Curatorial Directing and Actor Agency: Consent-Based Practices for Digital Performance

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Intimacy choreography, intimacy coordination, and other consent-based performance practices are not one-size-fits-all tools. As Laura Rikard and Chelsea Pace—founders of Theatrical Intimacy Education—acknowledged in "Consent and Cameras in the Great Digital Pivot" (2021), theatre artists within higher education "don't have a model for how to behave in this space of mutual, scheduled home-invasion with the complication of the instructor-student power dynamic" (122) that is created by relocating theatre coursework and higher education productions to Zoom or other video conferencing web platforms. The genre of digital performance will not disappear as COVID numbers decrease; therefore, the model that Pace and Rikard claim has been previously lacking must be developed.

During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, much theatre and performance was relocated to online platforms; the accessibility and innovation found through digital performance has led many artists to embrace this genre even as physical theaters began to re-open around the world. Therefore, artists engaging in digital performance need to continue adapting approaches developed for in-person collaboration for the arena of digital performance. Jared Mezzocchi, professor at University of Maryland and Obie Award-winning multimedia performance creator, opined: "saying 'digital performance is a kind of theatre 'is heard by so many as 'digital theatre will replace in-person theatre 'and that rhetoric then creates binaries, which creates a road to delegitimize one over the other. Why can't they be scene partners?" (Mezzocchi 2021). Since releasing this thought into the world in 2021, Mezzocchi and other digital performance creators have proven that the two genres can, in fact, coexist. *The MetaMovie,* a cinematic virtual reality immersive experience which premiered at the 2021 Raindance festival, ran through December 2022, and *The Under Presents,* which opened via Oculus Quest in 2020, ran through June of 2022 (Yu 2022). These productions—and others that continued in digital formats as theater companies across the country returned to in-person performances—demonstrate that digital performance can survive as a real-world scene partner with live performance. Mezzocchi's own recent digital performance *Section 230* was recently featured on the *URHERE* virtual performance platform, which is "funded by Bloomberg Philanthropies as part of the Digital Accelerator for Arts and Culture funding initiative" ("Section 230 – HERE" 2022), further indicating that digital performance and live theatre can, in fact, coexist.

In recognition that digital performance will remain as a practice far beyond the pandemic, and in response to Rikard and Pace's call for theatre educators to reconsider what consent looks like in on-camera classrooms, this article engages with the genre of digital performance that W.B. Worthen's analysis of performances created during the pandemic names as "Zoom Theatre" (2021). Worthen names this new genre as "the defining genre of theatre during the pandemic," defining it as performances in which "actors… all perform live, but remotely, typically from their homes, gathered on a screen" (183). Due to this merging of liveness and digitally captured performance, intimacy practitioners engaging with this form of performance need to consider ways in which intimacy choreography and intimacy coordination must merge. This article focuses on the ways in which the framing of Zoom Theatre can complicate Laura Mulvey's concept of the Male Gaze (1975), introducing the concepts of *agentic framing* and *curatorial directing* as tools for creating consent-based performance within the unique contexts of Zoom Theatre.

In discussing actor agency within the live-yet-digitized Zoom Theatre genre, which audiences view through screens and camera angles that shape the audience's gaze, it is important to consider the ways in which cinema theory might intersect with theatrical traditions to disempower performers. Because theories rooted in feminist game studies and feminist cinema studies analyze the ways in which onscreen avatars and actors are stripped of agency, I find these considerations helpful when discussing the concept of agentic framing. Therefore, I bring these fields into conversation with performance studies through the implementation of Performance-as-Research (PAR) methodology.

Research Methodology: Analyzing Affective and Embodied Experiences of Performance

Performance-as-Research (PAR), a research methodology which "originat[es] in the processes of making and analyzing embodied and practiced performance work" (Lewis and Tulk 2016, 1), veers from more historically established research methodologies such as the textual analysis of scripts or dramatic texts. While this methodology is less widely established in the United States than elsewhere in the world (1–3), PAR is a particularly generative methodology for those conducting research in consent-based performance. The authors of "Performance: An Approach to Strengthening Interdisciplinarity in Women's Studies and Gender Studies" (Shanahan et al 2016) indicate that more traditional or widespread scholarly methodologies such as textual

analysis impose limitations that make it difficult for researchers "to fully express the interdisciplinary, affective richness of our experiences" (7). Understandings of both performance and consent are rooted in complicated and overlapping affective and embodied experience; both a person's understanding of whether or not they consent to circumstances, as well as their reaction to and understanding of a performance, may be driven by affective, emotional responses or by physical sensations. Because both consent and performance can be understood through affective or embodied cognition, research in consent-based performance benefits from the use of PAR methodology to explore and analyze participants' rich, complex, and layered affective and embodied experiences of performance.

