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### Title

"The Trust Laboratory": Experimenting with Communication and Informal Authority

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

“The Trust Laboratory”: Experimenting with Communication and Informal Authority

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

in

Theatre and Dance (Stage Management)

by

Ashley Martin

Committee in charge:

Lisa Porter, Chair  
Robert Brill  
Charles Means

2018

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2018

## EPIGRAPH

I've learned that fear limits you and your vision. It serves as blinders to what may be just a few steps down the road for you. The journey is valuable, but believing in your talents, your abilities, and your self-worth can empower you to walk down an even brighter path. Transforming fear into freedom.

Soledad O'Brien

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- File 3. *What of the Night* Calling Pages 11L – 20L
- File 4. *What of the Night* Calling Pages 13H – 14H

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## ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

“The Trust Laboratory”: Experimenting with Communication and Informal Authority

by

Ashley Martin

Master of Fine Arts in Theatre and Dance (Stage Management)

University of California, San Diego, 2018

Professor Lisa Porter, Chair

I utilized *What of the Night* as a leadership laboratory to experiment with tactics for building trust and establishing informal authority with my collaborators. I learned that I am most engaged as a leader when I closely consider the group’s dynamic and adapt my methods accordingly. My first trial was with the stage management team. I directly invited their feedback on my methodology, requested their perspective on production challenges, and practiced translating my direct language into indirect communication. This openness to feedback communicated trust, enhancing my connection to the team. However, it also provided an opportunity for the team to push hierarchical boundaries, causing me to increase my efforts in

reasserting the structure. Next, I worked closely with the design team by articulating my expectations of self-advocacy. I spoke with pathos, promised to advocate for the designs, and provided concrete suggestions for how to improve group communication. Utilizing this authority during the transition into technical rehearsals prepared both the stage management and design teams for the shift into the theater and the challenges ahead. Finally, I built trust and authority with the director by offering myself as a guide to the UC San Diego collaborative structures and as a resource for a personal challenge outside of the production process. Ultimately, my risk taking on the *What of the Night* collaboration enhanced my leadership confidence and intuition. I will incorporate these lessons courageously and continue to experiment with enhancing group trust and connection through this transparent, efficient, and adaptive approach.