IMMERSIVE THEATRE AND EMBRACING THE LIVE MOMENT IN "STILL STILL STILL"

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to explore and define core elements of contemporary Canadian immersive theatre and apply these elements to a new Canadian play. This paper's research spans the history of immersive theatre with a focus on English language Canadian theatre. The research was explored through multiple practical productions throughout my degree at York University as well as four independent public projects. Collectively my theatre practice as a creator, director, and actor has explored immersive theatre since 2008. The research culminated in the direction of the workshop presentation of *Still Still Still* by Geoffrey Simon Brown. The thesis was publicly presented at the Commons Theatre in Toronto, Ontario in April 2017. The production, design, and rehearsal process of the workshop presentation is detailed through journals and appendices.

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Artistic Challenge

I am challenging myself to explore immersive theatre environments to discover if a newly constructed audience-to-actor relationship will amplify a text-based play's inherent theatricality and create a heightened awareness of theatre as a live art form. I will create this relationship through intimacy, immediacy, and a freedom of choice. I believe the key for theatre to be relevant and have a capacity to affect individual audience members is hinged on theatre embracing the live moment. Theatre is happening in the present time in a direct relationship with its audience and if the relationship between audience and performer is acknowledged through staging or participation, the relationship will transcend into a meaningful audience-and-performer exchange beyond communication to a "change in perception"(Roose-Evans 168). Theatre maintains its relevance and poignancy through providing its audience with an exchange. Whether this exchange is focused on politics, social change or comedic entertainment, theatre hopes to elicit a reaction from the audience. How can Canadian theatre continue to remain on the cutting edge, creating relevant, experimental and poignant work that is recognized globally at the forefront of artistic expression? I believe the answer lies within the keystones of immersion: space, audience awareness, and an audience-performer contract. These keystones and their intersections with text based English language theatre will provide the basis of my thesis, as I believe immersive theatrical research and intentional non-naturalistic staging could be a critical element in the future of English-Canadian theatre.

My research is placed within the contemporary Canadian theatre landscape, particularly in reference to our history, influences, and current productions of immersive theatre. I will use "immersive theatre" as a blanket term to include a wide variety of theatrical

forms: site-specific, environmental, found space, architectural, roving, promenade, site-engaging, site-sympathetic, and more. These terms have been used and continue to be exchanged and re-interpreted depending on the company, artist, or time period. Josephine Machon, author of *Immersive Theatres,* an exploration of England's growth of immersive theatre from 2004 to 2013, ascribes the term to have "appear[ed] to have entered common parlance within academic and artistic circles from around 2004 and archive research of reviews suggests it entered the lexicon of theatre criticism circa 2007" (Machon 65). Her assertion is in connection to the past decade's proliferation of "immersive" theatre companies and productions which all date post 2004. In particular the term's use has exponentially expanded since the success of 2011's *Sleep No More* by punchdrunk, which has led to "it [immersive theatre] taking hold in the city [New York]" (Lyall).

I will define "immersive theatre" as any theatre production in which the audience is made aware of its environment (purpose-made theatre or an unconventional presentation space ranging from the outdoors to the indoors), and the audience is implicitly or explicitly placed within the context of performance. I will use the word "audience" to represent attendees of the immersive theatre admitting the limitations of the term. I feel neither audience nor spectator fully encompass the sensorial experience (including touch, smell, and taste) which, immersive theatre intends attendees to have.

Immersive Theatre Research

My summer research encompassed four immersive theatre projects: a roving historic Shakespeare play, a new Canadian split-narrative workshop, a one-on-one theatre experience, and a one-man show performance. My theatrical career has explored different degrees of immersive theatre. I initially studied site-specific theatre at the University of Alberta. Then I took a master class workshop led by punchdrunk, the England-based company behind New York's *Sleep No More*. Over the past five years I have curated and led the site-specific multi-disciplinary Found Festival based in Edmonton, Alberta. Through Found Festival I have worked with multiple site-specific theatre companies: Det Andre Teatret (Norway), Swallow-A-Bicycle Theatre (Calgary), Surreal Soreal (Montreal), Theatre SKAM (Victoria), Major Matt Mason Collective (Calgary) and numerous Edmonton-based site-specific theatre companies.

Since 2011 I have directed over ten site-sympathetic productions for Thou Art Here Theatre. "Site-sympathetic" is a term I coined for the company's unique style based on work developed in collaboration with a space. The pre-existing text is intended to highlight the "found" environment, which in turn informs the text and therefore the play. The goal of this work is to create an interactive relationship between the space and the work, lifting the audience and the performer in a brand new experience of the text. As artistic director, our projects begin with the space. I am inspired by an environment to find a script that I believe has an inherent and relevant connection to it. Our work so far has been restricted by the company's mandate to use Shakespearean texts and adaptations. This relationship is key to how the staging and the audience's experience are crafted.

The Falstaff Project, a notable exception to other Thou Art Here work, was set within a claustrophobic music venue/dive bar in an inner-city neighbourhood of Edmonton, Alberta.

The audience was placed in one room with the show taking place all around them. Audience were given beer and sat at tables, stuck in the unpleasant environment, their experience mirroring that of the main character, Falstaff, who lives at the bar. The space informed the text in the same fashion, but instead of the audience exploring and discovering a space room-by-room they were kept still to explore the emotional life of a space, a space that at first is joyous and comical, but takes a dark turn as the walls begin to psychologically close in around the characters (and by extension the audience).

Thou Art Here has epitomized how space and the audience work together. In particular the company has learned how to choreograph absence. The company knows how to integrate the audience into the play, make them the scene partner(s) and part of the topography of the environment and the situation even before the first public audience showing. The work has used a balance of implicit and explicit contract rules.

I began my research by studying Canada's alternative theatre movement in the 1970s, which had elements which retroactively could be given the label of "immersive" or having elements of "immersivity"(Machon 93). Now famous productions such as Theatre Passe Muraille's *The Farm Show* (set and created in a farm community in rural Ontario) present similarities to current immersive theatre trends (Usmiani vii). My research will take into account current Canadian models of immersive theatre from across the country. Due to Canada's relatively short history of theatre and in particular immersive theatre, my research is also rooted in English-language theatre of Europe and America.

I ascertain that immersivity can be split into three elements: space, audience, and contract. My past work and summer research has delved extensively into how space informs and transforms text. Space has inherent scenography that can unfold and specifically tell a story on its own based on its multi-sensorial elements. Theatre that acknowledges and uses

the space it is within, not just for its resources (light, sound, etc.) but also for its history, its tactile elements and the artists' own relationship with the space. Space, outside of theatre-made venues, has been explored for over a hundred years in English-language theatre. In 1892, Loie Fuller created performances "out of doors in 'found' spaces"(Roose-Evans 49) in Paris. Her work went on to inspire L'Art Nouveau movement. Max Reinhardt developed large-scale productions "in squares, streets, cathedrals, and in private houses"(65), notably his *Everyman* which took place throughout the whole town of Salzburg, Germany. His work retroactively has been described as "epic theatre", a term his disciple Erwin Piscator coined in the 1920s. Antonin Artaud, the renowned French theatre artist behind the Theatre of Cruelty, had hope that "the art of life could be expressed without buildings…since time and space are enough"(77), an idea connected to the cornerstones of contemporary immersivity. It is important that although the use of unconventional space is not a new or unique idea, how the space is used and approached can be.

The audience can build upon space, how their physical bodies and presence fit or don't fit into the world of the play. What is their role and how do they move in space? How can their absence be choreographed in rehearsal before the audience ever attends the event (Machon 171)? Audience can become the scene partner or part of the scenography, part of the ever-changing topography of the performance space. Ric Knowles asserts "space and people that inhabit it makes a comment already on the people that inhabit that space"(Houston 77). The moment the audience enters a space, they begin to paint on the space but they also become part of the paint on that space. By occupying it, they become part of its lived history. The concept of limiting audience, an idea explored by Jerzy Grotowski in 1966 with his production of *The Constant Prince*, led critics at that time to call it "a theatre of exclusivity" (Roose-Evans 146). Piscator brought the audience and actors

together. In his production of *Rasputin,* "audience became…participants [as] audiences joined in spontaneously with the massed actors on stage singing the International"(67). This led to Luca Ronconi's Theatre of Ecstasy, "performance which can never be a communal experience as each spectator is only able to witness specific episodes from the entire event"(81). These are examples of historical experiments into how an audience's experience of a theatrical event can become individualized, as the element of the audience as part of the theatrical event is no longer seen as a single entity. This can be explored in multiple ways: through one-on-one theatre, in which a single audience member experiences the play in isolation from others or the audience could be physically separated from each other by their visual or aural intake through a different distance, angle, etc.

The majority of theatres and theatregoers understand the performance contract - they know they will have seats, an intermission, can park their car nearby, will sit in the dark, the show will end after two hours, etc. However that is only one version of participation. Once you step outside those borders all the rules go out the window and a new 'contract' needs to be established. This can be done implicitly throughout the experience or explicitly via a character describing the rules or having them written down. Intention is key with the contract. What happens when the audience chooses to disagree or counter the contract in a performance? A new contract is being written in the moment. The contract shifts when the audience or the space has been changed in any form. The idea of the contract and manipulating the audience's agency during a show has been explored through a variety of participatory theatres, such as Bread and Puppet Theatre, the American-based company that in 1970 with their production of *The Domestic Resurrection Circus* gave the audience the choice "to stay outside or move inside…between watching and doing. It was a moment in life that mirrored the action in the play; between those that give in or those that save

themselves"(124). In Canada, Hillar Liitoja, Artistic Director of DNA theatre has explicitly used an "audience-performer contract"(Houston xi) in all of his company's work since 1977.

