TRAVELS WITH MY FAMILY

AARON KELLY

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Abstract

This paper examines the processes, research, and theories drawn upon to create an interactive physical world using set, lighting, and media design. This world -- a full scale set -- built in the Joe Green Theatre was used to stage and photograph narrative rich large-scale images. The exhibit itself questioned creative agency in theatre story telling by placing the design of the environment before the creation of the story. The audience experience of the exhibit enabled the questioning of the relationship between audience and creator by breaking down the barriers between the two. This project and paper examine the process of creation and questions who is the performer, who is the audience, and who is the creator.

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Aaron Kelly

Professor Shawn Kerwin

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Introduction

This MFA project provided me with an opportunity to address what I view as a gap in theatre creation potential. The designer and technical teams are often considered to be a role of service to the creator (directors and producers for example). What would happen if the designer were to take on more of a creative role in theatre creation? What possibilities could emerge?

This thesis project developed between 2015 and 2019 and consisted of six stages: background research into images and concepts I explored, building of the model, the developing of processes for the build and scenic art, the build and construction, the photoshoot, and the exhibition. There are three distinct outcomes from this process: the photos (*Family Time*, *Conversation Time*, *Mother Time*, and *Daughter Time*(figure 35-38, Appendix)), the exhibition *Travels with my Family*, and the creative work that resulted from the exploration of the exhibit by co-creators of all kinds.

This paper presents the rationale, method and outcomes of my project in an effort to explore the questions about creative agency and the reorganization of modern western theatrical hierarchy (typically with producer and director at the top and actors, managers,

designers, and technical crew underneath). I begin with some background content on my rational, stitching together a number of theatrical design theories and methods. My methods range from immersive elements where the audience enters and experiences the art from the inside, exhibitions, and draws from the methods of photographer Gregory Crewdson and playwright George F. Walker - who wrote the *Suburban Motel* plays. Next, I explore my stitched-together process and many of its discoveries and challenges. This includes sections dealing with my build, paint, lighting, sound, photographic, and art direction processes. Also, my rational for approaching this project with the desire to do as much of the work as possible alone. Finally, I discuss the outcomes – the performance of the work and the open-ended opportunity for audiences to explore and become creators in the world of this project. The exhibition was open for a little over a week and over one thousand visitors - passersby, students, playwrights, outside artists and faculty – entered the world of *Travel with my Family* in the Joe Green Theatre at York University. There were over 500 photos, 12 plays, one film, and one publicity poster For Transcendence Theatre's production *#filters* (see figure 1) created and shared with me privately or through social media. All of this shows that new creative possibilities can emerge and be devised when existing structures are pulled apart and reorganized.

Figure 2. "#Filters Poster", Cassandra Troiano, 2019.

Struggling with creative agency in traditional western theatre

In a career spanning more than 20 years in theatrical design and production management, my artistic contribution has been the execution of the visions of other people or collectives, of which I have been a part. In most of my personal theatre practice, the show starts as a written script, and the creative team serves the script thought their choices. The play has certain requirements or needs that are demanded by the creators to varying degrees, depending on their role. In this model of theatre there are lines that need to be spoken and heard, actors that need to be seen (or hidden), physical elements that need to be present (such as scenery and costumes) and lighting that is controlled to either reveal or obscure the action on the stage. Depending on the relationship with the director and the strength of the creative team's initial vision, the designer has the freedom to create fantastic works of art and creativity. However, I have learned throughout my career that these works are limited by the need to serve the play. I have learned that my primary function was to serve the actor, the narrative, the play, the action and momentum on the stage. As a result, my work has largely been in reaction to the choices of others and built upon the creative instinct and output of others. The play has a story to tell, a set of actions to reveal, and prescribed requirements. Theatrical design must support the content. It is in reaction to this causal relationship, that I undertook this project, to create a space where my vision -- the vision of a designer -- initiated the creativity.

As a production manager and technical director, I have also felt the pull between creative agency and restriction in different ways. Production managers and technical directors have tremendous freedom to think creatively when solving, building, implementing, and

realizing the visions of the design and of the artistic team. Their jobs are the nexus point

between the realities of money, time, resources, law, policy, physics and the creative vision.

Like the designer they are still limited. Their creative output is limited by the need to serve two

masters: artistic vision, and the resource realities of the production.

Shawn Kerwin, Associate Professor of set and costume design in the Department of

Theatre at York University, uses an example from *Tartuffe* to emphasise the designer's

limitations in service of the play. In the following excerpt *from the play* we can see an example

of the tension between creative agency and the restrictions imposed by the script. Here in Act

4, Scene 5 of *Tartuffe* by Molière (Molière), Elmire instructs her husband Orgon to hide under a

table:

> ELMIRE
> Bring up this table, and get under it.
> ORGON
> What?
> ELMIRE
> One essential is to hide you well.
> ORGON
> Why under there?
> ELMIRE
> Oh, dear! Do as I say;
> I know what I'm about, as you shall see.
> Get under, now, I tell you; and once there
> Be careful no one either sees or hears you.
> ORGON
> I'm going a long way to humour you,
> I must say; but I'll see you through your scheme.
> ELMIRE
> And then you'll have, I think, no more to say.
> (To her husband, who is now under the table.)

This one moment is not only comically important but absolutely vital to the plot development.

Orgon, the head of the household, has been conned by the imposter Tartuffe and has been

acting under a set of beliefs that the audience knows are mistaken. Orgon is now crouching

under a table in the living room at his wife's request. He is about to hear a conversation that

will change the course of the play. Tartuffe, the imposter and con-artist, who has fooled and

manipulated Orgon (the head of the household), is about to be revealed. The audience knows

Orgon can hear the conversation, but for the sake of the dramatic and comic importance of the

scene, Tartuffe cannot know his own conversation and actions with Elmire are the subject of

this ploy. The table provides a physical hiding place where Orgon will witness Tartuffe's

duplicity while he sets about to seduce Elmire.

      Tartuffe can take any form and can be placed almost timelessly. But, when Elmire says

"Bring up this table, and get under it", there has to be a table (or something representing a

table) that the actor playing Orgon can fit under, in costume, and it has to be on stage where

the audience can see him—the audience must be able to register his reactions to the

conversation that follows. The designer (and the director) are limited by having to serve the

play. The director and designer are presented with the challenge of having to serve the script.

They have to take all the clues, language, and hints contained within the script and assemble a

cohesive set that works for the **narrative, the play, the action and momentum of the show.** This

does not reduce the value of their contribution to the art or their own creative ability.

Nevertheless, they have to serve the play and the audience.

      In striving to engage with this tension between creative agency and restriction in

theatrical design and production, my project cobbles together theories and methods in what

resembles a Frankenstein project. My project is not a critique of the traditional primary

function of theatrical design and production - artists in these fields have created worlds that are

beyond my imagination. Technical directors have worked with their teams to build and

engineer magic on stage that defies logic and seems to smash the laws of physics. Production Managers have managed shoe string budgets and a pile of rotted worm-eaten wood into award winning shows. This thesis does not diminish these professions or creative artists. My thesis aims to stitch together various disciplines in an alternative arrangement to create a new experience for the audience and myself. The seams are sometimes painfully visible and sometimes the needlework is near perfect stitching one element to the next. The overall experience of my project, which includes elements of sculpture, art exhibit, theatrical performance, immersive theatre, and social media, is an exploration of a theatrical experience that I believe is unique in the ways it alters the lines of creative agency and explores new paths and sources of storytelling.

My thesis is an exploration of a different approach to theatre, centralizing the designer and the creative potential of the audience/participant. In this project, the creative output of the designer inspires the work—the stories come from inside the set as a result of lighting, developing from a sound or smell, and are inspired by the scenography, and not from a script. My project also explores the potential for audience/participants to find the stories that exist in a set without being told where to look.

For this thesis, I also examine theatrical design as a photographic project and art installation. The products of the photo shoot are four cinematically shot, large format, narrative images. The installation is designed to support narrative storytelling through still images. It is a place for my creative, technical, management, and design mastery to be realized, viewed, recorded and shared freely via social media and web platforms.

This project is inspired by memory and a sense of nostalgia. I created a world that I know but that is shaded by whimsical notions of the adventures I once might have lived. *Travels with my Family* is the creation of a world, limited by the walls of the set and the bounds of the theatre. It is a pocket universe where an idea that coalesced in my mind during the years I worked have through my MFA, forming a palpable and visceral reality, demanding execution, is finally formed into practical material existence. It adds to the field of cinematic still photography, set design, and the study of the performativity of objects, art, and place. Inspired by the work of Gregory Crewdson and Edward Hopper, and drawing a sense of emotional resonance from Stephen Spielberg and Norman Rockwell, I created a world that is filled with hope and wonder, but whose corners are shaded with the crumbling decay on the fringes of our own world. The output of my research is also the performance of the photograph, the performance of the set, and the immersive experience of the audience. The experience started with a gallery exhibition, a viewing of the four photographs I took. In viewing, audience saw the photographs and had the opportunity to connect to the photographed subjects though an affective line of energy, differently shared emotional experiences, nostalgia, and generating intangible personal reflections recognised in the subject and echoed in the viewer. The photographs' performance created a unique and varying sense of co-presence (Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*) with the subject and an empathetic response.

Upon entering the gallery/theatre, the audience/participants viewed the photographs and research materials. They were backstage, with an insider's view to the process, but not

aware of the rest of the exhibit (figure 2).

They experienced a display of images, and

scenic art samples, the central

photographs produced during my shoot, all

orchestrated to lift the veil on the process.

Once the audience had seen the gallery

exhibit, they proceeded with their journey

into the world. The co-presence became

presence. They became part of the world,

breaking the fourth wall and entering the

pocket universe. The audience walked

onto the set, having seen the world from

Figure 3, View of the "Backstage" entrance as Audience/Participants entered. Above shown with exhibit lighting and photos. Below: Taken during the final install of the set, Aaron Kelly, December 2018, January 2019, Joe Green Theatre, Toronto Ontario.

the back, front, and now the inside. The veil lifted, they explored the construction techniques,

the paint treatments, the set dressing, and the stagecraft that created the world. As active

audience/participants in the experience they could interact with the set. They could sit on the

beds, pull up a chair to the table, dance on the floor. There was a sound scape, shaping the

universe, creating an outside realm to the room (a reality beyond the walls, within the walls,

within the room), and also a boundary to existence within the space. There was a heightened

reality to the exhibit that was designed to support the experience of the audience/participants,

the memories that might be triggered, and the motel they were in.

The experience created an immersive artificial reality that supported the existence of

this pocket universe within the theatre. This pocket universe challenged the

audience/participants to separate themselves from where they were before entering the motel and then immerse themselves in the moment and be part of the pocket universe population.

Robert Edmond Jones said:

> The sense of recognition is the highest experience the theatre can give. As we work we must seek not for self-expression or for performance for its own sake, but only to establish the dramatist's intention, knowing that when we have succeeded in doing so audiences will say to themselves, not This is beautiful, This is charming, This is splendid, but—This is true. This is the way it is. So it is, and not otherwise. (Jones 22)

I have taken the time and paid attention to the details to a point where the suggestions of reality in the pocket universe drop the audience/participants into the motel and they can believe it is real – I hope that in those moments of belief, in the abandoning the place they came from and the acceptance of the place they have entered, the pocket universe, they know (like Edmond Jones said) "This is true. This is the way it is. So it is, and not otherwise."

At the end of the experience, when audience/participants had finished exploring the set and the photographic installation, audience/participants had the opportunity to comment and leave their own narrative mark. The participants were invited to stage their own photographs and share in creating their own cinematic photo narratives within the pocket universe, which they inhabited, and share them with a unique hashtag on social media (#motelkellyfornia). This experience was designed to break down the final barriers of the traditional audience, perceived as distant viewer, and fully establish the active audience/participant, who evolved into a partner creator.

Why the Motel Room…or thank-you George F. Walker

In this section I begin to outline primary sources of inspiration that resulted in key developments and questions in my design process. In creating this universe, I drew inspiration

from many sources (some unconsciously) until execution. The following is an examination of

the cornerstones of my research and inspiration that led to, and supported, all stages of this

project.

Norman Rockwell has always been a visual reference for me in this project. My

grandmother, who was a formative character in my life, loved and, perhaps, had an obsession

with the work of this artist. She collected prints, created needle work, had calendars featuring

his illustrations, and created her own art based on his illustrations.

