Baby’s First Steps: A Microhistory of The Chicago Neo-Futurists

THESIS

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Arts in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

Max D. Glenn

Graduate Program in Theatre

The Ohio State University

2014

Master’s Examination Committee:

Professor Jennifer Schlueter, Advisor

Professor Beth Kattelman
Copyright by

Max D. Glenn

2014
Abstract

This thesis is a microhistory of the first years of the The Neo-Futurists. While The Neo-Futurists have been a well-regarded mainstay of the Chicago theatre scene for over twenty-five years, little scholarship has been written on the enduring company. Using oral history and primary source interviews from founding members of The Neo-Futurists, this microhistory is specifically focused on the time period of their debut in December 1988 through their arrival at their current venue, The Neo-Futurarium, in February 1992. The thesis primarily focuses on a set of key events related to company’s growth: its genesis with Greg Allen, its debut at Stage Left Theatre, The Neo-Futurists’ incorporation and emancipation from Stage Left, and acquiring The Neo-Futurarium. In doing this, the thesis will demonstrate how an alternative American theatre company has adapted and evolved to internal governing pressures and external material forces.
Dedication

To Pam, The Horsemen, and all those I call family.
Acknowledgments

This thesis was a long journey, and I would not have reached the end without an immense amount of support. I want to thank Dr. Jennifer Goodlander for inspiring me to start this project and her sage-like wisdom in times of crisis; Dr. Jennifer Schlueter for always demanding the best of me and being an excellent iron to sharpen myself upon; Master Jennifer Benavides for her eyes and grammar when mine failed; and committee member Dr. Beth Kattelman for her enduring support. I also need to thank Greg Allen, Heather Riordan, Lisa Buscani, Phil Ridarelli, Karen Christopher, and Bilal Dardai for their time, candor, and stories. Lastly, I want to thank the Truman State University Ronald E. McNair Program & the Truman State Department of Theatre for giving me the tools to succeed in a practice no Glenn has ever dared to venture into; and Pam for loving me unconditionally.
Vita

August 1988  Born Kirksville, Missouri

2011  B.A. Theatre, Truman State University

2011-2012  McNair Fellow, The University of Kentucky

2012- to present  Graduate Teaching Associate, Department of Theatre, The Ohio State University

Fields of Study

Major Field:  Theatre
Table of Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................................. ii

Dedication ............................................................................................................................ iii

Acknowledgments ............................................................................................................... iv

Vita ....................................................................................................................................... v

Introduction ........................................................................................................................ 1

Chapter 1: Foundation: Greg Allen and The Neo-Futurists’ Genesis................................. 11

Chapter 2: Incorporation: The Neo-Futurists Emancipation from Stage Left Theatre......................... 30

Chapter 3: Expansion: New Ensemble Members, The New York City Tour and The Neo-
Futurarium ......................................................................................................................... 49

Conclusion .......................................................................................................................... 64

Bibliography ......................................................................................................................... 69
Introduction

How does a small American theatre company evolve, survive, and remain relevant over the span of more than two decades? The city of Chicago has been a hotbed for upstart companies since the 1850s (Christiansen A Theatre of Our Own 11). Yet the list of Chicago theatres that have failed is quite a bit longer than the list of theatres that have survived, let alone thrived. Promising theatres such as The Hull House of the late 1800s, the Chicago Little Theatre of the early 1900s, and the Playwright’s Theatre Company of the 1950s all produced critically lauded work for their time. However, none of them were able transition into being commercially viable theatres, and thus folded. The Chicago-based Neo-Futurists, so far, have weathered these trials for twenty-five years.

A collective of actor-writers, The Neo-Futurists were founded by Greg Allen to pursue an aesthetic of honesty and brevity onstage, which he dubbed “Neo-Futurism” (Allen Interview). Known for their trademark production Too Much Light Makes The Baby Go Blind (TML for short), The Neo-Futurists and TML have been continuously running for over twenty-five years. Over that time, The Neo-Futurists have expanded in a variety of directions. They have toured the United States and the world. In 2003 they expanded to include a New York branch and in January 2014 opened a San Francisco branch. They have taught courses on their company aesthetic, on mime, and on other performance styles. They have even developed an ongoing primetime season of new
work. They have done all this while continuing to perform *TML* to sold-out audiences under 30, the very target demographic many regional theatres are desperate to capture (Radosavljevic 195).

Despite more avant-garde tendencies, The Neo-Futurists as a company have plenty in common with Chicago mainstays Steppenwolf and The Second City. Like them, The Neo-Futurists are a long-standing, ensemble-driven Chicago company that has grown beyond humble storefront beginnings, receiving national attention and producing highly successful alumni, including Greg Kotis, the bookwriter for the Broadway musical *Urinetown* (Milkovich 25). Chicago theatre has historically proven itself a fertile garden for small companies to grow from storefronts to main stages (Christiansen *A Theater of Our Own* 52). While lacking the budgets of larger regional theatres, The Neo-Futurists staying power is a testament to their capabilities as a Chicago institution.

But before they were a full-fledged company, The Neo-Futurists were simply the cast of the show *TML*, performing in a late night slot at Stage Left Theatre in Chicago in December 1988 (Allen interview). Within three years and two months of their opening at Stage Left, Allen and the cast for *TML* were incorporated into a not-for-profit theatre company and had begun leasing their own space (Pierson). Presently, The Neo-Futurists employ a full staff that includes managing director Dan McArdle, co-artistic directors Bilal Dardai and Kurt Chiang, a production manager, a variety of technicians, a booking manager, and a staff that more clearly resembles a traditional regional theatre institution (*Neo-Futurists*). This is a far cry from when the company Allen first brokered a late night time slot with Dennis McCullough at Stage Left Theatre.
The key question guiding this thesis is this: how did The Neo-Futurists go from a tiny upstart show in 1988 into an established alternative institution? They are clearly a Chicago success story: they have grown from a show to a not-for-profit theatre company that has endured for twenty-five years. Yet how were they able to accomplish this? Little scholarly analysis specifically addressing the company’s history and growth exists. The Neo-Futurist website (neofuturists.org) has its own marketing-driven account of its history, of course. It highlights milestones such as incorporating as a 501(c) 3 organization, obtaining its own performance venue, and developing a prime time season with little analysis of why or how these events happened. Further literature, including Justin Maxwell’s 2011 article “Welcome To Your Neo-Future” and Jaime L. Gray’s 2005 thesis *The Neo-Futurists in American Avant-Garde Theater: A Chronicle and Performance Analysis*, is limited to specific reviews of evenings of *TML* or investigation of the aesthetic of Neo-Futurism with only minimal regard to the interpersonal politics and communication of the company members formative years.

Despite the context provided by these scholarly works, the question still remains: what elevated the Neo-Futurists’ status from obscurity to the established alternative? The established alternative is defined as the half professional, half amateur theatre that survives in the shadows of larger theatres (“One for All”). Like many theatre companies, it has a genesis in a specific founding voice, Allen. Yet The Neo-Futurists future is built not just on his voice, but the voices of its many ensemble members past and present. The Neo-Futurists, as an structure, is modeled after egalitarian cooperatives (Allen Interview). This is to say: from play selection to interpretations of the aesthetic, The Neo-Futurists are a collective of individuals each with a vote and say in the company’s direction.
In this thesis I will investigate the critical first three years of The Neo-Futurists, specifically focusing on the genesis of the show, their emancipation from Stage Left Theatre, and procuring their Ashland Avenue location. I will draw from interviews I conducted with founder Greg Allen, as well as company members Heather Riordan, Phil Ridarelli, Lisa Buscani, and Karen Christopher. In doing this, I will demonstrate how one established alternative American theatre company has adapted and evolved to survive and grow. To do so, I will focus on December 1988 to February 14, 1992, which bookend the first opening of TML and the Neo-Futurists’ move into their current theatre space, The Neo-Futurarium, on Ashland Avenue. I posit this time period as formative for the company’s future growth.

**Review of the Literature**

There is very little scholarly writing on The Neo-Futurists. However, Erica Anne Milkovich’s 2010 dissertation, “A History of Neo-Futurism” serves as an excellent jumping off point for my research. Milkovich, a former technician of the Chicago theatre company, explores the history of the Neo-Futurist aesthetic, Neo-Futurism, and its connection and disconnections to its Futurist, Dada, and surrealist antecedents (Milkovich 11). She does this through specific correspondence with members, past and present, of the Neo-Futurists and analyzing the aesthetics of published Neo-Futurist plays and performances. This analysis is then placed in contexts and conversation with the Neo-Futurists’ inspired avant-garde antecedents, including Italian Futurism, Surrealism, Slam Poetry, and Fluxus.
Milkovich’s dissertation is useful for understanding the importance of specific ensemble members in the company’s history. Highlighted ensemble members beyond Allen include: Heather Riordan, Dave Awl, Ayun Halliday, John Pierson, and Greg Kotis. Milkovich’s investigation specifically points to the way in which The Neo-Futurists through the aesthetic of Neo-Futurism are a company that is committed to the preservation of individual creativity due to the aesthetics commitment to personal truth (Milkovich 22). This commitment to personal truth is manifested in the responsibility and privilege of each Neo-Futurist ensemble member to write their own work. This is important to my work in that it places a spotlight on the roles of individuals in a collective, which is incredibly important when looking into the way The Neo-Futurists function. It demonstrates that on a very clear level, the company has democratic policies in which individuals each have their own artistic and company voice that blends into the overall company vision. Knowing that each ensemble member is responsible for writing their own material for TML and the plays chosen for a week are chosen by committee is important in my own analysis of their history as a company and collective. What seems to be lacking and what this thesis will aim to include is details concerning the specific discussions about the direction to take the company, specifically in regards to growing the company, evolving the audience, and the decision making policies that came into being for the company.

John Pierson’s *The Neo Interviews* is a blog created in 2009 that contains interviews conducted with Neo-Futurist ensemble members past and present. Pierson, a punk-rock guitarist and Neo-Futurist ensemble member since the mid 1990s, provides insight and candid investigations of specific members of The Neo-Futurists. Pierson’s
interviews with founder Greg Allen, Heather Riordan, Dave Awl, Lisa Buscani, and Phil Ridarelli are of particular interest to my project. Their narratives help provide specific insight into early and important company including breaking away from Stage Left Theatre, becoming a company over a cast, and incorporating into a Non-Profit (Pierson Neo-Interviews).

While Pierson’s interviews provide a collection of insights, they are limited in scope. They only allude to a handful of specific moments in which leadership action is taken by individuals or collective in regards to the TML casts evolution into The Neo-Futurist ensemble and company. In my thesis, I will use questions more focused than Pierson’s in addressing who was in charge of specific decisions in the evolution of this company. Additionally, Pierson is himself a Neo-Futurist, and lacks an outsider’s eye into the company that perhaps might be able to create a clearer picture. Ultimately, Pierson’s depth in the interviews is to be commended and provides an excellent base for my investigation.

Other primary resources include The Neo-Futurist’s own website. The site provides specific and pointed information on the company’s history and alumni. It contains a “History of the Neos” section that details specific important moments in their history. These moments include their opening, their move to Live Bait, their first sell-out show, their first tour, their move to the Neo-Futurarium, when they incorporated into a not-for-profit 501(c)3 theatre and other pertinent historical moment. This history, however, is from a nameless author and entirely from the Neo-Futurists’ point of view. While it provides a thorough narrative, it does not account for the varied personalities that have always comprised the company nor any detractors or enemies the company has
made, like McCullough and Stage Left. Though one-sided, the website provides solid contextual resources for this thesis.

The Neo-Futurists have also been documented (by others and themselves) on YouTube. One particularly thorough piece is *The Neo-Futurists Celebrate 20 Years of Too Much Light Makes The Baby Go Blind*. This film, produced by The Neo-Futurists in 2009, gives an overview of their landmark production by using performance footage of *TML* interspersed with interviews by Allen and others on the subject of the company and the show (*The Neo-Futurists Celebrate*). Additionally there is PopMatters’ “Interview with Greg Allen” about The Neo-Futurists that includes film footage from then-recent performances of *TML* in 2011. In the interview, Allen addresses his history before the Neo-Futurists and the appeal of the company’s work (“PopMatters”). Both PopMatters and *The Neo-Futurists Celebrate*... are useful in that they provide contextual insight into *TML*’s role in their history as a company.

