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

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Three Things I've Learned From Being a Stage Manager

To begin with the reason why I was one of the stage managers of annual play, first of all, because Professor Basourakos generously gave me this opportunity, but most of all, it is because my good friend Boyni Ni, later my stage managing partner, talked me into doing this. He persuaded me successfully by saying that if I become stage managers together with him, we will have so much fun participating in an drama production. More importantly, on top of all that fun we can both use this course as our learning outcome for graduation benchmark. Thus, after three months of those crazily fulfilling days, what was left was not only the good times we had, but also three valuable lessons that I will be proud to tell people when the topic “one of the most memorable experience in college” is brought up in conversations.

I am aware that confessing my original intentions might make this decision of mine seem random and spontaneous, but didn't all good stories begin with a careless protagonist who will later on have a big life-realizing turning point? Although I wouldn't say the realization I had from stage managing is as sensational as a Hollywood drama, but these three lessons that I am about to elaborate truly had an effect on my perspectives towards a number of matters.

Before enrolling in this course, I can say that I haven't had the experience of closely working with a group of people on a joint project while being one of the big guns making important decisions; therefore, it was actually quite an exciting challenge for me, and I consider it more as a job than a three-credit course at school. As soon as I start taking up the duty of a stage manager, the first thing that I noticed and learned is that people do encounter communication problems in workplace. In the book that Professor Basourkos picked out for us, *The Back Stage Guide to Stage*

Management, the importance of communication is emphasized again and again throughout the book. Ideally, “stage managers are responsible and adaptable communicators who have the ability to handle and coordinate diverse groups of artistic personalities with tactful discipline and a sense of humor” (Kelly 20). While fully understanding every word Kelly said about being a good stage manager, I find it incredibly hard to communicate effectively, accurately, and pleasantly all at the same time. Before this, I don’t even think communicating would be a problem at all. Nevertheless, I discovered the fact that when people are dealing with large and complicated issues, there is a very big chance that everyone’s on a different page. Sometimes people could even be on the most bizarre page at crucial moments, and the best solution to these situations is to hold my temper first, listen to what he or she has to say and then find the best solution as soon as possible.

Moving on to the second lesson, I’ve learned the fact that multi-tasking can depreciate the quality of my work when I’m not doing it hard enough. The semester that I joined Annual Play was the same semester that I was in CCIII, and was about to start composing the most important piece of work in our entire college years, which is writing research paper and presenting it to professors. I even remember the date of my research paper presentation was the same as the second night of the show. Regarding this subject, I actually realized I wasn’t working harding enough by watching Boyni dealing with the same thing, who is a very dear friend of mine as well as my partner in stage managing. As the deadline of the final draft of research paper approaches, following by the presentation and all the assignments from other literature courses, I constantly felt overwhelmed and overstressed. As a result, I started to procrastinate at the point when I felt I don’t have enough time to do research for my paper, or prepare the speaking notes for my presentation and rehearsing it properly.

I sort of gave up only because I was tired. However, on this particular Saturday morning, Boyni invited me to go to a coffee shop near by the school to do some work together and keep him company. It as a sunny morning. A perfect one to be productive and efficient. While we were sitting

at the table by the window, I was staring at my laptop screen and having trouble typing the first sentence to begin my assignment for Professor Doris' MA course. The assignment was a research report on technology using as an aid in education. I was whining and saying I don't want to do this or do that, and how I wasn't in the mood for this. All the while Boyni had already finish finding useful journals online, and then he turned to me and said, "What's so hard about it?" A (He said it in Chinese, and it sounded a lot casual than it does in English.) As he got back to his inhumanly-fast typing, I stared to ponder on the fact that it isn't that hard at all. It was like fearing an unknown subject because you don't understand it, and then you over exaggerate the fear in your mind. I realized I shouldn't be coping stress with procrastination or giving myself excuses to chill when I was supposed to just face it and deal with it immediately, like Boyni did. Afterwards, we didn't speak a word to each other for about 3 hours, just silently working on the research report until we both have finished it. That was the most productive morning I have had in a while, and I felt exceptionally happy. That morning was the kick that I needed exactly, and I always think of what Boyni said whenever I feel inattentive in life.

At last, the third lesson that I've learned is that loving the work I do is the most powerful motivation. After participating every discussion and rehearsal of the play, I often found new perspectives to see or relate to the characters, and for that I enjoy being part of this production more and more each day. I especially felt related to the affair Helen Jones has with Richard Roe, partly because I was ending a long term relationship and experiencing a rebound at the time. It begin with the way Jones is left with nothing in the end after she tasted heaven with Roe, and this had me pondering on the question of what kind of freedom is Jones looking for, and what does she think that she has to have in order to be happy. Then I realized what Jones fell in love with is the facade of freedom. She thinks being in bed with this John Wayne type of man and enjoying the vibe of cigarette-after-sex is heaven, because it is the brief moment when she can escape from her reality. When we were rehearsing this scene on the stage I saw myself in Jone's situation, where a

vulnerable woman finding comfort in a dream that isn't realistic or constructive. She isn't Roe's destination, and neither should Roe be hers. Although this might seem melodramatic, but after seeing that from an objective perspective, I got to think about where I stood in this rebound relationship and what I was getting out of it, and what I should really be doing about moving on. It isn't letting myself sink in a habit of being comforted by another man. It is finding a way out and independence, which is the true freedom in the play from my interpretation. This is one of the magical appeals of a play. Audiences see the same play but interpret it or somehow see themselves through the characters in very different ways.

In addition to the things I enjoyed during Annual play, my friendship with Jason, Annie, Boyni also played a major part. We still hang out all the time even now, and I am lucky to meet these creative and nice people who I have had several heart-felt and deep conversations with. In retrospect, stage managing in my junior year has been the highlight of my college years. I pushed myself to multi-task between Annual play and Professor Kate's CCIII, and I managed to get through it with pleasure (despite the brief period when I felt distressed.) Frida Kahlo once said, "At the end of the day, we can endure much more than we think we can." This is the exact feeling I had when we were upstage, holding hands and taking a bow to the audiences after the show. All in all, I appreciate this whole time working with everyone in Annual play, because not only did all of our hard work had a successful outcome, but we also had fun doing it all along.

Works Cited

Kelly, Thomas A. *The Back Stage guide to stage management: traditional and new methods for running a show from first rehearsal to last performance*. Back Stage Books, 2011.