

STATEMENT BY AUTHOR

NECESSARY TARGETS

PROJECT IN-LIEU-OF-THESIS

PROPERTIES MASTER

ARIZONA REPARATORY THEATER

By

JOHN MICHAEL EDDY

A Thesis Submitted to The Honors College

In Partial Fulfillment of the Bachelors of Fine Art degree

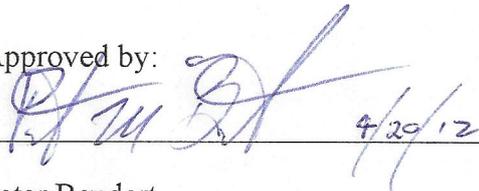
With Honors in

Theatre Production - Design Technical Production

THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

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ABSTRACT

This honors thesis documents the real-world application of the knowledge and skills learned over the course of my study in Theater Production with an emphasis in Scenic Design. The period covered in this analysis began with research six months before the actual performances of *Necessary Targets*, continued through the selection and construction of all properties, and ended with the final performance and striking of the set.

STATEMENT OF PROJECT PROCESS AND PERFORMANCE

Eve Ensler's 1996 play *Necessary Targets* was inspired by the author's trip to the former Yugoslavia, where Ensler interviewed Bosnian women war refugees; it was this experience that gave rise to the plot and characters of an extraordinarily powerful play. While the obvious milieu of the play is war, Ensler shifts the focus from the obvious superficialities of bullets, bombs, and blood to focus on the lives of the ordinary women who live through the horrors of war and are left to contend with its effects.

My journey through this project began in the summer of 2011 by familiarizing myself with the play and Ensler's other works, and continued into the fall with a semester of research specifically on *Necessary Targets*. Coinciding with my background research, our Director, Kevin Black, and Scenic Designer, Bruce Brockman, conducted research of their own to inform an eventual draft of their conceptual ideas and vision. My research started with an in-depth analysis of the play; this required several readings, with each sequential reading delving into greater and greater detail. During the process, I was able to parse and contextualize themes, characters and their relationships, action, setting, plot, dialog, conflict, symbolism, and imagery. Once I completed a detailed analysis of these elements, I met with Director Black and Scenic Designer

Brockman in order to understand and incorporate their concepts and vision. With this understanding, I started to tie the research together, compiling a reference document (binder) containing the corpus of both the written and visual research I had conducted. Pulled from a wide-range of disciplines, including the arts, sciences, architecture, politics, and numerous forms of media, including newspapers, scholarly articles, television, blogs, and internet searches, the research in this binder became a resource for visualizing and communicating a shared vision of the physical world in which this play was set.

With the completion of this research, I had the necessary data to articulate both visual and conceptual ideas with the Director, Producer, and my fellow designers. This work was a critical step in my development, and I believe it will prove helpful to my future work in design; specifically, the development of this product greatly enhanced my ability to share and collaborate on ideas with all the other members of the production team. This collaboration led to the creation of a more cohesive vision than would not have otherwise been possible.

This work overlapped into the Spring Semester of 2012, during the course of which we utilized the aforementioned research, in collaboration with the other designers and artisans, to begin visualizing the world the characters inhabit—bringing the setting to life for all members of the production team. At this point, our research ended and our concepts came to life through drawings, blueprints, color concepts, and models. Later, my fellow artisans and I began to turn these into functional objects and props used in the production.

From my first reading of the script, I knew one of the most challenging aspects of this production would be the scene transitions. The play is in one act, with 17 scenes, several of which are under a minute in length. The progression of the plot required us to move from an

upscale New York apartment to several different locations in a refugee camp, including a common area and kitchen, sleeping barracks, and an outside setting near a stream, and finally back to our New York apartment for the closing scene. From my earliest discussions with Scenic Designer Brockman, we knew the challenge these scene changes posed, realizing that unless they were handled deftly, these transitions might bog down the flow of the play. Brockman's set design ultimately resolved some of the issues through the development of a static set, which allowed all the locations of the play to be represented on stage, with action moving to different areas as scenes dictated in order to relocate and recreate each location. (Figure 1)

The question then turned to where the props should reside—on stage for the entire production (which would make them more accessible, allowing for better transitional flow), or hidden from the audience's view (which might bog down transitions). The solution came from my initial research images; we would create Humanitarian Relief boxes that would be used both as set dressing and as prop storage. (Research Images 1&2)

During this process and over the course of this production I learned a myriad of lessons and most notable among these were:

PEOPLE, PEOPLE, PEOPLE!

Like the similar adage about real estate, having good people trumps everything else. So whenever possible, surround yourself with positive people and utilize their strengths. To this end, my assistant, Taryn Wintersteen, proved to be invaluable resource, not only as a sounding board for ideas, but also by bringing her own experience and knowledge to bear in resolving challenges and generating solutions. Likewise, several of my colleagues, cast members, and friends contributed ideas, encouragement, and advice.

