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Building my director’s toolbox: For scab and beyond

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Building My Director’s Toolbox: For *Scab* and Beyond

An Honors College Project Presented to the Faculty of the Undergraduate College of Visual and Performing Arts

James Madison University
by Rebecca Klein

Accepted by the faculty of the Department of Theatre and Dance, James Madison University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Honors College.

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Abstract

The research question forming the basis of this project was “What can I learn about directing and who I am as a director by researching the processes of others and applying aspects of them to a production of Sheila Callaghan’s Scab?” For my research, I first learned as much as possible about the processes of several professional directors, by means of personal interviews and secondary research. I selected directors who I had worked with previously and wished to learn more from, whose methods I believed would be useful as I directed a production of Scab, and/or on whose methods substantial literature had been published. Scab, by Sheila Callaghan, is a high-speed postmodern play filled with vivid poetic language and unapologetic dark humor. It is a story of friendship, lust, grief, deception, and resilience. Within the context of this Capstone Project, directing Scab in the Studio Theatre in the Forbes Center for the Performing Arts functioned as a vehicle for testing specific rehearsal exercises, directing tools, and models of script analysis that I believed could further my growth as a director and could potentially be of use in future directing endeavors. Through my research process and the experience of directing Scab, I discovered and practiced working with several directing tools—some of which I plan to use again in the future based on their fruitful results. My work on this project and on Scab have taught me a great deal about directing, about leadership and collaboration, and about my own skills, tendencies, passions, and aspirations. My hope is that, in sharing my findings in this paper, I can also provide a resource to other young directors who are embarking on similar journeys of self-discovery and of developing their craft.
I. Introduction

The research question forming the basis of this project was: “What can I learn about directing and who I am as a director by researching the processes of others and applying aspects of them to a production of Sheila Callaghan’s *Scab*?” My interest in this particular research pursuit is not a recent development. By the end of my first week at James Madison University, I had already begun work on my first directorial pursuit: a workshop production of selections from the book *Voices of A People’s History of the United States*, by Howard Zinn and Anthony Arnove. In my sophomore year, I went on to revive this production for two separate academic conferences, and take my first formal class in Theatre Directing. In my junior year, I completed an internship where I was able to assistant direct a full length original musical. At this point I knew that I wanted to submit a proposal to direct a Studio Production during my senior year, but I was hungry for more formal education on the craft of directing before taking on such a large endeavor. It was from this desire for deeper exploration of the craft and of my process as a director that my Senior Capstone Project was born. The project design was inspired by a quote from the renowned theatre director Peter Brook. In an introduction to *On Directing: Interviews with Directors*, the book by Gabriella Giannachi and Mary Luckhurst, Brook argues that directors must “seize every opportunity that offers the possibility of understanding and respecting each other’s work, and enjoy the possibility of being influenced and changed by another director” (Brook xii). It was with this intention—to study the work of other directors in hopes that I could learn from them—that I began my research for this project in the summer of 2017.

In the “Project Design” section of this paper, I will summarize my research methodologies and project design and assess their effectiveness.
My “Discussion and Analysis of Findings” is structured around seven concepts that I
determined to be significant to the work of the stage director, based on the findings of my
research on other directors and their methodologies. My articulation of these concepts (and the
facets of the directing process to which they relate) is an attempt at synthesizing the
overwhelming volume advice for young directors that I encountered in my research. I hoped that
by organizing my findings in this way, I would be able to better internalize the information that I
had found in order to make use of it while directing *Scab*.

I chose to contextualize my discussion of these seven key concepts within a hypothetical
rehearsal process timeline. Rehearsal processes and production timelines obviously vary from
project to project. That being said, I decided to model my discussion of a typical process after the
three-part rehearsal process that Viola Spolin articulates in *Improvisation for the Theater*. My
use of the production timeline as a framework is not intended to suggest that my Discussion and
Analysis section is a comprehensive analysis of all possible steps and key ideas in a rehearsal
process, because it is not. I intentionally limited my focus to reoccurring key ideas and themes
that were of particular interest to me, because they related either to my strengths and weaknesses
as a director or to *Scab*. I also gravitated more towards aspects of the rehearsal process that were
fluid, intuitive, or subjective in nature in this step of my research (*Director as Energy-Source*, for
example). Later, in my practice-based research during the rehearsal process of *Scab*, I explored
tools from other directors’ processes that were more concrete in nature and better suited to
hands-on learning.

In Part One of “Discussion and Analysis of Findings,” I introduce and articulate my
understanding of the following seven directing topics and key concepts:

- *The Director’s Preparation*
-  Letting Go of Preparation (to Make Space for Collaborative Exploration)
-  Establishing a Common Vocabulary
-  Director as Energy-Source
-  Speaking Strategically
-  Necessary Know-How for Articulating the Final Product
-  Moving Into the Space—A Delicate Transition

In this section, I also analyze how various directors approach these facets of the directing process.

In Part Two of “Discussion and Analysis of Findings,” I discuss how these concepts and topics arose within the process of directing Scab. I do this with a particular focus on the practice-based research that I carried out during Scab, in which I tested specific directing tools borrowed from other directors’ processes. I analyze these directing tools in terms of their relationship to one or more of the key concepts and topics of directing that I established in prior sections of this paper. I also assess their effectiveness in my experience, and share whether I plan on continuing to use them in future directing endeavors.

In my “Conclusions” section, I analyze the findings of my practice-based research, and synthesize these findings in a discussion of what I learned about myself as a director.

In the Appendix of this paper, the additional content can be found that contextualizes my project or provides greater detail. This content is useful to reference but is not essential to the reader’s understanding of my thesis.

My hope is that, by exploring directing through my research and sharing my findings in this paper, I can provide a resource to other young directors who are embarking on similar journeys of self-discovery and of developing their craft.
II. Project Design

The research question forming the basis of this project was: “What can I learn about directing and who I am as a director by researching the processes of others and applying aspects of them to a production of Sheila Callaghan’s Scab?” I sought answers to this two-part question through two-part research.

Research Methodologies, Part One – Other Directors’ Processes

The first stage of my research focused on other directors’ processes, and took place between June 2017 and February 2018. My primary research objective during this time was to increase my understanding of possible methods of directing theatre, in order to gain inspiration for methods I would use to direct Scab. I also planned to note any methods that I might find effective for use on future directing projects.

I learned about several directors through secondary research and interviews that I conducted in person or via telephone. My secondary research consisted of reading the interviews others conducted before me, and surveying the directing literature that had been published either by or about these directors on their directing methodologies.

I chose professional directors to research based on the following criteria:

1. Their work had been introduced or specifically recommended to me by a trusted directing mentor or teacher, or I had worked with them personally.

2. Based on what I knew of their directing, it seemed as though borrowing from their methods would benefit Scab and my personal growth as a director.

3. There was substantial literature published on their working methods, and/or they were available for an interview.
The four directors that I personally interviewed were individuals with whom I had worked previously, and whose work I respect and believed I could learn from. Two of these individuals were Heather Lanza and Tom Ridgely—two professional theatre directors and educators who I met while interning for a New York City-based theatre company called Waterwell in 2017. It was through my internship experience that I was introduced to these directors’ work and was able to form a professional relationship with each of them. Heather Lanza is Waterwell’s Director of Education. For much of the summer of 2017 I served as an assistant to Lanza, and at one point I was able to observe and assist her in the rehearsal room as she directed students in Waterwell’s drama program at the Professional Performing Arts School (PPAS). Tom Ridgely is a co-founder of Waterwell, and at the time of my internship was Co-Artistic Director alongside acclaimed stage and film actor Arian Moayed. Ridgely is currently the Executive Producer of the Shakespeare Festival St. Louis. On June 3, 2017, I was able to see a production of *Hamlet* directed by Tom Ridgely at The Sheen Center for Thought and Culture in downtown Manhattan. The production was set in early 20th century Persia, and the dialogue was dual-language—half in English and half in Farsi. The production was thought provoking, engaging, creative, and meticulously staged.

My two other interviewees, Ricky Drummond and Jonathan Martin, are two JMU Musical Theatre and Theatre alumni who have directed professionally since graduating. Though Ricky and Jonathan are early-career directors who certainly have not finished developing their own directing processes, their interviews were invaluable to my research. Both men are capable and articulate directors who are confident in their methods even as they continue to evolve. The advice and knowledge that they shared with me was given with fresh memory of when they were in my same position just a few years ago—about to direct their own productions in the Studio
Theatre at JMU. Furthermore, because we knew each other personally, both interviewer and interviewees were able to speak more candidly. This resulted in their sharing honest and detailed accounts of their directing experiences, including successes and failures alike, that served their growth as artists and directors. With each of the four aforementioned directors, I conducted informal interviews based on a list of possible talking points that I provided. We discussed their directing methodologies, professional experiences and training backgrounds, and artistic inspirations and philosophies. For my list of interview questions, please see Appendix A.

Other directors whose methods I researched and chose to reference in this paper include Brian Astbury, William Ball, Anne Bogart, Peter Brook, John Collins, Harold Clurman, Tim Etchells, Jon Jory, Simon McBurney, Katie Mitchell, and Viola Spolin. I also included directing scholar Francis Hodge and renowned choreographer (and occasional theatre director) Twyla Tharp. I conducted secondary research on these individuals, primarily through reading books borrowed from the JMU library or from JMU professors, and reading articles found using the JMU library databases and through independent web-based research.

At an earlier stage of this project, I wished to synthesize my research on other directors in a comparative reference spreadsheet. This would have included the highlights of each director’s process and would have juxtaposed the directors’ processes in a way that facilitated easy comparison. I still believe that this reference tool would be valuable for a student of directing, and for my own personal reference. However, I came to the conclusion that to complete such a comprehensive reference tool for nine directors’ processes was outside the scope of what I had set out to do with this project, and would be unrealistic considering that the project already involved directing a fully realized production of a full-length play.
Instead, I decided to organize the findings of my secondary research and interviews in an examination of themes and concepts that I found reoccurring throughout directors’ methodologies. In the Discussion and Analysis section of this paper, I locate these concepts inside the structure of a rehearsal process. There are many possible ways to break down a rehearsal process, and none of would be accurate for every theatre production. For the purposes of this paper I chose to break my discussion of the rehearsal process into three stages: 1. *Laying the Groundwork*, 2. *The Digging Sessions*, and 3. *Polishing and Integration* (Spolin 307). This model for framing the rehearsal process is borrowed from the great director, teacher, and improvist, Viola Spolin, and is adapted slightly to include pre-production and collaboration between the director and designers¹.

**Research Methodologies, Part Two – My Directing Process**

In the second stage of my research, I turned my attention to learning everything I could about myself as a director, including:

1. My leadership style and collaborative tendencies
2. Strengths and relevant skillsets that I discovered and/or developed through my work on *Scab*
3. Areas of directing in which my skills and/or confidence need improvement
4. Discoveries about the type of theatre and creative processes on which I am interested in working

I sought answers to these questions about my directing through the process of directing. Each step of the *Scab* process provided an opportunity to test out various “tools” (rehearsal exercises, ¹Spolin discusses these subjects in her book, *Improvisation for the Theater*, but does not include them in her three-stage framework of the rehearsal process.
analysis models, movement vocabularies, modes of exploration, etc.) that I had encountered during the first stage of my research in descriptions of other directors’ working methods.

Prior to the start of the rehearsal process, I compiled a list of many tools from other directors’ processes. I poached these tools from my secondary research and interviews with directors. This list was my tentative toolbox—full of directing exercises, vocabularies, and that seemed as if they may be of use for Scab, but which I had not yet tested. It was from this list that I selected the tools I would use in the rehearsal room and design meetings.

Sometimes I pre-selected tools days, weeks, or even months in advance. At other times, I used my list of tools how Jon Jory recommends readers use his book, Tips: Ideas for Directors. In the book’s foreword Jory says, “Skim for something that catches your attention to help you rehash today’s rehearsal or plan for tomorrow’s. When you have a problem section, moment, or actor, run through the appropriate reading until something strikes you… Remember, this isn’t a method, it’s a set of tools, and it’s your task to find the right job for them” (xv). My list of tools did not add up to a method, and I did not want to replicate another director’s process. On the contrary, I wanted to borrow and learn from others in order to support the process of developing my own directing process.

**Scab, and the Production-Project Relationship:**

Within the context of my project, Scab functioned as a vehicle for practice-based research. This research that I conducted during the Scab rehearsal process consisted of incorporating pieces of other directors’ methodologies into my directing methods for Scab. I selected tools based on their usefulness to our production and one of my goals was, of course, to create a success production that effectively told the story of the play. Within the context of this thesis
project, however, my goal for the success of Scab was auxiliary to my goal of developing my long-term methods as a theatre director.