Inspired by George F. Walker's *Suburban Motel* plays (which I both saw and later worked

on at Factory Theatre) and my own nostalgia, I first explored the dream of *Travels with My*

Family in a ½ to 1' scale maquette (model) that I built over a summer, in my off hours, as an

independent study in the art of model building. The weather was warm, and as I explored the

little world on my work bench, I was transported back to the road-side highway motels I visited

as a child: the Knight's Inn, Super8, Comfort Suites. With their glowing signs towering above the

treeline on steel poles, these motels were a flickering beacon to my parents, weary from

driving, pulling them from the interstates and onto the off-ramp. I would sit in the backseat

tracing maps, cartoonish simple products of the Knight's Inn's designer, with my finger. We

would glide into parking lots, over crumbling speedbumps, with fading lines painted in

perpendicular, predictable patterns to the concrete curbs placed at a conservative distance

from the sidewalk. The sidewalk was lined by doors and large flat windows partially obscured

by floral print fading curtains. Above, on balconies framed by rusty steel rails and crumbling

stucco walls, the same seemingly endless row of doors and windows hid people and stories that

I could only partially understand, but that I knew somehow carried as much weight and

excitement as my own journey. As I explored the model I was transported to these familiar places.

As I entered our motel room though the door, holding the key on the plastic diamond shaped fob, I could see a tiny lizard clinging to the stucco walls. She was getting her fill of nighttime mosquitoes, the tip of her tail just barely visible, twitching with fear and excitement. My work bench and my model transported me to that motel. Walls a few inches high, with door handles crafted from the head of pins, I was inside and outside my own creation. Sitting in my chair at my workbench my imagination took over, I could hear the hum and occasional clatter of the ice machine, the vending machine, and the bells and whistles of the claw game in the lobby of my motel world calling to me.

I was a child, given new freedoms only allowed to children on vacations. I was filled with excitement resulting from the long days cooped up in the car with my parents. I was in this new place, in this new world, and I would ask myself, where did my exploration start? What would I discover as I wandered the motel corridors and the fringes of thick bladed grass growing on the edges of that world? It was a world defined and contained by parking lots and highways, patrolled by cars each on their own mission of sleep, food, work, or adventure. I built a model of a motel room and I built a world. A world the way I remembered it, but also a world as I know it must have existed. A world that I had creative freedom and agency to imagine, create and live in. A world with co-presence, multiple realities defined by the perception of the beholder. A place of wonder for the child and at the same time nothing more than a necessary and possibly unpleasant place to sleep for their parents. A world viewed from a child's memory

and a parent's reality. I imagined a microcosm that explored the multi-stability of reality, realizing that one thing can be many things – an adventure and disaster, a castle and a hovel.

I explored emergence, as the simple elements of the model became more - a memory, an experience, a story. There was a smell, a feeling, and an emotional attachment. As one simple reality coalesced with memories, experiences, and imagination a new bigger experience fought its way to the surface – once seen and understood, impossible to un-see. Every choice I made was steeped in the exploration of these dualities: coral pink walls whose texture was pitted with stains from cigarette smoke and age; tile floors built for durability, cracked and replaced with only moderate care and skill; windows to the outside world, clouded with time and dirt, humid air having plastered soot, smoke, and sand from the nearby highway in the corners of the frame; warm wood paneling and damp dank water stains. This mini world on my work table became a place with a smell, a feel, and memories which were both real and imagined – a place where my design was free from the tensions of traditional theatrical creative restrictions; I was afforded agency, free of imposed restrictions.

There was no doubt once I had finished the model that this was a world that had stories to tell, that it would speak to an audience. I was driven to create this pocket universe, to realize the model in full scale and expel the potentials of the observations I made in the creation of the mini motel room.

George F. Walker wrote six plays that all take place in the same motel room. I do not know which *Suburban Motel* play I saw first. It might have been *Problem Child* and it could have been *Criminal Genius*. The six plays tell the stories of desperate people on the edge of society or approaching that point of no return where the fall is inevitable.

Characters involved in criminal activities, hiding from crucial personal problems, or on the run, find themselves in the same motel ("The Plays"). When produced as a series of all six, or even a selection of two or more, the motel room transcends a theatrical set. The Motel in Walker's world, in his universe, is more than a character, it is the star. The collection of plays is called Suburban Motel ("The Plays"). The Motel is the consistent element in all six stories; it plays a role in shaping the lives of all the characters. Its importance grows as the audience builds familiarity with the room, and repeated exposure starts to breed an uncomfortable familiarity. The Motel resonates with the human characters on a sympathetic frequency - run down, on the fringe of society, nearly lost and invisible to most, and somehow sympathetic. The Motel is part of the story; it parallels the people in it and enables their stories that take place within.

Knowing that the product of this thesis work was going to – in part – be narrative photographic art, I started imagining the stories that I was going to tell. I narrowed in on several images and characters that were going to inhabit my motel room. However, I was acutely aware that the emergence of these stories was formed by my personal experiences. As a white, middle class, only child, only grandchild, male Canadian of Irish, English and German descent, the stories that my room could tell were limited by my experiences and assumptions. I did not want to draw on assumptions, and I did not want to tell other peoples' stories. Therefore, the world of G.F. Walker's *Suburban Motel* and the acknowledgment of my personal limitations in storytelling led me to the next element of my research. As hard as I could try, I would only see the stories that were available within my frames of reference; I would only see the shots that I could imagine. What would others do with the motel universe? What could social media do

with it? And, what would happen if the audience/participants were invited to be co-creators? I hypothesized that opening the door for others to create their own stories in the room - the pocket universe – would generate stories that I would never be able to tell, and in most cases would not want to try and voice because I would not be able to do them justice.

Realism, Superrealism, Voyeur and Exhibitionist

This section examines my choice to pursue a realism that I felt needed to extend beyond the theatrical set, while being completely anchored in the reality of a theatrical experience. I wanted the audience/participants (now co-creators) to feel immersed in the pocket universe because suspension of disbelief can power imagination and because I wanted them to believe what they felt.

I had made the choice to pursue a version of reality beyond what is usually offered by the traditional western stage, in a quest for a level of detail, appearance, and effect in my presentation that mimics reality and is immersive for the participants in the experience. My goal was a visceral palpable experience, on the edge of reality but fantastically located in a dream universe. Interestingly, in questioning why I was questing for realism (not the artistic movement but an authentic representation of life) I thought about Robert Edmond Jones's opposition to realistic theatre on stage and his desire to likewise inspire the audience's imagination. I was excited to think of my exhibit's realism as a super-realism; an immersive stage, specifically conceived, designed and realized to engulf and transport the audience/participants to a world of imagination and memory. Jones wrote:

> So much for the realistic theatre. The artist should omit the details, the prose of nature and give us only the spirit and splendor. When we put a star in a sky, for example, it is not just a star in a sky, but a "supernal messenger, excellently bright."

> This is purely a question of our point of view. A star is, after all, only an electric light. The point is, how the audience will see it, what images it will call to mind. […] We must bring into the immediate life of the theatre— "the two hours' traffic of our stage"—images of a larger life. The stage we inhabit is a chamber of the House of Dreams. Our work on this stage is to suggest the immanence of a visionary world all about us. In this world Hamlet dwells, and Oedipus, and great Juno, known by her immortal gait, and the three witches on the blasted heath. We must learn by a deliberate effort of the will to walk in these enchanted regions. We must imagine ourselves into their vastness.(Jones 24)

Drawing from my motel of dreams, I did not omit the details where the details existed. The spirt of those details - the stains on the walls, the cracks in the tiles, the smudged mortar on the cinderblock walls - those details in my pocket universe were the reality that the audience/participants saw. I asked my audience/participant to immerse themselves, I gave them the tools to do so (the details), however, I did not try to hide the outside universe. There was no omission of the outside world. The outside world was always present, but the details - not omitted - obscured it from sight. You could not see past the façade because the façade was too distractingly real.

The audience/participants in *Travels with My Family* could have an ongoing relationship with the world they entered. They created something new through their participation. And the results lived beyond the closing of the exhibit.

> Robert Edmond Jones saw the creative process as dynamic and ongoing; he believed that the audience as well as the playwright, actors, director, designer, and technicians must participate in it. He wanted everyone to experience freedom, grandeur, largeness in the theatre. If every member of a production team seeks the true wellspring of imaginative creation, Jones believed a vision could be brought to life on stage.(McDermott)

In *Travels with my Family,* I added audience to the production and creative team and supported their vision in on-going and enduring ways, through the creation of social media opportunities

and the internet. It was that multi-vocal vision and well-spring of imagination that brought life to the future of *Travels*.

Through comments I received from audience and feedback received though social media and email, I know that the people in my photos, the realties that they lived, reached beyond the

Figure 3. Aaron Kelly , "Mother Time", Toronto, Ontario, 2018

image and drew in the observer. For example, in the photo "Mother Time", (see figure 3) I know that some felt a co-presence with the mom, who was sitting alone with her cigarette. They had a sense that they were there in that place and time with her. They told me they could taste the tobacco and feel the distance between her and those she traveled with. Some felt like she had just had unsatisfying sex – and it was an experience she was used to. Some said they knew her longing for distance, some said they settled into her contentment in the quiet before the dawn of a new day. So many were transported into the world and felt that link to her and her emotions. These were powerful examples of similar experiences to those I had while building my model. We shared a sense that we were inhabiting a different place and time.

Part of my quest in this project was to question what an audience is, what a performance is, and who the creators are? McDermatt (1984) states, that for Jones, the audience is undeniably part of the process. Jones also talks about imagination and the

importance of seeing with the "eye of the mind"(Jones, The Dramatic Imagination 89). The

audience is the final creative force in the relationship. My goal was to unleash that force and

encourage the final evolution of the experience to be expressed.

So, what is an audience? Convention holds that an audience is a group of people who

gather to listen to or watch a performance (Merriam-Webster, *Audience. Merriam-*

Webster.Com). As definitions go this is technically accurate, but it does not address the

relationship between the performer, performance, and the spectator. Furthermore, the

definition does not address the fact that the audience does not just exist as viewers of an event,

but they are participants. In 1963, Tyrone Guthrie, the first Artistic Director of the Stratford

Festival of Canada, stated, "Performance is a two-way traffic. The greatest performer can only

be great when the reaction of the audience permits greatness"(Guthrie, "So Long as the

Theatre Can Do Miracles"). His opinion that the audience relationship is a two-way street, an

input/output relationship flowing to and from the stage and charging the experience, is shared

by many--both creator and audience. For example, drama critic Walter Kerr explains the two-

way, transmission of energy exchanged between audience and performer:

> It doesn't just mean that we [the audience] are in the personal presence of
> performers. It means that they are in our presence, conscious of us, speaking to us,
> working for and with us until a circuit that is not mechanical becomes established
> between us, a circuit that is fluid, unpredictable, ever-changing in its impulses,
> crackling, intimate. Our presence, the way we respond, flows back to the performer
> and alters what he does, to some degree and sometimes astonishingly so, every
> single night. We [the audience] are contenders, making the play and the evening and
> the emotion together. We are playmates, building a structure. — Walter Kerr, drama
> critic (Wilson, The Theatre Experience)

I, like Mr. Guthrie, believe that the audience/performer relationship is vital and alive--it is more

than just a group of people gathered together to watch something. I have been more and more

curious about the audience experience; how I might explore their power in the performance relationship, and how that relationship might change as I look at the audience/performer connection through different lens?

I wanted to question the audience/performer relationship though the use of photography. I discovered a quote from photographer Andy Goldsworthy who said, "[t]he difference between a theatre with and without an audience is enormous. There is a palpable, critical energy created by the presence of the audience"(Goldsworthy, *No Title*). While the conventional definition of audience (discussed earlier) creates a clear line between audience and performance, based on Ariella Azoulay's notion of a temporal co-presence with photographed subjects and the viewer (Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*), I aim to reimagine the conventional performer and audience relationship in order to blur the boundary lines between the two. Azoulay specifically writes about documentary photographs of "real" situations and the social contract formed between the viewer and the subject. She proposes that the sense of co-presence with the photographed subject enables the photograph to perform and brings the subject and viewer closer. My interest is in the possibility of developing a "fictional co-presence" -- forming this social connection and, more importantly, the sense of co-presence with the use of photographs enriched by narrative, and designed and shot cinematographically, using techniques and approaches of film photography. *Travels with my Family* aimed to start with the viewing of these photos and was engineered to turn the viewing into a sense of living the art and turning the living into creating something new. In my discussion of outcomes (which follows this current section), I will outline how the performance of this photographic exhibit transmogrified into the performance of the audience, blurring the

line between the watcher and watched and participant and creator. But how might the roles of

watcher and watched and participant and creator cross and redefine each other?