In the past decade, Britain has had an influx of immersive theatre companies, the majority of those interviewed in Machon's *Immersive Theatres* focus on non-text based work. Felix Barrett, Artistic Director of punchdrunk states "If ever an audience becomes aware of themselves as audience then we've probably slightly failed"(Machon 228). The idea of audience awareness being a negative or unintended result is counter to my goals with immersive theatre. While punchdrunk is pursuing theatre that by immersing the audience with a new contract via the space and audience participation, they hope the audience will be enveloped by the world, I am interested in the audience never forgetting they are experiencing a live event, that they are the essential element of the exchange.

In Canada there have been notable explorations in immersive theatre, particularly Necessary Angel in Toronto during the 1970s, work that Richard Rose, then Artistic Director, described as looking to define not just what the audience "merely saw...[but] commanding what audience sees"(Houston 49) and taking immersive theatre beyond the "novelty of multi-matrixed staging"(53). The trap of an immersive show being only about the novelty of performing outside of the understood "traditional" setting is prevalent. The *Gros Mourn* project in Newfoundland in 1973 surmised that the specificity of space and story will lead to universality in the relevance of the story (11). A concept re-explored in 2005, *The Weyburn Project* in Saskatchewan took huge empty spaces in order to reawaken all senses including touch, taste, smell, sight, and sound. They staged work in an abandoned mental hospital with a well-known history to the local community, which played into the audience's experience of the space (130). Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan's *Lesbian Park Rangers*, an immersive character durational piece in Banff in 1999, brought lived and real world

experience together. The performers explored the city of Banff attired as authority figures. They gave advice and informed members of the public about flora and fauna through a queer lens. Audiences were not aware or even necessarily consenting to be part of an audience, an example of an ever-changing contract and audience-to-space relationship as guerilla theatre that was not definable by any visual cues as theatre (101). Currently, Theatre SKAM in Victoria hosts an annual theatrical event, which separates its audience into mobile groups, each exploring a large physical space either by bike, foot, or wheel. During their exploration they witness multiple short-form performances within it. Vancouver-based Radix Theatre has presented works delving between the invisible and unknown spectator in comparison to the passive audience (Houston 144). For example, *The Swedish Play,* set in an IKEA in Richmond during store hours, had audience mixed with general public who were completely unaware of a theatrical event occurring around them. A similar aesthetic has been explored by Calgary's Swallow-A-Bicycle Theatre, which presents their show *Eavesdrop* in coffee shops across the city via headphones, without the public being aware it is occurring. Bluemouth Inc. is a Montreal/Toronto collective whose founding members focus is on going "through the fourth wall [and] living space" (160). The audience's proximity to the performer and the new contract established between them is a key component in their creation. Outside the March, a Toronto-based company started in 2009, focuses on "full theatrical experiences--personal and immediate encounters…[which] transform found spaces into playgrounds of performance" (*Outside the March Theatre Company*). Their work, based on text-based literature, focuses on the power of the audience and performer in the same space. Their 2014 production of *Brantwood*, an immersive musical set within the halls of an entire abandoned high school, gave the audience clear roles and a disjointed narrative of each individual audience members own choosing as they freely moved throughout the space.

The Four Projects

In summer 2016 I directed a site-sympathetic roving production of *Much Ado About Nothing* set in an historic mansion (Appendix A-2). In this work the audience discovered the space room-by-room as they were led on a 'tour' throughout it. The movement mirrored the characters' own experience of the space, furthering the emotional cross-over between audience and performer. Thou Art Here's work focuses on historical or culturally relevant spaces with a space memory that we can pull on and manipulate. It is about heightening and endowing a space. Theatre that is specific to a locale through language and narrative becomes more universal due to its local relevancy.

Much Ado About Nothing was written to take place within the residential household of a Spanish governor Leonato. This simple structure was then transposed to Calgary, Alberta. The play's setting was shifted but the audience was endowed throughout the play as members of the neighbourhood watch, as co-conspirators, wedding guests, and as individual characters. The endowments were malleable and changing, and they switched quickly. So it was interactive, but more importantly inclusive, bringing the audience into the story, making them culpable to every decision, and encouraging them to go physically and emotionally on the journey of the play.

In my recent immersive theatre research during the direction of *Everyone We Know Will Be There: A House Party in One Act* by Elena Belyea, an emerging Canadian playwright, I learned a great deal about split narratives (Appendix A-1). Developed under the auspices of being a site-specific production, the play is set in a residential household and requires the audience to be split into five separate groups in either an actual residential household or an accurate re-creation for a venue. A different exploration into immersive spaces, the workshop production I directed in June 2016 gave the audience explicit rules setting out the

type of agency and choices they had. The rules countered the expectations of the audience, whose show experience began before physically entering the space. They were individually invited via a fictional Facebook account. Audience could interact via comments, likes, and photos on the Facebook event. The expectation was made that the audience were going to be the friends of the party host and could engage with him in person as they had online. However once arriving at the event, they were informed they were "flies on the wall, unable to speak or interact with the host or any character", that they effectively could not be seen and did not exist in the eyes of the character. They had to follow their assigned character (one of five) "no matter what", which included physical chases and withstanding emotionally triggering situations in cramped environments.

The reversal of expectations was an unintentional element. The initial impulse was the audience would meet and know the characters before-hand online. However the public invited became enthusiastically engaged with interacting online with the character. Feedback made it clear that initial reaction to the "flies on the wall" instruction was negative. Unlike my version of *Much Ado About Nothing*, where all actions take place in a public eye, the events of this play were incredibly private, with audience members being privy to failed suicide attempts, violent attacks, and sexual intimacy. The production had a multi-sensorial element with smell and taste through cigarettes, alcohol, and food throughout the house for performers and audience alike.

The script was set and was not inspired by the space. The audience all had completely different experiences to the space. While one group explored the whole house immediately as their character cleaned in preparation for the party, another character was locked in his room tying a noose in preparation for an attempted suicide, with a third character locked outside the house looking through windows before sneaking inside. No

audience member had a complete narrative. Each was given a piece of the puzzle, only understanding where their character was coming from and what happened to them. This led to the audience having a similar lived experience to the party as an actual party, where there is a sense of missing out, and an active search for meaning and enjoyment at the event. Groups that arrived together were intentionally split up, which led to audience piecing the show together post-show, learning a whole new side of the events that unfolded.

A unique challenge was that it was physically impossible as a director to see the whole show. It would take five full runs for me to see the complete production and in that time the performance of each had changed. The collaboration and improv skill of the ensemble became the backbone of the execution as the moving pieces did not always fit together perfectly; scenes would stretch and shrink from night to night as needed and as cues came early or late. The audience inadvertently or actively would affect the length of scenes by choosing to obey or disobey the contract or stay on their character track.

Everyone We Know Will Be There was my first foray into separated narratives and using physical and emotional intimacy to bring the audience into the world, yet keep a fourth wall around the actor at all times. This exploration led to the audience's physical presence in the eyes of other audience members to fit within the stage picture as party guests and to fit within the topography of space. Although the contract was explicitly laid out, the element of separated audience experience is of utmost importance to me. I am interested in how an individualized experience or an element of exclusivity can in fact trigger more inclusivity for the individual audience member and make them integral, and therefore more likely, to have a shift in their perception. For example, one audience group sat in the dark silence with a character contemplating suicide as the sounds of a keg stand and celebration reverberated through the ceiling above. The juxtaposition between what different audience groups were

experiencing was poignant and realistic. The balance of movement and stillness, and of loudness and quiet affected emotionally charged and triggering situations in intimate environments.

My next research project was *ENCOUNTERS*, an exploration into short-form site-specific theatre with only one audience member to one actor (Appendix A-4). Conceived by Brian Dooley and Colleen Murphy and presented by the Citadel Theatre, twenty-four playwrights wrote five-minute plays. I directed eight plays: *The Trophy Hunt* by Trina Davies, *Intelligence* by Andy Garland, *Blankety Blank* by Beth Graham, *Face the Music* by Darrin Hagen, *So Long* by Nicole Moeller, *Songbird* by Trevor Schmidt, *Street Corner Playwright* by Kenneth T. Williams, and *The pee pee boy* by Michele Vance Hehir. Each was set in a different immersive environment with a new "contract" set out by the script and developed by the actor and me. The plays were only ever performed for a single audience member at a time with dress rehearsals involving me in hiding in an unobtrusive place in order to direct yet not take away from the individualized concept of *ENCOUNTERS*. Some of the performances had the possibility of an outside audience member, the unknowing passerby deciding to stop and watch or even attempting to interrupt. Sensorial experience was limited by restricting the audience's movement, setting them in spaces as small as a single washroom cubicle or a pitch-dark closet, and then alternatively expanded with one set on a busy downtown street corner. The single spectator was given no information about the theatre they were about to engage in and were randomly assigned to a play and led to the mystery location. The show would begin upon their arrival and end with their leaving. Shows became so individual as spectators frequently curated their experience by allowing the potential narrative to unfold, or sometimes responding and talking to the character, creating a new and unintended experience. The performances were experienced in rapid succession, which led to each

influencing the other as the order of experience altered the audience's understanding of how to engage.

