

CONTEMPORARY NEW PLAY DEVELOPMENT: PROCESS, ENVIRONMENT AND
LEADERSHIP

by

BRIAN PRINCE HAIMBACH

(Under the Direction of David Saltz)

ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a qualitative study of contemporary new play development. The foundation of the research is two case studies, one full production and one ensemble creation. Interviews with artists working in the field and literature on the topic support the findings from the case studies. Other features of the study are a taxonomy of processes currently used to develop plays and an investigation of successful development. I conclude that what has become mainstream practice in the development of new plays can benefit by adopting some of the techniques utilized during ensemble development. Other findings reveal the importance of environment and style of leadership when approaching new works for the stage. Case study methods, Small Group Communication Theory and Symbolic Convergence Theory inform the analysis.

INDEX WORDS: Theatre, Theater, Playwriting, Case Study, New Play Development, Ensemble Creation, Directing, Sociology, Small Group Communication, Symbolic Convergence, Process/product Dilemma, Theatrical Work Ethic

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Vincent Mays for his love and support.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The importance of institutionalized new play development cannot be overestimated. There are numerous organizations in the U.S. whose sole purpose is the development of new works for the stage and the majority of professional theatres in this country have some form of organized new play development program. It is extraordinarily rare for a professional theatre company to produce a play without its having gone through some sort of formal play development. . However, many theatre artists question the extent to which institutionalized development actually improves plays. Considering the ubiquity of this phenomenon and the controversy over its usefulness, it is surprising that there have been so few scholarly investigations of it.

Books on the craft of playwriting advise playwrights that rewriting¹ and development is a necessary part of both their writing process and the business of getting plays produced. “Rewriting can go on only so long without the input of good actors and a good director, artists who are sensitive to the needs of a new work and familiar with the exploratory nature of the developmental process” (McLaughlin 238). “Only when a play has been through the workshop experience does it have a crack at a commercial success” (Cohen XX). “Development is the normal route to production” (McLaughlin 241). Philip Himberg of the Sundance Theatre Institute asserts that due to the commercial theatre’s reluctance to produce new work, play development is a vital part of the industry (Dec. 11 2002).

The industry, however, has recently expressed concern that practices in the field of new play development are adversely affecting the efforts of artists and therefore the canon of dramatic literature. The Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the America's July 2002 conference was entitled "New Play Development: Challenging Assumptions." At this gathering of the largest organization of professionals who work extensively in the field of new play development, individuals not only voiced their anxiety about but offered alternatives to contemporary methodologies of developing new works for the stage. In the spring of 2002, Theatre Communications Group invited artists and administrators from theatre companies and developmental organizations around the country to attend their "New Works/New Ways" conference. Participants "discussed urgent concerns related to new-work development, and explored alternative options and opportunities for such development" ("New Work"). And *American Theatre* magazine's November 2002 edition contained an extensive special section entitled "The Future of New Work." The assumption of the articles is expressed by Todd London, artistic director of New Dramatists, who observes that "there appears to be general agreement that the old ways aren't the best" (18). In his article, "The Shape of Plays to Come," London adds that "It's a sad irony that the very systems set up to nurture writers and involve them in the theatre have led to their disaffection" (22).

Statement of Purpose

This study is a qualitative investigation that utilizes small group communication theory to analyze two groups' efforts at developing and producing new works for the stage. The case studies in chapters 3 and 4 may serve as useful historical documents of each group's activities,

but the goal of the research is to draw broader conclusions about new play development in general. The impetus for the research was the belief that process produced product; the original goal was to conduct case studies in order to find similarities in the ways a specific methodology of development affected the plays using that process. Although this assumption merits scholarly consideration, the research would require a different approach than the one intended from the beginning of this study. Such an investigation would require quantitative methods or qualitative methods that extended over a period of time longer than is practical for this study. After conducting interviews and especially after observing the artists in the case studies, it became apparent that environment is as, or perhaps more, influential than process. Therefore, the qualitative case study approach proved most effective.

The case studies analyze the process of developing plays through to full production, which many artists feel is ideal new play development. Pike and Dunn state that “productions should be the ultimate goal of any playwright, and a script that is not being reworked and developed toward the goal of a production is the script that is a waste of everyone’s time” (167). Also, Michael Wright’s new book *Playwriting at Work and Play: Developmental Programs and Their Processes* contains detailed descriptions of numerous developmental organizations’ processes including the O’Neill Playwrights Conference, one of the original case studies for this dissertation, which do not lead to full production. Numerous artists have expressed concern about the potential for contemporary new play development to alienate the playwright from the development group or process. For both case studies in this research, the playwright was present for the entire process. By investigating full production with the playwright present, this study analyzes how ideal this situation may or may not be.

The case study in chapter 3 is what one might refer to as “mainstream” development. The director, stage manager, dramaturg and actors started rehearsals with a completed draft of a play written by one playwright. The case study in chapter 4 is composed of a group engaging ensemble methods of development. While such an approach to play development is not nowadays considered a mainstream practice, it is important to recall that, as Frank Pike notes, “looking back historically to the great periods of playwriting, writers wrote for specific actors, for companies they were part of, for stages that they helped design and build and manage. Those periods provided us with the plays that make up most of our theatrical heritage” (Pike 181). At the Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas conference mentioned above, participants frequently offered ensemble methods as alternatives to contemporary development. And Todd London’s belief that “the fusion of individual talent and collective energy fuels great theatre” (22) need not be limited to what has become mainstream developmental practices.

Review of Literature

There are very few scholarly investigations of new play development. The overwhelming majority of the literature published on the topic is intended to serve as instruction primarily for playwrights or documentation of individuals’ experiences. Even though some of the historical accounts draw critical conclusions, their primary intent is to record and/or provide artists with practical information.

Douglas Anderson’s “The Dream Machine: Thirty Years of New Play Development in America,” inspired this study. The article, discussed in chapter 2, appeared in a 1988 edition of *The Drama Review*. It traces the history of institutionalized new play development in the U.S.,

inextricably linking it to the decentralization of the American theatre. Much of the article is a description of new play development methods that were used by a handful of major regional theatres and the problems those using the methods encountered. His assumption is that new play development begins with a finished draft of a play written by a single playwright. Anderson is himself a playwright and clearly assumes that the purpose of new play development is to “serve the playwright” (55). Although Anderson is critical of new play development in the recent past, his article is primarily a historical document.

Two other articles, also discussed in chapter 2, have influenced contemporary perspectives of new play development. Terrance McNally’s “How a Playwright Guards His Vision,” published in the *New York Times* in 1986, offers the playwright’s thoughts on inadequacies in the system of development at that time. While McNally complains primarily about dramaturgs, Steven Dietz complains about readings. His article “Developed to Death” published in *American Theatre* in 1987, rails against the staged reading’s ascension to genre status. He also expresses his concern that new play development at the time was producing similar plays due to similar processes. These two articles helped unite many artists in their disappointment with new play development as it existed in the mid 1980’s and gave contemporary playwrights reasons to be wary when approaching development.

Michael Wright’s *Playwriting at Work and Play: Developmental Programs and Their Processes*, mentioned above, shares a common goal with this dissertation: to “open up the nature of new play development for exploration, examination, discussion and criticism” (xxviii). Wright offers detailed descriptions of the process of development at over nine developmental organizations. The book is clearly a historical record meant to offer artists working in development the invaluable knowledge of what other artists have done. The most obvious

differences between Wright's approach and this research is that Wright reports on developmental organizations that do not lead to full production and does not include ensemble development as part of the developmental narrative.

Three unpublished dissertations offer the rare scholarly treatment of the topic. David Crespy's *Albarwild's Nexus of New Play Development: The Playwrights Unit, 1963 to 1971* completed in 1998, is similar to Anderson's article. As Crespy too is a playwright, he shares Anderson's assumptions while attempting to treat new play development critically. Crespy offers a historical description of new play development in New York City and a playwright's critique of new play development methods both past and present.

Contemporary New Play Dramaturgy: Structures and Techniques, a Report on Current Practices in the Field of Theatre for Young Audiences by Judy Matetzschk, completed in 1996, is similar to this study in that Matetzschk utilizes a case study as well as interviews with artists to draw general conclusions about the field. However, she utilizes quantitative as well as qualitative research; she draws her conclusions from one case study, described as a "case book," and survey responses from artists working in the field. Her study offers detailed instruction to those engaged in the development primarily during the pre-production rehearsal phase of new plays with an emphasis on plays for young audiences. Her conclusion that artists prefer to engage in developmental schedules that allow for periods of time for the piece to be dormant influences this dissertation. A particularly useful section of her study, "The Historical Context of New Play Dramaturgy," may prove useful to anyone investigating the topic. Researchers may consult this section as well as Anderson's article mentioned above, Crespy's dissertation, Michael Wright's book and Roberta Levitow's article mentioned below for a comprehensive account of the history of new play development in the United States.

Christee Lee Lucas Lesch's *Theorizing Collaborative Group Communication: A Case Study of How the Dream Guild Theatre Company Developed a Performance of Fineisterre*, completed in 1995, is clearly written to inform small group communication theory. However, it shares similarities with this work in that she also conducts a case study of ensemble development. Her conclusions are based on the one case study as well as interviews with the study participants. Conspicuously absent are references to the history of theatrical ensembles. She states that future researchers may combine her conclusions with their own findings in order to generate a grounded theory for collaborative group communication (3). Therefore, this dissertation may also help inform communication theory, particularly considering its use of symbolic convergence theory. The distinction between Lesch's study and this one is that she uses a theatre case study to draw conclusions about communication theory, while this study uses communication theory to draw conclusions about theatre.

There are a few books such as Edward M. Cohen's *Working on a New Play: A Play Development Handbook for Actors, Directors, Designers and Playwrights* and David Kahn and Donna Breed's *Scriptwork: A Director's Approach to New Play Development* that provide a how-to methodology for those working on new plays. Both of these books assume new play development begins with a completed script and neither incorporates any techniques of the ensemble creation methodology. One distinctive quality makes these two books uniquely useful: they are rare examples of literature on the topic whose intended audience is not playwrights. Many of the "how-to" books assume that the playwright needs to arm him/herself against the subversive goals of those who come into contact with his/her play. *The Playwright's Handbook* by Frank Pike and Thomas G. Dunn and *The Playwright's Process* by Buzz McLaughlin provide step-by-step description of what a playwright should expect once they give their play to someone

else. Although the intended reader for both these books is clearly a playwright, the detailed description of the process is useful for anyone researching new play development and the advice these authors offer playwrights can be useful information to any artist engaging in new work.

Making Plays: the Writer-Director Relationship in the Theatre Today by Richard Nelson and David Jones is useful for directors as well as playwrights. The book is written as responses to interview questions posed to a director (Jones) and a playwright (Nelson). Like Pike and Dunn and McLaughlin, Nelson and Jones assume what have become mainstream developmental methods. *Making Plays* is interesting because it offers both advice to directors and a director's perspective, and also because of the occasional reference to historical playwright/director teams such as Williams and Kazan.

A number of artists I interviewed have found David Rush's "Talking Back: A Model for Postperformance Discussion of New Plays" published in *Theatre Topics* in 2000 useful in guiding open discussions. Rush offers advice for transforming a part of the development process with questionable value/utility into a beneficial experience for the playwright. His process involves a playwright briefing and debriefing before and after the post-show discussion as well as limitations on what kind of statements from audience members are acceptable. "Reading Hell" by Joseph Megel, published in a 2000 edition of *The Dramatist*, divides staged readings into three functional categories. He claims that "developmental readings" will genuinely focus on developing the play; "backer readings" facilitate a producer's decision whether or not they want to produce a play; and "entertainment readings" are an inexpensive way for a theatre to present a play. He argues reasonably that knowing what type of reading playwright and producer are approaching can help avoid frustration and disappointment. Considering that the reading has

become one of the primary focuses of complaints about new play development in the US, this article may be quite useful to many artists.

Books documenting the history of individuals or theatre companies, such as Philip Middleton Williams' *A Comfortable House: Lanford Wilson, Marshall W. Mason and the Circle Repertory Theatre* published in 1993, are too numerous to mention. These accounts, ranging in style from memoirs to scholarly histories, offer researchers valuable descriptions as well as anecdotal musings. *Playwright Versus Director: Authorial Intentions and Performance Interpretations*, edited by Jeane Luere, is an interesting combination of historical account and interpretation of events. This book discusses the sometimes antagonistic relationship that can exist between playwright and director by citing specific examples from distinguished pairings.

Three books are useful particularly when researching the process of ensemble creation. Sue-Ellen Case's *Split Britches: Lesbian Practice/Feminist Performance* is an insightful description of the company's process analyzed through feminist theory. The bulk of the book is a collection of plays written by Split Britches. This dissertation is indebted to Case for the idea of the director as "facilitator." *A Book on the Open Theatre* by Robert Pasolli frequently draws theoretical conclusions about the differences between mainstream development and the ensemble process utilized at the Open Theatre. Of particular interest is Pasolli's conclusion that ensemble creation actually creates more fully-developed characters than mainstream development because the characters are created in reaction to other characters. In *The Joint Stock Book: The Making of a Theatre Collective*, Rob Ritchie also addresses the idea that the ensemble process leads to a more "complex view" of characterization (31). Ritchie offers the Joint Stock process as a necessary and perhaps inevitable alternative to mainstream playwriting and development.

Ritchie's ideas of the importance of environment and having only one person serve as the writer, even in ensemble creation, influence this study.

Both of Susan Letzler Cole's *Playwrights in Rehearsal: The Seduction of Company* and *Directors in Rehearsal: A Hidden World* offer methodological influences to this dissertation. These two books present detailed reportage with light critical analysis of numerous playwrights and directors engaged in their craft during rehearsal. *Playwrights in Rehearsal* in particular offers insight into the implications of the fact that the playwright is often in rehearsal only during the first production of a play. The book includes chapters about rehearsals for revivals of plays during which the playwright is present making revisions.

Lastly, *American Theatre* magazine merits mention as a resource for information about new play development. Although it is not a scholarly journal, this magazine offers readers descriptive accounts of activity in theatre in the US. Its periodical format allows its publisher, Theatre Communications Group, to detail the most recent productions from contemporary playwrights. The November 2002 edition, mentioned above, is of particular interest to those investigating new play development. This edition, which features the phrase "thinking about new work" on its cover, contains articles from researchers such as Roberta Levitow, Todd London, Lenora Inez Brown and Alice Tuan that cover such topics as the history of new play development, advice about how the field should evolve and a statistical analysis of new play activity around the country that dispels some commonly held myths about the number of plays in development that actually receive full productions.

Methodology

Case Study Research

One of the theoretical frameworks upon which this study relies is that of case study research, which consists of a combination of case studies, interviews and references to literature. In *The Art of Case Study Research*, Robert E. Stake provides an excellent practical description of case study theory and process. According to Stake, the basic structure of organizing case study research is observation, renewed inquiry and explanation. This broad perspective and his assertion that “the best research questions evolve during the study” (33) are particularly applicable to this research. As mentioned above, this study began with the assumption that the methodology utilized to develop a play would bear the greatest influence on the play. However, one of the conclusions offered in chapter 5 is that environment is likely to be more influential on a developing play than the step-by-step process utilized by the artists. Analyzing the data gathered from the case studies called for the renewed inquiry leading to this and other conclusions, and it was only during the study that I began to question the influence of environment and process.

Stake asserts that the case study report should be very descriptive and include narrative elements. Crafting the case study report in this manner allows the reader to experience the case vicariously and thereby draw conclusions based on their own knowledge (123). Aiding critical analysis in this manner is one type of triangulation. Stake refers to triangulation as protocols for getting information correct (107). In terms of description, the goal is to present enough incontestable information that the reader will draw the same conclusions that the researcher has drawn. Triangulation also includes comparison of observations with interviews and documents in

an attempt to confirm the researcher's final conclusions. The "rehearsal journal" section of chapters 3 and 4 provides readers ample description of both case studies to draw conclusions on the observed activities of the artists and chapters 2 and 5 specifically utilize interviews with artists engaged in development and literature published on the topic to support conclusions.

Lastly, Stake divides case studies into instrumental or intrinsic and the issues of each case into etic or emic. One undertakes an instrumental case study to investigate a phenomenon shared by other individuals or groups. An intrinsic case study provides researchers the opportunity to investigate a phenomenon unique to that case alone; intrinsic cases are often historical in nature. Likewise, an etic issue is one that researchers may apply to other case studies and an emic issue is unique to only one case. The goal of an instrumental case study is to relate its emic issues to etic issues (20). Clearly the case studies in this research are instrumental as the conclusions drawn from their observation are for the purpose of relating the activities and choices of these artists to those engaging in other development activities. However, Stakes' statement that "qualitative researchers treat the uniqueness of individual cases and contexts as important to understanding" (39) blurs the distinctions between these seemingly opposed case types and issues. The importance of the specific environments of both case studies in this research might appear to make them intrinsic with emic issues; these cases are potentially useful historical documents of those observed. But the conclusions offered in chapter 5 are potentially applicable to numerous groups and individuals engaging in new play development. By focusing on the uniqueness of these two "individual cases and contexts" one can conclude that in the field of new play development uniqueness of context is greatly influential.

Small Group Communication Theory

Three terms from small group communication theory indicating different types of leadership roles facilitate the analysis of the director's role in new play development: facilitator-trainer, social leader and spanning leader. For the purposes of this study, the most important of the three is the "facilitator-trainer." To approach leadership as a facilitator-trainer is to focus more on creating an environment that encourages contributions from group members than controlling the member's efforts. The facilitator-trainer's need to create "situations conducive to learning" and participate "as an expert" expresses this role's instructional tasks (Keltner 386). But a facilitator-trainer does not simply impart knowledge to group members. The responsibilities of this role also include encouraging the group to continually evaluate their working processes in order to maximize group output. One assuming this role greatly influences communication within the group by facilitating "the flow of information" necessary to accomplish group goals (Keltner 386).

Both the social leader and the facilitator-trainer create the environment. A facilitator-trainer "establishes a model of behavior" and "protects participants from unnecessary stress and attack" (Keltner 386) while the social leader focuses more on psychological reinforcement. This role entails "providing encouragement and reinforcement for individual efforts...encouraging celebration of team accomplishments, and...fostering an environment where individual differences are respected and constructively used" (Barry 417) as well as "being sensitive to the team's energy levels and emotional state [and] injecting humor and fun into team's work" (Barry 416). A social leader also influences communication within the group while maintaining the psychological health of the group by "assuring that everyone gets his or her view heard" (Barry 416).

The role of the “spanning leader” focuses on how those outside the group will perceive the group’s work. “Spanning leadership involves facilitating the activities needed to ridge and link the [group’s] efforts with outside groups and individuals. Associated behaviors include networking, presentation management, developing and maintaining a strong team image with outsiders” (Barry 416). One of the spanning leader’s tasks is to “provide the group with a constant source of reality checks” in an attempt to ensure that “the group’s outputs will be well received by others” (Barry 416).

The Process/product Dilemma

In her unpublished dissertation, *Theorizing Collaborative Group Communication: A Case Study of How The Dream Guild Theatre Company Developed A Performance of Fineisterre*, mentioned above, Christee Lee Lucas Lesch uses the term “process/performance dilemma” to describe the difficulties the group in her case study encountered when trying to maintain a collaborative atmosphere while creating a theatrical performance:

Often...our ability to develop ideas through interaction is limited by the need to get timely, effective work done. If we are to collaborate effectively, this dialectical tension between our desires to engage in a participatory, creative process and the need to turn out an effective, timely product must be negotiated through group interaction. In this study, I call this tension the ‘process/performance dilemma.’” (2)

In an effort to extend her research through application to other studies, she later theorizes that “It might also be useful to investigate groups who successfully negotiate perceived dualities, such as the process/performance dilemma which can be generalized to any process/product tension”

(155). The latter term is applicable this study. The concept of a “process/product dilemma” is one of the key elements in analyzing the information gathered for this study. Lesch finds “process/performance” more specific than what she refers to as a “generalized...process/product tension.” However, for the sake of the case studies in chapters 3 and 4 as well as new play development in general, to refer to the efforts of the process as a “product” is more accurate. If one were studying ensemble development, as Lesch does, perhaps viewing the efforts of the group as a “performance” might be applicable. But one of the understood goals of mainstream new play development is to produce a script that other groups will produce; the script is a product not a performance.

Another concept from Lesch’s dissertation that has proven useful to the present study is that of the “theatrical work ethic.” This concept is important when negotiating the process/product dilemma. Lesch describes the theatrical work ethic as the behavior a group adopts when focusing on the performance as opposed to the process of creating the material. This behavior is marked by “repetition and hard work” as well as the director’s dominance over the proceedings in the rehearsal room (81). Since most artists are accustomed to this type of behavior, when analyzing mainstream new play development, as opposed to investigating group behavior in order to inform communication theory, invoking this concept is most useful when the theatrical work ethic is absent.

Symbolic Convergence Theory

Communication theorist Ernest G. Bormann’s concept of symbolic convergence informs the analysis of both case studies. According to Bormann, as individuals work together in a group, they begin to share a dramatistic conception of the realities that influence the group’s existence.

“This shared public consciousness is a consequence of symbolic convergence, the communication phenomena whereby group members’ symbolic visions incline toward and eventually converge to some degree as the result of ongoing interaction” (Lesch 149). The theory assumes “that people construct a social reality that differs from the mere existence of phenomena. This rhetorical reality is created through the interchange of public symbols” (Cragan 6).

In *Applied Communication Research: A Dramatistic Approach*, John F. Cragan and Donald C. Shields delineate three primary elements of symbolic convergence theory: fantasy theme, sanctioning agent and rhetorical vision. The “smallest unit of communication is the *fantasy theme*,” which is composed of “a complete scenario or dramatistic statement” (Cragan 3). “The *sanctioning agent* is the source which justifies the acceptance and promulgation of a rhetorical drama” (Cragan 7).

As people seek to make sense out of their environment and events around them they chain-out fantasies that eventually swirl together to provide a credible interpretation of reality. This total dramatistic explanation of reality Bormann called a rhetorical vision. A rhetorical vision is a symbolic drama that contains a dramatic scene, dramatic characters (heroes, villains, supporting players), plotline...and a sanctioning agent.... Meaning, emotion and motive are contained in the rhetorical vision, and people caught up in the vision will act it out as their sense or understanding of social realities dictates. (Cragan 3)

When a group achieves a symbolic convergence they become a symbolic community, which “creates a shared culture for group members – a common set of beliefs, customs, activities, and communication patterns” (Adelman 11). The dramatistic scenario the group creates is often “a

mirror of the group's here-and-now situation and its relationship to the external environment" (Cragan 16).

Symbolic convergence theory assumes that "*meaning, emotion, and motive* are not in the skulls and viscera of people but are in their rhetoric thereby providing a direct link between communication phenomena and behavior" (Cragan 7). Researchers agree that this type of "consciousness transcending communication" is highly desirable in groups. To "transcend the individual consciousness and work in the emergent shared consciousness" facilitates a more efficient use of time (Lesch 54). And Cragan and Shields assert that through the use of symbolic convergence theory "the speech communication researcher is in a position not only to provide a why explanation of people's behavior, but to predict future behavior" (7).

Research Strategy

Prior to conducting the case studies, I interviewed numerous artists working in new play development. The information gained from these discussions and literature published in the field led me to develop the models discussed in chapter 2, but also led to the selection of the case studies. The telephone and personal interviewing continued during and after the case study observation period. Attending the Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas conference in June of 2002 and the O'Neill Playwrights Conference in July of the same year afforded me the opportunity to interview and/or make initial contact with many playwrights and dramaturgs.

The process of selecting the case studies parallels that of Susan Letzler Cole's selection of the playwrights for *Playwrights in Rehearsal*. Cole writes: "Some readers may ask: why these eight playwrights? Certainly there are others that it would also have interested me to write about.

I have been partly governed in my choices by who was available – and brave enough to allow me to observe them – during the period of my research” (211). At the time I selected the case studies, I intend to include three, one per each model discussed in chapter 2. I chose the O’Neill due to its popularity and the likelihood that readers would be familiar with the conference. However, the findings of my O’Neill observations are difficult to compare to those of the other two case studies partly due to the fact that the O’Neill artists focus on development as opposed to production. The amount of time dedicated to each play at the O’Neill was also an issue; although the conference lasts approximately a month, artists work together on each play for only four days. Comparing this length of time to the months of work dedicated to the plays at Touchstone Theatre and Chicago Dramatists proved problematic. I have incorporated the information I gathered at the O’Neill into chapters 2 and 5.

Both Touchstone Theatre and Chicago Dramatists relied more on kismet for their selection. In surfing the internet, I found the Network of Ensemble Theatres. Gerard Stropnický responded to one of my postings to the NET’s listserv and by coincidence was planning on engaging in the work described in chapter 3 at a time when I was available to attend. My meeting with Russ Tutterow, artistic director of Chicago Dramatists, at the 2001 Association for Theatre in Higher Education conference led me to interview him over the phone a few weeks later. During our interview I told him of my search for an additional case study and he mentioned *Book of Mercy*. Again, it was a fortunate coincidence that I was able to go to Chicago for the month of rehearsals.

During my time in residence at each case study, I sat quietly and made every attempt to be as invisible as possible. I attended 18 of 26 rehearsals while observing the artists at Chicago Dramatists and 19 of 41 at Touchstone Theatre. I also share my observation method with Cole.

She claims that her “research techniques, not very technologically advanced, were mainly those of listening – and writing down everything I heard and saw” (*Playwrights* XIII). I made every attempt not to interfere in the artists’ activities. Qualitative researchers generally agree that the use of electronic recording devices is not advisable when observing or interviewing subjects. Audio and video tape recorders can either make a subject feel uncomfortable or compelled to perform. I relied on pen and paper notes taken during interviews and observations and transcriptions of the notes typed immediately after each observation session. While in residence I interviewed most members of each case study, however some of the interviews had to wait until after rehearsals due to time restraints. I intentionally conducted an additional interview with the artists at Touchstone Theatre as well as Carson Grace Becker, the playwright of *Book of Mercy* produced by Chicago Dramatists, after the process in order to give them time to gain perspective on their experiences.

The chapters that follow contribute to the literature discussed above because of a unique combination of mainstream full production practices, ensemble creation methods, small group communication theory and symbolic convergence theory. The next chapter offers an analysis and taxonomy of contemporary play development and examines the concept of success in the field. Chapters 3 and 4 are in-depth case studies of the development and production of two plays at Chicago Dramatists and Touchstone Theatre respectively. Considering that each case is composed of a combination of artists unlikely to be duplicated again at any venue, I refer to each case by the title of the plays. *Book of Mercy* was first produced at Chicago Dramatists in October of 2002 and *If At All* was first produced at Touchstone Theatre in May of the same year. The analysis of both case studies is drawn from the literature mentioned above as well as interviews with a wide range of practitioners.

CHAPTER 2

MODELS OF NEW PLAY DEVELOPMENT

In this chapter, I will argue that the three primary features of most developmental situations are structure, artists and environment. The first half of this chapter defines and discusses these elements before addressing the concepts of success and failure in institutionalized new play development. In addition to deriving development's primary features, I have divided new play development activity into three models. The second half of this chapter examines these paradigms. Each model is composed of different combinations of structure, artists and environment.

Structure, Artists and Environment

Structure in new play development concerns the practical process that the artists undergo. The most important element of a process is the goal. The different goals in working with new material concern how far along the script will be at the end of a particular phase of work. Will the script be "finished" or performance ready, or will it continue to evolve before it is fully produced? Most development culminates in some kind of presentation, frequently a staged reading. Other possibilities include a concert reading², a workshop production or even a full production.

Two other primary elements of structure are the point of departure and length of time. Will development start with a finished draft of a play, which the playwright may rewrite considerably or not at all, or will the artists start with an idea and develop the script, and typically a performance, through the efforts of the entire group? The length of time apportioned to developing a play and the structure of daily work will affect the writing greatly. Will the artists work together intensely for a few days or will they spread their time out over months or even years? Will the structure of the artists' time together allow for breaks of time in which the playwright(s) can incorporate the work of the group into rewrites, or is the playwright expected to absorb the work and rewrite after development?

The last consideration is the rigor of that structure. How flexible is the process? If the playwright does not want a post-performance discussion, can s/he opt out of it? If there is a passage the playwright would like to hear or see memorized, can the actors do so even if the goal is a staged reading? Most developmental situations exist for the benefit of the play, but is the playwright expected to rewrite during the process in order to justify the time and effort the organization has dedicated to the play and playwright? The flexibility of the process is often dictated by the sponsoring organization.

Most of the individuals I interviewed agree that who you work with is the most important element in developing a play. The two key factors are which artists are invited to participate and task jurisdiction. Since that the goal of most developmental situations is a presentation, the sponsoring organization will almost always provide a director and actors. Many organizations provide a dramaturg and others even provide designers. Within the structure of the process among the artists assembled, the allocation of responsibilities and control weighs heavily on the outcome of the group's efforts. How much autonomy does the playwright possess? Does the

director have the final say over the presentation or does the playwright have the more dominant position? Are there clearly defined areas of jurisdiction? Is there one clear playwright or does the entire group contribute to the text? How the artists are assembled is also a factor in this aspect of development. Are these individuals working within a company of well-acquainted artists or are they only recently acquainted? The personalities of the individuals working together will also figure prominently in the grouping of the artists and the outcome of their efforts.

The elements of the environment are not as easy to enumerate as structure and artists. The simplest definition of environment is the “conditions in which” the work takes place (Ritchie 12-13). The environment extends to the culture influencing the artists. The practicalities of the environment include the where and when of the work. Is the occasion a retreat where people live, eat and work together for a week or longer or do they go home to their normal lives after a few hours together? Does the organization make efforts to cultivate a specific environment or does the atmosphere rely on the personalities that are mixed together? Indeed, personalities are one of the main contributors to the conditions under which the artists work. Communication practices, both personal and institutionalized, also contribute greatly to environment. Style of leadership also exerts considerable influence on the environment. One additional factor is whether or not the process is open for viewing by those not directly involved or reserved to those working on the play. The working environment may not seem like an element that warrants much consideration before the process begins, but it can be the dominant feature of a developmental situation.

Towards a Definition of Successful New Play Development

Due to the subjectivity of success in the arts, successful new play development is difficult to define systematically. There are numerous examples of what is considered successful development -- plays evolving through the input of other artists in a manner that all involved feel is an improvement -- documented in print and available through personal accounts from individuals. However, much of the literature in the field and most of the artists I interviewed express an eagerness for the current system to mature and improve. Therefore, discussion about the failures of new play development in both published material and conversation with practitioners outweigh the positive experiences. Due to this fact, one strategy for defining “success” is to invert the complaints against institutionalized new play development.

In 1986 Terrance McNally’s article, “How a Playwright Guards His Vision,” published in the *New York Times*, began the rallying cry against institutionalized new play development. McNally takes issue with the system of new play development in general and specifically bemoans the damage a dramaturg with good intentions can do. As reflected by the title of the article, McNally feels the greatest damage institutionalized new play development can do to a play occurs when the “original impetus behind its writing is misplaced or forgotten.” In 1987 Steven Dietz coined the expression now commonly used to describe a play that is worse for the wear of institutionalized new play development. In “Developed to Death,” published in *American Theatre* magazine, he expresses the notion that developing plays through a codified methodology will produce similar products. His primary complaint about the system of new play development is its reliance on staged readings as its primary developmental tool. In 1988 *TDR* published the article that was the impetus of this study. Robert Anderson’s “The Dream

Machine: Thirty Years of New Play Development in America” is very critical of the process instituted by the O’Neill Playwrights Conference and, like Dietz, warns against routinized methods of developing plays. The primary complaints these three authors have against new play development are the complaints theatre artists still have today.

Some artists feel the problems with new play development are simply symptoms of problems common within the American theatre. Merv Antonio of the Seattle Repertory Theatre states that poor marketing is a big problem. He feels that theatre is the only place where “new is a bad moniker” (30 Oct. 2002). Philip Himberg, artistic director of Sundance Theatre Institute, states that “edgy stuff” is less likely to be produced and he supported this assertion with an example of a Robert Wilson opera developed at Sundance that had to travel to Europe to receive a production (11 Dec. 2002). And Liz Engelman, former Literary Manager of the McCarter Theatre, states that bad new play development is a product of letting “assumptions of what the audience wants dictate the process” (13 June 2002).

When asked about the process of new play development, as opposed to the theatre in general, almost all artists published on the topic and those I interviewed agree on numerous issues. One of the ironies of the processes of mainstream development is that the playwright can become one of the least important figures in the process. Todd London, artistic director of New Dramatists, feels that contemporary new play development has “demoted playwrights to overnight visitors” (22). And James Houghton, former artistic director of the O’Neill Playwrights Conference, states that one potentially harmful situation in new play development is when the “playwright is the outsider” (18 July 2002). Buzz McLaughlin describes the effect of alienating the playwright:

Plays have been known to be mutilated or eaten alive by well-meaning people intent on ‘helping’ a script.... Sometimes writers are conned out of their plays, seduced into thinking that what they really wanted to write was actually very different from what they thought before sharing their work with a team. They enter into a collaboration that takes their work away from them and leaves them with a stack of pages they no longer feel connected to. (240)

This loss of control is often characterized by a great deal of feedback from many people. Sarah Gubbins of New Harmony, a summer play development retreat in Indiana, feels that when artists work together developing a play you sometimes end up with too many people trying to write (25 Oct. 2002). Once the developmental work reaches an audience, the feedback frequently continues. “Many workshops build in an audience discussion as part of their process.... [S]uch discussions have mixed results” (Pike 147). Almost every playwright I interviewed dislikes audience feedback sessions and Brook Berman states that they can be “hurtful” (13 Dec. 2002). James Houghton feels that post play discussions have far greater potential for “damage” than they do for “help.” One reason is that there are too many points of view in the “mass setting” of an audience (18 July 2002). Director Michael Bloom agrees that the large group setting is not conducive to healthy development. “Discussions foster the need for resolution instead of encouraging the acceptance of ambiguity” (31).

Although the developmental process may differ from one theatre or developmental organization to another, each organization usually follows a similar process each time. Michele Volansky, formerly of the Philadelphia Theatre Company, expresses a sentiment with which most of the artists I interviewed agree: “each writer and each play is different.... Its hard to routinize...a program [of development] that will be appropriate” for every playwright (13 Nov.

2002). Megan Monahan adds that good play development is not “prescriptive” (20 Dec. 2001). Dietz warns against “a growing trend in conferences and new play programs to *formalize* the development of plays. If said play fits the formula, great. But I fear that some of our truly unique voices are lost because their plays do not fit the formula. Consequently, we are cultivating apprentices, not artists.” He adds that the consequence of this trend is redundancy in the work. “Formulas produce formula plays” (43).

