Transcript of "Shaking Up Shakespeare: Directing the Bard in the 21st Century"
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Meese Room, Hannon Library
Southern Oregon University
3:00-5:00 PM
Moderator and Lecturer: David McCandless, Director of Shakespeare Studies, SOU

Participants:
Shana Cooper, Director of Oregon Shakespeare Festival's productions of *Julius Caesar* and *Love's Labors Lost*
Rosa Joshi, Director of Oregon Shakespeare Festival's productions of *Henry V, As You Like It,* and *Bring Down the House*
Penny Metropulos, Former Associate Artistic Director, Oregon Shakespeare Festival
Tony Taccone, Former Artistic Director, Berkeley Repertory Theater

David McCandless:
Welcome, everyone, to "Shaking Up Shakespeare: Directing the Bard in the Twenty-first Century." I'm David McCandless – I'm the director of Shakespeare Studies here at SOU [Southern Oregon University] and a programmer/presenter/producer of these events -- we've had others here (maybe you've attended some in the past.)

I want to acknowledge that we had some conflicting publicity about the end time of this particular event. Some publicity said it ended at 4:30; other publications said 5:00. If you've had a chance to peruse your program for today, you'll see that we decided we're going to end around 4:45 [*audience laughs*] – kind of a soft ending. In fact, I believe that'll be the time when the disembodied voice will intone "the library is going to close in fifteen minutes" [*laughter*] so we can take that as a cue to begin to think about finishing up, although I know that we're all going to want to hang on every word that's said here, if you're all as excited as I am about hearing our panelists today – I can see and feel it in the room.

What we've always done for the events in this room is have a little bit of a brief, concise (we hope), pithy warm-up act – that would be myself, today. Inasmuch as our subject is directing Shakespeare…I think one of the questions that pertains to the challenge of directing Shakespeare is "What is the text?" (That might be the question I start with,

"What's the text to you, Tony?" I don't know.) I wanted to give a very brief, broad meditation on that subject. I really will try to be concise (and also try to manage this mic.)

We're all enthusiasts of Shakespeare, presumably – we're all interested in Shakespeare in performance. So, one of the ways to answer this question straightaway, I think, is that the Shakespearean text is a script for performance. I'm guessing most of us would agree with that and maybe even assign priority to the text as a script for performance.

Having said that, a few interesting facts (many of which you may know, but): the text of Shakespeare's that we have – the quartos that circulated during his lifetime and the folio that was compiled some seven years after his death -- don't actually represent Shakespeare's original writing. Shakespeare's "authorial drafts" (as they're called) or the "playscripts" that he presumably brought (or did bring) to his theater company. The quartos and folios do not correspond. Now, we've lost those authorial drafts and those original playscripts. So, that's an interesting fact straightaway when we talk about the Shakespearean text as a script for performance: we're already one remove from what Shakespeare wrote.

Also (this is a fact I'm sure a lot of you know), his plays were ousted from the stage: the greatest playwright in English theater history had his plays displaced for some 200 years after his death by adaptations that were crafted to cater to the taste and values of the times. Some of you may know that his *King Lear* (arguably his greatest achievement) was replaced by a sentimental rewrite by Nahum Tate that held the stage until 1838, and included (among other things) a pairing off at the end of Cordelia – who did not die – and Edgar, who were in love and rode off into the sunset at the end after Lear saved Cordelia. So, that's also an interesting thing in terms of thinking about the Shakespearean text as a script for performance.

Also, frankly, if you look at the history of Shakespearean scholarship (as some of us are forced to) you'll find that, by and large, the notion of the Shakespearean text as a script for performance is a minority view. Most scholars who have approached the Shakespearean text over the years (over the centuries), have considered it as a literary text – a literary masterpiece, an object to be endlessly analyzed and scrutinized, not necessarily something to be performed. Or, if, sort of grudgingly. Performance as the poor relation of the literary text. An eccentric, imperfect reproduction. We might even say "a walking shadow," or "a player strutting and fretting his hour upon the stage, then heard no more."

So those are, I think, interesting facts that assert themselves straightaway when you define the Shakespearean text as a script for performance. What I want to talk about, briefly and broadly, are specific conceptions of the text-performance relation that actually try to elevate performance, that actually try to insist on the notion of the Shakespearean text as a script for performance. Again, this is very broad strokes, but we'll be talking about originalist, modern, and post-modern conception.

So – [*two members of the audience leave*]

Something I said? [*Laughter*] I'm anxious to get Tony up here, too.

What I'm calling the Originalist would be the idea that Shakespearean text records an original meaning that can only really be theatrically conveyed in a performance style or in a performance mode (set of conditions) and performance conventions that emulate Shakespeare's own. The first significant person to really promulgate this radical proposition was William Poel – some of you may be familiar with Poel [*an audience members walks in front of McCandless*] – no problem – as a practitioner/scholar who very heavily invested in presenting Shakespeare's plays in the "Elizabethan" manner. He was working against a dominant practice of realism in the late nineteenth century, but really when we talk about realism, what we mean is illusionistic spectacle with ridiculously long scene shifts that would necessitate [cuts to] the Shakespearean text--which was finally being performed after being supplanted by adaptations, but it was being so heavily cut, with scenes often transposed or rearranged. So, Poel rebelled, again, not only trying to rescue the Shakespearean script from this laborious illusionism, but also trying to make a contribution to scholarship. It wasn't just about theatrical practice. He was also, essentially, saying to scholars, "You have to account for the fact that these plays are meant to be performed. You can't just get all wooly and analytical about these plays and not police yourself, not discipline your analysis, by remembering that you're talking about a script."

He was spectacularly unsuccessful – ridiculed by critics and scholars alike. However, there were other Originalists, or Revivalists, who followed in his wake and were far more successful – most notably B. Iden Payne, who actually worked with Poel and developed a method that he called "modified Shakespearean staging" or "modified Elizabethan staging." It had the following attributes or features: the permanent architectural set (like a replica of Elizabethan playhouses) was integral to his notion of modified Elizabethan staging approach; Elizabethan costumes; original text (as in no transposition of scenes, no interpolations; fluidity of action (so there were no scene shifts, keep it moving, cinematic overlap); and rapid delivery of verse – verbal thinking. Simply meaning that the point wasn't to speedily spout the lines, but to use the lines as

a method of mental processing – a method of arriving at a conclusion through a thought process. All of this should sound a little familiar for those who are veteran play-goers here in Ashland.

Payne actually dispersed this method far and wide – he was indirectly responsible (well, that's probably overstating the matter) -- he indirectly played a role, even, in the installation of the Globe Theater in London. He definitely had a role to play in the establishment of the Old Globe Theater in San Diego. But really, his biggest influence was here: Angus Bowmer studied with him at the University of Washington in 1930. This modified Elizabethan staging approach was the house style at OSF [Oregon Shakespeare Festival] really from the inception of the Festival to Bowmer's retirement as Artistic Director. And I would say (having grown up around here) I would say, in fact, that the style outdoors (in the outdoor theater) for quite a while after that-- Some of you are nodding your heads who've also seen those shows.

That's essentially my summary of the Originalist position. Again, you can see the legacy of this way of regarding the text-performance relationship in Original Practices movements – I know many of you must be familiar with those – they've sprung up in the wake of this Originalist orientation. The Sam Wanamaker theater, the indoor theater, as well as the outdoor theater there (*London*), are replicas of the Elizabethan playhouse. Sam Wanamaker—That's a bit of a side note; I'm determined to finish on time, so I'm not going there – interesting story, though! (Also, the Blackfriars)

Let's talk about modernism, then, continuing our broad, brief, pithy sweep here: if you remember how I was defining before the Originalist approach, this is slightly revising that. Instead of thinking that the text records an original meaning: well, the text does record a meaning, it does imbed a meaning, but we're not going to call it the original, we're going to say it's related to the original. In fact, as opposed to saying that the only way to theatrically convey this textually-derived meaning is in a replica of an Elizabethan playhouse, we're going to say, "Well, the key thing, really, is that empty space [*with a dismissive hand wave*]--the architecture, the costumes, we're not worried so much about that--but the way space was used in Shakespeare's theater, space as unbounded, space as elastic, that can contract or expand as the scene requires, as the moment requires." That idea of the open stage, the empty space -- very central to modernist staging of Shakespeare.