Working on *ENCOUNTERS*, I discovered the influence of the individual playwright voice: how to collaborate with the playwright and stay true to his or her vision, while pursuing my understanding of the text. The power of one audience member and directing a play for a single audience member was a huge challenge. The actor would intimately interact with the audience, and in a short span, familiarize himself or herself with that specific audience member. This led to performances becoming particularly individualized as the performer would (and had to) react to the single audience member's reactions, whether they were laughter, disengagement or tears. This led to an extremely dynamic run of shows, with each performance of a play becoming quite distinct from the other. The actor could not ignore the offers they were given, and the shows became specific to the energy the audience brought into the space. Conversations with the actors post-performance revealed the huge leaps scripts would take depending on individual responses. The one-on-one theatrical immersion heightened the uniqueness of each performance. *ENCOUNTERS* was an exciting addition to Canada's limited exploration into one-on-one theatre, which inevitably takes on qualities of immersion, even if not intending to do so because of the inherent intimacy and privacy. The opportunity to work with eight different playwrights from across Canada, and to see the variety of immersive theatre writing and how a playwright's voice is present in the rehearsal hall taught me how a directorial vision of immersive theatrical structure has to be in balance with the playwright's vision.

Assist Ed is a new work I am currently developing, which explores assisted suicide and masculinity when faced with death (Appendix A-3). Developed to be performed in a proscenium or thrust stage set-up, *Assist Ed* explores elements of immersive staging within a

physical purpose-built or used theatre. The actor invites the audience up onto the stage en masse at the top of the show. They are invited to a party, full of food, drink, and music. The audience mingles and moves on the stage, with the solo performer moving among them. The intention of connecting audience space to performer space is to transport them to an alternative space, to a party, of their own mind's imagination. With lights, sound and food as handrails, their mind fills in the rest. As a live auction takes place around them (complete with bid paddles, real items, and real money exchanging hands), the audience is consistently influenced to believe the events taking place are real. The hope is that the tactile reality will create a significant emotional reality as the play sweeps the audience forward into being complicit in the assisted suicide of a hospitalized patient. The show is created to take place inside purpose-built theatres, contains elements of participatory theatre and necessitates an audience. The audience's involvement in the play's final action is essential to the character's arc. The participation includes elements such as dancing, live auction, and a party, which begin to connect to alternative live human experiences.

Each of these four research projects has combined different elements of "immersivity" that I want to continue to explore through a new work for my thesis production. In order to pursue my research, I will be directing an immersive workshop presentation of *Still Still Still* by Geoffrey Simon Brown. The production will interlace elements of "immersivity" into a black box theatre space. The production will utilize an implicit contract, with audience movement throughout the performance and audience space, and split narratives allowing for individualized experiences for various audience members.

The Playwright and *Still Still Still*

Geoffrey Simon Brown is an Alberta-based playwright, a graduate of the National Theatre School and Mount Royal College, and a founding company member of Major Matt Mason Collective. He is the recipient of multiple Betty Mitchell awards for his past work and is the winner of the Playwrights Guild of Canada's post-secondary playwriting competition. He made his Toronto premiere in 2016 with *The Circle* at the Tarragon Theatre. His company Major Matt Mason Collective is a collection of multi-disciplinary artists dedicated to creating visceral, intimate, experimental, small-scale theatre for the younger generation, with a passion for the provocative in subject matter and presentation. The company's mandate and dynamic voice/aesthetic first brought my attention to Brown's writing. I was introduced to Brown's work through a production of *Air* that I read on a festival submission I was curating. The work affected me through its accurate and guttural presentation of a slice-of-life in Canada that I had never read or seen on stage before. It was youthful and unapologetically contemporary. I programmed *Air* in Found Festival 2014 in a residential household living room, and have followed the company's work and Brown's artistic career since. My research on immersive theatre and decision to focus on English text-based Canadian theatre led me to read a wide variety of unproduced new Canadian plays. The script of *Still Still Still* consistently intrigued and confused me due to its distinct text formatting and non-linear narrative structure. The play is a departure from Brown's previously produced work that follows a more conventional Canadian regional theatre aesthetic.

The script is a fast-paced exploration about senses, memory, and ultimately how we experience the world around us. The audience experiences this through the sensory interpretation of Solomon Strange, a man who can not forget anything, but instead

remembers everything at the same time. The script lends itself to a flexible space and time and is not restricted by stage directions demanding a particular set or technical elements. I believe the narrative can be presented in a disjointed audience set-up and the script presents multiple theatrical design challenges.

Still Still Still was initially inspired by the writings of renowned 20th century psychologist Alexander Romanovich Luria. Luria spent over thirty years studying and cataloguing the memory, mind, and world of Solomon Veniaminovich Shereshevsky. These studies were published in *The Mind of the Mnemonist*, which details how Shereshevsky's memory works and how he trained to have a highly advanced memory and made his living as a mnemonist. A mnemonist is an individual with the superior ability to remember and recall long lists of information. The historical Solomon lived from 1886 to 1958 in Russia, beginning his life as a journalist until he discovered his incredible memory abilities by accident. This accident led Solomon to meet Luria and become the center of Luria's research for the rest of Solomon's life. Luria noted how Solomon's "memory is embedded in [his] pattern of life" (Luria vii) and defined how Solomon made choices and created relationships.

In Brown's script certain details and characters are extrapolations from recorded anecdotes from Solomon Shereshevsky's life. The character of Morris is based off of Solomon's journalist employer and boss, who accidently discovered Solomon's unique memory abilities. This discovery and initial meeting between Solomon and his employer is distinctly re-created and re-contextualized in Brown's play (Brown 9-12). The Host who interacts with the audience in *Still Still Still* and introduces "the world's greatest mnemonist" (Brown 59) is inspired by the historic Solomon's stage career as a mnemonist. The character of Dr. Francis String is a psychologist studying Solomon and has published a research book about him, which is based on Alexander Luria. The remaining characters, July, his twin sister,

and Jack, his grandfather, are Brown's fictional creations. The parallels between historical fact and Brown's fiction provide a jumping-off point for the narrative of *Still Still Still*.

Brown provides a few detailed stage directions at the beginning of the text, which describe the play as "An experiential manifestation of Solomon's world. Everyone is always there. Everything happens at once. And in one moment." (Brown 1). These four statements are the basis from which the majority of all my directorial choices will come. The stage directions describe the world of the play and set up the rules of the reality for all the characters. Multiple aspects of Solomon (such as his ability to alter his own heartbeat, his memorization techniques, his synesthesia, and his 'face blindness') are based on Luria's research (Luria 15). Solomon's memory and sensory interpretation were noted in great detail by Luria, particularly how his synesthesia and 'face blindness' worked. I want to replicate elements of synesthesia in the audience's experience of the show through staging and design. Specifically, Luria notes Solomon's synesthesia is ideasthesia, which is a phenomenon in which activations of concepts evoke perception-like experiences. In the play, this is represented in such moments as when Solomon hears a single note from a piano, then sees a distinct visual colour and feels a particular emotion. For example

> " [*A note played by Francis*]
> Turning orange
> The sides are
> Pushing
> Into Me
> Shining
> Aggressive
> Smells
> Very rough
> Very rough" (Brown 17)

Since the play is set within Solomon's mind, is it possible through design to have the audience see a colour when a sound is heard, or have the audience smell an olfactory design element when a lighting cue occurs.

Luria breaks down Solomon's mnemonic abilities, and describes a memory technique he applies called the method of Loci, more commonly known as memory journey or memory palace. Through the method of Loci, you place the items you are trying to memorize in a familiar environment such as the street you walk home on everyday. Then when you try to remember the list, you simply walk down the familiar street in your mind and see the new items placed along it. With prop and set design, an initial idea is to have objects in space cue new scenes as Solomon's gaze falls upon them. I want to explore how to stage an interpretation of the method of Loci. Luria's detailed notes on Solomon's personality will create the basis of developing Solomon's character with the actor.

The play unfolds its non-linear narrative through showcasing four distinct relationships Solomon has with his boss Morris, his grandfather Jack, his psychologist Francis, and his twin sister July. A fifth character, the Host, has a direct-address relationship with the audience throughout and does not interact directly with Solomon. The four relationships drive towards their final interaction and the traumatic sudden end of their relationship with Solomon. As each relationship unwinds, the Host introduces the audience to the mnemonist, Solomon Strange, Solomon's onstage persona. The content of each narrative begins to cross and combine with the other, eventually with one scene beginning before the other has finished. This culminates with all four characters interacting with Solomon simultaneously as the Host interacts with the audience. The inherent crossed sense stimulation and multiple interwoven narratives are applicable to my desired effect for individualized audience experiences. The script is uniquely typed out on the page in columns, diagonal lines, and spread across the page in patterns, unusual to a conventional text-based play layout. The visual layout of the script in combination with the text's content builds the rhythm and rising dramatic action of the play. Brown has explicitly informed me that the

layout of the text is also a clue to how he envisioned the staging and spatial relationship between the characters. However, Brown encourages me to interpret the text layout in my own particular directorial and staging vision.

My directorial work will begin by applying Canadian director Paul Lampert's adapted premise structure. A premise is a central message the director creates that represents what the play means to the director. The premise expands into source work; discovering a visual, aural, tactile, and literary source that represents the play as well. These sources are not specific design choices but a more encompassing and impulsive representation of the play. The premise acts as a guide for the director to defend all choices throughout the entire process. These source images are the guideposts that will assist me in directing the play, leading the design process, staging, and informing all production decisions. [1]

My rehearsal process will begin with a text-focused script breakdown. I will break down the play into units of action (units) and specify objectives for each character in each unit. This technique commits the actors to portray emotions on stage by putting themselves in the place of the character. The script work will focus on defining the relationships, conflicts, and chronology of events. I suspect the chronology of the play will be particularly difficult and a flexible element of the play, not inherently set or necessary for the audience to follow in their viewing. Solomon in particular is a challenging protagonist, as a character who is often only affected by the world around him, paralyzed by overstimulation and incapable of change or drive. The script work will include conversations around the use of choral lines and the flow and rhythm of scenes: when do scenes overlap, when are they simultaneous, etc. The majority of rehearsal will be focused on the staging and creating the audience-performer relationship. Problems to be solved in rehearsal will include defining when the

[1] Final premise used in rehearsal process was: without forgetting, the remembrance of every

audiences' experience begins, and finding how design can heighten and encourage engagement as well as connection between the audience and the six performers. Most particularly, I will be exploring if an implicit audience-driven audience movement, in which an audience motivates and chooses to physically move through the space without explicit instructions from performers, is possible during the play's performance. Can the audience be empowered to move and change their own physical perspective of the action as the play unfolds? The biggest challenge will be balancing my directorial vision with the playwright's voice and intention with the script. The rehearsal hall will be a collaborative environment, full of improvisation, and all artists will be encouraged to trust their impulses. The principles of immersive theatre will guide the rehearsal process: an implicit audience-performer contract, split audience narratives, and audience movement.