In George Rodosthenous' *Theatre as Voyeurism: The Pleasure of Watching* he divests

the notion of voyeurism from the clinical psychological definitions with an interest in studying

the phenomenon of voyeurism without negative connotations, "Focusing on the notion of

'pleasure' rather than 'deviance'" (Rodosthenous, *Theatre as Voyeurism : The Pleasures of*

Watching). He offers the following definition of voyeurism:

> Voyeurism can be defined as an intense curiosity which generates a compulsive
> desire to observe people (un)aware in natural states or performed primal acts and
> leads to a heightening of pleasure for the viewer. (Rodosthenous, *Theatre as*
> *Voyeurism : The Pleasures of Watching*)

The traditional western theatre audience, watching from the safe cover of darkness, deriving

compulsive pleasure from the intimate, abusive, sexual, forbidden, and normally hidden private

lives of the characters on illuminated stages can fit easily into the definition of voyeur offered

by Rodosthenous. However, the audience is only one side of the equation. In 20th century

traditional western theatre the performer is not casually, mistakenly, or inadvertently revealing

themselves to the audience, they are exposing themselves (at least their character) to the

voyeur. They are the exhibitionist, which is conventionally understood to mean a person using

extravagant behavior to attract attention (Oxford Dictionaries, *"exhibitionist". Oxford*

Dictionaries.). In other words, a performer on stage behaving in an extravagant or unusual

manner in order to attract and hold the attention of the audience is engaged in an exhibitionist

act.

If we try to understand the audience/performer relationship as a voyeur/exhibitionist relationship where gratification and pleasure are mutually derived from watching and being watched, then we can start to understand the force that connects the parties. There is a current that travels between them in a performance space; energy flowing to the other, fulfilling the desire for gratification. Through this lens we gain insight into the compulsion and drive that makes theatre vital.

When viewed through the lens of the voyeur/exhibitionist relationship, both parties have a duty to one another--they are both performers in that they "carry out, accomplish, or fulfill (an action, task, or function)"(Oxford Dictionaries, *"perform". Oxford Dictionaries.*) As Guthrie pointed out, even the greatest performer needs their audience, and extrapolating from that, their audience needs them. With the bi-directional responsibility that the audience has to the performer and the performer has to the audience, both parties in this equation are thereby performers. Without the completion of their respective tasks neither can fully fulfill their function. The voyeur and the exhibitionist, the watcher and the watched, the audience and the performer--contract in-hand--enter into the performance to be excited, titillated, moved and completed, driving them to seek it out again and again to feed their compulsion--to perform their role. The audience and performer are equal partners in a mutually pleasurable relationship.

I proposed that if the audience was given access to this pocket universe, this super-reality, and was asked to create, to be seen, and to breathe their own life into their own work, they would generate their own content. They would now be watched and performing for a new audience through their posts to social media. There would be shares, likes, comments, and

bidirectional feedback from their networks, blurring the lines between audience and performer further.

In my own photographic performance project, this understanding of the active relationships between performer as exhibitionist and audience as voyeur was explored further. I set up the opportunity for audience/voyeur to shift to exhibitionist/performer by providing unfettered access to the set, props and environments. I opened the doors backstage, on-stage, and to the performance. I encouraged the audience to immerse themselves in the pocket universe and activate their suspension of disbelief. The tools for their creation were provided in the near realistic details and the permission to imagine that the theatre environment provided. I asked them to photograph themselves in the stories they had imagined. The sounds, smells, and feelings of the realities were explored and enhanced for the audience/participant so they could blur the boundaries of their role and reality. By placing the medium of photography between the performance and viewing, my work demonstrates the cross-over and blurring of these roles and perceptions, unbinding the potential energy between creative roles and generating creative agency for all the co-creators.

Gregory Crewdson

As I stitched together this work, Gregory Crewdson was a major visual, technical, and overall artistic inspiration. Among all the artists, works, and theories I have drawn from, it is his cinematic photography that has given me the artistic drive to explore my own potential to bring all these pieces together.

My MFA started with a desire to rekindle my love of photography and took shape from my admiration of Crewdson. His photographs are often described as cinematic (Kitamura). I

have felt, since first encountering his book "Beneath The Roses", that the term "cinematic" did

not do his work justice. I have been taken by how theatrical his work is. While he uses

cinematographic techniques to produce his cinematic work, the sense of suspension, perhaps

anacruses, seems to give his photos a palpable, visceral life. His photos are much more alive

than moving pictures, they have always required me to participate in the narrative more than

as a passive observer. I have participated in the story-telling as a creator, generating the next

moment, the downbeat post anacruses. They have inspired a sense that what comes next is

almost more important than the moment captured, a feeling of build-up which calls me to

respond with my own imagination, creating the next note. How might I draw from Crewdson's

methods to generate a feeling of suspension?

As a lighting designer and photographer, I have always appreciated Crewdson's use of

continuous light (Weingart). In a photography studio and for many professional shoots,

photographers enhance the available and ambient light with flashes and lighting umbrellas.

Crewdson's use of continuous light is traditional to movie sets and theatrical stages (figure 4). While flash bulbs, ring lights and studio umbrellas are all part of a photographer's tool box, as a lighting designer for theatre, dance

Figure 4. Example of Crewdson's work, Gregory Crewdson, "Untitled", *Beneath The Roses*, 2003-2007

and opera, I recognise the time, thought, and imagination Crewdson invests into his worlds. He shapes light with a precision and intent that a flash bulb cannot accomplish. When contemplating this project, I could see no better use of my interests in photography, lighting design, set design and immersion then applying my skills and challenging myself to accomplish a photo shoot in the style of Crewdson, with the hope of providing inspiration and imaginative push for other artists in this field. Starting with a Crewdson-esque photo shoot gave me the opportunity to explore the creation of an environment worthy of my admiration of his work. With a further benefit of being in a university setting, I was able to open the exhibit up to other creators and achieve not only an exhibit of photos, stagecraft, and scenic design but inspire other artist as well. I created a world where the performance of the photo was able to reach its audience, where a link was formed, and then the possibility that that link could be explored and felt in an even more visceral way. I will discuss in the outcomes section how the voyeur become the exhibitionist and the exhibitionist (myself, cast, and crew) could become the voyeur (watching and witnessing others use our universe), and how the cycle continued as the new works spread through the internet, and social media inspired others to attend the event, view the exhibition, and then put themselves on display.

Execution – the birthing of a monster

I believed that my life in theatre taught me many lessons and this project challenged some of the fundamentals of those beliefs. One is that theatre is a community organism. That is that theatre is a life form (organism) that comes into existence through the work and force of a community - the many parts (individuals) seed and water the whole. Playwrights, directors,

actors, managers, technicians, artists and craftspeople all come together and share their skills

to bring about the creation of the theatre organism. My goal in this project was to "go it alone".

I use quotes here because I was never actually alone, and what I accomplished was always

intended to be the work of many, including my amazing actors, crew, the support of my family,

the theatre department, and my faculty advisors. However, I wanted to exorcize my own

complete creative agency over the creation of the pocket universe before others entered my

world. I wanted to challenge myself, invent my own wheels based on my set of unique

experiences even if that meant reinventing processes that already exist in the industry. I use

"go it alone" throughout this paper to mean that I needed to bring to life my world on my own,

and, possibly selfishly, I wanted to enjoy any accolades that resulted. I needed to work on a

project that came from within me, grew from my imagination, and was executed through the

application of my skills. I felt that I had to come out of this project having challenged myself for

every outcome. Unfortunately, this challenge centered me in the creative process, and was

isolating when I had not previously developed a process or technique. The effect of this

approach was to forgo the creative power of the community. I needed to bring to life a creature

of my own design; I was to stitch together my own Frankenstein's monster and breathe life into

it. The breath I was to give it would only last a moment--an experience affective and poignant

but sadly temporary. However, my hope was that I would be releasing my creation with this

breath of life, this gift, and it would inspire others to fill the thing with their own gifts, thus

creating theatre, new and exciting, from the shell of creation I released into the world.

Working from the model (figure 5) and three-dimensional drafting I created using

Sketchup (figure 6), I started preparing my construction drawings. Planning, costing, and purchasing for a build is not a new skill for me. I am fairly good at material breakdowns, construction planning, and purchasing. These were not challenges, and I knew that I had saved and prepared a materials budget that was completely reasonable for the project. I set about the beginning phases of my build in the summer of 2018. I had to build 20 television style flats for the walls of the motel. Television flats are constructed out of 1x3 lumber and skin ply to be lightweight but sturdy stand-ins for real walls in movie and theatre sets. Mine where constructed out of 1200 linear feet of 1x3 and skin ply. Over the course of three 8-hour days I built the entire flat inventory for the motel.

Figure 5. Photo of 1/2-=1' scale model of motel room, Aaron Kelly, Toronto, Ontario, 2017

Figure 6. 3D drafting of motel room, drafted in 1 to 1 scale in SketchUp, Aaron Kelly 2016.

With the help of Julian Iacob, a third-year theatre production and design student at York

University who worked as my production assistant, in late August 2018 I assembled the subfloor

and walls in the theatre space. I taped out the furniture on the floor to confirm spacing and

traffic flow around the room. I then took some reference photos to confirm that my imagined

camera angles were accurate. (figure 7). I was able to create an outline of the walls on the subfloor as well as number all the floor panels to ease instillation at a later date. I achieved several goals with this dry fit into the theatre space. Having an opportunity

Figure 7. Roughed in set, Joe Green Theatre, Toronto, Ontario, Aaron Kelly, 2018

to dry fit the set, months before all the scenic paint and stress around getting the final touches

in place, gave me the chance to view the skeleton of my creation as a proof of concept, and

confirm that the building blocks where all in place and present. I was able to finally visualize the

outcome.

Although I had created a 3d digital model of the room and played with camera angles in Sketchup to visualize my perspective shot , this real space prototyping allowed me to actually stand in the room and mentally frame my photos. It was also the first time that I was able to walk the path that I was going to ask my audience/participants to walk. I wanted the audience/participants to enter into the theatre as if they were backstage. The first sights and sounds upon entering the exhibit would be a backstage arena of a box set, the back side of unfinished flats and various props and equipment set out for use. This was inspired in part by the "production material" section of Gregory

Figure 8. Kevin Kennefick, "Production Still", *Beneath The Roses*, 2004

Crewdson's book "Beneath The Roses"(figure 8). I loved the idea that the audience relationship would be challenged from the first by being presented with an insider's experience. They would then walk around the back of the set, in minimal theatrical running lights (dim, usually blue, lights backstage to help the actor navigate, but that are not seen by the audience), emerging to the entrance of the motel. This entrance path would help breakdown the division of theatre audience and participant. Their journey through the backstage world would make them part of the world into which they were about to emerge, it would help break the rules implicit in an audience/performance relationship. They would enter the space transformed (if only slightly) into an active participant. Once through the backstage they would then enter using the motel room door, crossing the threshold of the theatre into the pocket universe.

As soon as the set was dry fitted and I was able to walk the space, I knew where my photos would hang, how many photos I wanted to exhibit and that my audience/participants would be able to experience the journey the way I had envisioned. It was confirmed that everything was possible and I could visualize so much more. I now had three months until I could get back into the theatre for the final installation. I now had three months where I could experiment with scenic treatments and prepare for the parts of creation process where my existing knowledge, skills and experience disappeared, and I had to truly explore new, uncomfortable, and exciting territories of creation.

Scenic Paint

My design and planning leading up to this project established several challenges beyond my current and available skill set in theatre craft. My first challenge was the floor – a terracotta tile pattern. The second challenge was the window wall – a three-dimensional cinder block treatment. Finally, the third was the painted 4x10 flats on which I wanted to mask and hide the seams – developing a method to do so that was time efficient enough to be considered useful for theatrical practice. The scenic art challenge that I set for myself was by far the largest gap I forced myself to cross.

My process became formulaic. Every challenge was broken down into a general question. For example, how would I create a temporary wall that was realistic enough it would appear real in a high resolution photograph? I then moved on to questioning the question, what do I mean by "passes for reality"? What passes for reality in TV and movie sets? What passes for reality in scale model and hobbyist projects? What passes for reality in bars,

restaurants, and clubs with faux finishes? What did I mean by reality? This formula grounded me through challenging aspects of the process.