Much of the literature on the topic and most of the artists I interviewed feel that plays that have been subjected to the developmental mill begin to look alike. The adjective most frequently used to describe these plays is *homogenized* and the cause of the homogenization is loss of the writer’s original inspiration. Director Steve Wilford states the when a play is over developed it will become “very neat” and it will be missing the writer’s impulse (12 Dec. 2002). Michele Volansky describes these plays as “diluted” and lacking “passion and heat” (13 Nov. 2002). And the ever expressive Edward Albee goes so far as to assert that the purpose of new play development “is to de-ball the plays; to castrate them; to smooth down all the rough edges so they can’t cut, can’t hurt. It’s to make them commercially tolerable to a smug audience. It’s not to make plays any better” (“The Play Development Process”).

The reading or staged reading is the primary component in most methods of new play development. This dominance of the reading is one of the most frequent complaints about the system and the most frequently cited reason for a homogenized product. One reason for the dislike of readings, and therefore the system of new play development in general, is the lack of time devoted to the work. Philip Himberg feels that readings are “not so hot” because there is “not enough time devoted to them” (11 Dec. 2002). “A director usually has 15 to 20 hours of rehearsal before showing a staged reading” (Pike 134). One may wonder how much effort is

dedicated to truly developing the script when “analytical time in a staged reading rehearsal process is necessarily nonexistent” (Pike 163).

Most of the artists I interviewed feel that realistic chronologically constructed plays work best in a reading and, when asked to consider the possibility, many agree that the reading is one reason for the continued dominance of this type of play in the U.S. When I asked Michelle Volansky if new play development was perpetuating realism, she paused and whispered, “I bet it is” (13 Nov. 2002). Megan Monahan adds that since realism is our “default setting” it is the logical format for the easily understandable (20 Dec. 2001). Tanya Palmer adds that plays that do not work well in a reading often “fall through the cracks,” receiving less attention (30 Oct. 2002).

Alice Tuan offers the following observations:

Readings are the great platypuses of theatre, creatures unto themselves, half on land, half in water. As part of the institutional development process, they provide an optimal way to start associations and relationships without being too committal. But has the reading become a genre of its own, a breeder of shallow drama that plays well with book-in-hand but registers as tinny when it comes to a material production? Or, conversely, does the reading deprive a play that bombs in that format of a chance to have its ineffabilities theatricalized and evolved?

(36)

Jennifer Kiger formerly of South Coast Repertory feels that “a lot” of MFA playwriting students are “writing for readings” (17 May 2002). And Steven Dietz adds that “the staged reading has become its own form.... Our playwrights have, with the adaptability of cockroaches, learned to write brilliantly to *fit the form* – and in today’s

theatre, more often than not, the given form is *not* production, it is the staged reading” (43).

This quote implies the main complaint artists have with new play development: theatres are not fully producing enough new plays. Michele Volansky says readings can be “Band-Aids” because they “cover up the fact” that a theatre is not going to produce a play. “New play development does not mean new play production. It should” (13 Nov. 2002). Buzz McLaughlin states that a full production “is the final phase, the home port, the ultimate destination” for a play (268). Yet “production opportunities are few and far between, compared to the opportunities for readings. A ratio of a thousand to one is probably close” (265). Although this statistic seems a bit exaggerated, all the artists I interviewed agree with the sentiment expressed by playwright Brook Berman: “I’m really concerned about the gap between new play development and new play production” (13 Dec. 2002).

The Models

The following section offers three broad categories encompassing the majority of the features of contemporary institutionalized new play development. Each element is not necessarily exclusive to its model. However, analyzing each paradigm in terms of process, artists and environment reveals the unique qualities of each. The models exist on a continuum of levels of collaboration and time dedicated to a play.

The O'Neill

The choice of name for this model acknowledges the influence of the paradigm for development instituted by Lloyd Richards in 1964 at the O'Neill Theatre Center's National Playwright's Conference. Due to Richards' efforts, and the extent to which his process has been emulated, the staged reading is synonymous with new play development; numerous organizations around the country have adopted and adapted the O'Neill methodology.

The main advantage of this model is that it is the most cost-effective way to develop a play and/or bring a play to the attention of those who may facilitate a full production of the work. Also, a script-in-hand reading allows the playwright to write up until the last minute. However, due to the model's reliance on staged readings and accompanying short length of time dedicated to development, many of the problems with new play development listed above are potentially applicable to the O'Neill process. The ubiquity of this model has caused artists to comment upon its perceived shortcomings and express apprehension about its dominance. The playwright participates in this process with the intention of getting feedback about a specific play from many people. Frequently this feedback results in rewrites. There is no imminent production of the play and this model commits the shortest length of time to the work.

The goal of all artists using the O'Neill process at any venue is a reading or staged reading.³ Some might argue that the goal is development of the play, however the culmination of the artists' time together is always a reading or staged reading regardless of how much -- or how little -- the script develops. The process begins with a completed draft of a play written by a playwright without collaboration with the other artists who will participate in the O'Neill process.⁴

The playwright is present for all activities. One of the first activities the work group will undertake is a read through of the entire script. At the O'Neill Playwrights Conference the playwright reads the entire play aloud, but it is more common for the actors to read their parts.⁵ Artists typically meet for morning and afternoon sessions, which allow the playwright to rewrite in the evenings. The group's rehearsal time can be measured in hours. As quoted above, Pike states that usually fifteen to twenty hours are dedicated to preparing a staged reading.⁶

The group's activities usually resemble production rehearsal. At the O'Neill Playwrights Conference each of the four consecutive days the artists work together is meant to express the work of one week of production rehearsal: one day of table work; one day for blocking; one day for run-throughs; and one day for technical rehearsal. The processes at Sundance and New Harmony, two other prominent playwriting retreats, are less structured. These venues feature a mid-point check in with the artistic staff as well as the final presentation as their main structural features. However, since the artists know there will be a presentation at the end of the process, it is logical to assume that they dedicate some time and energy preparing for an audience. Groups utilizing this methodology must spend some of their time together negotiating the form of the staged or concert reading. Deciding how the actors will manage holding and reading scripts while enacting blocking takes rehearsal time and skill on the part of the actor. For a concert reading, the group must decide which stage directions the audience will hear.

Some maintain that playwrights are compelled to make rewrites during the process. Even though artists are beginning to discourage this expectation,⁷ playwrights usually rewrite during their time with their production team. However, at some predetermined point, possibly only hours before the final presentation, the playwright must concede that a public presentation is imminent and discontinue rewrites to allow the actors time to prepare.

Before collaborating with his/her development team, the playwright will usually meet with the artistic staff of the sponsoring organization throughout the process. Sara Gubbins says that a major factor in the potential success of development at New Harmony is that there is “a great articulation of what the writer wants to accomplish at the beginning” (25 Oct. 2002). Whether formally or casually, the playwright may have the opportunity to discuss needs and desires with the artistic staff during the rehearsal process. A post-reading meeting is usually standard practice. This final meeting not only serves the playwright, but gives the playwright the opportunity to give feedback to the sponsoring organization.

Perhaps the most influential element of the O'Neill process is the retreat, which at least partially addresses the concerns of those who feel staged readings do not dedicate enough time to development. Certainly numerous organizations around the country produce readings and staged readings without the retreat setting. However, to fully utilize the O'Neill methodology such a setting is essential. After the playwright submits the play for selection and the other artists complete the required application processes, the first step for the artists engaging in the O'Neill model is to pack. Artists abandon their daily lives to live and work together in a temporary community dedicated to the exploration and development of new work. The O'Neill Playwrights Conference is approximately a month long, Sundance is three weeks and New Harmony is two weeks. Playwrights may work with their development team for all or part of their time in residence. These days with the development team may be consecutive, such as the four days at the O'Neill Playwrights Conference, every other day like at Sundance or at the playwright's choosing like at New Harmony. The time away from their work group allows the playwright time to write, reflect on or even ignore the play. Since the playwright has time to write while in residence, it is likely that the goal of the retreat is development as opposed to the reading.

However, even in a retreat, the reading is of primary importance because this is the final product that the work group presents to an audience. The first read through of the play may or may not be open to the public. In the retreat atmosphere the larger conference community will likely be in attendance, or at least invited. The audience for the final presentation may include the paying general public, but will always include the retreat community.⁸

Historically, there is a session after all readings, at a retreat and otherwise, in which the audience offers feedback. The discussion is moderated by the director, a dramaturg or staff member of the sponsoring organization. This discussion may be marked by disagreement among the audience members. Frequently the audience has questions for the playwright, but traditionally the playwright does not respond as the purpose of post-show discussions is to let the playwright know what the audience thinks as opposed to enlightening audience members. Due to the dislike for this practice, many organizations have dispensed with this type of immediate response. Many groups that have retained this feature of the staged reading process impose a structure that minimizes the potential harm unwelcome responses can have on a new play.

Unlike the other two models, the O'Neill process does not rely on the artists having any prior knowledge of each other's work. Organizers will obviously have some basis for selecting the artists, but the artists themselves are likely to be strangers.⁹

In this process job jurisdiction mirrors that of a typical production. The playwright is responsible for the words; the director is responsible for staging and coaching the actors; and the actors are responsible for creating a complete character. The dramaturg has historically been one of the most important members of the development team at the O'Neill Playwrights Conference and is highly likely to be a member of groups using this process at any location. The process, which starts with a completed draft of a play, does not necessarily lead to high levels of

collaboration on the writing. One of the purposes of the process is to help the playwright realize the play's potential.

Due to this task assignment, this model presents the greatest potential risk to playwright autonomy. Given the specific process and personalities of a group, the playwright could easily become an observer left to make rewrites based on the urgings of the rest of the group. The alternative, where the playwright is a participatory member of the group and the other artist respect their task in development, is certainly possible

Another important element in personnel, especially in the retreat setting, is the staff of the sponsoring organization. These individuals are responsible for ensuring the accomplishment of daily activities and the fulfillment of playwright needs. A supportive and friendly staff can help make the artists' time in development enjoyable, which may lead to more effective work.

The environment at a venue is the most important element of the O'Neill process. When asked about the O'Neill Playwrights Conference, Sundance and New Harmony, one of the first replies the artists I interviewed offered was about environment. O'Neill director Steven Williford describes the process at the O'Neill Playwrights Conference as "a retreat" (12 Dec. 2002). Philip Himberg states that one of the best aspects of Sundance is that "egos seem to fall off" and "there is an aura" that is "conducive to creativity" (11 Dec. 2002). Sara Gubbins calls New Harmony a "love fest" that is "incredibly focused and really relaxed" (25 Oct. 2002).

Certainly the process affects the environment. As exemplified by the number of meetings between playwright and organizing and artistic staff, open communication between staff is encouraged. But the circumstances under which the artists live also encourage communication. Brook Berman's description of the O'Neill Playwrights Conference as a "writer's community" de-emphasizes the staged reading process and focuses on the opportunities afforded by

interacting with fellow writers. Frequently there are events other than readings for the conference participants. At the O'Neill Playwrights Conference special guests will speak for the gathered community during the daily two hour lunch break and at Sundance there are no evening rehearsals, which allows for social interaction. By living and eating as well as working together, the O'Neill process gives artists ample opportunity to discuss their play with many other artists.

By being out of their daily routine, artists are able to concentrate on being writers. Steven Wiliford says the main feature of the O'Neill Playwrights Conference is that artists are "sequestered away" (12 Dec. 2002). Although there are other readings to attend and social activities to join, playwrights are able to focus on their play more than they would during their regular daily lives. Since the artists are gathered for the purpose of developing plays, the playwright has a level of importance that is uncommon in the world outside of the retreat. Sara Gubbins says New Harmony is "all about pampering the artist" (25 Oct. 2002). The atmosphere I witnessed at the O'Neill Playwrights Conference was marked by respect for the play and the playwright's writing process.

The Artistic Home

Many theatre practitioners agree that the artistic home model has proven to be the most effective way to produce plays of the highest quality. "Historically, playwrights have emerged from a company of like-minded individuals.... The plays of Shakespeare, Moliere, O'Neill, Shepard, Mamet [were written] in concert with companies they helped create" (Anderson 68). The Artistic Home model was employed by the Albarwild Playwright's Unit, which developed such experimental works as LeRoi Jones's *Dutchman* and plays with more traditional dramaturgy, albeit challenging subject matter, such as Mart Crowley's *Boys in the Band*. New

Dramatists, The Playwright's Centre of Minneapolis, Victory Gardens and Chicago Dramatists currently utilize the artistic home style of development.

This model's large investment of time and energy in a playwright is perhaps its primary advantage. The primary disadvantage of this model is the cost. Many companies do not have the resources to keep a playwright on the payroll or are not willing to risk placing an untried play in their season.

The goal of the artistic home model is the development of playwrights as opposed to the development of plays. The Artistic Home model provides the playwright with the time, space and tools needed to develop new scripts as well as their writing talents. It is difficult to articulate one process for this methodology because it embraces the widest range of development activities including, but not limited to, staged readings, workshop productions, full productions or any combination of the three. The artistic home also offers financial and emotional support to playwrights.

If the sponsoring organization is a theatre company, it is likely that the process will lead to full production. In this case it is possible that the playwright rewrites the play knowing the space in which it will be performed and even the company that will perform it. The length of time dedicated to a specific play may vary, but will usually be longer than a traditional production rehearsal process. Other full-production artistic homes stage readings throughout the year and plays in their mainstage season are highly likely to have been part of the reading series at some point, possibly even years prior to receiving the full production.

Since the goal is the development of playwrights, this model potentially offers the highest level of autonomy to the playwright. But the playwright might also want more guidance and less autonomy. Hence, it is the model generally preferred by playwrights. The Artistic Home model

is conducive to long-term working relationships between playwrights and the organization.

Although a playwright will usually choose to collaborate extensively with the artistic staff of the sponsoring organization, he/she may work without much feedback, utilizing the resources supplied by the sponsoring organization for personal critical evaluation.

The artistic home model entails some type of selection process for playwrights. Sometimes through channels as formal as application and paying fees or as informal as invitation, the company confers upon the playwright a status of inclusion through membership. Playwrights are usually members for long periods of time, which affords them the opportunity to develop strong working relationships with other artists.

Membership offers playwrights a security rare for writers in the American theatre. This inclusion not only validates an artist's efforts, but may offer the opportunity to experience other artist's engaging in their craft. The exposure to actors and directors who are willing to share their work is bound to have a beneficial effect on the plays developed through this model.

Ensemble Creation

The third model requires not only the most collaboration between the artists, but a comparative lengthy time commitment as well as a particular environment. Ensemble Creation has a strong history of producing innovative works for the stage. Groups such as The Living Theatre, The Open Theatre, Joint Stock Theatre Company, The San Francisco Mime Troupe, Mabou Mines and Tectonic Theatre Company have utilized the Ensemble Creation process.¹⁰ Of the three models of development, Ensemble Creation is the least likely to produce plays that will become part of the canon. The Wooster Group is an example of a company that produces ensemble works for the stage that are very unlikely to be produced by any other group. However,

Ensemble Creation is included in this study because it has given rise to numerous highly influential works of theatre and offers contemporary artists an alternative to the traditional model of new play development.

Arguably, the main drawback to Ensemble Creation is the time and energy required of the artists. Strangers can, and often do, participate in the O'Neill model together and the Artistic Home model relies on a relatively close artistic acquaintance between the artists, but the social dynamic in Ensemble Creation is primary. This type of development requires the artists to make the strongest commitment to the piece being developed and the group developing the piece. This aspect of Ensemble Creation may be prohibitive to many contemporary artists.

The goal of most ensembles is to create fully produced performances. The process begins with an idea. Historically, this idea reflects the political affiliations of the collective, but contemporary Ensemble Creation may be inspired by a work of art such as a piece of literature or music or a proposal from a source outside the ensemble for a performance to address a specific issue or audience. The group will then choose the most appropriate type of development for the project at hand.¹¹ The process may include extensive discussion and brainstorming among the ensemble artists, creating and recording improvisations based on gathered material, group or solo writing of text, performing the evolving material for audiences and group dramaturgy. Companies such as the now-defunct Joint Stock Company begin the process with extensive research including interviews with individuals affected by the issue at hand. In these situations, a great deal of their findings becomes part of the script.

Since this type of development begins with an idea and not a finished play, the physical element of the finished work will typically be addressed earlier and play a much more important role in the "writing" of the piece than in the above two types of development. Actors are "up on

their feet” earlier improvising and testing possibilities for inclusion in the finished text and performance. The evolution of the script relies on input from all the ensemble members and extends into the rehearsal period much longer than in the first two types of development.

Although a playwright may work in isolation on a play for years, the total amount of time an ensemble spends together on one project is usually much greater than the length of time a playwright spends with a company developing a particular play. Also, unlike mainstream development, an ensemble will take lengthy breaks in developing a single piece.

Michael Fields states that Dell’ Arte has been known to plan and develop projects three or four years in advance of opening (29 Oct. 2002) and Eric Bass says that Sandglass Theatre rehearses for numerous three to four week periods over approximately a year’s time (18 Feb. 2003). Susan Letzler Cole observed the creation of a Wooster group performance in which the period from first rehearsal to opening night spanned four years. Among those ensemble artists I interviewed, even the ones that develop works over shorter periods of time still expressed the desire to have breaks in the schedule so the piece can be dormant.¹²

The role each artist will assume is less prescribed in Ensemble Creation. Although a single artist may be referred to as director or playwright, the distinctions between the roles of actor, playwright and director are typically less clearly defined than in the above methodologies.

Considering the egalitarian and communal nature of ensemble creation, it is logical to assume that the role of the ensemble director would be different from the role of a director engaged in a traditional production. The main difference is that, due to the nature of the ensemble process, the ensemble director is called upon to be much more of a facilitator than the director of a production of a pre-scripted play. Sandy Timmerman of q-Staff Theatre states, “each artist in the ensemble is a creative artist not an interpretive artist” (18 Feb. 2003). The

actors are not merely enacting the director's vision of the text, but co-creating the vision and the text with the director and the writer. The writer and the director use the ensemble's creative work, which includes ideas, language and movement, to craft the text and the performance. In order to generate and ultimately shape the materials that will become the text and performance, the director must foster creation in the rehearsal room by facilitating the work of others.

The role of the ensemble director may also differ from mainstream development in that his/her purview may extend to writing. Traditionally the director translates the material, which is a completed script, for the audience's understanding. But in ensemble creation the material is generated by the ensemble and needs to be organized and edited. In *A Book on the Open Theatre*, Robert Pasolli states that "when the work is done and ready to be shown publicly, one can look back and say that the writer structured the workshop investigation to make it understandable to outsiders" (36). Historically writers who engage ensemble methods have done more than structure the words generated by the ensemble. Caryl Churchill is an example of a playwright that has used ensemble methods while maintaining a voice and vision that is distinctly her own. Frequently there is not one artist designated as the "writer" because the entire ensemble will participate in the writing of the script, particularly the generation of character and dialogue. Even if the director is not specifically designated as the writer, it is usually necessary for her/him to assume the responsibility of making final decisions by taking a dominant role in the shaping of the text as editor. In *Group Theatre* Jan Kubicki asserts that the director "must edit the ideas" generated by the ensemble (30) and for Split Britches Lois "Weaver function[ed] as the director, dramaturg, and editor" (Case 10).¹³

The director of the play in Lesch's case study states that having the writing be an "all-ensemble process [is] not a good way to work" (90). Of all the ensemble artists I interviewed,

Michael Fields was the only one who specifically stated that writing is “not a group project”; however, all indicated that the idea of having one person serve as the writer was welcomed.¹⁴

Considering that the majority of the activities involved in creating an ensemble piece occur in the rehearsal room, the atmosphere during Ensemble Creation is of vital importance. The most productive atmosphere will be marked by open communication that encourages input from all the artists. In reference to work with the Open theatre, Joseph Chaikin says he hated “to say ‘no’ to anything” (Pasolli 10). LeCompte and Sellars’ work at the Wooster Group is said to take place “in an openly acknowledged context of experimentation” (Cole, *Directors* 105). And Sandy Timmerman affirms that for a while “everything goes” (18 Feb. 2003).

Ideas are not only generated through action, but also by discussion. Eric Bass states that, in terms of serving a practical purpose, discussions are important for keeping everyone on the “same page” (18 Feb. 2003). It is logical to assume that an open atmosphere would allow for a great deal of discussion; however, the ensemble artists I interviewed agree that there is a limit to the productivity of discussion. Pasolli recalls that when working with Chaikin and the Open Theatre, “discussion [was] minimal. The emphasis [was] on improvising and...structuring an improvisation” (12).

Discussion factors strongly in the case study chapters that follow. The *Book of Mercy* case study in chapter 2 is an example of the Artistic Home model and the *If At All* case study in chapter 3 is an example of the Ensemble Creation model. Both the analyses in each case study chapter and conclusions drawn from comparing the two in chapter 5 reveal the importance of open communication, primarily through discussion, during new play development.

CHAPTER 3

BOOK OF MERCY CASE STUDY

The walls of the lobby of Chicago Dramatists are painted with blown-up cutaways from the scripts of different plays. These physical manifestations of the playwrights' efforts remind audience members that the purpose of the theatre is to develop plays and playwrights. I attended the rehearsals for the first production of *Book of Mercy* by Carson Grace Becker produced by Chicago Dramatists in the Fall of 2002. Observing this group gave me the opportunity to analyze what has become the most common method of working with new plays.

This chapter contains seven sections. The first is a very brief history of Chicago Dramatists and a description of my coincidental first encounter with *Book of Mercy*. The rehearsal journal provides readers with a condensed version of the daily activities these artists employed in producing and developing this play. This information will support the analysis and assertions of the subsequent sections. For the sake of brevity, I have not included entries for every rehearsal I attended and omit entries for rehearsals in which little of direct bearing on the study occurred or when describing a rehearsal proved redundant. The third section analyzes this group's rehearsal schedule by comparing it to a five-step rehearsal process articulated by Lee Strasberg and endorsed by Robert Cohen as an effective manner in which to organize rehearsals for the first production of a play. This comparison reveals that the director, Ann Filmer, the stage manager and the actors in this case study were primarily engaged in preparing a production as

opposed to developing this play. The fourth section of this chapter compares and contrasts Ann's efforts to the tasks of spanning leader, facilitator-trainer and social leader as articulated by small group communication theory and described in chapter 1. Her emphasis on the responsibilities of the spanning leader provides the opportunity to discuss the process/product dilemma as applied to these artists and, once again, reveals that product dominated over process. Carson made mostly small rewrites to the script during this process, however she did make one rewrite substantial enough to warrant giving the actors new scripts. Throughout this chapter, especially in the fifth section which concerns writing, I refer to these two drafts as the first draft and the production draft. After the production in this case study Carson made an additional rewrite to *Book of Mercy*. I refer to this draft as the final draft. The writing section focuses on the manner in which the play changed during this case study as well as from this case study to the final draft. The sixth section of this chapter utilizes Symbolic Convergence Theory to further analyze the communication practices of the artists. Dividing the group in two is useful for a richer discussion of their styles of communication. This section compares the discussion group's stronger shared reality to the rehearsal group's weak flow of information, which led the cast to rely on the theatrical work ethic to justify their group membership. The chapter concludes with an analysis of the final draft of the play.

History of Chicago Dramatists and Researcher's Initial Contact

Chicago Dramatists was founded in 1979 by a group of aspiring playwrights. At first they met in a donated space and read each other's plays. Two years later they named the group Chicago Dramatists Workshop and leased a storefront theatre. In 1982, Russ Tutterow, the

company's current artistic director, directed the company's first fully staged production and in 1986 the company created its first paid position by hiring Russ as its artistic director. In 1986 the company also moved into its own theatre, which is the location for this case study.

The staff at the time of the study consisted of an artistic director, a managing director, a development director, an outreach director and a director of the Playwrights' Network. The company's website states that it employs over 600 actors, designers and directors annually, which makes it one of Illinois' largest employers of theatre artists ("History"). The theatre's bi-level facilities at the time of the study included a seventy-seven-seat proscenium performance space, a small box office and lobby area, a dressing room, two small rehearsal spaces and two administrative offices.

Chicago Dramatists is currently an Equity contracted theatre and has received grants from The Shubert Foundation, The National Endowment for the Arts and the Dramatists' Guild Fund. The plays and playwrights developed at Chicago Dramatists have won Emmy Awards, Drama-Logue Awards, the Julie Harris Playwright Award, the Lorraine Hansberry Award, the American Theatre Critics Association's Osborn Award and Illinois Arts Council Playwriting Fellowships. Member playwrights have received commissions from the Kennedy Center, Berkeley Repertory, South Coast Repertory, Steppenwolf Theatre, Goodman Theatre, Sundance Institute and London's Court Theatre. Chicago Dramatists operating budget for the 2002-2003 year was \$250,000.

The company's mission statement reads as follows:

Chicago Dramatists is a professional theatre, dedicated to the development and advancement of playwrights and new plays.... The organization provides both beginning and established playwrights opportunities to expand their professional

affiliations, showcase their work to the theatre marketplace, and collaborate with actors, directors, dramaturgs and audiences during the creative process. (“About”)

Chicago Dramatists offers playwriting residencies and Network Playwright memberships. Resident playwrights must live within seventy-five miles of Chicago and, although they do not have to be produced playwrights, the application calls for two completed plays and a letter of recommendation from a theatre professional. Russ referred to selection of the resident playwrights as “selective” and “competitive” (Oct. 2 2002). Residents are not charged to be members, but they are expected to volunteer for the theatre, attend events at the theatre and maintain membership by continuing to write. The program for opening night of *Book of Mercy* lists twenty-two resident playwrights. Network Playwrights are not screened and membership is open to anyone who is willing to pay the fee of approximately one hundred dollars. The main feature of being a Network Playwright is having resident playwrights read and respond to your plays. The company produces two full productions of resident or Network member playwright’s works annually and readings of new works almost every Saturday of the year.

The playwright in this case study is Carson Grace Becker. She has been a resident playwright at Chicago Dramatists since 1994. She holds a BA in English, Literature, Creative Writing and Women’s Studies from UCLA and has studied dramatic literature at the University of London. She is also a graduate of University of Iowa’s MFA playwriting program. Her plays have received numerous productions around the country and in Russia. She has been playwright in residence for numerous theatres and has had her plays developed at PlayLabs in Minneapolis. After the production of *Book of Mercy*, Carson’s next project was a commission for a production at the Goodman theatre.

Ann Filmer was the director for *Book of Mercy* and was also the managing director of Chicago Dramatists at the time of the study. Her past titles have included associate artistic director of Writers Theatre Chicago and founding artistic director of The Aardvark Theatre Company. She has directed for many Chicago theatres and holds a BA in Dance from San Jose State University. Ann has taught for numerous arts education institutions and is a member of the Board of Directors of the League of Chicago Theatres.

In December of 2001 I interviewed Russ Tutterow on the general topic of new play development. During our conversation I informed him of my study and he suggested that I might want to come to Chicago in March for the reading of a play at Chicago Dramatists because there would be other potential interviewees in the audience. He also hinted I might be interested in the reading because the play was a likely candidate for production in the upcoming season and would be a good potential case study.

As it turns out, I had seen a staged reading of this play at the Chicago Cultural Center in the spring before our interview. This reading of *Book of Mercy* in the spring of 2001 was produced by Prop Theatre of Chicago and directed by Lisa Portes. She had actors sit in a semicircle as they read from scripts and stood to indicate when they were on stage. The audience was not particularly responsive during the talk back session after the reading, but did express a general appreciation of the play and the characters in particular. These two elements were to be the strongest features of this play throughout the process. *Book of Mercy* tells the story of Stella, a wealthy socialite from Manhattan and Vincent her enormously successful husband. The couple is divorced and Vincent comes to visit Stella, who is in a posh alcohol recovery facility, to tell her he is remarrying. During their visit Stella receives a package that contains the diary of their deceased daughter Mercy. The play is peopled with Vincent's fiancée, Stella's doctor and family

friend, his male partner and an employee from the facility who has developed a friendship with Stella. The play covers numerous themes and issues including redemption and forgiveness. Stella frequently and Vincent occasionally use elevated language. One of the challenges Ann expressed was how to make the play active due to the fact that it is composed of people sitting, talking and reading from the diary all in the same location.

Ann Filmer directed the reading at Chicago Dramatists in March 2002. A new cast sat in a semicircle once again, but this time in swivel chairs, and turned, sometimes dramatically, to enter and exit. The audience for this second reading was much more engaged during the talk back session. A few of them had questions about the character of Mercy, who is dead and does not make an appearance, but all generally agreed that the play's language is poetic and the characters are well developed.

At this reading Russ introduced me to Carson and I explained my research. She was very excited about the possibility of *Book of Mercy* being one of my case studies but she, and I, had to wait until May to know if Chicago Dramatists was going to produce it. Once Chicago Dramatists announced its decision, Carson, Ann and I made arrangements for me to attend rehearsals. The first rehearsal was on August 26 and the play opened on September 4. The rehearsal schedule was Sunday through Thursday from six to eleven p.m. I attended 18 of 26 rehearsals, all four preview performances and opening night. During the rehearsal period I interviewed two of the six actors in person and after my observation period I interviewed two others over the telephone. I interviewed Carson once during the case study period and once after the play closed and I interviewed Ann twice during the case study period.

Rehearsal Journal

August 26 (rehearsal 1 of 26) ¹⁵

The first rehearsal consists largely of a read through of the play on the main stage. As I arrive Carson is in the lobby showing props she has brought from home to the stage manager and costumer and Ann is buzzing around the theatre preparing for the evening's work. The cast members are alone on stage seated in silence around a large table; they do not appear to know each other. Rehearsal begins with Russ Tutterow, the artistic director of Chicago Dramatists, explaining that it is the theatre's twentieth anniversary and that he is very excited about producing *Book of Mercy*, in part because "many people will benefit from Carson's work." Ann adds only that she is "thrilled and grateful" to be working on *Book of Mercy* and wants to start the reading right away. She gives the actors a few instructions: "don't act...only read for sense...we just want to hear the words."¹⁶ Before they begin Carson offers an extremely brief history of the play and states that she will be around for the entire process so she can explain anything the actors need. Carson concludes her brief remarks by telling the actors, "I'm ready to learn from you."

The reading lasts over three hours as the actors read very slowly. No one stops them to correct errors of punctuation or pronunciation. As they read I am struck by how much subject matter the play addresses.

After the reading Russ gives some house rules: the playwright has the last word on the text and there will be rewrites up until the last minute because "we want Carson to do as much as she wishes."

August 27 (rehearsal 2)

Carson is not in attendance tonight because she has a commitment made before she knew *Book of Mercy* was going to be the first production of this season at Chicago Dramatists. Ann informs the cast that her plan is to take tomorrow and the next evening to block the entire play because she wants the actors to “get up on their feet” as soon as possible. She warns that the first blocking will be very quick. She then instructs the actors to come to her if they have questions, as opposed to asking Carson directly, or at least to include her in any discussion about the play.

Rosie Forrest, the dramaturg, has created a time line for the play’s events and she hands copies of it to the cast and Ann. The company members are grateful for the information because they have quite a few questions about when the events in the play or discussed in the play occurred. Even after receiving the list, the cast has a great number of questions about specifics in the play such as the ages of Stella’s children, how long Stella and Vincent have been divorced and when Mercy died. There is general agreement on the impracticality of Stella’s being on the twelfth and final step of her rehabilitation program in less than a year. Gregory, the actor playing Paul, appears to have first-hand knowledge of twelve step programs and is very sure that even the quickest recovery would take much longer.

Ann asks for feedback from the actors about the reading last night, because there was not time after the reading for discussion. They all agree that the characters are very well drawn and that Beth’s first entrance is a welcomed burst of energy. Suzi, the actor playing Stella, states that “there’s so much” in the play and most concur.

After this discussion they read the play again and stop briefly to ask questions after each French scene. At these times the discussion is minimal and focuses on the timeline of the play’s occurrences.

August 28 (rehearsal 3)

Earlier today Rosie and Carson had lunch and Rosie suggested that Stella be on the third step of her rehabilitation program and Carson immediately agreed it was a good change. Ann and Carson are taking the opportunity to speak to each actor privately before rehearsal and today is Suzi's turn.¹⁷ Carson admits, as she did during lunch, there is a lot she has yet to figure out about the particulars of the characters and their chronology. She adds, "I don't know that I need to figure [it] out by myself."

Before they begin staging, which was scheduled to begin at 6:00 but begins at 6:50, Carson has numerous questions about the set and openly expresses her curiosity to Barbara, the stage manager. Ann has the actors read through a section quickly, with little to no discussion afterwards, before she gives them what she calls "skeletal" blocking. After each read through and at the end of a blocking section Carson always has minor cuts for the actors. Carson twice points out the literary repetition in the play and how lines mirror each other. Later she declares that she has had a "revelation" about a beat. This discovery does not change the language of the play, but does offer Suzi a reason to say a line as it is written.

As the blocking progresses it becomes clear that Ann is giving the actors physical movements for almost every beat in the script. As they stage the play, the atmosphere is very social and the actors, especially Suzi, crack a lot of jokes.

August 29 (rehearsal 4)

As Ann blocks Carson follows along in the script. She continues to offer cuts after blocking sections and asks the actors to suggest cuts if they see opportunities. At this moment Ann adds that she would rather opt not to change lines now if there is a doubt because she wants

to wait until the company has a stronger grasp on the play before they make such decisions. I notice that Carson is asking Ann for permission to make comments, which she was not doing yesterday. These comments are much less frequent and consist primarily of line cuts. One time when Carson asks to interject a thought, Ann abruptly cuts her off and asks her to wait a moment. When Ann gives Carson the floor, Carson says to never mind.

During a break Carson almost covertly asks Ann about a blocking moment. Ann goes on stage to physicalize her understanding of Carson's inquiry and begins moving furniture in order to "fix" the moment. Carson joins her on stage and expresses her concern about changing the placement of the furniture and Ann states that "if its going to change I want to work with it now." During this exchange Ann's tone becomes louder and slightly aggressive.

As I leave rehearsal I say goodbye to Carson. Her normally jovial response is replaced with a grunt as she distractedly stares at the stage.

