

PROCESS VS. PRODUCT:
POST-SECONDARY
MUSICAL THEATRE PEDAGOGY

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ABSTRACT

In the fall of 2016, I directed a production of *Shrek: The Musical* as part of Theatre Sheridan's 2016/2017 season. This document represents a record of the productions process, from the initial research in the summer of 2016, personal reflections on the venture, and journal entries of the rehearsal process.

Chapter one addresses my journey as a director and educator. From Memorial University to Sheridan College, through to my development as a director, it traces the steps that led me to where I am presently.

Chapter two examines process vs. performance as a central pedagogical ideal which plays an integral role in a young actors development.

Chapter three is a summation of my research and my experience in the past few months as I explored a pedagogical approach of process based direction through *Shrek: The Musical* at Sheridan College. It is a reflection of the entire process.

Chapter four contains my concluding thoughts on the subject. It defines how my research has influenced my pedagogical approach to exploring process in teaching and directing musical theatre.

Chapter five is a selection of entries from my directors journal that I feel best represents the experience I had thought the rehearsal process of *Shrek: The Musical*.

DEDICATION

To my family, friends, mentors and students who have supported me in process and encouraged me to explore, ask questions and breathe - Thank -you.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The process of learning how to act has been the subject of an array of scholarship in recent years. Various methods by renowned theorists Konstantin Stanislavsky, Uta Hagen, Stella Adler and Sanford Meisner have been used in post-secondary institutions across Canada and the United States, often broken down over numerous semesters of intense training, with the objective to endow the students with the fundamentals of acting. The acting studio is designed to enrich student experience so that upon graduation, they are in a position to succeed as professionals in their chosen field.

Typically this training culminates in a staged production of a play or musical as a capstone learning event. These productions may be directed by instructors within the institution, but oftentimes, professional guest directors are invited to lead the artistic team. A professional director approaches a university production as they would any other show, with little expectation for them to teach the students *how* to act and behave in a rehearsal environment. Is there an opportunity for a director to explicitly use the rehearsal room as an acting studio? Would this allow the student a more fluent transition from the classroom to the professional world?

“Shrek: The Musical,” explored the benefits of using the rehearsal space as a teaching environment. It was used as an incubator where the main objective was to explore how process can influence the journey of the student actor. Building upon relevant literature, this multi-modal research is intended to help create a unique pedagogy for teaching acting at the post-secondary level, specifically within the rehearsal process for graduating productions in a musical theatre program.

Chapter 2

The Beginning of a Process

My interest in teaching began in 2004 at Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador where I studied music, specifically vocal studies, conducting and music education. Over the course of my 5 year tenure at Memorial, I was introduced to professors who approached the studio with product as the primary focus and subsequently did not place enough focus on the process in achieving a final performance. They were more interested in giving answers, rather than asking questions. While the program at Memorial placed emphasis on performance, I thrived whenever process was the central part of the discussion. During my tenure at Memorial and my on-going pursuit in understanding process, my interest in teaching became a priority. As a result, in my final year, I was accepted into the Music Education stream, where the majority of courses in my schedule focused on pedagogy. High School teaching methods and Elementary teaching methods investigated teaching styles and their purpose as they pertain to a specific age demographic. They examined current pedagogical practices, methodologies, and resources for use in the primary, elementary and secondary school music program. Teacher candidates developed skills and instructional strategies for developing the singing, moving, playing, listening, and creating student. In addition to standard contexts in general music, choral, and instrumental settings, emphasis is also placed on music technology and settings such as musical theatre in order to reflect the

diversity of music programming in intermediate/secondary schools. (<http://www.mun.ca/regoff/calendar/sectionNo=EDUC-0443>) These courses urged me to explore various learning styles.

“One learning style is neither preferable nor inferior to another, but is simply different, with different characteristic strengths and weaknesses. A goal of instruction should be to equip students with the skills associated with every learning style category, regardless of the students’ personal preferences, since they will need all of those skills to function effectively as professionals.” (Understanding Student Differences)

We were equipped with the knowledge that a student retains visually, aurally, verbally, physically, interpersonally and logically.

The following year I attended Sheridan College in Toronto and began a three-year journey in the world of musical theatre performance. There, I met artists and teachers who thrived on understanding the process of acting, singing and dancing. My time at Sheridan fostered a deeper understanding of process, and in 2007 inspired me to found a professional theatre company in St. John’s, Newfoundland and Labrador. Theatre St. John’s enabled me to both engage in the process of producing musical theatre, and direct simultaneously. This collapsed the wall between creative process and the physical production itself. It allowed me to ask questions, solve problems, and take risks. I directed over 15 productions with Theatre St. John’s, each one allowing me to dissect what my role is as storyteller, leader, investigator and interpreter. In 2011 I was given the opportunity to assist the Director

of *Oklahoma* at Sheridan College. I was excited to apprentice under a professional director and choreographer, Tim French. What I did not anticipate in accepting this invitation was discovering an interest in working with post-secondary students. It was over my sixweek apprenticeship that I first glimpsed an opportunity to combine my passions for musical theatre and education.

Chapter 3

Process vs. Performance

Product versus process has been a topic of interest to pedagogues within the professional industry for many years. In a post-secondary environment, some feel that the end performance should be the main focus, while others feel the process in the rehearsal room must bear the most weight in a student's development. Throughout my apprenticeship at Sheridan, I noticed that Mr. French was confident in creating theatrical stage pictures and impressive choreography to assist him in interpreting the script. He placed significant importance on the elements of performance. What was missing was a dialogue with the company of actors, never allowing the cast of students the opportunity to explore and dissect the journey for themselves. Educator/Author Joe Deer compares this exploration with the many takes a film actor and director may attempt before landing on the perfect one. The difference being in theatre, the 'best take' is repeated nightly, dependent on the length of the shows run.

"The challenge of performing live is you have to attempt that entire selection of the 'best takes' every night. Doing so requires a lot of skill that must be built over a rehearsal process, not overnight. Learning how one moment follows another and finding the internal logic and emotional through line takes time and experimentation." (Deer 223)

This style of directing can be quite successful, especially when the company is filled with seasoned actors whom are already steeped in their process and approach

to the work. One cannot blame the director who stresses the value of performance, as it is the performance that is ultimately judged by the audience, not the process. In the professional world, the performance, from an audience's point of view (and the reviewers), is the deciding factor if the show and its company of theatre artists are a success. With production costs at an all-time high, there are producers who rely on exceptional performances and familiar titles like *Mamma Mia!*, *Jersey Boys* and *Wicked* to recoup their investment. In post-secondary training, the actor's journey culminates in a staged production of a play or musical as a capstone learning event. It is an opportunity for the student to grow as an actor, but also a time where theatre agents are invited to scout new talent. It is the responsibility of the educator to reject the narrow focus of the industry and maintain a more expansive pedagogy in the classroom—one that privileges personal development as its primary focus. They should allow the student to understand the needs of industry, but strive to understand the process in getting there.

A production in a post-secondary environment is not professional, therefore the value placed on performance should be questioned. Students may not necessarily have the skill to put all the dots together in the rehearsal room in the same ways a professional actor can. "Skills are the specific, recognizable part of an actor's work made evident in performance. Before there are skills, there is process" (Ross 52). If there is an emphasis placed on performance, the student may bypass the necessary questions they must explore and practice because of their need to be performative

right out of the gate. Detailed guidance from the director assists the novice actor in applying the skills learned in the acting studio to the work of the individual scenes and the larger arc of the work itself. This kind of approach is not typical to the rehearsal process in the musical theatre.

