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A Final Creative Project: The Essence of Telling a Story

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Graduate Student Research Conference
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Abstract: A Final Creative Project: The Essence of Telling a Story

What is a Final Creative Project? For the School of Theatre & Dance, as partial fulfillment of the Masters of Fine Arts degree with an emphasis in acting, I did not write a standard masters level thesis. Rather, I was cast in a significant role in one of the theatrical performances presented during my third and final year of the program. After the performance run ended, I compiled a document which included both written and visual supplements detailing the research and reflection of the process. What is this Final Creative Project if not a thesis? Through this oral and visual presentation, I will detail where I believe this project's intention diverged from a more traditional dissertation.

In brief, the first stage of the Final Creative Project is the research into the circumstances of the chosen play and character. This type of research is most akin to the beginnings of a traditional thesis. First and foremost, I read the script, several times. Then, through published performance theory and analysis, I explored the historical context of the play, both at the time it was written and when the story itself takes place. The background of the playwright and the original and subsequent productions of the play were also taken into account. These secondary sources provided a context for *why* we decided to put this play on *now*.

The chosen play, *Translations*, by Brian Friel, was a unique addition to the School of Theatre & Dance's theatrical season. Instead of being a main stage production with a full budget for set, lighting and costume design, it was presented as an unsupported "studio show." The lack of resources turned out to be a gift to the creative process. The minimalist approach of putting on a play allowed the director, Dr. Bernadette

Sweeney and an ensemble of twelve, to focus on the craft of performance and the essence of telling a story.

Therefore, in this presentation, I will focus on the second phase of this project: the methods of acting as part of an ensemble. I reveal the individual work of each actor during the rehearsal period. I dissect the inner workings of our ensemble, giving you a better understanding of how we came to tell this story through performance. But ultimately, I reflect on how this project has made me rethink the significance of live theatre and its endurance in today's world of shorter attention spans and little screens.

A project of this nature took an equal amount of scholarly research, generation, practice and reflection. But where this work moved beyond the realm of a dissertation was in the less tangible outcomes. How does one describe the "group mind" energy created between ensemble members in a secluded rehearsal space? What words explain the feedback loop of energy felt between the actors and a live audience witnessing the execution of the work? Theatre is an art form with the potential to affect its audience on a visceral level as they hear the language and song, and see and feel live bodies move in front of them. The audience knows it is a play. The actors know they are playing a character. So then where does the magic, for lack of a better word, come in?

This presentation will attempt to answer these ethereal questions by providing tangible examples from our work in this process. From the onset, our director created a container, a safe rehearsal space. Her direction within this structure provided our ensemble with a common vocabulary and approach to the work. We were then able to build upon this solid foundation, and it held us together in times of unavoidable confusion and disorder.

The result was the strongest artistic endeavor I have ever been a part of and one in which I now have the resources to emulate. Of course no process will ever be the

same, which is very much to the point of my discourse. However, as an artist embarking on her own post-graduate school path, I will carry the principles and aesthetic of this type of work into my future artistic career.

I look forward to sharing these insights through an oral presentation, supplemented with media documentation (both photography and video), my personal written documentation during the process and an example of my work as a short live performance conducive to the presentation space.