August 31

Today there is no rehearsal and Ann, Carson, Rosie and Russ meet at a local pub/restaurant to discuss the play. On numerous occasions Russ and Rosie express their feeling that the play is beautifully written. The conversation hinges upon the largest change in the play thus far: Stella is now on step three, not step twelve, of her rehabilitation program. Carson brings up the literary device of the high and low language used by Stella and Vincent and mentions a few aspects of the play she would like to develop. Ann states that she wants to know right away how the play is going to change and Carson says she needs to see the whole play staged before she can fulfill such a request. She reassures Ann that the structure of the play or even the shape

of any scene will not change. The two decide that in three days the cast will get entirely new scripts.

When Russ takes the opportunity to speak, he asks structural questions. He wants to know how Stella, the main character, changes during the play and what is the action of the play. As we leave Ann expresses to me her gratitude for Russ asking such good questions.

September 2 (rehearsal 6)

Yesterday (rehearsal 5) I noticed Carson and Ann whispering frequently and this action continues today as it will through the rest of the rehearsal process. Some of these whispers are inaudible to anyone else and some are easily heard by anyone. During a break Carson whispers to Ann the clarification of an acting intention of the David character. When rehearsal resumes Ann gives this note to Rhys, the actor playing David, and he is relieved to have the formerly difficult moment explained. A byproduct of this clarification is simplified blocking .

September 3 (rehearsal 7)

Today they get the new scripts and Ann tells the cast that the plan is to transfer blocking notes so Barbara, the stage manager, does not have to lead them through their steps. But half way through the rehearsal Ann stops the process and says they need to “just get through it,” meaning that they practically just read the new text because Ann is not watching the actors but following along in the script.

While handing out the new texts Carson tells the company “obviously there will be no more scripts” and Ann says that the work the actors have been doing has really informed this

more active rewrite. One of the main changes to the play is the setting; it is now the one-year anniversary of Mercy's death.

Later in rehearsal two actors, Carson and the stage manager become engrossed in a conversation about the meaning of one line and Ann tells them to stop the "dramaturgical conference" and let Carson go home and think about the line.

September 12 (rehearsal 14)

I have not attended the past five rehearsals. They are now rehearsing downstairs in the rehearsal space because a crew is building the set on stage in the evening hours. The actors are now off book and they have done a run-through of the play that lasted two and a half hours, so Carson will make more cuts. Members of the group inform me that in my absence they have worked repetitiously on small sections of the script undertaking what Ann refers to as "moment-to-moment" work

Ann announces that it is no longer the one year anniversary of Mercy's death, however it is approximately a year since she died. This change bears minimal effect on lines.

Much of tonight and tomorrow night will be about learning lines. They work in short sections with a great deal of repetition. I am reminded how much Richard, the actor playing Vincent, and Suzi like to make jokes during small breaks. But tonight, with the added frustration of the repetitive nature of the rehearsal, I notice that they joke more frequently but with less joviality. Ann frequently interrupts the chitchat by indicating from where to begin.

Carson has a pad and frequently makes notes and slides them over to Ann. At one point Carson wants to cut one word from one of Stella's lines, but Suzi states she likes it as written. Carson does not make the change.

September 16 (rehearsal 16)

Tonight they work through and run act 2. During a break after the run Ann, Carson and Rosie are alone in the room and Ann says it went too poorly for her to have the energy to give notes. The cast returns and expresses their gratitude at having the opportunity to run the whole act for the first time.

September 17 (rehearsal 17)

Their first action tonight is to work on Stella's revelation section, which is the climax of the play. On numerous occasions Carson has expressed her intention to rewrite it and Ann wants to know now how it will change. Carson says she can make a few cuts now, but will have to go home and rewrite the entire section on her own. Ann asks Carson if she thinks improvising the section with the whole cast would be a good idea and Carson excitedly agrees. Then Ann changes her mind and decides to improvise with Suzi alone. When Suzi arrives she sits at the table normally occupied by director, playwright and dramaturg and Carson asks her to just say what she thinks is important from the section. All are impressed with the somewhat condensed version of the moment. Tomorrow Carson will bring in the section rewritten. It is not the same as Suzi improvised, but is clearly inspired by this activity.

With only fifteen minutes left in rehearsal after the run-through, Ann gives a few general notes and says she will e-mail individual notes to the actors.

After the cast leaves, Ann, Carson and Rosie compare notes. First of all Carson asks if it is ok for her to blurt remarks out to actors during rehearsal. Ann says since time is so short this will be an acceptable manner of working. However, this decision does not change the

communication process of the group since the remaining rehearsals are composed of run-throughs and no one blurts out anything any more. Carson does not give notes after runs.

Ann shares all of her notes with Carson and Rosie. While reading her list, Ann appears to be looking to Carson and Rosie to affirm what she thinks needs work. After Ann goes through her list, Carson and Rosie each have a number of items to add and Ann adds these new notes to hers.

September 19 (rehearsal 19)

Tonight is the first night on the set. At 6:00 the cast does a quick line through in the lobby partly because the crew is still working on the set and partly because they need the line repetition. Carson gives quite a surprising number of cuts to the actors after they run the lines of each act. Before they do the whole play on stage, Ann has individual actor notes. She goes up to Richard and he jokingly asks “now what?”

Ann is clearly frustrated with the pace of the rehearsal run. She frequently takes her face in her hands and shakes her head. At one point she says, loud enough for all on stage to hear, that the play has lasted ten minutes longer than it did at the same point last run. Ann and Carson laugh frequently and Rosie occasionally finds a moment amusing.

After the actors leave, Ann, Carson and Rosie discuss the rehearsal. Russ has watched this evening and on his way out suggests that the end of the play needs “to be heavily pruned.” He also verbalizes his curiosity about why Stella’s revelation comes when it does.

At first Carson wants to wait until previews before rewriting the ending. However, she suggests a minor change to the end and Ann says, “I think you’re totally right.” With this affirmation, Carson says she will make the suggested change tonight to give to the cast

tomorrow. As the three are excited about this change, they bring up the fear that two of the actors are not performing successfully. Carson says she has no reservations about making cuts for this performance in order to accommodate what they view as the actors' lack of skill.

September 23 (rehearsal 21)

As I arrive Carson and Barbara, the stage manager, are dressing the set. Ann has e-mailed notes and line changes to the actors and placed hard copies of the notes in the dressing room. At 6:30 Ann gets the cast on stage to work through the climax section of the play. She wants to go through line by line and make sure Suzi knows whom she is addressing with each line. Suzi appears to find the exercise unnecessary.

During the rehearsal run though, the actors make numerous line mistakes. After the rehearsal I ask Carson if she, Ann and Rosie are going to discuss the run-through. The manner in which she tells me that she has "lots of notes" makes me ask if they would have a more productive meeting in my absence. She appreciatively admits that she would be able to talk more candidly if I were not there. I leave.

September 25 (rehearsal 23)

Tonight is the last dress before previews and Carson is not here due to a prior commitment. The rehearsal must have been more acceptable to Ann because afterwards she tells the costumer, "I never thought I'd get to the point when I'd feel good about it opening." However, there were still numerous line flubs and during the end of the play Ann curses and moans quite loudly. Afterwards the actors joke about being able to hear her.

September 26

Tonight is the first preview. Once again Carson is dressing the set when I arrive. About twenty audience members populate the house. At intermission Russ tells me he thinks it is going really well and after the performance he tells the cast he is really proud of this production and script. While giving notes, Ann is clearly in a hurry and tells Suzi she needs to “clip” her words but does not offer much of an explanation of this remark. After Suzi’s request for elaboration is left unfulfilled, Suzi makes a face in frustration and clearly decides to ignore the comment.

September 27

Tonight is the second preview. Afterwards Ann lavishes the cast with praise and complements and hugs everyone. The performance was much more energetic than last night’s.

September 28

Tonight is called “playwright preview,” which means the other member playwrights of Chicago Dramatists are expected to attend. The house is packed with a crowd that laughs at every opportunity. The actors appear to be feeding off the audience’s energy as their pace and energy is increased from last night.

September 30

Russ, Carson, Ann and Rosie meet for a dramaturgical conference. Russ drives most of the meeting with recommendations for numerous cuts. He suggests deleting an entire small section and Carson readily agrees that it no longer contributes to the play. He states that three other sections of the play need considerable trimming. Carson immediately becomes defensive

when he suggests that the language of one of the journal entries is too opaque for the audience to grasp. After a word by word analysis of a particularly dense passage, Carson agrees to trim it. Russ discusses the ending of the play at the greatest length. He says it ends twice, which is not always bad, but that the ending drags on so long that the audience loses interest before the play is over. They read over this section and Carson offers to cut two lines. All agree that these are good choices but that she should cut other lines too. Russ says Carson should go away and make changes on her own. All express concern about the performance of three of the actors. Carson reminds Ann that she is willing to make cuts just for this performance to accommodate the actor's abilities, but she does not make any more such cuts.

October 1 (rehearsal 25)

The purpose of this rehearsal is to implement rewrites Carson has made after the preview performances. They do run-through the whole play, but Ann has them skip the readings from the journal in order to save time. Ann gives a blocking change and jokes that people are resistant to change but just need to "deal with it." The actors look as if they do not understand what precipitated this comment.

After the rehearsal Ann complements everyone and tells the cast that there is a positive buzz around town about the show.

Friday October 4

Tonight is opening night and the whole theater is buzzing with activity. Two articles about Carson appeared in two different newspapers today. Although not as full or appreciative as the playwright preview audience, tonight's crowd clearly enjoys itself.

Schedule

This case study consisted of 125 rehearsal hours in preparation for a full production. The rehearsal schedule indicated they would spend their time in the following manner: two days reading and discussing the play; four rehearsals blocking the entire play; one rehearsal running the play; three rehearsals to work each scene and run the play again; six days doing “moment-to-moment” work and running each act; two rehearsals to run the entire play twice; two technical rehearsals; two dress rehearsals; three preview performances; three understudy rehearsals, and opening. The actual process differed in that they took seven days, as opposed to four, for the initial blocking. This change in schedule meant that they did not have the three rehearsals for working each scene and running each act. Also, due to lack of time, the company was unable to run the play as often as the initial schedule indicated. The other change to the proposed schedule occurred between previews and opening, in which one of the understudy rehearsals consisted of implementing rewrites as opposed to rehearsing the understudy.

The reason the schedule did not progress according to the initial plan was largely due to the implementation of a new script and rewrites along the way; the original schedule did not allocate time for this activity or allow for other developmental work. At the second rehearsal the director described the structure of the rehearsal schedule: quick blocking of the entire play, running the play, specifying and solidifying blocking, and running the play numerous times. Conspicuously absent in this schedule for the first production of a play is any time allotted for changes in the text.

In *Working on a New Play*, Edward M. Cohen endorses a rehearsal period based on Lee Strasberg’s five step plan as an effective way to structure the rehearsal process for the first

production of a play (148). Although there are as many ways of directing plays as there are plays to direct, comparing the process of this case study to one endorsed as conducive to development will facilitate analysis. The detailed analysis of the rehearsal process below will investigate the extent to which the lack of foundational and developmental work, specifically table work, affected the process.

The first step Cohen articulates is table work, which is a period at the beginning of rehearsal when “the company sits around the table, discusses the script, analyzes the characters [and] breaks the play down into beats. This [process] is all intellectual, and the director does not expect the actors to work for more than a logical understanding [of the play]” (148). Tanya Palmer, former literary manager of Actor’s Theatre of Louisville, states that table work can take different forms, but that it is important to have a period of time early in the rehearsal process when the company is “focusing in on the text” (30 Oct. 2002). Russ Tutterow states that he now does table work because “it gives the playwright a chance to talk” and explain anything if needed (2 Oct. 2002). Of the more than thirty professional playwrights, directors and literary managers I have interviewed, some state that too much table work can be harmful, but all agree that table work is necessary in the first production of a new play.

As indicated by the rehearsal journal, the group spent only one day doing table work and this one day was without the playwright present.¹⁸ The main reason Ann offers for not doing more table work is that she did not want to spend the time defining beats and then have them change in rewrites (17 Sept. 2002). Carson does not know why Ann did not do table work and feels that this decision “harmed the play the most.” She acknowledged that as a playwright she “loves” table work in part because she gets to talk sometimes self-indulgently about herself, her craft and her play. However, she feels more talk about addiction, one of the main themes of the

play, and the way she structured the characters would have helped these actors and “informed their performances” (3 Mar. 2003). Carson suggests that it might have made sense to block the play first because the cast had to move downstairs into the rehearsal space due to set construction, but that they should have discussed the play more while downstairs (10 Sept. 2002).

Most of the artists involved in the production of *Book of Mercy* state that they were surprised that Ann decided not to do table work.¹⁹ Suzi, Rosie and Amy feel that blocking before table work wastes time. Suzi states that the discussion that accompanies table work has to occur at some point, so its best to get it “out of the way” first. Since they did not do that, it interfered with staging rehearsals. She elaborated on this idea by saying that if you make decisions before you “get up on your feet” you don’t have to change blocking “when you make discoveries” (1 Oct. 2002). Rosie states that “the work has to happen some time and even two days of it would have saved time in rehearsal” (2 Oct. 2002).²⁰ And Amy agrees with Suzi and Rosie: table work “can make blocking easier.”²¹ And she adds that more discussion at the beginning of the process would have helped by ensuring that the cast was “all on the same page,” especially in terms of the depth of the relationships and conflict in the script (29 Sept. 2002). Richard agrees with Amy by saying “I like to have everybody on the same page. It would have been clearer” if they had done table work (13 Nov. 2002).

The manner in which early rehearsals actually progressed, as opposed to the original schedule, appears to prove the actor’s assertions. The group began their deviation from the original schedule at the third rehearsal when blocking began to take much longer than expected. During these rehearsals the company engaged in many activities usually associated with table work. Ann would have the actors read through a scene before blocking it and then Carson would

almost always give the actors small line cuts, an activity that would clearly have been as productive and easier seated around a table. It was during initial blocking that the group indirectly defined beats. Ann's "skeletal" blocking was actually quite complex; she gave actors moves at almost every beat change. Also, these blocking rehearsals were marked by discussions that Ann frequently cut short in order to stay on schedule. In fact, during many later rehearsals, particularly the "moment-to-moment" rehearsals, the actors interrupted the scheduled tasks and engaged in somewhat lengthy discussions about the plot and issues in the play. Ann did not stop these conversations apparently because it was obvious that the actors needed a deeper understanding of the play in order to perform their roles. The extent to which additional discussion would have aided the actors is discussed in the symbolic convergence section below.

The group did indirectly engage in the work of table work throughout the rehearsal process, which supports Suzi and Rosie's assertion that this work is unavoidable. It is likely that if the company had performed traditional table work they would have saved rehearsal time or at least been able to adhere to the schedule. For example, if the group had marked beats before they got up to block, the initial staging would surely have gone more smoothly because the moves Ann gave them occurred on beat changes.

It is also highly likely that table work would have created more rehearsal time by allowing Carson to make the major rewrite earlier in the process. As stated above, one of the main reasons the group could not remain on schedule was due to the implementation of the rewrite that yielded new scripts. Carson's statement on August 31 might indicate that seeing the play staged enabled her to make this rewrite. At the meeting between Russ, Rosie, Ann and Carson on August 31, when Ann wanted Carson to make any probable changes in the text right away, Carson said she wanted to wait until she saw more of the play staged before rewriting the

entire play. It could not have been staging alone that was informing Carson's rewrites.

Considering that the play relies on language and not movement to tell its story, the frequent discussions as well as the reading of each scene that occurred during these early rehearsals surely influenced Carson's writing as much as blocking. If the schedule had included a few days of table work, the actors could have had new scripts days earlier. Having scripts even two days earlier would have given the cast approximately ten more precious rehearsal hours with the more solidified text. Also, since they had already blocked the entire play when they got the new script, Ann had to give the actors rehearsal time to transfer blocking notes. Obviously this time expenditure would not have been necessary if Carson had been able to give the actors new scripts before blocking.

The lack of table work meant the group was not able to adhere to the original schedule, which meant they had less time for activities, such as working sections and running the play, that would have had a beneficial effect on the final product. If Ann had included table work in the original schedule, she would have had more control over the use of time therefore ensuring the inclusion of important activities.

Cohen's second step in the rehearsal process for the first production of a play is improvisation. "The actors improvise to explore their relationships and personalize the situations. Staging emerges out of the beats defined around the table and these explorations" (148). The only improvisation work this company employed, twenty minutes spent with Suzi working the revelation scene on September 17 (rehearsal 17), did yield a newly written monologue, but did not begin to address relationships or staging.

Khan and Breed state that "the purpose of development is unpressured exploration and the freedom to experiment" (22). This schedule, composed of staging, "moment-to-moment"

work and run-throughs, did not allow for experimentation. Ann allotted time for work that directly produced a product that would be viewed by the imminent audience. Staging rehearsals were obviously meant to yield blocking and run-throughs were designed to assess the product at different stages in the process. “Moment-to-moment” rehearsals focused much of their energy on adjusting blocking, although the company did engage in a great deal of discussion at this time.

If improvisation offers the opportunity to explore relationships, it would have been an effective use of time in this play, which is largely about the relationships of the characters. If improvisation helps to produce staging, it would be an effective tool in blocking. Considering that Ann’s approach to the play was largely physical, improvisation could have afforded her time to experiment with the physical life of the play. One may wonder whether, had Ann spent time engaging the cast in improvisation, she could have arrived at blocking more quickly, therefore accomplishing the goal of blocking while fostering more development of the script. As stated above, Carson desired feedback from the actors. One of her complaints about the process is that the “resources in the room” were not utilized (3 Mar. 2002). Certainly improvising lines especially, but blocking as well, would have given the actors the opportunity to respond to the text directly or through creative use of their craft. A schedule that apportions time only for blocking, piecing together the blocking and running the play is designed for the director to be the primary, if not only, artist responding to the text.

The first rehearsal of Cohen’s third step, “absorption of mechanics,” is the first off book rehearsal and begins after blocking is finished and requires four to five rehearsals per scene (148). In this step the actors take the time to absorb the decisions the company has reached and concentrate on creating moments. Cohen calls his fourth stage “piecing it together.” In this stage all the previous work begins to cohere to produce a performance of the whole play. “As each

moment emerges from stage three, it is connected to another; beat by beat, scene by scene, act by act” (148-149). Although not in Cohen’s sequence, Ann’s “moment-to-moment” rehearsals included the work of both these steps.

The “moment-to-moment” rehearsals consisted of testing and solidifying blocking, continued discussion of the type that might accompany table work, line repetition, running scenes and running acts. The main difference between Ann’s “moment-to-moment” rehearsals and Cohen’s “absorption of mechanics” rehearsals is that Ann did not begin with solidified work for her actors to absorb. One of the disadvantages of not having more solidified work at this stage is that much of the time during what would have been “piecing it together” rehearsals was spent repeating small sections for the sake of line memorization. Cohen’s third step out of five begins with memorized lines; Ann’s second step out of three ended with a line-through of the entire script in the lobby before they rehearsed a run-through on the set for the first time (rehearsal 19). Cohen asserts that “if the analysis was right in stage one, if the blocking emerged organically in stage two, if the actors are allowed to absorb it all in stage three, they will start to relax and let things happen [in stage four]”(148). The lack of foundational work earlier in the process demanded that the company still explore intellectual, psychological and physical choices while still memorizing lines during “moment-to-moment” work. At a time when they could have been building the house the company was still making the bricks, which meant that the actors had to rely on run-throughs to give them the security needed to deliver effective performances.

Cohen’s fifth step, “run-throughs,” is clearly the opportunity for the company to exercise the work and decisions of the rehearsal period. Cohen’s description of this final phase is less precise than the previous steps: “the actors find the arc of the play... [and] the director watches to see if the story comes through... [and] if the pace is right” (149). Once the company was back

on the stage (rehearsal 19) all the rehearsals featured a run-through of the entire play. The quality of the performances increased greatly with each run-through, which makes one wonder how the company would have enhanced the quality of the show if they had begun this step with stronger foundational work.

The lack of time allowed for development of the script indicates that Ann, who created the original schedule, saw the rehearsals primarily as preparation for the production. During the meeting with Russ, Rosie, Carson and Ann after the first week of rehearsal (on August 31), Ann wanted Carson to immediately tell her how the script would change so she could proceed with her task of directing it. Carson asked for, and received, three days to rewrite the play. Ann's eagerness for a completed script once again indicates her belief that the process was about production rehearsal as opposed to script development. Two factors in this case study may explain why Ann was operating from this perspective. Ann had a standard length of time for rehearsal; the rehearsal schedule was that of a "finished" play. Also, most of the individuals involved in this case study were surprised at how much the play changed during this process. These changes are discussed in detail below, but it is reasonable to assume that Ann did not expect the script to develop as much as it did and therefore did not allocate time explicitly for development in the schedule.

However, Carson's request for more time to write indicates her belief that rehearsals were inclusive of script development as well as production preparation. At the August 31 meeting, Carson stated that she wanted to develop the history of the relationship between the Paul and David characters and also wanted to add an additional section describing Mercy as a child. At the first rehearsal, Carson told the cast that she would be making changes to the text and that the play was now at the point where she needed to "learn" from the actors. Throughout the process

Carson indicated that she wanted actors to inform the characters. When discussing the short improvisation for Stella's revelation scene on September 17 (rehearsal 17), Carson stated that if she knew so little rehearsal time was scheduled for developing this pivotal moment in the play, she "would have demanded" at least three hours of work with both Stella and Vincent on this scene. In frustration she continues: "The process is where the dye is cast.... Plays don't leap out of our heads full blown like Athena" (3 Mar. 2003). Although this process clearly had a professional production as one of its goals, since this was the first production of this play being produced by an organization dedicated to play and playwright development, Carson may be justified in believing that rehearsals would address development as well as production.

Ann and Carson's contrasting views of the rehearsal process indicate the presence of the process/product dilemma. Ann was focused on the product and Carson hoped for more process. As discussed in chapter 1, the process/product dilemma occurs when rehearsal hours are spent preparing a performance for an audience as opposed to developing the script. Considering the need for both rehearsal and development, if this rehearsal schedule had dedicated more rehearsal time to development and offered greater flexibility in accommodating changes to the text, this group might have minimized the process/product dilemma. Chapter 1's discussion of the process/product dilemma also indicates that efforts required for both development and production rehearsal often complement each other. One may argue that if Ann had accommodated development in the rehearsal schedule the actors would have been better equipped to give effective performances.

The success or failure of this process is difficult to prove considering the impossibility of testing alternative processes and the subjectivity of assessments of success. It is apparent, however, that this schedule was less than ideal for a play that features language and characters.

Directing

Small group communication theory states that the roles of spanning leader, facilitator-trainer, and social leader are necessary for effective decision making in work teams. Due to the nature of the responsibilities of these roles, when a group's goal is a theatrical production the director usually performs the tasks of each. Of these three roles, Ann emphasized her tasks as spanning leader over her responsibilities as facilitator-trainer, and social leader.

Before rehearsal began Ann stated that she "loves Carson's language" and that Carson has drawn "such complete characters." She also stated that she and Rosie agree that the play has such a "broad scope" that it could benefit from focusing and perhaps "narrowing" its themes and issues. She expressed apprehensiveness about staging a play where "nothing happens," meaning that the play consists largely of people "talking in a room" with very little action (25 Aug. 2002). These observations are appropriate for a director approaching a full production of a new play; she expressed an appreciation for the elements of the play that make it worthy of producing while acknowledging that some aspects of the play still need developing.

Addressing these elements in rehearsal is part of the responsibilities of a spanning leader. The tasks of this role include managing the output of a group's efforts while maintaining the perspective of those who will view the work (Barry 416). As a spanning leader, the director of a new play maintains the perspective of the audience while watching rehearsals. In addition to working with the playwright and possibly actors in developing the play, the director also guides the actors in creating a performance.

Articulating the group's daily work by making the schedule was one of Ann's most important tasks as spanning leader. The constant feedback she gave the actors, especially through

discussion during moment-to-moment work and notes after run-throughs, was a clear way to provide the actors with an audience's perspective of how their performances were progressing. It was in these activities that Ann dedicated most of her energy during rehearsal. By placing such importance on the physical life of the play and continually encouraging the actors to produce performances, Ann was addressing her responsibility to create a product that would please audiences. This goal and these activities are arguably part of all competent directors' work.

However, it is curious that Ann only indirectly addressed what she felt were the most important elements in the play. Considering most agree that the characters and language in *Book of Mercy* are the play's strongest features, it is logical that Ann did not feel the need to dedicate time to developing these elements in the play. But, the actors still needed time to address them in creating their performances. The company addressed character relationships and, to a lesser extent, character goals during the moment-to-moment discussions. But one may argue these discussions, which were largely left to chance, and the lack of time engaging in activities such as marking beats, other script analysis or improvisation left the actors to their own resources in creating character.

Practically no discussion of the language took place during rehearsal. Both Rosie and Carson reluctantly express regret at the way the production utilized the language in the play. Carson suggests that because of the "lack of comprehension [and] awareness" about how the language in the play works, a whole other "axis" of the play that was "ignored" in this production (3 Mar. 2003). Throughout the play characters read highly poetic entries from Mercy's journal. The irony is that "Ann loved those passages.... The mystery of them made her want to wrestle with the piece." Carson expresses frustration at her attempts to include elements in the language and have the company "not get it" (3 Mar. 2003). Rosie states that there are

“references and linkages to other lines” that were ignored and that the production “may not have handled the language well” because the company did not get “everything out of the text” (2 Oct. 2002).

As far as the lack of action in the play and its density of theme and subject matter, these two elements are changed very little from the script as it existed at the beginning of rehearsal to the latest rewrite. This fact is not surprising considering that the company spent little time or energy developing either of these components of the play, which is odd considering that the dramaturg and the director felt that they needed to be addressed. The company gave theme and subject matter interstitial treatment during spontaneous discussions. But Ann would frequently stop the discussion in order to stay on schedule, which again indicates her perceived belief that these rehearsals were about creating a production as opposed to developing the play.

The responsibilities of the facilitator-trainer and social leader are less product-oriented than the spanning leader. These two roles complement each other in that they are primarily responsible for the atmosphere and communication practices in the work environment. The facilitator-trainer ensures that group members have the information they need in order to function successfully and creates a hospitable environment in which all can understand the subject matter at hand (Keltner 386). And the social leader assures that everyone has the opportunity to express themselves and offers support and validation (Barry 416).

Most of the company members describe this rehearsal process as tense.²² Carson offers the following adjectives to describe Ann’s directing style and conduct during rehearsal: “energetic...organized,” “meticulous,” “mechanical,” “micromanaging,” and “peripatetic” (3 Mar. 2003). Barbara states that Ann “crafts every moment of the play” (29 Mar. 2003). And Rhys complements her “meticulous” care of detail but continues to state that “at a certain point I

began to question just how good a communicator she was.” He politely suggests that she could use the word “fucking” less (2 Mar. 2003). Ann herself admits that her job as managing director of the theatre is very stressful and that she fears her coming to rehearsal “stressed out” affected the actors (17 Sept. 2002). Ann would often make comments and interrupt others in such a manner that made her appear to have to say what was on her mind immediately lest she forget it. Amy states that she feels Ann felt “rushed” (29 Sept. 2002). One of the numerous examples of her harried behavior is from the rehearsal journal on September 3 (rehearsal 7) when the cast received new scripts. She began the rehearsal by allowing the actors time to transfer blocking notes to the new script before they would work through a section, but half way through rehearsal she said they were running out of time and that they must “just get through it.” Although Ann lavishly complemented the actors and expressed her deep appreciation of the play, which are actions particular to a social leader, the prevailing atmosphere was one marked by a feeling of being rushed and impatient.

Carson states that because Ann was treating her actors “like puppets” they did not have the “emotional foundation” and the “safety” in the rehearsal room they needed to “carry” them through the process and that “subtle discoveries” were lacking due to the atmosphere. Because Ann was so “jumpy” and “kept stopping them,” they were not able to “find things out” on their own (3 Mar. 2003).

Ann’s impatience was not the only contributing factor to the tense atmosphere. Barbara states that Suzi was resistant to Ann’s direction and that “Ann felt challenged by Suzi” (29 Mar. 2003). Rosie also sensed some “power jockeying” between director and lead actor (2 Oct. 2002). Suzi developed an attachment to the character of Stella and became resistant to line changes. Carson feels that Suzi’s being “very territorial of lines” and her behavior in general “became

confining” and was an “enormous handicap” for both playwright and director (3 Mar. 2003).

Suzi’s conduct in rehearsal was frequently distracting. On numerous occasions she would crack jokes or discuss her bodily functions. Sometimes these articulations resembled an adolescent’s attempts at gaining attention. After receiving a note from Ann, Suzi would occasionally make a disapproving face and look around the room to see how others were reacting to Ann’s direction. Carson expresses the notion that since Suzi and Ann had “almost no” relationship Suzi “shut down” and did not function to the best of her abilities (3 Mar. 2003).

Lesch states that the theatrical work ethic “favors directorship” which can manifest itself in the actors having to “tough it out and do as they [are] told” (81). The atmosphere Ann created supported the notion that the actors are there to serve the director’s needs. Due to her impatient behavior during rehearsal, the atmosphere expressed an urgency to get the play staged, which left no time for the “unpressured exploration” needed for development.

As discussed in chapter 1, theatre scholars and artists as well as small group communication theorists agree that “the quality of communication” within a group “may well be the single, most important determinant of the decision-making success or failure of that group” (Hirokawa, “Communication” 109). The facilitator-trainer and social leader, roles most often assumed by the director, are primarily responsible for creating the communication environment. Lesch concludes that a successful work environment will consist of “open, inclusive communication ... that affords a high level of interaction and participation in group work by all group members who desire to do so” (151). A social leader will help create this environment by “assuring that everyone gets his or her view heard” (Barry 416). As the social leader, Ann’s most influential action in the creation of the communication environment for the artists in this case study was to separate them into a discussion group and a rehearsal group. The discussion group,

consisting of Ann, Carson, Rosie and occasionally Russ, engaged in the style of communication endorsed above. One may argue that the exclusion of the actors from this group is a loss of potentially valuable input. The rehearsal group, consisting of Ann, the actors and the stage manager, exhibited a much more restricted type of communication. It may appear odd for the playwright not to be part of the rehearsal group for the first production of her play being produced by an organization dedicated to play and playwright development.

One clear way to facilitate the flow of information, which is one of the requirements of the facilitator-trainer, is to encourage discussion. “Discussion allows group members to distribute and pool available informational resources necessary for effective decision making and problem solving. [It also] allows group members to catch and remedy errors of individual judgment” (Hirokawa, “Communication” 109). The lack of table work not only had a direct effect on the development of the play, but also affected the quality of the rehearsal group’s communication. Russ states that table work gives the playwright an “early opportunity to talk” and allows the rest of the company to address things that people don’t understand (2 Oct. 2002). And Tanya Palmer states that table work is about “sharing ideas” (30 Oct. 2002). As noted above, due to the density of theme and subject matter in the play, discussion would possibly have aided the group’s attempts at creating a production. As a spanning leader Ann’s responsibility was to ensure a productive use of time by avoiding potential digressions and idle chat, but as a facilitator-trainer and social leader she was responsible for creating an environment in which the actors were not only fully informed but free to express themselves. Planning for discussion and allowing spontaneous conversation would have aided the communication practices for these artists.

Although Carson attended all but a handful of rehearsals, her director-imposed conduct during rehearsals excluded her from the rehearsal group. There is disagreement about the number of rehearsals a playwright should attend. In *Playwright vs. Director* Jeane Luere quotes Tennessee Williams quoted as saying, “Kazan said something very important to me. He asked me to stay away from rehearsals at certain times. ‘I didn’t watch you make your mistakes. I’d rather you didn’t watch me make mine.’ It saves wear and tear on both” (53). Playwright Richard Nelson in *Making Plays* expresses the prevailing sentiment that a playwright should be there for most rehearsals, but not all. He says he likes to be there “almost every day,” but he continues to say that “there is a stretch of time when there’s blocking and going over things that you don’t need to be there for” (93).²³ He continues to add that “the playwright is useless to the director” during technical rehearsals (101).

However, Russ states that he believes it is important for playwrights to be there for the entire process, otherwise when they do attend the cast feels they are performing for a visitor (2 Oct. 2002). David Chandler, an actor in the 1997 New York Theatre Workshop world premiere production of David Rabe’s *A Question of Mercy* directed by Douglas Hughes, affirms this belief and implies that the playwright’s absence and subsequent return can actually interfere with the actors’ process. “When the playwright’s around a lot, he [or she] becomes part of the scenery. When he drops in just a bit, you feel it more as an event, and you have to fight the impulse to make it an event, to *perform* it” (Cole, *Playwrights* 42). Wendy Wasserstein agrees that the playwright must always be in the rehearsal room in order for the play to develop: “I go to every rehearsal. I’m not gifted visually; I can only fix my plays by hearing them. [The director] will turn to me and say ‘This line doesn’t work’ and I’ll rewrite it while I’m there. So I am always on my feet” (Plimpton 404).

If Carson had not attended rehearsals when Ann was blocking, as suggested above by Nelson, she would have missed a large portion of rehearsal time. Since Carson did make a large number of minor rewrites on the spot, it was important for her to be there as frequently as possible. Obviously, Carson did not make the lengthier rewrites discussed below during rehearsal. The research can not yield supposition about how the play would be different if Carson had not attended such a large percentage of the rehearsals or had not made the minor changes so frequently along the way; perhaps she could have made them on her own after seeing a few run-throughs of the play after Ann had blocked all of it. But it is clear that she needed to see the cast and director working with the material in order to make both major and minor rewrites and that her constant presence in the room did affect the play.

If a playwright needs or desires input from the company producing his or her play, it is logical that the more frequently the playwright attends rehearsals the greater the opportunity to procure the necessary feedback. Also, one of the advantages of the Artistic Home model of new play development is that the playwright is part of the production team. As discussed in chapter 2, some of the most historically successful playwrights were fully participating members of the company that produced their plays. If one were a fully participating member of a company, it would obviously be necessary or at least encouraged for one to attend all rehearsals.

When the playwright does attend rehearsal, it is generally accepted that s/he speak only with the director's approval during rehearsals. In *Making Plays* Richard Nelson states that "the rehearsal room is the director's world, and that is that... That doesn't mean that there aren't times when I talk with actors, but only with either the spoken or the obvious permission of the director" (93). And in *Working on a New Play* Edward M. Cohen says "...it is imperative that writers, when they attend rehearsals, sit at the back of the rehearsal space, and make themselves

inconspicuous.” (155). Jean Luere adds that “The playwright never talks directly to the actor except to say, ‘You’re wonderful’” (33). Lastly, Russ believes that the best protocol is the “traditional,” where you “go in with the director as head” and have no playwright/actor communication. He does believe that under some circumstances the lines of communication may change because each “relationship is different” (2 Oct. 2002).