This article engages deeply with PAR methodology in the analysis of experiences directing, performing in, and participating as an audience member in three instances of Zoom Theatre—Otherworld Theatre's *Valha11a,* the University of Colorado Boulder's *She Kills Monsters: Virtual Realms,* and Punchdrunk Enrichment online immersive performance workshops. Analyzing the experience of participating in these digital performances illuminates the impact of agentic framing and curatorial directing more clearly than mere theorizing possibly could, by presenting real reactions to the experience as data, rather than speculating on how participants might feel, think, and respond. By rooting this PAR analysis in conversation with theories and published works from cinema studies and theatre, this article presents and analyzes the impact of agentic framing on Zoom Theatre and similar digital performances.

Zoom Theatre and the Male Gaze

In digital performance or Zoom Theatre, the use of a camera that frames the characters and action while guiding the audience's attention creates a genre that, while remaining live performance, is in conversation with the practices and theories that inform film and cinema. Specifically, the use of a camera to determine what the audience sees brings Zoom Theatre into conversation with the concepts of framing and gaze. Artists seeking to create consent-based practices for digital performance should specifically consider the filmic framing techniques that objectify characters, and often actors, often resulting in removing agency from characters and actors alike. In "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Laura Mulvey named this phenomenon—the artistic representation of cisheteronormative patriarchal standards and the subjugation of

women's bodies in cinema— "the male gaze" (Mulvey 1975). This practice uses framing and other cinematic techniques to maximize the amount of a woman's body that displayed onscreen, especially compared to male counterparts, as well as mazimizing the amount of time a camera spends lingering upon a woman's bodily features. These cinematic techniques are used, Mulvey stipulates, in order to satisfy the desires an audience which is presumed to be cishetero men. The male gaze, according to Mulvey, situates the camera is an "invisible guest" in each scene (Ibid, 26). Because the character is unaware of the presence of this "guest," she lacks the agency to either consent to, or withdraw from, the gaze; the character—and therefore the actor who plays her—are objectified by to this lack of agency. Mulvey analyzes the camera's framing as purposefully crafted to objectify the human seen onscreen. Mulvey's writing aims to highlight and prolematize the ways in which cinematic framing techniques have objectified femme actors as a step towards returning women's agency and disrupting patriarchal norms both onscreen and in reality. Because, she argues, changing the ways in which we are taught to view women through visual media will teach us to change the ways we view femme folx in our lived experiences.

In crafting Zoom Theatre and other digital performances, intimacy choreographers and coordinators similarly need to inform ourselves about the ways in which framing can remove agency, so that we can be purposeful, communicative, and clear in our storytelling while reinforcing actors' agency. This requires us to consider the male gaze and the ways in which gaze is shifted when applied to different forms and with changes in the camera's framing. Similarly, this requires us to consider the hierarchical structures of cinematography, in which the average actor has little agency over how their body is displayed onscreen. Without agency, a person can neither give nor revoke consent; therefore, in pursuit of creating a consent-based Zoom Theatre process, I propose the concepts of *agentic framing* and *curatorial directing,* which return the agency of framing to the viewed, rather than the viewer, and aligns with Quiara Alegría Hudes's recent description of her role as director as a facilitator of "community care" (Solís 2022).

Agentic Framing and Curatorial Directing for Digital Performance

As I prepared to direct *She Kills Monsters: Virtual Realms* at CU Boulder in the fall of 2022 I wondered how, as a director, I could empower my student-actors. Nearly a year into the COVID-19 pandemic and still learning and working from home, our participation in the world had

largely been relegated to online formats. How could I unleash my students from what felt like the constraints of the pandemic, empowering them to create Zoom Theatre without adding to the shared trauma of being forced to participate in life and in one's collegiate experience at a distance? When many felt as though we had lost agency over our daily lived reality, how could I create a theatrical praxis of seeking to return agency to students and performers?