I will workshop the script and present a staged reading in the fall at York University campus. The staged reading will focus on the rhythmic structure and interconnectivity of the scenes. Auditions will be held in October prior to the staged reading. My design documents and directorial prep work will begin in October. The rehearsal process will be six weeks' long, involving collaboration with the playwright, production designer, stage manager, sound designer, pianist, and a six-member acting ensemble. The thesis production will be produced in downtown Toronto in a black box theatre in April 2017. My thesis will move beyond the more traditional straightforward staging of realistic and historical narrative plays that currently dominate English-language theatre in Canada. *Still Still Still* will provide a challenging, relevant, and affecting text for me to explore an immersive directorial approach.

Journals

October 29, 2016 – 1st Day of Auditions

I learned the lesson (again) of having a second person in the room with you to assist with actors entering and exiting, etc. There was no time to direct the monologues or script excerpts without going over time. The Host monologue was popular and I was questioning myself about what type of space is he in, where does he occupy and how does this affect the show? Is it an intimate space or a giant circus or something in between? The central theme of invention also kept popping. I have ideas of switching around which character reads which lines. Perhaps multiple actors could play one character since the whole play takes place inside Solomon's head. Talked to Geoff (the playwright) on the phone. I am nervous about working with him and sharing ideas. I feel that I am hiding the precarious financial situation of the project.

November 3, 2016 - Casting

Met with Rob Fothergill for the role of Jack. It was an invigorating conversation. He challenged me with all my ideas about immersive theatre and audience interaction. He is interested in being cast but wants do the reading first before he says yes for sure. I think he will challenge me a lot in rehearsal and potentially refuse direction.

November 18, 2016 – Staged Reading Prep

I am planning the staged reading and figuring out what needs to be cut from stage directions etc. I have thought a lot about how to stage the stage reading and have told myself to stop trying hard to be weird. I will do it simply with music stands to share the story as clearly as possible.

November 28, 2016 – Staged Reading Rehearsal

I had the realization from the group talk about how the chronology and the facts in the play

work. How the chronology may be important for us the actors and team to be solid on and have a clear idea (make a choice) but the audience will not walk away necessarily with a specific idea of what happened when and what is the present time if any and that is in fact the point!

November 30, 2016 – Staged Reading

Great house. I had the realization that Morris was not in the same world as the rest of the cast. The actor was cartoony and comic in a way that was funny but not supporting the story.

December 5, 2016 - Designers

I met with Alex and hired her as a designer on the show. I shared my premise and source work that I created using Paul Lampert's directorial method. It was the beginning of what feels like a fruitful collaboration. I brought Kim Craig (the stage manager) on for the show as well. Both are quite young but I feel confident they will commit fully to the project. Both are excited by the material and slightly intimidated by my 'age' and experience. I am setting up a schedule for design and production.

December 15, 2016 – Actors Lost

I had lots of bad news this week with two actors dropping out. I fear that my thesis is already not possible based on the venue and the restrictions of the space and how Taliesin and Kevin's need for proscenium set up is not helpful to my play in any way. Short set up makes it much more difficult to follow through with my artistic vision and research on creating an immersive environment. As we make the tech week schedule it becomes clear that my time in the space will be more limited than I expected. I will be last up each night of the festival so the sound and lights will need to be set up in a way that works for proscenium and for me. The financial concerns around the piece make that inevitable at this point. Quick

turnover and the fact that the audience has seen and been in the space already also limits my show's ability to transport the audience and to change the rules as they have been already so explicitly set up by the other shows.

January 9, 2017 – Design Meeting

Initial design meeting with Alex and it went well. She is a fantastic addition to the team. She brought in costume sketches and colour palettes for all six characters. We made some shifts particularly to how the women will be represented via clothing. Design of set focused on flexibility and the restriction to have it put it up and taken down in 15-20 minutes as well as using props in multiple capacities to limit production elements. Idea of hanging props throughout the space and taping elements to the walls behind the curtains so there can be design hidden away that can be revealed in the 15 minute intermission. The clock was discussed technically how to make something tick or a projection (which I encouraged to avoid). The deer will be people and the bursting into ash is a big question.

January 12, 2017 - Casting

I am offering a woman, Bobbi the part of Morris. I kept asking myself why? Switching the gender in a show is a choice and just choosing someone because they are the "best" is bullshit. Read a great article about casting ethics and these reasons felt important to tackle. I want more women in the show & involved in the process (more equity). Bobbi is Jewish and has cultural connection to Morris. The age of the characters is not accurate as it jumps through time and takes place in Solomon's mind and it's a workshop presentation.

January 16, 2017 – Venue Lost

Brick and Mortar double booked our venue! So we are currently in conversations over the production and where to move the whole thing. FUCK.

January 18, 2017 – New Venue

They are offering us less time in the new space and one less performance but the price is similar to the last space and within our range. Technically the space provides more lobby and green room spaces. Less storage as we have to strike every night. Need to discuss with Taliesin how she wants to set up the audience and how we will balance her needs with mine. Beggars can't be choosers.

February 1, 2017 – Sound & Opera

I am having challenging and fascinating conversations with Michael Palumbo, the sound designer. He discussed the idea of transducers, sound generated from the space and integrating the sounds of the space. Focused on repetitive sounds, the evolution of repeated sounds and schitzophonic sounds, sounds that are two distinctly different sources that slide from one to another sound. I am going to create a sound drawing of how I picture sound moves throughout the play for Michael as he requested. I met Perri, the opera pianist this week. We agreed that recorded piano would lower the quality of the production yet she still agreed to be on board. I need to know more about opera and music as I fumble around with the language and terminology.

February 15, 2017 - Design Elements

Discussed possible ash and cinder bursting options and want to look into bringing in some form of actual cinders or ash and throw on floor to test. Possibility of substances to blow into air without health or air affects. We set shareable set and props with other shows. Hanging items from the grid seems possible. We need a cheap substance to hang stuff with magnets. Floor to be covered with photos, writing, and images from the play. Anything mentioned in the play is fair game. As well the CAEA form was approved!

February 18, 2017 – Script Changes

Looked through the script's new draft and noting all changes. I went through my unit break down and gave each unit a name that summed up what happens. Questions around the gender of Morris in play? To play it as a man? To hide or to shrink away from that she is a woman? Or to change two references to the gender of the character?

March 2, 2017 – Playwright Meeting

Geoff, the playwright was here and we discussed the new draft of the script. When the script is really close together that represents the rhythm of the piece. The general flow of the script also represents the spatial relationship of the characters in the space. We discussed design (the hanging props, the floor of memories, the set pieces are still a mystery), music and how opera will be integrated. Geoff wants to leave that up to me as it may change depending if the opera is distracting or not. He gave me a tour of the Tarragon space. I want to ask him if he has anything he would like to share with the cast at the first read. Geoff brought up the violin playing and how will we do this. I do not know. The train? The bursting into ash? Lots I don't know.

March 6, 2017 – Design Meeting

I re-iterated Alex's responsibilities, encouraging her to contact me at any point with new ideas or images etc. I feel concerned that she is not fully equipped or able to do the jobs that lay ahead. First priority is seeing the venue and sending the dimensions to her so she can create a model box and we can solidify decisions. I feel that I am designing the show at some points and I am not a good designer. Lights – potentially only on trees because of roof problems. Ideas of bringing on board a lighting designer specific to the needs of designing all three of our shows. Have only one person in charge and concerned about lights will make Alex's design much simpler so she can focus on set and costume.

March 8, 2017 - Staging

I am thinking through staging options after having seen the space. Made a plan to meet up with Alex and Kim and play in the rehearsal hall with the exact spacing and how it will all shake down and work. Where are actors when they are not in the scene? Getting in and out of the curtains will be difficult. I think and feel they just stay there. But in what capacity? Will that be distracting? Reconnected with the premise. Feels true but maybe not the most true. I am in a doubtful state about the piece, the before I begin rehearsal spot where everything I have been working on and all the prep does not feel like enough. Got the aria translation to clarify the moment. Did objectives for each character. After I do unit breakdown I try to make all my objectives I (character) want B (other character) to do blank. The most active as it is in relationship with another. I will go through the script unit-by-unit discussing the flow of the moment, meaning of the words, why things are happening, read through, work through and then read again.

March 11 – First Read – Start of Rehearsal

I shared my thesis, my process up to this point, how I want to explore elements of immersivity in the production while balancing the demands of the script and vision of the playwright and the restrictions of the venue, which continue to unfold. Introductions with everyone sharing their very first memory gave me an insight into where each had come from and how they were raised. It was a connecting moment. Discussed the super objectives of each character and the play in general bouncing around ideas. I wanted to give everyone a chance to share and talk about the script, what they were thinking about, and how they understood it. How to take this forward into the table work in a structured and useful manner? How best to organize the table work? This program has not prepared me for this at all. Just trust my own instincts of conversation and guiding the actor to make a choice that is

in line with my vision. To do: to correlate the actor's super objective choice with my vision of their super objective. Super relieved that the process has begun and the ball is rolling forward.

