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Publication Date

2022

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

The Dynamism of a MFA

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Master of Fine Arts

in

Theatre and Dance (Acting)

by

Margaret Grayson Heyl

Committee in charge:

Professor Ursula Meyer, Chair
Professor Marco Alexander Barricelli
Professor Stephen W Buescher
Professor Manuel Rotenberg

2022

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The Thesis of Margaret Grayson Heyl is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically.

University of California San Diego

2022

DEDICATION

To my family and all their continual love and support, no matter the physical distance.

To all of my teachers. Every one of you.

To Lois Shih, whose friendship continually uplifts and betters me as a person and an artist.

To Thich Nhat Hanh and his students, without whom solitude would never have become a dear and generous friend.

To the MFA Acting class of 2022; Henry Walter Greenberg, Noah Israel, Noah Rose Keeling, Jada Alston Owens, Natalia Quintero-Riestra, Lois Shih, and Jordan C. Smith. I am incredibly grateful that my time here was with such a positive, goofy, steadfast cohort.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to acknowledge the following people for my time here at UC San Diego. With deep gratitude, I give standing ovations in alphabetical order: Adair Heyl, Allen Gilmore, Arthur and Molli Wagner, Ashton Heyl, Carla Harting, Deborah Stein, Eileen Troberman, Emily Moler, Eva Barnes, Gerhard Gessner, Hilary Ward, Jacole Kitchen, Jamie Newcomb, Jen Chang, Jonathan Heyl, Julie Burelle, Kim Walsh, Kyle Blair, Linda Vickerman, Marco Barricelli, Naomi Iizuka, Peter Heyl, Richard Robichaux, Robin Miles, Stephen Buescher, and Ursula Meyer.

Thank you.

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

The Dynamism of a MFA

by

Margaret Grayson Heyl

Master of Fine Arts in Theatre and Dance (Acting)

University of California San Diego, 2022

Professor Ursula Meyer, Chair

I viscerally remember while reading The New Yorker article “The Dynamism of Janet McTeer,” as I sat in my cubicle in Chicago at a survival temp job turned actual fake career, sitting slack-jawed, elated, and sucker punched. McTeer talked of acting as jazz where artists re-invent every performance. I finally had words to describe the craving I longed for in my work; something I could point to and say ‘YES! See?? I want to do that!’ But with no idea how to bridge the gap from where I was to where I now dreamed to explore my craft.

Admittedly, it is disorienting to look back on a MFA experience that is so vastly different from what I expected and still say... absolutely; I bridged that gap. Perhaps the incubation period

is intensified when confined in isolation for most of your grad school career. Where your bed, kitchen, green screen, movement studio, shower, anger, digitalized classmates, heart aches, work, suffering students, tears, panic attacks, pee-inducing laughter, triumphs, failures, and you all manifest together like a hundred piece orchestra playing in a 425sq foot studio apartment. It is deafening. Yet, among all this is where I learned to breathe through my emotions as I speak; sustain in the power of living thought; really do what I'm doing for real, really; and forever challenge myself to embrace the free-fall of a soft belly. Held by my training, I enter back into the professional world saying 'YES! See?? I now act jazz!'