The playwright’s presence could certainly disrupt rehearsals if the playwright chose to do so. However, the actors were pleased to have Carson in the room. Amy Raffa expresses the sentiments of all the actors in the cast I interviewed by stating that she liked having Carson there and, because of the way she conducted herself, never felt that her presence prevented her from doing the work she needed to do. As indicated in the rehearsal journal on August 29 (rehearsal 4), Carson’s conduct in rehearsal changed early in the process. During the prior two rehearsals Carson attended, she spoke freely to Ann and the actors. Beginning on August 29, her verbal communications with the actors consisted largely of responding to questions, although she did talk to actors during breaks and would occasionally interject a comment after asking Ann for permission to do so. At this point she also began passing notes to Ann in rehearsal. After talking privately to both Ann and Carson, I learned that Ann asked Carson to refrain from speaking so freely during rehearsal (17 Sept. 2002). Ann states that after the first few rehearsals she was concerned about Carson “blurting things out” (17 Sept. 2002). On August 27 (rehearsal 2) Ann told the cast that she preferred all questions to go through her and that she should at least be present if any discussion of the play occurred. During our second interview, Ann stated that she forgot that Carson was not in attendance on August 27, which meant that she had to inform Carson individually about her preferred method of communicating in the rehearsal room. Carson’s curtailed communicating continued until September 17 (rehearsal 17) when Carson

asked Ann if she could make statements directly to the actors without clearing them with her first. Ann said “that’s fine” and stated that Carson communicating directly to the actors would be a more expedient way of working and was wise considering that time was running out. However, Carson did not have the opportunity to change her style of communicating with the actors because the remaining rehearsals consisted of running the entire show. After a run Ann would give notes or send the actors home which left little to no time for Carson to talk to the actors.

If Carson had been able to speak, she could have elicited the feedback she desired from the actors and the actors could have benefited from her explanation of the play’s numerous themes and issues. Considering the density of the play, there were numerous times the cast needed the playwright to explain a passage or reference. When the director allowed her to answer a question, she was only afforded a few moments to reply. Carson indicated that the script was not developing as much as it could because of her limited opportunity to communicate: “If I can talk I can be challenged” (3 Mar. 2003). Rosie concurs that it was a “shame” to have the playwright there and not let her talk during rehearsal (2 Oct. 2002). One of the articulated problems in new play development expressed by the practitioners I interviewed is that the playwright often is not part of the development or production team. But how much a part of the team is someone who must sit silently in rehearsal?

It is possible that Carson’s refraining from speaking out during rehearsal contributed to the actor’s feeling that her presence was not a hindrance. However, it is clear that one of the repercussions of Carson’s silence during rehearsal was a feeling of exclusion for the actors. As rehearsal progressed, the playwright did make occasional remarks to actors, but only those she knew had the director’s approval. The playwright’s primary method of communication during rehearsal was to whisper and pass written notes to the director. Given the very small rehearsal

space and the small house, the actors were very aware of this interaction. Suzi states that their attempts to tell secrets were “silly” (1 Oct. 2002). Amy feels that “especially towards the end” of rehearsals, they could have just talked out loud because the actors “had a firm handle on what they were doing” (29 Sept. 2002). And Rhys adds that the covert communications “bothered” him. “This process should not be about secrets.” When we are too “worried about hurting people’s feelings” we end up keeping “things confidential [and] sequestering ourselves.” He adds that these communications added to the lack of collaborative feel to the whole process (2 Mar. 2003).

Rhys expresses regret that, from his point of view, “collaboration was not welcomed” on this project. He states that at the beginning of the rehearsal process he would suggest line changes but since the lines were never changed he stopped making suggestions (2 Mar. 2003). It is possible that his recommended rewrites were not agreeable to Carson, however it is clear from his remark that he expected more collaboration during this process. Carson’s input during rehearsal was very limited, but at least she was present. The actors were not even present when the most productive developmental discussions took place. The discussion group convened after numerous rehearsals when Carson, Ann and Rosie discussed the play in depth and on a few occasions these three met with Russ for further analysis of the play.²⁴ The highest quality communication of this case study occurred in these script meetings.

In *Making Plays* David Jones states that “it is great at the end of the day to be able – not necessarily as a regular or ritual thing – to post-mortem, to be able to say, ‘Why do you think that isn’t quite working? Didn’t you think that was really major what we did with that scene today?’” (Nelson 97). Many of the changes that accompanied this developmental period occurred

or had their beginnings during these late-night discussions. Russ' presence at the meetings on August 31 and September 30 facilitated discussion about the larger structure of the play.

The atmosphere during these meetings was more relaxed than during rehearsals. There was no sense of being short of time and the communication flowed more easily. It was in the presence of these three, as opposed to the entire company, that Kahn and Breed's "unpressured" atmosphere necessary to script development existed. It is clear that Carson's ability to communicate openly during these meetings facilitated development of the script. It may follow that if she had been able to communicate more freely with the rehearsal group rehearsals would have been more productive.

By constantly being aware of her responsibilities as spanning leader, in the rehearsal room Ann was pushing towards opening night even at the expense of her responsibilities as facilitator-trainer and social leader. This mode of behavior meant that rehearsals focused on preparing a production of the script as it existed and not developing the play. Instead of ensuring open communication, she isolated different groups within the team and therefore restricted the exchange of ideas which possibly limited the effectiveness of the actors for the playwright and vice versa. Due to the lack of communication and Ann's temperament in the rehearsal room, the atmosphere was often stressful and was not "conducive to learning" about the play. Although she often complemented the actors when she felt they performed well, her words did little to alter the generally tense mood. Hedy Weis of the *Chicago Tribune* does not feel that this group's efforts were satisfactory. She writes that "under Ann Filmer's direction, the actors chew the scenery voraciously, which is not surprising, given the dialogue." Although the research can not prove hypotheses about the results alternative modes of behavior might have produced, it seems likely

that an atmosphere fostering more experimentation, as opposed to focusing on the creation of a performance, would have benefited the script and performances.

Writing

Most of the artists involved in this project were surprised at how much the play changed from the beginning of rehearsal to opening night. As stated above, Carson anticipated “fine tuning” the play as opposed to making the “major rewrites” that occurred during rehearsal (3 Mar. 2003) and Barbara states that there were “considerably more script changes” than in her past work with Chicago Dramatists (29 Mar. 2003). Rosie agrees, saying that she is “surprised” at how much the play has changed and adds that the play is “less repetitive” now (2 Oct. 2002). Russ agrees that the play is less repetitive and continues to describe the changes as moving the action forward and providing clarification (2 Oct. 2002). Carson agrees by stating that filling in the “gaps in [her] knowledge” has made the play clearer (3 Mar. 2003).

One of the largest changes in the play came from Carson’s lack of knowledge about twelve-step substance abuse recovery. When rehearsal began Stella was on the last step of her recovery process after only a year at the facility. As described in the rehearsal journal, at the second rehearsal, Gregory, along with other members of the cast and the stage manager, pointed out how unlikely it would be that she would have advanced so quickly. Once Carson realized the nearly miraculous feat she had written for her main character, she gladly made the change and was grateful for the knowledge shared by the company.

Another manner in which the play changed was through numerous small cuts. On August 27 (rehearsal 2), Carson stated that she loves making cuts, but that it is “impossible until you’re

at this stage.” The actors suggested many of these small cuts and other minor line changes. With few exceptions, every time an actor offered a line change Carson rewrote accordingly. This willingness to accommodate the actor’s contributions makes Carson’s desire for input from the company apparent.

One might expect the time, however little, Ann, Carson, Suzi and Rosie spent improvising Stella’s revelation to have produced a considerable rewrite. In the first script, this section consisted of twenty-two lines, in the production script it is eighteen lines long. Although the section begins and ends almost identically, most of the lines are rewritten to excise what some may consider extraneous lines, thereby allowing Stella to express her epiphany more directly.²⁵

Russ states that cuts are one of the best ways to move the action of a play forward. The following examples of changes to the script facilitate a more active production. They do occasionally create less verbiage, but it is more accurate to call them rewrites as opposed to cuts. On a few occasions, Carson interjected a short line for one character to interrupt a longer line of another. By creating more of a dialogue effect versus the monologue effect of the longer line, more appears to be happening on stage.

In the production at the end of this case study, Vincent goes to the window and sees two people having sex. When rehearsal began, Stella told Vincent about the two sex partners earlier in the scene and when he saw them he remarked that they were doing just as Stella had said. In production Vincent and the audience discover this odd occurrence for the first time as the pair is engaged in the action.

Ten lines were actually added to a transition in an early scene between David and Stella. After an argument these two were supposed to enter a discussion in which David acts as Stella’s

psychiatrist. In the earlier draft David jumps in with “how would you describe intimacy?” after their tiff. Carson has added lines to the production script to help the actors transition from confrontation to therapy.

Later in the play David opens a package of the dead Mercy’s belongings. In the earlier draft, stage directions instructed him to remove all the objects at once, which forced the actors to play a jumbled mix of emotions at seeing each object before deciding to refer to one specifically. In the production draft of the play, the stage directions tell David to remove the diary last, which facilitates a smoother flow into the discovery and discussion of the book. Now when David removes an object, the characters discuss it and proceed to the next item in the box as it is removed, which creates a clearer response to each. Another example of an alteration that could help clarify acting intentions is the movement of Tina's first entrance in act 2. In the earlier draft, Tina, in need of advice, enters in the middle of a scene between Beth and Stella immediately before Beth reads from Mercy’s journal. Tina, brushed off by Stella, is supposed to sit on the couch and read her own letter in which her boyfriend breaks up with her. Beth, who was reluctant to read from the journal in the first place, must now read in front of Tina as well as Stella and the audience has another action on stage to draw their attention away from the more important journal material. In the production draft of the script, Tina enters at the end of the Stella-Beth scene, is brushed off by Stella as she and Beth exit which propels Tina’s continued action.

Lastly, one character’s destiny is no longer neatly concluded in the later drafts. Beth has written a screenplay. In the earlier draft of the play, she exclaims “They’re going to make my movie!” after talking on the phone to her lawyer. Now the play ends with her lawyer calling her to tell her he only has investors interested in seeing the script. During the discussion after

rehearsal on September 19 (rehearsal 19), detailed in the rehearsal journal, Carson as well as Ann and Rosie, were excited about this decision because they felt it left some questions unanswered and helped minimize the feeling that everything was neatly concluded at the end of the play. This change also resulted in Carson cutting numerous lines following the phone call that addressed Paul's potential audition for the movie and his approach to acting. This cut clarified the ending by deleting a whole topic and a whole page of dialogue.

As rehearsals progressed both Ann and Carson grew concerned about the abilities of two of the actors. Carson told Ann that she had no reservations about cutting some of Tina's and Paul's lines just for this production in order to draw less attention to the actors playing these characters. Although Terrance McNally warns about falling "into the classic playwright's trap of blaming actors for something that isn't working" (McLaughlin 267), Carson made cuts to Tina's lines.²⁶ Over a page was cut in the first scene between Stella and Tina. These lines consisted of Tina expressing her fear of the chef at the facility. It appears that Carson cut these lines only for the performances in 2002 because she restored them in the final draft of the play. In this version, one of the cuts made ostensibly to give Bethany less stage time was retained. In the first scene of the first draft, Tina asks Stella if she believes in angels. In production, four lines of this exchange, which Tina drove the action, were cut. However, it appears that making this cut revealed to Carson that this exchange was not necessary because it does not appear in the final draft.

Although fewer than she made during rehearsal, Carson made numerous cuts from the production script to the final script, but she also made a few additions; both drafts of the play are almost exactly the same length (approximately 125 pages). Additions are minor, consisting of a few lines throughout the script. However, the cuts continue to make the play clearer. The most

noteworthy cuts are at the ending of the play. During the meeting on September 30, Russ suggested cuts but Carson appeared reluctant to make them. However, many of his suggestions are evident in the final script. He stated that the ending of the play was “fat” and Rosie concurred that the audience was “finished” with the play before it ended. Carson expressed the desire to retain most of the lines as written and said, “I think it can work,” if the company spent more time on the acting and staging.²⁷ But upon further reflection it appears she came to agree with Russ and Rosie because she cut as many as 11 lines from the final exchange between Stella and Vincent.

Additional changes from production to final drafts make the play potentially more actor-friendly. In the final draft, Carson has added and rearranged lines before and during Stella’s revelation at the end of the play. This change creates more of a dialogue effect in this pivotal moment and decreases the potentially awkward impromptu speech forced upon the lead character. Also, in performance the character Paul had to run around the room and imitate a choo-choo train for no apparent reason. In the final draft, Paul dances around the room in preparation for an audition for a music video. This change retains the purpose of Paul’s creating general havoc in the room prior to Tina’s waking and revealing the final phase of her character’s journey and but gives the actor a clear action to play. Earlier in the play, during Stella and Vincent’s first scene together, the pair drinks grape juice and Stella offers to toast with Vincent but he walks away. During rehearsal and performance, Suzi would look in the mirror on stage and toast herself. This action is now part of the script’s stage directions.

One of the most noteworthy aspects of the writing process in this case study is the writing Carson did not do. One element of this process that all artists clearly agreed upon is that any change to the text of the play was Carson’s decision alone. Although Russ, Ann and Rosie

offered Carson very frank feedback on the play and the company occasionally suggested changes, none of the artists in this study acted as though they expected or desired Carson to rewrite.

Khan and Breed not only state that “the purpose of development is unpressured exploration” but that the “consequences of the work [should be] solely in the hands of the playwright” (22). Although it would be misleading to describe this rehearsal as unpressured or exploratory, the consequences of the final product were in the hands of the playwright.

Most of the artists who have encountered *Book of Mercy* agree that the language and characters are the play’s strongest features. Neither of these crucial aspects of the play were compromised during this process. The characters are as unique now as they were at the beginning of the process, only one of Mercy’s poetic journal entries was altered and the lead character’s elevated language remained as elevated now as it was when rehearsals began.

So, although the company and director did not follow textbook rules about how to develop a new play, the process did foster development that allowed the playwright to stay true to her vision of the work. One of the goals of development is to avoid the “developed to death” syndrome. As discussed in chapter 2, the literary managers, playwrights and directors I interviewed described a play that has been developed to death as “clean,” “neat,” “streamlined” and “lifeless.” None of these phrases accurately describe the play in this case study. The process also provided Carson with the tools needed to make another rewrite to the play after the run of the show. Considering that this rewrite does not contain considerable changes from the production draft, it appears that she remained true to her vision of the play during rehearsal. It is impossible to know how a different process would have affected the script.

Symbolic Convergence

A group achieves a symbolic convergence through its communication practices. This case study involved two different styles of communication. During rehearsal, Ann and the actors discussed very little more than was necessary to prepare the play for production and during script meetings Ann, Carson, Rosie and occasionally Russ conversed primarily about the development of the play. During rehearsal the communication was very product oriented, which led to the director being the source of and primary contributor to the flow of information, and during script meetings all present freely contributed ideas in a conversational manner. “Problem-solving groups are created when several people share a common task and communicate with each other in order to resolve the task or problem” (Samovar 7). If, as this chapter has indicated, the goal of rehearsal was production and the goal of script meetings was development, analyzing the two groups separately will facilitate a more complete analysis of the communication practices and symbolic convergence in this case study.

There was little symbolic convergence for the rehearsal group. At the first rehearsal Russ told the actors the rules of the house and briefly shared his thoughts on the play. He said that the actors should expect rewrites and that Carson had final say on the text; he also stated that he was very proud to be producing *Book of Mercy* and that the company stood to learn a great deal by working with the material. Also at the first rehearsal Carson stated that she wanted input from the actors. Throughout the process she supported this claim by accommodating actor’s suggestions for small line changes and even larger rewrites, such as Stella’s progress in her twelve-step program. Russ’ introductory remarks and Carson’s early statement gave the cast a fantasy theme or scenario in which they would participate: as actors they would rehearse an

already well written play that would undergo continued development in which their input would be appreciated. However, Ann's actions conflicted with this fantasy theme.

Ann stated that rehearsal is not the time to rewrite (17 Sept. 2002). She enacted this belief by creating a schedule that did not allow time for the actors to voice their thoughts on the play and employing her energetic communication style in order to keep the cast on the task at hand and faithful to the schedule. Ann's contributions to the actor's perception of the process only affirmed the importance of the theatrical work ethic and since Russ and Carson were not a part of the rehearsal group, Ann's perspective dominated. The theatrical work ethic is the mode of behavior most commonly engaged while producing a play and is marked by repetition and the director's authority. The theatrical work ethic stands in contrast to a method of working that facilitates the creation of ideas or refining of material, both of which are likely tasks during the development of a play. When she stated that she would block, run, reblock and run, she was telling the actors to expect repetition as opposed to improvisation with the material and her control over the group's use of time affirmed her authority. Although initially the actors had cause to create a fantasy theme that included a high level of collaboration, ultimately the theatrical work ethic had a greater influence over these actors than any other element contributing to the shared or individual symbolic reality of the participants in this case study. The theatrical work ethic served as the unifying element and sanctioning agent for the rehearsal group. In fact, one can argue that a traditional theatrical work ethic comprised the rhetorical vision of the cast.

Lesch offers the following observation about small group communication: "In unfamiliar situations, it's important that group members have both opportunities for interaction and access to information that will help them fill in the gaps of their shared vision about their experience. If

interaction and information flow is hindered in some way, they fill the gaps with their own interpretations from successful past experiences” (61). The artists in this case study embodied this scenario. Working with a new play that covers as much ground as *Book of Mercy* does put the actors in an “unfamiliar situation” in which they required ample information in order to function effectively. However, the lack of discussion about the themes and plot of *Book of Mercy* throughout the rehearsal process forced the actors to assume answers that informed their performance. The actors did not have “access to information” that would have informed their decisions because Carson was not allowed to communicate with them during rehearsal.

This communication style led the actors to adopt individual truths about the play and their characters. The problem with individually created realities is that the group does not operate from the same perspective. Although they may assume that their realities coincide, without sufficient communication there is no way to know if they do. Even the theatrical work ethic can vary widely from individual to individual. Matetzschk asserts that “because of the ambiguity of language, it is often easy to assume that collaborators have a shared aesthetic and taste in theatrical choices” (268). For example, one may assume a more equal relationship with the director as compared to another’s expectation that the director will dominate over the actors. One may assume table work will consume the first handful of rehearsals while someone else may be accustomed to blocking and discussing during early rehearsals. As their sanctioning agent, the theatrical work ethic justified the actor’s efforts because they had successfully utilized it in the past. Without the theatrical work ethic, this company would have had no unity or group identity. The actors had to justify their existence in this process based on their past experiences.

The research does not indicate how the results of their efforts would have differed if they had a stronger convergence of their realities. One may reasonably speculate that further group

discussion would have been helpful in developing characterizations and understanding the relationships between characters. Similarly, a group understanding of as opposed to an individual psychological justification for the arguably difficult language may have facilitated a more effective delivery of lines. Hedy Weis' unfavorable review suggests that further work was needed to make the performance successful.

The limited symbolic convergence of the rehearsal group stands in opposition to the symbolic convergence of the discussion group. A better quality of communication and clearer goals, which facilitated a stronger shared vision of their process, characterized this smaller group. Lesch asserts that "idea development is focused when the group shares a clear vision about its goals" (4). Although Carson and Ann had different perceptions of the purpose of rehearsal, all the members of the discussion group clearly agreed that the goal of discussion meetings was to develop the play. This agreement led to focused conversations and a productive use of their limited time together. Since each member was allowed to communicate openly and informally, these meetings were filled with provocative and productive discussion about the play. At the first meeting between all four members of this group on August 31, the participants were unsure about how to begin because they did not know who should be in control of the meeting. They agreed that Rosie as the dramaturg should conduct the meeting. This decision led to her making the opening comments, but the rest of the meeting was a low stress informal conversation between courteous participants. The meetings after rehearsal were also conversational and even more focused because the subject matter consisted largely of the sections of the play covered by the rehearsal group that evening. There was a great deal of agreement between the participants as they discussed the play and the skills of the actors. When Russ attended he asked questions about larger issues of the play which gave the other three

members a new perspective; his questioning of structural features of the play, such as the inciting incident and the climax of the play, fostered a deeper analysis of the play. These open conversations allowed all to contribute, and this heightened exchange of information led to a shared consciousness about the play and the activities of the rehearsal group.

Russ gave the rehearsal group a fantasy theme stating that *Book of Mercy* is a well written play, but the members of the discussion group chose to engage in this process because they already possessed this fantasy theme. As artistic director, Russ chose to produce this play on the basis of its merit; as director, Ann wanted to direct this play and made efforts to have it produced because she desired to work with the material; as dramaturg, Rosie approached Carson with the hope of working on the play; and as playwright, one may easily assume that Carson felt that the play was ready for production by accepting the opportunity to have it produced. The discussion of the group also indicated that they felt the play would benefit from development. This belief that *Book of Mercy* is a good play that could be even better with a little development served as a strong unifying element for the group.

Small group communication theory defines the sanctioning agent as “the source which justifies the acceptance and promulgation of a rhetorical drama,” or a group’s shared perspective (Cragan 7). In this case, the sanctioning agent was Chicago Dramatists. The group’s belief in the play was supported by a 23 year old organization that exists to develop plays. This organization and its past successes gave the group not only the financial, but also the emotional and intellectual means to exercise its beliefs.

It was during the discussion group meetings that the play developed. Certainly numerous line changes were a direct result of the rehearsal group’s efforts, but the more weighty structural changes were the result of the discussion group’s exchange of ideas. After rehearsal on

September 19 (rehearsal 19), Ann, Carson and Rosie reached the decision to leave Beth's story more open-ended, thereby making the ending of the play less neat. On September 30 the four members of the group decided that cuts more extensive than the cuts made in rehearsal were needed to produce a more effective ending to the play. Although the other three encouraged Carson to make the cuts on her own as she felt best, the discussion group made the decision. The fact that the play developed most extensively through the efforts of the discussion group supports Lesch's assertion that groups are more effective when they "transcend the individual consciousness and work in the emergent shared consciousness" (154).

Analysis of the Script

After the reading of *Book of Mercy* in the spring of 2001, Carson apologetically described the play as "very traditional" and during our interview Suzi stated that the play is a well-made play that deals with unconventional subject matter (1 Oct. 2002). Both these descriptions are accurate. The play is divided into four very long scenes in two acts. The action takes place in one room over the course of one day. In well-made fashion, the play features a great deal of exposition in opening scenes, a cause-to-effect series of events with most scenes ending in a suspenseful climax and an obligatory confrontation scene containing the play's climax. The moral position of the play does not necessarily affirm that of the audience, as well-made plays often do, but there is a clear belief system in place. The play takes on racism, sexism, homophobia, substance abuse, addiction, domestic violence, the Nazis, September 11, botanical evolution, blindness, tarot, heaven and non-western religious philosophy. These and other

themes and subjects are addressed by the six eccentric characters in the frequently heightened language of the dialogue and five readings from the poetic journal entries of a dead woman.

The overall structure of the play did not change during development. As most well-made plays do, the play begins with a scene between an uninformed stranger (Tina) who needs other characters (Stella and David) to give her a great deal of information. This heavy exposition makes the play drag in these early pages of the script, which makes the inciting incident appear to occur late, but it actually takes place in the first quarter of the play. Stella takes a phone call off stage and discovers Vincent is coming to see her on this day. The play begins in earnest upon Vincent's arrival, which begins the chain of events leading to the play's climax. This scene and the later scene between Beth and Stella are the best written scenes in the play. In both scenes, the exposition comes in much smaller chunks and arises out of character needs. Character goals precipitate an interesting and sometimes unexpected flow from beat to beat with no forced transitions. While Stella and Vincent are talking, David brings in a package for Stella. Due to the activity initiated by the arrival of the box of items belonging to Stella and Vincent's deceased daughter, one may easily mistake this event for the inciting incident, but it is simply the most significant complication in the play. Other complications include the arrival of Beth, Vincent's fiancée, and the appearance of Paul and his narration of his recent arrest. The former helps drive the action to the climax and the latter contributes to the play's metaphysical theme. The climax of the play is somewhat of a disappointment. Early in the play Stella reveals she is in love, but is very cryptic about the object of her affection.²⁸ After the motley mix of characters forces her into a corner, she reveals she is in love with the last step of her twelve-step program or, more accurately, her conception of God. After a poetic description of her newly discovered perception

of her past and future, four characters exit so she and Vincent can read one last journal entry explaining their daughter's death before they poignantly say goodbye.

A few of the play's transitions merit inclusion in the discussion of the play's structure. After Vincent witnesses Tina and her boyfriend's bucolic sexual exploits, he is reminded of Sundays when he used to spy on Stella and their children. The flow from being a voyeur to memories of a different type of voyeurism is a graceful transition which leads the characters to recall their past, thereby offering the audience an understanding of the characters in their current situation. Also in this scene is a lovely moment when Stella decides to smoke after a particularly snotty exchange with Vincent. Stella's simple indication of her desire to light up contrasts with the lavish language she and Vincent use when sparring, however this expression is clear and effective because of its verbal reserve.

The most effective transition in the play is Beth's entrance at the end of act 1. Before she enters, the mood is quite glum as the three characters on stage have been bickering and reading from Mercy's journal. Beth takes the room with such aplomb that the mood is immediately energized. This activity is gratefully welcomed after an act marked by a great deal of exposition and very little action.²⁹

Two other transitions are abrupt and may offer actors little opportunity to make the journey from one beat to the next. The section discussed above, where Tina talks about Antonio, is immediately preceded by a discussion of the emotional pain wine can alleviate. In the same line, Tina must create a reason to observe a great deal of pain and then begin to talk about the chef in the kitchen. Later in the play a major complication that leads directly to the climax is David's disclosure to Vincent and Paul that Stella is in love. He reveals this information abruptly after Vincent is denigrating Stella's ability to cope with stressful situations. One may see David's

decision as defending Stella, but it appears somewhat catty and even odd for him, as Stella's doctor, to offer such confidence to her ex-husband at this moment.

These and other transitions are the type of material one would assume to which actors can contribute greatly during development. Carson's unfulfilled desire for actor input indicates that she would have welcomed development during these moments that rely heavily on the actor's craft. Perhaps if the actors had a formal opportunity to do so, they might have observed some difficulty in journeying from beat to beat. These moments remain in the text with little noticeable changes from the case study's first draft to the final draft.

Both Rosie and Rhys, the actor playing David, state the obvious by saying that the play is dense. During the talkback session after the reading at Chicago Dramatists in March of 2002, one of the audience members expressed her desire to read the play. This comment was offered as a complement to the poetic language of the play, but could also be a reaction to the audience's inability to process the amount of material presented in the play. The inclusion of such a wide range of subject matter makes one wonder how the play would change by not only cutting lines, which was a frequent activity during rehearsal, but entire topics of discussion.

Four examples easily come to mind when considering material that could effectively be cut. I am not asserting that the play would improve by cutting any or all of them, but do believe that their inclusion makes it difficult for an audience to process the themes and events in the play. Vincent's gift of roses prompts Stella to tell a page and a half long story about a Roman emperor who killed his dinner guests by suffocating them with rose petals. Carson edited the exchange for the production and these cuts remain in the final draft. The exchange contributes to the mood of the scene and adds to the metaphysical theme. But the story does not advance the plot and merely serves to make the characters articulate what has obviously happened in their

lives: “life caves in like that, sometimes.” A later story about the purchase of a bottle of wine from a Nazi occupied winery is intriguing and strangely beautiful, yet serves the play only by distracting the audience and characters from the play’s main action. The compelling narrative does not develop the plot and is placed at a time when both the audience and the characters are attempting to come to terms with the contents of a mysterious package, which actually is vital to the play’s dramatic action. In act 2 David reveals that he and his partner Paul, for whom he has to post bail immediately, are financially broken. Vincent saves the day by saying he will pay to have Paul released. This plot development is only obligatorily mentioned later and serves merely to get Vincent out of the room so Stella and Beth can have a scene alone together. Lastly, Paul coaxes David into telling a two and a half page story about the evolution of flowers. One of the charming elements of the play is how these people come together, get to know each other and benefit by their shared time. While together they tell interesting stories mostly about their past, however the ideas the flower story present are so loosely related to everything else that occurs in the play it is difficult for the attentive audience member to process in terms of the play’s plot or theme. In a broad interpretation of the play, one could easily argue that these four examples contribute to plot and/or theme. However, there is so much material in the play that contributes more directly to the necessary elements of telling this story that there is little room for material that is even marginally extraneous.

An example of material that may appear extraneous yet actually does contribute more directly to the dramatic action is the frequently mentioned discovery of Tina and her boyfriend having sex outside Stella’s window. Vincent’s later disclosure that he has witnessed the event propels Tina’s story into its conclusion. Also, Paul’s incarceration story is rather long and does not appear to serve the plot directly. However he reveals that he wooed the police officers by

reading his tarot cards, which contributes to the metaphysical perspective of life that serves as the climax of the play.³⁰

The above observations on the density of the material in the play may also address concerns about the inactivity in the play. If one were of the opinion that the play lacks action, one may assume that covering too much material through discussion would intensify this shortcoming. Ann, Rosie and Richard observe that one of the obstacles to producing the play is the fact that the play is composed of people just sitting in a room talking. One of the reasons for the limited dramatic action is the reliance on readings from Mercy's journal for the advancement of the plot. The play is composed largely of these readings and the characters' reactions to them as well as stories from the characters' past. This structure certainly offers the challenge of keeping an audience entertained while watching people talk. The play attempts to engage the audience through what the characters say.

When I asked Rosie to articulate the strengths of *Book of Mercy*, her first response was the play's language. When I asked her to describe the play's weaknesses, she smiled and said the language is not easy to handle in production (2 Oct. 2002). Carson has clearly made efforts to have Stella and Vincent speak in different voices depending upon their emotional state and to whom they are speaking. This poetic language is marked by passive voice, lack of contractions and an inversion of the usual subject/verb placement. Stella in particular reverts to the heightened language when she is feeling threatened or emotionally engaged. She and Vincent spar with words as their weapons as they recall the wounds from their former marriage. When Vincent impatiently asks, "Can we stop this now?" his inquiry helps explain to the audience that his and Stella's affectations are part of their usual performance for each other. As the conversation heats up, the language is still heightened but increasingly viscous as indicated by

poetic barbs. Stella's revelation speech, which may be described as the climax of the play, is particularly poetic and arguably heavy handed. However, the extensive explanation is necessary to justify the climax. The most poetic language in the play is found in the readings from Mercy's diary. If the heightened language of the characters appears stilted, the journal entries are more justifiably lavish in their choice of words because Mercy was a poet and the material she discusses in her writing often concerns dreams.

In order to deliver many of the eloquent lines successfully, an actor would need a high skill level and/or a great deal of time to focus on the language alone. As discussed above, no time was dedicated to crafting line delivery or even discussing the different literary elements in the play during rehearsals for the production at Chicago Dramatists. A reader who can not imagine a skillful delivery of these lines would find the language stilted. If the actors had been allowed to speak frankly to Carson, perhaps they would have observed and/or questioned a line they were having difficulty delivering and this exchange may have resulted in a rewrite. As a result of this lack of attention to the words and a cast that was arguably not particularly skilled with language, the language is not noticeably different now than it was when rehearsals began.

This somewhat verbose language does create the play's clearest strength. Ann states that the characters drew her to the play and Rosie also acknowledges them as a singular achievement. Although the lack of action and difficult language may make the play difficult to stage, the characters offer ample opportunity for actors to exercise their craft. They are each well-rounded and fully developed. Together they populate the play with an odd assortment of strengths, neuroses and past experiences. Stella in particular is effective. She is practically an anti-hero because she has been a bad mother and a faithless wife, yet her vulnerability and accessibility

contrasted with her upper class grace makes the audience interested in the stories she tells and her emotional ups and downs through the play.

The central event of the play is the development of the characters. However, one may have difficulty believing that Stella makes a journey of note. In the early moments of the play, she reveals to David that she is in love and the climax of the play is her explanation of the statement. Perhaps she develops to the point that she can share this information with the most important people in her life or possibly she is unsure of her feelings at the beginning and through the play confirms what she suspects. To critique this structural element of her character, however, is to minimize the skill with which she is drawn.

The character of Mercy is also worth mentioning if only because the play reveals her only through exposition. Though perhaps the most important character in the play, she never makes an appearance. Yet the effect of her absence only serves to support what others say and read about her. She is Christ-like in her inability to remain in this world and her death brings about Stella's salvation. To see such a character in the flesh would surely disappoint any expectations the audience creates; denying her corporeal status provides the audience with the opportunity to create her as they see her.

It would be easy to take much of the above analysis as a condemnation of the play. Some may call the play inactive, overwritten and excessively dense. However, one of the themes of the play is that we must embrace all life has to offer, which includes the good as well as the bad. If the strongest element of the play is its characters, the excessive language and subject matter serve to support what is best about the play. Without the lavish stories, poetic verbiage and opportunity for the characters to engage in lengthy discussion, as opposed to engaging in a more active pursuit of their goals, the audience would not have the opportunity to get to know these

eccentric individuals. The fact that what some may call flaws remain vital elements of the play even after development can be interpreted two ways. On the one hand, if Carson had the opportunity to communicate more openly during rehearsal and if the environment in the rehearsal hall had been more conducive to input from the actors, the company could have addressed these elements and incorporated rewrites into a vision of the play that capitalized upon the strengths and minimized the weaknesses. On the other hand, while many complain that the development process often eliminates elements that make a play truly unique, in this case the play emerged from the process with its distinctive qualities fully intact. Carson freely admits that the development process of this case study was less than ideal, which suggests that she feels the experience of rehearsal did not develop *Book of Mercy* to its full potential. The play is obviously not perfect. However, it is unique in its flaws and achievements. Although this developmental case was not markedly successful, it preserved and even strengthened a unique play that continues to articulate its playwright's unique voice.

CHAPTER 4

IF AT ALL CASE STUDY

Walking down Fourth Street on the south side of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania one may be surprised to find a professional theatre company situated among numerous row houses across from a large Catholic church. The tall thin structure of the theatre makes it blend in with the environment, indicating the theatre's connection to the community. Over a period of eleven weeks, I observed one way in which the ensemble method of new play development can produce a dramatic text. The six artists at Touchstone created *If At All*, a play based on T.S. Eliot's "Four Quartets" with Einstein and Hawking's theories as additional source material. The ensemble's time commitments to their community, their goals for the play they developed, and the environment they created while employing the ensemble process proved to be the decisive factors in determining the output of their efforts.