March 14, 2017 – Table Work #1

Do I have the right questions or probing for the group? I looked at William Ball's *A Sense of Direction* to focus my thoughts and feelings about talking about objectives. I kept using wants and pushing the actors to use what do I want from the other character. Keeping it in relationship. It was difficult with the Host's relationship to the audience. Questions about the age of characters, the chronology and answering the questions were not always solid in my mind. I need to make choices on these items in prep of next rehearsal. We only got through one third of the script. Perhaps we can push and get through the rest on Thursday, which is my hope so we can move into individual scene work on its feet on Saturday. I left exhausted but felt that good conversation and work was done. I wonder more how much do I need to know in the rehearsal hall? I am creating a warm and friendly environment full of laughter. Rob rarely joins in on it, but I do not think it is helpful to be stuck on that fact. The text is both poetry/verse and also contemporary and everyday language at the same time. There is going to be a search to find what is the struggle in each scene. What was the struggle originally in the first time that Solomon experienced the scene and why is he going through it again now? Why is it essential?

March 21, 2017 – On Feet Rehearsal

The idea with the staging about what is reality of the scene staging versus essential action of the scene. What does Solomon physically remember? I feel myself constantly being pulled back to naturalism and staging realism. The one scene where Solomon is talking to Morris and Jack when they are both dying and describing it to Francis is an example of this. The

pronouns in the scene become problematic because we changed the gender. We did a run on feet, which became just a hot mess and did not really work. Where are the characters when not in the scenes? Floating on the outside but not actually walking in space. Need to either be standing or sitting or in the voms in some capacity. The final scene of Solomon, what does he realize? What happens to him? How does he change? Not clear. I am asking myself what do I want the audience to walk away with? What question, feeling?

March 28, 2017 - First Day at Tarragon Theatre

Today was the first time since the first read with the entire cast in the space. We created the opening of the play and went through a 1/3 of the play. I keep coming across how challenging this play is to stage. I think it is a combination of the design limitations and how the script changes location and characters constantly. The constant idea of how often do scenes overlap or another character is in that scene etc. It is a challenging idea of how do we integrate everyone yet keep a clean and sharp image that shares the scene and the playwright's intention. Consistently dealing with Rob's physical ability has also been a challenge but worthwhile endeavor. Directing makes me aware when I see a choice that I know works, one that I know is not working or when I am confused about it. It is immediate, and I am not sure where that comes from. Because I have had limited directing training in the program I think I am questioning myself, my choices, and aesthetics. Makes me think more about what the fuck makes a director? If anything. What skills do I have? It is so indefinable.

April 2, 2017 – Stumble Through

Did a musical warm up and went through the final transitions & did a stumble through.
It is difficult to articulate notes immediately following a run. I had multiple specific ones but I need to work on making them sharable in the moment. So many blocking and transition

issues in the show that are difficult to note, just need to be worked. Erika was there and gave me advice about audience interaction and sharing this with other characters and who is the audience to them? Starting the play on an extremely different note and tone by easing the audience into the world. When can we slow down and see a moment more fully before bursting forward to the next. Elements to still integrate: hanging props, ash, host, transitions, and sound.

April 15, 2017 – Last Rehearsal in the Hall

Geoffrey came to rehearsal today. Fine tuning blocking and prop movement then we did a full run. The cast is getting through but feels unsteady on their feet. They are wide eyed thinking of their next movement, where they are going and tying all the pieces together instead of being in the moment and acting. Geoff and I had a chat about sections that need to have more of the simultaneous language that existed earlier that wasn't working. He mentioned the idea again and it re-sparked in me my original vision, which after implementing it with the actors is working as they now know the text super well and are able to follow what each other are saying while speaking their own lines. I cut the final kiss to clarify the final moment of the play to a hand grab. The kiss either way is just confusing the momentum and brings in a lingering feeling of incest and confusion over the relationship.

April 17, 2017 – Tech Week

First day in the space mostly focused on setting up and was difficult working with Brick and Mortar. The actors did two line runs and they are really starting to cook with their lines. We had to cancel their spacing rehearsal due to time constraints. The space is going to work in the round as well as I envisioned. The lighting is going to be much worse than anticipated and the sound is going to work but be concentrated to one side making it difficult to level. Did light and sound levels at the same time which was madness to stay focused in yet I

succeeded in achieving a look & feel for both. I learned so much about music, having a musical director, and piano and violin as part of this process.

April 20, 2017 – Last Dress & Opening

We ran through four sections of complicated movement and text and drilled it. We had to re-focus the sound levels and some of the light levels due to another rental. The sound unfortunately has lost some of its potency and the lights are as good as they can be. At this point it is triage and have to choose my battles. There were a few minor staging issues to fine tune and bringing up cues and levels of the actors voices in combination with the tech. Clarified the audience interaction element so the actors should only be talking to the audience in the opening chorus section and no other. Opening went well and I feel so much lighter after conversation with the audience. The cast all came and shared a word or two with me. I want to detail them all but it was heartfelt and challenging process with all them and many shared hopes to collaborate together again.

April 22, 2017 – Closing Day

We are fixing the sound levels for the matinee as other rentals keep playing around with them. I am concerned about attendance and hope it will be a decent sized audience turn out. I wonder ahead of time if I have said everything I need to do as a director. When does my job of leading stop? Should I keep giving words of wisdom and little notes or just let it all go? The matinee had a super small audience turn out but the final show went fantastic with almost a full audience. Geoff wants to keep working on the show with me. The story is great and how it can be expanded and more successfully tell the story of synesthesia and bring the audience into Solomon's mind.

April 24, 2017 – Post Show

This process has been extremely challenging. First time producing in Toronto, second time

producing outside of Edmonton. It was hard on my health, my relationship with Marlee, and my relationship with theatre. How do I keep a level head and feel that I am guiding the ship even when the ship has parts that are sinking or can't float? I feel there was something inherently wrong pedagogically about how we produced the show and the festival. A micro festival of three one acts make sense but the way finances, the issues of space, and how we didn't have continuous contact to the space is a great lesson on how not to produce.

I want to produce but I cannot afford (in all senses of the word) self-financing projects like this. I hope to continue to have a professional relationship with all the artists involved in this project but they were collectively unimpressed with York University. The project was not a good ambassador for the program to the world. They all felt that the project was left hanging and dry and questioned if we were even attached to York in any capacity. What made this different than an independent theatre project downtown? My belief in new Canadian work and my researched ideas on immersive theatre has been solidified. I hope to continue to develop my immersive aesthetic and apply this to staged productions in theatre spaces. I believe in integrating the playwright and feel I found someone in Geoff that I can collaborate with. The spread out rehearsal process did not work for this script and the cast would benefit from a shorter full time rehearsal process. I've learned more about what I want as a director but I do question what did I learn in this program that I applied directly and indirectly in this process?

Conclusion

I strived to have the principles of immersive theatre: an implicit audience-performer contract, split audience narratives, and audience movement, guide my rehearsal process for *Still Still Still* by Geoffrey Simon Brown. I applied my immersive directorial approach to the beginning of the rehearsal process and explored all three elements. Due to production and financial constraints all elements were changed or cut in order to make the workshop presentation of *Still Still Still* go ahead within the restrictions of the venue and the micro festival it was presented within. Despite this failure of applying the immersive theatre principles to the show I believe the workshop presentation succeeded as a theatrical event for the audience, an artistic expression of the playwright's vision, and as a collaborative process between all the artists involved.

The staged reading was a success with the rehearsal focused on the rhythmic structure and bringing the complicated and difficult to read script to life. It clarified the playwright's intentions and saved valuable time in the rehearsal for the workshop presentation. After the staged reading multiple elements of the production began to unravel. Within weeks several actors dropped out due to scheduling and financial conflicts with the large voluntary commitment, which shifted my focus as a director to casting while in the design process. The original venue was lost due to a scheduling miscommunication between the venue owners and multiple theatre companies. With only weeks before rehearsal began and after design had been finalized, a new venue was found, which caused a major shift in how the show was going to be staged and designed. I made the financially driven decision to produce the workshop presentation in collaboration with two other one-act MFA thesis productions. All these events and decisions shifted the scope of the project and the

possibility of exploring my thesis proposal of integrating immersivity into a black box theatre space.

Original design concepts for the production included highly distinct audience seating/standing arrangements that would have encouraged and enabled a fluid audience movement during the play. This was explored with audience movement mimicking the movement of a clock in a clockwise pattern around the black box space. However, this movement was cut because of the production and space restrictions. The festival setting made it impossible to create an immersive environment that encouraged audience movement. In order to accommodate the other shows my stage set up had to be transformed into a more traditional proscenium stage set up in a short fifteen minute turn around. Due to this restriction I decided to stage the production in-the-round stage configuration. I believe the round configuration resembled the intimacy and immediacy I had hoped to explore with an immersive environment. This in-the-round stage configuration also changed multiple times in the process. When the original venue was lost, the new venue made available to us could not accommodate a four-corner vom set up. Alternatively I created a three-vom set up for entrances and exits with four miniature voms that worked as landing spots for the actors where their backs would not be to an audience member. This set up became the final stage configuration (Appendix C-3). The audience risers made available were unable to be taken down and placed in storage and had to stay in the venue. With limited rehearsal time and with one audience bank of risers being visually coded as the main audience bank, I made the decision to fully cut any intention of audience movement.