I thought back to my work on *Valha11a,* an immersive gamified performance produced by Chicago's Otherworld Theatre. *Valha11a* used a Zoom Theatre format within which participants performed a digital larp. Larp—often acronymized as L.A.R.P. within the United States but used elsewhere around the world as both a noun and a verb and added to both the Merriam-Webster and Cambridge dictionaries in 2022—denotes *live action role play* and is a genre of gamified performance. Within larp, ticket holders—who, attending other genres of performance might most often be called audience members, but in larp are called players—perform as characters, improvising with actors and one another, collaboratively creating an emergent narrative driven by solving challenges, reacting to story events, or working to uncover lore. Within the Zoom Theatre format of *Valha11a,* all players created their own sets; designed their own lighting, costumes, makeup, and props; and determined their own framing. In this way, all participants had control over the ways in which they were gazed upon. In *Valha11a: Agency and Genre in Emergent Virtual Larp,* Villarreal, Poynton, and Martineau analyze the way that this self-framing practice creates a new gaze—an "agentic gaze" (Villarreal, Poynton, and Martineau 2021). Conversing with the "feminine gaze" as theorized by Stephanie Jennings (2018) in analysis of video games, the authors describe the agentic gaze as follows:

> Each individual, therefore, remained a subject, rather than an object, in the way that they were framed. …this creates a new gaze—an *agentic* gaze—in which each player has equal ability to determine how they will be viewed. The agentic gaze is defined by balance among a community, in which each player maintains subjectivity through self-determined framing onscreen. …Rather than a cinematic dialectic between viewer and viewed as in Mulvey's gaze and adding to the video game dialectic between viewer and avatar…a player's use of the agentic gaze illustrates the dialectic created through the performance of their character within the emerging narrative of *Valha11a*—namely, a dialectic between equally agentic players (142-143).

In this agentic framing, players exercised agency over the framing of their cameras and the angles through which they were seen while they performed their characters. In many instances, players changed the angle and framing of their camera during the performance to reinforce character

decisions or to emphasize specific details of their costume, their setting, or their performance (Villarreal 2021).

If larpers, as performers, could purposefully craft an agentic gaze while improvising an emergent performance and remaining in character, I thought, then certainly actors who had time to plan and rehearse could also engage with agentic framing. I hoped that crafting *She Kills Monsters* using agentic framing would create an environment in which performers were equally agentic, resulting in "balance among a community, in which each [participant] maintains subjectivity through self-determined framing onscreen" (Villarreal, Poynton, and Martineau 2021, 142).

But if actors are using their agency to create the framing through which they are seen in digital performance, how—someone may ask—does the director shape the performance?

Curatorial directing is the key to directing digital performance and Zoom Theatre while crafting the work through the actors 'agentic framing of the audience's gaze. Curatorial directing echoes Jose Solis's summary of Quiara Alegria Hudes: "She describes the work of a director as one of 'community care, 'and compares it to a gardener choosing the seeds, planting them, and then nurturing them toward excellence. 'Directing is the process, 'she said" (Solís 2022). Similarly, curatorial direction involves casting (choosing the seeds), issuing invitations for experimentation to the actors (planting the seeds), and then curating the results for production (much like the process of weeding and grafting that nurtures fruit-bearing trees towards excellence). The director's role, here, emphasizes on unleashing the actors 'process from the perceived constraints of performing in Zoom Theatre. A director invites actors to use agentic framing while experimenting with crafting their performance throughout the rehearsal process. Then, much like a museum curator selects pieces to support the theme of a collection, the director curates the performances, determining which version of a moment or scene best compliments others, so that these performances—actors 'submissions to be curated by the director—align to clearly communicate the desired story and impact upon the audience. Below, several students from the University of Colorado Boulder's production of *She Kills Monsters: Virtual Realms* reflect upon their experiences as actors working with agentic framing and curatorial directing. All students have been anonymized, and their words are shared with their consent.

Actor 1 describes their experience of curatorial directing:

It was really great because Amanda Rose would have us do the scene, and then say "this is how the audience will interpret what you just did. We want the audience to interpret it more like *this*. Try this line four different ways right now, and let's see if one of those readings supports the story better." They'd let you go into a breakout room to try the line different times on your own and bring a few options back to the main rehearsal room, so there was even less pressure. It was all about us making our own decisions. It was like the director was trusting me as an actor to experiment… The focus was always on the story... It was really collaborative. I learned how to be free and bold in my character decisions. (Anonymous 2020)

Actor 2 describes the process:

Her direction taught me how to look at my craft and how to use my expressions, my posture, eye contact, and breathing in support of the scene instead of focusing on what I thought looked or sounded "best." The way she directed helped me to not be afraid of being ugly or raw on camera because a strong emotional story isn't always pretty. (Anonymous 2020)

Actor 3 says:

