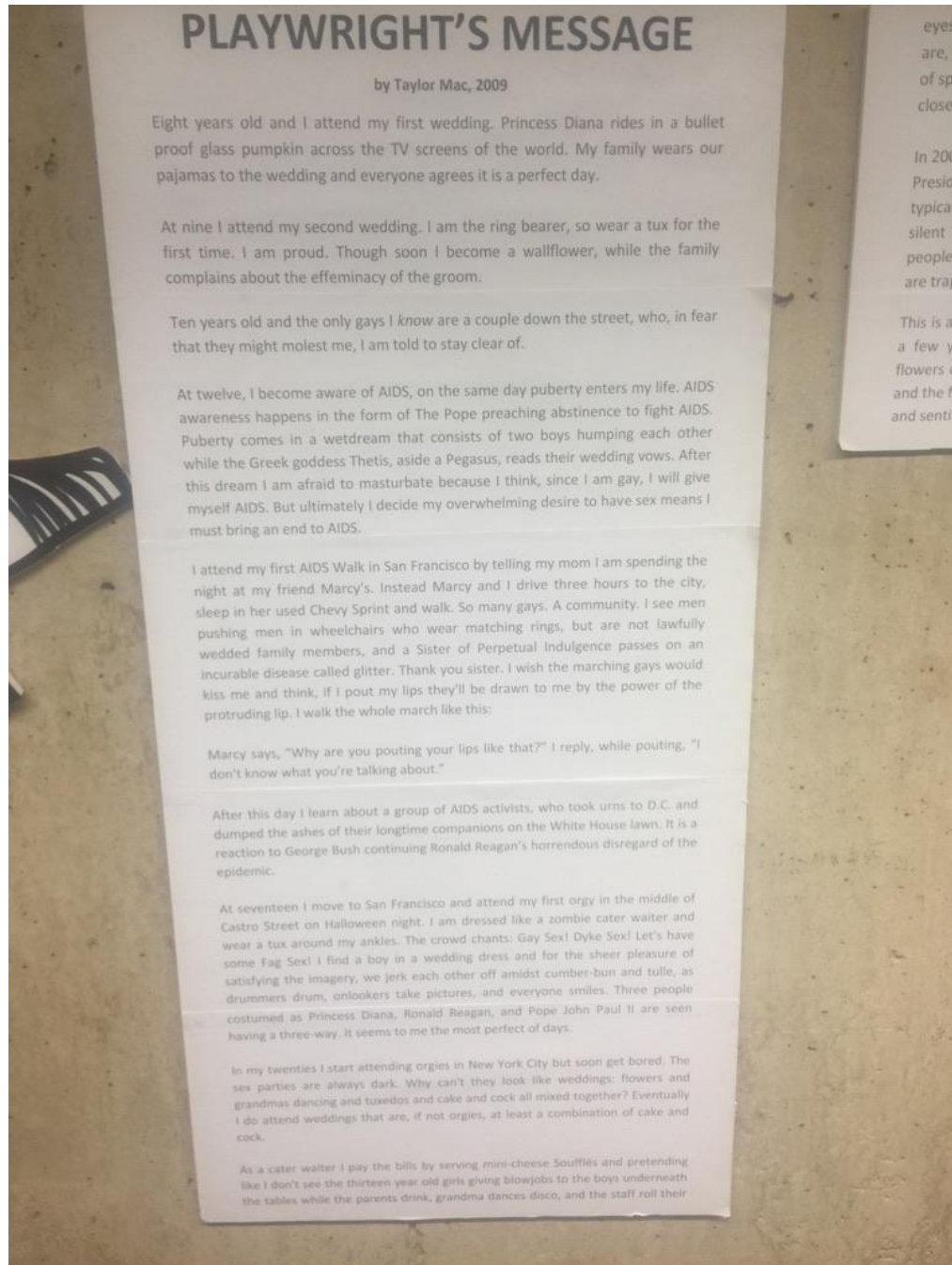
The photobooth was made by Gaven D. Trinidad and Afrikah Smith.



APPENDIX J

KYOGEN SIGNS 3

They were made by Gaven D. Trinidad and Afrikah Smith. Taylor Mac's "Playwright's Message" was displayed in the Curtain lobby and in the backstage hallway between both theaters.



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