

## Maneuvering Through Madness, Movement, and Method Queerly in Faust's Production of *Murderous Moveable Macbeth*

Christina Rodriguez de Conte

Allow me to begin with an excerpt from the Faust *Murderous Moveable Macbeth* script:

LADY MACBETH:  
He that's coming  
Must be provided for: and you shall put  
This night's great business into my dispatch;  
Which shall to all our nights and days to come  
Give solely sovereign sway and masterdom.  
MACBETH: We will speak further.  
(MACBETH EXITS THROUGH THE HINKLE TINKLE.)

The Mickee Faust Club's 2018 production of *Murderous Moveable Macbeth* did not fear the play's curse. Instead, it embraced the company's 30-year-old process to queer *Macbeth*. After Lady Macbeth's "unsex me here" monologue the Faust stage directions read: "(MACBETH EXITS THROUGH THE HINKLE TINKLE.)" The Hinkle Tinkle is the accessible bathroom where a portrait hangs of its namesake and donor sitting regally on her porcelain throne; crown and scrubbing wand at the ready. The juxtaposition of classical drama and camp seen in this stage direction speaks to the overall aesthetic of Faust. Renaissance scholar Jonathan Goldberg suggests in his book, *Queering the Renaissance*, that camp can queer a classic by providing "activities on the margins or in the shadows," which "redefine the center."<sup>1</sup> Faust's *Macbeth* proves Goldberg right.

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<sup>1</sup>Goldberg, Jonathan. "Introduction," *Queering the Renaissance*. (Series Q. Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 14.

*Murderous Moveable Macbeth* can best be described as classical Shakespeare produced and staged by a socially-conscious pro-queer and disability-centered company rooted in a feminist creative collective process providing an immersive experience for the spectators. In this chapter, I highlight the originality of Faust's process, sound, collective non-hierarchical directing techniques, costume and set design, and fundraising strategies. I investigate the company's effort to reimagine gender roles in Shakespeare, as well as the use of queer space to queer classical works. My role as the co-director, fight choreographer, and leading lady of *Murderous Moveable Macbeth* provides me with a unique positionality to investigate how the maddening elements of the production along with the ever-changing immersive movement within the production served as a conscious methodology employed by the Mickee Faust Club to queer the classic work.



Christy Rodriguez de Conte as Lady Macbeth in Mickee Faust's *Murderous Moveable Macbeth*.

In April 2018, Faust held a meeting to determine the annual fall productions. After much discussion we agreed to cut the fall cabarets and instead add a new fall lineup that allowed for a rotation of projects. The Ad Hoc Faust Fall 2018 Show Committee decided that the upcoming four years would

loosely resemble the following: Fall 2018: *Macbeth*, Fall 2019: Musical (either original to our company or one we secure rights to), Fall 2020: Political Cabaret (it's national elections, likely followed by a Ball/Bawl in January 2021), Fall 2021: Weird Production (i.e. Actual Lives, *Ubu Roi*, Greek trilogy, Molière or an evening of weird short fiction adaptations). This would continue as a regular rotation to get the audience used to the scheduling and allow the company time to write any original material or secure any rights that might be needed. As their final act the committee chose the Fall 2018 production. The two final choices came down to *Richard III*, submitted by a 10-year Faust veteran, and *Macbeth*, submitted by Terry Galloway. The committee was torn, and the excitement culminated in a now historic coin flip. Terry and *Macbeth* won. Faust folklore now hints at the existence of a double headed coin with Mickee's face on it, but who knows for sure.

Once *Macbeth* was chosen, the elements that highlighted the "murder" and "moveable" aspects of the production were introduced to the vision. It became clear that blood would be plentiful and the production would be interactive. With this declaration came the realization of the magnitude of our gory immersed version of a classically queered *Macbeth*. We divided into teams responsible for: Bar, Budget, Captioning, Closers & Distribution of Duties, Costume & Props, Directing, Assistant Directing, Education Outreach, Executive Producing, Food, Fundraising, House Management, Lights, Mobility/Accommodation Issues, Music, Program, PR, Set, Sound, Space Management, Stage Management, Weaponry/Battles/Blood, and Website. Although Faust's Cabarets hold similar production meetings, they do not have as many teams and do not meet nearly as often. The democratic distribution of power implored by the *Murderous Moveable Macbeth* production team reveals the complexity of creating productions that honor Faust's main core community values of inclusion and queer artistry.

Faust is no stranger to Shakespeare. Galloway's own intimate relationship with Shakespeare's work began in 1969 when she was a student at UT's Shakespeare at Winedale Summer Theatre Festival. By 1973 Galloway had taken a full residency there as a Research Assistant and Assistant Director.<sup>2</sup> "Winedale changed my life and forced me to take a second look at my future," Galloway noted that before participating in Shakespeare at Winedale she was working as a historical archeologist and although she enjoyed it, "after Winedale, nothing was good enough."<sup>3</sup> Galloway's adoration of and connection to Shakespeare continued to inform her work beyond Winedale and into the Mickee Faust Clubhouse.

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<sup>2</sup>"Biography," *Terry Galloway*, <http://www.theterrygalloway.com/terry-galloway.html>, accessed February 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Alan Jenkins, "Shakespeare King of Hill at Winedale," *Austin American-Statesman*, August 10, 1980, 27.