Our production of Scab did not solely exist within the confines of my Capstone project, though. The production was produced through the student organization Stratford Players, which is funded by the University through funding allocated to the School of Theatre and Dance. In order for the production to take place in the Studio Theatre, and receive financial and creative support from the School of Theatre and Dance, I had to go through a proposal process that had nothing to do with the Honors College. Through this process, I presented my proposal for Scab to STAD students and faculty, who cast their votes on which of several proposed productions that would support being produced in the Spring 2018 Studio Theatre season. Through this process, I was voted to be one of three students who directed productions in the Studio Theatre during the spring semester. The following is an excerpt from my Studio Production proposal for Scab:

All of Sheila Callaghan's plays are something like a seven-car pile-up stuck into a blender on high speed. That being said, Scab is likely Callaghan’s most linear, plot-driven work. The play centers around a casualty-inducing love triangle between the three principal characters, and utilizes elements of realism such as high-stakes relationships between fully dimensional characters, action effected through manipulation of the physical world, and nearly naturalistic dialogue. These more traditional tactics of storytelling are infused with moments of utmost absurdity that exist in the world of the play without generating skepticism, a la magical realism. One example of this occurs at the top of Movement Two, when Mary-Androgyne (a yard sale statue of religious iconography come to life) births two angels who wear leather fetish clothing and proceed
to play the electric guitar, harp, and sing in three-part harmony. All of the absurd non-sequiturs can seem incongruous at first glance, but Callaghan manages to orchestrate them through an internal logic that operates primarily with the rhythm of text and physical action (Klein 1-2).

I proposed to direct Scab, and involve it as the centerpiece of my thesis project, for a number of reasons, including the following:

- Having a protagonist who is a bisexual woman provides an opportunity to represent at least one fully dimensional voice from a highly marginalized community.

- Scab is a meditation on how young adults (and more specifically, students of the arts) can endure a nonsensical and oftentimes cruelly violent world through the healing power of storytelling. In this way, Anima’s story (as it intersects with those of Christa and Alan) is immediately recognizable and pertinent to all of us in the School of Theatre and Dance, and to those who see our productions.

- The postmodernist world of Scab provides the exciting opportunity for all students involved in the production to work with a postmodern play that fuses multiple genres of theatre, including Theatre of the Absurd, Realism, and Surrealism.

- Woven throughout and underneath Scab’s comedic and sensual surface are layers and layers of encrypted symbolism and scholarship that provide actors and designers the opportunity to practice the translation of textual analysis and theatre scholarship into the physical realm of live performance.

- Scab provides opportunities for actors to practice heightened language in the context of contemporary work written by Sheila Callaghan, a playwright who is both up-and-coming and already significant in both theatre and television.
Reflections on Research Design

*Breadth vs. Depth:* Breadth was my top priority when I was initially designing a structure for my research. I thought that if I studied many renowned directing methodologies I would be able to synthesize them all into an ideal set of directing guidelines, universally applicable for any directing endeavor. My naivety in thinking I would be able to accomplish such a task within the confines of this project cannot be overstated.

This project forced me to confront an inconvenient truth: it is not possible to cheat the system and simply weave together a perfect, universal set of directing practices through academic rigor. To do so would be impossible for many reasons, most significant of which is that there is no such thing as a universal set of best directing practices for all directors and directing projects. Stated differently: directors are human beings, and every human being is unique; therefore, every director’s process must be uniquely their own. Furthermore, directing is an act of collaboration with other humans who are also unique individuals, all working together on a project that is unique in all of its internal dynamics and external, or contextual, circumstances of creation and production.

Having learned all this, I would abandon breadth as a research priority, and prioritize depth and specificity instead. I would seek directors who had worked on plays like *Scab*—and directors whose identities and/or communities had significant relevance to my own. I imagine this would have served me better than arbitrarily asking other people for recommendations of books that had proved most useful to their growth as directors.

*Diversity:* I would also actively seek diversity in the directors whose methods I included in my research. I asked other directors for suggestions of literature that they considered to be a part of the “essential directing canon.” The problem is, the directors in the canon are not
representative of all directors from their eras worth studying. For most of them (Peter Brook, Harold Clurman, and William Ball, to name a few), the credibility granted to them (over contemporaries who are women+, queer, and/or POC) by others in the field is influenced by the fact that because they are cisgender, white men. Many of the directors who I included in my secondary research based off of recommendations were men. Most of them were heterosexual (or passing as such). Almost all of them were white. Going forward, I plan on actively seeking more diversity in the directors whose work I study.

Workshopping Outside of Rehearsal Time: If possible, I would also restructure my practice-based research (the testing of individual directing tool and areas of my directing process), so that the bulk of my workshopping tools did not take place during rehearsal time. Instead, I would build in space for “workshopping” aspects of my directing process and my interpretation of the script within the pre-production period. This could be with the actual cast of the production, if it took place between casting and the first official rehearsal. It could also take place with an entirely separate group of actors. In her book, *The Director’s Craft: A Handbook for the Theatre*, Katie Mitchell distinguishes between workshops and rehearsals, and argues the necessity of keeping these two separate:

*While rehearsals are about delivering a production for an audience, workshops are about exploring ideas. Use workshops to investigate grey areas in your interpretation of the text, or to test-run new steps and tools in your process… In a rehearsal process you cannot change your mind all the time about your working method or the interpretation of the text. This will make the actors unstable and stop them from building a performance strong enough to go in front of an audience. In a workshop you can chop and change as much as you like because you do not have to build anything durable* (Mitchell 103).
In hindsight, it is clear that Scab did not benefit from my energy the fact that my energy was divided between the needs of my thesis and the production. My thesis required me to test out new directing tools (with which I had little practical experience) in the rehearsal room. This had negative effects on my actors’ sense of security and on the clarity of the story we told in performances, as per Mitchell’s description above.
III. Discussion & Analysis of Findings

I have organized my research findings in rough chronological order within the framework of a theatre production timeline, broken down into three stages. An exception to this chronological order is my organization of ideas related to design meetings. The director’s work with designers generally begins well before actors are introduced to the process, which means that the groundwork for director-designer collaboration is laid down earlier than the groundwork for the director’s work with actors. Director-designer and director-actor “digging sessions” also tend to occur non-contemporaneously. There is a great deal of overlap in how the director works with designers and actors, though, especially in relation to the key themes and ideas that I selected to discuss. Therefore, I chose to integrate my discussion of these admittedly distinct subjects.

Part One: Other Directors’ Processes

In the following sections, I discuss and analyze the findings from my secondary research and interviews with directors. These findings are synthesized into a discussion of seven key concepts and topics that were common threads between directors’ processes. I found that there were a range of possible interpretations of and approaches to each of these concepts and topics. To illustrate this, I summarize and compare examples sourced directly from the processes of directors who were included in my research.

Laying the Groundwork

According to Viola Spolin, the two most important goals for the first stage of the rehearsal process are “warming up the actors and the director” and “laying the groundwork in relationships and attitudes to the play and to each other” (Spolin 307). Within this section I will
discuss how the director works in pursuit of these goals during preproduction, preliminary design meetings, and preliminary rehearsals with actors. Topics and concepts that my research showed to be of significance to this stage of the rehearsal process include 1. *The Director’s Preparation*, 2. *Letting Go of Preparation (to Make Space for Collaborative Exploration)*, and 3. *Establishing a Common Vocabulary*.

**Key Concept #1: The Director’s Preparation**

The bulk of the director’s preparation falls under the category of play analysis. The late directing scholar Francis Hodge has made it very clear in his writing that “logical, thoughtful examination” of the play is an essential step for the director in developing a “perception” of the play that includes “basic objective awareness of how a play is made” (Hodge 6). This logical approach is not intended to stifle the director’s emotional and intuitive responses to the play; it is to support them. The textbook *Play Directing: Analysis, Communication, and Style* provides an in-depth breakdown of a Hodge style play analysis, which consists of “a written analysis of given circumstances, dialogue, dramatic action, characters, idea, and rhythm-mood beats” (Hodge 53). Given circumstances is a term used by many theatre practitioners, but Hodge specifically defines it as including “environmental facts” (information about the world of the play), “previous actions” (events that occurred in the world of the play prior to the story’s onset) and “polar attitudes” (how the character relates to their surroundings, and others in it, at the beginning and the end of the play) (Hodge 15). “Rhythm-mood beats” is another term of Hodge’s that is useful to define, since the specific way in which he uses it is not self-explanatory. He uses this phrase to describe “[t]he playwright’s music in a play—its moods and tempos,” which are determined by “1. The qualities of the dramatic action in each unit and 2. The juxtaposition of these actions”
(Hodge 46). For further details on Hodge’s proposed methods for play analysis, see Chapter Two of his textbook, *Play Directing: Analysis, Communication, and Style*.

Jonathan Martin, another of the directors who I researched, also has a particular approach to play analysis. In my interview with Jonathan Martin, he explained that his preparatory work during the pre-production stage of the directing process includes three things:

1. Charting character and relationship arcs alongside the events of the play;
2. Analyzing the playwright’s use of punctuation, translating that analysis into a reference guide for the rehearsal room; and
3. Identifying and defining the physical needs of the play (Martin and Klein).

I should note that it is highly possible that Martin’s approach to directorial preparation is influenced by the ideas of Francis Hodge, since *Play Directing: Analysis, Communication, and Style* is the text most frequently referenced in JMU courses on directing. Even so, I found significant differences between Hodge’s style of play analysis and the methods that Martin claims to use.

Martin’s attention to punctuation is in the same vein of logical examination that Hodge recommends. In our interview, Martin described how he uses punctuation as a tool for deciphering subtext. He described an example of this from a production of a play for which he realized that the playwright had used ellipses and dashes to signify the context of cut-off dialogue. Martin noted that the playwright’s choice to either one over the other was related on the character’s motivation to stop speaking in the middle of a sentence. In instances where the playwright used ellipses, the character was cutting-off mid-sentence because a nonverbal interruption of some kind, whereas a dash was used in instances where the character was verbally interrupted by another character. Martin described how this analysis was of practical use in the
rehearsal room. While doing moment-to-moment scene work with actors, his set of punctuation rules served as a tool for making sure the actors understood the subtext and motivation for their lines (Martin and Klein). This particular of punctuation playing a role in play analysis is different, however, from what Hodge describes in *Play Directing*. Martin uses punctuation as a tool for accessing the sub-textual meaning of dialogue, whereas Hodge focuses on punctuation as a tool for communicating the literal meaning of the text. He argues that “[m]any directors and actors… assume that if the subtext of a line is fully comprehended, the technical delivery of that line is assured…[but] the subtext and the text must both be communicated,” and offers punctuation as a tool for making sure that this occurs (Hodge 23).

Similarities can be found between Hodge and Martin’s approaches to character analysis. In the words of Francis Hodge, “characters do not change, they unfold”—meaning that as the events of the play occur, each one progressively reveals something new about the underlying nature of a character. He therefore argues that analysis of dramatic action is essential to understanding a character’s arc (Hodge 38-39). Martin also sees the connection between character and dramatic action, and incorporates character relationships into this analysis, as well. In our interview, he shared that one of his priorities in analyzing any script is to find areas of overlap between different characters’ arcs. He first assesses individual characters arcs in a way that resembles Hodge’s “polar attitudes” (Hodge 15), then looks for areas of overlap and connection the arcs of multiple characters. For instance, one character might change to become more like another, or they may change in a way that increases their differences. The final step to this process, in Jonathan’s words, is to analyze how the individual character arcs and corresponding changes in character relationships “sync up to moments in the play—how all of those things come together” (Martin and Klein). Though their methods differ in that Hodge
prescribes a written character analysis that is more formal and comprehensive than the one Jonathan describes, the two men demonstrate a similar philosophy on the relationship between characters and dramatic action.

Another component of Jonathan Martin’s pre-production preparation is identifying and defining the physical needs of the play. This is a step that includes basic considerations such as whether the play includes dance or stage combat. It also includes assessing whether any of the characters have inherent physicality that must be factored into casting. Jonathan also considers whether physicality can be used to support communicate characters’ growth by highlighting aspects of their character arcs through changes in body language, relationship with the space, and gesture. Jonathan uses all of this information to inform the physical framework for the play—establishing a unified vocabulary for the actors’ movement, the movement of the sensory world of the play, and for interactions between the two (Martin and Klein). Jonathan’s analysis of physicality is significant because, unlike much of the discussion of directorial preparation I found in my research, it emphasizes the physical life of the play over the intellectual.

In addition to analyzing the play itself, I found that it is also important to learn about the play from outside sources, through various forms of research. Several directors included traditional, academic-style research in their processes. Tom Ridgely mentioned reading nonfiction books on subjects that are significant to the play, in order to ensure accurate portrayal of these subjects—especially if a play is not set in a contemporary time period (Ridgely and Klein). Jonathan Martin told me he does thorough research of all unfamiliar words and references, including seeking out definitions and etymology (Martin and Klein). The acclaimed British director Katie Mitchell, in an interview with Gabriella Giannachi and Mary Luckhurst, stated that she does considerable research on “the background of the text, looking at its
historical, socio-political and cultural context” and “the autobiographical details of the author’s life” (Giannachi and Luckhurst 95).

One style of research that several of the directors I studied employed which is not based on text is image-based research. In an interview in July 2017, director Heather Lanza described her process for image research to me. She explained that first, she does preliminary exploration through a “mind association Google search,” using keywords from the play as search terms in a Google Images search (Lanza and Klein). Lanza then continues her image research at the New York Public Library’s Picture Collection, which contains “well over one million original prints, photographs, posters, postcards, and illustrations from books, magazines, and newspapers, classified into more than 12,000 subject headings” available for library users to borrow (NYPL.org). Lanza shared with me that this collection is particularly useful for finding images on a specific historical period, a task that can be difficult to do through basic internet research because not all sources claiming to have period images are credible, and not all images are labeled accurately (Lanza and Klein).