Theatre critic Richard Christiansen’s 2004 book, *A Theatre of Our Own: A History and Memoir of 1,001 Nights in Chicago*, provides a thorough history of the Chicago theatre scene dating back to the late 1800s. Covering over one hundred years of theatre history in Chicago, Christiansen seeks to capture the “lighting in a bottle” that is Chicago Theatre events (Christiansen *A Theatre of Our Own* xiii). Christiansen is thorough and readable in providing historical context for the small theatre movement at the turn of the century in Chicago, the circumstances that brought forth The Second City, the ascent of Steppenwolf, and the proud history of the Goodman. In addition to focusing on these three major institutions of Chicago theatre, Christiansen profiles various individuals who were seminal in the growth of Chicago theatre, including Second City
Founder Paul Sills, founder of Chicago Little Theatre Neville Brown, and countless others who individual loves for city and theatre speak to the dynamic environment The Neo-Futurists came out of. While Christiansen’s book lacks any information concerning The Neo-Futurists, it helps provide important context on the theatrical environment and historical moment in which The Neos arrived.

Additional literature that provides historical context to my work is secondary sources on the company. This includes writer Justin Maxwell’s article in American Theatre, “Welcome To Your Neo-Future,” which provides a brief company history in conjunction with a first person account of the mad experience of watching TML and the Neo-Futurist Aesthetic. Additionally, there is the Oberlin Alumni magazine that includes a 2011 interview with Greg Allen and 500 Clown Founder and former Neo-Futurist ensemble member Adrian Danzig. It’s a bit short on new information but provides additional contextual information onto Allen’s individual relationship with one of his ensemble members as well as more biographical information on Allen.

To provide further context for my microhistory I rely on contact with Co-Artistic Director Bilal Dardai and his access to the office and archive of the Chicago Neo-Futurists, current Stage Left Theatre Artistic Director Vance Smith Stephen, and reviews and articles from The Village Voice and Chicago Reader. C. Gray’s dissertation, “A History of the Chicago Off-Loop Theatre Explosion: 1969-1989” and Catherine Gleason’s dissertation “Mapping the Lincoln Park Nexus: The Origin of the Chicago Off-Loop Theatre Movement” provide thorough historical research into the storefront Off-Loop Theatre scene in Chicago. As such, both dissertations help deepen the context and other theatres of which The Neos were forming and developing around. Additionally,
Jack Poggi’s *Theater in America: The Impact of Economic Forces, 1870-1967* provides analysis and contextual insight into the ways economic forces impact the American theatre. Poggi’s book focuses specifically on Broadway and major commercial theatres and the trials and tribulations of the theatre industry in relation to American economic history. Poggi’s book serves for me as a model for how to contextualize and explore the economic history surrounding The Neo Futurist’s growth and expansion due to leadership in the key years I’m exploring in my thesis.

**Chapter Overview**

In Chapter 1, I address the ways in which The Neo-Futurists functioned as an ensemble by engaging and developing the aesthetic of Neo-Futurism and *TML*. In doing so, I argue that the collective focus on aesthetics and *TML* created an environment of group accountability and individual responsibility that helped guide the ensemble forward. I pay specific attention to the origin story—of Greg Allen, Neo-Futurism, and The Neo-Futurists themselves—by zeroing in on the years between 1980, when Allen first discovered Italian Futurism at Oberlin College until 1989, when The Neo-Futurists had their first sell out performance of *TML*. I also investigate the ways in which Allen was a steward for The Neo-Futurists in light of the ensemble being modeled after an egalitarian cooperative model. In doing so, I demonstrate how early group dynamics played a pivotal role in the company’s early and current success.

Chapter 2 addresses the group dynamics of The Neo-Futurists during Fall 1989 through May 1990. These dynamics are be contextualized within the framework of
Allen’s brief departure from The Neo-Futurists at the end of 1989 and The Neo-Futurists’ schism from Stage Left Theatre that launched them on the road to incorporation. I show how both the ensemble surviving Stage Left’s attempt to take over TML and Allen’s departure and return were pivotal moments in the early history of The Neo-Futurists’ development.

Chapter 3 documents and explores the continuing growth of The Neo-Futurists from May 1990 through February 14, 1992. Specifically, the chapter focuses on the ways in which The Neo-Futurists constructed more egalitarian power structures within the ensemble. Here, the decision to undertake their first tour of New York City in 1991, the struggles that tour presented, and the ultimate acquisition of The Neo-Futurarium on Ashland Avenue in 1992, illustrate how The Neo-Futurists responded to organic demands and not ambitious individual designs.

Understanding The Neo-Futurists’ formative years provides a unique insight into not only the way a company operates, but also its impact on its location. Where other Chicago theatres have changed personnel and mission, Chris Jones of the Chicago Tribune notes that The Neo-Futurists have pulled off the rare feat of changing the arts aesthetic of Chicago, “without changing much at all themselves” (“25 Years of ‘Too Much Light’”). If we are to investigate much of this consistency, it is best to begin with its founder: Greg Allen.
Chapter 1: Greg Allen and The Neo-Futurists’ Genesis

Whether it is facilitating post-show conversations about cutting plays from the
TML line up, auditing potential ensemble members, or handling larger company decisions
such as who will be touring or running the concessions stand, The Neo-Futurists function
as an egalitarian collective in their decision-making process (Allen Interview). Notably,
each ensemble member has an equal vote in these decisions, from founder Greg Allen to
junior Neo-Futurists member Malic White (Ridarelli). Yet were The Neo-Futurists
always the self-organized, egalitarian group that they are today? How did Neo-Futurism’s
development play a role in the dynamics and governance of the ensemble group? To what
degree was Allen instrumental in early the stewardship of TML and The Neo-Futurists?
Answers to these questions are critical for understanding the early history of the
company, as well as for understanding how those processes evolved as the company grew
from a produced ensemble to an incorporated not-for-profit company. Is the fact that the
company is committed to egalitarian principles today an indication of their past
approaches? Stage Left’s website, which archives their previous seasons, directly names
Greg Allen as the leader of the organization. Does this negate the fact that Karen
Christopher calls the Neo-Futurists a “company of equals”? A dynamic tension between
these two poles might be the foundation of the organization itself.

In this chapter, I will address the ways in which The Neo-Futurists functioned as
an ensemble by engaging and developing the aesthetic of Neo-Futurism and TML. In
doing so, I will argue that the collective focus on aesthetics and *TML* created an environment of group accountability and individual responsibility that helped guide the ensemble forward. I will analyze the origin story—of Greg Allen, Neo-Futurism, and The Neo-Futurists themselves—by zeroing in on the years between 1980, when Allen first discovered Italian Futurism, and 1989, when The Neo-Futurists had their first sell out performance of *TML*. I additionally will explore Allen’s role as creator and original steward of The Neo-Futurists in light of a being in a cooperative egalitarian ensemble. In doing so, I will demonstrate how early group dynamics played a pivotal role in the company’s early and current success.

The Neo-Futurists are founded on the unifying aesthetic of “Neo-Futurism.” But what, exactly, is Neo-Futurism? Over the course of its twenty-five year existence, the company has debated not only its definition but also its portability. Can it be franchised to other branches in Montreal, New York, and San Francisco? Can it be taught? Attempting to nail down a definition is critical, then, to understanding the development of The Neo-Futurist ensemble. In this case, it is best to go back to where Neo-Futurism began: with Greg Allen.

**Allen, Neo-Futurism, & *TML***

Allen is the Founding Artistic Director of The Neo-Futurists, and has been referred to as “the godfather of the company and Neo-Futurism” (Ridarelli). Before Allen was any of those things, he was a Wilmette, Illinois, native studying English literature at Oberlin College in the early 1980s (Allen Interview). From his days in high school, Allen
was fascinated with absurdist theatrical literature; it spoke to a feeling of isolation he experienced living in the suburbs of Chicago (Pierson).

Allen’s foundations as a director and writer began at Oberlin, where he wrote his first play, *Angst*, in 1984. Allen disliked the production: “I remember just cringing and hating it, because of course it wasn’t the way I wanted it to be. So that was definitely what inspired me to be a writer/director/performer” (Pierson). He went to London his junior year and saw over sixty productions. The experience, though vaguely described by Allen, is what solidified in his mind that he wanted to be a director.

Junior year, Allen took a seminar about the historical avant-garde in theatre with scholar Philip Auslander (Pierson). In this class, Allen was introduced to Dada, Surrealism, Fluxus, and the Italian Futurists. Allen, particularly inspired by the Futurists, was turned on by the fiery rhetoric of their manifestos and the speed and confrontational manner of the plays they wrote (*PopMatters* YouTube). In the winter of 1984-1985, Allen returned to Oberlin to live with his girlfriend. Remembering the Italian Futurists, Allen assembled a group of Oberlin students to perform a short evening of Italian Futurist plays, in a decidedly robotic performance style (Pierson). The group, dubbed The Automatons, were a comedic hit with the Oberlin student body (Pierson). Following the group’s success, Allen spent the first half of 1985 directing plays at the Oberlin Theatre Department (including Sam Shepard’s *Action*) and working for a food cooperative on campus. In the spring of that year, Allen applied and was accepted to the O’Neill Theatre Institute to train as a director.

Allen described his fourteen weeks at the O’Neill as “intense” and very grounded in traditional theatre practices. While Allen often had difficulties engaging with
traditional theatre scripts and rules, he found his way in through writing and taking charge of his directing assignments. When directing scenes for class, Allen went out of his way to personally experiment with stage configurations in his directing, and in his playwriting. Allen used his own upbringing as the subject of a play, titled *Out of Sight, Out of Mind*. Upon concluding his tenure at the O’Neill Allen returned to Chicago in January 1986 (Pierson).

Allen’s orientations as a leader and artist are detectable in this formative moment. Allen, self-admittedly, was not at his finest as a performer of traditional scripted theatre due to his difficulties memorizing (Allen Interview). Through his tenure at Oberlin, in London, and at the O’Neill, he discovered he had the aptitude for directing and playwriting. He was specifically interested in using these avenues as a way to engage and address issues he had with his isolated upbringing (Pierson). Much of Allen’s persona as an artist or leader seems to stretch back to his experiences of childhood, and Allen is the first to mention it. Growing up on The North Shore during the shadow of the Vietnam conflict, Allen describes his childhood as: “…isolated, bereft of friends, filled with public humiliation, and completely repressed” (Pierson). Allen states that much of his modus operandi extends from the lack of self-expression he experienced in his childhood (Pierson). This information greatly colors the way in which Allen, as an adult, tries to use art: as a medium of seemingly endless personal expression.

In 1986, Allen returned to Wilmette, Illinois, to live with his parents and begin his theatre career in Chicago (Pierson). Allen spent much of his time following the trajectory of a traditional theatre artist: directing scripted work, adapting plays, interning, and
working backstage (Milkovich 12). As Allen was doing this, he was also writing and acting in experimental and original theatre works (Milkovich 10).

In his private work, Allen was developing an aesthetic uniquely his own. Inspired by his time performing in the Automatons, Allen borrowed the speed, brevity, and compression of the Futurists, a joy of the chaotic and unpredictable from Dada and Surrealism, audience participation and happenings from Fluxus, and games from the theatrical experiments of the 1960s. These elements, combined with his poor financial situation at the time, formed the aesthetic he dubbed Neo-Futurism (Neo-futurists.org). This private work took the form of writing three scenarios per page on legal pads as furiously as possible, and came out of a frustration with writing and adapting traditional American theatre in two to three acts (PopMatters YouTube).

Allen’s scenarios amounted to seventy individual short pieces, which he collectively titled Too Much Light Makes the Baby Go Blind; in 1987, he staged a solo reading of these pieces at the Organic Theatre (Milkovich 10). These pieces did not see public eyes again until 1988, when Dennis McCullough, Allen’s friend and then Artistic Director of Stage Left theatre, invited Allen to produce a show in a late night slot at his theatre (Allen Interview). After discussing and brainstorming with McCullough, Allen realized that “…was the most frightening thing I could do” and thus most satisfying thing he could do was develop his Too Much Light shorts into a full-on show that embodied his aesthetic (Pierson).

The First Ensemble
Allen held auditions for his Stage Left piece in October 1988. The audition process itself involved Allen giving groups of people a task: create an “exquisite corpse,” the famed Surrealist poetry-generator (Pierson). The task was pitched mainly to see how people worked together, and worked within aesthetic parameters Allen gave (Pierson). At the time, his vision was not to create a not-for-profit company, but to find individuals he could fire up about his aesthetic mission (neo-futurists.org). His goal was to find passionate people willing to put his work on stage whether they were professional performers or not, later noting: “To this day I believe anyone can be a Neo-Futurist” (Allen Interview). He was certain that he wanted to try a different method of production than he had previously attempted as a director. Instead of being an auteur, he wanted to assemble an ensemble cast of performers and writers who could compliment his vision but remain faithful to his aesthetic (Milkovich 12). While Allen was content being produced, he sensed the potential of the project’s longevity from the time of auditions, telling Karen Christopher, “People aren't going to say ‘Have you seen Too Much Light Makes the Baby Go Blind?’ …they're going to be saying 'Did you see it last weekend?'” (Christopher).