During rehearsal I explored multiple ways to integrate the audience into the performance and implicate them in the action of the play. My original plan was for all the characters to interact with the audience and with the set up to have simultaneous scenes be

delivered to different groups of audience members. My intention was to isolate audience banks so depending on where in the space the audience chose to sit they would experience a distinctly unique narrative. In the end the play had direct address with the audience but not to the level I originally envisioned. Joe Perry, who played the Host, was adept at interacting with test audience members and fellow cast members during rehearsals. He consistently made new offers and was ideal to explore this audience participation. I decided that the Host's interaction with the audience off the top allowed the fourth wall to be broken and brought the audience in the world of the play. However in rehearsal when the Host broke the fourth wall in the middle of the play in a manner that encouraged a verbal response from the audience, this audience response altered the rhythm and pace of the play that I believe was detrimental to the play as a whole. It also lessened how the Host thematically highlighted conversations Solomon was having with other characters in parallel scenes. Therefore all Host sections after the opening did not allow for the audience to verbally respond to the Host. The Host's sections of dialogue are connected to my original vision in how individualized audience experiences could have singled out audience members to have unique and potentially private moments.

I explored all the characters addressing the audience directly. I had each character deliver their lines to audience members instead of to Solomon in the initial chorus scene. The idea behind this was that the audience is in Solomon's mind, as are the characters. The characters are still delivering the lines to Solomon but they do this via an audience member. I explored this idea up to the final dress rehearsal. I had characters do distinct shifts in the middle of scenes from delivering lines to Solomon to an audience member on the opposite side of the space. However after multiple runs and discussions with the playwright I decided to cut this element from the majority of the play. I felt it pulled the audience out of the

moment and brought less of a dramatic or emotional context to the scene. If there had been more time I would like to explore this element farther to see how I could integrate it into the play. My exploration of direct address was a contentious direction with multiple actors especially Rob Fothergill. Rob fought me on my choice to have him explore delivering any lines to the audience instead of to Solomon. He refused to see the worth of the choice. This resistance was also a factor in my decision to cut the direct address. If the characters were not all consistent in their direct audience address this choice would not work. In performance I noticed Bobbi Goddard who played Morris continued to have moments of direct address left over from rehearsal. I decided to leave the direct address in the first choral scene as a transition from the Host's first monologue. The first choral scene represents the entire play, which the audience experiences in a quick succession of one-line snippets. These lines all foreshadow full scenes later in the play. These full scenes then play out immediately after. *Still Still Still* is structured as a repetition play where the action of the play happens three times. The first time occurs from the Host's opening monologue to the initial chorus scene, the second time is the majority of the play from Solomon's first scene to his realization about the identity of July, and the third time is the final chorus section until Solomon's replacement of the Host in the final monologue.

In the public presentations the rules of the play were no different than the understood rules of traditional English language theatre in Canada. My hope to have an implicit audience-performer contract that was different than the expected one was thrown out. My show was presented last in the order of the festival so the audience would always have a prior experience in the venue having just watched two other one acts. This prior knowledge and the loss of individualized audience experience and audience movement made this shift in expectations via an audience-performer contract impossible to pursue.

The production restrictions on the entire process were extremely limiting to my ability to fully explore my thesis, however, the cast, crew and playwright were pleased with the presentation. The playwright is currently working on a new draft and we are in conversation on future production pursuits, and the actors have all expressed an interest in collaborating with me in the future. I succeeded in running a collaborative and trust filled rehearsal hall that also challenged everyone in the room. I know one of my greatest assets, as a director is how to create and run a rehearsal hall that brings a team and script together. I believe unequivocally the workshop presentation made the script come to life and began to transport the audience into Solomon's mind. It gave them a taste of what it may feel like to experience synesthesia, face-blindness, and the overwhelming sensory overload that Solomon lives with. Particularly I feel the hanging props and ash bursting were successful theatrical conventions that displayed the playwright's intentions. The overlapped text particularly the explosive climax with all six actors talking at the same time was aurally how I envisioned it. When I work on this script again I want to re-investigate the design elements and find creative solutions to have the lights, sound, and set highlight and expand the script's feelings of synesthesia. In my opinion, the grey scale tone of the design hurt the playwright's intentions instead of being neutral objects that could transform the world into a fantastical and colorful one; it made the world dim and neutral. I explored how to direct non-linear narratives and how to rehearse simultaneous and overlapped text through trial and error in the hall.

My artistic challenge to discover how the audience-to-actor relationship amplifies a text-based play's inherent theatricality and how theatre can embrace the live moment was at the forefront of my mind throughout the process. I believe my workshop presentation was aware it was happening in present time and acknowledged through staging and participation

the relationship between the actor and audience. Therefore I am hopeful the audience experienced a "change in perception" (Roose-Evans 168) perhaps similar to how Solomon Strange experiences this change. Although my thesis did not turn out how I envisioned it at first, the process has begun to clearly define my directorial aesthetic and method. I will continue to explore my immersive directorial approach in both site-specific and stage theatre.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Archival Photography of Research Projects



Image 1. Two actors (Roland Meseck & Jacob Holloway) perform in a bathroom with audience watching through doorway. (*Everyone We Know Will Be There* by Elena Belyea. Directed by Andrew Ritchie. May 2016.)



Image 2. Audience gathered around two actors (Ashleigh Hicks and Roland Meseck) performing in a bedroom. (*Everyone We Know Will Be There* by Elena Belyea. Directed by Andrew Ritchie. May 2016.)



Image 3. Audience drinks with the actor (Jacob Holloway) in an interactive group scene on the house porch. (*Everyone We Know Will Be There* by Elena Belyea.



Image 4. Acting ensemble (10 actors) perform a dance scene inside the historic Lougheed House venue (*Much Ado About Nothing* adapted and directed by Andrew Ritchie. September 2016.)



Image 5. Actors (Elena Belyea and Oscar Derkx) perform outside in the historic Lougheed House gardens on bicycles**.** (*Much Ado About Nothing* adapted and directed by Andrew Ritchie. September 2016.)



Image 6. The audience drinks, eats, and dances with the solo performer (Andrew Ritchie) on stage. (*Assist Ed* created and performed by Andrew Ritchie. June 2016.)



Image 7. An audience member wins a hammer from Ed (Andrew Ritchie) during a live auction. (*Assist Ed* created and performed by Andrew Ritchie. June 2016.)



Image 8. An audience member helps dress and clothe Ed (Andrew Ritchie) who is immobile in the bed. (*Assist Ed* created and performed by Andrew Ritchie. June 2016.)



Image 9. Solo performer (Doug Mertz) performs during rehearsal in back alley venue. (*ENCOUNTERS* conceived by Brian Dooley & Colleen Murphy. Directed by Andrew Ritchie. July 2016.)



Image 10. Solo performer (Lora Brovald) performs during rehearsal in backstage hallway venue. (*ENCOUNTERS* conceived by Brian Dooley & Colleen Murphy. Directed by Andrew Ritchie. July 2016.)

Appendix B: Script Excerpt of *Still Still Still*

Script Excerpt Pages 51-52

HOST: Every sensation

FRANCIS: Calm down

CHORUS: Every person

SOLOMON: Get it out of me

CHORUS: Every sound

HOST: Every smell

CHORUS: Every taste

FRANCIS: Focus

CHORUS: Every word

CHORUS: Every note

SOLOMON: It

CHORUS: Every name

It

CHORUS: Every place

It

CHORUS: Every room

It rushes in

HOST: Every touch

CHORUS: Every picture

At me

CHORUS: Every second

At once and I

HOST: Every phrase

CHORUS: Every hair

I

CHORUS: On every head

Can't see

CHORUS: Of every person

I can't feel anything

CHORUS: You've ever met

I feel everything

CHORUS: And the womb of your mother

So I can't feel anything

CHORUS: On the day you were born

FRANCIS: Calm down

CHORUS: Every person

CHORUS: Every sound

SOLOMON: You can create your

CHORUS: Every taste

Your person

CHORUS: Every word

Your self

CHORUS: Every note

You can create your self

CHORUS: Every name

You change your past

CHORUS: Every place

And I've been

CHORUS: Every room

So many different things

CHORUS: Every picture

I am

CHORUS: Every second

So many different people

CHORUS: Every hair

CHORUS: On every head

FRANCIS: Cut out what you don't need

CHORUS: Of every person

Focus on the moment

CHORUS: You've ever met

CHORUS: And the womb of your mother

SOLOMON: It doesn't work

CHORUS: On the day you were born

FRANCIS: Now

CHORUS: Every person

Be here with me

CHORUS: Every sound

Cover the rest

CHORUS: Every taste

CHORUS: Every word

SOLOMON: I cover it

CHORUS: Every note

I cover and it glows

HOST: Where what's past

CHORUS: Every name

Glows Is relived

CHORUS: Every place

It climbs through

CHORUS: Every room

I focus and the words fall into my mind

CHORUS: Every picture

And I disappear into it

HOST: Over and over and over

I burn it

CHORUS: Every second

I burn the thoughts
And it burns
It burns
Into me
It burns into me

FRANCIS: Stop

SOLOMON: I can't

HOST: Where the past
Murders the present

HOST: And the dead
Are as alive as the living

CHORUS: Every hair
CHORUS: On every head
CHORUS: Of every person
CHORUS: You've ever met
CHORUS: And the womb of your mother
CHORUS: On the day you were born