The collective has produced both original Faust Shakesparody Festivals and full-length Shakespearean plays. Each full-length Shakespearean play produced by Faust, *Moveable Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Murderous Moveable Macbeth* used immersive theatre to achieve heightened community engagement. The Faust's ShakesParody Festivals featured a multitude of events throughout the Mickee Faust Clubhouse. Events consisted of Shakespearean scenes and monologues and modified Shakespeare and Shakespeare-inspired skits with a mostly comic heir to it. The festivals were also community gatherings where local performance groups like Society for Creative Anachronism, Troupe Arabesque and the FSU fencing club set up to give sword demonstrations and dance classes. Railroad Square volunteers brought Shakespeare to the children through arts and crafts and Shakespeare-themed games like the Ophelia Dunking Booth and Sponge Jousting.<sup>4</sup>

In 2006, twelve years before *Murderous Moveable Macbeth*, Faust produced *Moveable Midsummer Night's Dream*. In her review of the play, Elizabeth Bell describes the event as a “tremendously ambitious project: a full-length Shakespearean production, three different stages, more than forty costumed players, and a technical crew of more than thirty.”<sup>5</sup> The production took part in several different areas of Railroad Square Art Park (the then deeply wooded lush overgrown acreage adjacent to a railroad), which recalled to Bell “neighborhood block parties, summer trips to the lake house, years of hand-me-down furniture, all spelling comfort and home.” Overall, the production of *Moveable Midsummer Night's Dream* served as a community event that brought together all ages, ethnicities, physical abilities, lifestyles, professions, and experiences. As Bell articulates, “the staged play mirrored the community and vice versa.”<sup>6</sup> From mud pits in the art park to drum circles in the square and food in the theatre's backyard, this event was a memorable win for Faust, and one the production team had been eager to replicate. The company's website describes this as a production “on three stages in Railroad Square. The audience experienced the play with the characters as they moved from the court to the fairy woods and back to the wedding banquet. Community members and children dressed as fairies and joined in the fun.”<sup>7</sup>

Although I was not present at *Moveable Midsummer Night's Dream*, I have become familiar with this production through archival research and Faust stories shared during the production of *Murderous Movable Macbeth*. These stories illustrate how Faust queers any classic. One particular story that has struck my

<sup>4</sup> “Shakespeare & ShakesParody,” *Mickee Faust*, accessed May 2020, <http://www.mickeefaust.com/shakes>.

<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Bell, “A (Movable) *Midsummer Night's Dream* Produced by the Mickee Faust Club, April 22, 23, 29 & 30,” *Mickee Faust*, accessed May 2020.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> “Shakespeare & ShakesParody,” *Mickee Faust*, accessed May 2020, <http://www.mickeefaust.com/shakes>.

personal fancy recalls Donna Marie Nudd as Helena rolling in a mud pit reciting her part while dry humping a statue as the train horn blared 50 yards away. Legend goes that during the lover's scene, which culminated in an actual mud fight where "real water and mud were flung" much to the audience's excitement and appreciation, a train would sometimes pass by the square.<sup>8</sup> Faust was prepared and had strategically placed fairies in the wooded area amongst the audience to "pause" the action when a train went by to ensure the audience could hear the actors. As fate would have it during one of the shows in 2006, such a moment occurred. The train came blaring past the square, the fairies sprinkled their dust to freeze the actors, but Donna Marie would not have it. She waved the fairies off and mounted one of the closest art park statues and began to ride it to the sounds of the train horn. Engulfing the real ambience in the fictional Shakespearean world, she broke the character and instead offered her mud-covered lesbian body to be displayed and desired by the audience. I will investigate moments such as this – scenes that subvert the gaze by placing queer and disabled bodies on display – in *Murderous Moveable Macbeth*.

Madness, movement, and method are of primary interest to me, as well as the way they are each manipulated in Faust to create a 30-year-long aesthetic. Truthfully, my mode of analysis stems from Donna Marie's own self-amusing need to use alliteration cleverly in an early email to the *Murderous Moveable Macbeth* production team titled, "Monday Meeting for Murderous Moveable Macbeth (with Meal)?" Nudd began this email with, "mmmmm, Yes I wanted to see how many "M"s I could get in the subject heading."<sup>9</sup> The overuse of M's became a running joke throughout the process. I find it only appropriate the joke continues to shape my methodology. Moreover, Faust's previously discussed history of moveable theatre combined with Terry Galloway's almost maddening approach to Shakespeare, has influenced my arrival upon the elements in the title of "madness, movement and method." In this chapter I explore how madness, movement, and method create an immersive feminist queer experience in the 2018 Faust production of *Murderous Moveable Macbeth*.

### **Moving Theatrically Through Queer Space**

Faust used movement as the driving force of the event. In fact, Galloway adamantly argued for a large portion of the initial meetings that it was crucial that the title contain the word "moveable." She believed Faust fans would know the reference to *Moveable Midsummer Night's Dream*; ensuring an audience. And, because it was decreed, it became so. The audience was always a consideration from the conception of the production. The audience members were viewed as more than spectators. Rather, they would have a role of active participants and

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Donna Marie Nudd, email message to author, June 29, 2018.

accomplices to Macbeth. The audience would serve as the keepers of secrets. Long time Faustkateer and *Murderous Moveable Macbeth* audience member, Susan Gage, wrote of her experience of culpability in an email to the cast. She wrote:

The play made for an all-sensory extravaganza for the audience and even made us culpable for the murderous trek of an increasingly mad and greedy royal couple. It began at the ticket booth. We dipped our hands in "blood" and smeared our prints onto a tapestry that read "Blood will have blood." True, we could wipe our hands after that and be made "clean." But, just like Lady Macbeth, there was no way to get the "blood" off my fingers until I got home and could wash them off with soap and water. Hence, I was marked as part of the deadly plot of the play ... If I had forgotten that I was part of the murderous mayhem, I certainly couldn't forget it when [*during the final battle scene*] I felt the rush of soldiers armed with swords come past my seat, clanging and banging, kicking and punching and then the inevitable spray of blood from the rafters as people died at my feet. It was techno-color, surround sound, over-the-top murder. Now not only was their blood on my hands; it was in my hair and on my body ... As an audience member, it left me with the question: Will I remain a participant in that cycle of violence? Will I be lulled by music and dance and fine food into ignoring the rot going on in the castle? Great questions to have in these 21st century times. Faust, again, has achieved a masterpiece."<sup>10</sup>