“We don’t rehearse to simply nail down our first and only idea and slowly drain it of any hint of spontaneity. Rather, rehearsal can be a blend of exploration of the possibilities, experimentation within a set of boundaries and, finally, a selection of the best elements from a wide range of possibilities. This scenario may sound idyllic, or even frightening. You may be used to going to a rehearsal hall and being told where to go, what to do, how to say it or sing it, and then drilled on that until you repeat it exactly like the director has told you. So, the notion of trying something different time after time could be intimidating to you and threatening to your director. But get in the habit of trying new things without fear of ridicule or ‘making a mistake’. “ (Deer. P. 222)

Process plays a major role in the journey of an actor in the rehearsal room. Since the inception of actor training, the ways in which an actor learns their craft are varied. The art of acting has its roots as far back as the sixth century BCE with the ancient Greeks. The analysis of acting and the human condition has been the subject of an array of scholarship over the past one hundred years. Various methods by renowned theorists Konstantin Stanislavsky, Jacques Le Coq and Sanford Meisner are used in post-secondary institutions across Canada and the United States. They are often broken apart and analyzed over many semesters of intense training, with the objective to endow the students with the fundamentals of acting. Teachers like Jacques LeCoq place emphasis on the physical body and the way it influences storytelling. The Meisner technique explores the external factors in creating a piece

of theatre, particularly an emphasis on the other actors in the room; acting is reacting (Brestoff 129). Stanislavsky's method, on the other hand, explores the character from within. The exploration of objective, obstacle, actions, and sense memory (Johnson xiv-xv) are the building blocks of his method, and is the cornerstone in major theatre-training institutions across North America (Watson 72). It is a process that has prepared students to approach their work in exploration, play and curiosity thus allowing them to succeed in the rehearsal room. Institutions like Sheridan College, who offer training in musical theatre, find themselves focusing on not only acting training, but also training in movement and voice. There is an equal weight placed on each discipline. While an institution like York University has four years to train their students in one discipline, Sheridan has four years to train their students in three.

To investigate the ways a director can use the rehearsal room as a teaching platform, we must understand the duties of both roles. The director's role is to steer the ship. They are the negotiator amongst the artistic team and facilitates casting, design choices, staging, and many other production needs. Their skills include: courage, effective communication, organization, preparation, collaboration, curiosity. (Deer 204). Interestingly, the skills necessary to teach effectively are quite similar. In addition to the aforementioned list, one should include demonstrating self-discipline, team-building and self-starting.

“Teachers communicate, counsel, model and manage, using a wide array of methods and resources to guide students. They use a mix of traditional and technological approaches to spur student achievement, tracking student progress

and refining their practices as they go. Teachers listen to and work with other teachers, parents, professionals and community partners to build the atmosphere of respect and collaboration necessary for academic achievement and character development.” (Ontario College of Teachers, <https://www.oct.ca/~media/D14950CF1D3648BA8772445A89046FF3.ashx>)

Acting teachers are often labeled many things; educator, trainer, tutor. For instance, a professor may feel he is ‘closer to a coach of sports.’ There is a similarity between sports and acting training. While specific skills can be taught in both, it is not until they are in practice that the player or student is able to use those skills as tools to succeed.

“You can’t just say “listen to your partner”, you've got to coach them to do it. [...] Listening to your partner doesn’t just happen, it has to be practiced. We have exercises that help practice listening like looking into the other persons eyes, physical gesturing etc. The role of the teacher is to coach the student along.” (Prior 113)

Understanding which label a director/educator identifies with could influence their pedagogy in the classroom. A lecturer may find their approach to be teacher-centric. This kind of learning reduces the students' responsibility to engage in dialogue, thus placing full responsibility on the teacher to relay knowledge. While this approach may work in a chemistry lab or math class where the learning is knowledge based, it is worth exploring a different approach for the acting studio. If you approach the work as a coach or guide, there is a sense that conversation is

allowed. The student may feel more at ease, open to taking risks and come to a conclusion through experience and learning.

The shift from teaching to learning has been endorsed by prominent leaders in education since the mid - 80's. Their view is that all segments of a college campus must work together to deepen a students learning experience (Freed 3). This can also be said for curriculum and more specifically, cap stone projects; it is through this kind of direct assessment of student learning that the student is given the opportunity to demonstrate how they are able to apply the knowledge gained from the acting studio (Freed 11). In this current model, there are three levels of assessment: Institutional, Program and Course. Learning outcomes under the institutional umbrella will be more broadly construed than at the program level. Furthermore, the outcomes at the course level will be, quite logically, the most specific.

Figure 1 Plan for Designing and Delivering Learning Outcomes (freed 108)



The way in which the director navigates his way to a final product is their prerogative; however, in a post-secondary environment there should be an implicit expectation that the work of the production ultimately promotes growth within each cast of students. When a guest director enters the rehearsal hall in a college or university, an invitation to review program/course objectives prior to working alongside the students may be beneficial. Sheridan College, for instance, combines Music, Dance, and Acting as three major components of its curriculum. A better understanding of the program and course outcomes allows the director to evaluate the students' progress throughout the rehearsal period with greater specificity. Designing a plan on how to incorporate specific learning outcomes into a rehearsal process may allow the director-teacher to navigate evaluation more effectively.

Figure 2 Plan for Designing and Delivering Learning outcomes in a rehearsal room



Language plays a vital role in the rehearsal room. A director's job is to be clear, concise, and engage the company in bringing the writer's story to life. There are two ways to approach language in the rehearsal room: product based language

and process based. Product based vocabulary is concerned with the "What's" of the production. What is the character thinking? What are the relationships? What is the circumstance? This sort of questioning may box an actor into one way of approaching the work. While these are important questions to ask an actor, there is an opportunity for deeper elaboration. Including "How's" and "Why's" to the process will challenge the student to explore more than one option. Multiple options allow the student actor to make the strongest choice. How is the character thinking? How are the relationships with the other characters affecting them? How do the circumstances influence the character's needs and objectives? Immediately the door has been opened to active choices and the application of skills learned in the studio.

Doug Lemov, an American pedagogue, feels language plays an important role in how a student translates direction. He believes that attention must be paid in armouring the student with tools to succeed. Lemov notes that certain kinds of behaviour are "not always the result of an oppositional attitude on the part of the student, but lies rather in simple misunderstanding, the result of insufficient clarity on the part of the direction-giver." (Gottlieb 64) The instructor should provide clarity and the necessary tools so that the student can succeed.

"When you tell a student to pay attention, ask yourself if she knows how to pay attention. Has anyone ever taught her? Does she know your specific expectations for paying attention (having her eyes on the speaker, say)? Has anyone ever helped her learn to avoid and control distractions and distractedness? The command "pay attention" provides no useful guidance because it fails to teach." (Gottlieb 64)

While one student may require the teacher to delve further into an explanation, it may be condescending for the student who is already applying the knowledge. The director must understand what the expectations of the process are, and how to balance the output of knowledge in the rehearsal room. For instance, there is an expectation that the idea of objective and obstacle are embedded in the process of a graduating acting class. If a student asks the question ‘What is an Objective?’ the discussion and process become rudimentary, and growth is halted. However, if the question is “In what ways can I obtain my Objective’, there is a teaching moment. The director now has an opportunity to teach the student about *actioning* as a way to gain specificity in their work. When an actor chooses a specific active verb to explore, the chances that they will gain their objective increases. It offers ‘an immediate way of achieving an objective...it is a specific transitive verb which describes what your character is actually doing to another character’. (Caldarone xvii) For instance, if a character’s objective is to ask their friend on a date, they may use actions like charm, tickle, empower, uplift as a way to flatter their scene partner. In teaching the group how to choose an active verb to help gain an objective, in a circumstance where the majority of the company can grow, the process of learning can move forward.