Another form of pre-production research that excited me in my secondary research was the workshop, as defined by Katie Mitchell. Mitchell suggests in her book *The Director’s Craft: A Handbook for the Theatre* that workshops should be used by directors as a space to “investigate grey areas in your interpretation of the text, or to test-run new steps and tools in your process,” and speculates that any director working on a production could benefit from workshopping at least one thing before the start of rehearsals (Mitchell 103). Mitchell distinguishes the investigative research that takes place in workshops from the exploration as follows:
While rehearsals are about delivering a production for an audience, workshops are about exploring ideas… In a rehearsal process you cannot change your mind all the time about your working method or the interpretation of the text. This will make the actors unstable and stop them from building a performance strong enough to go in front of an audience. In a workshop you can chop and change as much as you like because you do not have to build anything durable (Mitchell 103).

Mitchell’s model of workshopping production-specific methods and ideas was novel to me in that she incorporates this work into the pre-production phase and suggests that it can be done prior to casting (with the actors who will be working on the production or with different actors altogether) (Mitchell 103). This was of particular interest to me because it laid out a model for involving practice-based research in the rehearsal process that significantly differed from the one I had designed for Scab. By the time I found this model, it was unfortunately too late to redesign the relationship of my practice-based research and the rehearsal process of Scab. However, I admired Mitchell’s model for how it seemed to simplify the work of the director. It did so by separating the objectives of solidifying understanding of certain production-related tools and ideas and using those tools and ideas to develop a performance-ready final product (within finite hours of rehearsal).

Key Concept #2: Letting Go of Preparation to Make Space for Collaboration Exploration

All of the directors who I researched seemed to be in unanimous agreement that, once the director does the preparation, they must let it go. Doing so requires trusting that they are “prepared for luck” (Tharp 121), meaning that they have internalized their research and analysis and can therefore afford to not reference it during work with designers and actors. Abandoning
the preparation in this manner is a “freeing device… the best possible tool you can give yourself” (Hodge 54). It allows the director to focus all of their attention on the collaborative exploration in digging sessions and be “fully responsive with [their] actors and designers” (Hodge 54). Full attention and knowing what “luck” might look like when it strikes are crucial to the director’s ability to recognize and harness valuable content when it is created by collaborators (Tharp 121). This is of particular importance to the director’s digging sessions with actors; unlike in design meetings (where designers typically bring the product of their latest creative exploration so that it can be discussed as a group), the actors’ work takes place in the rehearsal room. Master choreographer Twyla Tharp says that her dancers could do “the most marvelous things in the studio, but if [she is] not there to witness it, it may as well be the proverbial tree falling in a forest. Never happened” (Tharp 121). It is the same with actors and directors. The director is an active witness to the actors’ work and is a participant in the creation of content; therefore, they must stay present in order to discern which of the actors’ choices should be explored further and/or kept permanently.

Of course, it is not always possible for the director to remember all of their preparation during the heat of the moment in the rehearsal room, nor is trying to do so always the best course of action. Time is a luxury, and my research showed that the balance a director strikes between predetermining the actors’ performance and allowing it to develop organically through collaborative exploration often depends on how much time is available for work with actors. Shorter rehearsal processes may lead a director to predetermine much of the actors’ performance, even if they would prefer to build the performances through collaborative exploration. Jonathan Martin recounted to me a time when this was true for him; he had only a few days to rehearse a full-length play. Martin modified his usual process to accommodate the time restriction by pre-
blocking the entire play, and emailing actors their entrances and exits ahead of time so that these 
would already be memorized at the beginning of their rehearsal time (Martin and Klein). On the 
other end of the spectrum from this example are the working methods of director Tim Etchells. 
As the artistic director of Forced Entertainment, a renowned experimental theatre company based 
in the United Kingdom, Etchells has stated that he specifically designs his processes to be five or 
six months long, and that the guiding principle of his work as a director is “to wait and see” 
(Giannachi and Luckhurst 25). In many cases directors will land somewhere between these two 
examples, predetermining parameters for that day’s exploration and/or preparing a rough sketch 
of what the final product of the exploration might be, in case no better options are discovered. 
For example, director Tom Ridgely told me that he always rough blocks scenes before working 
on them in the rehearsal room. At the very least, Ridgely will have a plan for actors’ entrances 
and exits. The degree to which Ridgely predetermines blocking varies, though, depending on 
how many characters are onstage (it is more complicated to block stage compositions with many 
actor’s bodies, and therefore may cause Ridgely to prepare possible stage compositions ahead of 
time for such moments) (Ridgely and Klein). This level of “letting go” gives the director more 
control over managing time effectively (Mitchell 2), without settling for a production lacking the 
vitality and synergy that comes from playful collaboration that has been “nourished by the skills, 
creativity, and energies of many” (Spolin 298).

Key Concept #3: Establishing a Common Vocabulary

In the interview with British director Simon McBurney in On Directing, McBurney 
declares that he is “adamant about unifying people through a common language” (Giannachi and 
Luckhurst 75). He is not alone; every director I researched takes time with designers and actors
to establish goals for collaboration—asking questions like “What story are we trying to tell, and what are the priorities for how we will tell that story?”—and to establish a common vocabulary for talking about their work together. It is widely agreed that consistent use of a vocabulary that allows collaborators to communicate effectively about the work at hand is key to laying the groundwork for a successful production. McBurney describes the language used between theatre collaborators as being “a physical, vocal, musical and architectural language,” and emphasizes that this language “is not a constant one, it is defined by the material in front of you” (Giannachi and Luckhurst 76). The language of directors, designers, and actors is informed by the material they are working on, and varies accordingly—even if the team of collaborators is the same from one project to another. According to McBurney, the thing that matters most is not the method of communication but that “when you say something, the other person understands…unconsciously as well as consciously” (Giannachi and Luckhurst 75).

Some directors develop their own theatre vocabularies and use them consistently. Viola Spolin, Katie Mitchell, and Anne Bogart all fall into this category. Viewpoints is a vocabulary that was first developed by American choreographer Mary Overlie, then adapted for theatre by directors Anne Bogart and Tina Landau (Bogart and Landau 6). In The Viewpoints Book: A Practical Guide to Viewpoints and Composition, Viewpoints is described as “a set of names given to certain principles of movement through time and space; these names constitute a language for talking about what happens onstage” (Bogart and Landau 8). Both Heather Lanza and Jonathan Martin, two of the directors who I interviewed personally, also attested to using Viewpoints vocabulary in their processes.

While some directors use vocabularies that address both performance and design elements of the production, many directors use different methods of communication with
designers than they do with actors, especially when it comes to communicating the goals for how
the play’s story will be told. Mitchell instructs her readers to “use images or music and not
words” as the basis for communication with designers, and stresses the importance of sharing
preparatory work with designers “whenever possible” (Mitchell 76). In The Director’s Craft, she
insists that directors should at the very least communicate “the events around which the action
will be structured” since, “[i]n an ideal world, the lights, sound, music, movement, set and
costume design will all work to sharpen or underscore these turning points” (Mitchell 76). I
found that it is less common for the director to hand over written analysis to actors than
designers. However, many directors take time to do tablework in preliminary rehearsals and will
discuss the structure, characters, and ideas of the play with actors. Director Ricky Drummond
has actors read through the play “scene by scene,” stopping intermittently. In our interview, he
described his communication style during tablework as follows:

    I don’t [always] phrase it in a way of ‘What’s their intention, or what tactic are they
using’ unless the actor responds to this. I might say, ‘on this line right here, I’m not quite
sure what the character is trying to say. What do you imagine is happening here? How
do we get from ‘I hate you so much’ to ‘will you marry me’--where is that journey?
    
(Drummond and Klein).

This style of communication allows Drummond to “make sure that [the actors] understand the
tempo and the rhythm and the intention behind [the dialogue]” without giving them all of the
answers (Drummond and Klein).
The Diggging Sessions

Viola Spolin describes the second stage of the rehearsal process as “the spontaneous, creative period—the digging sessions” (Spolin 307), in which actors “bring up actions through the exercises or in the reading of the script” and “the director picks them up, enlarges them, and adds something more, if necessary” (Spolin 331). Within this section I will discuss components of directing the “digging sessions” that take place during design meetings and in the rehearsal room. Themes and concepts that my research showed to be of significance to this stage of the rehearsal process include 1. Director as Energy-Source and 2. Speaking Strategically.

Key Concept #4: Director as Energy-Source for Digging Sessions

Energy is the lifeblood of the rehearsal room. During the “Digging Sessions” stage of the rehearsal process, one of the director’s most important responsibilities is to fuel the work of their collaborators with energy. According to Viola Spolin, energy is synonymous with inspiration, and both can be defined as “the intensity of the director’s attention to what the actors are doing, plus the use of every skill you can call up” (Spolin 309).

American director Jon Jory speaks on “watching rehearsal creatively” in his widely used book Tips: Ideas for Directors (197). This seems to be his version of what Spolin refers to as the “intensity of the director’s attention” (Spolin 309). Jory recommends that the director keep track of “what [they] might be watching for,” and offers a list of suggestions that includes circumstances, action, obstacles, clarity, interplay, folding in, blocking, theme, theatricality, character, words, relationship, creativity, beauty, and repetition (Jory 197). This makes it possible to keep the “watching” of the digging session focused and energized (Jory 197), which in turn energizes the actors who are doing the “digging” (Spolin 307).
At times, “the director must literally pour this energy into a cast,” in hopes that they will return it (Spolin 309). In *Improvisation for the Theater*, Spolin illustrates the type of energy that is necessary with a quote from an actor who once told her, “playing to you is like playing to a full house at the Opera!” (309). In other cases, the director will “prod the actors into extending themselves, into ‘reaching beyond’” by creating an obstacle that activates the actor’s intuition and spontaneity (309). Spolin’s “problem-solving technique” (Spolin 20), and accomplished South African director/teacher Brian Astbury’s “Resistance Techniques” are examples of this approach (Astbury 51). In both examples, the director provides the actors with an objective, and an obstacle to that objective. This obstacle might be physical—such as someone pushing on their shoulders, or abstract—such as providing rules that restrict the actor’s methods of achieving the objective. The actors rise to occasion—generating the energy and creativity necessary to beat the resistance.

**Key Concept #5: Speaking Strategically:**

The director’s most important work during digging sessions is in the realm of communication. Directing scholar Francis Hodge expands on this in the following quote: “The director’s field of action is communication… to touch and move audiences with a play, [but] she cannot do so by herself; rather, she must communicate to audiences how she thinks and feels through actors and designers—her collaborators” (Hodge 59). My research showed that the director’s primary responsibilities during digging sessions are 1. To provide parameters or instructions for the exploratory work that will take place during that digging session, 2. To serve as audience to the exploration (watching with the intent to identify valuable choices and/or content that should be explored further and/or kept permanently), and 3. To provide feedback (to
those who are actively “digging”) based on what they observed. This cycle then repeats many times over the course of the digging sessions, as the director gradually guides the work in progress towards a finished product. At least two out of three of these aforementioned responsibilities rely on the director’s ability to communicate skillfully and strategically with collaborators.

**Responsibility #1 – Giving Instructions/Parameters:** When it comes to setting parameters for exercises with actors in rehearsals, Katie Mitchell warns young directors to “not waste time… explaining your ideas or justifying your process” (Mitchell 122). She suggests that this tendency of young directors is a manifestation of their insecurity and desire to prove themselves as directors, but insists that it is not necessary (122). Mitchell also offers the following advice on how to give clear, concise instructions to actors:

> *If you talk to the actors using the language of literary criticism or abstract ideas they will struggle to respond to your instructions precisely and, as a result, their work will be vague. Of course, most actors are perfectly capable of holding an intellectual conversation about a play, but that is not what they are in the rehearsal room to do… Consider how you might give someone directions for a car journey… The driver needs precise information with clear points of reference about roads, signs and landmarks. The clearer the instructions are, the quicker the driver will arrive at their destination. It is the same with actors* (Mitchell 5).

Viola Spolin echoes this sentiment, as well, positing that “[w]ords can easily become labels, dead and useless” (Spolin iv). I found these quotes particularly valuable because they reminded me that words should be used economically in rehearsals and for practical purposes only. I myself am an actor who enjoys intellectual conversations about plays, and I had always assumed
that directors who avoided these types of discussions with actors did so because they assumed
the actors did not enjoy or were not capable of having them. Mitchell’s perspective on the matter
helped to me understand the practical benefits of minimizing intellectual discussion in the
rehearsal room.

Responsibility #2 – Audience to Digging: Some directors will not do much talking during
the active exploration of “digging sessions,” but Viola Spolin proves that this does not have to be
the case (Spolin 307). Instead, Spolin frequently employs side-coaching during digging sessions
as a means of energizing the actors and providing ongoing feedback to their work without
interrupting it. In Spolin’s words, “Side-coaching allows the teacher-director an opportunity to
step into the excitement of playing (learning) in the same space, with the same focus, as the
players” (Spolin 28).

Responsibility #3 – Giving Feedback: A director’s job as audience is not complete until
they have responded to the group improvisation or play. It is through this pattern of exchange—
witnessing organic play, and then articulating what they have witnessed—that the director works
with the rest of the creative team to build a story that is both vital and rigorous. Katie Mitchell
voices the importance of feedback, telling directors to “[a]lways give feedback to actors after
they have done any practical acting work for you, at any stage in the process, even if you just
give a brief note about time or place” (Mitchell 128). Anne Bogart also speaks to the necessity of
giving feedback to actors. In A Director Prepares, she recounts a time when one of her directing
graduate students took over directing a rehearsal that she was unable to attend. Afterwards, an
actress said the student had not done well, because “he didn’t say anything” (Bogart 49). From
this actress’s perspective, “it doesn’t really matter how erudite or naïve the observation, but, as
an actor, she needs the person responsible for watching, the director, to say something around
which she can organize her next attempt” (49). Providing useful direction for the actor’s next attempt, after all, is the entire point of feedback in the rehearsal room.