I'm going to use Tyrone Guthrie as a prime exemplar of this. Interestingly enough, in his autobiography, *As I Remember, Adam*, Bowmer actually targets Guthrie as one of the exemplars of the kind of theater that's the antithesis of the kind of theater he believed in. But Guthrie was very much a proponent of the open stage, and also the thrust

configuration, and really championed the idea of the actors and audience in intimate relationship, and took that idea and created a couple theaters, at least, based on it—He was actually one of the founders of the Shakespeare Festival in Canada (Stratford Ontario) and you'll see the similarity – This [*on projector*] is the new Guthrie, but I've been to both the new theater and the old, and it's pretty much the same idea – that thrust stage, that open space, similar to what we call the *platea* in Shakespeare's theater -- that elastic, unbounded space.

Guthrie really was, I think, one of the giants of modern theater, of twenty-first century theater. In addition to promulgating this particular kind of stagecraft, he also had some ideas about directing Shakespeare that were different from Payne's and Bowmer's, and Poel's. One of them – I don't think he ever used the word, but I'm going to use it – performance as presentist. Guthrie was one of the great recontextualizers, so: "there's a meaning in the text that I can access, but I'm not going to put it in Elizabethan garb, I'm not going to put it in an Elizabethan playhouse, because that might (and very well will) diminish its communicative value. If I really want to make this meaning land with a contemporary audience, I'm going to put it in a form that's accessible and entertaining, that's going to amplify and clarify and ramify the meaning of that play."

Here's the great man himself [*on projector screen*]: "We figured that if the characters looked recognizable, like the sort of people with whom—" How am I doing with this mic, by the way? [*Audience response, crosstalk*] "We figured that if the characters looked recognizable, the sort of people with whom we are familiar and whom we can place in the context of our own experience, it would be easier to accept them as real people, not just as remote beings from another era." So, there's that idea of accessibility and familiarity.

Also, he put forth the idea that the director is really an interpretive artist: yes, there's a meaning that I need to find, but I'm also making the meaning, because, inevitably, the meaning is mediated by my subjective consciousness. This may not seem like a radical proposition but, remember, with Originalism, it was kind of like the medium was the message – the message was the medium, I guess, is what I mean. That once you took Shakespeare's story and put it in a theatrical idiom that was comparable to what he used, you'd kind of done it. But this idea was: "no, there's some way in which my mediating artistic temperament is coming into play."

Guthrie, again: "That your own interpretation of the work of art is flagrantly subjective seems to be regarded as an arrogant attitude, but the true view is that the interpretive artist can only make up his own comment upon the work."

Also, the other person that Bowmer targeted was Peter Brook, who took that idea of the open stage that Guthrie had installed in specific theaters and turned it into a concept. His most famous book, *The Empty Space*, -- so, yes, he's referring to physical space, but he's also talking about a way of looking at Shakespeare and looking at theater -- freeing the imagination of the audience was really what was crucial.

As far as what's a text, what text for Brook was, was just empty, it was an empty shell, it was a ghost of a lost original. But he said the creative journey on the part of the artist, the theater artist -- they undertook a parallel creative journey. They could, nevertheless, find the spirit of the play, they could reach that inner play, that mysterious essence that, if found and enacted for the audience, would give the audience access to something beyond the naturalistic, beyond the superficial – would give them access to the metaphysical, the existential.

This production is so iconic. Maybe some of you even saw it. I've talked to people who have seen it. But this was regarded as sort of the height of achievement of modernist theater-making, modernist directing: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in a white box with actors on trapezes in an empty space. I think, again, thinking about Guthrie as someone who believed that meaning had to be made as well as found – Brook would have said, "Well, you find it by making it."

I also can't resist mentioning, before leaving the modernist mode – I can't resist mentioning this book, not just because it celebrated Peter Brook's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as the exemplar of how Shakespeare should really be done in the modern era (this book came out in 1977), but also the revolution that Styan envisioned was based on the fact that in this one moment in time (far away from poor William Poel) there were actually a whole bunch of "stage-centered critics" who were in the vanguard of Shakespearean scholarship. For one moment, it appeared as though that idea of the text as a script for performance would be the paradigm. Styan envisioned practitioners and scholars together moving forward, learning from each other, and the revolution never happened. It was stopped in its tracks by Post-modernism. Let's talk about this (*Post-Modernism*) and wrap things up here.

Remembering the way I was formulating the modernist and the Originalist approach (if you remember that formulation) this (*Post-*Modernism) is radically different: the text doesn't record a meaning, performance doesn't convey text, performance, in fact, is an autonomous entity. The goal of performance is to create an event which is in no way answerable to -- in no way beholden to -- the text. The text, then, becomes in relation to performance an incitement to invention, a cue for the muse (as it were), material to be

used, and once used, disposed of – a dispensable prop, is another way of looking at the post-modern concept of text.

This whole notion in post-modern conceptions of the performance as other to text—So, this is about as far away as you can get from the idea of the two as inextricably tied. If this notion of "other" seems a little much, maybe my graphic does, too – I think one of the ways to grok it is just to say that, "well, if you think of the text as connoting the full range of a play's conceivable, performable meanings, and you think about performance as one of those meanings, then, of course, looking at it that way, performance *can't* enact text."

The idea is that performance doesn't interpret text, that text incites interpretive activity. So, you have, in fact, interpretation as process, that what the text incites is a vast, collaborative, creative labor – a vast improvisation upon an idea that eventually materializes, and is interpretable, because there was interpretive activity.

Another thing we would say about a Post-modern approach: it replaces the literary conception of text with an anthropological understanding of performance. The meaning of performance is accumulative – meaning accrues according to the material circumstances of the production's creation, according to the mode of representation that's used, according to the public discourse that it generates, and also, most particularly, the ideological import of the way it addresses the cultural moment. Here's a concept now of performance, not looking back at the text, but looking at culture and participating in negotiation of cultural values – doing cultural work. This is a key concept.

It does overlap with performance studies, in the sense of disdaining literary paradigms and training the gaze on an anthropological, sociological, political understanding of performance. The interesting thing about performance studies, though, is that if you know performance studies, it disdains, also, the text. It's about non-scripted performance. So that the more Shakespearean performance critics hanker after the paradigms of performance studies, the more they have to get rid of the text. A lot of Shakespeare performance critics do, in fact, aspire to that. They do ghost the text.

One final thing I can't resist saying because it addresses directors, and maybe is a segue into our panel: there was one work, in particular, that I think has been very influential – a 1995 book by William B. Worthen, *Shakespeare and the Authority of Performance*. He talks, among other things, about directors. He kind of decries (or laments, anyway) this odd phenomenon that he finds, that directors habitually attribute to Shakespeare their most *outre* inventions. They cite Shakespeare to authorize their most audacious

inventions. They claim the text has sanctioned choices that are clearly extra-textual. In a way, he's saying that directors are either deluded idol-worshippers or idolaters fetishizing the text, or they're frauds – they're artful dodgers, in the sense that they'll resort to a peculiar kind of self-validating self-denial: "I didn't do it! Shakespeare did it!"

What I want to end on is my own little critique of this idea, my own *sotto voce* affirmation of the necessity of text: simply that the qualm I've always had with this particular critique is the untenable extremes that it posits. On the one hand, textual fidelity, on the other hand this anarchic invention/intervention. It seems, to me, that you can find a middle ground there -- that you can talk about the text as a unique artifact in it's own right that has a describable, discernible content, but it's also, in the hands of a performance artist, a kind of shape-shifting entity that can accommodate the content of the artist's imagination. I think that's, to me, a more useful way of looking at the text-performance relation these days that yes, text is material for use, absolutely, but in being used, it melds and merges with the theater artist's fancies and needs.