It was so cool the way I got to play with the lighting they [the theatre department] sent, and the green screen, and I got to add to their costume pieces with my own stuff to really play with my characters in each scene. I think my favorite was the time I decided to play with [the character] sneaking away during the scene, and I did it once and Amanda Rose was like "I like the detail you're adding to the character, but the movement was distracting us from the focus of the scene. Let's try a few different ways to do that" and it really let me know that like it's okay to try things, and sometimes when a director says "don't do that" it's not because you suck, it's because it's not like really working for the story. And sometimes one of us would try something and it was always great when Amanda Rose would laugh right out loud and was like "I love that. Let's set it." And she would usually explain why it added to the overall story, so that we would all understand what she was thinking. It taught me to be a director just by watching, which helped me think deeper about what I was doing. (Anonymous 2020)

These students describe what their experiences as actors working with curatorial directing felt like. Each of the above students indicate a deepening awareness of process and agency in performance as they explored this new approach to directing Zoom Theatre. Throughout our process, I invited actors to explore their portrayals of characters using agentic framing, and I facilitated as director by curating their creative offerings. Often times, I would invite these student-actors to change the angle of the camera during the next run of a scene, just to see how the changes impact the tone or focus of the scene. I encouraged actors to consider themselves as mad scientists, attempting something new, even if it felt a little whacky, just to see what could come of those experiments. I

used "statements of meaning" as explained in Liz Lerman's *Critical Response Process* (Lerman 2003) to verbalize my reasoning as I curated, explaining to students what details of their performance someone viewing their character on a screen might be noticing and how a prospective audience member might interpret that performance through the specific framing used.

The above students describe the ways that this process furthered their education as actors and supported them emotionally as artists; other students reflected on the way that the curatorial directing approach shaped the overall creation of digital performance. A student who performed a major role in the show reflected on the experience of creating Zoom Theatre, informed by her conversations with her peers who were performing in other digital productions at our university. This student said that "so many other people were having horrible experiences with digital theatre because their directors were so focused on the outcome. But we really got to grow and learn. And we got to play with it. Rehearsal was a relief from social distancing" (Anonymous 2020). Another student elaborated:

> I expected to hate it. I remember at first we were all complaining. Someone said we wished we were doing "real" theatre and Amanda Rose was like "you guys this is real theatre, we are really performing together. The stage just looks different and we're creating something new!" …And then we had so much fun with it because we were all really, really working together, so it didn't even feel like we were on Zoom. It was almost better collaboration than I've had in some of my in-person classes before COVID. (Anonymous 2020)

As indicated by the above quotes, the director-as-curator model seemed to support a sense of agency during the pandemic. This was especially valuable during the pandemic, which proved to be a time textured by increased isolation, uncertainty, and lack of control in the life of folx throughout the U.S. (see, for example, Jones et al. 2021; Dedman 2021; Sreenivasan 2021).

By embracing agentic framing in an attempt to empower actors, and by taking a curatorial approach to directing this production, I was able to craft an approach to directing digital performance during the pandemic that was consent-based and trauma informed. Actors exercised agency in the ways they moved, spoke, and presented themselves as their characters, feeling emboldened to make creative blocking decisions—such as running towards the camera until only their torsos were visible, peering into the camera from a position standing above and behind their computer, or sniffing the cameras in such a way that the audience's view was limited to looking up the actor's nostrils—without feeling pressured or feeling as though their bodies were being controlled by an outside force. I, as the director, issued invitations that added direction and

encouragement for emboldening their experimentations and curated their findings in order to create a cohesive production.