The director may also be strategic about providing feedback that is tailored to the individual communication style and needs of each actor. Ricky Drummond spoke to me on the importance of being able to “work with different egos and know how to pull the best work out of them” (Drummond and Klein 6:30). He confided that this sometimes means knowing “when to say, ‘That was awful, let’s do it again,’ versus ‘You’re great, you’re wonderful. I saw you do this thing, can you do that more’—even if they didn’t do that thing” (Drummond and Klein 5:30-6:30). It is important for the director to be versatile and agile in their communication. Feedback can be ineffective or even destructive if given at the wrong time or in a way that is not suited to the individual actor.

**Polishing and Integration**

According to Viola Spolin, the most important goal for the third and final stage of the rehearsal process is “polishing and integrating all production facets into a unity” (Spolin 307). Within this section I will discuss how the director works in pursuit of these goals during late-process rehearsals, before and after the transition from the rehearsal room into the performance space. Themes and concepts that my research showed to be of significance to this stage of the rehearsal process include *Moving into the Space—A Delicate Transition* and *Necessary Know-How for Articulating the Final Product*.

**Key Concept #6: Moving into the Space—A Delicate Transition**

In *The Director’s Craft: A Handbook for the Theatre*, Katie Mitchell offers the following warning on the transition from the rehearsal room to the performance space:
The way in which the director negotiates the transition from the rehearsal room to the theatre needs careful thought. Manage it smoothly and it will strengthen the actors’ work and your ability to help them develop that work. Manage it inefficiently and it will weaken what the actors are doing as well as your hold on their work. You will then waste time having to rebuild their confidence and their acting choices (Mitchell 201).

Mitchell’s ominous tone emphasizes the importance of this delicate stage in the rehearsal process. She goes on to provide practical tips on transitioning smoothly into the performance space, as did multiple other directors who I researched. Mitchell’s biggest piece of advice was that directors should aim to reduce the number of “new ingredients” that actors must deal with during the transition by introducing “lights, sounds, scenery, costumes and so on” in the rehearsal room whenever possible (Mitchell 138). If this is not possible to introduce the new ingredient prior to the transition out the rehearsal room, Mitchell suggests at least describing what it will be like to the actors ahead of time. This similarly accomplishes the goal of “preparing the actors for everything new that you are planning to do in the theatre” and reducing the amount of new information that they will need to process during technical rehearsals (Mitchell 139).

Besides integrating design and technical elements early on, directors should also assist the actors in anticipating aspects of their work that will need to shift and grow with the transition from the rehearsal room to the stage, according to Jon Jory and Viola Spolin. In Tips: Ideas for Directors, Jory speaks specifically on the topic of “Playing at Performance Level” (209). He observes that “[v]ery often you’re rehearsing with a much smaller volume of space than you’ll be performing in,” and subsequently actors must increase the size of their physicality and vocality (in other words, increase their energy) in order to produce the same effect that was achieved in
the rehearsal room (Jory 209). Pushing actors to heighten the volume of their speech early on will get them “used to the sound [of their own voices],” making it easier for them to “find nuance amidst the noise” later on (Jory 209). Viola Spolin’s advice on getting actors used to the actor-audience relationship operates with similar logic. She warns that the best way to avoid “exhibitionism” (performing with the intention of impressing the audience members) is to establish early in the rehearsal process that “members of the audience [are not] judges or censors or even… delighted friends, but… a group with whom an experience is being shared” (13). If the director can successfully accomplish this, the actors will be able to perform with “complete release and freedom” and will not be held back by their perception of the audience as critics (Spolin 13).

Perhaps the most important thing a director can do to ease the actors’ transition into the space, according to Jon Jory and William Ball, is to schedule four to five run-throughs of the entire play before leaving the rehearsal room. This allows the actors to absorb “the full emotional experience” (Ball 124), and “the shape of the play” (Jory 216) before their attention must temporarily switch over to “the physical aspects of the stage—the lights, the furniture, the costumes, and so forth” (Ball 123).

In summary, I found that directors should “avoid surprising [the actors] with entirely new ideas” or production elements (Mitchell 139), and “press to get into the space early for everyone’s sake” (Jory 209). Doing so eases the transition from rehearsal room to the performance space and all that follows. Furthermore, it makes it possible for the director to support actors, designers, technicians, and all of the rest of the production team in their efforts to product the best work possible during this crucial stage of the rehearsal process.
Any amount of research on Viola Spolin makes it clear that she generally values process over product. She spends much of her book *Improvisation for the Theater* discussing methods for directing a rich, exploratory rehearsal process. And yet, Spolin also offers wisdom on the fundamental importance of the product, positing that “[t]he actuality of communication is far more important than the method used. Methods alter to meet the needs of time and place” (Spolin 14). In other words, the final product that the director needs to concern themselves with is successful communication with the audience. And while that may sound simple, in the words of Twyla Tharp: “It takes skill to bring something you’ve imagined into the world: to use words to create believable lives, to select the colors and textures of paint to represent a haystack at sunset” (Tharp 9). It takes a great deal of know-how to effectively support the actors’ in communicating the story of the play to audiences.

In the forward to *On Directing*, a compilation of interviews with directors edited by Gabriella Giannachi and Mary Luckhurst, the director Peter Brook talks at length on the subject of the director as “craftsman” (Brook ix). Brook frames the skills necessary for staging an effective play in terms of “the world of *How*” (Brook ix). This involves “knowing the difference between two people on stage being close together or far apart; between a platform being high or low; between a taut and a sloppy tempo; between the lights being bright or dark; between the audience being able to participate or not participate; between a living response in the audience or the absence of a living response; and between the interest of the audience between shared or not shared with the actors” (Brook ix). It involves many things according to Brook, all of which fall under the category of knowing how to use the resources available—including both performance
and design aspects of the production—to tell a story onstage that is both engaging and clear to audiences.

A young director such as myself might wonder how to accumulate the know-how necessary for this enormous task. My research gave me some insight into just how many possible methods there are. Director Tom Ridgely cites his extensive training as a ballet dancer as having improved his sense of “bodies in space,” and his subsequent ability to perceive the varying information that different arrangements of bodies onstage can communicate to audiences (Ridgely and Klein). Anne Bogart, Francis Hodge, and several other directors I encountered in my research offer strategies for creating staging that is compelling, organic, and in support of the play’s events. Jon Jory recommends seeking wisdom from other directors, in order to avoid his experience of “making mistakes (for years) that a tip or two by a peer or a veteran could have shortcutted” (Jory xiii). The multitude of answers to the question of how to gather directing know-how is both frustrating (because there is no singular answer and therefore the process of searching cannot be outsmarted) and empowering—because there are so many opportunities to successfully learn.

**Part Two: My Directing Process for Scab**

The following sections discuss and analyze my findings from the practice-based research that I conducted during the *Scab* rehearsal process. This will include microanalysis on the effectiveness of the individual tools that I tested from other directors’ processes, in terms of building a success production of *Scab*. It will also include macroanalysis of my work as a director during the *Scab* process, in terms of the seven key concepts and topics of directing that are featured in the section prior to this (Part One: Other Director’s Processes).
Laying the Groundwork

According to Viola Spolin, the two most important goals for the first stage of the rehearsal process are “warming up the actors and the director” and “laying the groundwork in relationships and attitudes to the play and to each other” (Spolin 307). Within this section I will discuss how I worked in pursuit of these goals during preproduction, preliminary design meetings, and preliminary rehearsals with actors. I will also discuss and analyze my approach to the key concepts that my research showed to be of significance to this stage of the rehearsal process. These include 1. *The Director’s Preparation*, 2. *Letting go of Preparation to Make Space for Collaborative Exploration*, and 3. *Establishing a Common Vocabulary*.

Key Concept #1: *The Director’s Preparation*

The director’s individual preparation (analysis, research, etc.) is only useful in so far as it supports the actual production. This is something that I lost sight of during my preparation for *Scab*. Using the methods of other directors as reference point, I have concluded that I did too much intellectual analysis for *Scab*, and not enough practical analysis. In other words, If I had the chance to re-do the pre-production period of the *Scab* process, I would have spent less time theorizing why Sheila Callaghan wrote what she did in the script, and more time thinking about how I wanted to turn what she had written in the script into a fully realized production.

I did not do a full written analysis of the play in the format and quantity that directing scholar Francis Hodge suggests. I intended to do this, but ran out of time. However, I did analyze of all of the components of the play that Hodge includes: given circumstances, dialogue, dramatic action, characters, idea, and rhythm-mood beats (Hodge 6). I analyzed these components of the
play to varying degrees. I spent a lot of time thinking about the ideas of the play, the logic of its world, and the biographies of its characters.

I spent countless hours searching for logic and analyzing patterns in the vacillation between Realism and Surrealism in Sheila Callaghan’s writing. I created a massive spreadsheet of what I observed to be reoccurring motifs of the play. I meticulously tracked and wrote down all instances in which they were explicitly mentioned by characters and/or depicted prominently onstage. These motifs included technology, plants, blood/violence/death, tears/ocean/fluuids, nudity/sex, drugs/alcohol, articulation/expression through language, passage of time, clutter vs. emptiness, social performance/performative “bullshit” (Callaghan 14), family, and religion. Completing this spreadsheet helped me understand the play and internalize its key ideas and reoccurring symbols, but I spent far too much time on it. I should have done it much more quickly, and just listed the spots where the themes came up, as a note to myself to investigate that moment later for potential significance. For a more detailed understanding of the format and content of the motif spreadsheet that I completed, please see an excerpt in Appendix B.

I studied Callaghan’s use of punctuation, focusing my attention on the rhythms her punctuation (or lack thereof) created. I noted differences in the communication styles and language use of individual characters, and the information that these differences revealed about the individual characters and their relationships to one another. For example, sections of dialogue with little to no punctuation tended to correlate with moments where characters were not censoring themselves or performing a facade (either because they were comfortable being vulnerable or because the moment had high emotional stakes).

I also noted sections of dialogue in which content and form contradicted one another, and formed hypotheses on why Sheila Callaghan chose to write the play in that way. For example,
the characters Jenna, Davie, and Kellee are caricatures of pretentious graduate students who assume power over other characters based on their intelligence and prowess (Figure 1). Yet, Sheila Callaghan makes the choice to have their dialogue dissolve from fluent French into nonsensical gibberish on multiple occasions. At one point, Davie is complaining about Christa and says “She’s got the Klemer grant AND the Walker AND a TA-ship,” to which another member of his cohort, Jenna, responds “So arbitrary! Fa-da ga ga” (Callaghan 16). While completing my play analysis, I pondered what examples like this revealed about Callaghan’s worldview and about the lens through which the audience is perceiving the events of the play.

I also tracked rhythm-mood beats obsessively—marking both minor and major beat shifts in hopes of bringing logic and organization to Callaghan’s chaotic play. *Scab* is episodic in structure and shifts rapidly (in time and genre) from one scene to another without formal delineation of where one scene ends and the next begins.

Despite all of the aforementioned careful preparation on the language and ideas of the play (or possibly because of it), I did not spend nearly enough time analyzing the dramatic action and how the events of the play might be physically realized onstage. I lost sight of the fact that the play’s ideas could only be communicated through its events (both literal plot points and psychological milestones in relationships between characters). The progression of the play’s events and its characters’ arcs are the forest—it is imperative that the director does not lose side of these in an effort to attend to each of the trees (i.e. minor aspects of the play that support the
dramatic action or otherwise contribute to the arc of the story). I lost sight of the forest in my fascination with the trees. In the words of British director Simon McBurney, “[w]hen you are making theatre ideas are never the problem. There are hundreds of ideas. It’s finding how to transmit them. It’s all about how the idea is expressed” (Alexander 57). I got lost in the hundreds of ideas, because that work was familiar and similar to work I had done in the past as a dramaturg and in academic assignments.

I did a lot of research, but could have done a lot more. Research topics and areas that I focused on include:

4. Etymology and meaning of unfamiliar and/or significant words (including translations of all dialogue in French)

5. References within the play (cultural, historical, literary, etc.)

6. Characteristics of Surrealist art and literature, and methods for its creation

7. Extensive image research, compiled in a Pinterest page

8. Physiological and psychological effects of abuse and trauma.

Research topics and areas that I wish I had done more research on include:

9. The structure and culture of graduate programs (specifically, Theatre and History programs) in early 2000s Los Angeles

10. James Taylor, and cultural perception of James Taylor and his music when it was first created and in the early 2000s

11. The grieving process (especially in situations where the grieving person was abused by the person who died)
12. The impact that the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 had on our national culture for the remainder of the early 2000’s (including methods that artists used to respond to these events)

13. New Jersey and Los Angeles in the early 2000s

14. Cultural perception and representation of bisexuality in 2002

15. Plants as a symbol and/or actual tool for healing

16. Research on other productions of Scab (or other Sheila Callaghan plays, or plays that use Surrealism similarly) to see their approaches to staging and designing the world of the play

Beyond these individual research topics, I also wish that I had been able to incorporate a workshopping period (in the style suggested by Katie Mitchell in The Director’s Craft) into the pre-production stage of Scab’s rehearsal process. Mitchell recommends workshopping an exercise before taking it into the rehearsal room if it “doesn’t make sense to you” yet (Mitchell 2). There were often times when I brought exercises or tools into rehearsal or a design meeting hoping they would work, but not feeling exactly sure of how they would work. If I had workshopped these tools ahead of time, away from the pressure of using them to develop an effective production in a very short rehearsal process, I think I would have been more confident and better able to manage time effectively.