Well, I'm so tempted to just end, but I did have a Beethoven-esque finale here, because – This is totally self-indulgent, but I wanted to say, "Okay, what did we talk about? We talked about text." Here's what I'm talking about, I just momentarily was debating even to do it, because I was so determined to end on time, but here we go:
A script awaiting transmutation – not transmission, but transmutation; a play that Shakespeare, in some fashion, wrote; a story comprised of a sequence of actions, riding on the waves of dazzling catalytic speech; it bears evidence of having been shaped to some aesthetic, thematic, philosophical, ideological end that exists in its own right, asserts its own value and exerts its own pressure on the contours of performance. [*changing slides*] But wait; there's more: a multi-vocal entity engendering multiple valances to be sure, but, ultimately, not simply a cue for one's muse, nor a vessel emptied of import once plundered for matter, but rather an essential reference point for the process of creation it sparks, and the performance it ultimately enables – a substantial, if evanescent entity that generates and circumscribes the sprawling, strenuously-wrought spectacle that materializes in its name. Performance offers both the unfolding of the thing and the thing itself. Thank you.

[*Applause*]

Okay, thank you. Let me introduce our panelists now. I'm very excited about this discussion and I know you all must be. I will return this microphone. I first want to introduce Tony Taccone, who was the long-time Artistic Director at Berkeley Rep, as I'm sure you all know. I know for a fact that, having retired, he has not slowed down at

all. I was very lucky to get him here. You also will know him from some of the work he's done here. I remember his production of *Coriolanus*, back in the day, and more recently, *The Tempest* – I'm sure he may have occasion to reference those. Of course, he's developed shows that have ended up in London and on Broadway. You can read the specifics in the back page, there, of your program. He was here (oh, I've forgotten the year) but he actually wrote a play called *Ghost Light*. It was done here some time ago, not that long ago. He also won the prestigious Margo Jones Award, which is touted here as "demonstrating a significant impact, understanding and affirmation of playwriting with a commitment to living theater." Tony Taccone!

[*Applause*]

I also want to introduce Penny Metropulos, who was at OSF for quite a while (for twelve seasons, it says here) and directed over twenty plays, and did some adaptations (also listed in your program): a musical adaptation of *Comedy of Errors, Tracy's Tiger*… [She] also collaborated on an adaptation of *The Three Musketeers*. Penny is a respected, accomplished director in the regional theater circuit, as well as having done some very accomplished work here. I also am proud to say that she's a sometime colleague of mine here at SOU – Penny Metropulos!

[*Applause*]
Also, we're very lucky to have Rosa Joshi here today. Now, anyone who has been paying attention to recent Shakespeare offerings at OSF knows all about her. She has been extremely busy, directing *Henry V* a couple of years ago, *As You Like It* just this season, and next year she will be helming this really interesting redaction-compilation of the *Henry VI* plays called *Bring Down the House* – do I have the right title? I always have to avoid saying "*Bringing Down the House*" which is a Steve Martin-Queen Latifah vehicle. [*Audience laughs*] *Bring Down the House* – and this is a work that actually grew out of amazing stuff she's doing at a company she started in Seattle, the Upstart Crow, which is an all-female collective and, indeed, *Bring Down the House* is an all-female rendering of the Henry VI plays. Please welcome Rosa Joshi!

[*Applause*]

I also want to introduce Shana Cooper, who is an amazing artist. I have to say I was lucky enough to see the opening in the Theatre for a New Audience in New York of her production of *Julius Caesar*, which played to great acclaim here in 2017 (I think it must have been). She also directed *Love's Labor's Lost* here, she's directed a lot of non-Shakespeare stuff here, doing the world premiere of *The Unfortunates*, that went on to perform in other regional theaters. She's a member of the Woolly Mammoth Theater

Company – you can see her credits there [*in the program*], including *The Nether*, which is a really interesting play. And [she's] also a professor at Northwestern: Shana Cooper!

I wanted to give each of them a chance to comment-- I'm hoping to ask some really generative questions that will give each of them a chance to talk a bit about some of these issues, and then after each of them has had a chance to address that question and do some informal riffing (I hope), I'll be available to pop in with a question as needed.

There were so many different ways (I thought) of framing the question about Shaking Up Shakespeare: Directing the Bard – I thought about asking, "how does each of you think about the text in relation to performance?" Do you like that? Or should we go with—I also thought about the fact – You know, going back to all those people who were adapting Shakespeare for all those years, it was like to do Shakespeare is to fix Shakespeare. Of course, a lot of people accused Tyrone Guthrie of that: he was fixing Shakespeare, there was something wrong with Shakespeare and he had to fix it. Which of those do you like? Or should I come up with another one?

Tony Taccone:
Why don't you talk about your approach to your new play?

Rosa Joshi:
To *Bring Down the House?*

Tony Taccone:
Yes.

Rosa Joshi:
Okay, sure.

David McCandless:
Yeah, I would love that, because I watched a video of you talking about it, and you referenced *Game of Thrones.*

Rosa Joshi:
Yeah. Well, because *Game of Thrones* is based on the War of the Roses, right? So, *Game of Thrones* – the Starks and the Lannisters; the Yorks and the Lancasters. The Northern, the Southern… So, when someone pointed that out to me as I was working on *Bring Down the House,* I felt like I had to watch the entire series. [*Audience laughs*]

I have a company that does all-female Shakespeare. It's a post-modern riff on the fact that Shakespeare was done with an all-male cast. But it didn't grow out of a directorial vision or anything – it grew out of two actors – It grew out of need, as things do. Two female actors in Seattle who, frankly, were just tired of waiting to audition for the same two roles that showed up in a season of classical work. They never got to work with each other. They met each other in audition rooms and were like, "Good luck." And then, I think Seattle Shakespeare Company had also done *The Taming of the Shrew* as an all-male version, also. Instead of continuing to bitch and moan and complain about it, they decided to do something about it. They approached me and said, "Would you be interested in doing a production of an all-female Shakespeare?" and I said, "Yes, of course," not really having considered "what does that mean," necessarily.

I say that meaning that I think as artists – Am I an Originalist, am I a modernist, or a Post-modernist? As you were saying these things, I was like, "I don't know." I make work, and other people categorize that work. I do all-female work that came out of practice, that came out of working artists' needs and desires to create something that didn't exist before, and to move the field forward in some way by re-imagining a centuries-old form. I do think that that's my job, as a director, is to re-imagine that for a contemporary audience. I don't know why we're doing classical work if it's not speaking to a contemporary audience. I don't know why I would be doing work (honestly) the way it was done, because that's the way it was done. One of my favorite directors that I'm inspired by, Deborah Warner, says that she believes that you take classics and you throw them up against the wall of our time, and you should be ready for what falls back from that. And that can be controversial, and that's great. That's how we keep the work alive.

So, we started doing this, and when I first started doing it, I didn't know— It was an experiment. I feel like that's always how I enter the work: I don't know. I don't come in saying, "This is what *King Lear* is going to be." Of course, you have to have ideas about it, but you go in—And it was an experiment, and I discovered things about the work and I discovered how people view gender onstage. I discovered how people made assumptions about male behavior versus female behavior. I discovered gender in these plays. And women discovered, "I never get to talk about this aspect of the work."

We do a lot of political plays. I just did *Henry IV Part One* and it wasn't an all-female cast, but I cast some of the roles as women. I cast Worcester as a woman and she says, "You know what? I never get to talk—" (The actress playing it, said:) "I never get to talk about this part of the play. I'm always the whore in Eastcheap. I don't get to talk about political strategy. I don't get to talk about what it means to lead." But don't we need to have examples of that on our stages, of women in positions of power, leading? So that

when we see that, it becomes normal in our lives, also? I had two young men of color playing Hal and Hotspur – young leaders presenting very different ways of being in the world. Don't we need to normalize seeing young men of color as kings, as possible leaders of our nation, as taking us into the future?

That's what I feel like—In doing the work with an all-female cast, with diverse casts, of all kinds, I'm trying to re-imagine these works and make them speak for an audience today, because I love text – let me just say that I start with text. *Richard II* is one of my favorite plays because the poetry is so gorgeous. But I think that if we say, "Oh, yes, Shakespeare, the beauty of that text, it's going to live forever" that's actually going to be the death of the form that I love very, very much. I love it too much to let it die, by saying "Oh, it's so beautiful, let's put it up on this pedestal and let's make sure that we put a box around it and make it beautiful." Because it will die, because who's going to come and see it and how are we going to talk to new audiences? How are we going to make it relevant? So that's the kind of thing that I think about a lot. [*To her fellow panelists*] How about you guys?