Integrating Intimacy Choreography with Curatorial Directing and Agentic Framing

Agentic Framing and Curatorial Directing are tools or approaches offered to use in supporting the development of performances in Zoom Theatre; these tools align with extant intimacy choreography philosophies. Many intimacy choreographers already emphasize storytelling and process, as is illustrated by Intimacy Directors and Coordinators" 'Pillars of Intimacy in Production" ("The Pillars of Intimacy in Production" n.d.). Elaborated in a blog post on the organization's website, their pillars are: context, consent, communication, choreography, and closure. These pillars include elements from throughout the performance process, from actor preparation (context) to rehearsal (consent, communication, and choreography) and leaving the character behind (closure). Agentic framing aligns with these pillars by emphasizing actors' agency within the process, as actors experiment with their own versions of choreography, informed by the context of the characters and the narrative. Curatorial directing offers communication and context through the process of offering feedback and invitations to actors; furthermore, curatorial directing facilitates consent and the collaborative planning of choreography through processes as described above. Another major organization in the United States leading in the development of the philosophy and practice in the field of intimacy specialists is Theatrical Intimacy Education (Acacia and Valentine 2022). The company's co-founders, Laura Rikard and Chelsea Pace, write in *Staging Sex* that "a good intimacy practice" does not undermine the artistic process or the power of a director in the room; rather, they say, "this system is not about empowering actors at the expense of directors, but rather actors and directors alike gaining a vocabulary to meet the demands of the art they are creating together" (2022, 7). This is the aim of agentic framing and curatorial directing practices; by empowering actors to experiment with their performances, as illustrated by students' statements above, and simultaneously reinforcing the director's obligation to curate performances, ensuring that actors' at-home experimentations come together as a cohesive whole. In this process, collaboration is facilitated through a shared vocabulary that meets the unique circumstances of creating Zoom Theatre productions. Therefore, by establishing a shared vocabulary of agentic framing and curatorial directing, an intimacy specialist can support both

actors and directors alike by meeting the demands of creating within the Zoom Theatre genre's format.

As well as aligning with the established philosophy behind intimacy choreography, agentic framing and curatorial directing approaches support the use of already existing intimacy choreography or coordination practices. Pace and Rikard's 2021 "Consent and Cameras in the Great Digital Pivot," published in *Theatre Topics* Volume 31, outlines a series of adaptations that theatre educators can apply to practices established for in-person performance courses during the "digital pivot." Similarly, existing intimacy practices can be adapted. Choreography can be shifted from literal simulations of intimate contact to poeticizing the narrative beats of an intimate scene or individually physicalizing the impacts of intimacy on characters. Alternatively, choreographed performances can use breath, sound, eye contact, and proximity—named as "ingredients" of intimacy choreography in *Staging Sex* (Pace 2020)—to communicate the intimacy of a moment.

In *She Kills Monsters: Virtual Realms,* we used the ingredients of breath, sound, eye contact, and opening or closing distance within the Zoom Theatre format. In *Staging Sex* (2020), Chelsea Pace writes that "Eye Contact choices allow us into the mind of the character and help us understand relationships onstage" (51), and this can be heightened in Zoom Theatre, when the actor's eye contact with the camera can feel to the audience like individualized eye contact. Moments of openness to vulnerability can be communicated through eye contact—the actor gazing into the camera—which can invite the audience into the character's mind and communicate relationships onscreen. When characters 'interactions are not characterized by mutual trust and shared vulnerability, there may be no or minimal eye contact. But, when characters are vulnerable with one another, they directly address the camera. Our production also adapted the ingredient of "Opening and Closing Distance" (Pace 2020, 40) for Zoom Theatre; rather than closing distance between bodies onstage, actors altered their proximity to the camera. This proximity communicated intimacy, despite actors not sharing space—an actor leaning in towards their camera illustrated their character's desire for closeness.

In other Zoom Theatre production processes, I have witnessed the use of eye contact, proximity, and breath in communicating intimacy from an audience perspective. For example, during Punchdrunk Enrichment's "Storytelling through Body and Space" online workshop in the spring of 2022, I witnessed the following scenes:

I entered a Zoom room. I saw a figure, barely lit and framed from a vantage as if I was lying in bed next to them. They were shrouded in a cranberry blanket. I could see the texture of the fibers. Suddenly, the covering slid slowly downwards, revealing the striking face and upper torso of a close-eyed, long-haired actor. His eyes open. His soft gaze appears to search my face as he looks into the camera and unfurls an arm. His knuckles brush against the camera as though he were nudging my hair out of my sleepy face, soothing me with his slow, deep inhalation; his steady exhale fogs the camera as his other hand pulled the blanket, re-covering his countenance. (Villarreal 2022)

And then:

The camera is—I am—inside a colorful fabric tunnel. I feel small. Suddenly, a face—nose and eyes only—appears in the other end, its rapid sniffling reminds me of my dog when she's on the hunt for the source of a delicious scent. The eyes dart left, then right, not seeming to see me; I can see the nostrils flaring with the rapid, shallow, sharp breathing. Finally, the actor appears to see me, and the breathing stops. I feel vulnerable. Seen, and trapped. The face disappears. (Villarreal 2022)

In both of these scenes—short movement-based loops performed live by actors, created entirely through agentic framing—I felt pulled into the performance by the performers 'proximity to the camera, use of eye contact, and audible and/or visual breath. Although these performers were Zooming into this performance from countries in North America, Europe, and Asia, I felt intimately close to each of these artists as I entered their Zoom breakout rooms, interacting one-on-one with the characters. I felt enmeshed in the spaces they had framed, as though I were an implied character within the moment. My breath caught in my throat when an actor's gaze seemed to meet mine as though, through the performer's eye contact with the camera, I could also be seen. For a moment, I felt vulnerable.