I am not a scenic painter, so one of my biggest challenges with this project was the prolonged and thoughtful process that I went through to develop my surface treatments. I spent almost a year between the completion of my original model to the placing of paint on a surface. I had set myself four challenges. First was a cohesive scenic treatment that was photo realistic. In other words, a treatment that would be close to indistinguishable from the reality in my photos. The rest were the three pillars of my scenic work. The tile floor, the cinderblock walls and the theatrical flats that had to be seamed and joined while not looking like theatrical flats that were seamed and joined.

The process for creating the cinderblock wall took more than a year. I laid awake at night visualizing the process of creating a cinderblock wall treatment, imagining the pitfalls and planning the critical path only to start the next night with a new plan. I imagined actually creating the walls with real cinderblock and tiling the floors with real tile. I photographed block walls all over the city, I spent time running
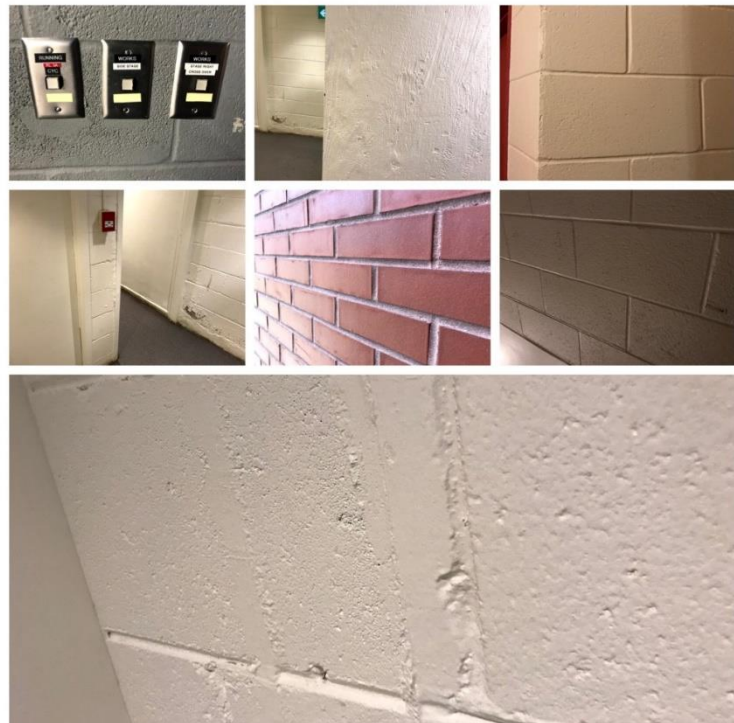

Figure 9. Block/brick wall research, Aaron Kelly, 2017-2019.

my fingers over the walls, thick with paint and dusty with crumbling mortar in the basement of

restaurants where my family was having dinner. I spent time staring at the walls in subway stations, coffee shops, and the clinically smooth block walls of the Centre for Film and Theatre at York University. (figure 9) All of this research fed into the final product – a treatment that emphasized the imperfect masonry work typical of a low budget cinderblock walls.

Shawn Kerwin, my supervisor in this research project, asked me what I meant when I kept using the words "photo realistic." What I imagined my goal to be was a room that, when photographed under any light with any depth of field and any amount of detail, would be indistinguishable from a real location. At the same time, I wanted a room that when the audience/participants stepped though the threshold, they entered a pocket universe and were not distracted by the inconsistencies with reality. I also wanted to create a fertile ground for others to imagine their own stories. In juxtaposition to this, I was also working within the reality that the audience/participants would know that they were in a theatre and that what they were interacting with was a set. This brings me back to Robert Edmond Jones' idea that it is the sense of recognition that is the highest experience I could give the audience/participants. My photo realism had to serve at least two purposes. The first was the photographic output worthy of my Crewdson inspiration and the second that creating a world where the audience/participants could believe enough, to imagine enough, to know "This is true. This is the way it is."(Jones 22)

Once I broke my initial question (or challenge) down into subsequent questions that I needed to answer to even understand the original question, I went in search of the answers. My self-imposed exile had me convinced that one resource I could not use was the professionals in my circle, who could tell me how to do it. I wanted to learn how to do it, I

wanted to invent my own wheel, I did not want to be shown, taught, or given the answers. I

feared that to be given the answer would mean that I not only came by the results too easily,

but that by simply doing it the way that it had always been done would potentially mean

missing new discoveries and processes that my unique and varied skills might bring to an

established practice. This was a space that I could experiment and grow my knowledge while

potentially growing the theatre discipline. I would turn problems over in my mind, dissect them

and pull them apart, reforming the problem for another round of dissection. The cinderblocks

and terracotta tiles represent months of stress and preoccupation.

When I final started experimenting with real materials, I had literally already built

dozens of failed mock-ups and experimented with failed processes in my mind before I touched my first set of sample materials. Once the actual experimentation began, each of these treatments took multiple failed (figure 10) attempts and

Figure 10. Cinderblock treatment Research and Development, Aaron Kelly , 2018

techniques to develop the final process. Some did not work the way I had visualized, for

example melting Styrofoam with torch heated copper pipe to create the mortar lines in the

block walls. Some just did not work, like spraying the Styrofoam with acetone to melt and

create an uneven organic texture. Both Styrofoam options were also not ideal, because of the

negative impact the production and disposal of closed-cell extruded polystyrene foam has on

the environment. Some, such as cutting felt rectangles and gluing them individually to the wall

to start the bas-relief effect of the blocks, were too time consuming. Throughout this process

the goal was to break new ground by avoiding the traps of how it has been done before.

However, I believe that what I achieved, the techniques, and modes of working, and workflow I

"discovered", are, for the most part, practices applied and used by the professionals whose

advice I avoided in hopes of finding new ground. I, in fact, went through a process of actually

reinventing the wheel in most of my processes, and admittedly my wheel was not quite as

round. This is not to say the process held no value, I learned a great deal, mastered skills that I

had never used before, created an sample of work that could be held up as positive and

negative practice, and in sum total, supported the goal, and achieved the multiple success

criteria – like near photo realism and an immersive environment filled with enough recognition of reality that audience/participants could lose themselves. (figure 11) I crafted effective scenic treatments that were convincing enough to support imagination and
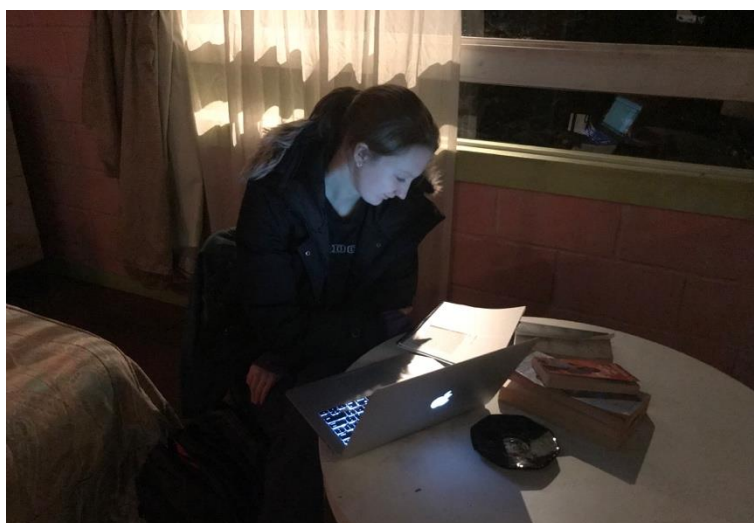

Figure 11. Undergrad Student Caitlin Mears Studying for exam, Aaron Kelly, 2019.

exploration of others on their own creative journeys, in a world where the boundaries of what

reality is were pushed and the traditions of creative agency expanded.

There are some processes I discovered that were extremely effective and efficient. I feel

my air painting technique for the tile floor is a good example of these processes. The paint goes

on near dry and as a result can be done on a vertical or horizontal surface (figure 12). Also, the

near dry application of the treatment means that second and third coats can be applied instantly saving time and money in waiting for drying. One drawback I discovered was that any wet blending of the coats was extremely time sensitive. I had originally

Figure 12. Tile floor sample, Aaron Kelly, Toronto, Ontario, 2018.

planned on moistening the first sprayed coat with water from a spray bottle and rolling over it

with a paint roller covered in a plastic bag to give it an organic stone look and add a slight

texture. This proved almost impossible as I was trying to paint 4x10 areas of the floor in one

pass and by the time I came back to roller the coat, it had dried. Upon reflection I realized that

the payout for the amount of work/time needed to work in 4x4 sections and switch to rolling

was not worth the effect. If I had had a second painter who could have followed me with the

roller it might have been possible. However, in the professional theatre world where scenic

paint treatments take place in a small window of time between the completion of build and

install into the theatre, there are usually shortcuts needed and this treatment would likely have meant extra labour costs and again the effect of the rolling, may not have been worth the effort, time, and money.

Another discovery that I made was the masking, hiding, and treatment of the seams in the flat walls. I have been bothered for years with treatments used to hide joints where two scenic flats come together with flush faces creating a butt-joint. It is difficult to hide the seams in theatre walls. In home construction and drywall instillation, full sheets of drywall have beveled edges so that when two pieces of drywall meet, there is a valley that provides the drywall tape and plaster (mud) a place to lay, the drywaller uses the valley to hide the seams/joints. In theatre, hiding these seems becomes even more difficult due to the lack of time, money, labour and the temporary nature of most of our installations. This becomes even more problematic as companies try to save money through use and reuse of stock flats, and those joint/seams become uneven, unlevelled, and unflush with warping flats, textured walls, and general wear and tear. To further exacerbate the problem, once theatrical lighting is added, which often hits the walls from angles and directions that would be impossible in a home or office, those imperfections are highlighted and the construction technique can become distractingly obvious as seams, cracks and unwanted texture cast shadows.

While my set had several seams that were intentionally unsightly (the wall between the bathroom and the main room had a particularly ugly taping and mudding job), this was a design choice to add detail to the second-rate motel experience. I found that my treatment of the seams along the headboard wall of the motel were near perfect, except for one spot above the

left-hand bed's head board which again was intentionally disruptive where the mudding of the tape was incomplete and the edge of the drywall tape was visible.

My seam treatment followed a similar mental prototyping process as the tile floor, where I built and experimented on and off for several months in my own head, using my previous construction experience (both scenic and remodeling) to figure out a process. One attempt I made - which I was sure would not work, but has potential for a large scene shop producing a large number of flats for use in similar box set or wall construction – was to create a table with a belt sander rigged to a slight angle over the table so that I could run the flats either under or over the sander and create a bevel similar to the bevel on full sheets of drywall. This would work similar to a planer in a shop, except that it would produce a flat with a 2-3-degree slope 1.5-2 inches along any edges that were to be seemed. It might also allow for the re-treatment of used stock flats to restore the bevel that usage and time would distort. I tested this idea with a belt sander and a small flat that I built. However, what I found was that it would have taken a great deal of engineering to design the rig/jig. It would have required at least two carpenters to run the rig over the 4'x10' flats or push the 4'x10' flats under the rig. It would have also created a large amount of dust and a potentially dangerous situation if I were to have attempted it alone (as was my plan). The beveled edges that I was able to create (although not perfect) did work as imagined, allowing two flats with similarly beveled faces to butt together and be seamed with drywall tape and mud filling the valley and laying fairly flat on the surface of the pieces. I tried a similar experiment with a router and a large round over bit, I found that the valley was too deep, and it made it hard to align the flats flush across their faces. It was also noisy and time consuming. Ultimately, I decided I needed a process that could be executed by

one person, fairly quickly, and took little prep. My final approach was a fusion between techniques used by professional drywallers to seam butt joints in cut drywall (without the bevel) and scenic paint techniques that developed though my mental prototyping and previous exposer to scenic artists throughout my career.

My joining technique was a three-step process that ended with a base coat covering in less than 1 hour of drying time. The steps for this process were:

First coat

- Mix and apply a thin skim coat of Sheetrock 20 (a quick drying drywall plaster) to the joint as per the manufacturer's directions.
- Dampen paper drywall tape and lay tape on the joint
- Embed the tape into the Sheetrock 20 with a narrow trowel pushing excess mud out past the edges of the tape. (figure 13)

- Wipe the tape down with a damp sponge. Leaving little to no buildup of compound at the edges of the tape and a small amount under the tape filling the seam and keeping the tape in place. This should eliminate the need for sanding.