Allen began with casting people he knew, including Robin MacDuffie, a fellow employee at a local bookstore (Pierson). Other initial cast members included Randy Burgess, Mike Troccoli, and Melissa Lindberg, all ensemble members of Stage Left Theatre (Pierson). Rounding out the original set of eight performers were Kathy Keyes and Phil Gibbs, who, according to Allen, “came outta nowhere” (Pierson). Most of these founding members did not make the jump in venue from Stage Left to LiveBait, let alone stay in the ensemble long enough to consider making that jump (Neo-futurists.org). These
individuals were unavailable for interviews, putting a large question mark as to their founding involvement with the company.¹

Once auditions concluded, Allen offered his ensemble “parts” in his TML pieces (Milkovich 15). What is interesting is his use of the word “parts” versus “ensemble member.” There is a clear tension between the two. The word “parts” highlights the idea that the performing ensemble is directly under the leadership, guidance, influence, and sway of Allen and his original TML texts. “Ensemble member”, on the other hand, is the chosen term for any member of The Neo-Futurists who performs in a contemporary performance of TML. Today, being an ensemble member of The Neo-Futurists provides the rights and privileges to create one’s own plays in the TML format and having a say in company related decisions via vote (Allen Interview). This tension is furthered in Allen’s own discussions of his early rehearsal processes. The shift from “parts” to “ensemble members” and when it occurred is unclear, as no one interviewed acknowledged being anything less than a member. Also, no one interviewed, with the exception of Allen, was involved with The Neo-Futurists on day one. This largely is due to Allen’s original core group of Neo-Futurists being an amalgam of his co-workers from a local bookstore, Stage Left ensemble members, and other individuals whose tenure was quite short. This shift in terminology could have happened after a couple iterations of the ensemble, as they had a “…high turnover of 5 or more ensemble members a year,” until they settled into their Ashland Avenue venue in 1992 (Buscani).

When Allen began working with his first ensemble, it was very much with the idea that he was the director and de facto leader. Allen took a portion of his original

¹ When Greg Allen put out the call for me to interview people regarding the company only 4 of 15 requests responded.
seventy *TML* plays, whittled it down to twenty he wanted to keep, and devised with his ensemble the remaining ten, aiming to create about an hour of theatre (Allen Interview).\(^2\)

The other major component of his early rehearsal process was proselytizing his Neo-Futurist aesthetic, going so far as to refer to it as a “gospel” (Allen Interview). Allen suggests that much of the early rehearsal process was spent exploring what Neo-Futurism is through the writing of manifestos (neo-futurist.org). What is contained within those manifestos themselves is unclear. If it resembles the current Neo-Futurist statement of purpose, it would consist of four principles: strengthening the bond between audience and performer, embracing non-illusory theatre to present personal truth, embracing audience interaction, and presenting inexpensive art to the general public (Allen “Statement of Purpose”). It is certain Allen, the credited author of The Neo-Futurist manifesto and “Neo-Futurism in a Nut Shell,” undoubtedly had a hand in it. If Allen’s word is to be taken, it indicates that in the beginning (and even through the scope of this thesis) that Allen’s vision is the needle through which all Neo-Futurist work, by individuals or collectively, is threaded. While there are exceptions and clarifications to Allen’s Neo-Futurist gospel, all interviews seem to indicate Allen as the proverbial Moses for the company, especially in its founding rehearsals (Christopher).

Yet Allen’s evangelizing of his aesthetic conflicts with his historical perspective of himself. He consistently suggests that when he set out to do *TML*, he set out to do so as a collaborator, deviser, and director. He even spoke of trying to model The Neo-Futurists

---

\(^2\) It is unclear when the concept of “30 Plays in 60 Minutes” became integral to *TML*. Allen is explicit that the subtitle has always been “30 Plays in 60 Minutes” (Allen Interview) (Pierson) due to the original performance having thirty pieces and clocking in at about an hour. However, the element of time measured seems to be muddy, and vaguely described as “within couple weeks of performing the show.” (Allen Interview).
after co-operatives: “…I had just set up this company based on my experience in co-ops at Oberlin” (Allen Interview). Yet so much of this genesis work, while providing room for his ensemble to find their own individual contributions to the work, seems far more guided and controlled by Allen than his intentions let on. Considering that two thirds of the work premiered on the opening weekend of _TML_ was written by Allen himself, it is evident Allen was far more in charge than he lets on in interviews. A large portion of Allen’s desire to be in control stems from his strong artistic vision and his own neurosis, as he has explained himself as someone who struggles with a deep desire to control things (Allen Interview).

Allen’s cast was not the only group of people to whom he was preaching. When _TML_ opened at Stage Left Theatre on Clark Street on December 2, 1988, the audience was immediately baptized and brought into Neo-Futurism (Milkovich 14). The process began with tickets whose cost was set by the chance-driven roll of a die. From there, audience members were name-tagged with a bastardized version of their actual name (Pierson). In this, Allen sought to evoke the disorientation of an immigrant going through Ellis Island before entering the United States of America (Pierson). When the audience members made it through the name tagging, the cast interviewed them about why they came, whom they were, and what they were about. This element was designed as an early way to enforce a specific aspect of their aesthetic: that there is no fourth wall (Allen Interview). Finally, before the start of the show, Allen took center stage and unleashed an angered manifesto on Neo-Futurism and its grand aims at a theatre sans

---

3 A contemporary example of name tagging: Max becomes “Woody”. My name taggers wore headphones, and couldn’t hear what I said in the first place.
illusions (Milkovich 60). The primary reason for this anger, as Allen tells it, is that he had “a bone to pick” with the mainstream theatre.

The opening success of *TML* at Stage Left is difficult to gauge. A lack of written material leaves only the memories of those who were there. Allen explained that *TML* opened to crowds of friends and family. It took until January 1989 for *TML* to pick up momentum and local praise (neofuturists.org). This local praise and momentum would lead to the company’s first sell out performance in June of 1989 (Allen Interview). More importantly, this shift in momentum coincided with a shift in the original cast.

When discussing The Neo-Futurists and *TML* in its founding stages, it is an unenviable task to keep track of precisely when certain members came and left. Heather Riordan, former Neo-Futurist and one of its longest active members, has pointed out that the ensemble never truly stabilized until they had moved into their Ashland Avenue space in 1992 (Riordan). The Neo-Futurist website is vague and unspecific as to when people left and why they parted, and Allen’s memory is left wanting.4

What is abundantly clear about the ensemble in its early days is that it was neither as highly selective in its auditions, nor as specifically demanding in its structure, as the contemporary Neo-Futurists. A major part of this, Neo-Futurist alumna Lisa Buscani points out, is that the ensemble was still cultivating a collective voice. When a vacancy in the ensemble opened up, Allen and company put out a call for auditions. In the audition, all Allen asked for was a two-minute performance of material that the performer had written. These loose parameters for those auditioning ended up attracting performers and writers of a variety of different stripes: performance poets, traditional actors, improv

4 If you’re interested in the timeline of Neo-Futurists leaving and joining the company, the best resource is Erica Milkovich’s “History of Neo-Futurism”.

20
comedians, devising theatre artists, and even artists who had never performed before (Buscani). As far as Allen was concerned, “anyone could be a Neo-Futurist,” (PopMatters YouTube). This is a stark contrast to the contemporary Neo-Futurists, who as a collective, tend to admit more polished, vetted writer-performers into the ensemble versus taking a risk on someone who is in love with the aesthetic but may lack experience (Allen Interview).

The high turnover of the ensemble presented intriguing possibilities, especially in engaging with early demonstrations of leadership and decision making with the early Neo-Futurists. New voices filtered into the room with new ideas and ideology on how to present their work for and through *TML* and the Neo-Futurist aesthetic (Christopher).

**The Aesthetic and The Ensemble: a Proving Ground.**

In all the interviews conducted, the number one response for how decisions were made within The Neo-Futurist ensemble was argument. In a time before The Neo-Futurists had a functioning board of directors, business manager, or voting protocols, the ensemble debated, yelled, and mercilessly fought one another out of passion (Riordan). Since The Neos were just a group who performed a show produced by Stage Left, a certain amount of agency and procedural protocol was lacking (Ridarelli). Moreover, the collaborative structures that Allen tried to implement in operating the Neo-Futurist ensemble contributed to this temperament.

Allen was specifically interested in using a cooperative model once the show was open and running. However, what Allen meant by co-op is not defined or clear. Allen wanted a certain degree of control over the completed product, because the aesthetic and
format were his creation (Allen Interview). On the other hand, it seems Allen desired a company that produced work that was wholly representative of all the collaborators who contributed to it. Therefore, TML’s format and aesthetic became a decision making protocol for The Neo Futurists.

The TML format has thirty play slots for whatever number of performers are in the ensemble at any given moment, all performed in or under 60 minutes as dictated by a wall mounted, dark room clock (Milkovich 14). At the end of each performance, an audience member rolls a single sided die. That number plus the die roll of the of the second evening’s performance is the minimum number of new plays that must be created. Plays were proposed via a rough pitch, and then a consensus vote. To create room for these new plays, at the conclusion of a weekend run of TML, the ensemble would look through the menu of plays and cut pieces that its creators felt were not working, had been in the line up too long, or were no longer relevant. A play was cut from the line up only if the author agreed to have the play cut. This system of play selection fostered a sense individual and collective responsibility. Since plays were cut and added weekly, it forced individual ensemble members to be neither precious about protecting their work, as ensemble and show rules forced the creation of new work, nor push overs, as it was an individual ensemble member’s decision whether to cut their own play or not. While ensemble members insist that the method is not entirely fair due to the power of popularity (Pierson), the system created a place in which individuals and collectives could create pieces unique to their own understanding of Neo-Futurists while being beholden to a group structure: TML. As a result of this play selection process, Allen was
thrust into a position of having his self-admitted neuroses put to the test: being a part of something he created but could not fully control (Ridarelli).

When questioned about how he views his role in the creation and guidance of *TML*, Allen openly referred to himself as “a benevolent dictator” and someone who likes to be in charge (Allen Interview). This stands in direct conflict with much of the rhetoric that he reportedly began *TML* with: getting away from the idea of the auteur director. Allen himself pointed out that for the first two months of *TML*’s existence, he was the one who set the order of the plays for the evening, long before the order became audience dictated (Allen Interview). He says,

…everyone would submit them [their plays] to me and I would choose what plays were going into the show... And I would very much direct the plays. I was very much kind of figuring out how to stage them, how to say the lines... I would say I was the director trying to instill people with this belief. (Allen Interview)

Allen’s description here highlights a narrative in which he is the definitive leader of the company. It also demonstrates a conflict in the narrative of The Neo-Futurists’ stewardship: Allen has perhaps a far more active view of his involvement with the past than his ensemble describes him as having. Specifically, the notion of being *TML*’s director is a confusing claim, in light of the influx of new ensemble members in 1989 who effectively directed their own work. Milkovich states that per the practices of Neo-Futurism that individual writers direct their own pieces so as to attain their specific vision of personal truth (Milkovich 17).

Allen’s claim that he was the director of *TML*, a director in charge of staging and line readings (Allen Interview), stands in opposition with every ensemble interview that
states the individual writer of the piece directs their own work. One example is Lisa Buscani’s piece entitled *Chekhovian Depression*. In *Chekhovian Depression*, Buscani rants about her existence in a fashion inspired by Anton Chekhov’s work (Buscani). Buscani explicitly sets her piece at a fictive Chicago Cubs game, something that would have been a clear no-go for Allen and the aesthetic because of The Neo-Futurist aesthetic of dealing with the present moment, and being non illusory (Allen “Neo-Futurism in a Nut Shell”). This suggests to me that Allen’s leadership was not as comprehensive as one might believe.

