

## **Project title: Shifting the Culture in the Rehearsal Room**

**A. Statement of Research and Importance in the Field** In a time-based process, how do we get out of the pressure-cooker and product-oriented framework that creates conflict? How can we upend the capitalist structures that built the professional theatre model with the goal of increasing all members' sense of belonging and worth? And in doing so, how can new methods create a better production? How do we similarly explore new models of working that value multiple voices in all decision-making, be it financial, administrative, production, or artistic? What is a new vision upon which to model theatre communities of the future?

By allowing the conflicts in the room – creative or otherwise - to be acknowledged, discussed, and worked through, there can emerge new processes that allow for full participation. The goal is to discover and record the language and codes of conduct in which conflict is considered a natural occurring part of some processes, while giving all the artists in the room agency to work through said conflicts together.

Can we create an artistic lab setting to find more equal ways of working together, allowing individuals to have space in a process, developing methods of critique, valuing revision, and embracing workshop, to find paths forward when faced with obstacles? By setting up a theatre “lab,” how can we explore different approaches that aim to subvert the hierarchies that are the givens in the field?

## **B. Partners and Collaborators**

**Project Lead:** Michole Biancosino

### **List of Collaborators and Consultants:**

*Devising Jam Workshop* – Sheila Bhandyophadyay (Shakespeare & Co)

*Active Analysis* – Andrew W. Smith (Carnegie Mellon School of Drama)

*Decolonizing the Rehearsal Room* – Antu Jacob (InterAct Theatre, CUNY Baruch)

*Devising Practices* – Melissa Moschitto (The Anthropologists)

**Student Research Assistants and/or interns:** Aidan Amster '24.5, Qinyi Hua '25, Elsa Marrian '25, Jordan Henry '26, Eliza Bryson (Wesleyan '26)

**Partnerships:** Project Y Theatre Company, Middlebury College Theatre Department

**NYC Artist Collaborators for Active Analysis:** Dana Jacks, Wynn McClenahan, Masha Cima, Josie Wright, Evans Malkin, Helen Farmer, Andrew W. Smith

**NYC Artist Collaborators for Devising Jam:** Gabrielle Scott, Blake Habermann, Jordan Cobb, TT Oh, Leta Marcellus, Katherine Benitez, Lily Linz

## **C. Summary of Findings**

**-Active Analysis** as a Tool for students and professionals to work democratically. By using this actor-centered training method, I saw every member of the workshop having equal input and agency in their work. The director creates a frame within which the work is done, but with very little decision over exactly what the actors do or say in any given

rehearsal. The actors have the agency to shape the work themselves; when needed they ask for feedback. I will continue to work with this method in my upcoming classes.

**-Devising/Physical Theatre.** There are a wealth of exercises and community-building tools in this work that can create a sense of ensemble. This worked well for non-verbal, physical work, as participants can improvise freely and imaginatively from their own point of view. That said, once participants stepped out to become leaders/directors, conflicts arose. When text was introduced from outside sources, it caused conflict. The major question I took away from Devising/Physical theatre methods – How can we use these methods with preexisting text? How can we introduce text early so that it doesn't create the same tension and fear as in traditional modes of rehearsal?

**-Decolonizing the Rehearsal Room** – We need to center well-being in our practices. Humans all come to the room with different stresses in our lives. Outside the room we live in an unequal world. How can we create the most inclusive, open and understanding room, so that all artists can do their work without added stress? Stress, and ways to deactivate stress, were the focus. This workshop also brought up expansion of time – how can we find more time before rehearsals begin and end for artists to do their work? How can we manipulate our rehearsal period to create greater output alongside greater artist health and well-being?

**-Devising Practices/Theme Based** – There are ways to demystify the process of creating researched, theme-based or historical-based work. A group of people interested in a topic that is relevant to our historic moment is a powerful starting point. How can we immediately work together and build an ensemble to create work that is about today? There are lots of techniques a director can initiate, through the body/movement, as well as through writing, to allow people to quickly become intimately engaged with and in conversation with each other's ideas.

## **D. Implications**

If we do not change our practices then we remain in an outdated, broken system that harms both individual artists as well as the overall artistic product. If we invite artists in as full participants, generative as well as interpretative, then we are building a space of creativity and inspiration. If we can find the right way into each process, then we can build community and good will on day one of a process, so that when conflicts do inevitably arise, there is already a good working relationship in place from which to have difficult conversations. If we acknowledge conflict, including how and why we got there, in an open, deliberative way, we can continue to work with each through and past the conflict and continue making the work. Through de-centering the director in each rehearsal and centering the actors, we are upending at least a hundred years of entrenched hierarchical training that has kept the theatre industry at a creative standstill.

### **E. Publications, Performances, Media Coverage, Public component**

Active Analysis centered both student actors, professional actors, and acting teachers. By training other educators in these methods, we are effecting acting pedagogy beyond our own practice. Just this past spring 2025, a student who had interned as part of this grant produced their own 700 thesis work in the Hepburn Zoo. Their program notes cited that their fundamental goal for their project was to work using non-hierarchical methods in rehearsal. Continued use of and work with Active Analysis will continue in the summer 2025 Women in Theatre Festival rehearsal process for the NY Premiere of *Dorothy's Dictionary*, June 13-29, 2025, at ART/NY Theatres in the Gural Theatre (503 West 53<sup>rd</sup> Street, New York, NY). Credit will be given in the program for support from CT Collaborative, as well as on the website: [www.womenintheater.org](http://www.womenintheater.org)

The current project continues as I develop a handbook for non-hierarchical theatre practices for the Director, to be presented in the Theatre Department Lunch series during the 2025/2026 academic year.