In pursuit of the product, students often feel the need to rush through process. Teachers of the Alexander technique of body alignment ‘always remind students to beware of ‘end-gaming’ - not to look for the results of better body posture

but simply to concentrate on the process' (Hahlo 118). A director that uses their platform to further the students acting training is giving the student an opportunity to merge the gap between the acting studio and the rehearsal hall.

Chapter 4

Reflections

Deciding how to approach a rehearsal process is one of the most important decisions a director will make. It will set the tone in the space, determine the kind of dialogue that will be expected between actor and director and will clarify how the story can be explored and unfold. In musical theatre, many additional factors must be considered. The amount of time dedicated to choreography, music and staging should be balanced according to the needs of the show. If a production is dance heavy, like *West Side Story*, more time will be spent learning choreography with less time to spend on scene work and actor training. The musical theatre actor is required to multitask at a level that other actors may not be expected to do in a play. The rehearsal period for any musical is structured so that choreography and music are taught in the first portion of the process. For instance, in a 3-week rehearsal period, typically music and choreography is introduced in the first 6-8 days, so that it can begin to live in the actor's body. There is roughly 5 days dedicated to staging the scenes and songs, with the remainder of the time, before beginning technical rehearsals on stage with lights, sound, set and costume, being used to run the show and fix problems not only with staging but also choreography and music. For the most part this sort of schedule, as it would typically be used in a professional context, was adhered to for my thesis production of *Shrek*, at Sheridan College.

Shrek: the musical, based on the original film work from *Shrek*, is a story that follows the journey of popular, and some unpopular, fairy tale creatures. By the very nature of the fairy-tale form, anything is possible and the imagination of the creative team and cast are free to run wild. In my thesis production the first thing to address was choreography. There was an opportunity with *Shrek* to explore movement in a way that is married more fully to character development. In the Sheridan production this opportunity was explored extensively in the first week of rehearsal in many ways. For instance, the ensemble was responsible for creating 3 distinct worlds: The world of the Dulocians, the world of the villagers, and the world of the fairy-tale creatures. With many of the actors playing individual roles within these worlds, it was integral that each character was unique and different from one another. In collaboration with the choreographer, time was spent exploring staging, movement and ensemble techniques such as “flocking” and Viewpoints, a system of group improvisation created by Mary Overlie. These approaches are often used in the classical theatre as a way into the story and the physical score of the characters; however, this is an uncommon approach in the musical theatre context. It was interesting to observe the students fully trust and engage in the exercises. Their imaginations allowed them to play within the explorations. The students began to create unique ways of traveling through space, leading with different parts of their bodies: their nose, eye-brow, left elbow, right hip, or big toe on their left foot etc.

As a teacher introducing an atypical process through which the students could continue their growth as actors, I challenged the cast on a daily basis to voice their decisions and reflect on the choices being made by them. The artistic team was encouraged to ask questions, rather than give answers - allowing the student actor to take responsibility for themselves and their process. As director, my hope was to dissect the story in order to create a deeper reading of the characters and their relationships, beyond what the audience may expect from a “fairytale” story. This approach was reflective of a number of articles that discussed the show’s relevance to modern day society and culture. In his book *Shrek Investigated*, Francois Depelteau discusses the kinds of transactions/relationships that are explored in the story: political transactions, economic transactions, ideological transactions and military transactions (Depelteau 109). “Human beings live in a world characterized by huge social inequalities...We know how to develop amazing technological tools such as spaceships, complex computers and nuclear plants. But socially speaking, we are still surprisingly involved in destructive power relations through multiple fields of transactions.” (Depelteau 109) An entire 3-hour rehearsal slot was dedicated to exploring these transactions. The following was the lesson plan for this rehearsal:

6:00 - Introduction to 4 transactions

- (i) **political transactions:** where people are conflicting, making alliances, demonstrating, for the control of laws, population, taxation and territory

- (ii) **ideological transactions:** where people contend over school curriculum, give speeches, write texts, make movies, interpret and preach words of God, and so on for the control of worldview, values, norms, etc.
 - (iii) **economic transactions:** where individuals compete for the accumulation of wealth.
 - (iv) **military transactions:** where generals, soldiers, child - soldiers, etc, fight for the control of space and resources on land, sea, and air through the use of weapons and various forms of violence such as torture, terror, massacres.
- (Depelteau, 109)

6:20 - Image and Instinct

Each transaction was typed on a sheet of paper. In the 4 corners of the room, we laid a very large, long brown sheet of paper accompanied by crayons, markers, coloured led pencils. The cast was divided into 4 groups, and each given a different transaction to explore. They were encouraged to read the explanation of the transaction and draw images that came to them upon reflecting on the text. They were encouraged to draw freely without judgment. After 5 minutes of drawing, the groups switched places, until all 4 groups explored each transaction. (See Appendix II)

6:50 - Art Gallery

Each sheet was then taped on the wall in the four corners of the room. The cast was invited to engage with the images as if they were walking through an art gallery, allowing the images to effect them in a palpable, authentic way. I observed the students interact with the drawings in a curious way. They appeared to communicate with each other informally what they were seeing, and how the images made them feel.

7:00 - Tableau exploration

Each group found their original transaction and chose one image that was drawn on the sheet of paper. They were given the task to create a static tableau based on the image they chose. Each group presented their work to the class. As the group presented, the rest of the class viewed the tableau like a piece of sculpture. They walked around, through and next to the tableau/sculpture, trying to understand the story that was created, from all points of view.

7:25 - Moving Tableau exploration

Each group had 5 minutes to explore their static tableau through movement. They were instructed to create a moving tableau that was based on their original static tableau that lasted 20 seconds and was able to be achieved as

a loop. Each group presented while the other groups circled the tableau and observed the images that were created.

While the students explored, the creative team observed their responses and process. We noted the kinds of images that were presented in order to apply them as movement or shape to the staging of the production. To conclude the exercise, the company gathered in a circle and debriefed on the exercise. A central discussion emerged around power struggles and the relationships of power in society and consequently the production. Immediately following the exercise, the company was instructed to place themselves (as characters) in an order from least powerful to most. What seems like a simple task, took 30 minutes. We allowed the cast to debate amongst themselves, and clearly articulate their reasons for where they felt their place was in the line. The creative team observed a heated debate amongst the actors regarding their place within the community. They were forced to reflect and voice their ideas on relationship, status and circumstance.

Three weeks after *Shrek: The Musical* closed, I had the opportunity to sit down with three of the show's actors to discuss their views on how process was used during the rehearsal period. These interviews are used throughout this chapter as a support to my thesis.

