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Artist Statement

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“In our world it is becoming harder and harder to communicate with each other simply and honestly, on a gut level. Yet we still go to the theatre to have a communion with the truth of our existence, and, ideally, we leave it knowing that that kind of communication is still possible.”

—Bruder, et. al., *A Practical Handbook for the Actor*, pages 6-7.

Our world is a hurried place; it is suffering and we are suffering. I am an artist living amidst a global pandemic. Live theatre is virtually non-existent. Unemployment in the United States is higher than during the Great Depression, and economists warn that the recession will be worse than during that time. Racial violence proliferates and somehow the call to end systemic racism is controversial. Capitalism continues to win the day. How and what do we create amidst these circumstances? For whom do we create? Of what value is art—or, for that matter, beauty? Where can we find sanctuary and healing? Is it even possible to *reach* another any longer? These are the questions that I, as an artist of the theatre, wrestle with. I begin with quoting from Bruder’s text, then, because it captures the root of the anxieties embedded within my own questions: “it is becoming harder and harder to communicate with each other.” Yet, Bruder also productively grounds me in what has, for decades now, been a core philosophy of my life and work: the theatre remains a sacred space for those who meet there. I conceive of this sacred space as one for brave ideas, for exploring truths, and for making visible the invisible.

As a director, I engage theatre as an art, but also as a powerful social tool that cultivates community and shapes individual and collective consciousness. I am drawn to works with brave ideas presented in imaginative forms; I am particularly drawn to non-realism, magic realism, dream plays, and metatheatre. With extensive training in dance and music, I am particularly well-suited to works with lyrical language and/or that call for

movement-based acting approaches. Thematically, I am compelled by works that explore the ephemeral and the perennial; these works make visible the invisible in a manner consistent with Peter Brook's Holy Theatre.

I am also committed to theatre that speaks directly and boldly to social-political injustices. In this way, the work of August Boal and his notion that theatre is a rehearsal for revolution is a primary influence. Here I extend Brook's notion of making visible the invisible to center on working with plays that destabilize dominant systems of power and dominant rhetoric in favor of amplifying historically suppressed and even erased narratives, and the voices of underrepresented groups. My research on LGBT dramatic literature deliberately intersects with my artistic work in this way. I am motivated to explore the intersection of theory and practice, moving beyond the theorizing of plays' rhetorical purposes to working toward the actualization of those rhetorical purposes. As a lesbian theatre artist, I recognize the ways that my identity positions me to explore this work, even as I recognize that my experience does not represent the whole lesbian experience, and certainly not the whole of LGBT experience. I similarly recognize the opportunities and limitations of my identity as a white theatre artist. I recognize the systemic white supremacy in America and acknowledge that the American theatre has failed BIPOC artists. I admit I have been complicit in these failings. I am an artist who seeks to listen to BIPOC; I am an artist who seeks to make space for BIPOC artists; I am an artist who is an ally; I am an artist committed to engaging in an artistic praxis that functions as a form of "ethically-guided citizenship."¹ To that end, critical reflection, dialogue, and redressive action are crucial to my praxis.

A note on logistics: in terms of how I approach artistic projects, I am in accord with scenic designer Robert Edmund Jones, who has spoken of there being no exact formula. But like Jones, I engage in a creative process that is highly intentional. As Jones has said, "to ask ourselves, why did that artist do that thing in that particular way instead of in some other way? Is to take the first step towards true creation."² With this in mind, my praxis is characterized by four explicit strategies: scrupulous textual analysis, dramaturgical research, the development of a central production metaphor, and extensive and flexible collaboration with all creative

¹ Elliot, David, et.al., *Artistic Citizenship: Artistry, Social Responsibility, and Ethical Praxis*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 6.

² Robert Edmund Jones, *The Dramatic Imagination*, (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 2004), 27.

partners. I seek an integrated praxis that marries the world of the play with the real-world circumstances from which the play emerges. I bridge this to the real-world in which the play will be presented through a clear concept that realizes the play in a relevant, coherent, and unified form.