Figure 13. Seam masking step 1, Aaron Kelly, 2018.

- Move on to the next seam while this seem sets up (approximately 20 minutes)

1. Second coat of Sheetrock 20

- Using a 14" curved trowel, run a medium to thin coat of sheet rock 20 over the seam. (figure 14)
- Move on to the next seam
- 10-15 minutes after the second coat the sheetrock 20 should be almost dry, use a wet sponge and spray bottle of water to feather out the edges of the second coat (about 6-7 inches from the seam)

2. Final feathering and base coat of paint

- Mix Sheetrock 20 into a paint podge (thicken the paint until it is close to peanut butter consistency) with 80% base coat paint and 20% water. Use a high-nap roller to paint this thickened paint over the seams and feather out to 10-12 inches on either side of the seam. The Sheetrock 20 should be thick enough to hold the peaks and valleys of the roller. (figure 15)

Figure 14. Seam masking step 2, Aaron Kelly, 2018.

- When set - about 20-30 minutes – paint the entire wall with a Sheetrock 20/paint/water mixture a little bit thinner than the podge mixture. The exact ratios on this formula are hard to determine and would be based on the viscosity of your paint and the depth of your roller. There would be more paint then in the podge mixture and the goal is a uniformed orange peel texture and a very thick base coat.

Figure 15. Seam masking step 3, Aaron Kelly, 2018.,

Because I wanted the paint treatment on the walls to have an appearance of many coats of paint hastily painted over years, I wanted texture, bumps, and debris onto the surfaces. To achieve this I added sawdust and small clumps of Sheetrock 20 that had dried and clumped around the workspace - this gave the wall more texture in the final rolled paint treatment.

The end result was a wall with an orange peel texture and small clumps and bumps randomly peppering the surface. If the desired end result was a perfectly smooth wall, with little texture, my process for hiding the seams would not work as well. I suspect the thinning of the podge mixture to reduce the orange peel texture and smooth out the coatings would increase the self-leveling quality of the mixture. With a thinner mixture both the tape and cracks between the flats would not have been hidden under the coatings. However, if this were the desired result, there would have to be a fair amount of scenic paint time put into the treatment of these seems (to achieve a smooth crack resistant coating), so the offset of needing more sanding and a thinner podge might be worth exploring.

As it is, the orange peel surface, with the added texture, gave my final air sprayed finish coats of paint great detail, added depth, and life. The walls took light from the theatrical fixtures and conventional wall sconces exceptionally well. The result was an extremely believable "photo realistic" scenic treatment that I was very proud to show off and discuss with the students who visited the motel with their class, individually, and who worked with me on the exhibition.

In the end, although I may not have completely reinvented the wheel, I do believe that my self-imposed isolation, along with my extended preparatory period, site-specific research,

and practical construction knowledge allowed me to develop this process. While this process is not likely completely unique, I know from previous experiences managing and working alongside scenic painters that it is not common practice. The problem solving and creative process that I brought to applications of the scenic treatment, bridged my lack of practical theatrical scenic experience, and created the possibility for the discovery of new ground that potentially has implications and applications, which scenic artists who already work in this field may not have considered.

My wall treatment, described above, was a simple technique that effectively hid the seams in the flats and made them crack resistant. Another approach that I made, which perhaps was not totally unconventional, but did surprise the professional scenic artist I talked with during the exhibit, was the tile floor treatment. As mentioned above, the floor was a great source of consternation for me and it was only though various failed experiments (figure 16) that I finally accepted that it was to be a paint treatment.

Figure 16. 3D tile treatment experiment, Aaron Kelly , 2018.

During his visit to the motel I talked with scenic artist and set designer David Rayfield. David told me he was surprised that I used tape lines to grid out my tile floor; he said that in his practice he would have painted the lines. I told him the taping took me about an hour single-handed and that I found pulling the tape off actually not only saved me the aggravation of

trying to paint straight lines, it gave the treatment a natural depth and where the light base coat seeped under the loosely laid tape and gave naturally shaped highlights that looked like cracked, chipped or raw edges to the tiles along the dark grout lines.

I discovered in my early research and samples that when the tape was removed there was a ragged edge and imperfection that added more highlight and depth to the effect (figure 17).

Figure 17. Close up of Tile Paint treatment, Aaron Kelly, 2018.

When I applied my tape lines on the actual floor, I intentionally laid them loosely and did not push/seal them down completely so I could capitalize on this effect. If I had consulted with David or other scenic artists prior to this treatment I likely would not have discovered this approach, which I feel not only resulted in an effective and convincing treatment, but saved time and frustration for me as a sole painter, builder, designer. Furthermore, if I had wanted

the lighter highlighting that the lightly laid tape provided, I would have had to spend at least an hour going over the 800 plus linear feet of grout lines on the floor to paint it in.

I was not completely happy with the final floor treatment. I would have, in retrospect, done a textured black or dark grey base coat before my first coat of highlight yellow. This would have added a couple of hours paint and dry time. But, in hindsight, this would not have been possible since my time budget was to finish the paint treatment in 6-8 hours (a standard paint call once the set has been installed in small theatre). I think my tile paint treatment was surprisingly effective, fast, and realistic. Although I had clearly created a scenic treatment, my techniques where not completely novel. Regardless, the combined result of my discoveries, both by plan and happy accident, contained a depth and realism. They proved to be the effectively near photo realistic treatment that was my objective (figure 18).
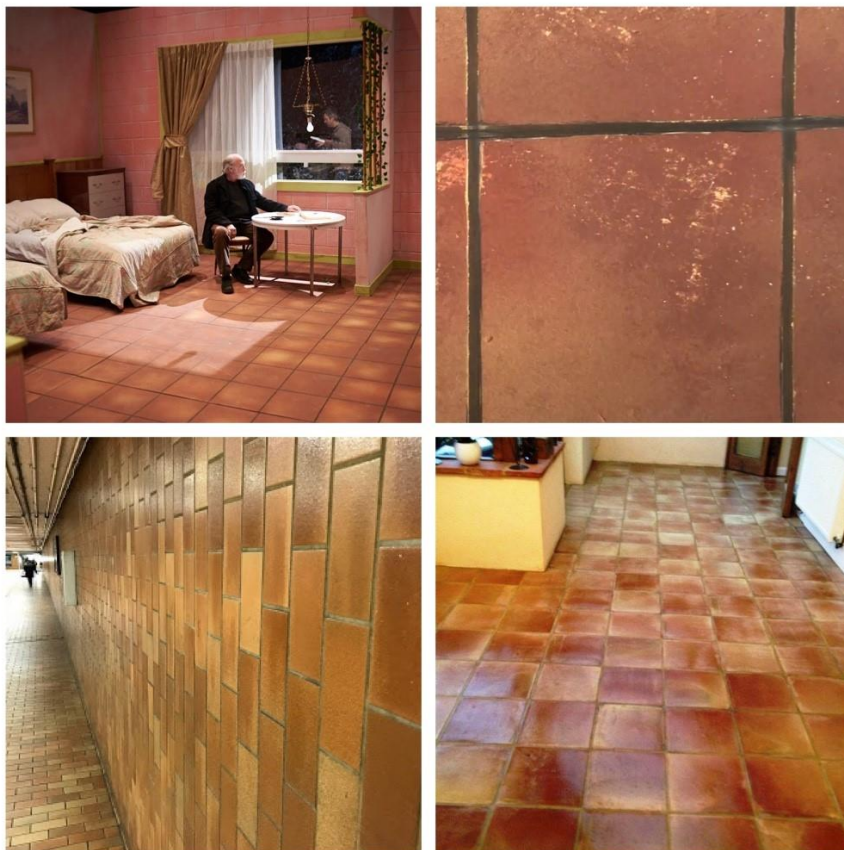
Figure 18. Above: Tile floor treatment on finished set. Below: Research Images, Aaron Kelly, 2018.

Costume Design

While I am not a scenic painter, I am even further from being a costume designer. In order to do my photography shoot with four actors, I wanted to have them clothed as characters fitting my sense of nostalgia that was driving this projects' aesthetics. The research for my costumes was thankfully fairly easy. One genre of research image readily available online is the family vacation photos from the 1980s. (figures 19-21) I was able to quickly pull together reference images and

Figure 19. 1980s Tourist Clothing, "Yellowstone with Dad", Merry-Jennifer Markham, date unknown, https://www.merrygourmet.com/2014/06/strawberry-balsamic-black-pepper-ice-cream

Figure 20. 1980s Tourist Clothing, "Couple with Boy & Dog", Roger Minick, Yellowstone National Park, WY 1980, https://www.rogerminick.com/light-art

ideas. From those photos I was able to distil down to the casual, slightly uncomfortable and awkward feeling that I remembered from my own family memories. The short shorts, shoulder pads, neutral and earth tones of the late 70s bleeding into the primary and

Figure 21. 1980s Tourist Clothing, Family at Grand Tetons National Park, Wyo., Roger Minick, 1980, https://www.rogerminick.com/light-art

neon of the 80s. The "dad shirts", the "mom blouses" and the sneakers. With the help of Photoshop I was able to generate pale unassuming renderings of my costume wishes (figure 22). Then, I was very fortunate to be able to hand these off with the actors' contact info to Tiana Kralj, a 4th year undergraduate costume and set design student at York University, who sourced, fitted and

organized the actual costumes and makeup for the show with the help of Joyce Padua another

4th year costume and set design student. This was the only time that I broke my "don't let someone else do anything that you don't know how to do yourself rule." Because I only had access to my cast during the two weeks leading up to the actual photo shoot, I did not have the time or the bandwidth to sort out the costume requirements for the show and finish the physical install and all the scenic work. The process of "going it alone" filled me with a sense of pride

Figure 22. Costume Design Sketch, "Travels with My Family", Aaron Kelly, 2018

and accomplishment, and as enjoyable and fulfilling as the processes were, it was when I relied

upon my small and very supportive team that I realized what I had been missing throughout

this process, the thing that has made theatre a fulfilling 20+ year career for me - it was the

community. I realized that not only does community bring into existence theatre, but theatre

births community.

Lights and Sound

Interestingly, in light of my career as a lighting designer, lighting my pocket universe and

my photoshoot was almost an afterthought. As mentioned in my section on Gregory Crewdson,

I knew that I would use continuous light sources, probably in the form of traditional theatrical

instruments. I positioned my motel in the Joe Green Theatre at York University to take advantage of the existing lighting plot hung in the theatre's grid suspended above the stage. This was not a project designed to challenge my lighting design skills. I used the existing plot, which offered a rich mixture of conventional theatrical fixtures as well as LED fixtures. Through computer control, these LED fixtures mix red, blue, green and ambler to achieve a broad spectrum of colours. The conventional incandescent theatrical fixtures used in conjunction with the LEDs provided me with several washes and areas of light. Using the existing plot saved me the time and resources of both a new install and the restoration of the house plot after the exhibit was finished.

The motel room itself had four light sources that were not part of the theatrical fixture inventory. In theatre terms these are called practicals. In my motel room these were two wall sconces, a hanging lamp over the table and small battery powered LED installed in an open book, read by the daughter. These practicals, in addition to light from fictional sources outside the motel room window and door and the cool clinical light from the bathroom, were the building blocks for most of my photographic scenes. I used the existing plot to reinforce, tone, and intensify these key narrative light sources. In all, I added eight fixtures at ground level on lighting booms and refocused five lights in the existing plot.

During the shoot, my crew - Julian and Joyce – used the computer interface in the theatre to record lighting levels and cues that I built as my actor/models explored the world and found new ways of interacting with the room. As I discovered looks that worked for my photographs, I would record them in the lighting computer to recall for future use. I used these cues as the basis for one of the most exciting and engaging aspects of my exhibit for

participants and co-creators. I set up an iPad in the space with an interface that allowed visitors

to access the looks and lighting cues I had recorded for my shoot, as well as some other general

purpose looks that I thought would be helpful to them in their own creation. Lighting for my co-

creators was a concern for me. Light tells so much of a story; time of day, mood, environment,

it frames what is important and what is background. Limiting the lighting options to the pallet I

had discovered in my own shoot limited any co-creators' agency and potential creative output. I

could not offer my co-creators complete control over the lighting in the room - that would have

required an operator and potentially a designer to be on standby whenever the room was

open. With the iPad offering up a selection of looks that they could choose from, and forcing

the computer to cycle the looks randomly, I was making an effort to allow and encourage

creative discovery and agency within a

practical limitation. I also set up two

Figure 23a. Use of Pinkness, "Untitled" Mona Farahmand, 2019

looks I thought were just for fun. *Blueness* and

Pinkness were sculpted looks using the vibrant

colours produced by the LED lights in the space -

with highlights in key areas around the room –

Figure 23b. Use of Blueness, "Untitled" Artist Unknown, 2019

lit using conventional fixtures. After the installation opening, I soon noticed that a lot of my co-creators' offerings - tagged to #motelkellyfornia on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter - used these two looks (figures 23a and 23b). This was exciting for me because my co-creators had stepped beyond the world of my photographs and found inspiration and agency in what I had made for them and what I had provided as tools.