Having only read about the ensemble process of such groups as the Open Theatre and San Francisco Mime Troup, I was unsure of what to expect from this case study. What I saw was a group of actor-creators and a director sharing a perspective about how works should be developed. The accord with which they worked and the supportive environment helped create a successful development process.

The first section of this chapter includes a history and overview of Touchstone theatre as well as a brief description of the development of *If At All* before my observation period. The

second section is an edited journal of the process these artists employed in creating this play. The actions I have detailed here are those most relevant to the issues investigated below. The following sections draw conclusions about Touchstone's schedule, style of directing and writing process. Important issues in this section include: the extent to which the process/product dilemma fostered the creation of this play; how the writer/director facilitated goals and desires for the piece; and the practicality and productivity of designating one artist as the primary writer. The next section is an analysis of the play the company produced during my observation period. This analysis focuses on how the developmental process affected structure and character. The chapter ends with a short description of the development of *If At All* after my observation period and brief coda.

History and Overview of Touchstone Theatre

The beginning of Touchstone Theatre goes back to a 1977 street theatre class at Lehigh University, located just blocks from the theatre's current location. Students from this class formed a professional touring mime troupe called the People's Theatre Company. This company focused on creating original non-verbal movement-based theatre. In 1981 the company became known as Touchstone Theatre and in 1987 moved into their current permanent location on Fourth Street. Touchstone's website states that "exploration of form and performer authorship of play creation have remained at the heart of the artistic vision and our ensemble process" and describes the current company as "a not-for-profit producing and presenting organization, which fosters inter-cultural, international and community collaborations" ("Our Mission"). Touchstone's most widely known collaboration, with Cornerstone Theatre of Los Angeles,

produced *Steelbound*, an original adaptation of *Prometheus Bound* performed in an abandoned steel mill less than a mile from Touchstone's facility. Touchstone is very active in its community with workshops, a youth ensemble and educational residencies. The company also tours shows and offers a professional apprenticeship.

The elongated structure of the theatre, which seems like an odd configuration of office and performance/rehearsal space, makes sense once one learns that the building is a converted 19th century firehouse. The interior of the building is arranged on three levels and includes the theatre, a rehearsal room and administrative offices. The theatre is an intimate seventy-two-seat proscenium configuration and the rehearsal space, named the Peace Train rehearsal room, is directly above the theatre on the third floor and measures approximately 19 by 29 feet.

Touchstone's operating budget for the 2001-2002 year was \$400,000. At the time of my observations, Touchstone employed a production manager; a tour and group sales manager; a managing director; one individual who functioned as a box office manager, office manager and volunteer coordinator; five acting apprentices; and the ensemble.

The ensemble is made up of five actor-creators. Bill George is the co-founder of Touchstone. He has extensive training in mime and tours solo performance pieces. Jennie Gilrain has been a member of the ensemble since 1983 and frequently directs for Touchstone and other theatre companies in the community. Jennie has also trained as a mime artist. Cora Hook joined the ensemble in 1996 and is involved in co-creating many projects for Touchstone. Mark McKenna joined the ensemble in 1986 and became artistic director of Touchstone in 1994. Jennie, Cora and Mark trained in physical theatre at the LeCoq Theater Institute in Paris.³¹ Mary Wright has been involved with Touchstone since 1998 and is currently its marketing coordinator. She joined the ensemble in the 2001-2002 season and has worked extensively in the craft of

storytelling. The guest director for *If At All* is Gerard Stropnick (Jerry). He is founder and artistic director of Bloomsburg Theatre Ensemble, another ensemble-based theatre company, in Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania and has directed for Touchstone in the past.³²

Early Beginnings of *If At All*

The first meetings for what would become *If At All* were held in the summer of 2000. From the beginning Touchstone knew that this play would be in its 2002 season. At the time of these first meetings, Mary was not a member of the ensemble and the group of four (Bill, Cora, Jennie and Mark) threw out ideas for topics and themes for the unknown play; they were starting from scratch. At the very first meeting they decided that this play should rely on dialogue to tell its story, which was a departure from much of their past work. Frequently during my observations and interviews with Touchstone, members of the ensemble expressed the idea that ensemble and/or self creation often produces work that relies on collage and/or monologue for its structure. From the very beginning their intention was to create a work with a strong through-line by having characters talk to each other, though they acknowledged that this desire would be difficult for them to fulfill. These first meetings did not produce any definitive decisions about theme or subject matter. One general theme that kept recurring was family relationships, specifically the issue of what parents bequeath their children. Although at times during the course of development the company members seem to have forgotten this theme, it is definitely one of the main issues in *If At All*.

In the fall and winter of 2000 they began meeting again, this time bringing in materials such as literature, music and visual images to share with each other. Each member of the

ensemble alternated directing the other three in physical stagings inspired by these materials. Then in the spring of 2001 Jennie brought in T.S. Eliot's "Four Quartets" to share with the others and the ensemble decided the Eliot poem should be the basis for the new piece. During my observation period Jennie expressed her attraction to the "sensuality" of the poem. Each of them took one of the four quartets with the assignment of creating a solo non-verbal piece that expressed that section of the larger poem. After this solo work, each member directed the others in a short piece based on "their" quartet. In the first group interview I conducted, I learned that this process was a way of learning from and listening to each other while alternating leadership responsibility (3 May 2002).

In May of 2001 the ensemble presented "Works in Progress" for an audience at the theatre. The program was a combination of solo pieces unrelated to *If At All*, the four primarily physical pieces based on the quartets and a series of other short pieces, some utilizing dialogue, inspired by and developed from the Eliot poem. At this point the ensemble wanted to have the pressure of an impending performance to encourage them to focus their efforts. They also wanted to hear the audience's reactions to the work. During the first ensemble interview, Mark stated that what they presented to the audience "didn't have to be a story;" it was an exploration of the poem (3 May 2002). The main question they had after this performance was how to combine the sections the audience liked with the material the ensemble felt compelled to continue exploring.

After putting the work away completely for a few months, they began meeting again in September of 2001 with Mary as an ensemble member. Other than watching the video from the May "Works in Progress" performance and discussing themes for the piece, the ensemble worked very little on it between September and January 2002. It was during this time that they

decided to hire Jerry Stropnick as director, partly because of his schedule availability but also because he is “dedicated to the ensemble process” (3 May 2002). Months earlier, in the summer of 2001, Mark and Jerry discussed the possibility of Jerry directing *If At All*. By December the decision was final and Jerry watched the video from the May 2001 performance during an informal meeting at Jennie and Mark’s home. The company began rehearsals on January 24 with a handful of largely physical scenes, the desire to tell a story through dialogue, the vague notion that they wanted to address the topic of what parents bequeath their children and T.S. Eliot’s “Four Quartets” as the basis for their work. The main challenge to the work was how to incorporate all these elements using an ensemble creation methodology.

The group created a rehearsal schedule that was customized for their busy lives. From January 24 until April 12 (twelve weeks, rehearsals 1-27 of 41) they rehearsed on Thursdays and Fridays only, from 10:00 am until 5:00 p.m., taking an hour for lunch. The week of March 4 through 8 (rehearsals 13-17), was the one exception to this schedule; they rehearsed from 10:00 am to 5:00 p.m. almost every day. Beginning April 15 (rehearsal 28) they rehearsed full time every day except for the weekend of April 20 and 21 until the final rehearsal on April 30 (rehearsal 41) before the preview on May 1 and opening on May 2.

Researcher’s Presence and Methods

An investigation of current ensemble creation companies led me to interview Jerry in the Fall of 2001. During this conversation he informed me that he would be directing the next ensemble-created piece at Touchstone in January of 2002. At that time he assumed there would be no obstacles to my observing the ensemble’s process, but thought it would be best to ask the

ensemble's permission before giving me an affirmative answer. After Jerry presented the idea to the ensemble, Jerry informed me that the ensemble had many reservations about my presence. The two main expressed reasons for their apprehension were the fact that someone outside the ensemble was to direct and that this would be the first time this group of five ensemble members had developed a piece together. They feared that a stranger's presence during this vulnerable time would interfere in their process. Also on their minds, though not as clearly articulated to me, was Sara Brady's article appearing in *TDR* in 2000 that spoke unfavorably about Touchstone's production of *Steelbound*. After this article, which precipitated many letters to the editor published in the next edition of *TDR*, it is understandable that they would not be eager for anyone to write about their process. After conducting this case study, I now understand why they felt a stranger's presence could potentially alter their manner of working. After numerous letters and e-mails to Mark, which he shared with the ensemble, he presented me with some requirements before they agreed to let me attend rehearsal. I was to be in attendance as much as possible so that I would become a permanent feature that the ensemble could ignore. I was to "aim for invisibility," as Mark put it, and should not expect to be asked for my input at any point in the process. The ensemble also wanted to make sure I understood that due to their busy schedules I should anticipate little social interaction outside of rehearsal. I assured them that this was the code of conduct I already planned on assuming and they graciously agreed to be my first case study.

It was impractical, and ultimately unnecessary, for me to attend every rehearsal. I observed 19 out of 41 rehearsals. At the ensemble's request, I did not attend the first four rehearsals. My visits to Touchstone were evenly spaced over the fifteen weeks of the development/rehearsal period. Only once did I miss more than four consecutive rehearsals. I was

absent during the last week before preview (rehearsals 32-39). However, by this point I felt I could easily catch up on what the group had done through verbal descriptions. During my observations I sat in a far corner of the rehearsal room in unobstructed view behind the stage manager's table or in the darkened house once they moved into the theatre and recorded my observations with pen and paper. I discussed rehearsals with Jerry informally during approximately five meals the two of us shared and I interviewed the entire ensemble two days after preview and two weeks after opening.³³ During my observation period I had little other interaction with the company.

Rehearsal Journal

February 7 (rehearsal 5)

The ensemble began rehearsal by spending over an hour discussing numerous topics including scheduling, subject matter and goals of *If At All*, Jerry's written material, the Eliot poem and the design of slaughterhouses in McDonald's ranches.³⁴ The discussion of Jerry's written material for this day, and every day Jerry brought in written material, was openly critical and complimentary. The ensemble asked numerous questions about the material, eliciting explanations from Jerry about source material and structure of the play he and the ensemble were creating. When Bill asked about how a particular section will be perceived by the audience, Jerry courteously replied, "My task is to find a way to bring the audience [...] to an understanding of the writing that makes sense."

Jerry's written material for today, entitled "Working Ideas," is twenty-four pages of sections of the Eliot poem from which he has created scenes and characters for the play. The

sections include such titles as “Opening/Closing,” “The Scene Change” and “Seven Poems for the Price of One.” This written material does not contain the entire Eliot poem, but does contain all the lines from the poem that will be included in the final script.³⁵

Numerous times today Jerry tells the ensemble that “everything is still open” and the group members remind each other that there are no rights or wrongs at this point. However, today the group agrees that it is at a fork in the road and needs to begin narrowing the options for inclusion in the final performance.

When the twenty-minute physical warm-up is over Jerry asks to see “reconstructions” from the “May workshop,” as he and the ensemble refer to the May 2001 “Works in Progress” presentation. Once they recall and list on a large Post-it pad as many scenes as they can, Mark directs the other three in staging as they all contribute to remembering and recreating scenes from the May workshop while Jerry takes notes on his laptop. Mary and Lisa Dolcin, the stage manager for *If At All* do not attend the first six rehearsals because they are involved in another production. Once Lisa is in attendance, her primary responsibility will be to record on Jerry’s laptop the dialogue and movements the actor-creators generate. It is this record of the work that Jerry will use to create much of what will become the play.

At 3:30 Mark has to leave--as he will on most Thursdays. The remaining three recreate and augment a tea party scene from the May workshop. As the recreation becomes more of an improvisation Jerry suggests they use lines from the poem as text.

At the end of rehearsal, Jennie mentions a piece of literature she wants to share with the group, but Jerry asks her to present the material physically. This is the second time on this day Jerry chooses to work physically instead of discussing an idea.

February 8 (rehearsal 6)

Jerry decides to start rehearsal late today so the company can support Mary's directorial efforts by attending the first performance of her children's show taking place in the theatre below the rehearsal room. Only Bill and Jerry watch the performance; the rest of the ensemble members take advantage of the time to work in their offices as they already have seen or have plans to see the show. Once rehearsal begins Jerry is last to lead warm-up, which is often the case. His warm-up is a game of creating physical puns about time using a ball. One example is standing on the ball and being "on time." Jerry explains that the reason for this warm-up/improvisation is that more and more he feels that the Eliot poem is about time and he wants to begin "physicalizing" this notion.

Much of today's rehearsal time is spent reconstructing a scene from the May workshop that the ensemble refers to as the "Boar and the Boarhound" scene. Jerry suggests eventually adding Mary, who is not here today, as a daughter in this domestic scene downstage right. In the final performance Mary does end up playing the daughter in this very spot.

After lunch Jerry declares, "We have two more weeks to come up with a structure." Jennie then suggests that they name a date when they can no longer bring in new materials for possible inclusion in the play in an attempt to narrow their options for the final product. All agree this is a good idea, but no date is set.

Another important use of time today is an exploration of character. Jerry asks the four to create characters based on texts they have discussed thus far. Jennie recreates a clown character based on one she previously performed in a solo work.

February 21 (rehearsal 9)

This morning they read over Jerry's latest written work, "Some Physical Physics," which consists of quotes from Einstein and Hawking that are humorous or suggest physical actions that Jerry offers as staging ideas and ways of making human connections with laws of physics, which will become one of the themes of the play. Each member of the group reads aloud from the work.

One of the goals for today is to spend some time working on clown characters, which are becoming an increasingly probable inclusion in the play. The most fruitful work on these characters comes from Mark, but will not be part of the clown's actions or text in the final piece. One of Mark's ideas is a mad professor who discusses angels on children's faces. In the final production Mark's father character will deliver a monologue about seeing the tiny angels in the corner of his child's eyes while she sleeps.

With half an hour left in the rehearsal, Jerry asks the four ensemble members (Mark had to leave early) to recall all the improvisations they have done since rehearsal began, write one each on a small Post-it and put them on the wall. He asks them to rank them and indicate the rank with a colored dot: red indicates it should not become part of the final production, blue indicates that they liked performing it and green indicates that it has a place in the structure of the final production. He says this is a good way to "gauge where we are." With the aid of these Post-its, he will write what he will call his "skeleton," upon which the ensemble can "flesh out" a performance during the next seven rehearsals (rehearsals 11 through 17) which Jerry will miss.

Post-its of numerous sizes were an important part of the company's process. They employed the sticky notes to make lists of all types: scenes they had created, scenes they needed to create, desires for the piece, potential ideas for inclusion, etc. Upon my return after missing a few rehearsals, I could see the work they had done listed on huge Post-its upon the wall. By the

end of the rehearsal process, the walls in the rehearsal room were covered with papers of all sizes documenting the work that had transpired.

February 22 (rehearsal 10)

This morning they discuss Jerry's "skeleton." This latest written material is basically a list of scenes from yesterday's Post-its. Only one Post-it received a red dot indicating the ensemble's desire to abandon the idea, so Jerry has edited the numerous scenes himself. Before they read through what Jerry has written, he says that the play will be approximately ninety minutes long and points out a few dramaturgical needs in the shaping play. Later today Jerry states that he will begin to focus on "paring away" the material the ensemble has generated and Mark replies with, "That's why you're here!" When the Touchstone ensemble hired Jerry it was with the intention that he would serve as editor. During the first ensemble interview on May 3, Mark stated that one of the reasons they wanted Jerry to direct *If At All* was because he is "good with text" and structure in particular.

Jennie asks numerous times today if Jerry is going to leave them with a hard copy of the outline and assignments for the rehearsals he will not attend. The ensemble agreed months ago that next week would be a full week of rehearsal without Jerry, as he has a prior commitment. Jerry tells Jennie and the ensemble that they should prepare to present a "showing" to him based on the "skeleton"³⁶ upon his return on March 14.

Jerry must leave at lunch today. After lunch the ensemble sits down to look over the schedule for the coming full week of rehearsal. Due to a lack of understanding and the need for repeated clarification, it takes the ensemble an hour to settle a rehearsal schedule they had already discussed during initial planning meetings.

February 28 (rehearsal 11)

Today is the first full day of rehearsal during Jerry's absence. The ensemble members settle down to reread Jerry's "skeleton." They realize that Jerry has compressed and edited some of the improvisations from the past weeks of rehearsal and occasionally stumble over his syntax.³⁷ There is discussion that suggests that there might have been a bit of a discrepancy between what Jerry wants and what the ensemble wants out of this production. Mark points out that if the ensemble members feel it is important to include certain elements in the production that they must make more of an effort to contribute to the writing that Jerry had been doing because they are at the point in the rehearsal calendar that Jerry can not proceed with his job as director without an increasingly solid script.

March 1 (rehearsal 12)

This morning Jennie suggests a five-minute "free write." Each person should create a flow for the piece. She says that this flow should also express what each of them finds appealing about the work. Later in the day Mark repeats that if the ensemble wants to include specific material in the shaping play, they must contribute more to the writing and he adds that he would prefer to see Jerry perform his job as director and not be the principal writer as he has had to be.

March 14 (rehearsal 18)

This morning the ensemble presents a "showing" of the work they staged from the "skeleton" to Jerry. Mark and Jennie have to leave at lunch, so the remaining attendants discuss the presentation. Later, as a way to work on structure, Jerry also asks them to perform a "free-write." He asks them to write for fifteen minutes creating a story from the characters they have

so far. Neither Cora, Bill nor Mary develops a story during this free-write, but they do create is a structure for a play.

March 21 (rehearsal 20)

Jerry's announcement, "I have a scenario of how we proceed from here," elicits applause from everyone in the room. He says that this week they will create a play based on scenes from past rehearsal work and come up with a run order, which needs to stay flexible. This evening after rehearsal Jerry and Cora will write an outline of the play. The plan for the rest of today is for the entire group to work on improvisations that will generate dialogue for this evening's writing. As part of this work, Jerry has the group brainstorm quotes from the Einstein and Hawking they have read during rehearsal to use as lines for the forming physicist clown characters. As the group is preparing to leave rehearsal, Jennie asks Jerry to keep in mind that the writing happens during rehearsal.

March 22 (rehearsal 21)

They alternate reading from "*If At All Work Outline*" which Jerry and Cora wrote last night. The outline is basically a list of characters and titles of scenes with short adjective phrases and actions listed under each, such as "Answers phone [...] voice flat and dead – errands – things to pick up on the way home" listed under "OFFICE MAN." Again, the only suggestion of lines is from the poem, but all the poem lines that will be in the final script are not in this outline. This written work also lists elements Jerry and Cora feel they still need to develop as well as suggestions for additional material.

The ensemble members thank Cora and Jerry greatly for the work they did last evening. Jennie likes the fact that it is so “thin.” Jerry and Cora say they were careful not to add any new material.

April 11 (rehearsal 26)

Today Mary and Jennie are the only ensemble members in rehearsal. When Jerry arrives he decides that today will be a writing day and we all make our way to the conference room. New this week is opening night panic, which will worsen at the end of today when Jerry meets with the set builder and realizes that they have to video a run-through for the lighting designer in one week.

Four rehearsals have elapsed (rehearsals 22 – 25) since my last observation. In the time I have been gone, they have spent the majority of their time refining improvisations they created earlier in rehearsal. The group now refers to a “script” as Jerry’s writings have transitioned from ideas for scenes or structure to something that resembles a play. The following is a brief account of that transition from March 22 (rehearsal 21) to April 12 (rehearsal 27).

There are numerous scenes written out in script format dated March 29. Numerous characters have lines not taken from the Eliot poem. These scenes are labeled as drafts and clearly indicate a progression towards the final script. These scenes do not comprise the entire play as it existed on this date; they are a partial progression towards the finished piece.

The “*If At All Work Outline*” dated April 3 bears a striking resemblance to the finished script. It is the entire play treated in the same manner as the scenes in the March 29 material. Now the physicist clowns or “Cosmologists” characters speak in a mixture of lines from the Eliot poem and literature by and about Einstein and Hawking. All of the characters that will appear in

the final draft, with the exception of one minor character, are in this draft without names. Much of the poetry spoken by the “Poet” character and a few scenes in this draft will not be in the final script. Yet, much is still to be added as this draft is twenty-one pages and the final version will be thirty-two.

The draft of the play dated April 11 is still labeled as an outline, but is in fact a strong progression towards the final script. This draft still contains much that will be cut. In particular, numerous pages of the final scenes will be cut and/or completely rewritten. This draft is four pages longer than the final draft.

April 12 (rehearsal 27)

The day begins with a great deal of scheduling talk as the company is clearly in pre-production mode. Jerry proclaims: “From today on there’s a different dialectic.” Today is the first time I hear the company explicitly acknowledge that *If At All* will not be complete for opening night or this run of performances.³⁸ The company reads through and edits the latest incarnation of the script. By saying that the piece would not be finished, the ensemble feels they are able to continue to work on the text. When Jennie expresses her desire to keep the writing process alive, Jerry replies, “we will write until the day we close.”

Jerry has now clearly taken the directorial reigns. All questions about script and scheduling are now addressed to him first and, although he often consults members of the ensemble before making decisions, he is willing to take action alone more so than prior to this date. The ensemble members realize that they are at the point in rehearsal when they need to craft a performance and they welcomed Jerry’s assuming a more controlling position.

Today also marks the beginning of the major editing sessions. Because these sessions are during rehearsal, the ensemble is very active in shaping the play. Jerry will still write a great deal, as he had been doing, but the focus is now on shaping the material they have as opposed to generating more material.

April 15 (rehearsal 28)

Pre-production rehearsals continue in full force with a renewed eagerness marked by humor and a heightened sense of camaraderie. The first order of business this morning is to prepare for the first run-through of what they now refer to as the “script.” Mark and Jerry agree that they should run the show at least twice every day from now until opening. Late in the day when Jerry asks Jennie for her feedback on the script, Jennie says she is at the point where she is trying to approach the material as a performer and feels further discussion of the script will interfere with her new task. Also, once they began to do run-throughs of the play, there is a formal sense of deportment the company has not employed previously; they make efforts not to be in the “on stage” space unless they are performing.

When the rehearsal begins to take on a looser structure, Jennie states that she is very confused by their process, but that she is willing to dedicate herself to it because she trusts “what the ensemble and Jerry have to offer.” When she and Mark have to leave, the remaining three ensemble members and Jerry cut a fair amount from the script. The mantra for the rest of the day is: “Is there dialogue? Do we need it?” This morning Mary brought in a scene she rewrote on her own which Jerry ends up importing unaltered into the play.

One of today’s interactions that led to a line change warrants a detailed description. Through the entire rehearsal process, Bill frequently tried to add elements he felt were missing

from the text. After every reading of an outline or during general discussion of the structure of the play, he would critique the material pointing out what he saw as structural or thematic flaws. Mark and Bill disagreed earlier about a message for the piece; Bill wanted to say that life is worth living and Mark did not want to be so overt with any message. Mark's point of view basically prevailed during this earlier discussion, but Bill did not let go of his hope to make the piece reflect a positive view of the human condition. Today he stated that he thought the opening monologue should be more "humanist." Jerry tried to accommodate Bill's desire without changing what he himself felt was important about the specific moment. Jerry suggested changing the line "moment of beauty" to "beauty of a moment" in order to express the potential for joy in each moment of life. Bill replied "great" to this suggestion and other ensemble members eventually, in subsequent rehearsals, realized that the new phrase was an effective way of "connecting the cosmic with the commonplace," as the Scientist says in this monologue. It is interesting to note that Bill was frequently the least in-line with the energies and tasks in the room. On two specific occasions, the ensemble expressed frustration with Bill's misunderstanding of a topic or his intentional interruption in the flow of warm-up. Frequently during my observations, I found myself wondering why Bill appeared to have difficulty understanding a task or idea the rest of the company grasped easily. However, on most occasions his lack of understanding or agreement kept the other ensemble members active in their process of digesting a thought or task. Since Bill usually brought a different perspective into the room, the rest of the company was forced to analyze their individual perspectives more closely. When Bill occasionally expressed a conflicting opinion, Jerry and the ensemble members received the idea with respect and genuine consideration.

After rehearsal tonight, Jerry (whose name is actually Garard) will incorporate the changes the three made in the text to produce “*If At All*/Touchstone Theatre & G. Stropnick / Draft 4/15/02.” This version, which is no longer labeled an outline, features names for each character and an indication of four scenes that are missing but necessary. The ensemble has not improvised these four scenes during rehearsal as of yet; they are scenes that Cora and Jerry feel are necessary in order for the play to continue progressing. Two of these scenes will be cut after the ensemble members improvise them but before they are put to paper. Almost every scene in this draft will be edited and shortened before the final draft.

April 17 (rehearsal 30)

Eight rehearsals have transpired since my last observation. Jerry and the ensemble inform me that in my absence Jerry has been writing in the evenings after rehearsal and during rehearsal they have continued improvising material to aide in the writing while rehearsing existing material for the impending performance.

Jerry and the ensemble tape the entire script together in what Jerry likens to dot matrix printer paper and lay it diagonally across the floor. Jerry asks the ensemble--Jennie will not arrive until after lunch--to highlight in orange the parts they think are theatrically interesting or that they like to perform, in green the vital elements of the story and in yellow the elements that are debatable. After highlighting using these criterions, the plan is to cut away and discard all the non-highlighted sections to produce the newest edition of the script. Mark puts masking tape on the floor to mark the beginning and ending of the script so they can see how much they excise today. They engage in a great deal of discussion about specific scenes and dramatic structure as they work. Bill expresses the desire to cut dialogue that can be expressed physically and all

concur. Jerry acknowledges that they will have to rewrite and restructure the entire script to accommodate the cuts. Although the group does not make it through the entire play, the new scenes they create as a result of today's editing will change very little in the final version of the script.

In an attempt to encourage the ensemble to be more involved in the writing he has been doing alone, Jerry says he would “love” to have help from the ensemble in writing the text. At this point it is appropriate to clarify just how much writing Jerry actually did. Beginning with the April 15 draft of the play, the authorship of *If At All* is appropriately credited to Touchstone Theatre and G. Stropnick. The script of *If At All*, as it existed at the end of my observation period, was a collaboration between Jerry and the ensemble; the ensemble generated the raw material and Jerry formed it into a script adding elements he felt were dramaturgically necessary. On four occasions Jerry had assistance with the actual crafting of the language of the play (the instances noted in the rehearsal journal above: March 21 when he and Cora wrote together; April 11 when he Mary and Jennie wrote in the conference room; and April 16 when Mary brought in a rewritten scene; as well as a small section delivered by Mary written by Mark during one of my absences). Jerry worked alone during all other writing sessions, particularly in the evenings after rehearsal during the second-to-last week before previews, which produced the majority of the final script. During our interview on January 13, 2004, Jerry made a point to clarify that his writing was based on the work the ensemble showed him during rehearsal. There is no scene in the play that originated from him; all scenes are edited versions of an improvisation or compressions of numerous improvisations the ensemble members created in the rehearsal room.³⁹ However, he and the ensemble expressed concern about the extent to which he was writing “on his own.”⁴⁰

April 19 – April 28 (rehearsals 32-39)

I was not in attendance for these rehearsals. Jerry and the ensemble members informed me that during the final week before opening Jerry rewrote on a daily basis. He clarified scenes and character motivations, which usually meant shortening scenes, but he did not change the structure of the piece. He used a different color paper each day to keep track of the daily rewrites.

April 29 (rehearsal 40)

These last two days of rehearsal before the show opens for an audience are very similar to the last two days before the opening of most plays. The set is within hours of completion and today is the second technical/dress rehearsal.⁴¹ As he gives notes, Jerry cuts a few lines and tweaks a few others. He acknowledges that the order of the show came late in the process, which made line memorization difficult. His last note is to get rid of everything on the set that is not absolutely necessary. There are a lot of props and papers on the set that were part of an earlier vision of the design, but Jerry says since they have not had time to work with them they are getting in the actors' way.

April 30 (rehearsal 41)

Jerry asks the cast to “speed-through” the entire show without props and to concentrate on lines, pacing and having fun. As the actors perform, Jerry is buoyant with laughter. After the run-through they have the remainder of the afternoon off until the dress rehearsal tonight at 8:00 p.m. After the dress rehearsal, Jerry's notes are very complimentary. Tomorrow afternoon they

will do another speed through in the rehearsal room just hours before they perform before a paying audience.

Schedule

At the end of this case study, the time from Touchstone's first meetings for the work that would become *If At All* to opening night spanned approximately two years and featured periods when the ensemble did not actively work on the piece. This schedule is not only typical in ensemble creation, but was necessary for the artists in this case study. Touchstone's schedule was unique in that, by rehearsing only two days a week for most of the rehearsal period, they even had periods of inactivity, five days a week, scheduled into the most intense phase of development. Although the company stated that the rehearsal schedule was created to accommodate their busy lives, they felt the days away from rehearsal provided them the opportunity to contemplate the work while away from it. However, it stands to reason that since the rehearsal calendar had to oblige their multiple tasks and responsibilities that they would have little time outside of rehearsal to dedicate to the piece.

As in other ensemble developmental schedules, Touchstone had clearly distinct periods of material generation and production rehearsal. Jerry's statement on April 12 (rehearsal 27), "From today on there's a different dialectic," expressed the shift. Although they were no longer generating new material, their production rehearsal phase was still marked by continued development of the script. Two features of this rehearsal process helped to prevent the process/product dilemma from interfering in their efforts: the experience of the cast and the decision that the script would not be finalized. Because the cast members are experienced actors,

little energy was needed to bring their performance up to a level worthy of a paying audience. Also, the tasks involved in rehearsing, such as blocking, line memorization and character development, were much easier for the ensemble by this point in their rehearsal process. Due to the ensemble's prior input on the creation of the text and the physical life of the play, once they transitioned to rehearsal period from generation period the majority of the work necessary to produce a performance was finished. Only having thirteen rehearsal sessions, as opposed to the prior twenty-eight material generation sessions, was not a problem because all along they had been involved in the creation of the characters, plot and blocking.

The theatrical work ethic accompanies the transition from material generation to production rehearsal. Touchstone's shift to a theatrical work ethic was subtle yet important to their preparations for opening night. Mark and Jerry's agreement on April 15 to run the play two times each day for the remaining rehearsals reflected the "repetition replacing improvisation" of the theatrical work ethic (Lesch 99). The renewed energy in the room contributed to the feeling that opening night was at hand and Jerry began to make important decisions on his own, indicating the theatrical work ethic's tendency to "favor directorship" (Lesch 81). However, due to the ensemble's skills and their prior input on the script, the need for repetition and directorial control associated with the theatrical work ethic did not interfere with the continued development of the play.

The decision that the performances in May 2002 would not present *If At All* in its completed form also relieved a great deal of pressure that can be associated with the process/product dilemma and the theatrical work ethic. By deciding that they were not going to have a finished "product," the company was able to continue to develop the script while preparing for an audience. The rehearsals after their shift in "dialectic" clearly focused on

preparations for the upcoming performances, but since they were not compelled to make definitive decisions about the text, they were able to maintain the atmosphere of experimentation that defined their period of material generation. Indeed, the text did change dramatically in these last fifteen rehearsals, but the writing now focused on preparing the script for an audience, as opposed to generating new ideas. Because the major editing sessions, which began on April 12 (rehearsal 27), were during rehearsal, the ensemble was very active in shaping the play, which contributed to the collaborative atmosphere discussed below. Although Jerry still wrote a great deal, the “different dialectic” shifted the focus from generating new material to shaping the material at hand. The group was reluctant to make final decisions until this transition in the purpose of rehearsal.

It was only after Jerry and the ensemble began to self-consciously craft a performance for a paying audience that the text advanced from an outline to a script. The pressure of performance compelled them to make decisions. They clearly used the pressure of performance throughout their rehearsal process. One of the major advances in idea generation occurred after the ensemble presented their “showing” to Jerry on March 14 (rehearsal 18). Throughout the rehearsal process and especially on this day, Jerry was the audience for whom the ensemble performed. During daily improvisations, Jerry served as the audience necessary to give the ensemble feedback in order to proceed with idea and material generation. Even before Jerry was involved in the process, the ensemble used the pressure of performance to create materials for the May 2001 workshop. The repetition and directorial control associated with the theatrical work ethic would have been prohibitive during periods of material generation, but the pressure of performance did not impose behavior that would have limited material generation or development of the script. The impending audience simply forced them to make decisions, but the theatrical work ethic

would have forced them to act upon decisions already made. In the case of *If At All*, the process/product dilemma fostered a more collaborative atmosphere and produced a more complete text. By having an imminent opening night but not feeling bound to make definitive decisions about the text, these artists were able to operate without the stress that usually accompanies the process/product dilemma.

Directing

The ensemble looked to Jerry to guide their daily activities during rehearsal and, especially during their production rehearsals, he was compelled to make decisions that defined the performances. He was clearly the leader of the group, but to designate him as the primary artistic contributor or the artist from whom ideas originated would be problematic. *If At All* is a combination of the artistic input of all the artist involved. Jerry the director contributed to the process primarily by creating the environment in which the ensemble members were able to generate material which Jerry the writer shaped.

In the role of director, Jerry clearly performed the tasks of a *spanning leader*. The spanning leader might also be known as an *outside eye* and is responsible for presenting a group's work to others outside the group. When Jerry stated, "My task is to find a way to bring the audience [...] to an understanding of the writing that makes sense" on February 7 (rehearsal 5), he was articulating his role as outside eye and spanning leader. Considering the importance group communication theory places on this role,⁴² it appears that this group was wise to employ Jerry, or any single artist, in this manner. Obviously, the director would automatically perform the function of an outside eye especially considering that the director was not also a performer.

But the definition of a spanning leader indicates that there is more to the task than giving feedback to the performers from the perspective of an audience member. “Spanning leadership involves facilitating the activities needed to ridge and link the [... group’s] efforts with outside groups and individuals” in addition to “presentation management” and “developing and maintaining” the group’s “image” (Barry 416). It appears that a successful spanning leader and outside eye, to extend the definition of this role, does more than respond to the work he or she sees.

Literature concerning past ensembles and interviews with current ensemble artists agree that it is incumbent upon the director of an ensemble creation piece to foster creativity in the rehearsal room. By defining parameters around which the ensemble improvised scenes, Jerry created “situations conducive to learning”⁴³ (Keltner 386). He also created “a model of behavior” (Keltner 386) by showing respect for and confidence in the talents and skills of the ensemble artists. Almost any example of communication practices between members of the company reveals the support they showed each other. General goodwill was abundant in the rehearsal room as expressed by an easy camaraderie and plentiful joking and humor. A specific example occurred early in their rehearsal schedule when Jerry decided to attend Mary’s children’s theatre production instead of rehearsing.