With the audience members at the center, *Murderous Moveable Macbeth* came to resemble the cyclical nature of life, sin and fate as the performance moved throughout the four distinct Theatre areas of the Mickee Faust Clubhouse: the wooded area outside the backyard gates, a fire pit around a large mulberry tree, the outdoor Marc Masonbrick backyard stage, the indoor Schnittman Hall, and the indoor Mickee Faust Mainstage. The audience was greeted on the slab of concrete just outside the teal and purple warehouse known as the Mickee Faust Clubhouse. The backyard gates were closed, covered in cloth, and framed not with the familiar "Faust" archway, but with bloody heads on stakes. Wandering minstrels set the eerie tone of the witches' entrance into "the blasted heath" of Scotland. The crisp cold November air wisped over the bodies laid strewn just outside the gates as if they were an offering to the witches who entered through the foliage. Audience members followed Macbeth like shadows, witnesses to the prophecy the witches proclaimed. The gates, adorned with bloody heads, were opened by the Captain and participants were ushered through the backyard. To do so, they walked past a one-armed Buddha with a plastic pet rainbow flamingo under the edge of the large mulberry tree branches to the left and a 10-foot upside-down Mickee logo on the metal exterior of the building.<sup>11</sup> Just under the

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<sup>10</sup> Susan Gage, email message to author, November 19, 2018.

<sup>11</sup> The Mickee Faust logo combines the Mickee Mouse Ears (three round circles that create a head and two ears) and the cross-bone part of the skull and cross bones. To

logo passersby saw a 2-foot rat hole with Mickee's dirty shorts, glove and underwear hang on a clothesline with a crossroad sign that reads "Welcome to Faustlandia." The audience would arrive at the newly renovated Marc Masonbrink Garden and outside stage to meet King Duncan, Malcolm, Banquo, and Macbeth before greed and sick ambition took over the latter. King Duncan would lead the audience into the castle for a party. He would have a brief yet powerful encounter with Lady Macbeth situated in Faust's black box theatre, the Adelaide Schnittman Hall.<sup>12</sup>



Even the audience has blood on their hands as they enter the building and are asked to dip their hands in red paint and mark their involvement in it all from the entrance of the show.

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overly ensure they do not get sued by Disney, the logo's left ear has a bite taken out of it.

<sup>12</sup> Adeline Schnittman Hall was renovated primarily to provide an air-conditioned performance space to cool the notoriously hot summer cabarets, *Queer as Faust*. It has since become an extra source of income for Faust as a community rental space for parties or artistic and theatrical events.

Imagine a bare stage, holding only two banners with the Macbeth Family crest. Lady Macbeth enters through the Hinkle Tinkle, reading Macbeth's letter. She invokes Hecate and resolves to gain power at any cost. She and Duncan invite some of the audience through the Hinkle Tinkle and Green Room and others around the front 20-foot barn doors into the Mickee Faust Clubhouse Mainstage. This moment of immersion becomes pivotal to *Murderous Moveable Macbeth*. The audience has been given both glimpses of Macbeth's life and Faust's home and is then introduced to a vast space that echoes and radiates. In this space the audience is implied in all of Macbeth's wrongdoings, the murders of Duncan and Banquo, and the lies and deceit woven because of them.

The next round of passage through the space follows the same pattern, beginning with a musical procession through the parking lot, through the gates, and into the transformed backyard/Banquet Hall. The banquet, which took place in the backyard under the hanging lights around tables borrowed from the nearby art gallery, was the most critical part of the entire production as well as a profound experience to me as a performer. First, I was able to improvise a scene as Lady Macbeth – what actress wouldn't love to do that? But most importantly, because the event gathered the community together to break bread, sing, and witness the appearance of the ghost of Macbeth's best friend and (as I had inserted queerly), Lady Macbeth's secret lover, Banquo.<sup>13</sup> The banquet became an immersive experience that embraced a queer aesthetic of cross-gendered performers, transgendered audience, disabled technicians, etc. combined with a literal egalitarian communal breaking of bread. And what is immersion if not movement of the mind, body and soul.

Instead of having a traditional intermission, much to Terry Galloway's insistence, a live banquet was held featuring a full traditional English feast. At the middle of Act III, Scene 3, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth would invite audience members into the backyard where they all took their seats at the eight round tables. Pickles, cheese, bread, olives, and a delicious pea puree awaited them at their tables. Lady Macbeth took her place on the renovated Marc Masonbrick outdoor stage<sup>14</sup> and invited her guests to partake in an authentic

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<sup>13</sup> At the 2018 Comparative Drama Conference I presented a shortened version of this chapter, *Something Wicked This Way Comes to The Mickee Faust Club*. After I read my paper an audience member asked me if the layered levels of queerness, such as cross-gendered casting of Banquo. I was elated to hear such a question and without much thought shouted, "Lady Macbeth and Banquo are having an affair!" Although their relationship was a conscious actor choice on my part, played only through subtext, it became a character truth in Faust's production of *Macbeth*. When in Faust, do as the Faustkateers do. Queer it up!

<sup>14</sup> The Mickee Faust Academy for the *REALLY* Dramatic Arts was awarded Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation's "Quality of Life Grant" to renovate The Marc Masonbrick outdoor garden and stage for 2016 -2017. Faust had previously received the "Quality of Life Grant" in 2011 to create an accessible Arts Administration Offices and

Faust-made Elizabethan feast. Audience members shared stories with strangers and whipped jabs or comments to the cast that walked about as two more courses of vegetables, chicken, and traditional rose watered jelly were served. As dessert was being served, Macbeth entered to join Lady Macbeth and begin the scripted portion of Act III, Scene 4 when Banquo appears to Macbeth. Depending on the night, the audience consisted of “career” Faust audience members who have seen everything produced by Faust, community artists who support Faust as an artistic part of Tallahassee, and then there were people who had never been to Faust, but were intrigued by our production of *Macbeth*. Always present at the banquet were the three children who performed in the show. They could be seen nightly out of costume eating with their parents before their scene. Fourth wall or not, we make sure the children are fed at Faust.<sup>15</sup>



The audience enjoys their traditional English feast as the minstrel’s play for Lady Macbeth’s banquet guests.