As the exhibit continued, I added additional looks to the pallet. I added *Yellow, Cyan,* and *Red.* These looks were less sculpted. They almost entirely consisted of the LEDs in supersaturated colours. What these looks added to the exhibit was another dimension of exploration and education. *Cyan*, *Red* and *Yellow* transformed the room. Using the physics of colour subtraction, these looks altered the world. For example, the pink walls transformed to grey as cyan light denied the pink paint the red spectrums of light it was formulated to reflect, and the pink paint absorbed most of the blues from the cyan light. The walls in the *yellow* look made the room "feel sick" – as many participants noted. The iPad and the control it offered participant became a feature of the exhibit. Return guests would bring their friends just to show them the different looks and repeatedly affect change in the world they had entered.

Sound

Once the motel was installed, I realized that the sounds within the theatre -- heating ducts, fans on lights, and the Starbucks outside the main doors -- created a level of distraction that was going to be problematic if I wanted my audience/participants to abandon the world outside and immerse in the pocket universe. After the final installation and before the photoshoot I built a simple soundscape that featured recordings of a highways overlaid with passing cars and sirens, with the occasional car pulling into a gravel parking lot. I played these

sounds though the house sound system and located them in the speakers closest to where the

sounds would originate in the pocket universe. For example, the car in the parking lot played

through the upstage left speaker, and the siren at one point traveled upright to downright and

then returned a few minutes later. I used a low pass digital filter on all the sounds to give them

a muffled, deadened effect so as to increase the perception that they were being heard

through the walls of the motel and at a distance. The soundscape and the subtly located levels

reinforced the reality. Often participants did not realize there was a sound scape until I

questioned them about it and they realized that subtle sounds reinforcing the reality were part

of the overall effect, and that they felt "real". My initial plan under-valued the soundscape and

its importance to immersion. This was striking and I wish I had taken more time with my efforts

in this area. I could have included sound effects of adjoining rooms, distant voices, toilets

flushing or the clatter of the ice machine. I could have used sensors in the doors to trigger a

change in the sound quality when the outside door was opened and I could have built triggers

into the iPad interface for some events like toilet flushes, or sirens, or cars pulling up. I also

could have added speakers to the set and theatre to increase the effectiveness of the located

sounds. In the world of still photography, this would have had little effect, but as co-creators

explored my space, anyone filming the experience could have easily triggered sound events

that would have added to their work.

The Actors, the Shoot, and the Photos

Finally, when discussing process and methods, I have to consider the photoshoot itself. I

chose to rent a Sony Alpha a7r2 mirrorless camera. This choice was driven by four factors: the

fact that my personal camera is the Sony Alpha a6, the dynamic range in the ISO of the a7r2,

the 1.8f of its 50mm lens and the fact that it shoots at 42.4MP. Letting in the maximum amount

of light, with a huge range of light sensitivity, on a full frame (35mm sensor), with a huge pixel

count, and user interface I was already familiar with made the choice of equipment simple. I

was able to walk into the shoot on the first day and within half an hour I had most of the

settings manually adjusted to the theatrical light and the low and sometimes dynamic levels of

light in my scenes. Since I was not using any flash devices, I had to adjust my settings and use

the camera's histograms (a visual representation of the highlights, colours and shadows in a

dynamic digital graph on the camera screen) to set my cameras aperture (the opening in the

lens which allows light in), shutter speed (the time which the camera's digital light sensor is

exposed to light) and the ISO (the sensitivity of the digital light sensor) to capture as much

detail as possible while not producing grain or blowing out the whites - which can occur at

higher ISO levels in dark scenes.

The first time a co-creator stepped into my pocket universe was when my actors arrived

in costume and makeup. I had told the actors that they were a family: Mother, Father, Brother,

Sister. I told them that they had just checked into the motel. That was all I told them. To my

surprise and delight they had spent the hour previous - while getting into costume and makeup

with Tiana, Joyce, and Julia – developing their characters. They had given themselves names

and personal interests and they were already immersed the moment they walked in.

As the director of the photoshoot I asked them to make themselves comfortable. Eagon,

(Brother), instantly jumped on the bed and started eating ice out of the ice bucket. Jason,

(Father), started teasing the kids relentlessly. Lindsey, (Mother), started unpacking the luggage.

While Leanne (Sister) made herself at home and tried to ignore the whole family – especially

the Father. For about an hour I shot the cast while they improvised vignettes and mini stories -

one of the most interesting moments was when Julian Iacob (my production assistant) stepped

in and played the motel clerk attempting to pick-up the teenage Sister outside the motel

window, with Father watching from inside.(figure 24)

Fig. 24. "The Clerk's Time", Aaron Kelly, Toronto, Ontario, , 2018

I had four distinct shots that I had planned and wanted to capture – *Family Time*,

Conversation Time, *Mother Time*, and *Daughter Time*. Within each, I played with the

interrelationship of the family, through distance, lighting and the physical space, but I knew it

was important that the cast, as my first co-creators, felt that they were part of the story telling,

especially when I got to shooting my imagined moments. I wanted their characters that they

found, through their own play, to be in the moments that I envisioned. I had composed these

shots thinking about light, balance, framing, negative space, themes, and camera angles, but I needed the actors to breathe life into the photos.

My co-creators (actors and crew) and I never actually discussed where the family was going or why they were in the motel. Nostalgia, memory, and imagination drove my choices throughout this process and allowed me to inhabit both my original model and the pocket universe. I wanted the cast to feel their own story and draw from their own experiences and understanding to give them a reason to exist in this world - to devise based on their own personal resonance with the pocket universe. I assumed that at some point we would talk as a group about what brought them here, but we never did. There were hints of a backstory and choices made that revealed each of the participants stories, however for the most part their internal story stayed internal and created an intensity in the world that I had not expected.

Once I felt the actors were inhabiting their space and the universe, we setup and shot the four photos included in the exhibit. I found that I needed to give very little direction to the cast (even the youngest member, 10- year- old Eagon) seemed to invest in the reality of each shot and embody the moments. We got through the four setups in about an hour and then had some time for more play - for example, Father's discovering the Sister in the room with the clerk. The entire shoot was followed by a sushi lunch I ordered in and a photo of my entire team (figure 25). In total, the shoot was about four hours long, in which time we invested in a family of creators (cast and crew) working together to kick start the universe spinning and open the world to other creators. The intensity that the cast and crew brought to the scenes came from

within them and their immersion in the world and characters, and was a rewarding experience

for everyone.

Figure 25. Travels with my Family Co-creators, from left to right: Jason Hilabrand, Eagon Kelly, Lindsay Bell, Julian Iacob, Aaron Kelly, Leanne Hoffman, Joyce Padua, and Tiana Kralj, Aaron Kelly, Toronto, Ontario, 2018

Outcomes and Observations

What did I create? Was it a sculpture, art installation, trans-local pocket universe,

theatre set, sound stage, photographic experience, physical dramaturgical cue, an educational

and pedagogical tool, or a piece of devised theatre where the environment leads the creation

process for my co-creators? I think all of those are possible interpretations and most exist

simultaneously.

Travels with my Family was open for seven days and saw hundreds of visitors, guests, artists, participants, students, and creators. The original plan was for a three-day exhibit that coincided with the January resumption of classes in the Theatre Department and York University as a whole. By the second day of the exhibit it became obvious that I needed to seek permission to extend the event for several days. Shortly after opening I was approached by three professors in the Theatre Department and Cinema and Media Studies who asked if it would be possible to book the exhibit as a private classroom. I was also approached by several students and professional photographers who asked if they could book private shoots. The original three-day exhibit was extended to a total of 8 days with 6 separate private bookings and 18 additional hours of public viewing/experiences.

I was amazed at the potential exposed by the usage of the space. My objective was to create a space for artists and creators to be inspired. I imagined my co-creators would primarily

Figure 26. Professor Shawn Kerwin marking assignments, Aaron Kelly, 2018

produce photographs, tracked and recorded through the #motelkellyfornia hashtag. What I did not envision was students checking in to the motel to work on their homework (figure 26), professors using it as a quiet space to do marking, cinematography and playwriting classes using the space

for educational purposes, a nap space for students between classes, a learning lab for lighting

design theory, or an example for scenic art class. Everyone found their own place in my place; in my micro universe they found their own home and their own story. Which in retrospect was the whole point of the project – to create a space that through a general sense of shared experiences where individual audience/participants would be inspired to tell their own stories unimaginable to me.

Initially I named the exhibit *Travels with my Family*, however, the title shifted through the co-creative process. Those who chose to share their experiences, thoughts, and adventures in the pocket universe were asked to share using the hashtag #motelkellyfornia (naming credit to Joyce Padua and Julian Iacob). Shortly after the exhibit opened and posts started appearing on Facebook and Instagram, the name of the exhibit changed (not officially) but through some sort of democratic social network rebranding to *Motelkellyfornia*. I received emails from friends and collogues telling me they had seen *Motelkellyfornia*, were going to see it soon, or heard about it from a friend. I was stopped in public by those who had seen it to say how much they loved *Motelkellyfornia*. Professors at the university told their classes to go and see *Motelkellyfornia*. The social sphere reshaped not only the experience of the event and the outcomes (as I had originally hoped), it also reshaped the name and identity as well.

The *Motelkellyfornia* identity was further locked in on March 26, 2019. Another exhibit, *Scenes by Design*, opened at York University and the curator asked if she could display several of my photographs. She hung these photos in her exhibit and labeled them "*Motelkellyfornia* by Aaron Kelly". I realized that my project had been completely rebranded by the social media contributions, creations of others, and the democratic will of my participants. This was the

point where I stopped thinking of and calling them participants and started fully referring to them as co-creators.

Not only did my co- creators help in the democratic social rebranding of *Travels With my Family*, they – as hoped – augmented, supplemented, and recreated the experience. With art, each observer brings their own interpretation to the viewing and any or all of these interpretations can be considered valid (LaNoue; "Aesthetic Interpretation"). I found that by asking the audience/participant to enter the creative process, this gave permission for those interpretations to come to the surface and manifest. Those manifestations were what I was interested in and it was the depth and breadth of those manifestations that surprised me.

I believe that *Motelkellyfornia* created an artistic experience that was mutually defining. The participant and the art did not just interact – like billiard balls bouncing off one another – but, like a river and its bank, they reshaped each other as they travelled together. As the artist who carved the original banks, I was part of this exchange, as I willingly watched and encouraged the shaping and reshaping of the experience until I was reformed into an audience/participant leaving behind my role as sole creator. My art -- set design, costume design, scenic treatments, lighting design, photography and sound scape -- was repeatedly eroded and reformed by other interpretations only to remerge different and changed. Active social media outputs from both me and my fellow creators changed the perceptions of those coming to the exhibit, enhanced expectations, and created narratives of experience for those visiting and revisiting for the second, third, fourth and more times.

These enhanced expectations were interesting. As my early participants started sharing their experiences on Instagram and Facebook, I saw a genuine interest in visiting the exhibit increase (figure 27). At the root of my questions surrounding audience integration, immersion, and participation, I wanted to give agency to others to use my art to create their own. As the art of co-creators emerged and the reactions to their art work reverberated through their social media communities, there was a growing interest in my work and the creative opportunities the exhibit opened for others.