The atmosphere during rehearsals for *If At All* was indeed marked by trust and openness and Jerry, as the director, was the main influence in the creation of this environment. Jennie expressed her confidence in the group on April 15 (rehearsal 20) when she explicitly stated that she was unclear about the group’s process, but was willing to “trust what Jerry and the ensemble” were doing. The ensemble chose Jerry because they knew of his dedication to ensemble creation. His willingness to collaborate was expressed early in the rehearsal process

(rehearsal 5) when he reminded the group numerous times that “everything is still open” and much later (rehearsal 20) when he stated that the framework they were developing should remain “flexible.”

The fact that Jerry did not single-handedly create the environment but welcomed the ensemble to implement changes indicates his effective leadership as a “pattern of responses to a group culture which [leaders] themselves cannot unilaterally create” (Samovar 75). Lesch’s prescription of a successful work environment – “an open, inclusive communication environment that affords a high level of interaction and participation in group work by all group members who desire to do so” (151) – clearly applies to the conditions that led to the creation of *If At All*.

Yet, ensemble artists and group communication theorists agree the environment should not be marked by complete agreement on all points among group members. The lengthy discussion which led to changing the line “moment of beauty” to “beauty of a moment” adheres to Barry’s assertion that a *social leader* must “foster an environment where individual differences are respected and constructively used” (417). By disagreeing on one of the messages of the play, Bill made the group consider more closely what the play was saying. Once Jerry suggested the line change, Bill and the others realized the alteration more fully expressed the message they all wanted to convey. In this line change the group did not “allow loyalty to the group to cloud their ability to make effective determinations” (Cathcart, “Barriers” 104).

The largest element in the creation of the environment was not any action, but rather the discussion that occurred in the rehearsal room. Through discussion, the group enacted their trusting, open and inclusive environment. Group communication theory and ensemble artists agree that discussion is an incredibly important element in the daily process of problem solving and idea/material creation. In particular, the discussion of the written material was the main

opportunity the ensemble had to engage in “the main function of group discussion” which is “simply to allow group members to compare their positions to those of others” (Hirokawa 136). However, as stated above, the ensemble artists I interviewed agree that there is a limit to the productivity of discussion. On my first day of observation, I witnessed the application of both these maxims. The topics of their discussion varied from the immediate necessities such as scheduling to digressions that clearly had nothing to do with their task at hand. But when Jennie suggested to Jerry an idea for a scene, he asked her to present the idea in the form of an improvisation instead of telling him about it. This was the second time on this day Jerry opted to work physically instead of discussing an idea.

It may seem that what was clearly a digression at these early rehearsals was indeed a waste of time. However, it is now apparent that digressions were a necessary contribution to the environment. The environment that allowed them to digress also allowed them to feel comfortable and relaxed in each other’s presence, which was necessary because some of these artists had never worked together before and the group needed to establish a safe environment.

An important element in discussion is listening. Hirokawa and Poole assert that “The substance that connects group members and allows group functioning is listening [because...] members feel as though they are valued and tend to contribute more frequently during interactions” (269). One of the responsibilities of the social leader of a group, discussed above, is “assuring that everyone gets his or her view heard [and] interpreting and paraphrasing other views” (Barry 416). Lisa’s recording material generation on a laptop computer maintained a record without which Jerry would not have been able to write the play.⁴⁴ But it also assured that the group members knew their ideas had been heard and were being utilized. Hirokawa and Poole state that “The productivity of a group can be enhanced if a group memory is utilized”

(103). They even articulate a method of maintaining a group record that Touchstone employed: “A group memory is when you record the work of the group on large sheets of paper and keep that work before the group at all times” (103).⁴⁵ This method of maintaining a group record was effective in insuring that everyone’s ideas were acknowledged. As a way of making the ensemble more proactive in the creation process, Jerry asked them to make the lists.

Writing

Jerry could easily have produced a completely different script reflecting only his personal goals for the play using an identical process of idea generation and writing. However, his intention was not to use the ensemble to craft his own play, but to write a play that reflected the desires and goals of the ensemble.

One can say that Jerry wrote all except two scenes of the play if one is to use a traditional definition of writing. On the afternoon of March 21 (rehearsal 20), Jennie expressed some apprehension that Jerry and Cora’s writing that evening would forestall the writing happening in rehearsal. The next day Jennie and the other ensemble members were very pleased when they saw that Jerry and Cora’s writing effort did not produce new material but crafted work the whole ensemble created. Her relief indicates that Jennie’s definition of writing implies the generation of material and not the crafting of specific wording or organization of ideas. Indeed, the genesis of the material that was to become the final script happened in rehearsal, but the majority of the actual *writing* of the script occurred in the evening after rehearsals.

Although it is clear that the text Jerry wrote is inclusive of the ensemble’s goals, the fact remains that the ensemble and Jerry were surprised by the amount of writing Jerry had to do on

his own. During the first group interview on May 3, Mark's statement that during the last week of rehearsal Jerry's being "willing to write all night was a luxury" indicates that this extent of writing was not expected of Jerry. And twice during rehearsals Mark indicated that he would prefer to have the ensemble members contribute more to the writing of the play.

The spring 2002 issue of *In Touch*, the newsletter of Touchstone Theatre, begins with the words, "Sometimes we are so busy." This predicament seems to pinpoint the main reason the ensemble did not actually write more of the text.⁴⁶ The ensemble members are very active in directing and teaching in their community. Due to these other commitments and the responsibilities of the ensemble's personal lives, rehearsal consistently started at least ten minutes late with a harried cast scrambling to get to rehearsal on time. Lunch breaks were often filled with running errands and making phone calls associated with the ensemble's other responsibilities within the company, which meant eating lunch during the discussions that often took place in the first portion of afternoon rehearsal. And at least one ensemble member was missing from numerous rehearsal hours. Although these absences were built into the rehearsal schedule, they did affect the ensemble creation aspect of the piece. If the "writing" happens in rehearsal, as Jennie asserted, when group members were absent, they did not have the opportunity to contribute to the generation and editing of the material that became the final product. The absent ensemble member had to accept the decisions made in their absence and proceed towards opening night. Considering that the group does not deem the script as it was at the end of rehearsals a "finished" text, it is clear that they needed all the scheduled rehearsals to generate the materials that were to be shaped into the script and to rehearse for the upcoming performances. So the writing had to take place outside of rehearsal. With the exception of Mary,

and to a lesser extent Mark, the ensemble was too busy outside of rehearsal to work on *If At All* during non-rehearsal hours.

It is impossible to deduce what the text would be like if Jerry had not been the principal writer. Certainly there are elements in the play that reflect Jerry's sole interpretation of the material, but this would be the case if any single member of the ensemble had had the final say on crafting the work. Just as it is necessary for one artist to have the final say on directorial decisions, group communication theory asserts that when one writer has the final say on what is set to paper the group produces higher quality work. According to Carl M. Moore in *Group Techniques for Idea Building*, "Although groups are usually more effective than individuals in generating ideas, individuals are often more effective than groups when it comes to developing ideas. That is because [...] analysis, and careful crafting of language – skills most necessary when developing ideas – are performed better by individuals" (101). And Richard Hackman in *Theory and Research on Small Groups* states, "There are other tasks, however, that are inimical to team work. One such task is creative writing" (248). Even though the company may regret that the ensemble did not contribute more to the writing, it appears that the methodology used by Jerry and the ensemble to produce *If At All* has proven to be an effective way of working.

Symbolic Convergence

The primary element that fostered an efficient use of this group's time together and assisted them in creating this play is the convergence of their shared fantasies, as defined by symbolic convergence theory, about *If At All* and theatre in general. The rhetorical vision that guided this process is the belief that ensemble creation often produces the most engaging theatre.

The strongest fantasy theme indicating this rhetorical vision is simply the group's process itself. The unspoken belief in the strength of ensemble theatre and the knowledge of the process used to create ensemble performances defined their activities and ultimately the product of their efforts. Daily the company eagerly participated in the process of improvising and shaping the play without having to spend valuable rehearsal time justifying their activities to each other. Their shared vision of the importance of ensemble creation served as a unifying element. These beliefs entail the particular manner of working described in this chapter.

Adelman and Frey's assertion that a symbolic community shares "a set of beliefs, customs, activities" clearly applies to this company (11).⁴⁷ Participating in this rhetorical vision gives these actor-creators the opportunity to engage in a symbolic community based on a process. Their belief in this methodology supplied them with a group identity that allowed them to be productive artists. By rejecting the idea that plays must be produced through a mainstream developmental process, they are able to perform, write and create what they want to create while making artistic partnerships within the ensemble that lend themselves to connections that are deeper than those between artists working in more common types of development. And the sanctioning agent for this rhetorical vision is the fact that they have been able to operate successfully in this manner for many years.

Although they were unified by a rhetorical vision, the company was not in accord about many dramaturgical aspects of this play until late in their process. Lesch asserts that "Idea development is focused when the group shares a clear vision about its goals" (4). This tenet may explain why Touchstone's process was more productive later in rehearsal when there was a clear theme and subject for the play. The group's goals at the beginning of the rehearsal process were not very clearly defined. They had a source poem, the desire to use dialogue for the structure and

wanted to explore family relationships, particularly issues of what parents bequeath their children. However effective these elements may be in guiding decisions about a play, ultimately they are not very specific. The main reason Jerry had to be the primary writer was that the company ran out of time. Had the company reached definitive decisions about the content of the play sooner, there could have been more time for writing during rehearsal, as the ensemble members were not available for writing outside of rehearsal. Once they shared a group fantasy about the play, their output accelerated. Particularly while editing, the group worked in remarkable accord, which produced quick effective results. Had they shared a vision of the play earlier in the process, the ensemble would most likely have had time to contribute more to the writing. However, although it may be assumed, there is no evidence to suggest that the script would be of a higher quality if the company had decided upon theme and subject earlier.

Their “voluntary commitment to their work” and “interest in the overall symbolic vision of the group goals and processes” (Olaniran 145) bore the greatest influence on the finished product. This ensemble was able to “transcend the individual consciousness and work in the emergent shared consciousness” (Lesch 154), which is essential to successful ensemble creation. Although the Touchstone ensemble and Jerry did not have a shared vision of the play until a late point in rehearsal, their shared consciousness of the process and the ethos that dictates the process fostered the production of an intelligent entertaining work for the theatre.

Analysis of the Script

Structure

It is interesting to compare the similarities between the structure of rehearsals and the structure of the play. Since Mark had to leave rehearsal early quite frequently, three women and one man were left to rehearse. Jerry often took this opportunity to improvise scenes with the three women, frequently plugging Bill into the scene as a father or grandfather figure. The “Thyme Heals All Wounds” scene is startlingly reminiscent of afternoons when the three women would improvise scenes in which Olivia was simultaneously mother and daughter while Bill floated on the periphery of the scene occasionally popping his head in to make a confrontational remark. “The Fugue” scene and the moment when the three women share a gesture that becomes almost a dance expressing the frustration of conflicting responsibilities are two instances when the absence of male figures gives the play a decidedly feminist leaning. Although making a statement about the lives of women was not a specifically stated goal of the company’s, one may easily interpret any play with a female protagonist coping with a distant husband, the responsibilities of raising a daughter and being an artist from a feminist perspective. The ensemble’s goal of having actors talk to each other was the largest contributing factor in the creation of the play’s structure. Very early in the process the members of the group articulated the desire to not only use dialogue, but to depart from their past work which relied heavily on monologue and collage for organizational patterns.⁴⁸ During the rehearsal process, Jerry in particular referred to this goal in an abbreviated manner by saying they wanted to create a piece that was or had sections that were a foray into “naturalism.”⁴⁹ The desire to use more dialogue could logically have led this group to a more traditional, perhaps linear, structure especially

considering that the ensemble never expressed disagreement with Jerry's use of the term "naturalism." But later in the rehearsal process the company arrived at the decision to configure the play as an "explosion of a moment." This decision led to a structure that easily accommodated dialogue, but offered more options than a conventionally structured play. What is interesting about structure in *If At All* is how it is a mix of their goals, skills and past work. Although they did not want to rely on monologue for the structure of the piece, the Scientist does begin and end the play with lengthy solo direct addresses to the audience. Jennie's skill in performing monologues and her past work on this character provided a strong framing device for the play. Also, before the Scientist speaks, the Cosmologists perform silent goofy renditions of physical science experiments. The ensemble's training and affection for physical work gave Jerry an interesting way to introduce the subject matter and begin the play.

The story of *If At All*, a family finds each other through the course of dealing with the death of a loved one, is not a new idea. What is unique is how the story is told. The structure of the play is difficult to classify; it is not simply stream of consciousness or associative memory and it would be problematic to consider it traditional. The play begins with an opening monologue, a scene and another shorter monologue. These sections form a prologue of sorts because they introduce the themes, conventions and structure of the play. The Scientist's first words are, "In my beginning is my end. In my end is my beginning" and she ends the prologue with, "We think of time progressing forward. [...] But what would it be to go *up* in time? Or *down*? [...] Time is not the same for you as for me. [...] Elastic *space-time* is where we live." In these lines she is informing the audience that time in *If At All* will be malleable and subjective. Without this hint, the audience could be confused about the progression of scenes and with it one may even wonder about the consistency with which the plot unfolds. After the prologue Olivia

hangs up the phone and wipes her face in frustration. This action is called the “Big Moment” and is repeated at the end of the play. This repetition, which is reinforced by identical lines before and after the gesture, would logically indicate that the scenes between the two gestures are taking place in Olivia’s mind, but the structure indicates otherwise. The lack of a single subjectivity, the inclusion of real-time scenes and logistical impossibilities preclude a clear cohesion to the scenes in this largest section of the play.

Most of the scenes between the Big Moments are presented from Olivia’s perspective; there are numerous flashbacks of her life, she daydreams horrific episodes where her writing takes over her life and others in which she connects with her mother and daughter by sharing lines and gestures, and she even delivers a monologue to the audience. However, there are also scenes in which she does not appear and could not have witnessed. Some of these scenes are clearly written as her interpretation of the events as told to her, such as the flashbacks of her parent’s life and even, perhaps, her husband in the office. But others clearly indicate a shift in subjectivity: her father and husband meet in the garden; her mother’s ghost and her daughter share an intimate discussion; and, particularly, her daughter tells the audience about her desire to peek at God. But the clearest shift in subjectivity is during the narration performed by the Scientist and Cosmologists. Throughout much of the play, including before and after the Big Moments, the Scientist and Cosmologists interject direct address that comments on the action. For example, after a scene where Joe does not take advantage of an opportunity to connect with his son-in-law, the Scientist states that due to the expanding of the universe “the future looks very lonely.” However, numerous times these narrators introduce a theory that the family characters subsequently act out, which gives the impression that the family exists as lab rats being manipulated by these physicists. During the opening monologue, the Scientist discusses

physical science principles that are embodied in the play. Also, the Scientist and a Cosmologist introduce a flashback sequence by saying “When you look deep into space...you look deep back in time.” Attempts to define a single subject position are not only fruitless, but occlude a greater appreciation of the play. The shifts of perspective make the play’s subject matter more accessible to the audience. When the Cosmologists and Scientist are commenting upon and seemingly controlling the action, they make the physical science theories applicable to the entire audience. These quasi-professors are explaining the way the universe operates, making it clear that all in the theatre are subject to nature’s laws. The play also offers the audience the opportunity to revert to a more accustomed mode of engagement by presenting scenes peopled by empathetic family characters. Even in these domestic scenes and psychologically expressive monologues, the shift of subjectivity creates a kaleidoscope of understanding by presenting the point of view of mother, father and daughter. This symbiotic mix of voices produces a multi-layered effect necessary in a play that combines the disparate subjects of the science of time and family relationships.

One may be tempted to analyze the structure as free form or associative because the most interesting moments in the play are when time does stop, restart and progress in unexpected ways. But the fact that the real-time scenes can be perceived as chronological coupled with an audience’s predilection to piece story elements together in a forward-moving action, the structure is best described as a chronological progression of a day punctuated by moments of fantasy and memory in which time and space warp. It is this juxtaposition in the temporal element that makes the play an interesting contribution to dramatic literature. The chronological progression gives the play a cohesion that allows even the most passive audience member to stay engaged, and the time-space shifts challenge the most experienced theatre patron. By mixing traditional and

nontraditional styles, this company has created an interesting homage to domestic realism that does not conform to traditional structural patterns. This clever, funny and emotionally engaging play is truly a unique expression of the artists that created it. This, as discussed in the concluding chapter, is the most an artist can expect from new play development.

Character

There are opposing thoughts about character development in ensemble creation: some feel the process produces richly developed characters and others feel it minimizes the importance of character in favor of action. However, it would be reductive to assert that any developmental process consistently produces the same types of characters or depth of character development. At Touchstone two factors were most influential in character development. The first was the source of character creation and the second was the goals of the process and product.

Critics have noted the lack of character development in the plays produced by specific ensemble companies. Matetzschk contends that the Open Theatre and the Living Theatre frequently produced characters that “represented groups or classes of people rather than unique characters facing unique situations” (41). And Pasolli states that in Megan Terry’s *Viet Rock*, written with the Open Theatre, character is “dispensable” (74). Sue-Ellen Case’s reference to *Split Britches*’ characters as being based on a “bipolar split” (9) and her comparison between commedia and the structure of this company (3) might lead one to assume that their characters are stereotypes as opposed to well-rounded individuals.

James Bunzli states that in the ensemble process “characters are created through interaction between performers in improvisations” (89). Limited scholarship suggests this method of character development creates less developed characters than mainstream

development, and one might logically assume that a play written “up on its feet,” as is often the case of an improvisation, would focus more on action than character. Pasolli’s discussion of ensemble acting in general gives one the impression that ensemble creation could clearly lead to less depth of character development. He feels that mainstream performance “depends on character” and that the ensemble method is “organized not according to the demands of character, but to those of incident and situation” (22).

These references to specific companies and the ensemble process in general are clearly applicable to Touchstone’s rehearsal process. The company spent very little time developing character as their focus was primarily on story and structure. During rehearsals they rarely had discussions about psychology of the characters, but they often talked at length about theme and structure of the shaping play. Character seemed to be taken for granted; they operated as if the personalities populating the play were readily available and required little energy to create. The following specific references to the rehearsal journal support this assertion. Scenes, not characters, were listed on the Post-its for the dot exercise on February 22 (rehearsal 10). On March 14 (rehearsal 18) when Jerry asked the ensemble members to “free-write” a story using the characters they already had at their disposal, the attending ensemble members practically ignored his instructions opting to create a structure for the play as opposed to a story. For rehearsal 20 Jerry stated that they would create a play based on scenes from past rehearsals, as opposed to creating material to suit the characters they had developed at this point. And on April 17 (rehearsal 30), for the editing that took place by taping the script on the floor, character was ignored. They agreed to highlight parts of the forming script that they enjoyed performing, that were theatrically interesting, and that were vital to the story.

Another feature of Touchstone's rehearsal process that emphasized story over character is the fact that lines and actions that were developed during improvisations did not abide in one character. If lines developed by or for one character served the story better when assigned to another character, the assignation was changed. One of the earliest improvisations Cora presented was her rendition of an office worker who operated as an automaton and spoke in a courteously cold manner. In the final performance it was the Travel Agent, played by Mary, who spoke in this manner and Cliff, played by Mark, who adopted the physical behavior. Also, Mark created his "angel" monologue while improvising his Cosmologist character and in performance the lines were spoken by his father character.

Touchstone clearly employed a process that has frequently produced shallowly developed characters. However, companies utilizing ensemble development methods have created richly defined individuals to populate their plays and the characters in *If At All* are thoroughly developed despite Touchstone's similarities to the processes of the above companies.

In his step-by-step explanation of the procedure Joint Stock used to create their plays, Rob Ritchie includes "interviews with character models" as one of the steps of the company's process (18). He asserts that "The Joint Stock process allow[ed]...the actors [to] bring to the rehearsal text a rich supply of observations that enable[ed] the characters to be more densely realized" (31). The feature of utilizing "observations" gathered during interviews with individuals who will serve as character inspiration is featured in Tectonic Theatre Company's *The Laramie Project*. This company of actor-creators interviewed numerous individuals and produced a play in which they quoted and physically impersonated the interviewees. A character in this play expresses the hope that the group of actor-creators will "get it right," meaning that he hoped they would be accurate in their account of their interactions with these people (Kaufmann

87). In an interview on January 13, 2004, Jerry expressed the notion that when producing a play based on interviews one has an ethical “responsibility to get it right” and that one of the fringe benefits of this obligation is that you end up with very well developed characters. Obviously, as exemplified by Anna Deavere-Smith, one does not have to work in an ensemble to create characters based on interviews. However, unlike in ensemble creation, it is rare in mainstream new play development for the actor to be involved in the creation of the text. When an ensemble generates a text through interview, an actor-creator is likely to have conducted or witnessed the interview and this feature allows for a richer understanding of the source.

Not all of Joint Stock’s characters were created through interview. Almost reluctantly, Ritchie admits that the material for a play occasionally came from within the group: “In some cases, as in *Cloud Nine*, the experience is the actors’ own personal lives” (31). One can arguably say that the characters in *Cloud Nine* are as fully developed as any in the Joint Stock canon, so it appears that interview alone was not Joint Stock’s secret weapon for creating fully developed characters and is not the essential step in ensemble creation that facilitates the creation of fully developed characters. If one were to create a character replicating or based on another person, interview would be one of the best ways to gain the insights necessary to write and/or portray that person. One would not need to take this step if the character source were oneself. One way to view both these approaches to character development is that they are both based on preexisting material. Perhaps in an ensemble environment, if the goal is fully developed characters, using preexisting sources is wise because they would give the ensemble a clear base from which to work.

Character in *If At All* was based on the source poem and performance and improvisation work that occurred before and during the rehearsal period. However, the lives and personalities

of the actor-creators were an equally strong influence and facilitated character development by providing a solid referent for the ensemble. It is interesting to realize the similarities between the characters in *If At All* and the actors playing each part. Mark is the artistic director of Touchstone and was the most frequently absent during rehearsals, so it is logical that his character is the distant father of the family unit. Mary is the newest member of the ensemble and the youngest in age and she plays the daughter. Bill is the founder of Touchstone, the oldest member of the ensemble and has a somewhat antagonistic personality and he plays the crotchety grandfather. Cora plays the mother of one daughter who is caught between familial responsibilities and the desire to be a creative individual. Negotiating the demands of family and being an artist are very familiar to the entire company as this is one of the themes of *If At All*. The similarities between Cora and her character are slightly more direct because Cora herself is the mother of one daughter. The similarities between Jennie and the grandmother character are less direct. The grandmother is a very strong matriarch and of the three women in the ensemble, Jennie was the most assertive during the rehearsal process; she was the most vocal about her desires and requests and when Jerry and Mark were absent from rehearsal Jennie was often the one to guide the daily activities. The ease with which the characters developed could be explained in part by the fact that since so many of the characters were based on the actor's own characteristics and life circumstances, the company was able to understand so much about the characters without the need for lengthy discussion or improvisation. The ensemble members have known each other for quite a long time; even Mary, in her first endeavor as a member of the ensemble, has worked with Touchstone for years. This familiarity gave the actor-creators a strong referent that facilitated quick and thorough understanding of character.

Both of Jennie's characters provide further evidence of this perspective of character development in *If At All*. As discussed in the rehearsal journal, Jennie performed her Scientist character in a manner very similar to a character she previously portrayed in a solo work. During the rehearsal process for *If At All*, the Scientist took on a life separate from the character upon which it was based. However, from one of the earliest rehearsals, the ensemble had in the Scientist a recognizable solid character. It may be no coincidence that this character was the first to develop and ended up performing the opening and closing lines of the show. Jennie's family character was not so easily recognizable to the ensemble. She stated that her family character, Louisa, was loosely based on one of her relatives. Partly because she used a referent from outside the ensemble that most of the members of the group did not know, this character was one of the last to be fully developed.

Another example of preexisting material made a major contribution to *If At All*. The couple Mark and Cora portrayed in the "Boar and Boarhound" scene developed for the May Workshop provided the family unit whose story the play tells. Although these characters were not as complete as the Scientist, the fact that they had a life before rehearsal expedited their development. The Scientist and the "Boar and Boarhound" couple served as the genesis of all characters in the play: the Cosmologists were interpretations of the Scientist and the family grew out of the couple, which supports the idea that using preexisting material is effective for ensembles creating fully developed characters.

Matetzschk states that the "goal of most modern day new play dramaturgy" is to "help playwrights discover and develop uniqueness of the voice of their characters" and, quoted above, she cites originality and "unique situations" as another mark of well-defined characters (42). Since many of the lines in *If At All* came from the ensemble members during improvisations, the

process at Touchstone offered a great deal of “uniqueness of voice.” The personalities and idiosyncrasies of the actors provided unique lines. In the final product, characters often spoke lines created for another character, but this fact does not diminish their unique qualities. And the “unique situations” that Matetzschk calls for are reflected in the fact that the action of the play is driven by character decision. Olivia’s crisis is compounded by her daughter’s decision not to attend Joe’s funeral. Cliff’s decision to leave work to be with his wife not only changes his character’s perspective on life, but it provides the conclusion of the play. And the central thematic issue of the play, balancing family responsibilities with work and art, is provided by Olivia’s desire to be a novelist.

Another factor in ensemble creation that may have contributed to the development of rich characters is the fact that the actor-creators spent a great deal of time with these characters. As discussed in chapter 2, ensembles regularly take years to develop a play. This length of time is likely to contribute greatly to the development of rich characters. One may argue that this length of time produces the performance of a well-defined character, but if the source is the text of a performance such as an improvisation, the rich performance will logically produce rich text.

What is interesting about the characters in *If At All*, especially the family characters, is how they are fully developed despite the fact that they are revealed in extremely short scenes. The longest scene in the play is three pages and the average length is one page. However, the dialogue and action in these short scenes express completely developed unique individuals. The company was able to create such concise expressive scenes because the generative work fully explored the necessary exposition. Given the wealth of information they gathered about the characters during improvisations, they were able to edit dialogue and retain the elements essential to revealing these complex characters. Another unique feature of the play is how the

characters come across as fully developed despite the lack of empathy inherent in the structure of the play. Actors playing multiple roles is not at all uncommon in ensemble created pieces. Rob Ritchie says this type of casting is a “logical outcome of the whole approach” Joint Stock used to create their plays (18). Although empathy and character development are not synonymous, it is logical that one would be more likely to have empathy for a character with a complete identity. Pasolli argues that when actors put character “on and off” it minimizes the connection between audience and character (74). If his assertion is correct,⁵⁰ when an actor plays more than one role the audience’s ability to identify with a character is likely to diminish. *If At All* was written for five actors to play twelve to thirteen roles. This performance requirement, coupled with the short scenes, gives little stage time to each character and fleeting opportunities for audiences to make strong emotional connections with them.

Two characters in *If At All* utilize the multiple role device for greater depth of development. Unlike the mother, father and grandfather, the Travel Agent and Scientist complement the daughter and grandmother characters. Mary played Jules, the daughter, Travel Agent and Bird. Bill frequently expressed the concern that the role distribution would appear unbalanced because Mary had four characters, including her Cosmologist, and everyone else had only two. Jerry admitted that in an ideal production of *If At All* other actors would play the Cosmologist roles, which are primarily a logistical necessity because they provide transitions. He then obliquely referred to the parallels between the Travel Agent and Jules. At one point in the play it becomes more apparent that the novel Olivia is writing is being spoken by the Travel Agent. When asked about the identity of the Travel Agent, audience members said they thought she was some kind of celestial receptionist to God. The parallels between Jules and the Travel Agent become apparent when the plot reveals that Jules is going to pursue a spiritual path as

opposed to a traditional life of marriage and children. The Bird character is another embellishment on the wisdom that abides in the Travel Agent and ultimately Jules. When the grandfather, Joe, is in his garden distancing himself from his family, the Bird admonishes, “You just don’t get it!” Jules is presented in the play at many ages, while the Travel Agent is a consistent enlightened presence. When Jules appears in the final scene as a content spiritual being she has only one line, “All will be well.” With this one line Jules’s portrait is complete because through the entire play the audience has seen in the Travel Agent what Jules is to become.⁵¹

There is also a strong connection between Louisa, the grandmother, and the Scientist. Both are all knowing; the Scientist functions as a professor with all the answers and both daughter and granddaughter continually ask Louisa how she knows so much. During the opening monologue of the play, Jennie establishes the wisdom that is associated with both her roles, so when Louisa does make an appearance the audience is predisposed to believe that she will be the purveyor of wisdom for both her female descendants.

There is not, however, a direct connection between the Cosmologists and the family characters. The goofy Cosmologists are not only functional as transitional devices, but they comment upon the action with carefully chosen fragments from the Eliot poem and Einstein and Hawking’s theories. These transitional observations, as well as the Scientist’s narration, frame and distance the family characters and their story from the audience. This Brechtian device minimizes, but does not eliminate, the audience’s direct identification with the family’s, in particular Olivia’s, story and places focus on the themes and literature upon which the play is based. The audience is able to identify with the characters because they are so well developed, but the structure prevents the play from relying on empathy to engage the spectators. The

strength of the play is the careful combination of elements, which results in unique characters, and an interesting investigation of theme and source material, all of which are clearly a result of this company's process.

It is apparent that the ensemble process does not dictate the depth of character development. At Touchstone the initial goal of the work was the largest factor in how the characters would develop. The ensemble's desire to employ dialogue as opposed to monologue offered greater potential for revealing multiple dimensions in character. Matetzschk supports the notion that purpose or goal of the piece is a strong factor in character. She attributes the Open Theatre's and the Living Theatre's lack of character development to the fact that "predominantly, these groups centered their work around contemporary social conflicts and situations" (41). If Touchstone had desired to create a piece that focused on a social issue, it would have been a logical choice to create characters with less depth in order to focus on the topic. However, the fact that they wanted to venture into new ground by relying on dialogue, which requires more direct communication between characters, for the structure of the piece gave them the opportunity to develop these rich characters.

Continued Development of *If At All*

Touchstone was invited to the 2003 Ko Festival of Performance in Amherst, Massachusetts. Due to financial limitations, they were unable to take the intended piece and decided to use this opportunity to continue developing *If At All*. Jerry and the ensemble addressed numerous issues discussed in this chapter during their process at Ko, which resulted in changes to the script.

In preparation for the performance in Amherst, the group met to watch and discuss the video from the May 2003 performance in Bethlehem. Then the ensemble rehearsed on their own with Jerry coming in only once to assess the work they had done. Once in Amherst the entire group had a full week of rehearsal and then presented *If At All* for six performances with post-show discussions. Between each performance the company rehearsed and made alterations to the piece. Jerry stated that the rehearsal time at Amherst was much more productive than in Bethlehem because there were “way less distractions.”

Jerry refers to this latest draft of the play as a “refinement” of the script presented in May 2002. The most obvious change is that Olivia’s subjectivity is strengthened; she is now the “center of the insanities” (13 Jan. 2004). Cora now plays Olivia only, unlike before when she was also a Cosmologist. The play no longer begins with the Scientist; instead the opening scene is a tableau of the family with strings connecting each member to Olivia. However, most scenes are intact, so there are still shifts in subjectivity. Also, the Scientist and Cosmologists still apply physical science properties to the family’s activities, which allows the audience to easily apply the actions on stage to their own lives.

Jerry states that women generally reacted more emotionally, sometimes crying, than men, who expressed more of an appreciation for the use of scientific properties in the structure of the piece. He feels that the increased empathy for Olivia’s plight was in part due to the fact that their audiences were filled with women who are also balancing artistic goals with family duties, but also because making the play more clearly about Olivia gave the audience more “to hold on to” (13 Jan. 2004).

Coda

As I observed the Touchstone ensemble and Jerry work, I continually wondered why this process was not taught more frequently in undergraduate theatre programs. One of the reasons is certainly due to the practicalities of the method. Kubicki states that ensemble theatre is the “most challenging and difficult form of theatre” (9). And the ensemble artists I interviewed consistently expressed the notion that, although they strongly felt the results were well worth the effort, ensemble creation is difficult due to its egalitarian nature. Group consensus takes more time and effort, but even small group communication theorists state that the results are worth the effort. “Collaboration that leads to consensus is ideal, but the process is time consuming, a factor that causes many groups to opt for a quicker fix” (Cathcart, “Conflict” 181). If theatre artists have the time and resources to employ ensemble creation methods, the process offers an alternative to traditional new play development and can lead to unique works for the stage.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

A comparison of the *Book of Mercy* and *If At All* case studies challenges some commonly held beliefs about new play development. The Touchstone Theatre artists' efforts support the view that full production is the ideal type of development, yet the Chicago Dramatists study calls the same idea to question. Both groups' communication practices contradict the belief that a playwright should not be allowed to talk to actors during rehearsal. An axiom for artists working in new play development is that the playwright and director should have a mutual understanding of the play. However, the research indicates that a shared perspective on process is at least as important, if not more so, as a shared perspective on the material. This chapter addresses these beliefs in an analysis of the salient issues revealed by the two case studies. The first section contains two significant conclusions. When material generation and production rehearsal take place concurrently the script and production are likely to benefit. Also, the application of the theatrical work ethic is one of the most important aspects of new play development. The discussion of symbolic convergence in the second section suggests that mutual realities about process may be more important than those about material. The third section analyzes styles of directing leadership during different phases of development. One important conclusion of the research is that applying practices common to ensemble development can benefit mainstream development. While asserting that environment is more influential than process, the fourth section offers the O'Neill Playwrights Conference as an example of a practical combination of mainstream and ensemble development.

The Process/product Dilemma and the Theatrical work Ethic

One concept researchers of new play development have to negotiate is the process/product dilemma. Chapter 1 defines the process/product dilemma as the seemingly contradictory idea that material generation and production rehearsal often complement each other, yet it is useful to have phases of rehearsal dedicated solely to one or the other. The two case studies and literature in the field appear to support the assertion that the key to reconciling this dichotomy lies not only in process or scheduling, but also in atmosphere and particularly in the application of the theatrical work ethic

As discussed in previous chapters, during development there is usually an implicit or explicit transition between the periods of material generation and production rehearsal. The primary difference between the two phases of development is the theatrical work ethic. Artists engaged in material generation will usually participate in more open collaboration, which stands in opposition to the increased repetition and elevated level of directorial control that often characterize production rehearsal. In her case study, Matetzschk discovered a point where “The concerns of the group shifted away from broad choices [...] to the much more specific concerns of exact word choice and the impact of those choices in production” (188). And Lesch discovered a similar time when “repetition replaced improvisation” in her case study (99). Matetzschk adds that “when new play dramaturgy takes place too quickly, the collaborators risk the loss of their ability to judge the effectiveness of their choices. This is often the case when script development and production rehearsal take place simultaneously” (276). And the case study in Lesch’s dissertation found the process/product dilemma an obstacle to achieving their ensemble-creation goals. “The need to craft a performance piece that communicated well to the

audience impinged on the exploratory process early on” (56). These two conclusions give the impression that periods of material generation and production rehearsal must be mutually exclusive.