Tony Taccone:
Go ahead, Shana.

Shana Cooper:
I see how this is rolling. Wait, we have a question back here, though.

Audience Member:
It's not a question; it's a request.

Shana Cooper:
Yeah!

Audience Member:
Could each of the speakers speak as close [to] and use as much of the amplification [*crosstalk from other audience members agreeing*] We're not hearing what you're saying.

Rosa Joshi:
Oh, I'm terribly sorry.

Audience Member:
It's not that loud…

Tony Taccone:
This one's good.

Audience Member:
That one's too loud.

Shana Cooper:
Let's just do a sound check, here, for a second. [*Holding the microphone close to her face*] How's that? Is that good?

[*Applause*]

Okay, let's check all the microphones. We'll just do it all at once. Let's check them all out. That's good.

Rosa Joshi:
This is not.

Shana Cooper:
Yeah, can we get more—Can we control this at all? We'll just share this one.

Penny Metropulos:
Can she say all of that again?

[*Laughter*]

Shana Cooper:
I know! We'll come back to a lot of those ideas, I feel. I would second everything that Rosa just said. I'm trying to figure out how to enter into this. I guess I'll just talk about—I think yes to all of those things. It's exciting to hear those truths (I think) about how many of us practice this work and keep it alive named. And then I'll just maybe talk about some of the other reasons why I come back to Shakespeare. Because I do direct new work and contemporary plays and musicals and also Shakespeare. I feel like—I think as a director, Shakespeare is the most fulfilling work that I continue to do in part because there is a level of authorship that you get through the interpretive art form, but I guess I always think about it as partnering with—I get to partner with someone I consider to be one of the most brilliant writers I've ever worked with or on that material—[*notices a sound*] Is that from me?

[*Yes from the audience*]

Okay, so we'll just hold it [the microphone] further away. Okay. Just continue to give feedback.

I find that it makes me think in a deeper, more muscular, imaginative way than almost any of my collaborators that I've ever worked with. And I've worked with some extraordinary collaborators, but Shakespeare asks more of us than any of us knew we possessed. I think it makes you grow and change and evolve as an artist and a human being both working on those plays and, I think, probably, seeing those plays, or you probably wouldn't come to see them.

For me, a lot of what I look for in a Shakespeare play, when I'm deciding what to work on (when I get to decide) are what are the plays that feel like they're wrestling with the moment in time that we're in – which is a little bit connected to this Deborah Warner idea of throwing a play up against the time that we're in and seeing what comes back.

In the last few years, since the 2016 election, which is (I think) a lot how I'm thinking about the last phase of my work, really, is: it's a volatile time in our country, not just about politics but also about who we are as a nation and as human beings, in terms of identity and all of those questions. So, for me, getting to work on a play like *Julius Caesar*, for example, beginning rehearsals in a month where Trump is beginning his tenure and getting to wrestle with a group of artists of what it means to have the soul of your country at stake, to truly feel that, to actually feel that, and investigating the cost and consequences of using violence as a tool for governance, and what is the impact on our nation when we make those choices? What it is to be doing that play at a time where we are living out some of those questions and Shakespeare happens to, I think, be one of the writers who gave voice to those questions in a muscular, spiritual, emotionally raw way that we just—It's one of the great plays on those subjects. We're at a point in our nation where we're critically in conflict about those ideas and those ideals. What better play to engage in or with as a group of artists and as a community than *Julius Caesar*?

And then, similarly, I guess it was the year after that I started working on *The Taming of the Shrew*, at the height of the Me, Too reports that were coming out. The artistic director, who I pitched *The Taming of the Shrew* (I love the play, many people do not)—But he called me after all of those reports started coming out, and he said, "Do you think we can *do Taming of the Shrew* in 2017-2018?" And I said, "I think we *have* to do *Taming of the Shrew."*

Because, to me, that is a play (and, I believe, from Shakespeare's perspective – I'll just make this bold statement that any of you all can contradict)—But I think it's a play that is a satire, or a clown show, about the absurdity and danger of the patriarchy. And then, within that, there is this radical love story between two people who are, in some way, proposing a new system because the current system is so broken.

I feel like: what better play could we be engaging with in the midst of this moment where we're only just starting to uncover the depths of the ways in which misogyny are embedded in every aspect of our culture and our systems and our societies and ourselves? What is required to change that system? What kind of bravery and risk is required? What kind of mistakes might we make along the way? But what better play to actually propose a kind of radical and risky love story in which people say, "Maybe we don't have to just accept the status quo, but we can change the status quo"?

[*Inaudible off-camera question*]

This is a good question, right? "What do you do with that ending?" I also propose, (again, can be in conflict) that if you go through that line—I'm a big advocate of text. If you go through that final speech, Kate's final speech, line by line and actually change with the changes, I think you start to see a woman who is in the midst of a radical act of self-realization and awakening. I think that there are a couple of sequences that are problematic, even with that take. The way I interpret that final speech is the act of—The bravery and risk-taking of fully abandoning yourself to another human being. What is marriage, what is true life-long partnership, if not the vulnerability of that? She is, in fact—One of the reasons she speaks for so long is that she is thinking ahead of her time and ahead of anyone else in that play.

There are a couple of sequences that it's hard to work out, but by changing -- and this is where this question of how do you bring the text into 2018 (was when I was doing it). I think I changed six pronouns and one word (changing "women" to "people"): "I am ashamed that people are so simple to offer war when they should beg for peace." Which is actually, I feel, a statement we could all get on board with. But if you say "I am ashamed that women are so simple to offer war when they should beg for peace," it's complex. That's a harder thing to get behind. But you change that one word—And I feel like, if you can change one word and six pronouns in one of the longest speeches that Shakespeare wrote, to me that means that from his point of view, the argument he is making in that speech is actually closer to what I am proposing he was saying than not. If it could sustain that many hundreds of years and still be relevant in that way, that's a remarkable act of insight into love and marriage and humanity. I'm going to stop there.

Penny Metropulos:
Well, I have not been directing as recently as my colleagues here. But I have done some. I guess I'm going to go back to this "Shaking up Shakespeare" thing because I thought about it quite a bit when I saw the title. I thought, "When have we not shaken up Shakespeare?" I was thinking about that from the very beginning, that we've just done it all the time. I think we're all—[*Turning to the previous two speakers to her right*] I agree, and I agree. I think as soon as we get our hands on something, we are actually addressing it from the point of view of where we are right now and who we are in that moment. That's what a director is coming up against.

I also come from an acting background, so text was always what led and what continues to lead any time I'm working on something. I guess what I'm going to say is: I find that when I get in a room with someone (with a group of actors), no matter what my ideas have been up to that point, and no matter what "concept" [*does an air quotes gesture*] has come about with the designers, as soon as the actors get their mouths around the words, things come alive in another way, and things shift and change. That is always going to be the case, I think. I think it's going to keep us alive and keep us thinking about—I don't think there's any time you can go into these plays without rediscovering something. That's what makes them so rich and wonderful.

I guess I'm just going to say that I am so on board with the idea that we can look at the plays afresh in terms of gender, in terms of how we approach the plays, in terms of changing single words, in terms of all of this, and still keep the integrity of the text. I think that's just a no-brainer as far as I'm concerned. We're all post-modernist, I guess. I don't have too much more to say on this subject.

Tony Taccone:
What you're seeing here is a unanimity of feeling about the fact that we all live in our own history. We all live now. We are carrying the issues, the forces, the contradictory forces of the particular moment in which we live in to anything we make. Anything we make. It's impossible to be an originalist -- that's an insane idea. Like you can recreate something—you can't even do it! It's like me trying to say "I'm going to do Penny's production of"—I'm not Penny! I'm sure she's very grateful for that.

[*Audience laughs*]

We are people who have a worldview. We have constructed a certain analysis of the world on our own. It's our job, our responsibility as a director to be as articulate and clear about that as we possibly can, and understand how we are marrying or how we are in dialogue with this thing called a text. When you're in the presence of a great play,

and a great writer (and I would not limit that to Mr. Shakespeare – I've had the same experience when I've directed Beckett or Brecht or Kushner or Churchill) – Where you are in the presence – you are in the imaginative presence of a great artist. My first job is to understand what they were trying to do.