The following are practical takeaways from the approach I took to The Director’s Preparation for Scab, framed in terms of how I intend to do things the same or differently as a director on future theatre productions:
1. It is better to include fewer steps/areas of analysis in your play analysis and do them fully (i.e. completing the analysis and translating it into a format that is of practical use to the production).

2. Prioritize analysis of dramatic action above all other areas play analysis.

3. Once the play analysis is complete, it is important to decide what lens the production will use to tell the story of the play (i.e. what elements of the play I want our production to emphasize and use as a framework for communication the play to audiences).

4. Start work on time-consuming tasks/areas of the plays as early as possible (composition of original music, development of movement vocabulary/specific choreography, etc.), especially when their completion must precede other steps in the rehearsal process (such as assessing casting needs, creating the set design, or creating blocking).

5. Whenever possible, complete all workshopping (of directing tools and production-specific ideas) before the start of the formal rehearsal process.

Key Concept #2: Letting Go of Preparation (to Make Space for Collaborative Exploration)

According to my own assessment of my work, I failed this aspect of the directing process for Scab. I did extensive preparation, hoping to let it go in the rehearsal room. But because I did more intellectual research analysis than practical analysis (identifying physical needs of the play, working with our composer to develop the music ahead of time, making a decision about the story that I wanted to tell with this play out of the many possible interpretations, etc.), I was not actually prepared to “let go” of my preparation and be fully present to the work of my actors and designers. I had not determined what “getting lucky” might look like, and therefore kept checking my research and preparation constantly during the digging sessions (Tharp 121). Even
when I knew my analysis and blocking and rehearsal plans backwards and forwards, my insecurity as a new director caused me to doubt myself and continue to constantly reference my preparation, though that meant being distracted from the work of the rehearsal room. This probably caused me to miss countless valuable discoveries and choices made by collaborators; it also caused my confidence to suffer. My ability to watch rehearsals creatively and with my full attention was also impeded by my poor attention to my own health and wellness during the Scab. Anxiety, stress, and a lack of sleep and proper nutrition all exacerbated my normal Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) tendencies and led to me being unfocused and distracted fairly often. Furthermore, the design of my project (testing and reflecting on directing methodologies while simultaneously developing a fully realized production) meant that my attention was always divided.

It was important to me to let the work of actors and designers evolve organically, through the collaborative play of “digging sessions.” However, I should have taken into account factors such how short our process was and how difficult and chaotic a play Scab is. With these things in mind, I should have adjusted my expectations for how much organic exploration was possible versus how much I needed to predetermine ahead of time.

In preparation for my work with actors, I could have done more pre-blocking. I still could have been flexible with that blocking, leaving room for the actors to explore and play without feeling overwhelmed. However, I predetermined only entrances and exits for most of the scenes, and left the rest of it open to what we would discover in the rehearsal room. I thought I could get away with this because most of the scenes in Scab have only two or three people in them. However, many of my actors were young and still struggled with keeping their bodies engaged
physically and acting on their physical impulses. This led to many of the scenes being stagnant and/or looking similar to one another.

With designers, I should have come into design meetings with a more fleshed out idea of what story I wanted to tell and what kind of a sensory experience I wanted to create for audiences in order to support the communication of the play. I learned that, when working on plays that fuse Realism with elements of magic or absurdity, it is important to understand the dramaturgical basis for when and why the play shifts genres. Furthermore, when working with a condensed rehearsal process, it is critical that the director come to their own conclusions on these matters before beginning pre-production design meetings. With some productions, it is acceptable and even useful to complete such play analysis in collaboration with the production’s design team. But when time is limited, doing this will take away from discussion of more concrete production goals, such as how the director’s interpretation of the play will be physically realized by the work of designers, technicians, and actors.

The following are practical takeaways from the approach I took to Letting Go of Preparation (to Make Space for Collaborative Exploration) with Scab, framed in terms of how I intend to do things the same or differently as a director on future theatre productions:

1. When in doubt, pre-block. You can always ignore it later if something better is discovered in the rehearsal room.

2. Know what “getting lucky” will look like when it happens in the rehearsal room (Tharp 121). This means knowing what story you want to tell, and having at least an inkling or hunch on how you want to tell it.

3. It is essential for the director to practice self-care and maintain a healthy lifestyle in order to be grounded and present in the rehearsal room. Directors are humans, too.
Key Concept #3: Establishing a Common Vocabulary

In Part One of Discussion and Analysis of Findings, my discussion of Common Vocabulary included establishing literal vocabularies used by directors for talking about the work at hand during collaboration, establishing expectations/conditions for collaboration, and establishing production objectives (the most significant of these objectives is the story that you, the director, want to tell with this production).

Working vocabularies: The formal vocabulary that was used most extensively during Scab is Viewpoints. Viewpoints is “a philosophy translated into a technique;” it is “a set of names given to certain principles of movement through time and space… a language for talking about what happens onstage…;” and it is “points of awareness that a performer or creator makes use of while working” (Bogart and Landau 7-8). It is all of these things, and it was first developed by choreographer Mary Overlie. Later, Viewpoints was adapted for the theatre by directors Anne Bogart and Tina Landau, through a decade of experimentation that began in the late 1980’s (Bogart and Landau 6).

There are nine primary Viewpoints, each corresponding with a “principl[e] of movement through time and space” (Bogart and Landau 7). Viewpoints of Time include tempo, duration, kinesthetic response, and repetition (8-9). The Viewpoints of Space are shape, gesture (including both behavioral and expressive gesture), architecture (including solid mass, texture, light, color, and sound), spatial relationship, and topography. There are also five Vocal Viewpoints: pitch, dynamic, acceleration/deceleration, silence, and timbre2.

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2 For more information on each of the Viewpoints and a discussion on how they can be used as a working vocabulary in the theatre, please refer to “Chapter 2: Viewpoints and Composition/What Are They?” in The Viewpoints Book: A Practical Guide to Viewpoints and Composition (Bogart and Landau 7-13).
There were several factors that influenced my selection of Viewpoints to be the primary vocabulary for collaboration on *Scab* between myself, actors, and designers. First and foremost, I knew that our primary vocabulary needed be centered on movement, since physicality and the human body are so important to *Scab*. Viewpoints is a movement vocabulary that most JMU students (including myself) have worked with—either in the classroom or in rehearsals for a production. Therefore, it seemed logical to use a vocabulary that would already be familiar to many of my collaborators. I decided to experiment with using the vocabulary of Viewpoints with both actors and designers, in an effort to streamline communication with one production-wide vocabulary.

My actors and I used Viewpoints to develop specific physicality distinguishing one character from another. Physicality was also one of our major tools for visually differentiating realistic scenes from moments that crossed in more surreal or magical territory. It was also used to portray moments where the characters had control (over themselves and/or reality) from moments when they had lost that control. I first introduced this tool during callbacks, and continued to use it throughout the rehearsal process. I explained how we would apply Viewpoints to the actors by saying that we would be using movement that was nonrealistic (in terms of how characters interacted with each other and with the set) to signify moments where the play’s genre shifted into something other than Realism. Viewpoints was highly useful towards this exploration, and I would use it again in a heartbeat on future productions with similar needs for intensely physical and stylized movement.

With designers, I focused on using Viewpoints as “points of awareness that a performer or creator makes use of while working” (Bogart and Landau 7-8). From the beginning of my proposal process, I knew our production of *Scab* needed to be a visceral experience for audiences
in order to do the play justice. The following is a quote from my proposal for Scab that further expands on this point. In this section of my proposal, I described my goals for the physical world of the production:

*With the juxtaposition of Anima and Christa comes an exploration of technological and/or artificial categorization of reality vs. the irrational, bodily, visceral core of the human experience. I would like the physical world of this production to resemble the latter, filling the space with physical symbols of the human experience that demand visceral reactions from all of the senses. These will include plants, blood, and nudity (Klein).*

Essentially, I wanted our production to call the audience’s attention to the messiness, power, and beauty of the human body. My intention was to use Viewpoints vocabulary as a means for discussing this goal with my designers, and for assessing throughout the process whether the production design was setting us up to accomplish that goal. The Viewpoint of Architecture seemed particularly relevant to our work. *The Viewpoints Book* describes suggests that “[i]n working on Architecture as a Viewpoint, we learn to dance with the space, to let movement (especially Shape and Gesture) evolve out of [the solid masses, textures, lighting, colors, and sounds in] our surroundings” (Bogart and Landau 10). As a group, we discussed how we could design the production in a way that intentionally steered the actors’ movement and physical interactions with the production’s Architecture. Most of my designers were fairly inexperienced in working with Viewpoints, but excited by its potential as a production-wide vocabulary. And yet, this was one of the most risky and experimental of my directing tools. It needed further workshopping in order to be applied effectively, which we did not have time for. For this reason, Viewpoints was unofficially abandoned as a vocabulary for design collaboration.
Even so, Viewpoints is a method that I would be interested in exploring in the future, so long as I had time to workshop it outside of the pressures of a finite rehearsal process.

Viewpoints was not the only vocabulary that was used in Scab collaboration. With actors, I also used terminology associated with Psychological Realism (objective, action, beat, etc.). I switched off between these two vocabularies depending on what each scene called for and which approach I wanted the actors to take. In some of Scab’s scenes, communicating characters’ inner emotional experiences and thought processes to audiences was the most important thing. The external form of how those things were communicated mattered less, as long as audiences could perceive and understand them on some level. In other sections of the play, the characters written by Sheila Callaghan resembled caricatures of three-dimensional people. Such is the case in scenes with the graduate students Jenna, Davie, and Kellee, and in scenes with Anima’s brother and mother (Figure 2).

When this occurred, it was usually as a device for externalizing nightmarish scenarios imagined by Anima or Christa. In these instances, the audience’s visceral experience of the “caricatured” characters was more important than communicating the characters’ nuanced inner emotional lives.

In my work with designers, we communicated through metaphors, images, and descriptive adjectives more often than we communicated with Viewpoints vocabulary. In our first design meeting, I shared my own metaphor—not for the production itself, exactly, but for its focal point: Anima’s poor physical and mental health in the aftermath of chronic abuse and trauma. Borrowing one of Sheila Callaghan’s metaphors, I compared Anima’s suffering to a wound. I extended this metaphor by comparing the behavior
that the play’s other characters demonstrate in response to Anima’s suffering to the range of responses people might have upon encountering a particularly gruesome wound. Christa is at first disgusted by the wound, but then gets closer to study it and becomes entranced. Alan is disgusted and walks away, refusing to deal with the wound. Mom refuses to acknowledge it, and Artie feigns total ignorance so as to cope with his lack of power to help heal the wound. Anima, our bearer of the wound, continues to pick at it by seeking love and affirmation from people who treat her poorly and without respect. It is not until she realizes she own self-worth, distances herself from toxic relationships in her life, and takes steps towards genuine self-care and that the wound begins to heal. After sharing this complex metaphor at the first design meeting, I asked each of my designers to come up with their own metaphors using the structure “The play Scab is like…,” or “Scab reminds me of…” These would then be shared the following week at the second design meeting. This sharing ended up being immensely productive. One by one, each of the present design and production team members shared their metaphors, and then we discussed reoccurring elements and described commonalities between metaphors in terms of descriptive adjectives. To my knowledge, everyone left that meeting feeling excited, validated, and like we were all on the same page with what we wanted to create through this collaboration. For a full list of the metaphors that were shared during that meeting, please see Appendix C.

In addition to communicating via metaphors, we also used images to communicate our ideas to one another. This was less successful than our communication via verbal language, according to my own assessment. For the first design meeting, I requested that the designers bring “one piece of (already existing) art that you feel lives in the same universe and/or style as Scab.” I intentionally did not restrict this to visual art, instead saying “This could be a song, a painting, a poem, a tv show, or anything else that makes sense to you.” Still, many of them brought images.
In the second design meeting, I shared a multitude of images with my designers that I had collected in a series of Pinterest boards. Each board communicated how I envisioned a different aspect of Scab (included locations, characters, and reoccurring themes). There were collections of images titled “Anima,” “Virgin Mary & Angels,” “Alan’s Apartment,” “Mom & Artie,” “Davie/Jenna/Kellee,” “Los Angeles in the Early 2000s,” “Reality Colors: Bleak,” “Surrealism Colors: Lush, Neon,” “Textures,” “Overall Mood/Tone” “Makeup Art,” “Lighting,” “Distortion & Illusion vs. Reality,” “Bodies,” “Technology,” “Fluids,” and “Plants/Trees/Nature” (to see the complete collection of images, please go to https://www.pinterest.com/kleinrw/scab/). I put together hundreds of images, and yet I did not know how to talk about them with my designers. Because I did not provide any explicit guidance to how these images might inform the work of each designer, and because of the overwhelming quantity of images, we did not realize the full potential of images as a language for collaboration.

*Expectations/conditions for collaboration:* In directing Scab, one of my top priorities was to establish clear and effective expectations for the responsibilities of each collaborator’s work. Deadlines were always set early, and as much notice as possible was given for what was expected of each collaborator. Weekly calls were always sent to the actors so they could better manage their weekly responsibilities as student-actors; production calendars were sent to all; and goals were set at the end of each rehearsal and design meeting.