However, Lesch later surmises that in order to contend with the process/product dilemma successfully one must “recognize it is a false dichotomy” (155). What Matetzschk warns against is hasty development, but the assumption that hasty development is the product of combining material generation and production rehearsal is incorrect. The conclusion she draws, based on interviews with artists working in the field, is that a schedule that allows for periods of inactivity is more desirable than one continuous work schedule (56). However, each period of rehearsal does not need to be defined solely by material generation or production rehearsal and breaks do not need to indicate transitions between the two. The tasks necessary to create a text and create a performance can complement each other. The main reason the process/product dilemma was in fact a dilemma for those in Lesch’s case study was the imposition of the theatrical work ethic, which “provided justification for unpleasant tasks, like repetition and hard work [and] justified pushing forward by doing things instead of talking about them” (81).

One of the biggest differences between the *If At All* and *Book of Mercy* case studies is that although the artists at Touchstone engaged primarily in material generation, they utilized both phases of development while the artists at Chicago Dramatists engaged almost exclusively in production rehearsal.

The artists at Touchstone clearly realized that the process/product dilemma is a false dichotomy. In fact, they relied on production rehearsal to finalize the script. The deadline of the impending performance forced the group to make final decisions necessary to crafting a play. When the group had to make decisions about what an audience would see, the writing evolved

from an outline to a script. Only 14 of the 41 rehearsals were spent in an articulated period of production rehearsal; clearly the focus of the schedule was crafting the play. However, the production did not suffer due to the emphasis on “writing.” By allowing for high levels of actor input, the ensemble process allows artists to engage in material generation while preparing for a performance. In fact, one might say that in the ensemble process, material generation is production rehearsal. For Jerry and the ensemble, process and product existed in a truly symbiotic relationship because rehearsal helped them write and material generation helped them rehearse.

Part of the reason Touchstone Theatre did not have a problem with the process/product dilemma is they decided that development could continue during their entire process. By deciding that they were not going to finish a “product” during material generation, the company was able to continue to develop the script while preparing for an audience. However, their process was not all material generation; there was a clear period of production rehearsal beginning when Jerry announced, “from today on there is a different dialectic” on April 17.

During material generation Jerry did not direct but guided activities in order to help the ensemble improvise. But once the group shifted to production rehearsal, he took the traditional role of director by having the ensemble run the play numerous times and giving notes afterwards. Due to the ensemble’s skills and their prior input on the script, the need for repetition and directorial control associated with the theatrical work ethic did not interfere with the continued development of the play. A careful application of the theatrical work ethic enabled the two phases of rehearsal to work symbiotically. By valuing the ensemble’s continuing input on the script and having confidence in their performance skills, Jerry was able to avoid much of the directorial control associated with the theatrical work ethic. The theatrical work ethic is a mode

of behavior compelled by the pressure of performing for an audience. The ensemble needed the pressure of performance to make final decisions, yet they did not allow the behavior typically associated with the theatrical work ethic to interfere with development.

One may easily understand why the artists in the Chicago Dramatists case study engaged predominantly in production rehearsal. Although they started with a completed script and Touchstone Theatre started with only source material and a handful of improvisations, the Chicago Dramatists artists had half the rehearsal hours afforded to Touchstone Theatre. Also, *Book of Mercy* underwent more rewrites than expected. The pressure of accommodating these rewrites while preparing for audiences kept the artists on task, which meant focusing on production rehearsal. However, one may wonder how the application of practices typical to ensemble development, as exemplified by Touchstone Theatre, would have benefited the script's development.

One of the few examples of material generation during production rehearsal for *Book of Mercy* occurred on September 17 (rehearsal 17). When Suzi improvised Stella's revelation scene for playwright, director and dramaturg, all four were excited at the results and this activity influenced the final script. Even after Carson brought in the final production version of the monologue, the main task for preparing this pivotal moment in the play was for Suzi to decide to whom she would deliver each line, which is understandable considering that she performed the improvisation without the benefit of other actors' presence.

The discussion group of the Chicago Dramatists case study engaged in material generation; their conversations generated the most influential changes to the text and the atmosphere was void of the theatrical work ethic. Significantly, however, the discussion group also spent considerable time analyzing production rehearsals as opposed to developing the script.

Hence even these discussions proved that material generation and production rehearsal complement each other. In the final version of the play Carson has retained many of the changes the discussion group decided upon.

The main reason Jerry had to write so much of *If At All* was that there was no writing time during rehearsal. Similarly, the unfavorable review of *Book of Mercy* as well as the incredible improvement with each of the final run-throughs indicates there was not enough rehearsal time for the actors of that show either -- or at least that the schedule did not afford the actors the necessary steps along the way to craft effective performances. Since the artists in both *If At All* and *Book of Mercy* case studies ran out of time, it is difficult to draw conclusions about activities they did not undertake. But the research does reveal important findings. One of the most notable conclusions drawn from these two case studies as well as those conducted by Matetzschk and Lesch, is that one of the most influential factor in new play development is the theatrical work ethic.

Many artists feel that the remedy to the problems associated with new play development in this country is full production. But, considering that the artists in the Chicago Dramatists case study were surprised at how much the play changed, one may wonder if a full production, along with the obligatory theatrical work ethic, was best for this play at this time. As stated above, Carson anticipated “fine tuning” the play as opposed to making the “major rewrites” that occurred during rehearsal (3 Mar. 2003) and Barbara the stage manager states that there were “considerably more script changes” than in her past work with Chicago Dramatists (29 Mar. 2003). Rosie agrees by saying that she is “surprised” at how much the play has changed (2 Oct. 2002). Perhaps artists producing original scripts need a process that accommodates the possibility of big changes or a way to test scripts to see that they are ready for production.

Certainly more rehearsal time would solve the problem, but organizations do not always have the resources for more man hours. Perhaps a workshop process void of the theatrical work ethic would have been more beneficial to *Book of Mercy* than a full production. However, not all plays have the opportunity to receive a workshop before they are presented in a full production.

One may reasonably assume that if the rehearsal group of Chicago Dramatists had engaged in additional material generation efforts, the script would have benefited as Stella's revelation monologue benefited. One may argue that, just as Suzi needed less time rehearsing these pages because she contributed to the rewrite, other efforts might also have served simultaneously as material generation and production rehearsal. Perhaps engaging in material generation with the actors would have "created time" by shortening the length of time necessary for production rehearsal. If artists allow for periods of material generation, the discovery period of production rehearsal is shortened. Therefore if the same cast is involved in both material generation and production rehearsal, you do not add substantial amounts of time to the rehearsal period.

Perhaps a period at the beginning of rehearsal that utilizes the techniques of material generation -- in other words, a period of open communication between all artists and avoidance of the theatrical work ethic -- would be beneficial. Ensemble creation engages in this practice out of necessity; the actors must be involved in open communication during material generation because they almost always provide material for the text. Touchstone Theatre did have what most American theatre practitioners would consider a lavish number of rehearsal hours, but if the group had started with a more solidified conception of the end product, as is certainly the case in mainstream development, they would not have needed so much time. Jerry and the ensemble proved that groups can accomplish production rehearsal while engaging in material generation.

Even a short time during which the playwright is allowed to participate in open exchange with the actors can facilitate production rehearsal.

Symbolic Convergence

These case studies suggest that a symbolic convergence about process is more important than one about material. Although theatre practitioners do not discuss symbolic convergence specifically, they recommend a shared perspective on material. One of the most frequently occurring bits of advice for playwrights “is to make sure the other artists becoming involved have read the same play you’ve written.” Buzz McLaughlin continues to warn, “Directors may say they love your play, but the possibility exists that what they’re really excited about is what they hope they’ll be able to turn your play into” (241).⁵² And Richard Nelson explains that the foundation of the director-playwright relationship is the playwright’s “feeling confident that the director does understand the play” (103). Tanya Palmer asserts that “clear ground rules” are needed during new play development. Primary among them is that the play belongs to the playwright (Oct. 30, 2002). But these guiding factors do not directly offer guidance about environment or process.

As discussed in the case study chapters, Touchstone Theatre and the discussion group of Chicago Dramatists had generally high levels of symbolic convergence concerning process, and the rehearsal group of Chicago Dramatists had low levels. On the other hand, Touchstone Theatre had an understandably low level of symbolic convergence concerning the material they were creating and Chicago Dramatists had a high level concerning *Book of Mercy*. Considering that Touchstone Theatre was creating a play, it would be difficult for the actor-creators to share a

reality about something that did not exist. At Chicago Dramatists, Carson brought a production-ready play to the group's first meeting and the participants assumed the fantasy chain that the play was successfully written.

The outcome of both groups' efforts is due to the symbolic convergence created by their communication practices. Although the individual realities concerning the environment and process of rehearsal conflicted, all artists shared the fantasy chain that Carson alone had purview over the text. This factor is the key element to the play not being "developed to death." By allowing Carson to make changes or keep the text unaltered, the group gave her the autonomy needed for the script to remain her invention. Although the artists at Chicago Dramatists were in accord on the material, the conflicts in their shared realities concerning process created problems.

Although Carson did not directly assert that the script did not develop to the extent it could have if Ann had allowed more communication between actors and playwright, it is clear that input from the company would have influenced rewrites because she incorporated even the bits of feedback the actors gave her. The fantasy chains supplied by statements made by Carson and Russ conflicted with Ann's conduct, which presented the actors a confused perspective about the reality of the rehearsal environment and process. The expression of Carson's wishes led the actors to be disappointed by Ann's actions creating an atmosphere marked by tension and limited communication. Carson herself expresses regret about the communication and atmosphere which restricted the feedback she wished to receive. Both Ann and Carson are justified in their perceptions of the process: Ann was allotted a finite number of hours to mount a full production and she felt this amount of time was not enough to include workshopping periods; Carson was having one of her plays produced by an organization that is dedicated to play as well as

playwright development, which one may assume would include the playwright as part of the rehearsal group. But the lack of rhetorical vision about each other's function in the process of new play development led to tension and the potential lack of the script developing to its full potential.

Touchstone Theatre had a strong symbolic convergence about their process. The group's strong history of working in the ensemble method gave them fantasy chains concerning process that created their rhetorical vision about the world of theatre in general. Without this strong shared reality about methodology, this group would have needed considerably more time to create this play. Their belief that the play should be written by the entire ensemble differs from the widely-held view that the optimal way to work is to appoint only one playwright. Nonetheless, even this belief contributed to the highly collaborative process due to Jerry's efforts to include the ensemble in editing.

The Touchstone group certainly did not start the process with a strong shared reality about the play and arguably never developed one. The frequent discussions about the play reflect the desire to gain a shared perspective as opposed to the existence of a common reality. The lack of a shared perspective in the beginning had an arguably adverse effect on their process. If the group had started the process with clearer goals or more solidified text they likely would have been able to utilize their time more effectively. As the script became more solidified, the group's output did, in fact, accelerate.

The above observations on the symbolic convergence of material and process suggest that shared realities about environment and process are more important than those concerning material during new play development. To make comparisons about the quality of the two case study plays would be problematic not only due to the subjectivity of taste, but also because the

two plays are quite different. However, as argued below, the more important element in new play development is the atmosphere in which the work evolves. By sharing such a strong symbolic convergence about process, the artists at Touchstone Theatre were able to focus their efforts on the material. Conflicting realities about a play, especially between playwright and director, can clearly be detrimental during new play production and development. But part of the purpose of development is to discover the strengths and weaknesses of a play. Therefore, perspective on a play is bound to change during development. If the group's realities about process converge from the beginning their work is likely to be more productive.

Directing

As discussed in chapter 1, small group communication theory asserts that three types of leaders are necessary for successful goal completion in small groups: facilitator-trainer, spanning leader and social leader. When a group is engaging in a theatrical production or development, the director usually assumes all three roles. The research for this study supports the assertion that facilitation-training is required during material generation, spanning is most effective during production rehearsal, and social leadership is vital during all phases of development.

Chapter 1 defines a facilitator-trainer as a leader who “creates situations conducive to learning; establishes a model of behavior; provides new values in process; facilitates the flow of information; participates as an expert; protects participants from unnecessary stress and attack” (Keltner 386). These tasks are arguably those most directors undertake regardless of a play's developmental status. The fact that the definition does not indicate the director's position of dominance or task of interpretation makes the role appropriate for material generation. In *The*

Playwright's Handbook, Pike and Dunn assert that “an intelligent director who works more as a ‘conductor’ than a director can make all the difference in creating a flexible atmosphere for the workshop” (149). Particularly during material generation, directors must relinquish their position of control largely because their dominance over the process is traditionally based on their interpretation of the play. According to Michele Volansky, former president of the Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas, when approaching a new play directors need to bear in mind that “its not about them.” The needs of the script are more important than making a directorial statement, so they must strive for a “clear production” (13 Nov. 2002). Although she refers to production, the needs of the script are clearly most important during material generation. At these times the director needs to respond to the material. Sue-Ellen Case has called the performances *Split Britches* produced “more a response than an intention” (10). She feels that Weaver, Shaw and Margolin produced works that are combinations of their goals and desires for a piece and the materials available including, but not limited to, props and talent. This utilization of the materials at hand is similar to Robert Lepage’s process. James Bunzli states that in Lepage’s innovative REPERE method of creating original work, the “RE” stands for “reference” or “landmark” which is the point of departure for the creation of the piece and includes the artists involved in the project (89). Referring to the creation of a Wooster Group piece, “Norman Frisch suggests, ‘Rehearsals are about the play that Liz [LeCompte] is trying to see in front of her.’ The dramaturg’s statement is especially interesting in that its emphasis is not on private vision but on the director’s seeing what is ‘in front of her’” (Cole, *Directors* 99).

Jerry functioned as a facilitator and responded to the group’s work. If only by virtue of his writing efforts, he responded to the work the ensemble created. His primary function during their period of material generation was to “create situations” that facilitated the ensemble’s

improvisations. He also made considerable efforts to get feedback from the ensemble, both in terms of discussion and group activities.

Ann's facilitation is less clear than Jerry's partly due to the fact that she started with a completed script. Ann's approach during rehearsal did not reflect the belief that the play was going to change greatly, therefore she facilitated Carson's writing process by supplying her with a full production that was arguably as "clear" as possible. Providing a playwright with a full production is certainly creating a situation "conducive to learning" about the play, which is one of the tasks of a facilitator-trainer. But, as previously stated, the discussion group's conversations allowed Carson to have more direct input, which facilitated most of the changes in the text.

Functioning as a facilitator or approaching a new play from a position of response as opposed to applying an intention is clearly an approach necessary in ensemble creation. It would be futile to apply intentions upon material that does not exist. But this methodology would also be beneficial in mainstream development. If the developmental process truly allows the play to develop as the playwright feels appropriate, the process should accommodate changes in the text.

Lesch discovered two types of directing in her ensemble-creation case study: a "typical pattern" and one that "facilitated rather than directed" (132). She concludes that the more effective "leadership style is [...] to facilitate, not direct" (151). However, she also states that "nearly every group member" involved in her case study "expressed the opinion that there must be one person – in this case the director – who decides what works in the play, regardless of how much input others have" (68). The members of her study were expressing the desire for a spanning leader.

The role of the spanning leader is most commonly associated with the director's responsibilities. Primary among the spanning leader's tasks is "presentation management" (Barry

416). During material generation the focus is on the text and during production rehearsal the focus is on the audience's anticipated perception of the production. While mounting a theatrical production, engaging spanning leadership involves utilizing the theatrical work ethic.

In the *Book of Mercy* case study, Ann engaged almost entirely in spanning leadership during rehearsal, as is arguably the case for most mainstream full productions. The outcome of this group's efforts is primarily due to this fact. Although spanning leadership can be overused, even ensemble artists express the desire for it. The theatrical work ethic is minimized in ensemble creation; the actor-creators' input into the creation of the text minimizes the need or desire for the repetition and directorial control/interpretation associated with mainstream production rehearsal. However, all the ensemble artists I interviewed articulated the need for a single person to have the final say. Eric Bass of Sandglass Theatre succinctly expressed this sentiment: "creation by ensemble, direction by director" (18 Feb. 2003). Michael Fields of Dell'Arte uses the term *lead artist*, which begins to address the unique needs of an ensemble director, but still indicates that there is someone to say "yes or no" (29 Oct. 2002). Lastly, in *The Joint Stock Book: The Making of a Theatre Collective*, Rob Ritchie states, "It is hard to imagine a collective directorship working in practice, easy to see how compromising a director's control [sic] can dilute the results" (22).

Since the ensemble was also responsible for creating the material that Jerry edited and the material was created physically, staging the play was almost a technicality. However, after the group transitioned to production rehearsal, Jerry clearly assumed the responsibilities of a spanning leader. As stated above, he did not hesitate to make final decisions without consulting the ensemble and he gave notes after run-throughs. Furthermore, the ensemble received his direction appreciatively. One may argue that if the group had a lead artist sooner they would

have been able to make definitive decisions in a timelier manner therefore enabling them to produce what they would have considered a more complete script.

The social leader and the facilitator-trainer are primarily responsible for atmosphere and communication. Few would argue that the main contributor to the atmosphere during rehearsal is the director. In *Techniques of Group Theatre*, Jan Kubicki states: “To sum up the function of the director in [ensemble creation], it can be said that his [or her] greatest responsibility is to create the atmosphere most conducive to this kind of work” (30). And the above reference to Pike and Dunn not only asserts the importance of the director being a facilitator, but how his/her actions bear on “creating a flexible atmosphere for the workshop” (149). During both *If At All*’s and *Book of Mercy*’s rehearsal processes, the directors were responsible for scheduling and organizing activities, which contributed greatly to the atmosphere. But their conduct during rehearsal bore strongly on the environment.

The social leader contributes to the atmosphere by creating environments that utilize differences in constructive ways (Barry 417). Small group communication theory supports the notion that individual differences are healthy. “If everyone in the group has exactly the same beliefs and goals, there is little that can be done besides mutual reinforcement. Consensus may be too easy and consequently unproductive” (Wood 20). One way to compare the social leadership of Ann and Jerry is through their responses to the actions of Suzi and Bill respectively. Suzi was the only actor who openly questioned any of Ann or Carson’s decisions. She also occasionally engaged in somewhat adolescent behavior during rehearsal. Ann’s response to these actions was primarily to ignore them. Although the open discussions of her bodily functions clearly offered no potential contribution to the text, Suzi’s resistance to blocking she felt inappropriate and the cutting of lines she felt necessary could have supplied the actor

feedback Carson desired for the development of the play and contributed to a more satisfactory production. As noted in the *If At All* chapter, when Jerry accommodated Bill's request to address the line "moment of beauty," Jerry engaged Bill's willingness to go against the grain of the group. The result of the ensuing conversation was a line, "beauty of a moment," much more evocative of the spirit, subject matter and theme of the play. This comparison again highlights an advantage inherent to ensemble development. As implied above, considering that ensembles begin with ideas or source material as opposed to a draft of a script, an ensemble author is much more dependent on actors for the generation of text. Therefore in ensemble development social leadership is vital in creating an atmosphere where the actors can do their best work in order to produce the text. Although a playwright engaging in mainstream development is not as dependent on actors for text, an atmosphere in which actors can do their best work will only benefit the developing play and production.

One of the primary factors in the environment created by the social leader and the facilitator-trainer is communication. Small group communication theory attests to the importance of this element. Hackman and Morris assert that, "Indeed several authors have suggested that the quality of communication that occurs as a group attempts to reach a decision may well be the single, most important determinant of the decision-making success or failure of that group" (Hirokawa, "Communication" 109). And Hirokawa and Poole state that "high-quality communication influence[s] the production of higher quality solutions. In general, solutions from such groups were rated more effective, feasible, creative, significant, and comprehensive" (141). In *The Playwright's Process*, Buzz McLaughlin confirms the theorists' position: "What it all comes down to is two things: trust, and the ability to communicate" (242).

The type of communication proven to be the most effective is both open and inclusive. Jean Luere, in reference to Joint Stock's communication style, asserts that, "in the contemporary theatre, full communication among playwright, director, and performers has become the name of the game" (121). Lesch agrees with Luere, concluding that "the general picture that emerges of collaborative group communication is an open, inclusive communication environment that affords a high level of interaction and participation in group work by all group members who desire to do so" (151). McLaughlin adds, "Strive to stay always in close, open communication with your director during the workshop rehearsals" (266).

Lesch concludes that "evidence for the presence of a nurturing communication environment is found when group members hear, accept and use [each other's] ideas" (6). One clear way to accomplishing this task is to engage in open discussions. "The main function of group discussion is simply to allow group members to compare their positions to those of others" (Hirokawa 136). "First, discussion allows group members to distribute and pool available informational resources necessary for effective decision making and problem solving." Also, "discussion allows group members to catch and remedy errors of individual judgment" (Hirokawa, "Communication" 109).

The research from both case studies affirms the above assertions. The artists at Touchstone Theatre enacted very open communication practices. It would have been impossible for Jerry to facilitate the process as he did if all members of the group had not openly expressed their desires for the piece. For Chicago Dramatists, open communication was limited to the discussion group and the rehearsal group enacted very limited communication practices. Although it is generally accepted for the playwright to remain silent during rehearsal, one may wonder how *Book of Mercy* would have developed if Carson had been allowed to openly

communicate with actors during rehearsal. Artists who discuss the importance of the playwright remaining silent during rehearsal generally refer to production rehearsal. One may assume that a playwright would have more opportunities to communicate with the cast during a workshop process, when it is assumed that the script will change to a greater extent than during full production.

Perhaps if a play has not had the advantage of a workshop process, it is in the best interests of the development of the play to allow the playwright to be a more involved member of the production rehearsal group. Specifically during the first rehearsals, when the actors are discovering the play and the playwright is rediscovering it through the actors, allowing the playwright to talk directly to the actors will not only allow the playwright to get the feedback he or she needs, but benefit the production by saving rehearsal time. If artists are to address the problem of the playwright being an outsider during development, it is logical that s/he should be allowed to communicate with the artists developing their play.

Environment

The impetus for this study was the belief that process is the defining influence on product. As it turned out, however, though the original topic is worth exploring in future studies, these two case studies reveal the importance of environment. Russ Tutterow of Chicago Dramatists defined new play development as the application of “production tools in simple ways” (Dec. 12, 2001). Even in ensemble creation, readings and physical work with actors as well as full production are the primary tools available to artists engaging in development.

Considering that the range of activities is arguably finite, one explanation for the widely varied results in new play development processes must be environment.

At the 2002 convention of the Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas, panelists asked if the notion of a model of play development was useful. The general consensus was that current models were not working as effectively as they should and that applying the same process to different plays was illogical. Megan Monaghan, formerly of the Alliance Theatre and currently the literary manager of South Coast Repertory Theatre, states that effective play development is “not prescriptive” (Dec. 29, 2001). And Elizabeth LeCompte speaks of a “necessary ambiguity” in the process (Cole, *Directors* 22), which implies that a paradigm for development is not necessary or perhaps even useful.

In *The Joint Stock Book: The Making of a Theatre Collective*, Rob Ritchie states that “the key question, of course, is the relationship between...how the quality of the work is related to the conditions in which it is created” (12-13). His term “conditions” emphasizes environment over process. Carl M. Moore in *Group Techniques for Idea Building* states that “no process is any better than the people who participate” (105). As stated above, every artist I interviewed agrees that one of the most important elements in new play development is the combination of the individuals working together. Liz Engleman, currently of the Playwright’s Center of Minneapolis and an O’Neill Playwrights Conference dramaturg, feels that the future of the field is less concerned with models and more focused on “who needs to be in the room” (June, 13 2002). Tanya Palmer, formerly of Actors Theatre of Louisville and currently of the Guthrie Theatre, agrees that the outcome of developmental activities depends on the personalities in the room and the society and culture in which the work takes place (Oct. 30, 2002).

The discussion above argues that the environment most conducive to successful new play development is more common during ensemble development than during full production. Ensemble's combination of symbolic convergence about process, open communication, and emphasis on material generation is more likely to lead to effective play development and productions than the application of the theatrical work ethic common in full production. A brief discussion of the O'Neill Playwright's Conference helps to support this assertion.

Many organizations dedicated to development, as opposed to production, utilize the atmosphere necessary during ensemble creation. Although these organizations, such as the Sundance Theatre Program and New Harmony as well as numerous others, typically develop works that were not written using ensemble methods, their development practices and atmosphere are similar to those of ensemble creation. The O'Neill Playwright's Conference is unique in that it focuses on development; however the final product of the process is somewhat of a dichotomy. The artistic staff emphasizes to the artists and audience that what they are producing or seeing is not a full production. The blocked, script-in-hand reading features only modular pieces of a set and hints of costumes as well as production-quality lights and sound. However, partly due to the highly skilled actors, directors, dramaturgs and designers, the final readings are as polished as many full productions. The quality of the presentations coupled with the price of admission offers audiences the experience of seeing a full production. The fact that actors are holding scripts is often a mere technicality. Therefore I offer the O'Neill Playwright's Conference as a successful combination of full production and ensemble methods.⁵³

Both staged readings in general and the process at the O'Neill Playwright's Conference have been the target of negative press.⁵⁴ Lloyd Richards' installation of the staged reading process at the O'Neill has made the reading synonymous with new play development. However,

many of the O'Neill artists I interviewed assert that the defining characteristic of the O'Neill experience is the environment not the process. When asked about the O'Neill process, playwright Brook Berman states that it is a "writers' community" (Dec. 13, 2002). And director Steven Wiliford states that the most distinguishing feature of the O'Neill process is that "it is a retreat" (Dec. 12, 2002). These two representative examples from O'Neill artists indicate the importance of the atmosphere at the O'Neill. I can attest that the environment is not only idyllic (upon my arrival the first activity I witnessed was a yoga class), but very focused on the developing plays. To transfer this process to the "outside world" would pose difficulties. Therefore, it is highly likely that negativity associated with the staged reading phenomenon is due to the misapplication of the practice as intended by its creator.

At the O'Neill all artists follow the same process; therefore they share a mutual reality about how their work will proceed. Ensemble artists usually gain this perspective through years of working together, but the artistic staff of the O'Neill gives artists guidelines. Each day replicates one week of a professional rehearsal process: one day each for table work, improvising, blocking and run-throughs. Just as in ensemble development, this firmly established process in addition to the other elements of the O'Neill process discussed in chapter 2 allows artists to focus on the material. The playwright is clearly part of the process; during all the rehearsals I observed, the playwright talked openly with all members of the company. This open communication often bore direct effects on the developing script and clearly made the playwright a member, in fact the most important member, of the team.

The open communication and atmosphere of experimentation is similar to that of ensemble development. At the O'Neill this environment is possible because at the end of the process the plays are not "finished." In ensemble development the atmosphere is necessary

because their process does not usually begin with a script; they must communicate and experiment in order to generate the raw materials that will become the text. The two case studies in this research indicate that including this atmosphere even during mainstream full production development can not only create an environment in which the play can develop while maintaining the playwright's original vision, but also contribute to the goal of mounting a successful production without losing valuable rehearsal time.

The artists in the two case studies chose the activities they thought most effective to accomplish their tasks. Touchstone Theatre's process was to improvise, discuss, edit, and rehearse. Chicago Dramatists' process was limited group discussion and production rehearsal. Certainly these steps have yielded different results when enacted by other artists. Perhaps the definition of process should encompass not just activities but also the manner in which they are executed. Jerry's process was to try to get the best work out of the ensemble by creating an environment and situations conducive to free expression. Ann's production rehearsal process depended on staying on task which often meant limiting discussion. The heart of a process of new play development is less about what and much more about how.

Future Research

Considering the ubiquity of and number of complaints about new play development, the topic warrants extensive analysis. The research presented here adds to the materials currently available to artists, but further research is needed. More literature documenting the work of artists engaging in the practice of developing plays, such as Michael Wright's *Playwriting at Work and Play*, is needed. Reading about the trials and tribulations of others can be invaluable to

those engaging in similar activities. Since Wright effectively reports on numerous institutions working in the early stages of development, more books thoroughly documenting the first full production of plays would be helpful. Further documentation of different ensembles' processes is particularly necessary.

Even more than documenting others' experiences, the field needs additional research in developing and testing theories about working with new material. The social sciences can offer the basis for developing theories. Small group communication theory specifically provides a wealth of studies that can inform the field of new play development.

Although the current preference in social research is for qualitative research, new play development could benefit from quantitative studies. Issues mentioned in the first two chapters such as the harmful potential of audience feedback and the ubiquity of the staged reading do not find informative conclusions in this research but could benefit from statistical analysis documenting the similarities and differences in how different plays changed after going through the same process. These processes need not be limited to readings, although they are the activity about which most artists complain. If artists are going to learn how process affects product, researchers need to track the development of numerous scripts.

Additional topics include issues of supply and demand. There would be a greater demand for new plays, and more effective ways of producing them, if audiences attended new plays more frequently. The marketing and attendance of new plays is a subject worthy of study by cultural critics and sociologists alike.

This study specifically addresses the need for more research in methods of creating environments in which artists can flourish. Two case studies alone can only begin to address how the combination of process, environment and leadership affects actors, directors and playwrights and the product of their efforts.

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APPENDIX A
BOOK OF MERCY SYNOPSIS

Act 1 Scene 1

The setting is an elite drug rehab center in upstate New York a few hours drive from Manhattan in mid September, 2002. The entire action takes place in Stella's very large room, which is "lavishly decorated, in a combination of first class antiques and high fashion modern accents," according to the script. At rise Stella is cutting meditatively fruit when the playing CD starts to skip. Tina enters and Stella chides the nursing assistant for coercing her into joining the music club that sells such "garbage." After Tina refers to her as "Mrs. Withrow," Stella reminds Tina that she is now a "fancy free divorcee." Tina then presents Stella with a bottle of grape juice, which is supposed to be good for the heart. Stella replies that she will never like it as much as wine because the alcoholic version "takes away the pain." Tina cannot understand the attraction as she has never tasted wine. After noting the moving boxes that keep arriving for Stella, Tina asks to borrow another silky outfit for another date that afternoon. When Stella gives her a kimono, Tina confides that she and her "beau" are lovers. Stella is more than happy to be contributing to the "cause" of love. Tina flies around the room in the kimono and knocks over a picture of Stella's family leading Stella to tell her about her children, most notably Mercy the eldest who was killed by a cobra in India.

David, Stella's doctor and family friend, enters and recognizes the kimono on Tina which leads to some exposition explaining that David and his African-American partner, Paul, have

been friends with Stella and her family for many years. Tina suddenly gets very excited about Stella's making a reference to "qualities not so obvious—to the eyes" and exits.

David then tries to convince Stella to stop having moving vans full of furniture and personal items from her numerous homes shipped to the facility, partly because they are running out of room. When Stella informs him that she has had an architect draw up blueprints for an additional wing, which she will donate, David informs her that she has been discharged. This bad news hits Stella hard and causes a tiff between the two old friends; Stella threatens to get another doctor and David quits her case. After they apologize and reinstate their friend/doctor/patient relationship, David instigates an impromptu therapy session beginning with, "How would you describe intimacy?" This discussion leads Stella to reveal that she is falling in love. She offers no details, "Except to say that this is very different. And difficult. And if I look at it too hard, too straight on the square...I'm afraid I'll ruin it." Again trying to convince David that she needs to stay in the facility, Stella explains that wherever she would go she would find alcohol and start drinking again. This declaration causes David to have a small breakdown. He tells Stella that his partner is "using again" because he is not getting any acting work.

The two discuss their marriages (David to Paul and Stella to Vincent) and reminisce about their past hedonistic lifestyle and the wild parties Stella used to throw. Picking up the picture of Stella's family, David says he wishes he could go back to the times before Mercy's death and tells Stella that he read one of Mercy's poetry anthologies last night for the first time since her memorial service. A year has past and Stella still cannot bring herself to read her daughter's poetry. Exposition reveals that Mercy left her fiancé in Paris to travel to India with a "hippie girl." David was also treating Mercy, who had a problem with depression, and he regrets not being able to help her. When he wishes to have Mercy back, Stella tells him, "That can never

happen. Some things are impossible. By nature, it is made so. And these natural limits?—For the first time, I’m beginning to understand them. For better or for worse.”

Tina reenters to tell Stella she has a phone call at the front desk. Her leaving gives Tina and David the opportunity to talk. Tina reveals that she is having trouble at home because her parents disapprove of her boyfriend. She has questions for David about Mercy’s death. He tells her that Mercy had been living in Stella and Vincent’s apartment in France with her fiancé and, for unknown reasons, decided to go to India with a girl she barely knew. Mercy traveled to “the ancient city of Varanasi.... And never came back.”

Stella reenters and tells Tina her father is on the phone for her and she exits. Stella tells David that Vincent, her ex-husband whom she has not seen in six months, is coming to visit her right away. He is now living in Los Angeles producing independent films. When David says he does not want to see Vincent, the two briefly discuss Stella and Vincent’s physically violent marriage.

Act 1 Scene 2

It is now noon on the same day. Stella is in the room with Vincent, who is eating a candy bar. A large bouquet of roses is now on the table. The pair exchange niceties and Vincent tells Stella he has sold the Paris apartment to finance a movie deal. Stella has been investing in such organizations as the Sierra Club and Greenpeace in order to “pay back. For all the carpet bombing” she has done. Vincent drops a bomb on Stella when he tells her that Mercy’s personal effects from the Paris apartment are being shipped to the rehab facility. As they bicker over who was a more attentive parent, Vincent recounts a time when he took a five year old Mercy to work with him. At breakfast Mercy wrote a poem on a napkin which he kept in his desk for years.

Stella observes that it is gone now and Vincent replies, “Yep. Along with everything else.” The implication is that he worked in the Twin Towers before the attacks.

Stella then asks if Vincent has spoken to Hope or Eugene, their other children; she has written them but they have not written back. Hope is traveling around the world with a journalist and Eugene is living in the family’s Chelsea studio apartment building a harpsichord. They observe that both children’s activities are acts of defiance against their parents.