Ugly Duckling:

“The work we did on connecting the story Shrek to real life and relevant context. For Shrek it’s easy to get lost in song and dance, especially the beginning of the process, and forget what the message is and discovering what that message is. We had the 4 powers: military, economic, social and that exercises of drawing pictures, tableue and scene - that really stuck with me. I think the way that you helped us approach the material later on to me was very connected to our inner selves. So doing that work before hand gave me a way in, to be truthful and really caring about the fairytale creatures losing their homes - it brought it to something closer to understanding. I’m interested in the power of the to effect change in a real way. I benefited most in the discussions after the exploration, which wouldn’t have been possible without the exploration. The moving tableaux seemed to be designed in a way that was intentionally vague, specific from the performer but not the audience. The audience placed their own context on it. It stuck with me throughout the process - what the audience is getting is most likely to be different for most people.”

Shrek had a cast of 25 student actors. The 4 lead characters were Shrek, Fiona, Donkey and Lord Farquad. The other 21 students had roles within the ensemble. For a student’s voice to be heard and their individual skills to be seen was difficult. It was my objective to give space and room for each actor to safely explore and ask questions, while being challenged by the creative team. It was my goal to find opportunities in the rehearsal schedule to apply skills the students learned in the

acting studio through their tenure at Sheridan. In Sheridan's performance pedagogy, it is the actor's responsibility to make clear and specific choices. One skill that I focused upon in my rehearsal process was "auctioning" and "verbing." Their first task is to define an objective or a "want" in the scene. Uta Hagen defines an actor's objective as their immediate need within the play, scene or moment, most often in relationship with another character (Hagen 74). Actioning is a method that allows an actor to explore how a character can obtain their objective. One afternoon, I dedicated 3 hours to actioning two of the large, ensemble musical numbers in the show. The company met in a circle and tackled the opening sequence of the show, "Big Bright beautiful World," and arguably the most popular song in the musical, "Freak Flag." After instructing each character to define a clear objective for themselves, we divided both songs into units, named each unit and then married a tactic to each line of text. This gave me the opportunity to observe their skill level and the students the opportunity to practice what they had been learning in the actor's studio, outside the context outside of scene study—where scenes are typically dialogue driven or involve heightened emotion. This sort of precise exploration allowed the students to voice their knowledge and play as a company. It was a way for them to be heard as individuals, and work as a team to create a company of actors.

In text-based theatre, "table work" is a universally practiced technique that

begins many rehearsal periods. It is a process where the cast of actors, with the director, sit around ~~and~~ a table and discuss the play. The table read's main objective is to welcome and allow dialogue amongst the actors and director. Character development, relationships, circumstances, and the world of the play are ideas that can be discussed, dissected, and examined. Character objective is another concept that is explored, one which lays the foundation for the actors journey throughout the play. "In the architecture of constructing the character, the objectives are a powerful part of the basic structure. They must be sought out with strong, personal identification if they are to provide a solid for the work on the action" (Hagen 177) Traditionally at least one day of rehearsal is dedicated to table work.

In the musical theatre, this practice is not nearly as common, especially in a short 2-3 week rehearsal period. Amidst musical, choreography and staging rehearsals - there just isn't time! Patti Lupone, esteemed actor of the musical theatre comments in her memoir on rehearsing with Arthur Laurents in the revival of *Gypsy* reveals that she was shocked to learn the musical had never been rehearsed for Broadway with time dedicated to table work ("Patti Lupone: A Memoir"). While she was shocked, she also understood; musicals are usually rehearsed with little time to explore. "That's the way musicals are usually brought to the stage. Rehearsal time is precious so only rarely does the company ever sit around a table and read the play" ("Patti Lupone: A Memoir"). Taking the time to discuss and dissect the play, moment by moment, allows the actor to build a firm and steadfast foundation before

the staging process begins. It was my hope and goal to achieve precise table work with the entire cast around a table for the entire process. However music and movement needs had to be met within the 3-week rehearsal period, so only those who had dialogue or lyrics in a particular scene were called. While this was not ideal in creating a full company discussion (re: the world of the play and how it evolves) it did serve the immediate dramaturgical needs of the scene and its players. It also gave the students the opportunity to practice the skills they learned in their script analysis class that is an integral part of the acting curriculum at Sheridan. This includes: unit naming, establishing an objective for the character, exploring tactics, circumstances, environment and so on. A standard character analysis questionnaire was provided for the students to explore. (see fig. 3).

Donkey:

"I thought the amount of table work we did was awesome, and something that I always find interesting. I think it served everyone and definitely served me. It allowed me to get to know the show. I knew the show so well after that first week. It's something I don't think the other production received. I think the amount that we dove into the script was critically important. I think it's so helpful - I've had experiences where you do a read through and [immediately] start staging. By the time we started staging I felt that my feet were on solid ground."

Fiona:

“That was my favourite part; I really loved that. It taught me to be committed to a choice. You continuously challenged me to be strong with my choices. You’d make me question my choices - I started becoming ‘my objective IS this’ as opposed to being unsure and unclear. Re: action/tactic work: We did it in class, and I don’t feel like I ever really connected with it - and in the table WORK I started to understand why and how important it really is, so I felt a big connection with table work. I sat down and wrote a tactic for every line - and I would try it . I wish I took more time with every single song. I would think about how am I singing, how do I sound and would say ‘NO,’ think about my tactic.”

There was wonderful discussion and movement exploration in the first week that established analysis and reflection as part of our creation process. I felt it was crucially important for the actors to continue the second week in the same process-based structure. It was interesting to me, however, as I scheduled the rehearsal week and what needed to be accomplished, that I was clearly in performance mode. We had two weeks left to stage and choreograph a 120-minute musical. I now had the added challenge to create a room where process was the main goal, but my own needs and timeline were rooted in the end product and the professional obligation to deliver a completed production for the college. Our first rehearsal pass of the work was admittedly rough, but it was also clear that there was a scaffolding in place of a successful work. In fact, I had a plan on paper where I was merging pre-determined

choices around staging while allowing the student to live in a world of process, exploration and play. This approach worked well for staging rehearsals, as I was working primarily with 4 actors at a time. Subsequently, the rehearsals that included the entire company were efficient, well thought-out and planned. I learned that if the company saw that a clear rehearsal structure was in place that their ability to play and be spontaneous would be easier to achieve.

Musical theatre relies on three distinct aspects of performance: acting, singing and dancing. The shows' musical director had many excellent ideas but was also an emerging artist. It took him longer than expected to accomplish what was needed in terms of the music and consequently cut into quality exploration time with the actors and the staging of the show. This was no fault of his. When I was a young director, I always took longer than the time allotted to work out or problem solve sections of the script. With continued experience there came a point that I learned to teach/stage, settle and move on. I trust that the actors will do their homework and the process will move forward and grow. The relationship between choreographer and director is equally as important as his relationship with the musical director. Clear dialogue, trust, and collaboration are the essential foundations of a successful creation. This was certainly the case as the rehearsal process began with *Shrek*. The choreographer and I had many discussions prior to the first rehearsal regarding how we saw the world, the movement of each group of characters and how to achieve it. Through the movement explorations in week one the company created unique ways

to discover how these characters lived and traveled in space. These rehearsals were exciting for not only the actors but also the creative team. They created a process-orientated space where improvisation and play was at the core of the work.

Donkey:

"The amount of physical work we did helped me a lot for my physical character. Being able to push my body to [its] limits in those movement exercises pushed me unknowingly as Donkey. I didn't realize how physical the character was. It allowed me to realize how far I could go with my limbs."

Ugly Duckling:

"I feel I'm able to be truth fully when I'm connected to my body and then my breath. I appreciated bringing the physical work in early because it was that much easier to feel that I wasn't putting something on because it was integrated from the beginning. I didn't feel weird exploring the ugly duckling on open night because it was incorporated from the very beginning."