Phil Ridarelli, an ensemble member since spring of 1989, never felt Allen was as all-controlling as he thought he was, saying:

I don't actually think he had as much control in the individuals in the ensemble as he probably thought he did. I mean, it is show, and I think we all recognize that. But I think he also recognizes that the individuals make up what the show and the ensemble are and is and can be. So...I look at him as more as...you know...it is his baby. (Ridarelli)

Neo-Futurist Heather Riordan⁵ also highlights this tension, commenting: “Greg had a really challenging position of having created his vision yet understanding that a good artistic group worked as a collective. …I think that was always a difficult balance for him” (Riordan). Riordan and Ridarelli rightly point out a disconnect that Allen navigated from the beginning: having an artistic vision to communicate and execute while

---

⁵ It is important to note that Heather Riordan was not a part of The Neo-Futurists until 1990, after the move to Live Bait. While she is not a part of the specific historical moment this chapter covers, her credibility on the subject of Greg Allen is valued due to being the longest, continuously tenured Neo-Futurist in the company: over twenty years.
simultaneously allowing others the room they need to create their own work within that vision. This disconnect colors Allen’s tenure within The Neo-Futurists.

Allen’s self-narrative as a benevolent dictator is corroborated by Karen Christopher and Lisa Buscani, who both joined The Neo-Futurists in March of 1989 (Pierson). Karen Christopher, who Allen informally mentioned as his second in command, is quick to admit that Allen lived entirely up to being a dictator; he was, she says, the only Neo-Futurist in her tenure to tell people they could not do a play they created because it did not fit the aesthetic (Christopher). She further asserts that Allen got away with such bossiness due to his thoughtful, logical nature when explaining his apprehensions about a play not living up to the aesthetic, which Christopher called “his cloak of authenticity” (Christopher). This once again re-affirms Allen’s own self image as a leader as a benevolent dictator: a bossy individual who is thoughtful, considerate, but generally correct.

Allens’ claim is further corroborated by Lisa Buscani. When asked if Allen was a dictator, Buscani responded, “Pretty much” (Buscnai). She added that to Allen’s credit he was good at recognizing where he was not strong, specifically as an administrator (Buscnai). Buscani candidly admits that Allen is a good writer, a good performer, and a visionary (Buscani). She also clarifies that for a long while, Allen was terrible at actually defining, “…what the hell The Neo-Futurist aesthetic was” (Buscani). During the early part of every week, The Neo-Futurists would meet to present new material to be inserted into TML. New plays were presented, discussed, and voted upon one at a time. However, a major sticking point was Allen’s criticism of pieces not fitting with the aesthetic (Buscani). While Allen lacked official veto power, he often went out of his way to try and
dissuade his ensemble members from placing certain pieces within the show because they did not fit his vision of Neo-Futurism (Christopher). Buscani recalls the specific situation; “Greg kept doing this thing like ‘Well it doesn't fit the aesthetic.’ And we're like ‘What the fuck is the aesthetic?’ You know? It doesn't make sense. You keep shooting us down for this thing that we don't understand. And then, out of that pressure, came the definition” (Buscani).

Allen, especially in that first year, could not expect or prepare for the ways in which his ensemble might challenge him, and that is clear from the interviews with everyone but Allen. While there are discrepancies as to what degree Allen may have been dictatorial in his directing and leading of the co-operative theatre ensemble, what is made abundantly clear is that much of the discussions of power were not over how the ensemble conducted itself, but over content and presentation, and that dissent was an early part of the way The Neo-Futurists operated from within.

In 1989, Allen and The Neo-Futurist ensemble were singularly focused on controllable elements, specifically how to make next the week’s TML better both in process and in product (Buscani). How they went about attempting to refine and strengthen TML from week to week was through loud, passionate, argument over specific performance aesthetics, specific plays, and making sure people were equally represented in TML (Ridarelli). One of the major ways in which ensemble members were able to help shape the Neo-Futurists was through the long arguments and discussion about the aesthetic, presenting work, and rehearsal procedures.

To give some insight into this discussion, I feel an example of The Neo-Futurist aesthetic in action, an example of a play is called “Cucumber 101” by Dina Marie
Walters. In this play, Walters and Jay Torrence each hold a cucumber. They each state historical facts about the cucumber before Rihanna’s “S&M” plays over the audio system while they dance suggestively with the cucumber to highlight how phallic it is. This play has no characters, deals with real objects, real movements, and it set in a present tense, all of which are elements of Neo-Futurism as Allen describes it (Allen “Neo-Futurism”).

Furthering the complexity of this discussion, Buscani cannot remember what specific Neo-Futurists forced Allen sharpen and clarify his language about the Neo-Futurist aesthetic. While each respondent has stories of plays they created that failed or worked, when pressed to clarify the nitty-gritty aspects of the aesthetic and how they argued through it, ensemble members were unable to conjure it, with the exception of Karen Christopher. Christopher points out that Allen was the enforcer of making sure Neo-Futurist pieces were, “…in the here and now, not pretending, something we can actually activate in the space by doing it, by really talking to each other or really doing something and not faking anything” (Christopher). To this end, understanding the decision and governance amongst The Neos in 1989 is a task in trying to comprehend the history of an aesthetic that, according to Erika Milkovich, is decidedly postmodern, creating and instilling new aesthetic traditions, and rejecting them at the earliest convenience (Milkovich 176).

The ensemble also took the reins from Allen on how the rehearsal process would be executed. In the beginning of 1989, the Neo-Futurists performed two nights a week, Friday and Saturday night, and rehearsed two nights a week: Monday and Thursday (Buscani). In describing Allen’s directing, Buscani and Christopher both refer to him as “prone to wandering” and “long winded” (Buscani). Buscani remembers that the
rehearsal process felt drawn out, and that it could easily be condensed into something more succinct and respectful of the ensemble’s time (Buscani). Buscani states that Karen Christopher, who all the respondents spoke of as a peacekeeper amongst the ensemble, developed the practical and streamlined method of rehearsal, and Allen seemed to be amenable to it. This marks a clear moment in which Allen relinquished stewardship within the company, and in doing so set a pace for how The Neo-Futurists would develop organically for the future: collectively.

**Conclusion**

The gaps in the Neo-Futurist genesis and ensemble narrative are frustrating, but what information is available point to some clear markers about the early history of The Neo-Futurists, and the trajectory of the ensemble. First is the notion that while Allen may have envisioned an ensemble, he did not prepare for the push back his ensemble would provide in unique and individual interpretations of his artistic aesthetic and ideas. To Allen, TML was an artistic vehicle he shared with some collaborators; to the ensemble, TML was a unique individual and collective performance and writing opportunity. Second, TML and by proxy The Neo-Futurists, was driven by egalitarian principles and individual interests as part of a collective effort. Egalitarian, for the sake of this thesis, refers to the system of governing in which all participants have equal rights and opportunities. As a result of these ideas in action, Allen’s original aesthetic ideas and leadership were often bucked against other individuals’ desires and interpretations of Neo-Futurism. What these begin to point to is the foundational organizational structures
that will guide the Neo-Futurists going forward: the battle between Allen’s vision as a founder and creator, with the egalitarian rights of the Neo-Futurist ensemble.

What is clear is that from within TML, a true organization separate from Stage Left was forming. With its largely democratic methods, continually developing and refining aesthetic, The Neo-Futurists in 1989 were on the up-hill charge to being something more than just an ensemble performing a show. As they would start their first sell out streak in June 1989, The Neo-Futurists would continue to find themselves not just as artists, but as a self-identifying entity apart from its producers.
Chapter 2: Incorporation: The Neo-Futurists Emancipation from Stage Left

Theatre

Starting in fall of 1989, the Neo-Futurists met a great deal of success, beginning a run of sell-out shows (in a 75-seat house) that would last for two years (Neo-Futurists.org). In addition, Allen had negotiated a small but sizable gain in pay for all members of the ensemble: The Neo-Futurists now took in and split ten percent of ticket sales at the door instead of three percent (Milkovich 222). Moreover, The Neo-Futurists felt that, due to the enthusiasm of their audiences, they were beginning to hit their artistic stride (Ridarelli).

But how would success affect The Neo-Futurists? Beginning in the later part of 1989, Allen departed to pursue other artistic ventures (Allen Interview). New ensemble members pitted against more senior members began to debate what the artistic vision for the company was going to be without him (Christopher). Stage Left began to impose censorship on controversial TML pieces and force their own ensemble members upon The Neo-Futurists. The collective response of The Neo-Futurists as an ensemble would be critical in not only withstanding these trials, but also allowing them to expand into something more than just a late night theatre ensemble.

In this chapter, I will address the developing group dynamics of The Neo-Futurists between Fall 1989 and May 1990. I will examine the changes created by the departure and return of Greg Allen, the increasing pressure of Stage Left’s involvement
with The Neo-Futurists and *TML*, and the acrimonious break up between Stage Left and The Neo-Futurists that put The Neo-Futurists on the track to incorporation. In doing this, I will serve my greater thesis by showing how both the ensemble surviving Stage Left’s attempt to take over *TML* and Allen’s return were pivotal moments in the early history of The Neo-Futurists’ development.

The previous chapter established that Allen was an integral figure in The Neo-Futurists, but perhaps not as integral as he saw himself. The founder of Neo-Futurism was riding high on success and developing an organic, dynamic relationship with an ensemble of artists. So: how would this collective function without him?

**Allen Leaves The Ensemble**

In contrast to contemporary Neo-Futurists, at this point in time there was no scheduled time off for ensemble members (Buscani). This meant that the Neo-Futurists, circa 1989, were in every show, every weekend, with few exceptions. On top of ensemble responsibilities of writing, rehearsing, and performing every week, Allen had additional responsibilities doing administrative work. While Buscani calls him out for being a, “terrible administrator,” for his inefficiencies in running a rehearsal room, Allen points out that it was he who had to handle all of the administrative “dirty work,” including working with *TML*’s producer, Stage Left Theatre (Allen Interview).

When *TML* began in 1988, the producing agreement between Stage Left Theatre and The Neo-Futurists was simple: Stage Left provides The Neo-Futurists space to perform and rehearse, and in return Stage Left takes 97 percent of the week’s earnings from ticket sales (Allen Interview). Stage Left, per the agreement with Allen in 1988, was
not responsible for publicity, properties, sets, or technicians (Allen Interview). When it came to honoring the financial terms of this agreement, Allen was the point person for The Neo-Futurists. He handled the cash flow by taking the week’s ticket sales take and delivering it to McCullough and Stage Left (Allen Interview). He additionally typed and photocopied all the menus and made the numbers for TML’s clothesline of plays. Whether this was motivated out of his desire to be in control or out of a necessity is unclear. While some ensemble members—such as Karen Christopher, Ayun Halliday, and Heather Riordan—are noted for their leadership in picking up administrative tasks, others—like Buscani and Ridarell—were, Buscani herself notes, very quick to shirk that responsibility (Buscani). What is clear is that Allen, in 1989, was integrated into every facet of TML.

Allen’s involvement with TML often manifested in unexpected ways. In July 1989, Allen had plans to return to Oberlin, Ohio, for a college reunion. For that week, Allen created a play called “Dad Checks Up on Baby” that involved him calling Stage Left Theatre’s telephone during the middle of TML. The Neo-Futurist ensemble would answer the phone, put it on stage, and Allen would actually hear how the show was going via telephone (Allen Interview). This incident reiterates Allen’s paternal attitude and desire to be deeply involved with the company, even in his absence. That Allen actually spent portions of a weekend away to check up on his ensemble in the middle of a performance displays both a certain lack of trust in and a deep interest and concern for his ensemble.

Towards the tail end of 1989, as The Neo-Futurists and TML continued their sell-out run, Allen announced he was departing from the ensemble (Allen Interview). Allen
felt that it was time to “move to other directing opportunities,” with Curious Theatre Branch and Red Moon Theatre, as well as eyeing a potential move to the east coast with his girlfriend (Allen Interview Facebook). The ensemble, in interviews, were non-plussed about Allen’s initial departure. It seems, then, that either the ensemble maintained a “the show must go on” attitude or that, in light of Allen’s return, the impact of the incident was forgotten. What is clear is that in Allen’s wake, he envisioned a hierarchy remaining in place, with a new person “in charge” (Allen Interview).