In thanking him for the roses he brought her, Stella tells Vincent about a Roman emperor who drowned the city’s celebrities with rose petals. When Vincent asks Stella if she has ever imagined “pulling such a stunt,” she replies, “I imagine abominable things, Vincent. All the time. But I try to make sure they’re quite beautiful, before they leave my mind.” Stella then mentions heaven for the second time, as Vincent observes. She recounts a theory she has just learned concerning a heavy heart’s inability to “pass through heaven’s gate.”

When Vincent asks if they can stop the idle chitchat Stella resists, but Vincent’s refusal to answer his cell phone prompts Stella to ask why he has come today. He informs her that he is getting married to a screenwriter he has known for six months, in fact she is waiting in the car because they are driving across the country. In questioning him about his fiancée, Stella and Vincent easily resume bickering about their marriage and divorce. Stella was unfaithful and Vincent was physically abusive.

When he is about to walk out in anger, Vincent spies Tina and her boyfriend making love against a tree outside. Stella is not surprised and Vincent asks if Stella is paying them to perform for her. Of course she is not, but she does glimpse the recurring routine frequently. After a couple pages or reminiscing about a time when Vincent used to spy on Stella and the children

and deciding that they left their children alone too often, the mood becomes almost romantic. David breaks the mood when he enters with the package of Mercy's personal effects.

After some male posturing between Vincent and David, they open the box. It contains some bedding, a coat, cloth from India, Mercy's depression medication, and a very old bottle of wine. After a three page story about the wine, which was recovered from the Nazis, they discover Mercy's journal. Despite Stella's protestations, David reads from it beginning days before her death. The entry reveals that Mercy was uncertain about her upcoming marriage, she was concerned about losing her grasp on reality again and that she had a dream she hoped would become a new poem.

Beth, Vincent's fiancée, knocks and takes the room with aplomb. Beth and Stella light cigarettes and, after Stella compares the opening of Mercy's package to Easter, Beth tells an involved story about how her mother used to make her dress up as Bugs Bunny which led to her parent's divorce. Although Vincent tries to make an escape with Beth, the act ends with Stella, delighting in watching Vincent squirm, asking Beth to tell everyone all about herself.

Act 2 Scene 1

The act begins with Beth in the middle of a story about an outrageous film director. The following conversation reveals that David and Paul's relationship began scandalously because they were doctor and patient. Beth and Vincent have a tense moment when Vincent rescinds his promise to sell the wine and use the proceeds to finance Beth's movie and Stella and Vincent bicker over possession of the wine and the journal.

Vincent reads from the journal. In this entry Mercy tells of her decisions to stop taking her medication and to travel to India with a homeless pregnant girl. Beth observes that, contrary

to everyone's perception of the events leading to her death, Mercy was acting of her own free will primarily because she did not want to get married.

David uses Vince's cell phone to answer a beeper page. Paul has been arrested for possession, but his innocence is likely as David points out that the police frequently racial profile him and he was driving a friend's car. But David does not have the money for bail because they lost everything in bad investments. David reluctantly agrees to let Vincent post bail, which means they have to go to the police station together. Vincent warily agrees to let Beth stay with Stella.

The two women quickly get into a conversation about their differing views on love; Stella sees it as "ecstatic...hurt" and Beth sees it as a contract. They play a little one-upmanship on each other articulating their defining moments; Stella's is the bombing of Hiroshima and Beth's is the bombing of the Twin Towers. Beth discloses that she dropped out of high school so now she learns from the world. Stella asserts that she still has some influence over Vincent and Beth readily agrees. Beth tells about her wedding dress and her tattoo, a Bodhisattva or Buddhist angel which is a soul that "forgoes it's own...uh, transcendence...to return to the Earth...to relieve humanity's suffering."

They cover the issue of Vincent's former physical violence and the question of Beth marrying Vincent for his money. After the two women reach a shared appreciation for each other, Beth reluctantly reads from the journal. This most poetic entry offers little exposition except that Mercy's thinking was becoming more abstract. Before they leave to stroll in the gardens Tina enters desperately needing to talk to Stella. When Stella and Beth leave Tina drinks the rare wine because she is "in pain."

Act 2 Scene 4

It is now early evening. David, Paul, Vincent and a sleeping Tina are in the room. The men have been back from the police station for a while and Paul reads from the journal. The entry tells of Mercy's flight to Delhi and Varanasi. When Paul asks how Stella is handling the arrival of Mercy's journal, Vincent's rather course reply prompts David to tell the other two that Stella is in love too.

After excited greetings with Paul, Stella introduces Beth who immediately wants to hear the story of his arrest. Paul regaled the police with a Tarot reading, from the deck in his bag. He was raised in Louisiana and had been touched with the gift of second sight. As he tells of his arrest and his ability to see the future, Stella cheers him on affirming his beliefs in numerous occult ideas.

David, convinced of Paul's innocence, tells a two-page story about how the evolution of flowers led to humankind as we know it: "the weight of a petal turned the whole world upside-down." Beth, always scoping out potential movie ideas, bluntly returns the room's attention to Paul's arrest. In the end Vincent has the charges dropped because no one ever read Paul his rights. Beth takes out her laptop to record all the stories she is hearing. While David tells Beth she should read James Joyce, Paul dances around the room preparing for a music video audition.

Due to all the commotion, Tina wakes. Vincent clumsily indicates that he has seen Tina and her boyfriend through the window in Stella's room and Tina is understandably hurt by Stella's voyeurism. In her distress, Tina tells them all that her boyfriend has left her. Tina's boyfriend is blind and her father threatened him so he broke up with Tina in order to save her from further pain. As Tina is telling her tale Stella realizes she is drunk and all frantically look for the rare bottle of wine. As Beth picks up the empty bottle Tina passes out again. Vincent

declares that Tina owes him “about a hundred thousand dollars,” but all the others accept the loss of the wine as fate.

When Stella calls Vincent “cheap” he counters with, “And here I thought you were just in love.” An insulted Stella tries to avoid explaining, but eventually does. She is in love with “The Last Disciple.... The Twelfth Step” of her rehabilitation program which she and David describe as God or a higher power. Stella explains that the sooner she accepts that God is capable of atrocious acts as well as love the sooner she will heal. After two pages of dialogue explaining this revelation, David relents and says she can stay in the facility.

Vincent’s phone rings; Beth’s lawyer has potential film investors that want to meet with her immediately so she and Vince must leave right away. David, Paul and Beth say their goodbyes and Paul carries Tina to the nurses’ station. Beth goes to the car ahead of Vincent leaving the divorced couple to say goodbye.

Stella reads the final journal entry. This entry describes the complex ritual of burning the dead in Varanasi. Mercy tells of her plans to play her flute for a cobra the next day. After also expressing her love for her parents, she recounts a vision she has had which is clearly a premonition of the Twin Tower attacks. Ironically the last lines of the journal are, “I am alive.” In the last two pages of the play Stella and Vincent make peace with each other and their pasts. Stella asks, “All this...this horror. Is it beautiful yet? (Pause) It is, I think. Isn’t it.” Vince replies, “Yes. And more. It is *Divine*.”

APPENDIX B

IF AT ALL SYNOPSIS

“The Play Begins” (Pages 1-7)

As the play begins a “Chaos of Cosmologists” conducts physical science experiments with strings and balls. The stage directions indicate this activity should be a “wonderfully lyrically danced physics class with music but no words.” The Scientist enters with a cup of tea and begins a cryptic physics lecture about the mercurial nature of “space-time” that begins with the lines from Eliot’s “Four Quartets,” “In my beginning is my end. In my end is my beginning.” She declares, “We seek a unified theory. A theory that connects the cosmic and the commonplace.... It is a search for the astonishing beauty of a moment. A look into the instant of beginning, a peek into the mind of God.” After mixing her tea with other liquids in a test tube and drinking it, cosmic music indicates a transformation. She draws scientific formulas and a woman holding an infant.

Jules, the daughter of the family unit whose story the play tells, appears holding a baby doll. Jules’ mother, Olivia, enters and comforts her as she has just had a nightmare. Without interrupting the flow of lines, Olivia becomes the daughter and is comforted by her mother, Louisa, played by the same actor playing the Scientist.

The stage directions indicate “A hand and arm gestural poem, where movements foreshadow characters, moments, elements in the play to come” occurs before the Scientist makes a paper doll that walks across the set while the Poet Voice/Cliff character narrates lines

from the poem about “Men and bit of paper.” The Scientist returns with a short monologue that somewhat explain her earlier lecture before the family scenes begin in earnest.

The audience finds Olivia frustrated in her attempts to write. Stage directions indicate she is writing a novel, but the written lines she reads echo the Scientist’s lecture, which sound like a poetic physics textbook. In the height of her aggravation she makes a “gesture of hand slap to eyes, hands sliding down face.” This gesture is the “Big Moment.” Yet, the scene continues almost seamlessly. In her frustration she notices all the dust on her desk describing it as “strands of original cosmic dust. Bits of stars from the moment of creation.” Additional lines indicate she is annoyed with her daughter who encourages her to “Be still and wait” for something yet identified. She abandons writing and calls her husband Cliff at work to give him the grocery list.

After a brief transition involving the Cosmologists, the Scientist informs the audience that they are “like a voyager posed *just at* the event horizon of a black hole” before Cliff appears in his office speaking his side of the grocery list conversation. Olivia also tells him he must go see Pop after work. Stage directions indicate he engages in “paper fun” including getting wrapped up in a length of dot-matrix style office paper. He makes a call, is put on hold, and finally informs his boss that “time is money.”

After another Poet Voice/Cliff narration of lines from the poem, the Travel Agent appears answering many different telephones with “home is where you start from.” Using bits and pieces from the Eliot poem, she gives directions to callers who seem to need spiritual guidance.

Back at home, Olivia is vacuuming while complaining to herself that her domestic duties have interfered with her artistic pursuits. After one of the Cosmologists, who has been observing her and making notes, is almost sucked into her vacuum, the three women engage in a “‘dance’ of mothers and daughters” in which the three make the Big Moment gesture. Poet Voice/Cliff

narration leads to the brief ending of Olivia's vacuuming scene and a transition/scene change in which the Scientist and one Cosmologist state that "When you look deep into space...you look deep back in time."

"A Ship in the Garden" (pages 8-12)

Joe is Olivia's father. He sits in his garden feeding birds and thinking about his deceased wife. A bird tells him to "Go, go, go! Human kind cannot bear very much reality." The same actor playing the bird narrates poem lines, "Where is there an end to the drifting wreckage? In a drifting boat with a slow leakage" and Joe flashes back to his honeymoon. He and his wife are arguing on a boat because Joe is trying to dictate orders to her while a storm threatens. Olivia pops in to wax philosophic about her parents, "all of my genetic being." A brief pantomime of all the family members in a storm at sea becomes Joe at work on top of a telephone pole preparing to take a lunch break while two Cosmologists observe and comment on his actions using lines from the poem.

Cliff appears in Joe's garden bring Joe out of his flashback. In this scene, one of the longest pieces of dialogue (14 lines), a crotchety Joe indicates his age by not remembering that he asked Olivia to have Cliff visit him.

The Scientist and Travel Agent reappear for more lecture and directions. The Travel Agent and Olivia scream simultaneously which transitions back to Olivia's writing attempts. Two Cosmologists and the Scientist enter and contribute to the confusion in Olivia's mind. She eventually says she must go "back to the beginning" ostensibly with the book, but the next scene depicts Olivia as a little girl in her mother's garden.

“Thyme Heals All Wounds” (pages 13-20)

Louisa soothes Olivia’s wound and Jules enters with the same wound causing Olivia to be mother and daughter replying to her daughter with her mother’s words of comfort. Time continues to morph and Louisa engages in a conversation about the stars and God with her granddaughter Jules. After a one-line return to her book, “I’ll never get this. Delete,” Olivia flashes back to skipping rocks, “research in advanced physics,” with her future husband and the first dinner with her parents and Cliff. This dinner scene becomes a dinner at Cliff and Olivia’s home in which the parents argue about taking Jules to an important function. Jules then delivers a short monologue to the audience revealing her desire to make a paper airplane so she can “fly so high” and “peek at God.” Jules returns to the house years older and briefly argues with her mother declaring “there has to be something more than this.”

The house becomes the garden and Olivia discusses the perception of time with an aged Louisa. Stage directions indicate time passes and Joe advises Olivia to let Louisa go. Louisa walks up a ramp indicating she has died. To Jules’ shock, the dead Louisa speaks to her on the upper level, which stage directions indicate is a beach. Meanwhile in the garden Olivia and Joe bicker about the loss of Louisa. Back on the beach Jules and Louisa discuss marriage and finding peace. The section ends with Joe and Olivia deciding to make tea.

The following section is the “fugue” Mary wrote. The three women in the personas of Olivia, Scientist and Travel Agent repeat lines indicative of their character’s story or dramaturgical function; Olivia talks of dust and deleting, Scientist talks of “The Uncertainty Principle” and the Travel Agent gives cosmic travel directions. Occasionally the three quote lines in unison and frequently overlap each other.

“Losing It” (pages 21-22)

The Travel Agent speaks while Olivia types. The audience discovers that Olivia is writing the Travel Agents’ lines, however the latter rebels and refuses to give the person on the phone a refund even though Olivia wants her to do so. The Travel Agent becomes Jules and advises her mother that “the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.” Olivia tries to “Delete,” but Jules continues. Olivia finally succeeds in ridding herself of the voice of Jules/Travel Agent by shutting down her computer, but the keyboard floats away from her and she is left without the ability to speak words and makes a crackling sound. The other two women on stage join her in making an upward hand gesture to the throat. During the gesture the Poet/Cliff narrator quotes from the poem, “words strain, crack and sometimes break, under the burden...”

The Scientist enters and briefly indicates the ability to chart any specific moment in time: “February 14, 1983. 8:55 a.m.” Olivia then tells the audience of an almost forgotten date to make Valentine’s cookies with her preschool aged daughter. At the end of the monologue, stage directions instruct one of the Cosmologists to state the current date minus three days.

“Afternoon Visit” (pages 23-25)

Joe pays a surprise visit to his daughter Olivia. These three pages of uninterrupted dialogue are the longest in the play. An absent minded Joe has walked to Olivia’s house and she tries to convince him to let her drive him home. The conversation turns to missing Louisa and finding contentment. Joe refuses the ride and walks home.

“Event Horizon” (pages 25-26)

As Joe walks home the Scientist tells the audience that it takes light eight minutes to reach the Earth from the sun, so if it burned out we would continue our lives for eight minutes. The lights flash, the phone rings, Olivia answers and replies “No,” and Joe dances with Louisa’s ghost. Olivia calls Jules and Cliff at his office. After the conversation Cliff goes through the paper dance from before but without the frivolity; the dot-matrix paper streams straight into the trash can.

“Confrontation” (pages 27-28)

Over the phone Jules tells Olivia that she cannot attend Joe’s funeral as she is in some far away secluded place. She tries to comfort Olivia repeating lines spoken by the Travel Agent earlier. Olivia is not comforted. Two cosmologists watch the conversation and observe, “We are always uncertain of one another.”

“The Big Moment Repeated” (page 28)

Olivia hangs up with Jules and goes back to her writing. She reads what she has written, lines about space and time from throughout the play. After deleting them in frustration, she does The Big Moment gesture again and continues with the lines she spoke after doing the gesture the first time. Cliff enters covered in paper from head to toe.

“Time Heals” (pages 28-32)

Olivia is slightly amused by Cliff’s predicament and begins to remove paper so he can speak and move. During his restoration to mobility the pair speaks to each other in lines spoken

earlier in the play including lines from the Eliot poem. Cliff comforts Olivia telling her she was a good daughter. Olivia asks Cliff, “Now what?” He replies, “Now we begin.” They grow older and look at a scrap book of their lives finding a picture in which Olivia was sad because Jules could not come home for Joe’s funeral because “she was already on her path.”

Jules appears momentarily and Cliff stares at her nose, which propels him into a monologue that takes the audience upstairs to find the angels on children’s noses while they sleep. He returns to Olivia and she asks “Is it enough?” He replies that “It’s more than enough.... Infinite.” Jules now sitting in the Travel Agent’s position quotes from the poem, “And all manner of things shall be well. In my end is my beginning.”

The Scientist returns to lecture that, “It should be possible to project forward, with absolute confidence, everything, large and small that would ever happen.” The Scientist then becomes Louisa and continues, “The only thing is, you see, to map even a single moment would take an eternity.” Olivia adds, “Print.”

APPENDIX C

BOOK OF MERCY REVIEW

“Audiences Get Little ‘Mercy’”

By Hedy Weis

Chicago Sun times October 11, 2002

This is a banner year for Chicago Dramatists, one of the city's most devoted nurturers of new plays and new playwrights. A total of 18 works developed under its auspices through readings, workshops and other efforts are scheduled to receive their world premieres at Chicago area theatres both large and small.

Unfortunately, the company's own season opener, the debut of Carson Grace Becker's "Book of Mercy," is a wholly misguided effort. Plagued by a wretched excess of karma and kitsch, it is an unholy, self-conscious mix of the trendy and the spiritual that seems to combine all the worst elements of Tennessee Williams' archly poetic late works and contemporary confessional memoirs full of new age psychobabble. Becker's tediously self-involved characters wear their psychological quirks like designer labels and speak as if branded in the type-casting department of some laughably artsy filmmaker. The play's opening scene immediately triggers that sinking feeling that comes when you know neither the characters nor dialogue to follow can possibly feel authentic. The only distraction is Joey Wade's luxe set that conjures a large, private room in a former estate that has long since been turned into a posh rehab center.

The place is upstate New York. The time is now. Ruling the roost in the suitelike space, which is decorated with sexy divan, velvet-draped tables, antique lamps and unopened boxes, is Stella (Suzanne Petri), a former bed-hopping socialite, party girl and divorced mother of three. She is recuperating from alcohol problems after the recent death of her daughter Mercy, a troubled young poet who suddenly set off from Paris to India, where she died in a strange accident.

Tending Stella is a clumsy young nursing assistant, Tina (Bethany Perkins), whom she treats like a surrogate child, who tells her all about her love affair with a boy her parents cannot accept. Also on duty is David (Rhys W. Lovell), a colorless gay psychiatrist who is Stella's longtime pal. David is making a comeback after a professional breach of ethics: he seduced a patient, Paul (Gregory Johnson), a flamboyant black actor with a drug problem and a penchant for getting arrested.

Testing Stella's equanimity is the arrival of Vincent (Richard Henzel), her wealthy ex-husband whom she still loves. He has come to announce his upcoming marriage to Beth (Amy Raffa), an obnoxious young wannabe indie screenwriter for whom everything in life is a grist for the script mill.

They all gab on, with Stella insisting she isn't ready to leave the clinic because she has just fallen in love in a way different than anything she has ever experienced. As it turns out, she has just found God, or some deep spiritual healing. She must also deal with the rediscovery of her daughter Mercy's last diary, and the unexpected opening of a wildly valuable bottle of rare wine.

Under Ann Filmer's direction, the actors chew the scenery voraciously, which is not surprising, given the dialogue. Only Henzel gets it right as the middle-aged man who is quite aware of the pros and cons involved in his attempts at a second chance at happiness.

Listen to the rest of them babble on and on, and you more than understand why Mercy ran off to India.

1 Rewriting and development are not necessarily synonymous. A playwright will obviously rewrite alone, however development produces rewritten plays. Steven Dietz offers the following insight on the necessity of rewriting: "The initial burst of writing is a sweet and deceptive gift; the rewriting makes it a play. Nothing is more rewarding than to cut or rewrite well; nothing is harder to master; nothing the writer will do from Moment One will have greater impact on his/her audience. Rewriting is the writer's best friend: it means you don't have to get it right all at once. . . . To my mind what distinguishes the writers with 'staying power' – those who are able to make a career, a body of work – is their ability to rewrite. Period" (Engelman, *Truth* P8).

2 Distinguishing between the concert and staged reading might be useful. A concert reading is actors and stage manager sitting, or perhaps standing when "on stage," reading the play and necessary stage directions. A staged reading is blocked without the reading of stage directions. A workshop production is blocked and actors have memorized lines, but there are minimal technical considerations. It is interesting to note that when I posted an inquiry to the Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas' listserv asking for clarification on the definitions of these terms the responses revealed a surprising lack of consensus.

3 Buzz McLaughlin attests to the ubiquity of the O'Neill process. In *The Playwright's Process* he tells playwrights that "a typical journey your play will go on once it gets accepted into a play development program" progresses from a private table reading to the sit down reading to the staged reading (252). Anderson succinctly describes the process at the O'Neill Playwrights Conference: "a script is put on its feet, dramaturg, director and cast kick it around, talk, revision, more talk, performance, audience post performance discussion" (63). And playwright Brook Berman even more succinctly describes the O'Neill Playwrights Conference as a place to "test drive" a play.

4 A play using the O'Neill method could certainly be authored by more than one playwright. The point here is that the play is at least a complete first draft and that the group did not have input on it before they converged.

5 Steven Wiliford, a director at the O'Neill Playwrights Conference, states that the playwright reading the play aloud is "an old convention" dating back to the ancient Greeks and very prevalent in the 1940's heyday of Broadway. He feels it is "brilliantly useful" because, when reading, the playwright will provide a great deal of information about the play, particularly about rhythm.

6 This figure is not true of all staged reading processes. The O'Neill Playwrights Conference allots more than thirty rehearsal hours per play.

7 Under Lloyd Richards' direction at the O'Neill Playwrights Conference, every day's rewrites were copied on a different color of paper. When James Houghton became artistic director of the organization he discontinued this practice because of the implication that rewrites were expected and even celebrated.

8 The audience at the O'Neill is made up largely of conference participants but the presentations are also open to the paying public. At Sundance and New Harmony the final presentations are offered only to the conference community.

9 Sundance does encourage the application of playwright/director combinations.

10 Historically, the works of the companies that have used Ensemble Creation tend to depart from linear realism. Caryl Churchill, who is certainly known for innovative treatments of time and space, developed a method of playwriting at Joint Stock and it would be difficult to describe the work of The Living Theatre as either linear or realistic. In a 1999 article "Staging the Real: Breaking the 'Naturalist Habit' in the Representation of History," Tim Raphael describes a class for the development of new works for the stage and his attempts to have his students think outside the box of linear story telling in creating documentary theatre. He had his students study the developmental processes of Joint Stock Company and Moises Kaufman's Tectonic Theatre Company. In Raphael's case, these models proved to be an effective guide for creating theatre that is an alternative to realism. However, today's ensemble artists are utilizing the methodology to create a wide range of works.

11 Ritchie says of Joint Stock's process: "Whatever the original idea, the constant feature – and the attraction of the method – is the opportunity to devise a programme [sic] of work appropriate to the subject" (18).

12 Michael Fields admits that their rehearsal schedules at Dell' Arte are based on the fact that the company is very busy, even if the schedules they devise do usually work out for the best artistically (29 Oct. 2002).

13 Jerry Stropnick, the director of the *If At All* case study, is familiar with the task of editing. In *American Theatre* magazine Geoff Gehman states that Jerry's job description for *Letters to the Editor*, an ensemble-created play from the Bloomsburg Theatre Ensemble, was "final arbiter, and chief cut-and-paster" (35).

14 Companies such as the aforementioned Joint Stock, whose writers included Caryl Churchill, as well as others such as El Teatro Campesino for whom Luis Valedz was a principal writer, Tectonic Theatre Project for whom Moises Kauffman was the principal writer and the Open Theatre, whose principal writers have included Megan Terry and Jean-Claude Van Itallie, have produced some of the most innovative plays in recent history. Based on the success of these

companies and writers it is clear that having a single artist serve as the primary writer can lead to scripts of high quality.

15 When referring to a specific rehearsal, I will use consecutive numbering in order to maintain perspective on a particular rehearsal's placement in the entire rehearsal schedule. Lesch also uses such numbering in her dissertation *Theorizing Collaborative Group Communication: A Case Study of How the Dream Guild Theatre Company Developed a Performance of Finestierre*.

16 Throughout rehearsal Ann will frequently express the opinion that actors are more successful if they do not try to act but just say the words. On September 5 (rehearsal 9) she tells the actors to "cut the acting shit."

17 These discussion sessions consisted largely of Ann and Carson asking the actors if there were any inconsistencies with the characters. In theory the meetings could be a valuable tool for the development of the script, but in practice they were often too short to be productive because they were scheduled before rehearsal. In fact some of the actors did not receive their chat because time ran out.

18 One may argue that for the first production of a play it is necessary for the playwright to be in attendance for table work, which was not the case for *Book of Mercy*. The playwright's presence is discussed below, but considering that the cast and director generated numerous questions that were not answered due to the playwright's absence and that the playwright did not benefit from the company's feedback, which was often in terms of these questions, one may reasonably state that there was no table work.

19 Rhys Lovel, the actor portraying David, was the only artist interviewed that states he is glad they did not spend time doing traditional table work. Yet he also expresses regret that the process was not more collaborative (2 Mar. 2003). It may be assumed that table work would have helped in making the process more collaborative due to the increased discussion associated with table work as opposed to blocking.

20 The length of time devoted to table work appears to vary by only days. Russ states that he does not like to "do too much" and limits it to no more than three nights (02 Oct. 2002). Barbara, the stage manager for *Book of Mercy*, affirms Russ' statement by recalling that "one or two days has been the normal amount of table work done at Chicago Dramatists" (29 Mar. 2003). James Houghton implies that spending five days on table work is indulgent. When he directed Sam Shepard's *Curse of the Starving Class*, "We spent five days around the table. I think it's really important that we did that, that we all start on the same page. That frees your imagination" (Cole, *Playwrights* 211).

21 Merv Antonio, director of special projects at Seattle Repertory Theatre supports both of these assertions by saying that table work is important practically because "you don't want to make changes once actors are up on their feet" and that table work "invites actors to participate in the process" (30 Oct. 2002).

22 As stated above, I did not interview Gregory or Bethany. Rhys is the only artist interviewed that does not state that rehearsals were tense. He describes the atmosphere as “good...for the most part,” but he does comment on the director’s use of profanity and lack of communication skills (2 March 2003). Rosie simply states that “there has been a lot of tension” (2 Oct. 2002). Barbara states that “the rehearsal process was more stressed and tense than I am used to especially at [Chicago] Dramatists.” She attributes this environment in part due to “tension within the cast” due to Suzi’s behavior, which is briefly discussed below. She adds that “there were communication problems during *Book of Mercy*,” primarily between Ann and Carson (29 Mar. 2003). Before opening Amy stated that “tensions have been high” but have not interfered greatly with the work (29 Sept. 2002).

23 Nelson implies that he prefers to attend rehearsals “nearly every day” for the first production of a play. But he then immediately details the advice above that the playwright should not attend so frequently. I use the quotes here in reference to the first production of a play because Nelson’s book, which is primarily advice to playwrights and directors about how to achieve a successful working relationship, assumes that the two artists are engaged in mounting the first production of a play.

24 In her study of the communication practices during one ensemble’s development of a new play, Lesch notes that the director chose to discuss important moments in the play with the “inner group,” which excluded the performers, because he “‘didn’t want to deal with’” the whole group.

25 In the first script, Stella refers to her past lack of concern for heaven and jokingly says that heaven was not one of her “properties.” In the production script the joke is removed and she expresses this idea by simply saying “I don’t know.”

26 Carson did cut numerous lines of Paul’s, such as the auditioning sequence discussed above, but it does not appear that these cuts were made for the purpose of giving the actor less to say. His cuts are retained in the final draft.

27 Carson did immediately agree that part of the ending, a section where Beth pulls up a website called “Ye Olde Dictionary” to find the meaning of Prudence, Stella’s first name, should be cut. She stated that it was the denouement before *Mercy* was a character.

28 Stella’s revealing this news could also serve as the inciting incident, but few complications arise based on this news.

29 At both readings of the play before this case study, I commented on the fortunate entrance of Beth and numerous audience members offered their assent with nods and verbal expressions. This exciting entrance contrasts both of Tina’s entrances. Tina enters twice conveniently at the end of a beat. Although Tina clearly has a reason to enter both times, the placement seems a bit contrived and almost appears to be more of a playwright’s tool than in service to character need.

30 One may even wonder about the inclusion of the Paul character as an extraneous element. He is a gay African-American and just by including this character two major issues, racism and homophobia, become important elements in the play. Again, there is so much else in the play that excising these topics would not leave the play lacking. Paul is not important to David's character either. Although they are partners, David has plenty of action as Stella's friend and doctor.

31 Per their request, I sent the first draft of this chapter to the Jerry and the ensemble. In that draft I pointed out that Mark and Cora were LeCoq trained. Jerry pointed out my failing to mention that Jennie was also trained in this style of performance. He felt this was an important fact to note because it meant that the majority of the ensemble was trained in this method, which meant that it greatly influenced their work. Jerry felt compelled to familiarize himself with LeCoq's theories before approaching the work discussed here.

32 Throughout this chapter I often refer to Bill, Jennie, Cora, Mark and Mary as "the ensemble." References to "the company" include the ensemble and Jerry.

33 In order to learn of the continued development of *If At All* after the case study, I have subsequently conducted another phone interview with Jerry and exchanged e-mails with ensemble members.

34 I was aware of digressions in the conversation for numerous rehearsals after this first day of observation, but as rehearsals progressed and the play began to take a shape, the digressions all but disappeared and the conversation in the room was much more focused. I am indebted to John Flax of Theatre Grotesco for calling my attention to the possibility that discussion is heavier at the beginning of rehearsals. During our interview he, as well as the other ensemble artists I interviewed, stated that too much discussion can be harmful to the work. But he then said, in his experience, there was more conversation in the early phase of rehearsal (3 March 2003). Also, Jim Niesen of Irondale Ensemble states that the amount of discussion "depends on where you are in the rehearsal process" (17 Feb. 2003). The implication is that discussion is necessary for the early rehearsals for idea generation.

35 Although the company does not consider the version of the text they performed at the end of this rehearsal period to be a finished version, for clarity I refer to it as the final script.

36 The term "skeleton" is also used by the director in Matetzschk's dissertation case study to refer to the outline of the developing play.

37 Much of this editing is a compression of improvisations. In the final text numerous scenes will be compressions of improvisations they created during the rehearsal process. Later in rehearsal, the ensemble will be active in editing the dialogue generated by these improvisations.

38 The ensemble members confirmed this view of the piece during the first group interview when Mark stated that the script as it existed was not the "final script" (3 May 2002) and during

the second group interview when the ensemble referred to the continued development of the play (17 May 2002).

39 Jerry states that he is very familiar with the feeling a writer gets when he gives actors material he has created and that this experience was very different.

40 During my first conversation with Jerry concerning the process of *If At All*, I asked him if there would be a designated writer for the piece. He stated that he would most likely be doing much of the writing. However, it is clear from statements made by Jerry and the ensemble that Jerry ended up writing much more than they anticipated. On April 15 (rehearsal 19) after Jerry asked the ensemble to perform an improvisation with particular parameters, he jokingly observed that this exercise was “like writing on your own, but your imagination is other people,” which obliquely expressed the extent to which he felt he was writing without input from the ensemble.

41 It should be noted that Jerry also designed the set. After reading the first draft of this chapter, Jerry noted the influence of the physical space on his writing. He feels that the set design helped create much of the action in the play.

42 Ensemble artists also agree on the importance of this role. Sandy Timmerman expressed the sentiments of the majority of the ensemble artists I interviewed when she said: there is “a need for an outside eye” in ensemble creation (18 Feb. 2003).

43 In small group communication theory the term “facilitator-trainer” seems to be interchangeable with the term “facilitator.” I do not mean to imply that Jerry was “training” the ensemble how to create a performance and/or text. Because it is clear that this was a skill they already possessed. A situation “conducive to learning” can imply learning about the performance and text the group is creating.

44 Many of the ensemble artists I interviewed state that they use video recorders to keep records of their material generation sessions. Cole observes the Wooster Group, under LeCompte’s direction, utilizing this method of maintaining a record (*Directors* 100).

45 Michael Fields of Dell A’rte states they “cover the walls with butcher paper” upon which they write ideas for improvisations (29 Oct. 2002).

46 During our May 1, 2002 interview Jerry stated that because “everyone was stretched too thin” he ended up doing more writing than he would have otherwise.

47 Historically other ensemble creation groups, such as the Open Theatre, have “shared hopes, fears, beliefs, values, attitudes, norms, rules, practices, symbols, vocabulary, metaphors and stories” (Pasolli 53).

48 After viewing many of Touchstone’s past works on video I would say that many of them could be classified as collage. Each video did have strong story elements, but the stories were

told in a manner that is much more fragmented than *If At All* and frequently the performances were solo pieces, hence the desire to have actors speak to each other on stage.

49 I am assuming that “realism” would be a more appropriate description of the style as I am sure they did not mean to refer to the naturalistic movement in theatre associated with Zola.

50 Pasolli’s assertion can be argued against considering the historical precedent of one actor playing numerous roles in plays for which empathy is a goal. However, in light of modern theatrical practices promulgated by the conventions of domestic realism, which include one actor playing one part, it is appropriate to apply his assertion to *If At All* due to the play’s similarities with today’s more common theatrical fare.

51 The staging of Touchstone’s production in May 2002 also provided this connection because Jules’ final appearance is in the spot occupied by Travel Agent throughout the entire show.

52 According to Robert Anderson in *Playwright Versus Director*, “It is important that the playwright and director are doing the same play. Sounds strange? It often happens if the play hasn’t been talked out beforehand that they are not doing the same play” (Luere33). The need for the playwright/director communication, especially before the rehearsal process, is discussed below.

53 There may certainly be other organizations that combine ensemble and mainstream development practices, but I am using the O’Neill Playwright’s Conference as the example because it is likely to be familiar to readers and because my attendance at the 2002 conference enables me to speak about the organization from personal experience. I refer to the efforts of the O’Neill as successful due to its long history of developing plays that have been financially and artistically successful. As discussed earlier, the O’Neill Playwright’s Conference was one of my original case studies. But, in addition to the reasons mentioned, I did not include it as a case study because the artist I spent the most time observing stated that her goal for attending the conference was to present a finished product to influential people. Therefore, her inattention to development led to no conclusions for this study. Her goal supports the assertion that the O’Neill can produce full productions.

54 Many artists, playwrights in particular, have expressed the notion that the selection process favors a limited number of playwrights. However justified this complaint may be, it does not minimize the program’s effectiveness in script development. Those who complain that the O’Neill’s time commitment to a play is too short are more justified because this factor does affect the outcome of the process. The most logical argument against this complaint is that the end result is not intended to be a final product or the end of a play’s development. The process assures that the playwright is in control of the development of the play, therefore after the condensed rehearsal period the play still belongs to the playwright and s/he may rewrite at will.