In addition to clear expectations, it was important to me to create an environment for collaboration that felt safe, and was conducive to playfulness and risk-taking. I emphasized that failure was not only acceptable, but a necessary step to creating worthwhile work. We jokingly established a quota for each actor to “fail” at least one time each rehearsal. I strove to create a working environment where play and focused work coexisted in a happy symbiotic relationship.
I am naturally an intensely focused collaborator, but from the very start of the process I made an effort to mix in playfulness and humor. For example, I brought my cactus Sheila (named after Sheila Callaghan) to callbacks and early design meetings as a sort of mascot. When actors performed the callback sides that included Anima and Christa’s houseplant Susan, the actors used Sheila as a prop.

I also made sure to open forums for all of my team members to make known their working preferences. Multiple designers requested transparent communication and proactive deadlines. I worked very hard to honor these requests, and think I was generally successful in doing so. When asked for their working preferences, actors requested that members of the cast avoid trying to direct one another, that consent and communication be an utmost priority, and that the group be generally supportive and respectful of one another.

Overall, I think there ended up being too much play during our process. Collaborators got used to the gentle, playful atmosphere that I established at the start of the process. I sensed this, and as a result I was hesitant to switch into high gear (into a more focused, product-oriented tone of working) later on in the process.

*Production Objectives:* In preparation for the first Scab design meeting, I wrote down the three following goals to share with my designers:

1. “Creating fluid/surreal transitions *and* emphasizing the bulky/cumbersome physical presence of humans & objects (i.e. Phones that dangle from fishing rods and seamlessly enter and exit the world; but also towers of VHS tapes that physically accumulate throughout the show)”

2. “Not falling into the trap of being too literal *and* not getting so deep in the abstract that the story becomes unclear”
3. “Maintaining play and a sense of humor in order to survive the darkness of this world (a
goal both for tone of the production design, and of our collaboration)”

In hindsight, I am proud of these production goals and think that they were insightful. That
being said, the goals I laid out were insufficient. Nowhere in the goals that I shared did I
articulate the story I wanted our production to tell. Partially this was because I was not yet sure
what story I really wanted to tell. Furthermore, I spent too much time with my designers on
intellectual discussion of the dramaturgy of the play and how that could inform the production
design, and not enough time discussing in concrete terms how the play’s dramaturgy would
inform the physical manifestation of the play (i.e. how specific moments of the play should look,
feel, and sound). In addition to being insufficient, the goals I communicated to my designers
were ineffective. I say this because we did not accomplish them. This may be partly because they
were lofty goals for a fairly young production team to achieve working on such a difficult play.
More significantly, though, I believe we simply lost sight of these goals because I did not
effectively hold us to them.

The following are practical takeaways from the approach I took to Establishing a Common
Vocabulary for Scab, framed in terms of how I intend to do things the same or differently as a
director on future theatre productions:

1. Whenever possible, discuss production objectives with designers in concrete/practical
terms and in relation to the events of the play.

2. When setting goals and working vocabularies for the production, the director’s
decisiveness and consistency is key.
3. Having consistent rituals that signify the transition from the outside world into the work of the rehearsal session is useful, especially when working on an emotionally exhausting play. However, it is important that these ritualized activities do not consume too much rehearsal time.

4. Viewpoints has a lot of potential as a vocabulary to keep in my toolbox. That being said, I still have a lot to learn about it.

5. Quantity of research images is good, but less important than making sure that designers understand why each image was chosen.

The Digging Sessions

Viola Spolin describes the second stage of the rehearsal process as “the spontaneous, creative period — the digging sessions” (Spolin 307) in which actors “bring up actions through the exercises or in the reading of the script” and “the director picks them up, enlarges them, and adds something more, if necessary” (Spolin 331). Within this section I will discuss Scab “digging sessions” (Spolin 307). I will also discuss and analyze my approach the key concepts Director as Energy-Source and Speaking Strategically.

Key Concept #4: Director as Energy-Source

In Part one of the Discussion and Analysis of Findings, I made the argument that fueling the work of collaborators with energy is one of the director’s essential responsibilities during the “digging sessions” stage of the rehearsal process (Spolin 307). I also shared that Viola Spolin’s definition of energy in this context is “the intensity of the director’s attention to what the actors are doing, plus the use of every skill you can call up” (Spolin 309). I am naturally a highly
energetic person, and rarely struggle to maintain intensity in my attention to the work of my collaborators. My enthusiasm for the process of collaboration and for trying out the ideas of my collaborators during *Scab* “digging sessions” often seemed to be contagious (Spolin 307). In rehearsals, it was not uncommon for me to find myself (to my own surprise) standing on my chair when the actors were doing something exciting. It is nearly impossible for me to sit when scene work is happening. I am similarly energetic and enthusiastic in my work with designers. I remember after one meeting, *Scab* sound designer Nick Regan seemed surprised and almost giddy—this prompted me to ask what he was thinking. He responded by saying he was not used to working with directors who were willing to try his out-of-the-box ideas, let alone those who encouraged him to go even further, as I had done in our meeting.

Viola Spolin uses her “problem-solving technique” as a way to push actors to create their own energy in pursuit of finding a solution to the problem. However, she warns that “[t]o evolve problems to solve problems requires a person with rich knowledge of the field” (Spolin 42). I am still in the early stages of acquiring knowledge in the field of directing. Though I may be naturally gifted with an abundance of energy, that does not mean that I always know what tools to give my collaborators for them to create their own energy. I am still working through trial and error most of the time, and am not always able to pull out tools that I know are effective from experience. The following are three tools that I tried during digging sessions in hopes of “creating an obstacle that activates the actor’s intuition and spontaneity” (Spolin 309):

1. **Viewpoints Composition**: Composition is a way of practicing Viewpoints. Among other things, Composition is a forum through which Viewpoints can be applied and used to create performance content with an ensemble of actors. It is common practice for theatre directors to use Composition as “an assignment given to an ensemble so that it can create
short, specific theatre pieces addressing a particular aspect of the work” (Bogart and Landau 12). Used in the context of limited rehearsal time, Composition creates a setting for collaboration that is both urgent and structured enough to effectively allows to work from their “impulses and intuition” (12). With any given Composition assignment, the director typically provides the ensemble with “an overall intention or structure as well as a substantial list of ingredients which must be included in the piece” (Bogart and Landau 12). The requirements of adhering to the structure/intention and including all of the given ingredients are obstacles that will ideally—to borrow the words of Viola Spolin—

“activate the actor’s intuition and creativity,” and ignite their energy (Spolin 309). According to the methods of Anne Bogart and Tina Landau, these ingredients may include either “principles that are useful for staging (symmetry versus asymmetry, use of scale and perspective, juxtaposition, etc.) or the ingredients that belong specifically to the Play-World we are working on (objects, textures, colors, sounds, actions, etc.)” (Bogart and Landau 13).

One type of ingredient that we used again and again in this way was found objects. The practice of using everyday found objects in ways that contradict their intended purpose reoccurs throughout Scab—both in the character’s actions and in the description of the physical play-world provided by Sheila Callaghan. Milk crates are used as furniture. Blood is used for feeding a plant. Lawn ornaments are repurposed as living room decoration (Figure 3). A bucket becomes a makeshift vase. A sink becomes a toilet. I decided that our

Figure 3: Sky Wilson as the Virgin Mary, a lawn ornament who comes to life as Mary Androgyne. Photo by Emily Dean (2018). Lighting design by Emily Dean and Brandon Pela. Costume design by Mayme Todd. Make up design by Becca Ward.
production would emphasize this recurring theme by incorporating more moments where objects are used “incorrectly” or for unconventional purposes. All of these moments were discovered through exploratory play during rehearsals, which the actors and I would shape and evaluate in terms of Viewpoints vocabulary, and whether it supported the Surrealist aesthetic that the production was striving for.

In an effort to create a Surrealist aesthetic for the actors’ movement in certain scenes, I used chunks of the rehearsal time to guide actors through an exploration of using elements of their physical surroundings (set, props, costumes, etc.) in a manner that displaced their usual function. In several instances, moments from their exploration was directly utilized in the final blocking for the production. For example, the actor playing Anima, Gwyneth Strope, spent much of one exploration findings different uses for a plastic milk crate. This made it into the final blocking for a section of the play where the character is describing pulling a shirt on and off—the actor demonstrated this action with a milk crate. In addition to its influence on the actors’ blocking, our exploration with found objects also generated content that was incorporated in the production’s final sound design.

The unconventional use of found object supported the themes of Scab, in which nothing is what it seems to be and Anima is struggling to maintain her connection to reality. Furthermore, we were following a long tradition of artists who have used juxtaposition and unconventional use of found objects as a means for creating art that is unrestricted by logic and societal norms. Included in this longstanding tradition are the writers and visual artists of the 1920s-1940s. The Surrealists made “familiar or everyday objects… strange and recognisable” by juxtaposing unrelated or contrasting objects, and
by alienating the objects from their original, practical functions (Montagu 15). Using found objects in this way allowed for “disorientation of the rational world like that experienced in dreams or hallucinations” (15). More recently, the tradition of found objects also includes the ensemble-based, experimental theatre companies such as Frantic Assembly and Elevator Repair Service. Fabricating “chance encounters” between found objects and other disparate sources is a strategy that the experimental theatre company Elevator Repair Service uses frequently (Montagu 13). Sarah Bailes is a theatre artist and Performance Studies professor at New York University who had the opportunity to observe the methods of Elevator Repair Service artistic director John Collins. The following is an excerpt from her observations on the company’s use of objects as sources for devising performance content:

[A] rehearsal might proceed by taking two or three disparate things - an object, a piece of text, and an interesting sound, for example - to see what happens when they are placed together and what effects they produce as a result of such layering… attempting different possibilities that combine and displace the usual function (Bailes 91-92).

Elevator Repair Service’s use of objects as sources for devising is comparable to the use of objects as ingredients for Viewpoints Composition that is mentioned in The Viewpoints Book (Bogart and Landau). Therefore, it seemed only natural to combine Viewpoints Composition and exploration found objects a la the Surrealists in our methods for developing performance content for Scab.

In some theatre productions, the work that the ensemble creates via Composition may directly become a part of the final product to be performed. In other cases,
Composition is used as a launching point for exploration of a pre-existing play-script, as a “method for revealing to ourselves our hidden thoughts and feelings about the material” by “generating… work around a source” that is directly or indirectly connected to the content of the play (Bogart and Landau 12). Viewpoints Composition was utilized in both of the aforementioned ways at different points during the *Scab* rehearsal process.

During the first week of rehearsals, we used Composition to accomplish multiple foundational tasks and objectives. First, I tasked the actors with creating a composition all together as a way of introducing the practical application of Viewpoints vocabulary, and as a tool for building ensemble mentality. I split the cast into two groups and provided each with a set of ingredients to include in a short, textless performance. The ingredients I selected for each group included themes and motifs related to *Scab* (such as “the ocean” and “family”) and a few of the nine Viewpoints of time and space (for context, the nine Viewpoints are tempo, duration, kinesthetic response, repetition, shape, gesture, architecture, spatial relationship, and topography) (Bogart and Landau 8-11). The groups performed for one another, and we all practiced using Viewpoints to describe the movement in the performance. We also discussed content generated in the compositions that reminded us of moments in *Scab*. This meant we were thinking about the script through a primarily physical lens, which enabled us to make discoveries about the play different from those made during table-work conversations in the days prior. This first Composition activity took place during our third rehearsal, on February 28th.
On March 1st, more rehearsal time was set aside for exploration of physicality through Composition. This time we worked more specifically within the given circumstances of the play, though we still did not use any text, and were not working of the intention of generating content (i.e. blocking) that would be included in the final staging of the play. This time, actors worked in small group of two or three (according to which characters they interacted with most in the play) and explored their characters’ physical tendencies. They also explored the physical dynamics of group relationships within the play. Short performance pieces were created using ingredients that I selected for them. These varied in nature from one group to another, and included characters’ super objectives, music played from a laptop, random objects in the rehearsal room, the architecture of the rehearsal room, and adjectives describing pertinent aspects of the play. This day of Composition-making was highly successful, and produced content that greatly informed our production by creating the foundation for how we would articulate the events of the play.

The group with the actors playing Virgin Mary/Mary Androgyne and her Angels found particular success with this physical exploration (Figure 4). There is very little explicit information about these three characters given by Sheila Callaghan in the script. Therefore, the actors were free to form their characters and determine how their group functioned. Since the Angels do not speak (apart from singing), their physical relationship to their mother (Mary Androgyne) and to Anima was crucial.
There were also times when Viewpoints vocabulary and Composition methods were directly integrated into process of blocking the show. I frequently encouraged the actors to generate their own blocking, using Viewpoints and a set of ingredients provided by me. Sometimes this meant providing very concrete “ingredients,” such as places for them enter and exit, or a stage picture for them to reach at a certain moment. Other times it would be something more abstract meant to inspire them to think creatively.

For more information on the nine Viewpoints and discussion on how they can be used as a working vocabulary in the theatre, please see Discussion and Analysis of Findings/ Part Two/ “Establishing a Common Vocabulary,” or read The Viewpoints Book: A Practical Guide to Viewpoints and Composition.