According to Allen, he passed the torch of director of The Neo-Futurists to Karen Christopher (Allen Interview). As he viewed her as his second in command, he felt she would be a natural fit to take over his role in 1990 (Allen Interview). However, the specifics of this role, beyond handling administrative tasks and maintaining the company’s aesthetics, are not defined. Christopher, when asked about being made the leader of The Neo-Futurists, did not see herself as such:

I didn't consider myself in charge. I think a number of other people who were there would not have considered me in charge. I think that maybe the way Greg felt about it...I think there were a couple of us who had been around longer than others, and there were a couple of us who were loud mouths… I think...the way I look at it, there was three or four of us who were more senior than others, and more certain that we knew what works and what doesn't work. We just felt more confident. (Christopher)

Christopher did not want to claim the space of leader in light of the specific egalitarian and consensus models of decision-making the ensemble used. This stands in direct contrast to Allen, who implemented these egalitarian ideas, but still made claims to the
space of leader due to creating the concept of TML, and being the initiator of the Neo-Futurist aesthetic that the ensemble employed. What can be inferred from Christopher is that leadership, amongst the Neo-Futurists, is connected to ensemble tenure, experience performing in TML, and being able to vocalize to the ensemble.6

With Allen gone, the ensemble continued forward with TML much like it had before in terms of content and aesthetic (Christopher). While Allen’s absence provided new space for pieces that interpreted or disregarded his vision of The Neo-Futurist aesthetic to live in TML, much of the work created by the ensemble during this time period was very much continuing in as if Allen were there (Christopher). Karen Christopher noted that much of the ensemble continued to do work that emphasized brevity and actual action because it worked with audiences, not out of respect for Allen (Christopher). This pragmatic attitude to the aesthetic marks both a shift and retention of status quo within the ensemble. On one hand, The Neo-Futurist ensemble was artistically producing work that still upheld ideals that Allen had championed. On the other hand, they were doing it because those ideals had proven to work, not out of a great admiration for Allen.

In Allen’s absence, there was an uptick in tension amongst the ensemble (Christopher). This tension largely manifested as in-fighting about the direction of the content and presentation of The Neo-Futurists and TML (Christopher). On one side were the senior members of The Neo-Futurists (including Ridarelli and Buscani) who had built a taste for and trust in the aesthetic as it had been functioning with Allen. On the other

---

6 Christopher would not specifically say who the senior members were but it stands to reason from the time lines provided in the interviews and Neo-Futurist webpage that Phil Ridarelli, Randy Burgess, Melissa Lindberg, and Lisa Buscani might be the individual, due to their tenures beginning with Christopher’s.
end were newer ensemble members, including Ted Bales and Dave Awl, who were trying to push the direction of the ensemble and TML into uncharted territories.

Bales and Awl both came into The Neo-Futurists in late 1989 and early 1990, after Allen’s departure (Pierson). Awl, a man described by some of his contemporaries as a “sloth-like epic poem” (Pierson), was a long-time friend and member of the Bowling Green State University Forensics Team with Lisa Buscani (Pierson). Bales was an actor-performer whom Christopher describes as “great fun.” Bales was aggressive where Awl was shy and withdrawn (Buscani), but their combined presence shaped one important facet of the company that remains to this day: its presence in the gay community (Pierson). Bales and Awl were the first openly homosexual members of the company (Pierson). Prior to their involvements, TML and The Neo-Futurists had little visibility in the Chicago gay community, despite a large swath of gay theatre being performed in Chicago in the early 1990s (Pierson). Their impact helped organize The Neo-Futurists into marching in Chicago’s Gay Pride Parade and more importantly, beginning their annual LGBTQ show in June, TML Pride: Thirty Queer Plays in Sixty Straight Minutes.

Awl’s impact was felt through his writing and his dissident nature. Awl is the only ensemble member who ever functioned as a contributing writer for TML, having created short work for Lisa Buscani to use in the show (Milkovich 224). Awl’s work, which he himself felt did not reach prominence until 1994, comes from his unique interpretation of the Neo-Futurist aesthetic and his discomfort with the aesthetic’s moral imperatives (Pierson). “If something was not Neo-Futurist, then you might hear that said from certain corners of the company with a tone of almost biblical disapproval,” Awl
stated in an interview (Pierson). Awl, though noted as shy, stood his ground against Neo-Futurist’s moral charge by being slow and ponderous (Pierson).

Awl’s persistence in the face of Allen’s and others imperatives on Neo-Futurism helped create important space within the egalitarian system for minority voices, specifically concerning aesthetic presentation and representation. Where Allen and others were expeditious and athletic in their performances, Awl specifically was meditative and interested in the fluxus influences on Neo-Futurism and his own brand of personal truth (Pierson). For the sake of this thesis, fluxus is to refer to the performance art movement which asked audience and artists alike to investigate their own lives as artistic, and individual experience and time being paramount (“The Neo-Futurists Bring Fluxus”). While Awl often found himself under-represented in the TML line up, Awl’s differing aesthetic perspective was vastly important in creating room for other ensemble members to challenge’s Allen’s aesthetic, and shoot down much of the moral imperative language Allen had imbued Neo-Futurism with in the first place (Buscani). Additionally, much of Awl’s interest in the slow, mundane, fluxus elements of the aesthetic bled over into the work of Neo-Futurist ensemble member John Pierson (Pierson Facebook). Furthermore, Awl was the first historian of The Neo-Futurists, helping catalogue and author the company’s first book.

While Awl and Bales had differing aesthetic missions and artistic processes, both had a committed interest in the presentation of homosexuality in the TML menu, and regularly fought and voted together to insure that they were represented in the lineup (Pierson). This is one of the first instances where highly visible political alliances formed.

---

7 Awl called himself a “Fluxus guy” (Pierson).
amongst and within the ensemble. Some element of politics had been present from the ensemble’s founding in 1988, of course. But in the case of Awl and Bales, their use of their TML votes to ensure inclusion of plays that catered to their aesthetics and tastes underscores a political dynamic at play. Specifically, this interaction identifies the presence of micro groups within the organization based on interests or identity.

Bales, however, was not only noted for his impact on the representation of homosexuals amongst the company, but also for his desire to take The Neo-Futurists in a direction far more polished and humor oriented (Christopher). Bales was known amongst the Neo-Futurists for his spoofs of film and television (Christopher). Bales’ use of spoofs, musicals, dance numbers, and sends ups were a large hit with audiences and even members of The Neo-Futurist ensemble in Allen’s absence. Bales’ use of the genre impacted the contemporary ensemble, where parody still plays a role in TML and their mainstage work. Too, Bales vehemently disliked the “poor theatre” aesthetic (Christopher). His vision, unlike Allen’s, was brighter, shinier, and far more showbiz savvy (Christopher). Bales regularly argued in ensemble meetings that much of the company’s reliance on a poor theatre aesthetic was out of necessity, and should that necessity change, they should update their presentation (Christopher). Whether Bales was alone in this matter is not discussed, as the interviewed ensemble members were reticent to talk much about him, in so much as Bales described as fun, but difficult to work with.

Bales had a bit of a dark side. Allen described him as a “pathological liar.” Christopher and Riordan affirmed this stance. Christopher expounded by saying Bales

---

8 The Neo-Futurists still do spoofs to this day including readings of B level Sci-Fi Film.
9 Pieces include a play I’ve seen that parodied exposition scenes in thriller spy films by removing the subtext.
had aspirations to “bulldoze the numbnuts” out of The Neo-Futurists and take over the company. Bales never seemed to make good on his intentions, according to Christopher.

Bales left The Neo-Futurists in 1991 on poor terms. Allen explains:

[Bales]… explained to us as having left the week's take in a cab. That was the excuse. And then later it came out that he had convinced the treasurer, who was taking care of the money, to loan him the week's take so that he may pay his bills because he was behind on it. And he was paying her back a little bit every week but had missed a bunch of payments. So at one point we checked the money amount and we came up a couple thousand dollars shorts. (Allen Interview)  

Bales confessed to having misplaced the week’s take in the cab, but was then found to be lying about that as well (Christopher). Shortly afterwards, Bales resigned from The Neo-Futurists. He would pass away in 2000, at the age of 35, from primary pulmonary hypertension (Jones). While Bales was fondly remembered by some his peers, and was persona non grata to others, Bales was an important and powerful presence in that ensemble due to his artistic vision.

What is clear from the narratives of Christopher, Awl, and Bales is that, in some small way, the ensemble was taking greater ownership of TML in Allen’s absence. Without Allen stopping ensemble discussion of an individual piece on the basis of authenticity to the aesthetic, the remaining ensemble were able to push TML and the governing aesthetic in new directions. The ensemble was developing into an entity with

---

10 In relating Bales embezzlement of company money, Allen would not refer to Bales by his name, but only as someone who was “Not one of my favorite people” Christopher, having been very good friends with Bales, keyed me in to his identity as the embezzler.
no need for Allen as a parental figure. But as Allen departed, another party became interested in guiding the direction of The Neo-Futurists and *TML*: Stage Left.

**Stage Left Steps In**

When Allen first met Dennis McCullough to discuss producing *TML*, the agreement arranged was simple: The Neo-Futurists’ get venue space in return for ticket sales (Allen Facebook). The implication in this agreement was that The Neo-Futurists and *TML* were separate entities to Stage Left, merely housed in SLT’s theatre. This conflicts with conversations between McCullough and Allen in 1990 where McCullough claims that The Neo-Futurists were just a Stage Left production, not a sovereign entity (Allen Interview). As The Neo-Futurists’ ensemble included Stage Left ensemble members since *TML*’s inception, McCullough viewed the show as an investment: of time, money, and people (Smith, Vance). While Allen adamantly states that McCullough did not try to intervene with The Neo-Futurists until it was financially convenient (Allen Facebook), it is worth noting that McCullough and his company might want to have a say in *TML* due to its popularity, controversy, and perceptions of being associated with the Stage Left brand.

Allen’s theory as to why Stage Left took an increased interest in *TML* was due to *TML*’s financial success compared to the rest of the work produced at Stage Left. “We were certainly outselling anything they were doing,” Allen commented, insinuating that nothing Stage Left was producing at the time was attracting the same kind of public attention (Allen Interview). Allen’s claim clashes with specific information about Stage Left and its mission. Deborah Rodkin, Neo-Futurist ensemble members Randy Burgess
and Mike Troccoli, and original artistic director Ann Fournier founded Stage Left in 1982. Stage Left was built to provide opportunities to Chicago theatre artists to produce work (Chicago Public Library Stage Left Archive). This mission was later refined to “producing plays that raise the debate on political and social issues,” in 1988 with the arrival of McCullough (stagelefttheatre.com). The notion that TML solely was keeping Stage Left afloat is troubling as Stage Left even in its infancy was a Jeff-nominated and award-winning theatre, producing new and contemporary work by Lanford Wilson, Tony Kushner, and Anne Godden Segard long before Allen’s involvement with the company (stagelefttttheatre.com). Despite one season in which only two productions were mounted, SLT annually mounted four productions a year, presenting a combination of devised ensemble works, classical realism, and Midwest premieres including Tony Kushner’s A Bright Room Called Day in 1988. Yet, the claim that SLT wanted power and say over TML is not entirely unfounded.

With Allen out of the picture, the Neo-Futurists began to encounter pressure and demands that pushed them to a crisis point of leaving Stage Left entirely. What exactly that breaking point was is contested amongst Neo-Futurists. Some suggest it was Stage Left demanding The Neo-Futurists take any ensemble member from Stage Left who wanted to join (Buscani). Buscani was largely indifferent to the addition of some of these ensemble members. Ridarelli at this point was also a cross over member between Stage Left and The Neo-Futurists, and also largely not bothered by these additions. While the ensemble already included members of the Stage Left ensemble in 1990¹¹, Dennis

¹¹ Randy Burgess and Melissa Lindberg, who were founding Neo-Futurists, and Paige Phillips were Stage Left ensemble members who became Neo-Futurists. Ridarelli was a Neo-Futurist who joined (briefly) Stage Left.
McCullough sought to add more Stage Left members to The Neo-Futurist ensemble (Allen Interview). Deborah Rodkin, described by Allen as, “…one of the most obnoxious, uncreative women I have ever met,” was originally chosen, by SLT, to join TML. The ensemble, a bit incensed by this, bargained to take Paige Phillips instead, who was a SLT ensemble member and Dennis McCullough’s wife (Milkovich 223). According to Allen, The Neo-Futurists’ took her into the company as a means of appeasing their producers, though Allen was not involved directly with the company at the time (Allen Interview).¹² From Allen and Buscani’s perspectives, the forced addition of any ensemble member was the tipping point on whether to stay or leave SLT (Milkovich 223). For Buscani, it felt like a gross overreach to add someone who was not only not a poor fit, but someone the ensemble did not feel comfortable working alongside. Beyond a clear feeling from within The Neo-Futurists that she was not a good fit for them, there was also the matter of her being their producers’ wife and a potential conflict of interest (Allen Interview).