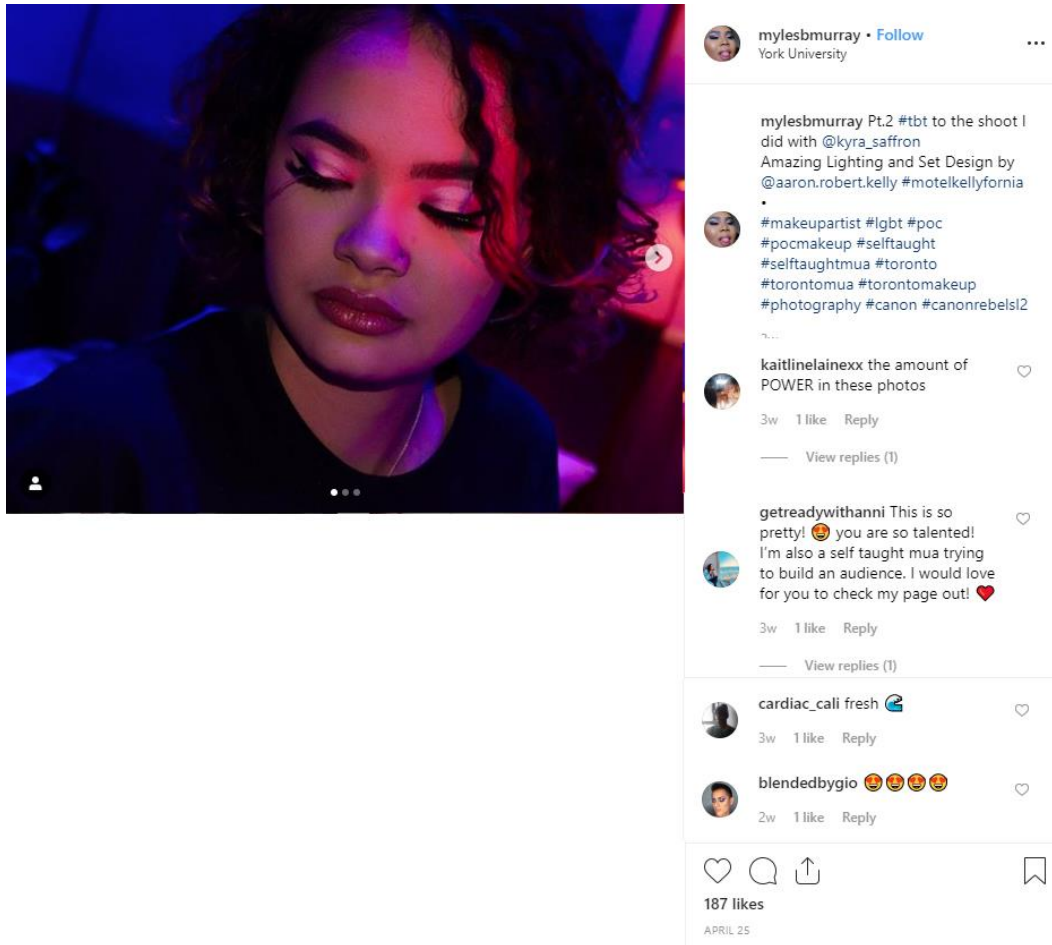Figure 27. Collection of Unnamed images shared to #motelkellyfornia, 2019

Figure 28 Instagram Capture with 187 likes, Toronto, Ontario, mylesbmurry, 2019

Figure 29 Instagram Capture with 535 likes, olcia05, 2019

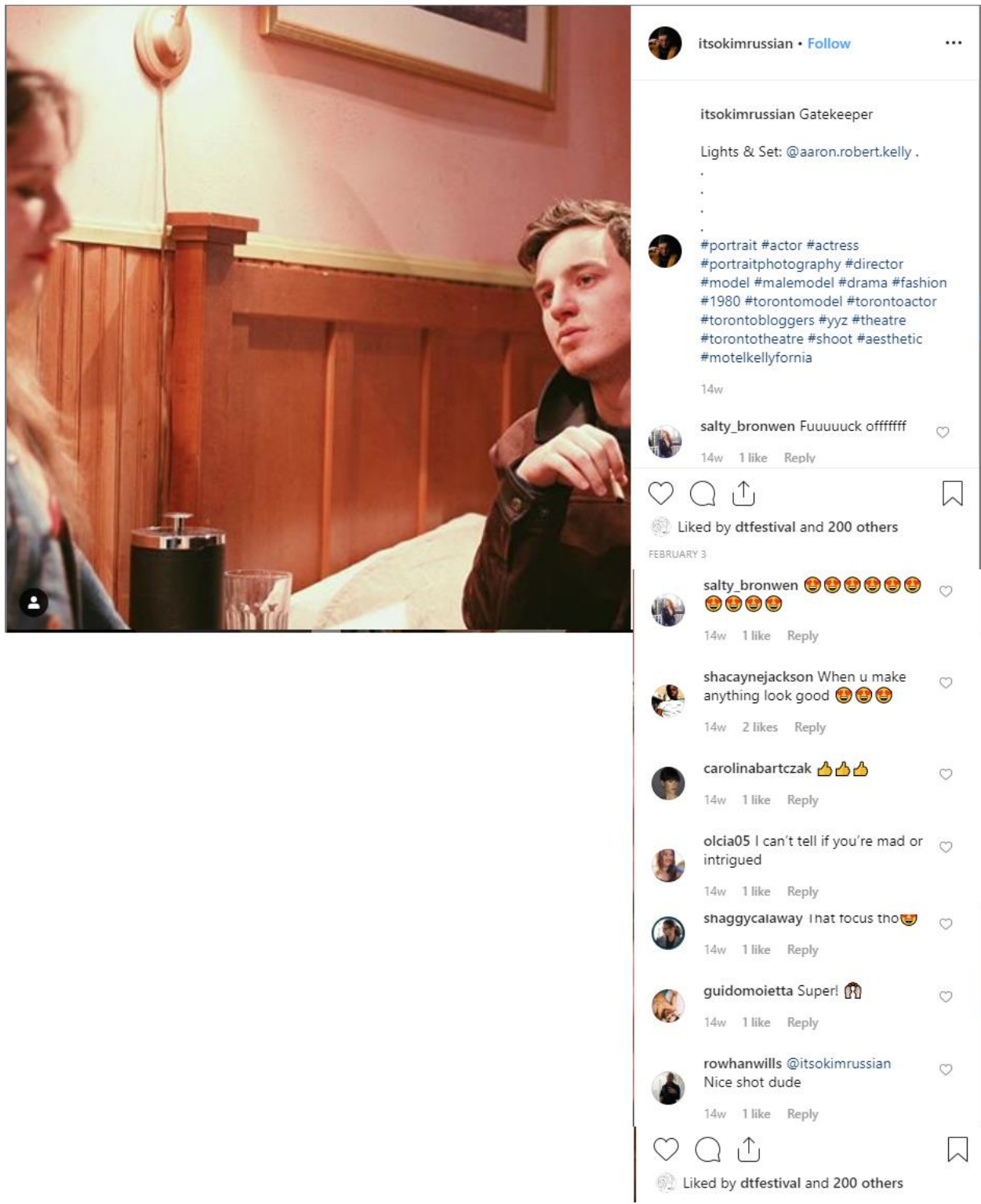Figure 30. Instagram Capture with 187 likes, vanessacerruto, 2019

Figure 31 Instagram Capture with 200 likes, Toronto, Ontario, itsokimrussian, 2019

One of the most unexpected uses of the space, at least one that I had not anticipated, was the private booking of the motel room by a fourth-year playwriting and dramaturgy class. Professor Judith Rudakoff, who teaches both classes, brought her students into the exhibit and prompted them with the line "There are stories about…". In their one-hour visit, their task was to write a mini play, based on the prompt and the room. The result was 15 plays, each with a surprisingly unique voice and a diverse tonal quality. The following is an email I received from Professor Judith Rudakoff after her visit:

> Thanks for allowing the Playwrights and dramaturgs of 4290 to spend time in your installation this morning. They drew much inspiration from the evocative environment. As you could tell from the monologues you heard directly afterwards, they were able to create developed worlds and populate those worlds with a diversity of characters. The students will forward their writing to you for the purposes of MFA thesis writing.
>
> Thx again for including us!
> Judith

Figure 32. Student in playwriting, Judith Rudakoff, 2019

Here are some examples:

Playwriting and Dramaturgy co-creators

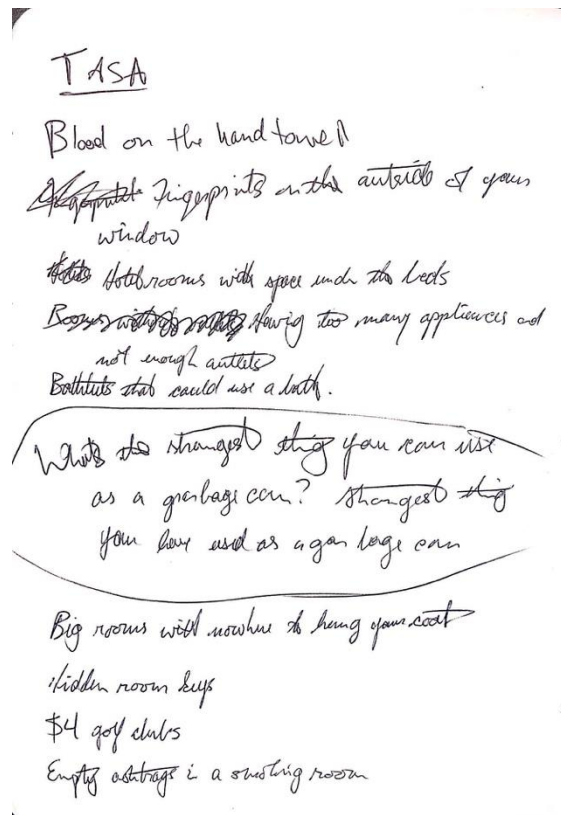Figure 33. Handwritten student notes, Toronto, Ontario, Jacob Heisler, 2019

Our Stay at Motel Kellyfornia

Kathryn Irvine

1. There are stories about streakily-painted walls stained with grime.
2. There are stories about metal bars encircled by vines.
3. There are stories about filthy bathtubs and clogged toilets.
4. There are stories about an open suitcase and its haphazardly-strewn contents.

5. There are stories about a mysterious dark stain dripping from the ceiling.
6. There are stories about harlequin romances and lonely realities.
7. There are stories about gauzy curtains shielding us from the outside.
8. There are stories about cracked and faded tile floors.
9. There are stories about far-off sirens and the fear they incite.
10. There are stories about wood paneling married with lime green trim.
11. There are stories about golf clubs collecting dust in a corner.
12. There are stories about Room #8 and its former inhabitants.
13. There are stories about fluorescent lights and the shadows they cast.
14. There are stories about an empty medicine cabinet with grubby mirrors.
15. There are stories about mold-stained towels in a bathroom that used to be white.
16. There are stories about plastic shower curtains drawn to conceal the filth.
17. There are stories about dusty footprints on a long-forgotten floor.
18. There are stories about an unevenly-mounted twin set of bedside lamps.
19. There are stories about bubblegum pink exposed brickwork.
20. There are stories about open doors with working locks.
21. There are stories about being on the outside looking in.
22. There are stories about paisley duvets and short white bedskirts.
23. There are stories about mingled feelings of nostalgia and anxiety.
24. There are stories about blank screens and the hum of white noise.
25. There are stories about an unopened blue luggage trunk.
26. There are stories about landscape prints in gilded frames.
27. There are stories about a chest of drawers blanketed in dust.
28. There are stories about cracked, floral-stamped lampshades.

Scene: Motel Kellyfornia

Catherine Brown

DAD: They really haven't changed this place at all. I'm pretty sure those are the same

blankets your uncle Si and I used; all they're missing is the ash tray on the table.

Oh, the days of cigarettes are in the rear-view mirror now, aren't they? I

remember when you could light one up anywhere you wanted, any time. Nobody

cared that it could kill you. Except your mom, of course, always made me leave

the house and sure as hell never let me smoke around you. Shit, they even got the same telephone!

I can't tell you how much I appreciate you coming with me, kiddo. I know you're confused as hell, but I need you to do me one last favour.

The night I met your mom, oh boy, I knew she was it for me. Never seen anyone so beautiful in my life, and that's still true to today. I tell her straight by the end of the night that I'll marry her one day and make her the happiest gal there ever was. She takes the fag out of my mouth, puts it out on the ground and says, "If you write me a love letter that sweeps me off my feet, I'll consider it. You tape it under that bed you're staying in and I'll come back here in a year. If it's still there, then we're meant to be, and I'm yours."

We never came back, though. I was so sweet on her, neither of us wanted to wait, just dove right in. She decided she loves me all on her own, and I forgot all about this place. But, I need that letter. If my love isn't enough for her anymore, maybe the universe can help me out.