BRAINSTORM BIG!

Start with an ultimate vision of what *could be*, given unlimited time and resources. As the production matures, and the Director and Actors make choices, be willing to jettison those portions of your vision that no longer fit or prove themselves to be impractical. Remain infinitely malleable, but hold onto, and fight for, those few items that you know will ensure the integrity of the collective vision and make a significant impact on the audience, even if others consider them insignificant. This became manifest for me in the what I call the Turkish Coffee set, an item I saw as something more than just a collection of utensils, something akin to a totem that unites this group of women and symbolizes a ritual that they hold onto in order to keep sane in an insane place. Both the director and designer loved the idea, but budget limitations kept us from purchasing a set that would do justice to the symbolism it was intended to convey. After tormenting myself for several days, it became clear to me that it was not the coffee set, *per se*, but the universal ritual of talking over coffee that was the most crucial element of the scene. In one of the most poignant moments of the play, the character Nuna asks JS, “Why do you hate us?” JS does not understand until Azra tells her why Nuna has asked this—because JS will not take coffee with them. JS explains to Nuna that it was something she had recently given up, but she drinks her coffee, understanding the significance of the moment. It is this act of having coffee, I realized, that bridges the world of the outsider, JS, and the women in the camp, and ultimately helps to transform JS by the end of the play. Given this insight, I pitched the idea to the director that JS should have a physical representation of her transformation when she returns to her life in New York, and he agreed. The token I chose, a simple coffee cup, became something JS could hold onto even after she left for home—and something both Director Black

and I hoped our audience members could hold onto when they next took a cup of coffee in their own homes. (Research Image 3)

As I complete the work for my BFA, I am confident that future projects—whether in the pursuit of my MFA, or later in public life—will benefit from the experience and lessons I learned from this production, but perhaps more importantly, from the people who have influenced me during my course of study at the University of Arizona.

Figure 1-Designer Brockman's Ground plan

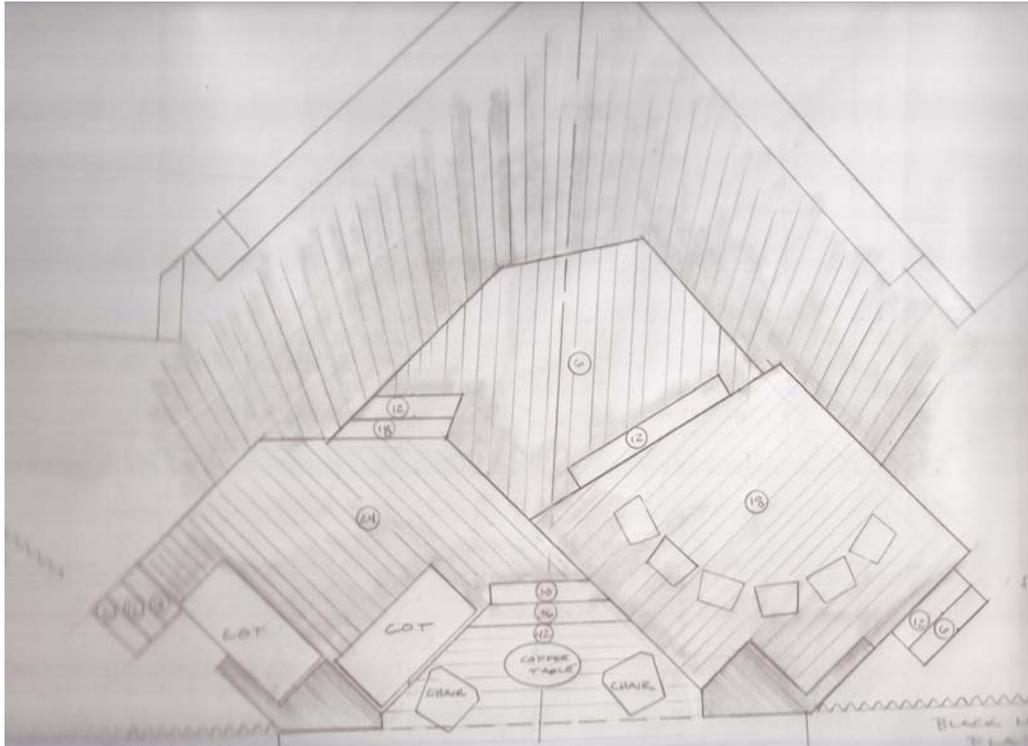


Figure 2 – Production Photo of Realized Set, including props and set dressing



Research Image - 1



Production Photo of Relized Porps



Research Image - 2



Production Photo of Relized Porps



Research Image - 3



Production Photo of Relized Porp