Script Excerpt Pages 56-58

HOST: And now

FRANCIS: And now

JACK: And now

MORRIS: And now

JULY: And now

SOLOMON: And now

HOST: The person you've been waiting for

JACK: Solomon

FRANCIS: A man whose remarkable mind defies the very laws of nature

MORRIS: I'm so tired, Solomon

HOST: And challenges our belief in human capacity

JACK: I can barely

FRANCIS: They say a man is nothing without a memory

MORRIS: I have nothing

HOST: That we define ourselves by our past

I have nothing

FRANCIS: Remembering his first step

[*July begins to sing*]

JACK: Oh

HOST: His first word

JACK: Oh

FRANCIS: His first breath in the world

JACK: Oh

HOST: Over and over and over

MORRIS: I'm so tired

FRANCIS: Where the past murders the present

MORRIS: It's killing me

HOST: And the dead are as alive as the living

JACK: Play for me

FRANCIS: Every person

MORRIS: I can't

HOST: Every sound

JACK: Play for me

FRANCIS: Every taste

MORRIS: I need to

HOST: Every word

JACK: Softly

FRANCIS: Every note

JACK: Just softly

HOST: Every name

JACK: Just softly, Solomon

FRANCIS: Every place

MORRIS: Where's my

HOST: Every room

JACK: Oh

MORRIS: Oh christ

FRANCIS: Every picture

MORRIS: Oh no

JACK: Oh

HOST: Every second

MORRIS: Oh my god

JACK: Oh

FRANCIS: Every hair

MORRIS: Oh my god

HOST: On every head

JACK: Oh

MORRIS: Oh my god

FRANCIS: Of every person

JACK: Oh

HOST: He's ever met

MORRIS: Oh my god

FRANCIS: And the womb of his mother on the day he was born

[*July stops singing*]

FRANCIS/MORRIS/JACK/SOLOMON: Don't go away

[*Beat*]

JULY: Have to

SOLOMON: Why?

JULY: That's how it happens

Appendix C: Production Design

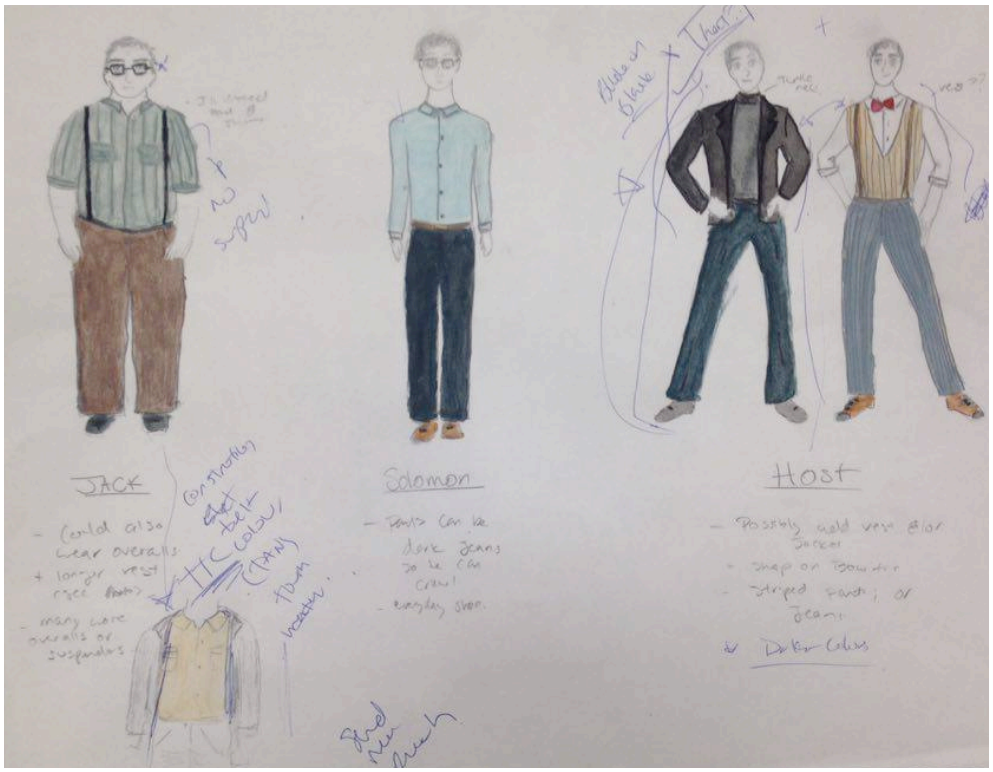

Image 11. Costume design sketches by Alex Caprara (*Still Still Still* by Geoffrey Simon Brown. Directed by Andrew Ritchie April, 2017.)

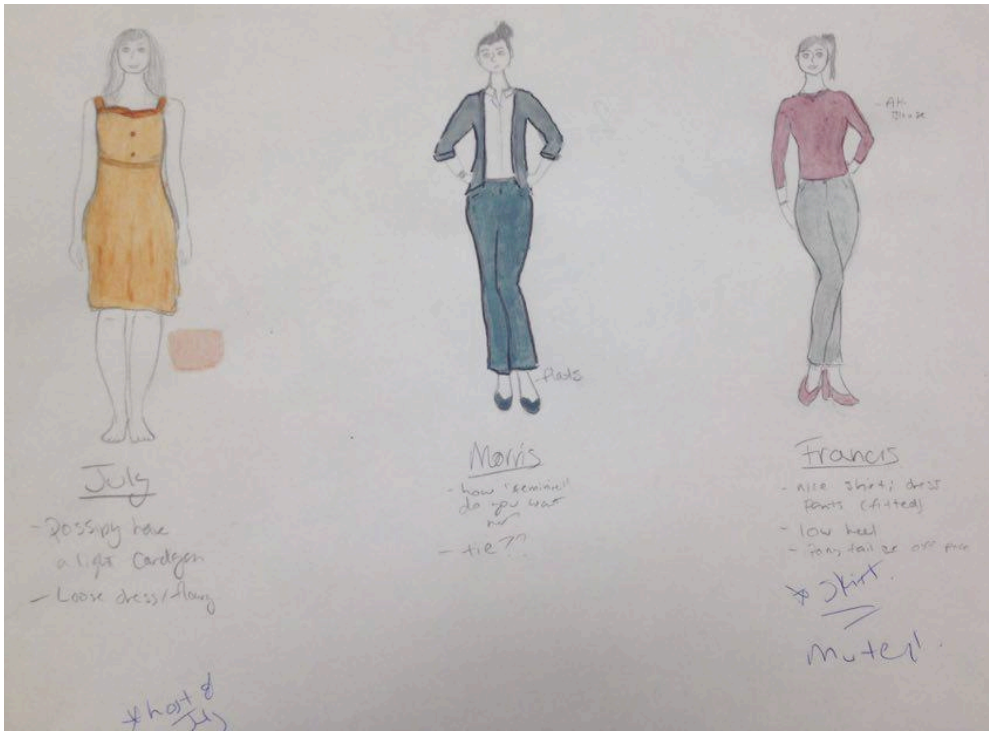

Image 12. Costume design sketches by Alex Caprara (*Still Still Still* by Geoffrey Simon Brown. Directed by Andrew Ritchie. April 2017.)



Image 13. Set Design Sketch by Alex Caprara (*Still Still Still* by Geoffrey Simon Brown. Directed by Andrew Ritchie. April 2017.)

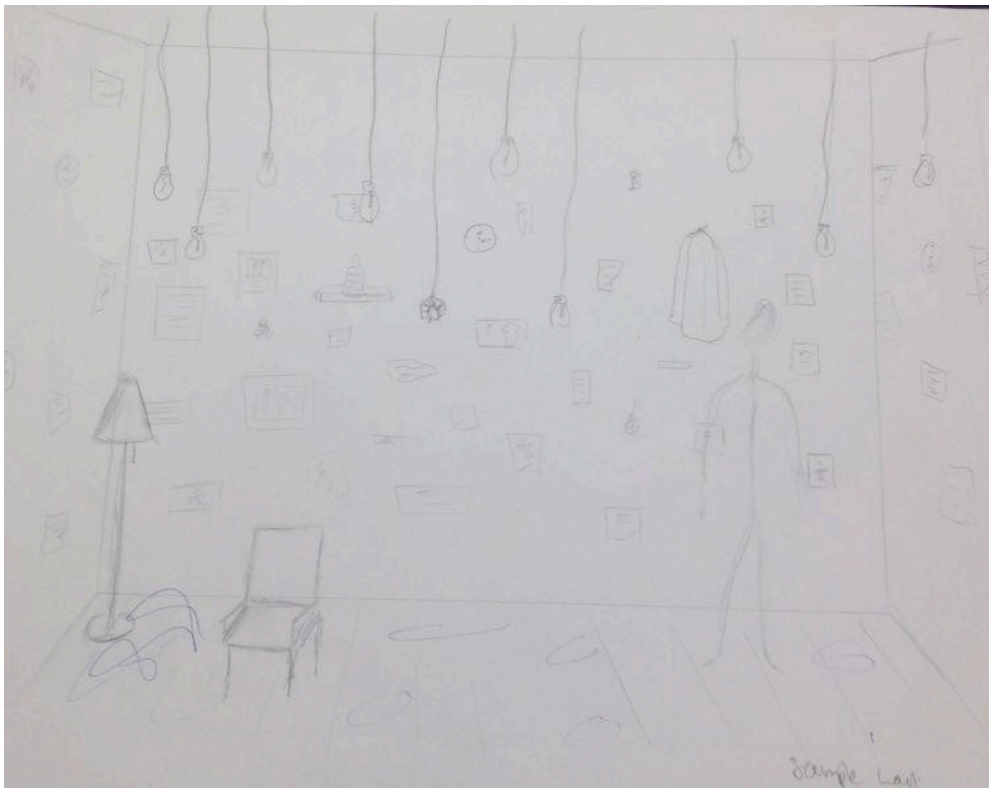

Image 14. Set Design Sketch by Alex Caprara (*Still Still Still* by Geoffrey Simon Brown. Directed by Andrew Ritchie. April 2017.)