Actors used agentic framing to create these scenes, responding to the prompt: "experiment with your body within your space to create a moment that feels intimate and engaging" (Villarreal 2022). In the vast majority of the resulting scenes, actors had chosen to use proximity to the camera, eye contact, and audible breath to create a sense of intimacy. Creating with complete control and framing these moments with full agency, then performing these moments on repeatable loops while audience members rotated through the breakout rooms. Each scene was choreographed to be performable on a loop with no discernible pause between one end and the next beginning. As an audience member, I observed each scene through several of these loops. The performances created during this workshop illustrate that agentic framing can be used to create and establish sustainable choreography, and that breath, eye contact, and proximity to the camera are incredibly

powerful tools for communicating intimacy within the specific setting of Zoom Theatre. As an intimacy practitioner who has choreographed intimacy for the stage, who has worked on set for short films, and who has also worked within the genre of Zoom Theatre, I believe that agentic framing and curatorial directing can combine with intimacy practitioners 'other tools to communicate intimacy even when actors do not share space. Furthermore, these tools can create a shared language to facilitate communication among collaborators within a creative process, working on Zoom Theatre productions.

Conclusion: A New Era, a New Gaze for Digital Theatre

The theatre that has been evolving throughout the COVID-19 pandemic is not what U.S. or Euro-centric theatre practices would call 'traditional' theatre; neither is it cinema. Artists are developing new approaches to our artistic practice, interweaving virtual elements with embodied performance, crafting new dialectics of liveness and spectatorship; a new art form—maybe multiple—is/are emerging.

New gazes are similarly emerging. In much Zoom-based or streamed theatre, the gaze is fixed by the framing of the camera, similarly to cinematography practices in the film industry. This welcomes Mulvey's concept of the male gaze into conversation. According to the male gaze theory, the audience's gaze is fixed, and the decisions made by cinematographer and director strip the character of agency. Often, these decisions were made as early as storyboarding, prior to casting; this strips the performer of agency, as well, as her body is treated as scenery and objectified for the viewing pleasure of the presumptively cishetero male audience. Directing through a model that focuses on the curatorial combining of individual performances onscreen, meanwhile, returns this agency to the performer; feedback is provided through a lens of dramaturgical context, which informs actors 'decisions while allowing them to maintain control over the ways in which they are seen through the production's fixed cameras. Therefore, the male gaze does not wholly apply.

When actors are empowered as creators within digital theatre production processes, agentic framing is applied: a self-determined gaze.

Agentic framing and curatorial directing practices could support students and faculty alike in their ongoing engagement with virtual or digital performance by inviting the use of new techniques during what Pace and Rikard call the "digital pivot" (2021), which is extending beyond campus closures. Pace and Rikard implore theatre educators in higher education to—rather than imposing our established practices for in-person processes onto the evolving genres and practices on our field—adapt and develop new approaches. Agentic framing and curatorial directing practices are examples of such adaptation. If our purpose as theatre educators is to aid in the development of well-rounded performers who are able to make bold character decisions; if our purpose is to facilitate interpersonal growth and development; or if our purpose is to create art without causing harm (and I believe that our purpose is all three of these), then we need to focus on the ways in which we can further empower our students to learn and grow. Focusing merely on the need to produce does not prioritize student learning. Forcing productions to happen according to our past practice because it's what we know and hope to return to can ignore the traumas our students are currently experiencing—and the new discoveries and practices emerging in our world and in the theatre industry. Many of these practices are quite valuable aesthetically, educationally, culturally, and historically. However, they are not above questioning. Faculty and directors in higher education ought to consider the practices we've inherited, experiment with new practices— or with developing or adapting practices to fit their specific student population, production, and audience—and engage in newly established practices that empower our students to be the brilliant young artists that they are capable of becoming, rather than shoehorning them into a recollection of the industry as it once was. I offer curatorial directing as one answer that I uncovered while

questioning the ways in which I learned to direct, and how these methods clashed with the circumstances of creating remotely during campus closures early in the pandemic. Further questioning from other artistic innovators will yield new approaches. And I hope to learn from those approaches as they emerge. Because we are all crafting the industry of tomorrow, together, today.

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