Yet, Ridarelli and Christopher point to a different scenario that was the breaking point of the Stage Left/Neo-Futurist producing relationship. Ridarelli claims it all had to do with the fallout of a singular Neo-Futurist play:

…there was a play in the show that was...a hot bed of political [sic]. People took offense to it. Somebody stepped on a flag. You know at the time, StageLeft was like "you can't do that. We get grants from the local and state government. You can't do this. You have to be more cautious." And we're like “we do not belong to you, we're not yours. We want to create the art we want to create.” (Ridarelli)

¹² The interviewees, sans Allen, were all reticent to even name Paige Philips in much the same way Allen was ever reticent to name Ted Bales.
Ridarelli points to a dichotomy in the Neo-Futurist ensemble’s relation to Stage Left. Stage Left, as a theatre with political interests, was deeply afraid of losing funding because The Neo-Futurists did a polarizing and politicized play. Yet, Stage Left was a theatre built on the idea of creating politically provoking work (stagelefttheatre.com). Allen, in discussing the piece, points out the hypocrisy of SLT trying to censor them, after a year of being left to their own devices (Allen Interview).

Both incidents pushed the Neo Futurists to recognize that something needed to change in their relationship with Stage Left. With censorship and pay concerns (Allen Interview), The Neo-Futurist ensemble reached out to Greg Allen in March of 1990 (Christopher). Their hopes were he would be able to persuade McCullough to back off about casting decisions, cease attempts to censor TML, and pay the ensemble better. With their demands in place, and Allen back to potentially barter for a better deal than he original brokered with McCullough, The Neo-Futurists were hoping to continue forward working with SLT. The reality of the situation would come to a head when Allen and The Neo-Futurists met with McCullough and SLT.

**Allen Returns and The Incorporated Neo-Futurists**

In March 1990, Allen found himself with more free time than planned: his move to the east coast fell apart when his girlfriend broke up with him (Allen Interview). In between directing gigs, Allen spent his time protecting his intellectual property by copyrighting “Too Much Light Makes The Baby Go Blind” and “30 Plays in 60 Minutes”
Allen returned to the ensemble, collected their demands, and set up a meeting between Stage Left Theatre and The Neo-Futurists. Allen sought to negotiate for a more favorable split of ticket sales (an increase from their current 10% to 20%), more money spent on advertising, and an end to censorship of TML (Allen Interview). According to Allen, McCullough stated, “We don't recognize you as an independent entity at all. You are a Stage Left Production” (Allen Interview). It was at that moment that Allen and The Neo-Futurists realized how much Stage Left was a threat to their collective artistic property. Stage Left did not see them as a self-organized, autonomous group, but a variety show.

Allen gathered the ensemble (sans Paige Philips) after the meeting and went across Clark Street to Café Voltaire, a coffee shop and performance space (Allen Interview). Voltaire would become the central hub for discussing the Stage Left issue. According to Allen, their course seemed clear:

I mean I don't remember any kind of hierarchy, or...we certainly didn't vote. There wasn't any controversy. It became very expressly clear that we need to...maybe not at the moment did we say we had to incorporate. Maybe I kind of thought

---

13 He licenses his copyrights exclusively to The Neo-Futurists and their various franchises. The impact of this legal maneuvering on the dynamics of the ensemble is further explored in Chapter 4.
about it and said, ‘Well we should incorporate.’ But we were all relieved. We're out of here. (Allen Interview)

In all the interviews conducted, the one area almost universally agreed upon was this one: they all knew the show must move somewhere else. However, Vance Smith, current artistic director of Stage Left Theatre, pointed out that Randy Burgess and Melissa Lindberg, founding members of the ensemble, actively stood against these decisions (Smith, Vance). Feeling it a betrayal to Stage Left, they were not complicit in this decision (Allen Facebook). The disagreement highlights a tension that no interviewee seems willing to bring up: the separation between SLT and The Neo-Futurists was far more acrimonious and nuanced than Allen or others initially made it out to be. None of the interviews conducted mention the presence of Burgess and Lindbergh as disagreeing votes in this meeting. Their presence in this decision has seemingly been erased by Allen and the ensemble, until pressed about the issue. While fences were mended well enough in December 2013 to have a reunion show with Burgess and Lindbergh, the erasure of Burgess and Lindbergh from that initial meeting brings to light two possible revelations: that Allen and The Neo-Futurists decided to commit to a self narrative of survival at the cost of any ensemble member, or that Burgess and Lindberg were never considered integral enough Neo-Futurists to be remembered.

Burgess’s and Lindberg’s disagreements over the issue aside, Allen contacted a lawyer to begin looking into how to incorporate the company (neo-futurist.org). Allen additionally began to touch base with Sharon Evans and John Ragir, the owners and

\footnotesize

14 Lindberg and Burgess did not respond to requests for interviews.
15 Allen invited me to an event titled Return to the Cradle, a TML event that featured plays and performers across the show’s 25 year run in the original venue space. I was unable to attend.
operators of the performance venue Live Bait Theatre (Buscani). Allen had a working relationship with Evans and Ragir, having previously directed work at Live Bait under The Neo-Futurist name (Allen Interview). In order to incorporate The Neo-Futurists, a board of directors needed to be put in place as well as a president, a vice president, a secretary, and treasurer (Allen Interview). Allen signed on to be the company’s president and artistic director and Karen Christopher was the vice president (Allen Interview).

While this was a huge occasion for the ensemble, and a possible re-inscription of power structures, Ridarelli did not see it that way. Ridarelli states, “I think that [the] positions that were on our original incorporation papers we just simply needed to sign. I could have well as signed my name on the secretary line as Karen could have signed on the treasurer line” (Ridarelli). Allen was similarly non-descript about how the signing of officers changed the ensemble’s group dynamics. “We never really met as a board,” Allen stated. (Allen Interview). Eventually, The Neo-Futurists would begin to flex and wield the power of a real board of directors, but during April 1990 the legal measures were meant to protect an ensemble, not re-inscribe a working dynamic when they became a company.

In late April 1990, a little over a week out from The Neo-Futurists’ debut at Live Bait, the ensemble informed Paige Philips that they were leaving Stage Left and that she would not be joining them. Incensed, Philips told Dennis McCullough (Milkovich 222). With the fallout happening, ensemble members found themselves and their relationship to the individuals in SLT complicated. Ridarelli was an active ensemble member in both companies. When pressed to decide who he would be joining, Ridarelli opted to stay

---

16 The play was titled *Leary*. Some websites say it happened after the move to Live Bait, but it occurred in 1989 (Allen Interview).

17 Allen claims that Ridarelli was “really a Stage Left ensemble member.”
with The Neo-Futurists because he began with them first and that they were challenging him in ways Stage Left was not (Ridarelli). Allen’s friendship with McCullough was in tatters (Allen Interview). Lisa Buscani, from accounts given, was the only individual nonplussed by ending the working relationship with SLT because she was not going to be forced to work with people she did not want to work with (Pierson). While the action was collective, the fallout was highly individual.

Within the same day of informing Paige Phillips of their departure, The Neo-Futurists announced to a sold out audience at their Friday performance of TML that they were moving to Live Bait Theatre one mile down on Clark Street (Allen Interview). Right after this announcement, Stage Left ensemble members stood up in the audience proclaiming "No. That's not true. We are continuing on with the show here,” much to the confusion of the rest of The Neo-Futurist ensemble (Milkovich 212). Lisa Buscani describes the tension in the room: “I still remember one show where we were sold out but all of the Stage Left people were sitting in the front watching our show so that they could recreate what they saw. Next week. So it was like, tension in the air. I almost couldn’t do it” (Pierson). The push back from Stage Left would continue through creating a *duplicate* TML show and deliberately subversive advertising for a single weekend. Stage Left created posters that used the TML logo (a stencil drawing of a small child), which read “Baby. Still at Stage Left. 17 months. 30 plays. 60 minutes” (Allen Interview). It skirted around copyright by not saying “Too Much Light Makes The Baby Go Blind, running for 17 months. 30 plays in 60 minutes.” However, The TML logo was service marked, and

---

18 Ridarelli is the only person I interviewed who is still good friends with Stage Left company members.
Allen began creating a civil case to hit Stage Left back for misleading audiences (Allen Interview).

As the day of their Live Bait debut drew near, The Neo-Futurists made plans for how to ensure audiences found where they were performing. *The Chicago Reader* that week had two postings for “Too Much Light Makes the Baby Go Blind”. One was taglined- “Now at Live Bait Theatre”, the other “Still at Stage Left” (Allen Interview). The Neo-Futurists changed the start time of their show from 11:15 to 11:30 to allow audience extra time to get from Stage Left to Live Bait (Buscani).19 Allen made legal preparations: his lawyer and Karen Christopher’s boyfriend made plans to attend Stage Left’s production of *Baby* to see what elements they were directly ripping off from The Neo-Futurists (Allen Interview). Stage Left’s show had a similar Menu to *TML*, had 30 plays in 60 minutes, but no title due to Allen’s legal maneuvering (Allen Interview).

Friday, May 4, 1990, the remaining Neo-Futurist ensemble encircled Stage Left’s theatre, handing out fliers directing audience members to Live Bait Theatre. Allen ferried people from Stage Left Theatre to Live Bait Theatre in his own car (Allen Interview). They kicked off their performance at 11:30 PM to a sold out audience. On night two of the head-to-head weekend with Stage Left, Stage Left officially conceded and ceased producing or performing their version of *Baby* (Allen Interview). In a moment described by Allen as “ultimate triumph,” Lisa Buscani ran through the streets, shouting, “We WON! We WON! They’re not gonna do it!” (Buscani)

**Conclusion**

19 From that day forward it became the permanent *TML* start time.
The early half of 1990 brought monumental changes to The Neo-Futurists. It was in the middle of their sell-out run that they realized they could function and grow without Allen as the guiding figure in the ensemble. Moreover, in light of pressing demands and tension from Stage Left Theatre, The Neo-Futurist ensemble incorporated, setting them down a road to becoming a 501(c)3. While Allen may have had a large hand in incorporating the company, his influence on the incorporation efforts could not happen without The Neo-Futurists welcoming Allen back in the first place. Karen Christopher described the time as the beginnings of individual responsibility and power within the Neo-Futurist ensemble (Christopher).

For members like Karen Christopher and Buscani, this period of time marked a beginning of a shift in priorities for the company: from low-tech and aesthetic-driven to commercially-aware (Buscani). For others, these shifts marked the beginning of a new normal for the Neo-Futurists, in which artistic directors work alongside ensemble members who are also business managers and board members. For them, keeping profits stable enough to continue experimental work was essential, as was relying on no one but themselves for space or permission. The next chapter will explore the way the Neo-Futurists began to move into risky but potentially stronger footing.
Chapter 3: Expansion: New Ensemble Members, The New York City Tour and The Neo-Futurarium

The Neo-Futurists’ ability to thrive despite moving venues and continuous ensemble turnover is one of the company’s keys to becoming a Chicago alternative theatre institution. In May 1990 The Neo-Futurists were continuing their sellout run of Too Much Light at their new home venue, Live Bait Theatre. Emancipated from the Stage Left Theatre, and collecting new ensemble members, the newly incorporated Neo-Futurists geared up to arrive on a bigger platform than even Allen had envisioned. From May 1990 to February 1992, The Neo-Futurists took their first tour of New York City to perform TML, expanded ensemble member responsibilities and powers, and began to take ownership of their future by leasing their own space to accommodate a growing audience. What began as a late night theatre show had quickly developed into something much bigger.

This chapter will explore the growth and expansion of The Neo-Futurists from May 1990 through February 14, 1992. It will do this by investigating how The Neo-Futurists began practicing more egalitarian methods for distributing ensemble responsibilities, the planning of a New York City tour of TML in 1991, and the acquisition of the Ashland Avenue venue, The Neo-Futurarium, in 1992. In doing this, I serve my greater thesis by showing that adding key new ensemble members, touring their
work, and obtaining their own space were pivotal moments in developing The Neo-Futurists into the company they are today.

**New Ensemble Members and “The Conductor”**

Ensemble turnover did not stop after The Neo-Futurists moved to Live Bait. During their one and half year tenure at Live Bait, the Neo-Futurists lost four ensemble members and gained five. The new ensemble members of 1990 and 1991 contained some of the company’s most valued and influential, including Heather Riordan, Ayun Halliday, and Greg Kotis (neo-futurists.org). The combination of these new members with the remaining ensemble created a charged atmosphere that opened new discussions between the ensemble and Allen.