Shakespeare is a little harder because the language is a little more dense, and I don't pretend to be an expert in this, so I hire people. Barry Kraft, who was here for many, many years, was a fantastic scholar and he spent his whole life actually studying these—every version of a Shakespeare play you could possibly—So I like talking to Barry, and then we get into arguments. Because Barry will always fight for what he believed was Shakespeare's intention, with every single word. And I will say, "Good, we're not doing that, but thank you for the—" [*Audience laughs*] You know, it gives me agency, because I understand—And he has changed my mind about some things. He's absolutely gone, "If you get rid of that, then you're going to screw up with that." When you cut any great play, what you are doing—If you have a sweater, and I'm taking out yarn [*mimes pulling yarn*] out of the sweater, I'd better know what I'm going to be left with after I pull the yarn out. When you do end up really studying a great playwright, you understand there's a logic there. There's a theatrical, imaginative, historical, psychological logic, so you be damn careful about what you're doing, because they're better than you, in that regard. So, that's been fun, to do that, is to be able to wrestle with some great imaginations and to try to match that.

My approach to dramaturgy is kind of simple: I try to understand what they did, I try to imagine a world which would be theatrically exciting, and I pick the best artistic strategy that I feel is going to vivify the text – vivify the *event*. Which could mean cutting sections of the text and replacing them with events. That's entirely possible within my—I know Shana, when she did the *Julius Caesar*, she cut certain parts of the text and replaced them with events. You're really up in front of that when you're doing a Greek play, where the language isn't as exciting, potentially -- where the formal structure is really less accessible. How are you going to do this battle? How are you going to do this battle? How are you going to do this fight? These questions trigger dramaturgy – they trigger choices.

When Rosa was saying, "There were these two women who didn't have work." We're much more practical than—And I know I went to school for many, many years and what's interesting talking about all that is how little of that I actually use when I'm working. I love to read and I love to study but I'm honestly—You're trying to get one to thirty people to go that way [*pointing*]. And there's a lot of issues that come up with that.

And you're trying, obviously, to come up with a theatrically vivid and dynamic and irresistible construct that makes people want to watch. You want to entertain people. You want to make it so thrilling that you just have to watch. The craft involved, of course, the great gift of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, is that you've got a structure of training people to actually embrace the enormous responsibilities and challenges of speaking the language in a way that is actually impactful. When I've done Shakespeare outside of this place, it's been like, "Whoa, nelly. Shit. People can't talk." It's a different thing. So that's been the great gift of working here, I know from being—And watching the great work of these guys [*gesturing to the rest of the panel.*]

I still remember Penny's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. That was just an awesome thing to watch, man. The way it glided—It was having so much fun with itself. Relentlessly confident. That's infectious. That's something you feel in the audience. You don't know what went on to make it, but you can absolutely feel it.

I think we're all kind of a blend between post-modernists and modernists of some kind, but I don't think it matters. It matters to scholars, but for me: does it work?

Penny Metropulos:
[*Inaudible*]

Tony Taccone:
Oh yeah, okay! [*Hands microphone to someone off-screen.*]

David McCandless:
I'm just so intrigued at all the affirmations—I mean, I'm intrigued by everything you're saying. I'm imagining it must be a little hard to talk about text in an abstract, general way. I would love it if each of you could talk about specific experiences as a director of Shakespeare – maybe *Midsummer,* maybe *Julius Caesar*, *As You Like It*, *Tempest,* whatever – that would give us a little bit of a peek into how specifically you as a theater artist work from the first encounter with text through the whole process to performance. That's probably [*inaudible*] from each of you, so-- I think that would be really interesting to hear.

Penny Metropulos:
Well, you read the play. That's a really good place to start. I want to riff on something that Tony said, which is really true: we're really craftspeople, we're hard workers, and we just look at what's going on. I want to say that one of the things you do is you look at the space that you're in, the place that you are. Are you going to be on the outdoor stage, are you going to be in the Thomas, where are you going to be? That's going to

start to affect how you think about the play when you first start to read it. Because I can read the play in the privacy of my backyard with no idea of a production in particular—no particular production in mind -- it's going to be anywhere in the world – I will have one idea about it that has nothing to do with reality. But if I'm thinking about the play in terms of doing it in one specific place, I'm going to start to think about the actors. I've been very fortunate in being able to work here for a long time and get to know the company and be able to know a lot of the actors that I've worked with. That comes into my brain as well. As I'm reading the text, I'm thinking about those things.

As I'm going over and over the text, the next thing that begins to happen is: what is the theme that keeps coming up for me from that? Because we're never going to get it all, because it's too big, it's too much. We'll get what we get for the time that we do it. That may work or it may not work. As Shana says about *The Taming of the Shrew*, not everybody may even want to see *The Taming of the Shrew*. But if you are looking at it and you love it and you've got an idea and you keep reading and reading and reading that text, that stuff starts to come out. It begins to come out. It begins to come alive in your own mind.

I think every circumstance is going to be different. I was thinking about this, in terms of—The plays that I've worked on, how I've been affected by, as Shana was saying about *Julius Caesar* or as Rosa said about how she feels about casting women in plays – where you are in the moment in your life is going to affect how you are looking at that text. What is so brilliant about Shakespeare is that he'll start to answer that. You'll start to answer that. And you don't have to push and shove and all the rest of it. I would say that the main thing that I would do when I'm looking at the text, when I get an idea, and I start to roll with it, is I will always really look at that fifth act and see if the idea holds all the way through. Because that's the thing: you can have a really wonderful idea in the beginning of a play that is really fabulous, and you've got all these really super ideas and you get to the fifth act and you go, "Oh, right, *that*." That's why, when you talk about text, that's why we are, always, relying on it, because we're always going back to that, no matter what.

I'll just quickly mention, because people talk about *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which was, by the way, about three hundred years ago.

Tony Taccone:
[*Off-screen*] But you're not bitter.

Penny Metropulos:
No, but I will say when we got to the last scene of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* the thing that really exploded was that—Because I'd had the idea that the whole play was a dream. When we got to the *Pyramus and Thisbe,* it suddenly felt very constricted. It wasn't a dream at all. It wasn't until we suddenly realized, "Wait a minute, you keep reminding yourself it's a dream", that it opened up and that *Pyramus and Thisbe* suddenly—that the mechanicals were able to fulfill their own dream. That doesn't in any way interfere with what the text was actually doing. That's all I'm going to say.

Shana Cooper:
I'm going to riff on something both Penny and Tony said: this idea of the fifth act and does the idea work through the end of the play. Working on *Julius Caesar,* that was significantly in play for me, because that was the reason I wanted to do that play, was the fifth act of *Julius Caesar.* It goes back to something Tony said as well: what is the playwright trying to do? Which is definitely a place that I always start with Shakespeare again because always he's so many steps ahead. What he's trying to do, if you can figure out a way to actually do the thing he's trying to do, that's (I believe) where the magic lies.

So, with *Caesar*, I had seen the production a number of times, and I had never seen that fifth act work. It's such a brilliant play, and then it would fall apart in Act Five. Then I'd always hear people reflect about that play this question of why does Act Five of that play even exist? Why doesn't the play end after Mark Antony's oration "Friends, Romans, countrymen"? I feel like, Shakespeare's a better writer than that. If he wanted to end that play after "Friends, Romans, countrymen," or after the tent scene, he would have done it, and he didn't. I was obsessed with Act Five, trying to figure out what does that mean.

When I began working on it, I didn't have an answer to that other than belief in the text and belief in the play and belief that there's a reason why Act Five exists. Once I sat down and really deeply dramaturgically started working through it, and worked with the brilliant Barry Kraft and started looking at the events of the play, it started to make so much sense that obviously, in this play about the cost and consequence of violence and using violence as a tool for governance, that of course the end of that journey would land in civil war. Where else can that story end?