Fiona:

"I think it helped me find my centre and where I led with. I led with my heart."

The process of teaching acting should encourage, uplift, and encourage the student to ask questions. It is the teacher's role to guide their students to discovery. This was the teaching and directing approach to *Shrek*, an approach that was steeped

in process, play and exploration. A learning platform was provided whereby the student was given the opportunity to grow by taking risks. They were encouraged to fail - and fail big. In order for any actor to make the strongest choice, they should explore as many of the weakest ones as possible. The rehearsal process isn't about being correct, it is about making discoveries and sometimes being wrong.

“...every actor should be in process, always learning, always growing, never too proud to fall on one's face and then go back to the beginning. The only way to find the level of power that leads to consistent success as an actor is to fail. Because failure leads to success. Every perceived failure gives you more understanding, creates more space for growth, and leads you closer and closer to mastery.” (<https://www.backstage.com/advice-for-actors/backstage-experts/how-fail-your-way-success/>)

This approach was specifically encouraged in the first phase of rehearsals. In week one the artistic team focused mainly on physical exploration and table work, work that allowed the student actors to explore, fail, dust themselves off and explore again. At the end of the rehearsal and performance period, I had the opportunity to interview 2 of the lead actors (Donkey and Fiona) and one ensemble member (Ugly Duckling) to get an idea of their experience in the process.

Donkey:

"It is so infrequent for me to do something that I would be watching myself. I think due to this process, more than any other show I've done, I was able to do anything I wanted without fear. When we went into blocking scenes - it was never "Ok we need to block this scene." - it felt like when we were in the room doing the work, we were doing the work, there was no outside force being like 'get this done' -

and I feel like it can happen sometimes. It all goes back to the table work where you [the director] were open to looking at each scene with out points of views [already] in mind. When we went to blocking, our points of view were held in regard. It never felt like we went into blocking a scene and you were like “Ok it’s fine.” Anytime we were blocking a scene - we explored many possible avenues that the scene could go in. It allowed me a safe place to explore many many, many different things that I could do. "

Fiona:

“I was really challenged in the process. Being challenged helped me to find [that] I learned what I really need to do as an actor. I feel like if I didn’t have all of that, and I wouldn’t have done as much work. I feel like I would have gone in learned the songs, learned the lines and that’s all.”

Ugly Duckling:

“I really loved the circle at the end of every day. It was such an easy way to focus in. I felt I was always leaving with a purpose. I didn’t realize until I got into this block, the people who take on the shows in the first semester. ‘This is what i did today’ which helped it to not feel like all the days were blending in together. Even if you don’t talk about it in the circle, when you’re thinking about word, you’re thinking about the day, what stuck with me, you’re reflecting on the day. It was our own chance to define how we are as performers. You were clear that this wasn’t

about the final product, I was glad that it was presented that way from the beginning. Some cast mates were used to classes where you are just taught the choreography - they were frustrated with a new process. The process in week one made week two more valuable. That second week was based on what our impulses were that were more informed impulses because of that first week. You can train your instinct.”

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Allowing the student actor to approach their work in a way that encourages them to take risks should be the primary objective of an instructor, in any field. In the performing arts, this is particularly important, as it frees up the actors' creative mind and body to play. They are free to practice a process rather than performance. Process can be difficult to achieve, especially in an industry whose end result is rooted in performance. It is integral that teachers at the post-secondary level are aware of the importance of learning in process.

I was fortunate to apply this approach at Sheridan College in their Musical Theatre Performance program. I was teaching a first-year course called 'Musical Theatre Vocal Performance'. In this class, students are asked to learn a song in the musical theatre repertoire and explore it amongst their peers. It an intimate class size, with 35 minutes dedicated to exploration per student. Each student has three opportunities to explore their piece; it is not unlike a monologue workshop. Given that this was a first year course, the ability to practice process made perfect sense, as the students were in the beginning stages of their development. The curriculum builds upon the students' explorations. Students examine their own evolving work and that of their classmates; they study the tools and skills of acting while they are in process. The student should have the opportunity to explore as much as is necessary

for her to discover what the character needs and wants in the song. The student is encouraged to explore objective, obstacle, relationship, circumstance and any other skill which may help her discover and communicate what their character has to say. Consequently, the student is creating a process they can use - now and in the future - they are learning a process, not a performance. It is important that the actor work within unpressured time to think, explore, create and dream. Their explorations are always unfinished and evolving.

Due to a change in Program co-ordinators two years ago, the graduating class at Sheridan received a mixture of teaching philosophies; a philosophy in performance and philosophy in process - the second being the current view. Within the cast of *Shrek*, there was a healthy balance of students who placed value on process and who placed value on product. This sort of binary opposition created a culture in the rehearsal space that was divided.

“...successful peer-group work depends on students having a shared understanding of the purpose of tasks and a joint conception of what they are trying to achieve. It has been shown that similar tasks can generate very different student responses in terms of the quality of talk and collaboration that emerges. Some studies provide examples of how students’ interpretations of the ground rules may differ in important ways from those of their peers and/or teachers. For example, while some students working in groups may see it as an opportunity to work collaboratively, others, in the same group, may see it as an opportunity to exhibit individual knowledge and superiority.” (<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/09650790100200161>)

Understanding this pedagogy and the importance it has at the college serves the Director/Instructor in bridging the gap between the studio and the professional world. Shifting the way the student learns in a post-secondary musical theatre environment in Canada will change how the student approaches the rehearsal room. Arming the student actor with the tools to play, and make choices that are rooted in process, allows the rehearsal room to be free, creative and explorative. Post-secondary education is the gateway to the professional world - it is where the student actor is provided the foundation on how to approach performance. If the studio is rooted in process, this sort of thinking will then translate into the students work as they navigate their way into the professional world.

Chapter 6

DIRECTORS JOURNALS

Monday, October 31st

Today was the first day in the rehearsal studio. It began with a brief meeting with Joseph and Nicola as we discussed how to tackle the day and the week. It was followed by a meet and greet and a design presentation from Anna, Joe and Bonnie. We dove right into movement exploration. The company was divided into 4 groups where they were given a nursery rhyme to recite as they traveled from SL to SR with three directions on traveling through space:

QUALITY ex: Slither, March, Crawl

TEMPO ex: Slowly, Briskly, Quickly

DIRECTION ex: Forward, Circle, Zig-Zag

Half of the groups decided to place a narrative on the movement, as opposed to allowing the simple direction to stand alone. Most groups on their first pass explored the direction 5/10. A lesson in committing fully to exercise and trusting. Point of light exercise/ Where it influences movement. Music learning. Ended day with Where you are right now, what you learned, what you will practice.

Tuesday, November 1st

Viewpoints grid walking, change direction often, spacial awareness.

Leading point. Where in your body does your character lead? Led by Nicola.

Music Rehearsal

4 transaction Art Gallery: image based inspiration.

Relationship vs. Transaction

Wednesday, November 2nd

- Table Work - breaking the script into units, objectives, tactics.
- Interviews- how can use the tools learned in studio and start applying. You have permission to play and explore.
- Circle Gathering musical instruments: We gathered as a cast and had some fun playing instruments that the cast members brought to the circle. It's our hope to use some of these instrument in the telling of our story.
- Interview with Gillian Saunders - Head of the Dance Discipline. We discussed the importance of breath in movement. I also asked Gillian what kind of terminology she uses in the dance studio so that I could have a better understanding as to where the students were coming from as we explored movement in the dance studio.