Heather Riordan, Neo-Futurist from 1990 through 2011, is the longest continuously active ensemble member in the company’s history (Riordan). Riordan’s career with The Neo-Futurists began when she made contact with Lisa Buscani in 1990. Riordan, at the time a company member of Zebra Crossing Theatre, was curating performers for a show on women’s rights (Pierson). After seeing Buscani perform slam poetry, Riordan invited her to be a part of this piece. In return, Buscani encouraged Riordan to audition for *TML* after they had moved into Live Bait (Riordan). With Buscani’s recommendation, Riordan was admitted into the company.

Riordan is often referred to as a pillar in the company’s lineage even though she was not a founding member (Pierson)\(^\text{20}\). This claim runs through interviews conducted by John Pierson, and my interviews with Lisa Buscani and Karen Christopher; clearly she is

\(^\text{20}\) Pierson jokes that even though Riordan wasn’t a founding member, it seems like she was.
incredibly well respected. In discussing her Neo-Futurist tenure, Riordan describes her time at Live Bait as focused and disciplined out of necessity (Riordan). As Riordan tells it, the company’s vision, at that given moment, was on how they could make the next \textit{TML} better than the previous.

Greg Kotis was another notable addition to the Neo-Futurists in 1991. Kotis joined due to encouragement from Phil Ridarelli, who had both worked together in Cardiff Giant Theatre (Ridarelli). Kotis, now famous for being the book writer of \textit{Urinetown}, added an improvisational edge, a more physical style of performance, and a witty rapport with audiences (Pierson). Kotis’s connection to Ridarelli, one of the company’s most popular performers, allowed him to have an immediate impact on the show due to their shared working vocabulary (Pierson).

Despite the strength of new ensemble members and a new venue, The Neo-Futurists were far from at peace. One of the challenges that arose in the aftermath of the SLT schism was defining who legally owned \textit{TML}: Allen or The Neo-Futurists. Buscani recounts:

Initially, Greg spoke of the theatre group and the process and everything as “we.” Then, like around the time we were at Live Bait and I wasn’t present for any of it, it started to be about “my..I me, mine,” and he wanted to be referred to as the founder and then he started talking about royalties and licensing and stuff like that. (Buscani)

Allen’s arguments would come into play when people outside of The Neo-Futurist wanted to produce individual \textit{TML} pieces outside of the \textit{TML} context. The ensemble, to this day, still argue and debate over issues of licensing of individual \textit{TML} plays, and
specific notions of authorship and how it relates to the performances outside of TML and
The Neo-Futurists (Ridarelli).

The crux of the ensemble’s argument against Allen is that TML was built around
individuals functioning within a collective format (Riordan). This viewpoint stands in
contradistinction to Allen’s claims of creating the TML format and the Neo-Futurist
aesthetic the ensemble was collectively working within (Allen Interview). In 1991, the
question of who owns TML became critical. No longer a purely academic discussion of
whether certain plays were aesthetically valid under premises Allen had outlined and
others had explored, the debate took on a new valence: who has the right to produce the
plays that individuals wrote for TML?

According to Riordan, an agreement was reached between Allen and the other
Neo-Futurists. TML, as an idea and format, belongs to Allen (neogregallen.com).
However, the individual plays within any TML performance belong to their respective
authors (Buscani). Thus, from the beginning of her tenure with The Neo-Futurists,
Riordan sent all of her plays to Washington, D.C to be copyrighted under her name
(Riordan). This is the case with all Neo-Futurist plays: in 200 More Neo-Futurist Plays,
the publishing page states “Each play contained within this book is the sole copyright of
its author, as indicated after each title.” Clearly, an individualist strain was becoming
stronger within The Neo-Futurist ensemble in 1990. The ensemble, as individuals, were
interested in having a greater say in company matters, especially when they affected
everyone (Christopher).

Following Allen’s return to active performing in fall 1990, contentions over Neo-
Futurism began to crop up again (Christopher). Allen had noticed how the performance
aesthetic grew and evolved in his absence. Allen’s quickly tried to put his foot down and stop Awl, Bales, and other derivative explorations of Neo-Futurism in order to wrangle the aesthetic back to something more recognizable to him (Christopher). Allen was met with immediate push back, especially from Ted Bales (Christopher). Frustrated with Allen’s judgments, Bales attempted to use ensemble anger to oust Allen from the company via a vote of no confidence. He failed (Christopher). Bales had misjudged the ensemble’s feelings towards Allen. While the ensemble, sans Bales, did not always like Allen’s views, they respected the way he articulated those views (Christopher). At the same time, Allen admitted that he learned that to be a good leader he cannot always control everything and would have to remain hands off in certain situations (Allen Interview). However, in setting up the San Francisco Neo-Futurist branch, Allen told their artistic director, Adam Smith, to save himself a headache and be the undisputed leader of his company (Allen Interview).

Allen’s absence from 1989 to early 1990 allowed members of the ensemble to have a chance at being the director of TML, also known as The Conductor. The Conductor does not direct in the sense of staging each individual piece. Instead, he or she leads rehearsal, is the emcee for TML, and spearheads the end of weekend gathering to cut plays from the TML menu (Allen Interview). Upon his return, Allen assumed he was retaking the mantle of sole Conductor (Christopher). The ensemble, however, wanted to continue to direct the show (Christopher). Allen, however, saw it another way:

People want power but none of the responsibility. And I was like ‘Well, if you want the power and you want to do this, then you have to be responsible for all these things that were going to divvy up, all these things that I do.’ So a lot
of the ensemble grumbled about that was like 'No, we don't want to do all this extra work, we just want to be equal.' and it's like oh yes, separate but equal doesn't work too well. (Allen)

Allen’s statement is bold but not entirely unsupported. Buscani admits to eschewing responsibility as much as she could (Buscani). Ridarelli similarly explains that he was not keen to take on administrative work when it was asked of him (Ridarelli). Yet this appears to be the exception, not the rule. Ted Bales was, at one point, the company’s treasurer and responsible for taking the week’s box office to Live Bait (Christopher). Riordan was, for a time, personally responsible for prop storage both at Live Bait and in The Neo-Futurarium. This is all to say that while Christopher makes overt claims to the ensemble already handling responsibilities, Allen’s counter claim of the ensemble being quick to shirk responsibility is not without fault. The important point becomes then, when did Allen allow others to direct.

Christopher, at one point Allen’s assistant director, accurately pointed out that they were conducting TML just as well without him. After some arguing, Allen made an agreement: the position of Conductor would become a two-week position, rotating amongst all ensemble members (Allen Interview). The Conductor position continues to rotate through the TML ensemble to this day (Ridarelli).

It was clear that transition and change from within The Neo-Futurists did not cease with a move to Live Bait. The addition of key ensemble members Kotis and Riordan provided not only new inspiration for TML but new discussions on how the ensemble would be run. Individuals in the ensemble began to take more agency over the
future of The Neo-Futurists. As a result of this, The Neo-Futurists as a company would soon chart new territory: New York City.

The Neo-Futurists’ First Tour

The Chicago-based Neo-Futurists have toured the United States, Europe, and have opened franchises in San Francisco, Montreal, and New York City. Yet The Neo-Futurists’ presence outside of Chicago begins with Buscani (Pierson). In 1991 TML was “hot,” according to Buscani. She felt she had a vision for how a TML tour might work:

I had been performing a lot in NY at various poetry venues; I knew Baby would go over well, it's relatively cheap to tour. I got in touch with one of the poetry/spoken word colleagues in NY, Todd Alcott, who had previously performed at the Green Mill and who was a big supporter of Baby. He said Greg had initially looked into touring but didn't pursue it for some reason. He suggested that I contact HERE [sic], a small space in NY. I did, and then pitched it to the ensemble. (Buscani “Clarifications”)

Buscani was aided by Ted Bales in persuading The Neo-Futurists to take on a New York City tour (Riordan). The idea to tour was roundly accepted by the ensemble (Buscani).

In structuring TML for the New York tour, Buscani proposed a new play selection method. In place of the usual debate over filling empty menu slots, Buscani argued for the entire TML menu to be built from scratch with each performer getting three guaranteed plays in the menu (Buscani). Any slots left remaining on the menu were open

---

NYC over the years has had two iterations of The Neo-Futurists. The first ran from 1995-1997. The second and current NY Neo Futurists opened in 2004 and are still running.
to negotiation (Buscani). Allen was not a fan of this idea and insisted on using the already established play selection method (Riordan). Allen won out in this case, and as a result, the company had only chosen three out of thirty plays by the time they finished their one rehearsal before they went to New York City (Buscani).

The incident highlights ways in which vision and ambition for The Neo-Futurists collective good was not something exclusive to Allen. Buscani pictured a TML line up that represented its performing ensemble equally (Pierson). Buscani wanted to further The Neo-Futurist’s commitment to cultivating fair decision-making practices. In her recollection of the incident, Buscani states:

> It wasn’t anybody being greedy, it wasn’t anybody being mean, it’s just they I thought—as considerate as they could be. I felt—if we say we’re about equality, if we say we’re about fairness, then goddamnit let’s be fair. If we think we’re progressive—justice is a part of that—then we have to walk it like we talk it and you know, hold the group to that standard. (Pierson)

The term justice, as Buscani seems to be using it, references or parity, in this case parity amongst the ensemble in play selection. The point of this parity is to highlight everyone equally to a new audience (Pierson). This is in opposition to Allen’s view that the New York tour should be run exactly as a Chicago performance.

Buscani’s concept of parity is wrapped up specifically in the equal representation of individual work as part of the TML line up. Buscani believed that the company should be “walking the walk” when it came to giving ensemble members equal opportunity to present material, especially in a tour scenario (Pierson). Buscani it explains it like this:
if you're picking a touring show, you come with six [ensemble members] and then you get so many. So that's the type of thing we had to do. And Dave [Awl] mentioned that he couldn't stand up for himself and people were like 'Oh, well, Dave can have one.' And he wouldn't say "I feel light. I am underused here." And I had to yell at the people, who I felt, were not being considerate .... (Buscani)

Buscani’s frustrations highlight a difficult aspect of the group dynamics: popularity.

While employing methods taken from co-operatives and using voting and debate measures for decision-making, a major influence on play selection with the ensemble was popularity before the audience and within the ensemble itself. For example, Phil Ridarelli’s overwhelming popularity with audiences and the ensemble was a major point of irritation for Buscani because it created overrepresentation on the menu (Pierson). Buscani points out that Ridarelli’s performance and creative energy was beloved by audiences but at times overpowering amongst the ensemble (Pierson). Buscani did not want to stop Ridarelli; instead, she aimed to cap his output within a touring context (two pieces plus one to be negotiated over) so as to allow for all members’ individual voices to be heard (Buscani). Parity in play selection is a tension still present within The Neo-Futurists today (Buscani).

While The Neo-Futurists’ tour of New York was successful enough to warrant two more trips in 1993 and 1995, the impact of the original is immeasurable in disclosing group dynamics within the ensemble, especially where parity is concerned. Following the conclusion of the New York City tour, The Neo-Futurists would make Buscani’s method of play selection the model for every tour that followed (Buscani). The incident shows a
growth from within the ensemble: that The Neos got to New York not on the vision of 
Allen but on the connections and vision of another ensemble member. Buscani’s stand for 
an equitable play selection process is a major playing point in the company’s history: 
individuals fighting for collective interests. While Buscani was not wholly successful in 
building an equitable first tour of New York City, her actions were strong enough to 
change the way the company operated internally for all tours moving forward. The next 
major change for The Neo-Futurists would not just be internal, but geographic.

The Neo-Futurarium

*TML*, as a show, has never been described as slow or concerned with the fragility 
of the performance space. In a word, the company has described its performance 
methodology as “rambunctious” (Buscani). Much of this rambunctiousness can be 
attributed to the aesthetic itself. Since Neo-Futurism demands honesty of action, props/set 
pieces/costumes are broken frequently (Allen Interview). While commercially lauded, 
The Neo-Futurists’ relationship with Sharon Evans and John Ragir, the owners of Live 
Bait, was sometimes tenuous due to The Neo-Futurists’ tendency to cause damage in 
their space.

On top of hosting The Neo-Futurists, Live Bait Theatre housed more traditional 
theatre fare during the early evening (Buscani). As such, the *TML* performance space 
used at Live Bait was often the set for another show. This created problems:

The one I remember specifically was...one set was kind of like steps all the way 
around. In the middle of the space was a ten-foot circle raised platform with 
Christmas lights sticking up a half inch over the surface of it, all the way
around. So clearly we would have to use this as our central playing space and it
was encircled with Christmas lights and I told the director of that show "We're
going to smash those lights." And she said "Oh no, you're not." And it's like
there is no way, it's like putting a ming vase in the middle of *Too Much
Light.* It's going to get smashed. We can be as careful as you want us to. We're
going to smash those lights. There was no way around it. Sure enough, we
smashed those lights. (Allen Interview)

As a result of frequently broken set pieces, Evans was often angry with the company. Yet
according to Buscani, Evans knew what she was getting into when she brought The Neo-
Futurists to LiveBait (Buscani). Evans ultimately seemed to tolerate the damages due to
the The Neo-Futurists’ popularity (Allen Interview).