2. **The Anger Run**: The Anger Run is an exercise developed by South African director/teacher Brian Astbury. Brian Astbury founded The Space, which was “South Africa’s first Apartheid-era professional, non-racial theatre” (Astbury 17). Later, Astbury moved to London and where he went on to have an accomplished directing and teaching career (Astbury 19). I was first introduced to the work of Brian Astbury when I participated in the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society (SDC) Fellowship competition at the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival (KCACTF) in January 2018. At this point in time, most of my secondary research for my thesis was complete. However, I was intrigued by the description of Astbury’s Emotional Access and Resistance Techniques that was given by one of our workshop leaders. I decided to read Astbury’s book, *Trusting the Actor*, and learn more about his directing and teaching methodologies. Further research into Astbury confirmed my initial interest, and I added
some of his exercises to the list of potential tools to test out during the *Scab* rehearsal process.

The objective of the Anger Run, one of Astbury’s Resistance Exercises, is to “create a wave of emotion [on which] the character can surf with the actor” (Astbury 169). The point is not to channel anger, specifically. Anger is simply a device to generate energy, which can then take the actor to whatever emotional life the play demands. In Astbury’s words, “[i]t’s all about energy. Set energy in motion and things happen. The text, and what lives beneath its surface, will give that energy direction and focus” (169). Guidelines for the exercise are simple: “Just do the speech with as much anger as you can muster. There is no ‘motivation’. The ‘reason’ is to release anger” (Astbury 145). In this exercise, the obstacle activating the actors’ intuition and creativity is tangible. The actor is presented with a physical obstacle that they must overcome in order to achieve their objective (for example, a barricade of chairs between them and their scene partner, or a person pushing against their shoulders). The actor experiences increased urgency in accomplishing their objective; energy also increases. With increased energy and no time to think, the actor doing the Anger Run exercise will often act intuitively and spontaneously in order to overcome the obstacle to their objective. When this occurs, the exercise is a success (Astbury 145).

My trial of this exercise as a tool for energizing the work of my actors was somewhat successful. I used it in multiple scene work rehearsals when actors were struggling to find energy and organic emotional connection to the material. One of my actors, Sarah Robinson, was hesitant at the beginning of the exercise, so I had her throw chairs around the rehearsal room while speaking text from the scene we were rehearsing,
as an adaptation of the “Resistance Techniques” that Astbury describes in his book, *Trusting the Actor* (Astbury 51). Sarah’s energy skyrocketed with this addition to the exercise, and afterwards she stated that she had never felt that kind of power before. This is where, for the first time, Sarah found the strength that is the core of Christa’s character. The two prominent female characters in *Scab* are Anima and Christa. Both characters are funny, intelligent, resilient, and headstrong, even though they first appear to be complete opposites due to contrasting external behavior. Completing the Anger Run exercise during scene work was the first moment in which Sarah broke through from playing the idea of Christa to actually showing us a real person who can be desperately pleading or playfully flirting in one moment and dangerously angry in the next.

Unfortunately, we struggled to sustain the results of the exercise. Sarah struggled consistently with energy, as did many of the younger actors in the production. It was a reoccurring problem that the actors would “react” instead of “acting” (Spolin 39). This was problematic because, in the words of Viola Spolin, “[t]o react is protective and constitutes withdrawal from the environment” (Spolin 39).

I tried many strategies for empowering my actors to “reach out”—to “act upon environment, which in turn acts upon player, catalytic action thus creating interaction that makes process and change (building of a scene) possible,” they continued to (Spolin 39). And yet it was an ongoing source of confusion to me—they were enthusiastic in the discussion of the acting work, but would then become cautious and reactive once they had entered the work itself. On the first day of rehearsal, I wrote in my notebook that the cast was “a soft group. Sleepy. Gentle. Loving.” To be clear—I do not fault the actors for this at all. I am sure it is because I was in some way unclear about what was needed from them, or about how to bridge our discussion of the play into
its physical realization. I also wonder if I was overly cautious about protecting the actors from the potentially triggering or emotionally distressing content of the play (surrounding abuse, trauma, etc.). It is possible that I modeled for them an overly precautious approach to building the production, when what I was trying to do was create a space where they felt safe to dive headfirst into the material.

The following are practical takeaways from the approach I took to being an Energy-Source for Scab “digging sessions,” framed in terms of how I intend to do things the same or differently as a director on future theatre productions (Spolin 307):

1. Energy is an essential component of watching rehearsal, but so is discipline. Make a list of what to be watching for during each stage of the rehearsal process, and keep a print-out of it by my side until it I am confident that it has been internalized.

2. Be clear about which actor is driving each scene energy-wise, and communicate to that actor when they are and are not accomplishing that.

3. Be on the lookout for actors with a tendency to react instead of acting on their scene partners. Squash this tendency early, and/or look avoid casting actors who struggle immensely with this.

4. Continue developing my practical understanding of various tools for prompting energy in collaborators. Continued practice with Viola Spolin’s problem-solving technique and Brian Astbury’s Resistance Techniques is a good place to start.
Key Concept #5: *Speaking Strategically*

This area of directing is probably where I am naturally the weakest. Having ADHD is a benefit in that I am a highly creative thinker, but the flip side of that is that my thought process is often nonlinear. As a result, I sometimes have difficulty communicating my ideas to designers and actors in a manner that is concise and coherent. This is highly problematic because, in the words of Francis Hodge, “what the director manages to [communicate to audiences] will depend entirely on her talent for, and her capabilities in, communicating with these collaborators” (Hodge 59).

*Giving Instructions/Parameters:* I am guilty of “wasting time” explaining and/or justifying my methods (Mitchell 122). I do this both when I am anxious about whether an exercise or method will work, and when I am particularly excited about an exercise or method. I am generally guilty of talking too much when fewer words would not only suffice, but would also use less time and leave less room for confusion.

I can see in hindsight that I sometimes fell into the trap of using theatre vocabularies in a way that was overly intellectual and not based enough in practice (in the development of an actual theatre production). I need to practice giving instructions that are actually useful to my actors and designers in the process transmitting ideas into the physical realm (Alexander 57). I plan on following the advice of Katie Mitchell, which instructs young directors to “practice translating your intellectual understanding of the material into specific tasks for the actors to execute” (Mitchell 5). The language of my instructions sometimes, in the words of Viola Spolin, “dead and useless” (Spolin iv). They were certainly not always the clear and pragmatic driving directions that Mitchell prescribes (Mitchell 5).
Side-Coaching: I do lots of side-coaching during rehearsals within the “Digging Sessions” stage of the rehearsal process (Spolin 307). I find that it is extremely useful in helping actors build awareness of things like low energy, actor ticks, and tempo, so that they can begin to coach themselves. One thing I am still working on is keeping my side-coaching comments brief and consistent. Brevity is important so that the coaching does not interrupt the flow of whatever the actors are doing so much that they have to stop and reset entirely. Using consistent phrases and vocabulary in side-coaching is valuable for a similar reason. When the same coaching phrases are used repeatedly, the actors become familiar with what it is you are asking of them and there is no need to spend time explaining. “See unlabeled!” “Expand that gesture! Pause!” and “Act! Don’t react” are a few of the many side-coaching phrases used by Viola Spolin (Spolin 374, 376). All of this makes it possible for the side-coaching and the actors’ work to weave together without getting tangled and bringing the flow of the digging session to a halt. Viola Spolin provides numerous suggestions for useful side-coaching phrases in her book, *Improvisation for the Theater*. My efforts to improve my own side-coaching abilities will begin by taking a closer look at Spolin’s suggested vocabulary.

Giving Feedback: The tendency of my ADHD brain is to always be thinking of multiple things at once, and during *Scab* rehearsals I would often find myself taking notes on things that were tangential to what I actually wanted to be focusing on. In my training as an actor, I am used to observing my classmates work and focusing my attention on moment-to-moment details and technique. As a result, I sometimes found it difficult to watch the cast of *Scab* during rehearsals without falling into a similar mindset. Furthermore, my attention would often get stuck

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3 For explanations of these coaching phrases and many more, see the “Glossary of Side-Coaching Phrases” in *Improvisation for the Theatre* (Spolin 374-376).
prematurely on aspects of the work that did not yet need tending to. For instance, in my notes from a table read with actors on the second day of rehearsal I was already thinking in terms of details such as how the actors might approach individual moments within scenes, places where diction was lacking, questions to ask them during scene work, etc. This problem was exacerbated by a lack of confidence in my understanding of which aspects of the actors’ work I should give feedback on at any given stage in the rehearsal process. This uncertainty also applied to my ongoing communication with designers. Because I struggled with knowing what to focus my attention on when, and then with actually committing my attention to that thing, I would often write down an overwhelming volume of notes while watching actors work. Subsequently, I would struggle to efficiently determine which things that I had written down would actually be beneficial to share with actors. I certainly confused myself in this way, and it is likely that at times I also confused the actors.

For future productions, I did think of one adjustment I could make to my working methods in order to make them more ADHD-friendly. After run-throughs and before giving notes and/or setting which sections to work/polish during the remainder of that day’s rehearsal, I could schedule 30 minutes of buffer time (Jory 229). During those 30 minutes, actors would be free to journal or eat or discuss the run with one another, while I would sort through my notes and talk with my assistant director(s), dramaturg, and stage manager. This would allow me to unscramble my brain and make a more thoughtful—less rushed and arbitrary—decision on how to use the remainder of our time.
The following are practical takeaways from the approach I took to Speaking Strategically during the Scab process, framed in terms of how I intend to do things the same or differently as a director on future theatre productions:

1. It is the director’s responsibility to give actors feedback that is useful (for that person at that point in the process) and within the realm of what that actor is able to achieve.

2. Treat instructions to actors like driving directions: utility is far more important than eloquence (Mitchell 5).

3. Theatre is a primarily physical art form; talk less and do more.

Polishing and Integration

According to Viola Spolin, the most important goal for the third and final stage of the rehearsal process is “polishing and integrating all production facets into a unity” (Spolin 307). Within this section I will discuss how I worked in pursuit of these goals during late-process rehearsals, before and after the transition from the rehearsal room into the performance space. I will also discuss and analyze my approach to the key concepts that my research showed to be of significance to this stage of the rehearsal process. These include Moving into the Space—A Delicate Transition and Necessary Know-How for Articulating the Final Product.

Figure 5: Anima (played by Gwyneth Strope) stares at Susan the houseplant. Prop by Tim Snyder with lights designed by Emily Dean and Brandon Pelar, and engineered with the help of Ben Gump. Lighting design by Emily Dean and Brandon Pelar. Set design by Cate Phillips. Costume design by Mayme Todd. Photo by Emily Dean (2018).
Key Concept #6: Moving Into the Space—A Delicate Transition

Earlier in this paper (in Part One of Discussion and Analysis of Findings) I shared director Katie Mitchell’s warning on the delicacy and necessity of managing a smooth transition from the rehearsal room to the performance space. I failed unequivocally in doing so, and the consequences were as Mitchell warned. The actors’ work and my “hold on their work” were weakened (Mitchell 201). Consequentially, I had to “waste time rebuild[ing] their confidence and their acting choices” (Mitchell 201). The following examples illustrate how I fell short in protecting the actors’ confidence, and in cementing their work so as to withstand the numerous production elements that get added during technical rehearsals.

*Early integration of design/tech elements:* We did not integrate design and technical elements early enough in the rehearsal room for it to significantly lighten the actors’ load going into technical rehearsal, despite my having encountered warnings to do so in my research on directing. We did begin to work technical elements in the rehearsal room as soon as they were ready, including Susan the houseplant and the costumes of the three graduate students, but it was not enough.

The houseplant prop was designed and constructed with Tim Snyder (Figure 5). It was built with interior space for coiled LED strips and a large battery to power them. The LED strips were supposed to be visible through holes in the base of the plant. Unfortunately, this ended up failing, and the lights were not visible from the audience. On top of this, the extra time spent trying to correct the technical difficulties meant that the prop was not available for the actors to work with until tech rehearsals were underway.

*Figure 6: Rendering by Mayme Todd, depicting her costume design for the graduate student characters (2018).*
Costume designer Mayme Todd dressed the three actors playing the three interconnected graduate student characters in jackets sewn to one another by lengths of thread (Figure 6). It was crucial for telling the story that the actors were physically connected in some way. However, the jackets seriously inhibited the actors’ movement and we did not have sufficient rehearsal time with the jackets for these actors to feel truly comfortable and confident with their characters going into technical rehearsals.

“Playing at performance level” (Jory 209): I did not push hard enough to get the actors to “play at performance level” in preparation for the transition into a larger space (209). In Tips: Ideas for Directors, director Jon Jory admits that there were many times as a young director when he “allowed the actors to play at a more intimate level in rehearsal only to lose the play in the transfer to the larger space” (Jory 209). This detail comes within a tip on “Playing at Performance Level” (209). I also made this mistake, directing Scab. We rehearsed in a rehearsal room in the Forbes Center for the Performing Arts, allocated to us by the School of Theatre and Dance. The rehearsal room was nowhere near the size of the performance space. Many of the scenes in Scab are highly intimate and between only two people. Even in a small and shallow rehearsal space I was struggling to get the actors to size up their physicality and volume in these sections of the show. I pushed them to be bigger and louder, but not enough to compensate for how much of their work would be swallowed in the larger space.

Actor/Audience Relationship: I did not effectively support the actors in avoiding an “exhibitionist” relationship with the audience (Spolin 13). Several of my actors were self-conscious and sometimes struggled to tune out the audience (i.e. any members of the cast and production team who were present) during scene work. This usually occurred when they were unsure of something in the scene—such as the given circumstances; the memorization,
pronunciation, or meaning of their lines; where a scene took place within the arc of a single character or a relationship; the acting style called for (it sometime shifted from scene to scene as we shifted genres from Realism to Surrealism or vice versa); and/or their relationship to the audience.