Thursday, November 3rd

Today was a full day of table work, music learning. We spent the day breaking scenes into units and constantly challenging students to explore their own wants and objectives. When the objective shifts, there's a new unit. "What clues do we use to begin a new unit?" Today's rehearsal was broken down into table work and music rehearsals. Most of the ensemble spent

time working with Joseph on learning music and reviewing. While he was in rehearsal, I met with cast members and continued table work. I am noticing that many of the students are exploring action work for the time in this kind of way (married with script). It seems to be benefiting their process. Nicola was away today teaching outside of the college.

Friday, November 4th

Today was dedicated mostly to table work with most of the cast. I continued work with with the leads and their scenes, with only 1 hour spent with the entire cast. The ensemble was working with Nicola on What's Up Duloc. Music continued for the ensemble in an adjacent room. I would have like to have the entire cast together for table work - time and multitasking is an issue.

Saturday, November 5th

The first part of day was spent finishing music with the ensemble and Joseph, and finishing table work with myself and some of the leads. The afternoon was spent in a full read/sing of the show from top to bottom. It is always interesting to me to reflect on doing the read at the end of the week, after table work and music has been learned. Does it serve? Or does it better serve the process to do the read at the top of the rehearsal week? Or do both?

Monday November 7th

The beginning of Week 2! Today we started staging the show. It was a whirlwind of a day, negotiating with the MD and Choreographer how the day will be blocked out. We finally decided

to take the show in chronological order and stop and start for Musical and Choreography notes/work.

The idea is to set the show and create a scaffolding, and then rehearse what we've staged in week 3. There are a lot of actors to navigate through the first 2 scenes of the show - 25! Phew! I walked into the rehearsal with a clear idea of what I wanted to accomplish. For the most part, I achieved it. We did run out of time, not getting to a one hour chunk - hopefully we will make it up tomorrow.

We ended the day in a circle - asking the group to reflect on one word for: Where they are? What they learned today? What they will practice for next rehearsal? It's a great way for me to check in with each cast member, allow their voice to be heard and take the temperature of the room.

Tuesday, November 8th

Today was a lot of the same process. It's quick! We managed to complete the first 20 pages of the show. It's a delicate balance in directing and being specific and allowing the actors to stay in process. I'm noticing some of the actors really coming on board, while others seem to want to be spoon fed ideas. Hopefully it doesn't create tension in the space. It's tough with 25!

The actor playing Shrek is having a difficult time not judging himself throughout the process. He feels his classmates aren't supporting him and that he is being judged. I reminded him we are playing and to allow himself to breathe and trust his decisions in this part of the journey.

Wednesday, November 9th

We split the rehearsal schedule in 2. I took the principal characters and staged their scenes while the choreographer took the ensemble and continued choreography for 'Welcome to Duloc'. I'm noticing that the process is taking a little longer than expected. It's difficult to observe that process while I'm in another room. The principal characters are playing, especially Joel - what an actor! He's game for anything.

Thursday, November 10th

Staging. Choreography. Music. Balancing all three! There is some tension between myself and the MD. I'm not entirely sure why. With my experience in Music, I feel confident in giving music notes as it pertains to staging and marrying the two. I'm not sure if the MD is used to a Director so hands on. Perhaps I need to have a chat with him so we are both on the same page.

We are on schedule, for the most part. Some rehearsals are getting switched or maneuvered, but such is the process. The entire company is called at all times this week. I feel them getting restless in the room - again, 25 of them!!

Friday, November 11th

Fridays and Mondays are the hardest for me, as I teach in the morning both days then head to rehearsal without much of a break.

Today I worked with Shrek one on one and discussed his journey throughout the production. I asked him to complete 'the hero journey' outline, so that he can have a clear outline as to how the show is structured. He doesn't seem to be doing a lot of outside work in building his character and relationships. I encouraged him to find time outside of the rehearsal space to dedicate to the work. He's having a hard time with self-esteem. I guide, I encourage, I receive and listen - I'm not sure if any of it working. Does he just need to get out of his own way?

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Appendix A: FIGURES

Fig. 3 - Character Analysis Form (Bennett, Suzanne)

Character Analysis ABC

To find either physical or mental attributes that contribute to the behaviour, or physicality of the character, translatable attributes which apply directly to your portrayal. Explored in order to narrow down the mode of behavioural actions and *express, bringing to life* the ideas. This is like working with an objective, you have to be working with something you can get, embody, and achieve. Let's keep it simple, otherwise it's too intellectual, and not easily *actable*. Not about coming up with the answers but exploring in rehearsal what can be developed. Every answer you come up with has to be active, not passive (i.e. once removed from the core of the action).

"Rules are made to be breathed upon, bellowed up" RH Small

Who Am I? Look for the Archetype: I'm a Miser, I'm a Saviour, I'm a Con-Man, I'm a person with OCD. I'm a Flight Attendant, I'm a Disciple, I'm a Dentist, I'm a Judge. Do your best to uncover the truth + your imagination which will deepen the experience of the character as you are playing them. Rehearsal is a process of exploring and refining this. "Who am I?" is guided by the author as written, but 'subsections' of the Archetype (Surprises, Opposites, Shadows) are possible and must be encouraged.

What are my Circumstances? What predicament am I in? What is happening to me? What events are surrounding my life right now (that give rise to the wants)?

What are my Relationships? Determine the literal relationship then determine the *real* nature of the relationship. Again, Archetypes are useful here: Tormentor/Slave, Bully/Victim, Lover/Lover, Sister/Brother. What is the real nature of the relationship, outside the literal one. Takes away judgment if you can see the character clearly *in relationship*.

What Do I Want? Based on who you are and the given circumstances and the nature of the relationship, you can deduce your objective (you got to get it from *somewhere*). Super objective (a big want i.e. to be my own person), and subsets (beneath that, within beats/units of action, what am I trying to accomplish in this scene? Confronting my mother, to kill my father. Do the subsets have anything to do with my super objective?): I want to be saved, I want to be loved, I want to keep my head above water. What are you fighting for?

What is my Obstacle? Internal or external: My asshole brother, my stubbornness, the distance between us, my insecurity, he won't let me leave, I can't break away, I can't be myself in front of him. All of these things speak to Stakes/Importance.

What do I do to get What I Want? Pull out your Action Thesaurus: to bribe, to threaten, to coerce, to humour, to seduce, to dazzle, to charm, to overpower, to intimidate, to lead, to seek approval.

Where am I: (Time and Place)? What role do you play in this place? How does this place change you? How do you behave in the place and time you're in? Your room, in class, at a bar, in an elevator, at a funeral, being at home, at court.