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in 2008 received money to create an Accessible Stage Design By and For People with Disabilities: The Maryanne Ward Memorial Stage which added ramps throughout the theatre and accessible bathrooms.

<sup>15</sup> Galloway could be seen serving as she performed an extended version of her character in the show, the Porter. I will admit, I delighted, as Lady Macbeth, to yell at the porter through the crowd and make her grovel and bow on her way out. Call it a creative release!

When the banquet was over, the audience continued as prescribed through the Adelaide Schnittman Hall to witness the fled Malcolm receive the news of his wife and children's deaths back in Inverness. The audience took one last lap through the Faustuscape, ending back at the mainstage to bid Lady Macbeth one last farewell and sit in the middle of a twenty-person melee Gage described earlier. The play ended with Malcom lifting the perfect Papier-mâché head of Macbeth with blood dripping from his severed neck.

Faust's ability to queer any content, done primarily by housing it in the very queer space of the Mickee Faust Clubhouse, establishes one of the key elements in the company's aesthetics. The overtly queer space the audiences moved through in *Murderous Moveable Macbeth* theatricalizes the world of the play. In *Performance and the Politics of Space: Theatre and Topology*, Benjamin Wihstutz speaks of the influence of the spatial aesthetic where a theatrical experience occurs as reflective of social and institutional experience: "Theatre is never simply an artistic space but also always represents a social, urban and institutional space, the discourse on the politics of space necessarily plays out on several levels."<sup>16</sup> He continues, "It is also possible to trace the history of social differentiation and political power relations in the history of theatre architecture itself, enabling the analysis of the performance space with regard to its social topology."<sup>17</sup>

The history of the current Mickee Faust Clubhouse began when Faustkateers gathered to strip, sand, and sculpt the empty warehouse located in an industrial section of Tallahassee, FL, just by the railroad tracks, to suit the company's needs. Over time the space evolved to be what it is today—a large warehouse painted in light blue paneling, purple trim and two large lime green barn doors with the Mickee Faust logo, a skull and crossbones Mickee Ears (similar to Mickey Mouse ears, but with a piece "bitten" off of one ear). The Clubhouse houses a variety of queer art on its walls inside and outside, as well as a collection of props and set pieces throughout the green room and main house. My own personal favorite, "How baby rats are made," is a sundial made with one plastic rat sitting on a pole that extends from the exterior wall just above a painted shadow of itself. According to artist and house manager Nancy Lang:

It works around the summer solstice which is June 20. By late April it's plainly visible but I usually tell people baby rats are made May 1 to mid-July. It happens about 45 minutes before sunset. The shadow is below the painted rat at first—but as the sun goes lower in that 45 minutes, the shadow moves upward and eventually it mounts the painted rat. See they're mutually loving

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<sup>16</sup>Erika Fischer-Lichte and Benjamin Wihstutz, eds., *Performance and the Politics of Space: Theatre and Topology* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 3.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* 6.

rats. So within that 45 minutes each gets some time to be a bottom and each some time as a top! Ah love.

This artistic installation that sits just above the office of the Mickee Faust Clubhouse amuses me and leaves me in a state of queer delight; as does most of the Mickee Faust Clubhouse.

The bathroom is one of the most popular rooms at Faust, not just for its utilitarianism, but for the archives that line its walls. In the Mickee Faust main house bathroom, one can find thirty years of playbills and promotional material. They are not laminated or carefully kept. Instead, the age of the cast is equally represented with the slow wearing of their archive. Still, there is something endearing and special about how and where their history is kept. It is actually accessible and complete. Equally accessible and displayed are the plethora of queer and disability awards audience members were forced to pass to go from Lady Macbeth's chambers to the castle.

Terry Galloway and my choice to keep most of the queer elements present and visible was a strategic methodological choice. No matter how much we tried to transform the space, this version of *Macbeth* was held in a queer building that influenced the audience's experience of the play. Many small things were done to "clean up" the place and move old prop pieces that had become expected visuals in the audience's sightline off stage. The long-standing staple to the building, the painted rainbow that ran along the entire upstairs balcony, was covered with pieces of plywood painted to look like castle stones. Yes, the set pieces diluted the elements of queerness in the room; however, the echoes of crude queer jokes, pictures and artwork of and by queer Faustkateers, and the movement of the beautiful queer bodies of the audience, cast and crew through the fueled the queerness that emanated from the Faust Warehouse during the show.

### **The Madness Descends**

The word "blood" appears 36 times in the text of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, making it a running theme through any production. From the first audition blood helped set the tone of the production. Auditionees were asked to recite the epic line that appears in *Macbeth* Act II, Scene 3, and "Blood will have blood." Terry Galloway, with whom I had the pleasure of co-directing, created a call and response layered in gore. "Blood will have blood," she screamed. "Blood will have blood," the auditionees responded. "Blood will have blood," Galloway yelled louder; "Blood will have blood," everyone yelled back. This is how *Murderous Moveable Macbeth* began and continued, as a collective group of individuals chanting about blood and theatricalizing madness. The blood made the psychological madness experienced by Macbeth tangible to the audience. As the fight director, I was responsible for the blood effects on the stage. I engineered ways to squirt blood from an actor's stomach, created intestines out

of marshmallows, and mixed edible blood into plastic sandwich bags for actors to shoot out of their mouths during the final battle. One critic found the gruesome nature of *Murderous Moveable Macbeth* to be central to its immersive nature. Derek Lee Barton writes:

In this writer's view, the climax of the play, the great battle at Dunsinane, is a beautiful piece of environmental theatre that uses their quirky space, with its multiple levels and various entrances, to full effect. The audience finds themselves quite literally in the midst of battle: combat takes place in the aisles, on the balconies above the seats, and all around. This scene is site specific theatre at its finest: an ephemeral experience emerging out of the unique life of a space, as much a product of that space as of any dramatic text. *Murderous Movable Macbeth* is what many theatres attempt but few pull off so well: a truly environmental piece which sweeps the audience up and, for a few hours, gives them an experience of not only watching, but of being a part of another world, in this case the world of one of Shakespeare's most gruesomely memorable plays.<sup>18</sup>

As the fight director/choreographer and blood specialist, I am greatly pleased by his observations. The gruesomeness of the production juxtaposed with the quirky space as described above, creates an erotic queerness to the backdrop of a violent melee.

The controlled chaos led to a heightened level of madness. Blood has a history of queerness within the body. An entire generation of gay men were identified by their blood, more specifically by the decline in CD4 cells that caused common blood problems like anemia, neutropenia and thrombocytopenia.<sup>19</sup> And like blood, queerness filled the veins of this production through the queer bodies on the stage.

To some, queerness itself is maddening. Faust revels in madness for it allows a level of freedom when casting bodies on a stage. One does not have to avoid or avert the audience's gaze and instead relies on such a gaze to help queer the work. Feminist scholars have long since debated the effects of the male gaze on the female body, but what happens to this gaze when placed on a queer and, at times, disabled body? How does the queer body influence Shakespeare's text? How did the trans-gender and cross-gender casting of the Captain, Lennox and Banquo help to queer the production? How does the topology of the performance influence the audience's queer interpretation of the production? Carrie Sandahl expands upon performance scholar Petra Kuppers idea of audiences searching for a "true diagnosis" on the multi-layered queer disabled

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<sup>18</sup>Derek Lee Barton, "Mickee Faust Club presents *Murderous Moveable Macbeth* Review: A Site-Specific Shakespearean Romp," *Picture This Post*, November 25, 2018, accessed May 2020. <https://www.picturethispost.com/author/derek-lee-barton/>

<sup>19</sup> Greta Hughson, *Factsheet Blood Problems and HIV*, Nov. 2017, <http://www.aidsmap.com/Blood-problems-and-HIV/page/1044643/>

body which Koppers calls the “diagnostic gaze.” Sandahl highlights how “the diagnostic gaze aimed at disabled bodies tends to negate sexuality.” She goes on to claim that “by asserting sexual, bare, crippled bodies that perform gender ambiguously onstage, queer crips draw the audience’s attention to the ways in which the diagnostic gaze is aimed differently at cripples and queers in everyday life.”<sup>20</sup> *Murderous Moveable Macbeth* did not exploit crip bodies in a sexual way per se, but it did use these bodies to draw attention to otherwise dismissed roles. The toad, the owl, and a lone fighter on a stage were all played by disabled bodies. Equally dismissed characters were the Captain and Lennox, whose comradeship was only heightened by their mutual representation of the Trans community.<sup>21</sup> Trans bodies produce a diversion from the usual audience gaze. Gender and sexuality scholar Jack Halberstam grapples with how gaze upon a transgender body is reflected back to the audience in his article “The Transgender Gaze in Boys Don’t Cry.” He defines the transgender gaze as an “ideological content of the male and female gazes and it temporarily disarms the compulsory heterosexuality of the romance genre.”<sup>22</sup> Likewise, the presence of transgender, dragged, and disabled bodies in a classical work disarms the compulsive heterosexuality embedded in these works.

The cross-gendered casting and the casting of Trans actors and disabled actors in *Murderous Moveable Macbeth* contributed largely to the queering of Shakespeare’s original. Some of these cross-gendered casting choices were intentional and others were purely kismet. The characters of the Captain and Lennox were played by two transgender actors whose personal identities are well-known in the cast, crew, and community. When investigating these performances through a transgender gaze it becomes clear how the queering of classical works can enhance the interpretation of the work. Every evening these actors sang an acapella warriors’ lament that seemed to resonate through the souls of two individuals who themselves had experienced deep grief and sorrow. The fact that these characters were gender-bending warriors brought issues regarding gender, war, and violence to the forefront of *Murderous Moveable Macbeth*. As Halberstam suggests, cross-gendered casting allows audiences to view, in this case, war and power through non-heteronormative gender-based lenses. Unlike the Captain and Lennox, the casting of Banquo as a woman, as well as the choice to play her as a woman, was deliberate and calculated. Making

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<sup>20</sup>Carrie Sandahl, 2003. “Queering the Crip or Crippling the Queer?: Intersections of Queer and Crip Identities in Solo Autobiographical Performance,” *A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies*, vol. 9, no. 1-2 (April 2003)

<sup>21</sup>Every evening during the banquet, in a secret corner of the theatre, Captain and Lennox shared an intimate private drink every night as they rehearsed their “warrior’s lament” before they shared it with the audience during the banquet.

<sup>22</sup> Judith Halberstam, “The transgender gaze in *Boys Don’t Cry*,” *Screen*, vol.42, no. 3 (2001): 294.

Banquo a woman only elevates the level of evil embodied in Macbeth's actions. Here violence on a woman is almost a rite of passage into the nationhood of man.<sup>23</sup> In casting Banquo as a woman and keeping the character a woman allowed for Macbeth's violent actions to reflect centuries-old practices of oppression over women and their bodies. The abuse and ultimate murder of Banquo only emphasizes the reason for so many women going mad in this world.