We particularly struggled with exhibitionism/self-consciousness during sections of direct address. The actor Gwyneth Strope, who played Anima, had several monologues where she directly addressed and interacted with audience members. Both Gwyneth and I struggled with how to approach these sections of the play during rehearsals where we had no test audience. It was only later, once we had people outside of the Scab production team in the audience for dress rehearsals, that Gwyneth figured out how to have fun with these monologues and treat them as a scene with the audience, rather than as an audition for them. In hindsight, I am not sure if I was useful in helping her to know how to navigate this relationship with the audience, or if she eventually just figured it out herself.

Runthroughs & Spacing: Within my research, there were multiple directors (Jon Jory and William Ball) who argued the importance of completing four to five runthroughs of the play before moving into the performance space. Viola Spolin states that running the entire play without stopping give the actors the opportunity to fully experience their emotional journey of their character and how this corresponds with the arc of the play’s events (Spolin 314). Having four to five runthroughs provides the repetition necessary to solidify the arc of the play (as each actor gradually commits their arc to muscle memory). Furthermore, it serves to stormproof the actor’s work in anticipation of the barrage of new design and technical elements that get introduced in the performance space.
In *Tips: Ideas for Directors*, Jon Jory posits that it is essential to plan plenty of time for spacing in the interim between moving from the rehearsal room to the performance space and starting technical rehearsals. Jory explains that this time is ideally used “to check whether the planned blocking works well on the set” (Jory 231). Generally speaking, I did not get us the time that we needed in the performance space in order to be sufficiently prepared by opening night. My stage manager and I allotted time before technical rehearsals to spacing, but several factors rendered the amount of time we had insufficient. We made the transition into the performance space on March 22nd, with 14 days left before the show’s opening on April 5th. At that point in time, we had never run the entire play without having to pause and/or skip over sections where the blocking was incomplete or we were lacking crucial technical elements. Multiple factors led to this being the case. First off, I wanted some of the blocking to be created via the actors’ exploration of the space (through the lens of Viewpoints, with a particular focus on Architecture). Additionally, our rehearsal conditions were so far from our performance conditions. I knew from Jory’s tips that “the nice open space in the rehearsal room… always impacts composition differently when you add the walls” (Jory 231). Consequentially, I thought it would be a waste of time to attempt blocking certain scenes (scenes that were particularly physical and/or had significant interaction with the set) before we had access to the set. A third reason for our lack of run-throughs in the rehearsal room is that we did not yet have the completed music for the song sung by the Angels and Mary Androgyne (Callaghan 47). I felt like I did not have enough information to block the scene until I had the music that would underscore it.

It brought me comfort to know that many of the directors who I studied had similar struggles with the transition from the rehearsal room into the performance space when they were first
starting out. That being said, Jory shared this tip with the hopes that readers could learn from his mistakes, not repeat them. I did read Jory’s tip on leaving time for spacing rehearsals during my preparation for directing Scab, along with all of the others in his book, but I clearly did not internalize it or register its significance. I have learned that it is one thing to read a tip (or take note of an exercise) and another thing altogether to internalize it thoroughly. Only when you accomplish the latter will that directing knowledge be accessible to you for recall and application in the heat of the rehearsal room.

This sort of disconnect—between my research on other directors’ methodologies and the application of that research—was a common occurrence during this project, unfortunately. I pursued breadth and quantity of research during the first part of this project. The depth and quality of how I understood the research material suffered as a result. Consequently, during Scab rehearsals I often found myself relying on instinct or on knowledge I had acquired prior to the start of project. The silver lining of this is that I realized how much I already knew about directing prior to and also learned about my natural strengths and weaknesses.

The following are practical takeaways on Moving into the Space—A Delicate Transition and the Scab process, framed in terms of how I intend to do things the same or differently as a director on future theatre productions:

1. Fight for time in the performance space, especially with shows that are very physical. Don’t settle if I know that this is essential to the success of the production.

2. I should always ask for a model box from my scenic designers. I should also get better at reading ground plans and lighting plots. These preemptive measures might help me to avoid being surprised by what the blocking actually looks like in the performance space.
3. Avoid rehearsing scenes out of order whenever possible. Doing so wastes precious opportunities for the actors to develop their understanding of the play’s arc.

4. Always make time for multiple full run-throughs before moving out of the rehearsal room.

5. Push actors to “play at performance level” from the start of the rehearsal process (Jory 209).

6. Bring in practice audiences to rehearse sections of direct address.

Key Concept #7: Necessary Know-How for Articulating the Final Product

The “Polishing and Integration” stage of the Scab process was far too rushed. Really, it was quite short. There was significant performance content being created all the way up to tech week. We did not really get to the narrow end of the funneled sculpting process, because there were still so many large changes that needed to be made up until opening. Part of this was due to poor planning for snow, illness, technical difficulties, and other inevitable obstacles that slowed us down. It seemed as though there was always one ingredient holding us up: we weren’t in the space yet (so we could not block Anima’s dream sequence because it was entirely informed by the actor’s relationship to the Architecture of the performance space), or we did not have the music yet (so we were not able choreograph/learn the angel rave song), or we did not have rehearsal costumes yet (so we could not develop the graduate students’ physicality). To some extent, it makes sense that we got behind schedule. Scab would be a difficult play for anyone to produce in the amount of time we had (just four weeks of rehearsal, including tech week). On top of that, I was inexperienced, many of my designers were young, and my actors were young. This
meant that we spent more time on unforeseen technical difficulties with design elements, and that we had to spend more time on basic technique with the actors in rehearsal time.

Even when it became clear that I would need to step in and do more managing (rather than guiding) of the actors, I continued trying to guide them to stronger choices and solving external problems (such as volume, staying present during scene work, etc.) by returning back to technique exercises with individual actors in spot rehearsals in the space. In other words, I saw that we were running out of time to create an articulate performance product, and realized that they weren’t going to get there organically, and that I would have to tell that what to do in an artificial, product-oriented way. Instead of taking those necessary short cuts, though, I returned to square one and tried to teach them the process-oriented tools to strengthen their performances organically.

All in all, I am still lacking in this area of directing. The fact of the matter is that I am not yet an experienced director, nor am I an extensively trained director. Therefore, there are many things that I do not know. Luckily, I learned from my research on other directors that many feel this way when they first start directing. There are many ways to go about accumulating knowledge and skill in the field of directing, but all of them take time and effort. I have a lot to learn in all areas of directing, but my current priorities are getting better at using stage composition to strategically draw the audience’s focus in a way that supports the story; increasing my fluency in technical theatre vocabularies (including ground plans and lighting plots); and finding time management strategies that allow me to schedule and adhere to rehearsal plans more effectively. I intend to grow my skills and knowledge in these aspects of directing through independent study of directing literature, through assisting and/or observing more
experienced directors, through self-producing small-scale theatre productions, and through formally continuing my directing education in a graduate-level academic setting.

The following are practical takeaways on *Necessary-Know How for Articulating the Final Product* and the *Scab* process, framed in terms of how I intend to do things the same or differently as a director on future theatre productions:

1. Ask for advice from trusted advisors and directing mentors when you need it!
2. Becoming a skilled director takes time and practice. Academic study of directing alone is inadequate. To learn how to direct, you have to direct.
3. Maintain a sense of humor and humility at all costs. I am still learning, and I will make mistakes.
IV. Conclusions

At the beginning of this project, I set out to research other directors methodologies, in the hopes that I could learn more about myself through the process of applying aspects of these methodologies to Scab. Through reflection on Scab and self-assessment of my work as director of the production, I made many discoveries about myself as a director. These are described throughout Part Two of the Discussion and Analysis of Findings section of this paper. There are three summative pieces of advice that I feel are imperative to reiterate here, though. These are both for my future self, and for any reader of this paper who can make use of what I have learned:

1. *Be decisive about the story you want to tell.* Throughout the Scab process, I struggled with indecision. The result of this was many of the decisions I made (regarding the articulation of the story) were based on someone else’s opinion, made to support my production research (rather than my own opinions), were made hastily and/or arbitrarily, or were not made at all.

2. Once you have made a decision about what story you want to tell, or what methods you want to employ in the directing process, *commit to your decision.* Do this out of respect for yourself and for your collaborators. Trust your original judgement enough to follow through with that choice, so that you give it a chance to succeed.

3. Finally, *be realistic.* Create a show that is possible with the resources available (most significant of which are time and the experience level of all involved).

I have truly enjoyed the type of research and introspective reflection that went into the creation of this thesis. I think it is important to be self-aware as an artist, and to actively reflect...
throughout the journey of learning the craft. I intend to continue this type of thinking and learning and reflection, and will likely use much of the research that I did here as a tool for that work. In the future, I hope to be able to do this work in a way that is healthier (more manageable alongside my other projects and responsibilities at that point in time), more organized (designing my research with more structure, picking tools deliberately and with attention to the specific needs of the production), and does not interfere with the best interest of any coinciding theatrical productions (by interjecting conflicting priorities for how my time and energy and attention are spent). I think that my work on this project and on Scab have prepared me to be able to make those adjustments in how I approach future directing and research endeavors. I know that they have taught me a great deal about directing, about leadership and collaboration, and about my own skills, tendencies, passions, and aspirations.

I leave this project—and my time as an actor, director, and student at JMU with an arsenal of tips and tools that I have learned through academic research, tips and advice from dear mentors, and hands on production experience. In an interview with Gabriella Giannachi and Mary Luckhurst, Katie Mitchell once said, “As a director I think that I have to keep working on myself as a human being, to improve my capacities to direct, to get better at the craft. This can preoccupy you for a whole lifetime” (Giannachi and Luckhurst 102). I look forward to going on that same, lifelong, journey.
## V. Appendices

### Appendix A: Interview Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How can I further develop my skills and methods as a director by borrowing tools from other directors and testing them through practical application?</th>
<th>What can I borrow from [individual director]'s process, that might work for me?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What independent pre-production work does this director typically do (script analysis, research, etc.)?</td>
<td>How does this director analyze a play?</td>
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<td>How does this director utilize research?</td>
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<td>How does this director collaborate with the rest of their production team (and in particular, with designers)?</td>
<td>What materials (or instruction) does this director typically provide designers (regarding the director's research and/or production approach)?</td>
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<td>How does this director structure design and production meetings?</td>
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<td>How does this director incorporate movement work into the rehearsal process?</td>
<td>How does this director incorporate tablework (discussion, research, and text work) into the rehearsal process?</td>
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<td>Are there any specific exercises/tricks/activities this director frequently uses during rehearsals (for scene work, warmups, table work, etc.)?</td>
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<td>How does this process evolve/change later in the process, during technical and dress rehearsals?</td>
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<td>How does this director manage their career as a professional theatre artist?</td>
<td>What are key characteristics of their work?</td>
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<td>Who does this director frequently collaborate with?</td>
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<td>How does this director manage their health and wellbeing as a human (while directing)?</td>
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<td>What is this director?'s philosophy on directing?</td>
<td>How does this director define an artist's role in society?</td>
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<td>Who and/or what influences and inspires them?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Camcorder/Technology</td>
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<td>&quot;A phone rings thrice in the blackness&quot; (7)</td>
<td>&quot;A large bucket of dead wildflowers festers in the corner&quot; (7)</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;A phone rings thrice in the blackness&quot; (7)</td>
<td>&quot;A large bucket of dead wildflowers festers in the corner&quot; (7)</td>
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<tr>
<td>CHRISTA: &quot;it's five hour flight the bus system here is appalling&quot; (7)</td>
<td>&quot;But even dead plants would be welcome as I said goodbye to the inorganic walls and the plasticmetalwood&quot; (11)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Christa enters with camcorder (7)</td>
<td>&quot;But even dead plants would be welcome as I said goodbye to the inorganic walls and the plasticmetalwood&quot; (11)</td>
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<tr>
<td>ANIMA: &quot;third ring that shot me out of bed&quot; &quot;as I ran to the phone I felt the cellulite&quot; &quot;the black was segmented into photograph pixels&quot; (8)</td>
<td>ANIMA: &quot;I don't own a vase&quot; CHRISTA &quot;Can I throw them out&quot; ANIMA &quot;No&quot;</td>
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Appendix C: Design Meeting Metaphor Brainstorm

The following is a list of production metaphors for Scab, generated by members of the design team and shared in our second design meeting.

- “Sweaters unravelling from the ceiling into massive puddles” – Becca Ward, Scab Make-up Designer

- “A voicemail that is left in the heat of the moment that says what you think not what you mean” – Nick Regan, Scab Sound Designer

- “An icy rapid pinning you against a towering cliff face” – Tim Snyder, Scab Props Designer

- “Like being trapped in a dark room feeling along the wall for a light switch, except once you find it the bulb burns out and you are left in darkness” – Brandon Pelar, Scab Co-Lighting Designer

- “Like losing something in the dark” – Emily Dean, Scab Co-Lighting Designer

- “A collective fever dream that shows everyone who they really are. Everything is sick, hurting, throbbing” – J. Travis Cooper, Scab Assistant Director

- “Trying to drink cold cherry coke with a really burnt tongue” – Lily Komarow, Scab Assistant Director

- “Looking at something through a melting magnifying glass” – Mayme Todd, Scab Costume Designer and Publicist

- “Running a race, but people are running around you and you can’t pass them, also there are wipeout obstacles” – Cate Phillips, Scab Scenic Designer
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