Image 2: Political Transaction Drawing

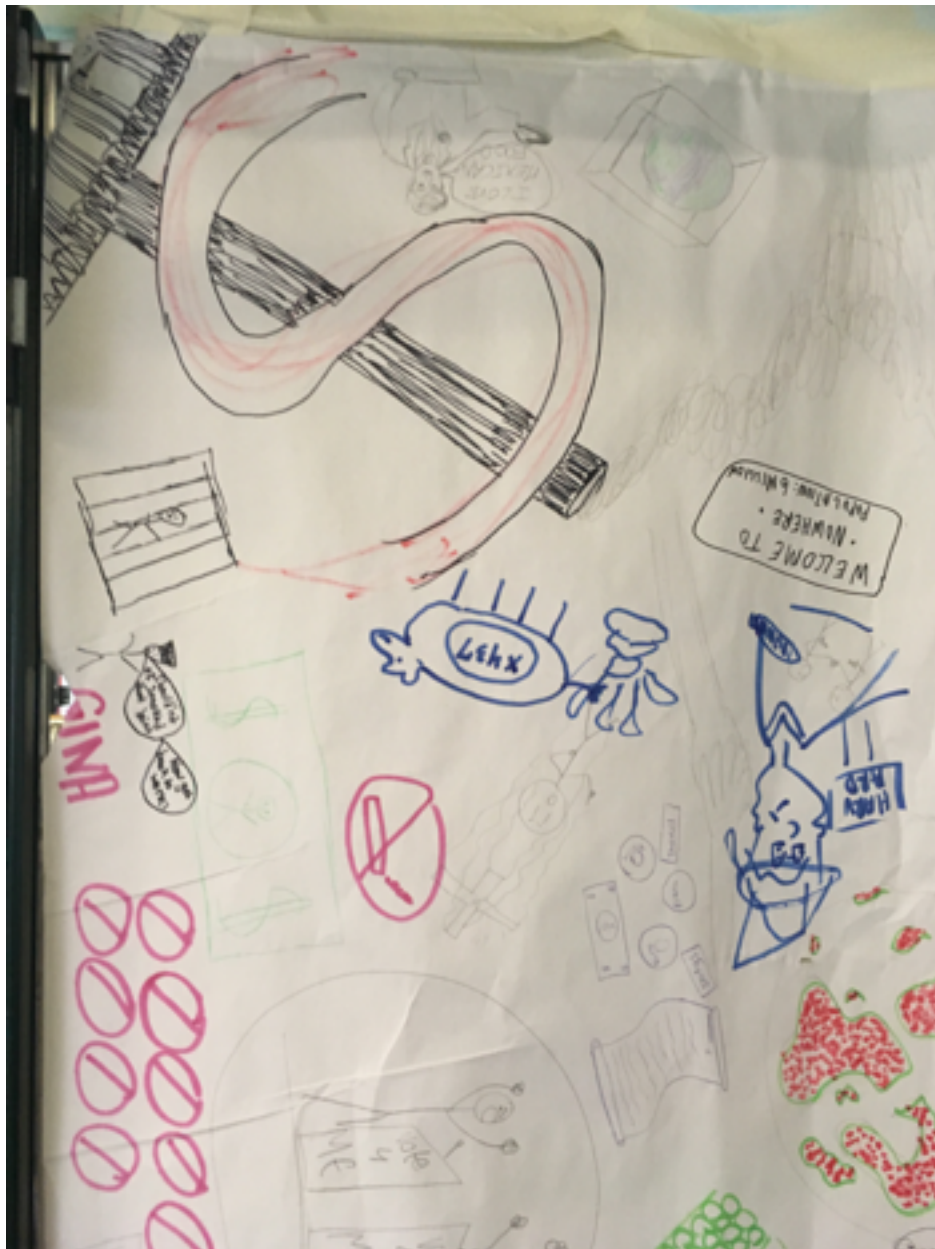


Image 3: Economic Transaction Drawing

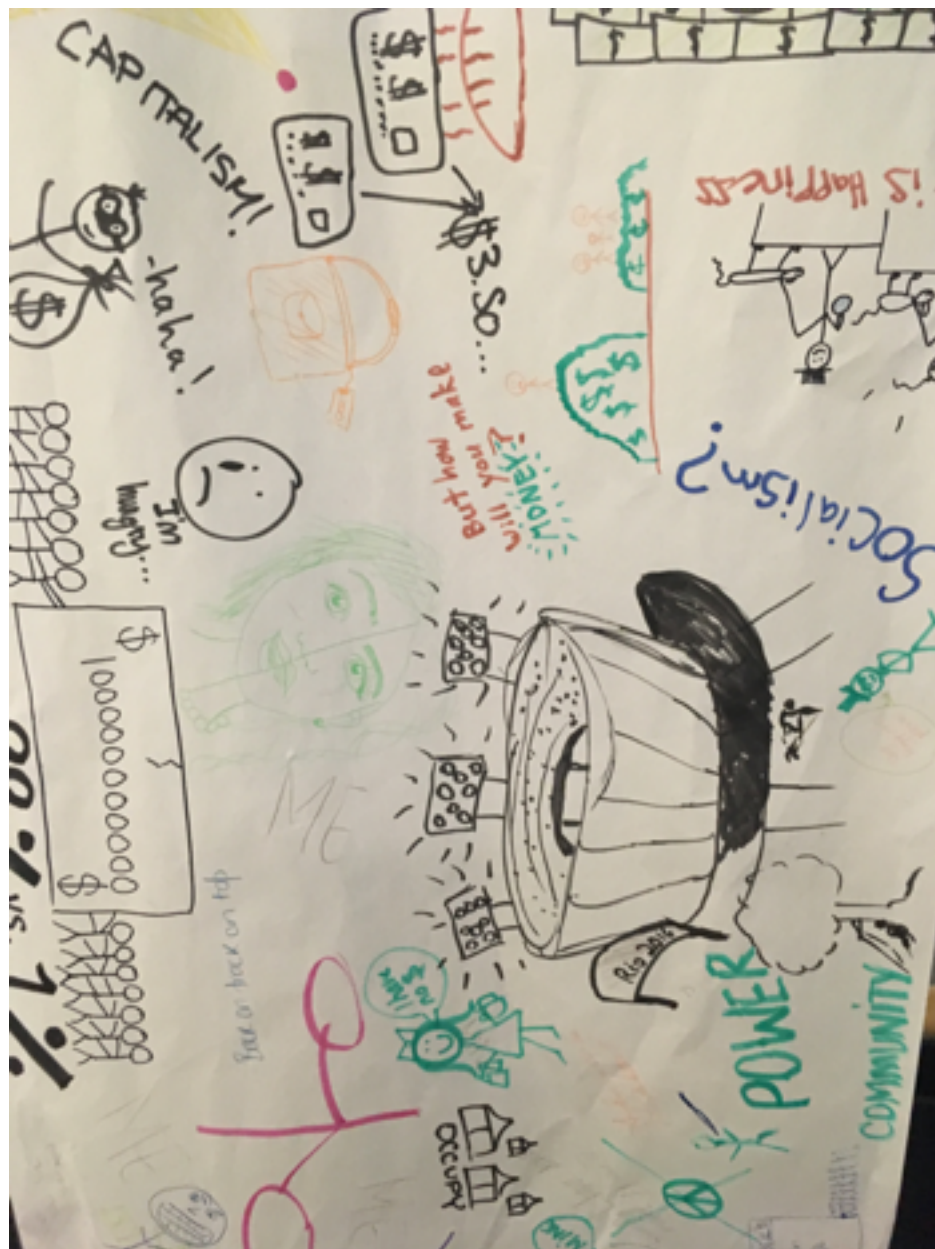