Disabled bodies also filled key roles in *Murderous Moveable Macbeth*. One actor with cerebral palsy was purposefully given one of the most dramatic lines in the play (and shortest) lines in the play: "The Queen, my lord, is dead." His struggle to speak the lines clearly as he had so diligently rehearsed mirrored that of Macbeth's own struggle to speak truthfully and see the horrors he created. Faust is known for incorporating an actor's disability into its blocking and staging, which creates a unique queered aesthetic that continues to shape and ultimately define the Mickee Faust Club's process, and breaks through the otherwise maddening lack of disability bodies seen on Shakespearean stages.

### **A Method to the Madness**

Faust's methodology roots itself in inclusion. Specifically, the inclusion of queer and disabled people of the cast, crew and audience.<sup>24</sup> Recent noteworthy

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<sup>23</sup> Carla Freccero, "Practicing Queer Philology with Marguerite de Navarre: Nationalism and the Castigation of Desire," *Queering the Renaissance*. ed, Jonathan Goldberg, (Series Q. Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 111.

<sup>24</sup> When discussing inclusion at Faust we are really talking about disability and exclusion, specifically the conscious inclusion of disability and subconscious exclusion of diversity. The reality is that Faust is a primarily white company. The common trend that I am finding as a lesbian Latina is that queer has taken the place of black or Latinx when being inclusive. Hire a gay white man and check the diversity box without ever having to have a brown person step foot into your office! I am not accusing the Mickee Faust Club of going to such extremes as to purposely keep people out, the way I have seen in academic institutions or corporate theatres, but instead I do see Faust as subconsciously creating an environment where that "other" version of my identity is not cherished as much as my queerness is. It hurts me to report that I myself have been speaking Spanish in a dressing room with another Latina woman only to be interrupted by a fellow Faustkateer with a racist comment like, "What is that gibberish? Speak English!" In all reality I almost walked out. Instead, I spewed out a slew of insults her way in Spanish and continued speaking Spanish to my friend as we applied our makeup. This was not a one-time occurrence, but it also was not a constant or even prevalent experience. No, I contribute Faust's lack of diversity to the lack of representation in the stories presented on stage. As part of the writer's team at Faust I know that my queer content will be better received than my Latinx content. It becomes easier to write a joke about a lesbian than to explain a joke about a Latina. One day maybe Faust will excel in diverse representations of race as it does in the advancement of disability, gender, and sexuality in theatre.

advances that have widened Faust's inclusion in the disability theatrical practice have primarily occurred on the technical side.<sup>25</sup> One of the most active ways this was seen was Faust's implementation during *Murderous Moveable Macbeth* of a new "app" for live captioning. The app enables everyone with a phone to have access to live captioning as they moved from location to location. At times during production we were able to fix problems, like in the case of providing portable personal closed captioning. Other times an attempt at fixing a problem did not work and instead served to highlight the ever-present need for more accessibility, as in the case of closed captioning for the blind and an accessible path in the yard. Although there was someone in Tallahassee who could provide closed captioning for the blind, the budget just did not allow for it. We had to let it go. Terry instead focused her energy on creating a path to help balance the backyard for those who had movement issues. The path was specifically designed with the mother of one of the Faustkateers in mind who was flying in from out of town to see her son in the show. He and his wife, who also happen to have their own disabilities that impair movement, took it upon themselves to procure the money and create the path. They, along with Terry, went to Home Depot, haggled pricing and eventually spent over \$500 dollars on a path made out of masonite board covered with a vinyl utility liner taped together with duct tape and stakes to hold it down. They were advised using these materials would be a weather resistant and non-slip option. It was bad advice. The pieces of masonite board were soaked by the first rain and started to take the shape of the divots in the ground. Despite the undesired outcome it is important to note that the community rallied together to question the current accessibility of Faust and attempt to make change to it. These adjustments to set and space exemplify Faust's methodological approach as one of listening to create action.

The sense of community permeated *Murderous Moveable Macbeth* and the amount of work that was put into this project far exceeded any effort by Faust in the past, all for free. Volunteerism is an essential fact when analyzing the Mickee Faust process. Year after year Faustkateers choose to donate money and time to keep the theatre going. Who are these people? And why is theatre so important to them? What does it add to the sense of community? Maybe it provides Faustkateers the liberty to express their creativity through a queer lens; a right that is honestly not extended in more mainstream theatres.

The methodology for creating Faust Cabarets became the bases for structuring the production of *Murderous Moveable Macbeth*, but Faust still had to make adjustments in their established ways of operation to achieve such a feat like mounting an environmental and immersive production of Shakespeare's play. For example, two expectations that come with a Faust show are 1) that

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<sup>25</sup> I would like to emphasize that I am referring here to current disability theatre advancements. In other moments of Faust history disability theatre advancements have been performer centered.

anyone who auditions will be given a role and 2) that Faust will work around the actors/producers/technician's schedules. I recall deciding and declaring as a production team that "Things would be different." We would be careful to not over-cast for fear of creating a monstrous production. Then, on the first day of auditions, Terry, maybe out of muscle memory or maybe out of sheer defiance, announced to all of the auditionees that anyone who was at auditions would be given a part. Can we be different after thirty years of defining and honing a theatrical practice? The process of *Murderous Moveable Macbeth* asked Faust to do just that, redefine the ways in which it approached already established practices such as the expected time commitment from Faustkateers and scheduling. *Murderous Movable Macbeth* called for a more fluid rehearsal process than that used for the usual cabaret skits. During a cabaret, schedules are based on how many hours a week Faustkateers are willing to give. *Murderous Moveable Macbeth* relied more on full run-throughs toward the end of the rehearsal process with a full cast. Still, the reality was that Faustkateers were honestly only able to dedicate "x" number of hours which meant, inevitably at least one person would always be missing from a rehearsal. I guffaw at this fact because I am reminded of many nights where I would be delivering lines to our always present and prepared Stage Manager instead of the actor who played the character. Though I admit it took all my restraint to not go full diva on everyone, I also note, these are the moments where the thoughts of community awareness and collective consciousness are put into practice at the Mickee Faust Club.