Then the job as a director, your job becomes: how do you actually realize that event of civil war onstage in the messy, sprawling, cost of what that thing is? I think if you look at the text, it seems like that's what Shakespeare is trying to do, but his way of doing it in that play, one: no longer translates to what we now understand those realities to be,

in concert with our own societies and selves; and it's a million people running on and off stage who you've never met who are dying, but how are they dying? Why do we care? Especially when you've tracked through that play with a group of citizens and senators who are the people who have actually told the story up until that moment in time.

That was a breakthrough for me, I think, once I understood the purpose of that text -- the story that Shakespeare was telling. Then I did start to make adjustments to the text in terms of things like reassigning certain roles in Acts Four and Five of that play, so that the conspirators who set the whole plan in motion are actually the people who have to fight the war; and have to lose everything that they were fighting for; and made that critical choice to assassinate to begin with; and made that critical choice to use violence as a solution to solve the world's problems -- that they then had to live out the consequences of that. In hopes that then, as an audience, we would understand the consequences of that in a more personal way, because of who we were tracking through the play with.

And then the other question of how are they dying? What does this civil war look like? Then that question was really about what are the scenes in which it feels like Shakespeare is really telling that story? And then, to Tony's point, how do you actually create room to manifest that event physically, viscerally, spiritually in a way that we can actually understand the cost of violence on ourselves? Again, not just physically, actually, but spiritually and psychically.

Because I think that is the question that we're all wrestling with right now, is: how do we start to unpack the cost and consequence of violence on our specific spaces, on our communities, and start to actually free ourselves from the addiction—our communal addiction as a human race to using violence as a tool to solve our problems? I think that is what *Julius Caesar* is about, and that's where Act Five lands. I think that's why we don't actually know what the hell that play is about, because we so rarely see Act Five. I think the importance, actually, and our responsibility as directors to go back to those plays and really try to figure out what Shakespeare was after is so critical, because we haven't answered those questions and we need his plays. If we can do the hard, rigorous dramaturgical work to actually figure out what is in there, I think we can grow as a human race more quickly, potentially. That's the work that we get to do.

Rosa Joshi:
I'm going back to—riffing on a lot that has been said. The one thing I keep thinking is: the play is so much bigger than me. In some ways, that makes me feel less anxious, because I'm never going to be better than this play! The production is never going to be

better than the play itself. This production will be what it is for this audience, in this time. Going back to – I always think: why this play, now? Why am I shaking up Shakespeare right now? With my all-female company, we did *Bring Down the House*, and then it became – What was fascinating to me in that play that I had forgotten is the emergence of this prototypical, nascent Richard III. You get to see how this pathology is shaped, his psychology—his pathology spurred in that play. So, it became clear that the next production we were going to do was *Richard III,* with the same actor who had played Richard in *Bring Down the House* in the Henry VIs. This was right after the election, and I was—I'm obsessed with politics, which is why I love these plays, also, because I think they're political war plays. They're not history plays; they're plays about politics and war.

I was thinking a lot about complicity. I was thinking about how a tyrant gets formed, because I just couldn't help thinking about what was going on in this country, and how a democracy slips away – how we lose a democracy; how we're complicit in that; how a society creates a tyrant. Looking at *Richard III,* I kept thinking about complicity, all the time – how the people around Richard allow Richard to become who Richard becomes.

I was trying to think about a moment of text that I not necessarily struggled with, but – The Lady Anne-Richard scene. That scene where he woos her [*does air quotes around "woos her"*] – how do we understand that scene today? Traditionally, he's sexy, he's wooing her, there's something about him that attracts her. Yes, and we were doing this play right around the Kavanaugh hearings. I'm doing this play at a time thinking about that and I'm doing this play where young women of color are coming in to audition are asking me, "Can you talk to me about this scene?" They're like—They're not just accepting the way that it's been normally or traditionally understood. I had a young African-American woman (a young black woman) playing the role, and I was trying to find her some agency in that role, in some way, like why does she do this?

Penny Metropulos:
I'm sorry, playing Richard, or playing Anne?

Rosa Joshi:
Playing Anne, and a woman playing Richard, too. But looking at the text, again, and examining it, and looking at what happens to her in the play, we examined: what were her choices? It came down to survival. It came down to: marry this man or what's going to happen to you next? When it came to the last line of that scene, Richard asks for a kiss, and she says, "Imagine I have done so already", and she leaves. Every time she said that line, she took it on with all the strength and power and agency that she wanted to have in that moment, as a woman living today. What she wanted to say: "Imagine

I've done so already," and she dropped the mic, and left. But she couldn't do it that way. She couldn't do it that way, because he has to say, next, "Was ever woman in this manner wooed?" He has to win. It was so hard. How do we let him win in that moment?

Rethinking the scene and going back into the scene, I said, "You don't get to have this victory, because this actually happens to women all the time. Right now, you have to think about how you're going to get out of the hotel room safely. What are you going to say, right now, in this moment, that is going to let this man let you go? You have to do this for every woman that's been through this. That's actually the mic drop that you get."

I think about what actors have to do, and the places they have to go, for us to heal. To represent the things that—We don't have to go through that, or we might have gone through that and then we get to see ourselves. How hard it was for her to let go of that, what she wanted to have in that moment, and what she couldn't have, in order to tell the story, which is what it comes back to—Whatever the idea is that you have, about Lady Anne, however you want to tell it, it still has to fit the story that is there, that's in the text. But that doesn't mean you can't tweak it.

I remember having a conversation with Bill Rauch about these plays, about whether the question is: are these plays sexist or are they about sexism? Are they racist, or are they about racism? The truth is: they're both.

Penny Metropoulos:
All of those things.

Rosa Joshi:
They're all of it. How do we, especially as—I think about this a lot as I'm trying to think about how will these plays live for us, for a new generation? Here's my radical—I believe that the future of these plays lies in the hands of young people of color, who will reimagine them for new audiences, and make them see themselves in these plays. Because, too often, I've had young artists of color tell me that, one: these plays were not really written for them, so why should they go see them? Two: they've been told these plays are not about them, they won't understand them, the language is too complicated. Three: you'll never get cast in them. Four: it's dead white male; it's colonial. All of these reasons why they've been told the plays are not about them, and then they see it reflected, when they literally don't see themselves in the plays.

I think about: how will this work be for everyone? If it is universal, universal can't be code for only a certain kind of person. Universal means it's for everyone, which means that we have to complicate the stories even more, sometimes. We have to deal with what's difficult in them for us as a contemporary society. In order to really grapple with what's difficult in the plays, that's (I feel like) my job, also. These plays are difficult, and that's why I love them, because we'll never solve them. Like Penny is saying, we're never going to do: "Oh, *that's Richard III.*"

I always think about, when I'm approaching it, there's the text: it's a new play. I know that's an old trope to say with Shakespeare, but I really believe that. Not like: oh, what is my Lady Anne going to be compared to every other Lady Anne? But like: what is Lady Anne—What is that experience for somebody who's never seen the play? What is the experience of that, as if someone doesn't know what the story is? That's the thing that I keep thinking about.

Tony Taccone:
I'll just say a couple of examples to respond to the question. Frequently, at the end of Shakespeare's plays, most onerously in the history plays, there's a coda. Some guy comes out and says, "Oh, what dastardly events have befallen us, let us now—All things are healed, the state can now go on." Usually I read those and go, "Oh my god, we're not doing that." So grappling with what the resolution is, for the experience that we've invented or created or interpreted or imagined is, that calls to—It's the fifth act thing: where are we going towards?

Frequently, I will take what I think is the most mysterious, hardest thing to play and try to solve that first, try to go after that first, because at the heart of every great play is something you really don't understand. Trust me. You're sitting there going, "Okay. Okay. How the hell…?" So, you come up with a solution -- you create a narrative. You create some sort of system—a universe in which that is explained to you first, because you're the director. That's your responsibility. Frequently, I have cut those codas and replaced them with what I would call visual events. So, that's one way that we've gone to the text.