Image 4: Economic Transaction Drawing

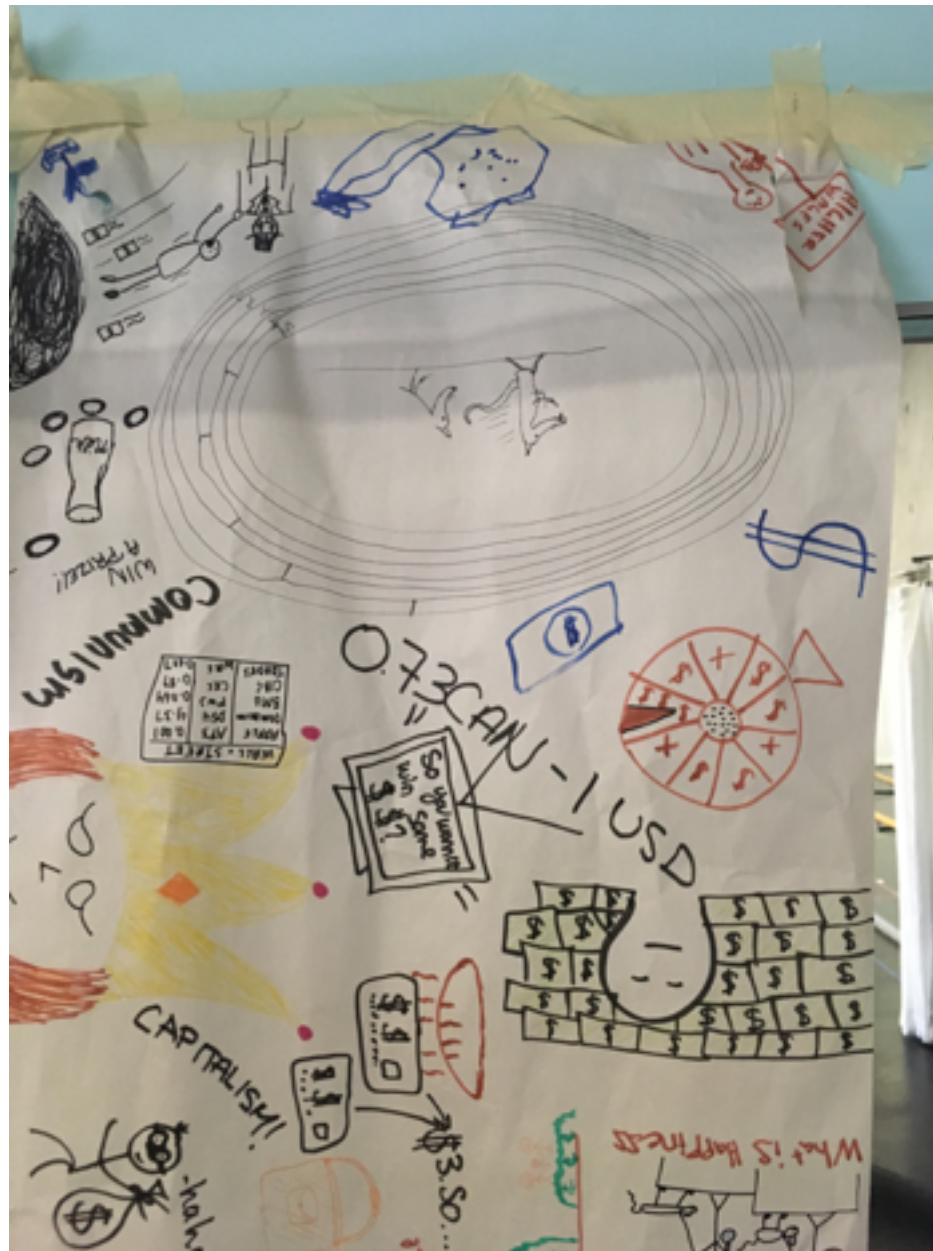


Image 5: Political Transaction Image

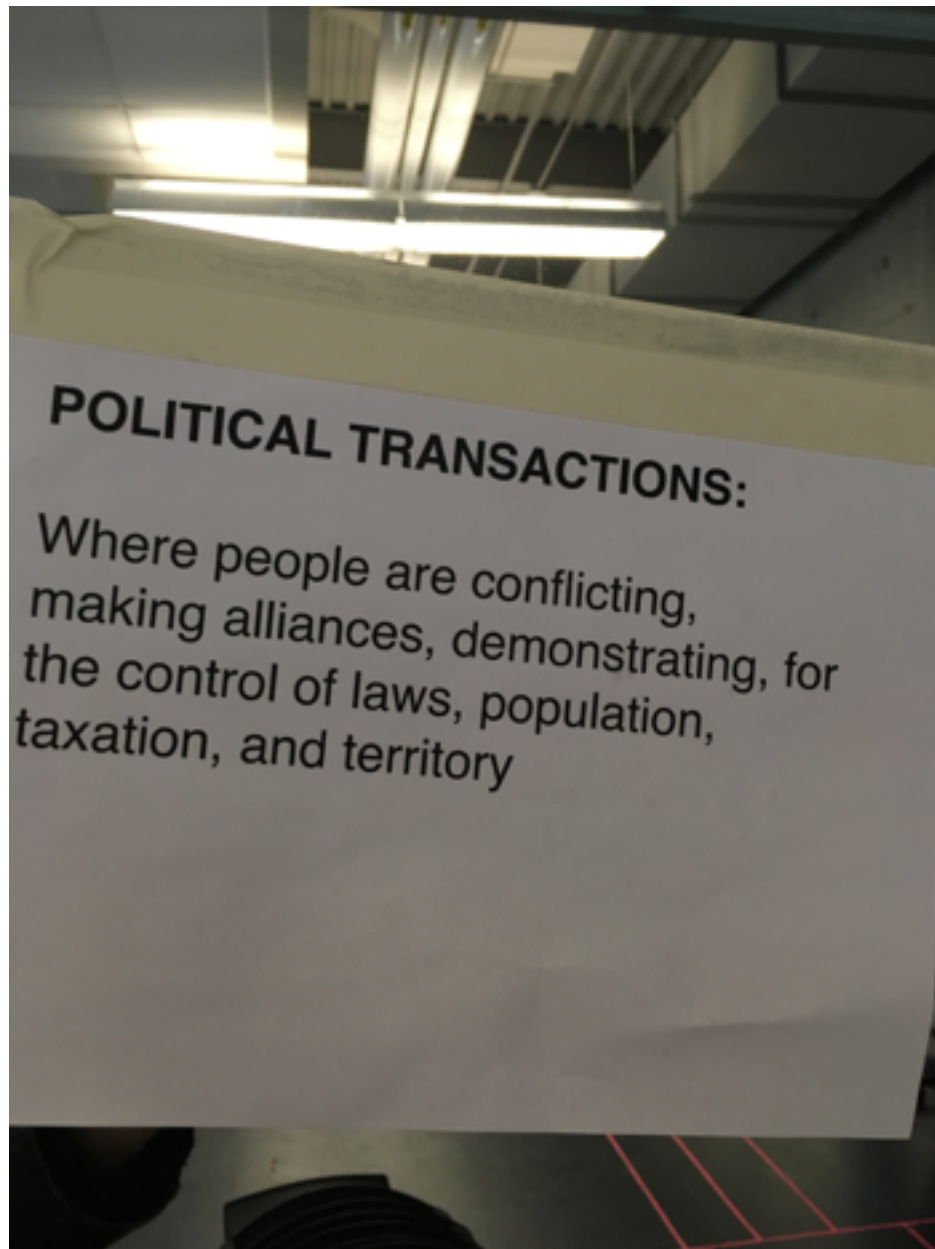


Image 6: Economic Transaction Image