### Maneuvering Through Madness, Movement & Methodology

In a September 2018 journal entry, I write:<sup>2627</sup>

*It's been about a month since we started rehearsals, and so far, ... well ... I'd say so good, but honestly not everything is good. Not everything is bad, it is just all very different. This is not a cabaret. I think people forget that. Therefore, many things pertaining to the process are different, yet still many remain the same.*

*Differences:*

1. *There is one person who makes the final decisions as a director, not many directors.*
2. *Scheduling has been a major issue, because asking how many hours are you willing to commit to Faust is not really in the hands of the performer anymore. The script is dictating it. The character of Lennox is a perfect example of the*

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<sup>26</sup> This is a direct excerpt from my own personal production journal. The grammatical errors and sometimes lack of defined subject or thought have been purposefully left in to demonstrate the state of mind I was in during the production.

<sup>27</sup> Christy Rodriguez de Conte, personal journal entry, September 2018.

*show's scheduling out weighing the community comradery and lenience just to include everyone.*<sup>28</sup>

3. *This show has a shit ton of moving parts, and takes a much higher level of artistry than some community members possess. The difference between professionals, or even accomplished community theatre actors, is strikingly obvious between that of the lower level performers.*

*Similarities:*

1. *All members of the production are encouraged to give notes. This is easier for some to balance than others.*
2. *Faust is still trying to be as cognizant and accommodating of people's schedules and conflicts.*
3. *Still, Faust cast all kinds of levels of community actors. For example, the murder scene consists of three new low-level actors, one veteran and one seven-year-old, that next to the low-level actors, should be considered a professional. She remembers her blocking, she takes her notes and adjusts, but for the life of me, these other women cannot. It is the first scene we blocked and rehearsed, and it is the one that looks the worst!*

*So, what is the reason for all of these differences? Does the style of work we are performing (i.e. Shakespeare) call for a "better quality" than the cabarets? Is expenditure so much more than usual that much more is at stake?*

Even in the midst of directing and performing, and having a baby, I was still able to see the massive explosion of art, emotion and community support that was going into the show. These reflections led me to identify three major elements that helped me maneuver through the production of *Murderous Moveable Macbeth* that are specific to the Mickee Faust aesthetic: the collective non-hierarchical directing methods of the company, their ability to create or queer any content, and the real necessity of working with a minimal budget.

Faust works as a community organization overseen by a board of directors and managed and populated by community volunteers. Decisions for each show are made by production teams and whenever a larger decision on the future of the theatre must be made, an open meeting is held to conduct a vote with whomever decided to show up.

The process of note giving (and shared directing) provides an even closer look at how Faust functions. The company rejects the usual form of note giving. The process of giving notes exhausts even the most accomplished actor. In most theatres a director spends the entire rehearsal taking notes only to spend almost

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<sup>28</sup> Originally, we cast a new performer to Faust to play Lennox. She would play Lennox as a strong woman. She was a good performer and a high school Theatre teacher, but unfortunately, she began missing rehearsals. Eventually communication about scheduling ceased and we were forced to replace her. We were able to dig into our Faustkateer pool and recruit an amazing person to fill the role. He was off book before anyone else.

the same amount of time critiquing and tweaking. The director speaks and the actors take the direction with a smile. The Director may consult her Assistant Director, but most of the observations and requests to modify come from the directing team. At the Mickee Faust club, it's all hands-on deck. Although Artistic Director Terry Galloway will make her opinions known, she listens and invites everyone to give their opinions. Note giving at Faust relies on communal participation. After a wet-run and dry-run of any show at Faust, the cast and crew sit together with the house lights up to discuss how to improve what was presented. The fact that there is a discussion is something unique to Faust. Notes have never been up for discussion to me in the theatre. Notes are kernels of gold given to you by the Director to be cherished and saved safely away. At Faust, no one holds that much power in the room, which allows actors and technicians to listen openly instead of defensively. Faust's production schedule will always culminate in four major events: a wet-run, that is, the first full run through with everyone off book and present (one hopes) with no costumes, no real tech, no expectations; the dry-run, held a few weeks after the wet-run, with more technical elements included and more fluidity from scene to scene expected; tech/hell week, which is a universal tragedy; and then the final dress rehearsal, a "final" version of the show in its full glory.<sup>29</sup> Each of these events ends with a communal note giving session and unlike most community theatres Galloway does not have final say over pieces as the Artistic Director of Faust. During the rehearsals of *Murderous Moveable Macbeth*, Terry and I used the same non-hierarchical note giving strategies usually implored at Faust to gain perspective and to build cast buy-in.

If necessity is the mother of all invention, then Faust is the laboratory and that laboratory a method for change. Faust has created innovative ways of working with lighting, costuming, and sets. I believe most of these innovations are tied directly to the real necessity of working with a minimal budget. In a cabaret most of the cast provides their own costumes, but the production of *Murderous Moveable Macbeth* needed a higher quality of costumes with a distinct period uniformity. Additionally, Faust was presented with a much larger cast to dress than usual. How does one dress a cast and musicians of 40+ in multiple costumes on a \$500 dollar budget?<sup>30</sup> You beg, scavenge, and beg some more. Lady Macbeth's outfit was made out of bed shams found at the local Goodwill cent store by one of our dedicated volunteer seamstresses on the costume team. One of the biggest challenges was recreating chainmail. Different prototypes were created out of different materials including crochet yarn, a mesh laundry

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<sup>29</sup> I put the word "final" in quotation marks because Terry loves to make edits! I was receiving line changes and blocking edits during the actual show, which was challenging.