The other way—I'll just give a specific example. In *Coriolanus,* when you read *Coriolanus*, you're struck by this obsession that Aufidias has with Coriolanus. He's his counterpart -- his enemy. Aufidias is obsessed with Coriolanus, and everything that Coriolanus has been accorded, regaled as the greatest warrior ever and Aufidias is seething in the corner going, "Why the hell isn't this mine?" I wanted to create an opportunity where we could really understand that in a visceral sense. I stumbled upon these statues of these Greco-Roman wrestlers, which are really erotic. I mean, these

guys are just going after it. So, I made a wrestling scene. They rolled out the wrestling mats and we scored it and Derrick Weeden and Ray Porter went after it. We structured a wrestling match and Coriolanus won. But Aufidas had his men jump Coriolanus and then he took a gun and shot one of his guards. He had the gun on Coriolanus and then he shot one of his guards, because he couldn't kill the man he loved. Aufidias is obsessed with Coriolanus. He could not—He would never be able to live that way.

The other thing I did was: I made a three-act kind of a structure, because, for me, the first act is about war, so I intercut—At the end of that sequence, the war is a battle and it rages over the whole stage, and I intercut the two exit—so the two characters, so Aufidias is beaten, but he's helped by his men, who don't want to help him, and Coriolanus is actually helped by his men who love him. In that contrast, you saw Aufidias going off and Coriolanus going off the same time. It's a directorial construct to explicate and enhance the contradiction.

The last thing I'll say is that there's a lot of mob scenes in Shakespeare that I find really challenging, because you got like—There's eight people: "Yay!" "Boo!" [*Audience laughs*] There's a lot of ways—You have to grapple with that. With *Coriolanus*, I had the great gift of having a gigantic cast, which Mr. Richard Howard [*indicating someone in the room*] was in, and he was fantastic. The mob is frequently like the dumb ox – they're just a mad bunch of oxen who just scream, they change allegiances every like—literally, three seconds later, "No, yes, maybe!" At the beginning of *Coriolanus,* I wanted to explain that a little bit to the audience. So, I basically started the play with a mad rush of—Basically, food was being stored away from masses of poor folks. The play opened with a bunch of soldiers throwing food into a bin and locking it up while the crowd rushed the stage and started screaming, and the soldiers escaped. The crowd's stupidity was explained by hunger. When people are hungry, they get stupid. But there's a logical reason, it isn't just a metaphysical statement about people are stupid. People get stupid when they don't have options, when they get crazy.

That's one thing that we all grapple with is: okay, there's a mob scene. What are we going to do? How do we create the—In *Caesar,* there's like, "who's he talking to?" and they're all screaming. Those eight [people]: "Yay! Bad." You get the soundtrack, or you get the audience to take part in the whole thing, or whatever. Those are just some samples of—

Penny Metropulos:
One of the things about the mobs or all of this kind of stuff: if you start looking at what's really being said to them or what's happening around it – he knows these people

(Shakespeare, I'm talking about.) He knows these people. I think that's a thing that is often overlooked: it's not just general.

Tony Taccone:
There's a lot of voices inside of the mob. There's arguments within the mob, of course.

Penny Metropulos:
That's right! You're always going back to that. And you'll find a little jewel somewhere that you go, "Oh my god, I can use that" that gets overlooked otherwise.

David McCandless:
Let's have some questions from the audience. There are a lot of you here; I imagine you must have some questions for our esteemed panel of star directors.

Audience Member:
Thinking about, Tony, what you were talking about how, when you approach a play, you're thinking about-- You carry your whole history with it. I was wondering, as a director, your-- If you're doing 2018-style Taming of the Shrew or something, how do you make the show make sense or be meaningful for somebody that has a completely different history, like I have however many years of different history than you have? Does that make sense?

Tony Taccone:
It makes complete sense. What you're asking is: how are you in dialogue with the audience? I think that all of us have actually responded to that in some way here now, which is: you're super conscious of what's going on in the world. You're interfacing with that. You try to make intelligent choices that reveal something that feels dynamic and now and present. I don't have to say too much -- I assume those things are alive in you -- I don't have to say too much to activate them. But/What I can't do is pretend like you're all going to respond the same way. We just reveal the most dynamic idea we can find in the most dynamically staged way and then it's up to you.

I think what's really interesting about what you're saying is of course there are different generational assumptions and expectations and thoughts and feelings about the world. One of the most fun things I got to do as a person who programmed seasons was to program plays where I absolutely knew there was going to be a war going on in the audience. If you do a Martin McDonagh play, I guarantee you you'll have some people that are just laughing on the floor, screaming hysterically and there are people furious that those people are laughing on the floor. Laughter is often a recognition of boundaries. What some person laughs at, somebody else is furious about. Comedy, for

me, is a much more unforgiving kind of experience, because you're going to create a volatility there. I imagine even *Taming of the Shrew* – [*to Shana Cooper*] here, talk about that!

Shana Cooper:
I feel like with these plays, especially a play like *Taming* that is colliding with a particularly volatile question that's happening in our society, is that I think that's the reason to do those plays in that moment. Because the hope – my hope – in telling a story like that is that it will ignite those arguments and dialogue within an audience, that are surrounding these conflicts that we haven't solved. You're putting forth a strong point of view – in my case, it was the strong point of view that I felt like coincided with the text, but it's a text that people are in conflict about. So, my hope was just that leaving that play that people would go home and with whomever they'd [experienced] that event with, and they would argue about it – they would argue about where we go from here. Because the play is just one moment in time, and the more interesting question is: where do we go from here?

Tony Taccone:
They were probably just arguing about how you did it.

Shana Cooper:
You know, they probably were! But that still, then, brings up the question of what is your own point of view about how I did it? I don't mind—I'm eager for someone to be angry about how I did it and then for someone else to passionately argue for it. But that conversation is going to lead (hopefully) to some epiphany that might happen within that relationship that carries the work forward. Because otherwise, who cares?

Audience Member:
All of you – each of you – has directed a performance that I consider one of the greatest I've ever seen.

Tony Taccone:
Which ones would those be? [*Audience laugshs*]

Audience Member:
I'm curious—Speaking of text, and going back to David's first point about the text as a vehicle for performance: how do you work with actors on text to produce those performances?

Penny Metropulos:
Thank you for asking that question, because I think that the actor is really at the forefront here. We're up here talking about what we do as directors, but the actor is at the forefront of all of this. If you don't have an actor—You can have a great passion for the work and I would say that probably almost every actor who decides to do a Shakespeare (especially if they've got a good role) has a passion for the work. They get passionate about the ideas, and the emotion, and all the rest of it. If they don't have the chops, it isn't going to come across, because it's hard stuff. One of our challenges in what's going on right now -- and has done for the last twenty-five years, I would say – is people being accustomed to having these words in their mouth. And I'm going to say, from what Rosa is saying, to have people of all colors, of all genders coming out and being able to speak these words and own them and learning what it is like to—having a chance to learn how to speak this work is really, really important. Because if you have actors going up and they don't know it, have never done it, have never heard it, and don't want to learn about it, that's the way we go, "Oh, we don't like Shakespeare." That's the way that happens.

When you have an actor who is—I've been able—(because I've been at the festival for a long time now) – I've been able to watch year after year, season after season, young actors come in and start to grow in the language, start to grow with this language. I'm going to mention someone, because she came immediately to mind. Christiana Clark, who came in here and was very, very talented from the minute she arrived – but what she is doing now after all the work she's been doing, is really stupendous (as far as I'm concerned).

I think we have the opportunity to have really great text people, text coaches here, but it is the will and the want of the actor themselves to want to do this work and to want to get behind it. You can't just pick it up and say it.

Rosa, maybe you'd like to talk about this. [*Passes the microphone*]

Rosa Joshi:
It's like singing opera. It's like dancing—It's classical work. It takes rigor. I'm a nerd, so I didn't go into any of this but when I did *Hamlet*, I looked at all the quartos, the bad quarto, the folio, and I put together my own cutting of it. I go deep into the text. I love those thick—the OED, the thesaurus, and I will look up every single word I don't know. Even if I think I know it, I will spend hours—because I'm a nerd, because, to me, you have to know exactly what you're saying. Not the general gist of it. Those are the words that you're saying. The specificity of text is a skill. There's rhythm and music and all of that. It's like singing in speech. What I will often say [when] talking to young actors is

that it's like learning to ride a bike or [drive] a car – the freedom comes on the other side of technique. Having that technique and you can just do it, then you can sing. Then you can really play.