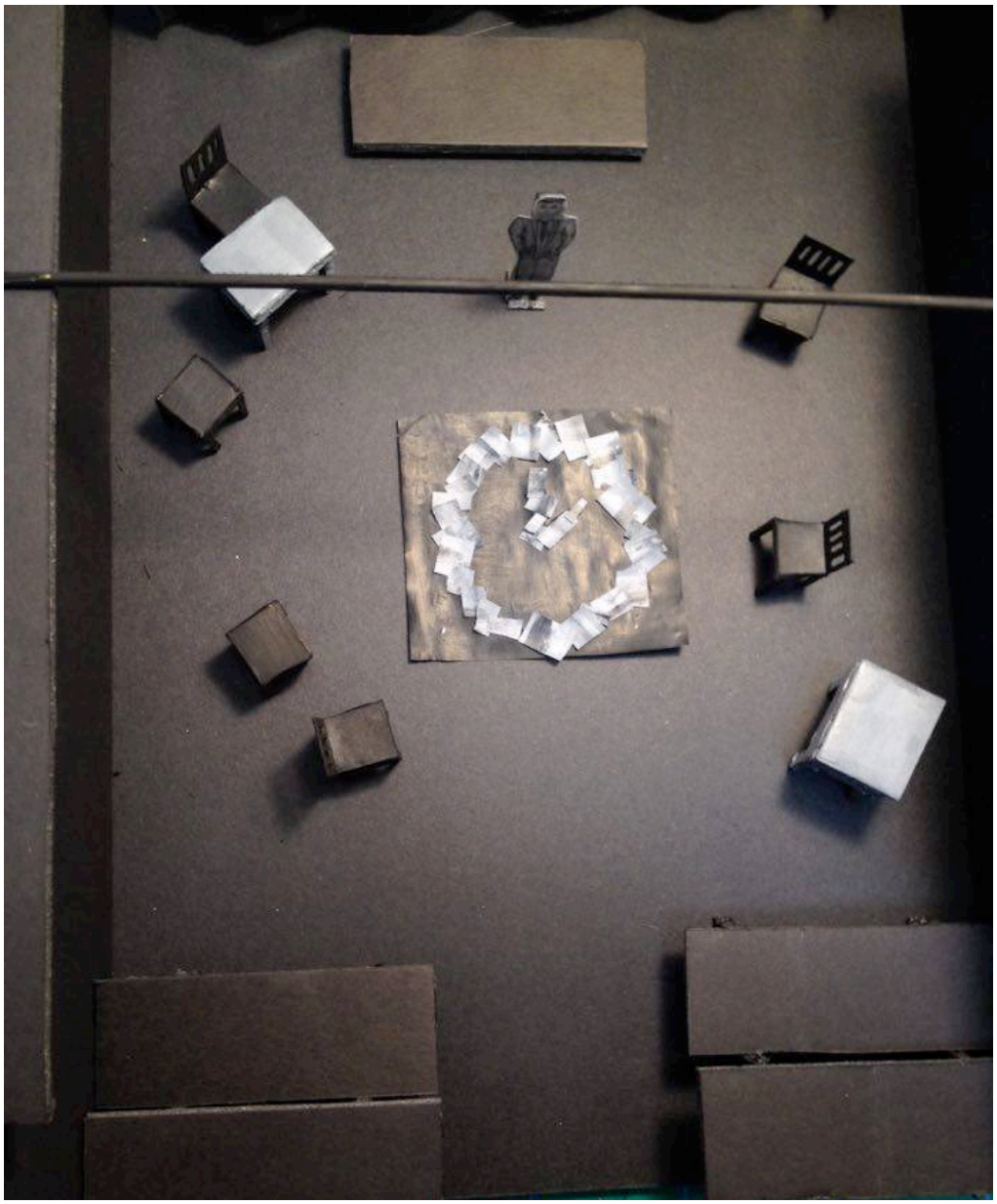

Image 15. Set Design Model Box by Alex Caprara (*Still Still Still* by Geoffrey Simon Brown. Directed by Andrew Ritchie. April 2017.)

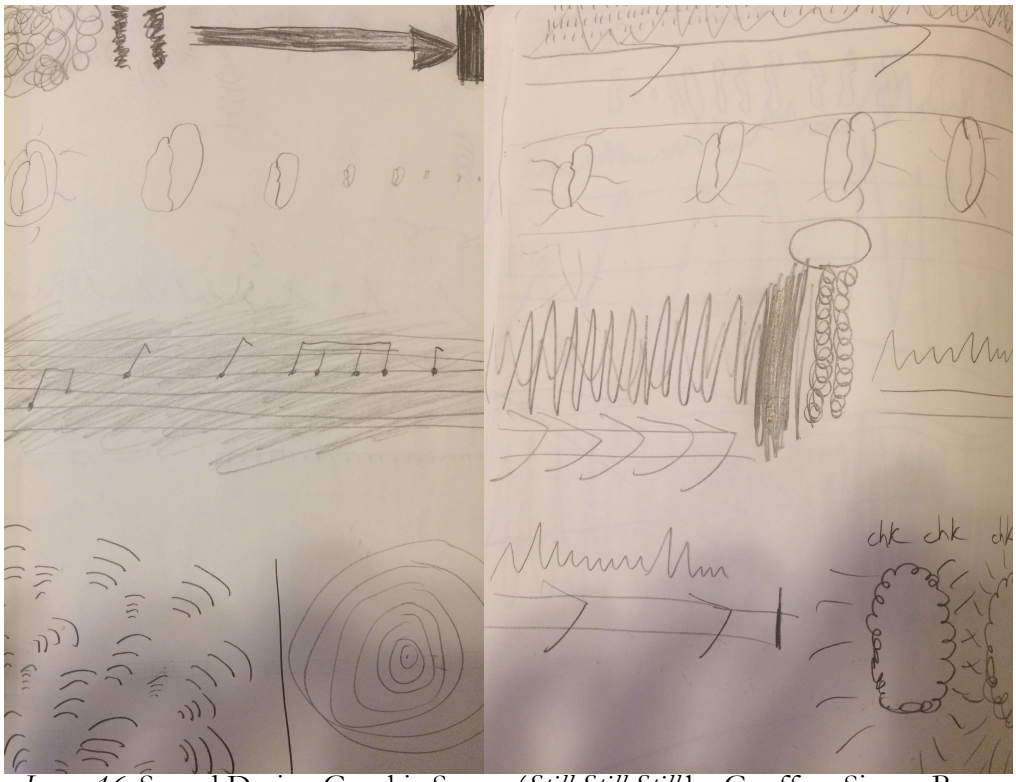

Image 16. Sound Design Graphic Score. (*Still Still Still* by Geoffrey Simon Brown. Directed by Andrew Ritchie. April 2017.)



Image 17. Marketing Design Poster. (*Still Still Still* by Geoffrey Simon Brown. Directed by Andrew Ritchie. April 2017.)

Appendix D: Archival of *Still Still Still* Workshop Presentation

Playwright's Notes
I started dreaming about this play seven years ago
After hearing Luria's account of Mr. S in *the Mind of the Mnemonist*
So, ironically, it's hard for me to remember what I was feeling when I first started writing it
So instead I'll talk about what it means to me now
When I was workshopping this play in Washington DC, I visited all the big monuments
And I was struck by the flow of people taking pictures and walking away
Not reading the words carved into the wall while they're in front of it
The same as taking a video at a concert
To watch later instead of now
It makes sense
We all know someone with alzheimers or dementia
I'm terrified of losing my mind
We now have the power to document everything
But I wonder what gets left behind
When I was a kid I used to get really upset over the fact that I could never truly know if I was seeing the same reality as anyone else
That I could never see colours through someone else's eyes
In a lot of ways this play was an attempt to do that
There's a lot of things and people that I love hidden in here
And most of them will never see it
This play is dedicated to Iris Turcott
Who knew what I was doing before I did
And told me how to write it
I love you
And am so blessed to have known you

Cast & Creative Team Listing
Playwright: Geoffrey Simon Brown
Director: Andrew Ritchie
Production Designer: Alexandra Caprara
Sound Designer: Michael Palumbo
Festival Lighting Designer: Claire Hill
Stage Manager: Kim Craig
Piano accompaniment by Perri Lo
Violin accompaniment by Larissa Poho
Production Manager: Ella Wieckowski
Cast: Erik Mrakovcic, Rob Fothergill, Bobbi Goddard, Mariann Kirby, Louise Lambert, Joe Perry



Image 18. The Host (Joe Perry) welcomes the audience at the beginning of the play. (*Still Still Still* by Geoffrey Simon Brown. Directed by Andrew Ritchie. Photography by Avia Moore. April 2017)



Image 19. Solomon (Erik Mrakvocic) is attacked by the deer played by the Chorus. (*Still Still Still* by Geoffrey Simon Brown. Directed Andrew Ritchie. Photography by Avia Moore. April 2017)



Image 20. Francis (Louise Lambert) looks on as Solomon (Erik Mrakvocic) remember being in the womb with sister (Mariann Kirby). (*Still Still Still* by Geoffrey Simon Brown. Directed Andrew Ritchie. Photography by Avia Moore. April 2017)



Image 21. Solomon (Erik Mrakvocic) fights off the overwhelming sensory overload at the climax of the play. (*Still Still Still* by Geoffrey Simon Brown. Directed Andrew Ritchie. Photography by Avia Moore. April 2017)