<sup>30</sup> \$500.00 seemed to be the magical number during the run of *Murderous Moveable Macbeth*. It became a running joke at early production meetings to discuss the budget; it seemed every team when requesting money would inevitably calculate it to be \$500.

basket, and long underwear. At the end the laundry basket won for its ability to create the illusion of chainmail for the cheapest price. Team leaders' frugality and inventiveness fueled and supported the success of the production. Outside, the LED color lights that lit the beautiful mulberry tree where the witches' cauldron lived and Macbeth was drugged were donated by the local animal shelter, due to the fact that one of their employees was one of our Hecate's. Inside, castle walls were made out of painted cardboard stapled over the main house walls to transform the theatre.

I recall one specific *Murderous Moveable Macbeth* production meeting where only women were present. The wine flowed along with the catty comments and joking support. At one point a debate got a little heated when a few snarky words were exchanged and no real solution made. We all laughed and cheered at what an all-female meeting was run like: openness, intelligent debate, and a lot of wine.

It would take more than a healthy dose of wine to achieve the level of show envisioned by Terry. In addition to a ridiculous amount of time, it would take a bit more money than Faust was used to spending on a cabaret production. Luckily, the payoff was equally more substantial. The estimated expenditures for *Murderous Movable Macbeth* included a budgeted \$4,725 for production costs (set, costumes, sound, blood, etc.). An unexpected \$940.00 event insurance fee was incurred as a result of the banquet, and a last-minute essential purchase of 3 space heaters for \$300. Overall, *Murderous Movable Macbeth* cost \$5,965 to produce. Thanks to the cult-like loyalty of the Mickee Faust audience and the power of the Bard, we were able to raise \$10,932 in ticket sales, \$3,585 in cash donations, \$84 in gift card donations, and \$1,404 in bar donations for a total income of \$16,005. *Murderous Movable Macbeth* profited \$10,996. A typical fall or spring cabaret will make a net profit of approximately \$5,000.<sup>31</sup> These profits are used to pay rental bills, electricity bills, insurance and maintenance, and always last and rarely funded, any future productions of Faust.

Since the Mickee Faust Club is run by a 100% volunteer "staff," it cannot rely on a corporate theatre's model of financial incentive. A volunteer's dedication and work ethic are not derived from a financial investment in the company. Instead, volunteers are there because they themselves are getting something they desire: theatrical training, a chance to express their creative selves, and a safe space to play with performing gender. *Murderous Moveable Macbeth* was able to provide Faustkateers with a way to fulfill those desires.

Ultimately, as seen in Faust's history and its future, the means to maneuver through this production came in a feminist manner. Two weeks before we opened *Murderous Moveable Macbeth*, I gave birth to my first son. No theatre that

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<sup>31</sup> The Summer Cabaret, *Queer as Faust*, consistently makes less than \$5,000. This is due to the use of The Adelaide Schnittman Hall, a smaller theatre space, in order to provide audiences an air-conditioned space of refuge from the July Florida heat.

I know would trust an actress to go give birth and return to perform! My time was magical specifically for those very reasons. My newly found maternal identity also made Stanislavski's magic "if" dreadfully scary to answer. When I recited the infamous lines from Act 1 Scene 7, "I have given suck and know how tender tis' to love the babe that milks me. And I would, while it was smiling at my face, bash its brains in. If I so sworn, as you have done to this," my cesarean scar burned. I too knew the suck of a babe, but could only imagine the desperation a mother would need to feel to kill her own child. As a scholar, my first-hand witness of feminism in action highlighted for me the benefits of community-based theatre rooted in feminist ideals. In my 20+ years as a theatre artist I have never seen a production hire a 7-month pregnant leading lady and fight director due two weeks before opening night.



Co-Director and Fight Director Christy Rodriguez de Conte leads a fight workshop, 8 months pregnant, for *Murderous Moveable Macbeth*.

In a reflective 2019 journal entry I answer the question, “How does Feminism play into the production of *Murderous Moveable Macbeth*?”

*This is a hard one. I continue to argue that there is a grounding in feminist values, but I will say this rehearsal process was a constant battle to gain power as female director and fight choreographer. My co-fight director desperately tried to take over my role as fight director. He would interrupt me constantly during fight rehearsals and workshops to add his own ideas. The reality is, I only needed an assistant because I was 8 months pregnant and could not do rolls and would be out for a week after I gave birth. Yes, a week. I was running a fight rehearsal and fighting in the melee eight days after I had a cesarean—which to me is where the feminism lies and continues to. What other job, let alone theatre job, would allow you to be so pregnant and physical. And then allow you to show up with a brand-new baby attached to you during rehearsals. My 1-month old son sat through the entire show without even crying. Maybe that is community too, or at least one that values the experiences of women.<sup>32</sup>*

Although Faust had accommodated pregnancies in the cast before, my own experience with Faust’s flexibility and support in my playing Lady Macbeth, serving as fight director and having a c-section two weeks prior to the production of *Murderous Moveable Macbeth* goes beyond what Faust’s past to highlight how feminist practices can be implemented through a collective conscious. I turn to Susan C. Haedicke and Tobin Nellhaus’ feminist notion of community-based learning to argue that the benefits to the queer community do not rely on the performance itself, but instead on the dialogue created that enforces the feminist consciousness-raising techniques that call for an awareness of social and political issues. Through the exploration of madness, the movement through a queer space and the situating of methodology in a queer feminist context, Faust’s production of *Murderous Moveable Macbeth* queered the toxically masculine Shakespearean classic.

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<sup>32</sup> During the production of *Murderous Moveable Macbeth*, I kept a personal production journal. The grammatical errors and sometimes lack of defined subject or thought have been purposefully left in to demonstrate the state of mind I was in during the production.



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