But we have to invest in that. Especially, again, I'm just going to keep saying it: when young artists are not let into that world, when they don't have the access—I think about how many young, white men (talented, but), I think "Oh, they're given that opportunity and I think they're not really ready for that opportunity yet. But they'll get better." But we don't think about that. But when a young person of color is given that same opportunity, I want us to just think about how, if you think they're not quite ready, how our own bias might just go, "Oh, that's why we don't do that." Just honestly. That's our implicit bias about it. How do we create the same—If we're going to talk about equity in the arts…well, we are now. But you can have equity and excellence, and you have to invest in it. You have to make the space for it, and remove our biases.

Shana Cooper:
I want to say one more thing about process. I love this, and I feel like one of our jobs, too, any time we get into a room, is (because you're often working with actors from a variety of different backgrounds) is how to create a company and how to give that company the tools to really bring that language to life. People are going to have a different amount of tools to bring to the table when you come into a room, always, with these plays. It's one of the thrilling jobs as a director is how you can help raise everybody up.

One of the things that helped unlock this work for me is I love the language. I love the text of these plays. It is muscular and it is visceral, but I think if it only lives in the head, it is not as muscular or visceral as what Shakespeare intended. What has been important to me is to figure out ways to develop tools where actors can access a muscular physicality and a muscular visual imagination and interpretation that can be paired with the language. Because I think that's actually when these plays come alive. That's part of the moments that Tony is describing in these plays. He's absolutely telling the story that Shakespeare is telling, and he's doing it through the language, but he's also doing it through visceral, alive, physical storytelling. We see before we can speak, as human beings. If you aren't delivering these plays on that scale, as well as on the level of the language, you're actually just leaving a huge part of the play behind. I think that's a big part of our job with actors, is to give them the opportunity to relate to, to access, and to personalize these plays in their imaginations through the language and through their bodies. That's when (hopefully), for you as an audience, then you feel these plays as viscerally as they have the capacity to deliver.

Tony Taccone:
I have a little story. First of all, if I'm training an actor, we're in bad shape. I'm giving actors actions, to be very specific about that. I'm working with actors who can pull it off, although—Tony Heald is sitting right over there and we were doing *Othello*, and I had this idea that in the last movement of the play that when Iago is running around like a madman trying to stitch together the last—He's got about four or five balls in the air. He's running around. He was literally running like a mad dog around the stage. It was tech and it was hard. I said, "Tony, we can probably simplify—" [*as Tony Heald*] "No, I can do it. I can do it." He had this marathon; he was like a demon; he was not going to let me down. Because he saw what we were trying to do. It's just one of the things you go through about trying to get in synch with your company. This is absolutely right. Trying to get the spirit of a company in every production is critical to the well-being of the show.

David McCandless:
More questions? Yes!

Audience Member:
I noticed that sometimes the time period where you place the play makes a big difference. When we had Caesar played by a woman set in contemporary times it was very realistic. On the other hand, recently, I saw *Othello* played in contemporary times, and they were fighting with pocket knives, which seems kind of silly. How do you decide what time period to put a play in?

Tony Taccone:
[*Relaying the difficult-to-hear question to his fellow panelists*] When you set a play in a different time period, what are the contradictions? What are you actually grappling with?

Penny Metropulos:
Oh, god. Why did I get stuck-- What do you guys think? [*Holds mic out to the audience, audience laughs*]

Audience Member:
We think you're always right.

Penny Metropulos:
Well, you're doing that again. As we've been saying all along, you're always approaching the play from where you are in the moment in time. Right now, you could hear today, because of what is going on today in our world, there is a passion behind a

lot of the way people are looking at the plays. Next week it'll be something else, because that's how—or, well, maybe within the next two hours. That's how fast things are going. When you're looking at a play, you're only thinking about how can I relate to an audience right now with what I have, with what this is in the time that we're in. Sometimes you get offered a play and it's literally two years from now and I just think, "Who am I going to be two years from now? How do I know what this is going to be?"

I think when you're setting it in another time period, you're thinking a lot of things. Again, you look at that fifth act: is that fifth act going to work out? Are you going to use guns [or] are you going to use swords? When you have that problem of fights, what is that going to be? You're always thinking about all of those things. I think what you're hoping, more than anything, again and again and again is how does it relate? Does it relate? Can I do something—It's not that you're just trying to do something different. That's where I'm going to go back to Shaking Up Shakespeare. I don't think anyone wants to do a play just to be different. We want to enter in with the utmost respect for what the plays are. But what the plays are to us in this moment in time, from where we are. I don't know if that completely answers your question, but that's what I think this is.

Shana Cooper:
I'll just say one other thing about that, because I fricking hate talking about time period in these plays. I feel like when I need to do it, everyone always wants to know that: where are you setting it, when are you setting it. I just feel so boxed in always from that question. I think part of it—When I'm approaching one of these plays, the question that (in my mind) is going on is: what is the world of the play? That's what I'm crafting with a team of designers. What is the world? What are the givens of this world that are going to bring this story to life in the most visceral, live way possible to engage with all of you? We'll make lists of truths about what the world of the play is, and we'll bring in images, we'll be looking at what is the world of the play. Of course, eventually that's going to land you in a specific vocabulary that people will connect to a certain period in time.

But I don't think I, personally, will ever talk about – even doing *Taming of the Shrew* set in 2018 – I think there was some advertisement about that *Caesar* in New York that was going around for a little while from the marketing department that said: "*Julius Caesar* set [on] the eve of the 2020 election" and I freaked out, because it was the kind of thing that I hate and suddenly (I think it was truly just a marketing team trying to make this play sound interesting to people) but I felt—we changed it, needless to say.

But I think there's a way in which (sometimes) we talk about those plays in that way because it's a shorthand, but I think it can so easily reduce what the plays are about. It's not to say that you're not going to—You have to make some choices about is it a gun, is it a knife…but I'm always searching, truly, for the choice that allows the ideas in the play to reverberate with as many different meanings as possible. I think if a choice that you're making can only reverberate through one meaning -- or through one time -- then maybe it's not the right choice (for me, when I'm trying to figure out when and how and where to set a play).

Penny Metropulos:
I just want to say one thing that my friend Deborah Dryden (the fabulous costume designer Deborah Dryden) always says. We had these very esoteric conversations, as we can have, about how we're approaching the plays. Deborah, at one point or another, will just say, "You know, this is all wonderful, but I have to put clothes on them."

[*Audience laughs*]

Rosa Joshi:
I also think that the reason that I do theatre is because it takes us into a place of imagination. What is the most dynamic way (as Tony was saying), what is the most dynamic event? This is why we [*she and Cooper*] connect, is that I have the same—I get to that production meeting, or someone says, "What period are you setting it in?" and I just go [*noncommittal sounds*]. It's the question that I dread, because—

Overhead speaker:
The library will be closing in fifteen minutes.

Rosa Joshi:
You [*McCandless*] predicted it; time to go. I'll be very quick. Because I feel similarly that I'm not the right person to answer the question about the specific period. I think there are some directors who do that really quite brilliantly and really well. I want to just point that out, because I think that we can be—With this work, the thing that I find the most damaging is, "Well, this is the way it should be done. Well, this is the right way to do it." This is how I respond, as an artist. This is how I make the work as an artist (with Shakespeare). What I love is the freedom to create that world – to create the world that invites an audience in. What I love about theatre is that it is not complete until you have participated in it. It's not a painting that I can just say, "That's complete." It is a performing live art. It is not complete until you complete the interpretation of it, or complete the experience of it. I want to create a world that has possibilities, and has

suggestions for you, but it feels cohesive for whatever we're saying and for whatever we're creating.

The literalness of a world, for me, is usually something that I never want to go to, because I always want to go to something that's abstract, that is metaphorical, that is something that you can only do on stage. I'm always like: Why is this onstage and why is it not a film? Why are you coming here? What is it that the medium of theatre can do for you, that you can't get from seeing a really great— Because there are some great films and some great TV out there. To my financial detriment, I do not want to do that kind of work. I want to live in the ephemeral world of theater, where it's never the same, ever, ever, ever twice. I'm always looking for the imagined world.