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**Reflection on Participating in the 2017 Annual Play:**  
*Machinal*

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Annual Play 2017 –*Machinal*

### Reflection on being a Stage Manager

I still remembered that I incited Alex to be the stage manager with me last semester. After raising our hands when Doctor John asked who wanted to be the stage manager of this play, we were both very worried and excited about our decisions. We were worried because Alex and I both did not have theatre-related experience before and we didn't know whether we could live up to others' expectations. We were also excited because we were going to break our comfort zones and be involved into theatres with each other. Although I made the decision just because I wanted to accomplish our graduation benchmark at very beginning, I finally turned to love working in the theatre and love this incredible team as well. Although we met with various difficulties and hardships during the production of the play, we also found out solutions to each problem quickly and presented the show wonderfully for all three days. Although we experienced ups and downs when working with different people, I still found that the project was so valuable and wonderful.

Rumor says that being a stage manager is a very tough job and many people complains about how good friends quarrel when they are cooperating with each other in the theatre. Due to my challenging personality, I determined to being a stage manager and to experiencing everything to see whether those rumors are true or not. To be honest, I was facing with many a problem and can't manager everything very

well in the beginning. As a freshman in the theatre, what I only know was that we needed to have one rehearsal after another. Being a stage manager doesn't need to take huge responsibilities in the early stage because at that time actors and actresses needed to recite lines and therefore we could do nothing with the property, make up, light and sound effect people. As a result, I turned to be a little indolent so that I couldn't devote much to the production. However, when the crew needed to have more and more rehearsals, Alex and I also needed to care about other things and make sure that everything is developing gradually. For example, we needed to discuss with the property team about the background setting. We should communicate with art design and make-up team to ensure that all we produced are in a uniform style (i.e. the 20s style).

But at that moment, a lot of ideas pop up in our minds. Although some ideas are quite creative, we needed to make some compromises and adjustments due to the limitations in the theatre. For example, I initially thought that we could hang the electric chair to the ceiling in SF theatre. It was not until the final episode that we let the chair descend from the very top, which I thought would be very shocked and amazing to audiences. However, my teammates suggest that it could be very dramatic and audiences might laugh out in the ending where they should in a very melancholy and mournful emotion. Furthermore, I also facing with a big difficulty when we are dealing with the setting. It is really hard for us to make out a consistent setting because every episode happens in a very specific setting in this play (e.g. kitchen, office, hotel, hospital, home and prison). However, professor and the director both want us to make a big setting so that property people can move the properties more

quickly and the stage will look more consistent and delicate as well. Alex and I spent a lot of time thinking over how to put and coordinate everything together. Finally, we decided to build up a higher platform which can be the bed in two episodes, a bar table in the bar scene and be a higher standing place for other episodes. Only by changing the bed sheet or placing other small properties could property people change the scene. In fact, property people did a very excellent job when we are performing because they moved the properties in a very rapid speed.

Since we needed to perform at SF theatre and rehearsed in the CFL theatre, many things needed adjusting and ensuring directly in our performing spot. For example, the light, the sound, the property and the blocking. Due to the budget, we only could book a whole week before our performances, Alex and I were very nervous and many things needed to be done there a week before the performances. When we were at the real venue, we started to understand why others consider being a stage manager was a difficult job. Not only did we need to care about the actors and actresses but also we needed to make sure everything follows the schedules we made. Many meaningful things happened during the theatre week. What impressed me most was that we are practicing cue point again and again with actors and lighting people. That moment let me feel that I really was a stage manager and I began to love the job. Unlike the extra rehearsals, tech rehearsals were just for us, staff and actors, to be in accord and to cultivate senses of trust. For example, the first episode has many cue points. I needed to speak to the walkie-talkie: 3, 2, 1. And the light people will give a light to Richard for appearing on the stage. The reason why we needed to practice again and again was because we needed to give the light in the exact moment when

Richard was on the stage. In the very beginning, I couldn't cooperate with light people and Alex and Annie who were responsible for pushing actors to the stage very well. Later, we came up with an efficient way that Alex and Annie need to cue the actor automatically when actors should appear on the stage. And I needed to do is staring at the stage and cuing the light people when I saw the actor show up. I was very nervous when the show was on; however; luckily, we cooperate very well on those three days. There were no big error happen during these three shows and I thought it was because we practiced many times before.

Being a stage manager is not only about to deal with theatre-related issues but also to communicate with different people. I learned a lot lessons in terms of interpersonal communication skills. As for *Machinal*, I initially couldn't show my sympathy to Helen so that couldn't understand why she decided to kill her husband. After discussing with Jason and Annie one night after watching the senior play produced by the German department. They helped me to see many things that I overlooked and we together thought how to make the play more dramatic and easy to understand. It occurred to us that we could add one more episode after the ending. The new episode is about Helen's memory of her happiest day with or maybe without Richard Roe. Helen is speaking to audiences and to herself as well: "Thank you and goodbye." It was that day let Helen understood that she always had a goal in her mind and she finally realized that she needed to pursue freedom instead of being confined to an unhappy marriage with George H. Jones. Many audiences told us that they love the new ending and we were very satisfied because it is our originality. This experience lets me know that we need to listen to each other and discuss with our

teammates. Many good ideas don't come from individuals but from brainstorming together. I also learnt that I needed to be calm under some emergent circumstances. For example, we were a little disappointed about property team because they couldn't finish their tasks very efficiently. In other words, we needed to give their orders one by one, which wasted a lot of time. Due to the time limitation, I became a little restless so that I almost lost my temper when discussing with them. However, I found out being angry could not solve the problem and reversely would create a bad atmosphere for working together. On the contrary, I witnessed that Annie helped the property team to sort the properties together. Later, they knew what they should do and how they should arrange the properties. I figured out that I needed to communicate with others more positively and kindly. What a stage manager needs to do is to maintain a good and happy atmosphere among all the people in the theatre. Aside from learning much knowledge of drama and staging, I also learnt many lessons about how to cooperate, communicate and coordinate with other team members in the play.

There is one more reason why I want to be a member of this year's annual play. After watching the senior play last year, I found out that many people became bosom friends due to that production. I also want to experience the charm of theatres. After one semester, I realized that how amazing and fantastic to work with my college classmates. One week before the play, we spent all day, from morning to evening, to rehearse, practice, eat, chat and work at SF theatre together only for our play. Although it was very dark inside, we rooted for each other and we witnessed how the play grow from nothing. The theatre is really attractive and Alex, Jason and Annie

also ultimately become very good friends now. Thanks to Professor John, I could get the change to be the stage manager this year. I also appreciate each team's hard work and great contribution to the play. I will never forget the background setting, the cue sheet, the telephone ring, the 20s' costumes and everything we created together. I love *Machinal* and I will regard this experience as a crazy and fantastic dream.