It should be under the bed on the left. I can't get down there anymore with these knees, so I need you to do it. I need to know if I can make her fall in love with me again.
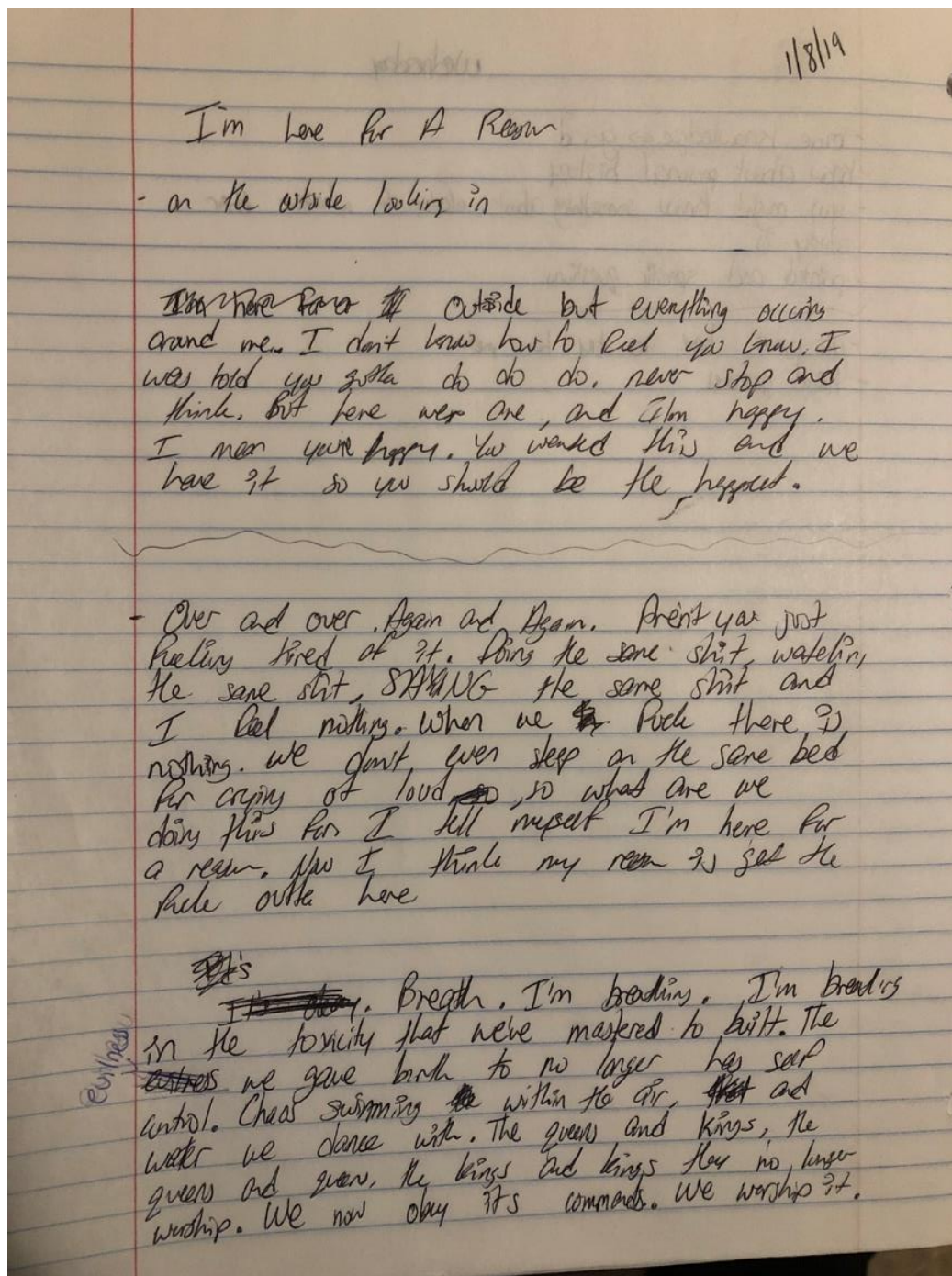
1/8/19

I'm here for A Reason.

- on the outside looking in

There Para # outside but everything occurs around me. I don't know how to feel you know. I was told you gotta do do do. never stop and think. but here we are One, and I'm happy. I mean you're happy. You wanted this and we have it so you should be the happiest.

- Over and over. Again and Again. Aren't you just feeling tired of it. Doing the same shit, watching the same shit, SAYING the same shit and I feel nothing. When we fuck there is nothing. We don't even sleep on the same bed for crying out loud, so what are we doing this for I tell myself I'm here for a reason. Now I think my reason is get the fuck outta here

It's . Breath. I'm breathing. I'm breathing in the toxicity that we've mastered to built. The we gave birth to no longer has self control. Chaos swimming within the air, and water we dance with. The queen and kings, the queens and queens, the kings and kings they no longer worship. We now obey it's commands. We worship it.

Figure 34. Handwritten student notes, Toronto, Ontario, Nia Osei, 2019

Brooke Dalton   January 14th, 2018

Salmon Castle
By: Brooke Dalton

Crystal   *The Mists of Avalon* is all about strong woman right? That's what I always

wanted to be. You tried to teach me that did you Lorrie? I keep reading it

over and over again you know. I can't seem to stop. But I always hide it

when David is back. The only book he thinks we should read is the bible. I

agree it's good but there are other storied that are also good. He doesn't

get that. He didn't finish school. He never did a lot of reading like we did.

He works a lot anyway so I can read.

You know, I never thought this is where I'd be. Twenty-five and living in

a motel. I mean it's not terrible. As mom used to say- you gotta earn the

good things in life, and I'm earnin' them. And Mom also said stand by

your man, and she did. She showed us that's what you do. Even

Guinevere, the most beautiful woman in all the stories stands by her man. -

Well to some extent. I keep thinking of ways to stay strong here.

Somedays I feel like a caged animal, caged bird even, ain't that eloquent?

David is working hard- I know he is. But the bed spreads are stained, and

the bathroom is disgusting, I just feel uneasy. As if something bad is going

to happen. But the other part of me is saying David is here and you need to

be with David. One day he's gonna make a good life for us, one day I'm

gonna have everything I've ever wanted.

Brooke Dalton   January 14th, 2018

That damn siren again. This place is too close to the highway. Once I complained to David, about the noise he said he knew a way to help me sleep noise free, he hit my head against the wall, but it's okay, it didn't even leave a mark on the wall. The good thing is no one ever complains about noise in this place- if we're fighting or fucking, no one seems to care- that's the beauty of it I guess. And everything is salmon pink. I like salmon pink. I guess it ain't all bad.

See sometimes life puts ya where you don't think you're gonna be- but if you fight it, life is only gonna get worse. See the TV is total shit- so I read ya know, making lemonade out of lemons.

I know I wanna have a baby and get married and I will as soon as we get enough money. I mean it's not like I'm homeless- when Dad died and the you got killed I thought I would be living on the street- scared I'd have to do terrible things to eat. But really David saved me. And I'm strong enough to be patient to wait. That's what strong woman do right? They wait. So I'll wait. I'll wait in my salmon covered castle.

2

While I had attempted to provide a canvas for visual artists to create their own visual stories, I had obviously not considered all possible pedagogical applications. These students each crafted a new work of art inspired and located in this pocket universe. Truly in the spirt of George F. Walker's plays, the room was a unifying character for unique, desperate, beautiful stories. This was beyond my expectations, and although I was open to the possibility that inspiration would be seeded by the experience in the minds of participants, I did not expect to hear the voices so clearly and immediately. I also did not expect to see the experience used as a teaching tool so directly.

As a pedagogical tool, *Motelkellyfornia* provided several more opportunities for me and my fellow educators and researchers. Another learning opportunity was created by scenic artist Andrea Battersby when she brought her scenic paint class through the exhibit. I held my breath as Andrea walked her class through the exhibit and asked how I arrived at certain results, and then explained how she would have achieved similar results. As an example of scenic art, I am proud of my accomplishment, and, as a tool of demonstration for students of the craft, my pocket universe provided strong examples of good and bad scenic treatment.

Conclusion

Throughout this project I realized that even though I was creating art work in a theatrical environment, with theatrical and cinematic techniques, exploring the performativity of objects, artifacts, and environments, I was not solely working in theatre. I often thought of the process, which would usually be undertaken by a team of theatre artists, including sound, lighting, set, and costume designers, builders, carpenters, electricians, costumers, scenic painters, directors, and photographers, as more of a sculpture or art installation. I was shaping

my raw materials, though experiments, thought, design processes, and practice into an art

piece. I was not necessarily building a set. I was creating an exhibit on a large and immersive

scale. My respect for the work of Crewdson and the detail, thought, and expression his

environments, actors, and photographs achieve reminded me daily, through my own work and

goals, that I had set myself a bar that was very high, but it was a challenge that I had the skill

and drive to clear. My success was highlighted in this email from respected theatre artist and

Director Jackie Maxwell:

> I was really interested in the ideas and impressed by the execution, and especially
> loved the photos which reminded me of the work of an American photographer I
> love, Gregory Crewdson...beautiful yet slightly disturbing! – Jackie Maxwell

Upon receiving this email, I knew I had succeeded in one of my many objectives throughout this

project. To further that feeling of success, I knew that I had achieved my goal within the

framework and limitations I had set for myself: I designed, built, painted, lit, reinforced the

environment with sound, and photographed and staged the exhibit as a solo artist. I did have

indispensable help from several young artists, who helped me assemble the set, focus lights,

and maintain sanity as the opening approached. The photoshoot itself would not have been

possible without technical assistance from my small and dedicated crew: Adam Breen, Kabeer

Garba, Madeleine Harkness, Julian Iacob, Tiana Kralj, Eleanor Kschischang , and Joyce Padua.

Also, my narrative photographs were only achievable because I had an amazing cast of models

and co-creators: Lindsey Bell, Jason Hildebrand, Leanne Hoffman, and Eagon Kelly, who were

the first to enter my pocket universe and live in its reality. Their creative force brought the

stories in my photos to life. I feel that I successfully managed a project of considerable scope

while balancing between the desire to "go it alone" and foster a community of collaborators in

creation. This process placed my set and me at the centre of the initial creation. It ended as a project in which roles were re-arranged around a pocket universe. The exhibit became a centre for creative work by audience/participants with their own agency to imagine. We created several works of art, or immersive art experiences, within a pocket universe. We created a physical dimensional cue for creation. Throughout the build I had full creative agency over the world in which I was able to express my own vision, message, and artistry. However, once released, I tapped the well-spring of my own imagination and into the springs of others.

Edmond Robert Jones said in The Dramatic Imagination:

> Many people confuse imagination with ingenuity, with inventiveness. But imagination is not this thing at all. It is the peculiar power of seeing with the eye of the mind. And it is the very essence of the theatre(89)

Since I was challenging myself against Jones' resistance to realism mentioned in my introduction, I chose this quote to examine this project retrospectively. Had I only come up with a clever idea, applied my ingenuity, and built a set simply in the void of imagination, could I have succeeding in creating theatre? If engaging imagination is a measure of success, then I believe, based on the vision, processes, and results my own abandon to the project and those of my co-creators, I have shown that imagination was in play in a meaningful way that contributed to the growth of participants, and myself as an artist. My goal of a photo-realistic super-real world juxtaposed against the theatrical experience in the theatre space blended into an alternate reality that was not only a product of my imagination but also proven by the production of all those who contributed to the community that became *Motelkellyfornia*.

My final thought (or meditation) is that this project is more than an attempt to exert creative agency over my artistic contributions. It is more than the sum of my own achievements

in photography, set construction, scenic paint and theatrical design. In the spirit of my artistic career of collaboration, being able to open a world to diverse artists to create and tell their own stories, which have re-sculpted the banks of my river and redefined the boundaries of my pocket universe, has been the most rewarding experience of this thesis and points toward potential future contributions. In future projects I will continue to experiment with bringing theatrical design forward in the creation process and reorganizing and challenging the ways in which people interact with theatre.

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Appendix

Photographs exhibited in *Travels with My Family*

On the following pages:

Figure 35. *Family Time,* Aaron Kelly, Toronto, Ontario, 2018.

Figure 36. *Conversation Time,* Aaron Kelly, Toronto, Ontario, 2018.

Figure 37. Daughter Time, Aaron Kelly, Toronto, Ontario, 2018.

Figure 38. *Mother Time,* Aaron Kelly, Toronto, Ontario, 2018.

Family Time

Conversation Time

Daughter Time

Mother Time