Allen recounts The Neo-Futurists’ tenure at Live Bait as being an overwhelming
success (Allen Interview). Allen measured this success by how many bodies they packed
into Live Bait’s 75-seat theater. When Allen and company arrived to prepare to perform
*TML*, the lobby and café of Live Bait was already filled with people anxious for tickets
(Riordan). To accommodate those who arrived early, the ensemble created ticket
vouchers out of playing cards.\(^\text{22}\) When they were out of cards, Allen announced that they
were out of tickets (Allen Interview). Allen, occasionally, broke Live Bait’s seating
capacity and fire code by adding chairs or placing audience members in the aisles.

Allen’s actions were always aimed at enhancing the show. Allen, as a response to
*TML*’s popularity, had developed the crowd and ticket management system utilized by

\(^{22}\) Playing cards were the standard ticket voucher until they moved to The Neo-
Futurarium. Once moved, they used playing cards as well as small toys, buttons, and
other small objects. For example, I received a triceratops as my voucher in 2012.
the company until 2013, when online ticket reservations made it possible for half of the seats in the house to be sold prior to curtain time (Riordan Facebook). While Allen had foreseen that the show could go on indefinitely (Christopher), he did not foresee the logistical measures the company would have to take to accommodate TML’s popularity.

In the midst of The Neo-Futurists’ run at Live Bait, other Chicago alternative theatres were expanding. In 1991, Theatre Oobleck leased a performance space on Ashland Avenue above a funeral parlor (Allen Interview). A theatre collective that works without directors, Oobleck originated in Ann Arbor, Michigan, before moving to Chicago in 1988 (Baudelaire). Oobleck increasingly felt that owning their own space was a responsibility they did not want to sustain (Allen Interview). In January 1992, Allen set out to catch an Oobleck show and make contact with the company:

And I had come and seen shows here and I was like, "You're moving out, huh? Who's going to take the space?" And they said "No one. We have no idea." And I said, "Well maybe we'd be interested in taking the space. How much you paying?" I think they were paying fifteen hundred dollars? For this whole space. A month. It was like, "wow, fifteen hundred bucks. How many seats? One hundred and thirty five seats?" You do the math on that. We could pay the rent in a weekend and have three weeks where we could have our own, free rent, bare stage anyway we want it to. All this space, every theatre company’s dream, 6000 square feet. (Allen Interview)

Allen took this intel to the ensemble, hoping to put together a bid to take over Oobleck’s lease. The company agreed to move in, and to move in quickly (Riordan). However, with that decision came the need to sever the company’s relationship with Live Bait. Riordan,
on behalf of The Neo-Futurists, spoke with Sharon Evans, explaining their need for a larger space that they did not have to share (Riordan). Evans was angry due to the lack of notice, not the end of the relationship (Buscani). Riordan’s presence enforces the work Buscani began: the power of individuals to speak and broker on behalf of The Neo-Futurists. Whereas Allen had been brought in to end the relationship with Stage Left, Riordan was given the task due to her steely nerves (Buscani). However, the move from Live Bait to Ashland Avenue was not without hiccups.

In examining Oobleck’s space, The Neo-Futurists discovered that it was “a pit” with ugly raked seating (Buscani). This pit, however, provided an opportunity to make the space a home. Tim Reinhard, a Neo-Futurist who joined in 1991 but seems more remembered for his engineering prowess than his ability as an artist (Ridarelli), completed the majority of the reconstruction efforts to the lighting grid system and seating (Buscani). Reinhard’s technical acumen combined with his intimate understanding with TML made him the prototype for the technicians that have since been hired by The Neo-Futurists (Allen Interview). Ayun Halliday, who would go on to become the company’s first business manager, was in charge of the bookkeeping and budgeting required to make the move happen (Christopher). Kotis’s, Ridarelli’s, and Riordan’s labor was particularly commended in the transformation of the space: painting, cleaning, and aiding Reinhard (Christopher).

For a burgeoning institution with a month to move from one space to another, it was critical that the tasks of renovating a space could be delegated and handled quickly. The Neo-Futurists handled it well, thanks to Riordan’s spine and volunteer attitude, Reinhard’s acumen, and Halliday’s savvy accounting (Christopher). The Neos’ efforts
paid off: on Valentines Day 1992, The Neo-Futurists christened The Neo-Futurarium with a sold out *TML* performance in their new home and their one thousandth play (Milkovich 223).

**Conclusion**

Once settled into The Neo-Futurarium, The Neo-Futurists began to change in unexpected ways. Buscani and Christopher departed from full time participation in the company (Christopher). Ridarelli left shortly after to pursue a film and television career (Pierson). Despite the losses, the ensemble achieved newfound stability: no major ensemble shifts occurred for two years (Riordan). As a result, the ensemble noticed their work began to feel more focused and on-point (Allen Interview). Yet to others, this period of stability marked the end of the wild days for The Neo-Futurists (Buscani) and the beginning of its descent into commercialism (Christopher).

From May 1990 through February 1992, major organizational shifts happened within the company. Discussions of parity and balance became more common amongst an ensemble that generally used democratic methods of play selection for *TML*. Allen began to share leadership with the implementation of the rotating Conductor. Precedents for where the Neos could go in the future, both geographically and organizational, were forged by Buscani’s entrepreneurship. Yet for all this growth, members such as Christopher feel the Neo-Futurists had lost their edge.

The process of growth however, fostered new demands on the company that were not only artistic, but administrative. Now a self-sufficient company responsible for the management of their performance space, the company had to find ways to maintain their
artistic integrity, and keep afloat financially. The Neo-Futurists had to grow up and manage something bigger than a show: they had to manage an institution.
Conclusion

In December 2013, The Neo-Futurists celebrated their 25\textsuperscript{th} Anniversary with a special performance at Chicago Comics, the former Stage Left venue, on Clark Street. The performance, titled \textit{T.M.L.M.T.B.G.B: The Baby Returns to the Cradle}, was a 90-minute event that included a traditional \textit{TML} performance. The event brought together an ensemble of twenty-one Neo-Futurists, past and present, helmed by Founding Artistic Director Greg Allen and current Co-Artistic Director Bilal Dardai (Dardai Facebook).\textsuperscript{23} Dardai and Allen carefully curated \textit{Baby Returns to the Cradle} so as to present a unique collection of thirty \textit{TML} pieces spanning the entire company’s history.\textsuperscript{24} In a very corporeal way, The Neo-Futurists were able to engage its past with its present, showing a spectrum of where the company had come from and where it was going.

The Neo-Futurists is an organization deeply rooted in its mythos and traditions. The format of \textit{TML} has not changed since its inception. Neo-Futurism itself claims a heritage from Allen’s very brief undergraduate study in Futurism, Dada, Surrealism, and Fluxus. The company’s methods have not changed significantly: debate and democratic vote are still the ways in which decisions are made amongst the ensemble (Ridarelli). In many ways, the view for The Neo-Futurists has not changed.

\textsuperscript{23} This includes Randy Burgess and Melissa Lindberg, who left due to the SLT schism.
\textsuperscript{24} The most poignant play was the newest one: “Major Devotion: A Companion.” The piece, written by Phil Ridarelli (The oldest active Neo-Futurists, having retired from \textit{TML} on November 22, 2014) and Malic White (the youngest active Neo-Futurist), is a dialogue discussing the life and contributions of Ted Bales.
In presenting this thesis, I investigated The early history of The Neo-Futurists to not only provide a deeper understanding of a Chicago institution’s beginnings but so that we may better understand its present moment. Engaging with Allen’s origin story of Neo-Futurism and his cloak of authenticity with his first ensemble is an important story to understanding the ways in which Neo-Futurism, as it stands now, is both moldable to the material abilities of the current Neo-Futurist ensemble and defined enough that Allen and others can actually teach it across the United States (neo-futurists.org). Uncovering the crux of various heated arguments over the direction of TML is important in helping us contextualize a contemporary Neo-Futurist ensemble that has been described as far more kind (Ridarelli) and far less thick skinned to criticism (Riordan).\(^25\) And understanding the ambition and conflict present in getting The Neo-Futurists a new space to accommodate audiences or a New York City tour helps us understand much of what has changed about the company from its founding days: it is now a commercial entity with franchises, books, DVDs, and memorabilia (Christopher). All of this is to say, The Neo-Futurists past is worth critical investigating to understand its present.

Yet, who tells that story is key to how The Neo-Futurists are understood. Allen, by proxy of being the founder and Neo-Futurism’s most public proselytizer, regularly recounts The Neo-Futurists origin story shifting details with each telling, and giving himself far more credit than others might. In discussing the company’s growth, Allen uses the phrase “I grew” versus “we grew” (Anderson). This persistence on “I” versus “We” highlights and important element to understanding The Neo-Futurists in the past.

\(^{25}\) Riordan recounted an incident in which she told an unnamed current Neo-Futurist that their play “…wasn’t working” (Riordan). The unnamed Neo-Futurist burst into tears. Riordan told the unnamed Neo-Futurist to take up finger painting if she could not handle criticism.
and present: Allen may be an important figure in The Neo-Futurist history book but he is just one part. The Neo-Futurists never reach the gay community without Ted Bales or Dave Awl; the rehearsal process does not become streamlined without Buscani and Christopher (Buscani); and Neo-Futurism and TML do not become what it is today without ensemble members arguing and butting heads with Allen’s desires to control.

While this thesis attempts to tell a fuller story of the company’s formative years, important voices are lacking. The presence of Stage Left providing its viewpoint on the formation of The Neo-Futurists is something that needs to be taken in. Without the voice of Dennis McCullough, Mike Troccoli, Randy Burgess, Paige Philips, or Melissa Lindbergh, I am forced to rely solely on the word of the Neo-Futurists. While history made The Neo-Futurist the winner in the SLT/Neo-Futurist schism, the voice of SLT is needed if we are to understand the ways in which SLT’s operating practices, aesthetics, and own group dynamics might have had a huge influence on Allen and The Neo-Futurists as a whole.

I find that Ted Bales, as a pivotal Neo-Futurist, is still something that needs to be explored in further research. In scholarship, blogs, and websites concerning The Neo-Futurist, Bales is mentioned briefly as a friend and someone who is missed. I find it strange and telling that Buscani and Awl are the only two who in Pierson’s Neo-
Interviews even mention any specifics about Bales. Bales desire to upend the Neo-Futurists and Neo-Futurism is fascinating and brings to mind what other issues and possible coups existed among the ensemble, but were silenced with his passing. Additionally, Bales influence on The Neo-Futurists’ work itself is something worth further investigation: as a powerful comic presence, how did his early work in parody set
up Neo-Futurists in the future, and how did his disgraceful exit from the company possible hinder that influence?

Additionally for further research, the voices of the many ensemble members who came and went during the company’s early years is critical. While I was limited by the available pool of interviewees, former ensemble members such as Adrian Danzig could provide new insight on Allen and the company as whole, due to being Allen’s friend at Oberlin and founder of Chicago alternative theatre company 500 Clown. Additionally, should this project continue, it is imperative to gather outsider accounts of The Neo-Futurists from 1988 through 1992. The stories of Allen’s contract lawyer, Theatre Oobleck, Sharon Evans, and Buscani’s contact at HERE could help provide a far clearer context of what The Neo-Futurists were in that historical moment.

In conclusion, understanding the early history of The Neo-Futurists is attempting to grasp how success is not necessarily a formula but a discovery amongst individuals and collectives. In recounting his opinion as to why The Neo-Futurists have been successful, Phil Ridarelli states:

You gotta realize where the true success of the show lies. You gotta learn to embrace each individual’s contributions to the show. Early conversations about ownership and the creative process were often painful and hurtful. It took a lot of us, Greg [Allen] included, accepting what the show, what the company, was going to be... and what it wasn't going to be. (Ridarelli)

While Allen was the founding figure, if smart, passionate individuals willing to challenge had him not surrounded him, Neo-Futurism could not be codified and taught. The ensemble mantra of “how can I make next week’s TML better?” (Riordan) propelled The
Neos into the Gay Chicago Theatre Scene, out of Stage Left Theatre, into New York City, and ultimately into becoming their own company with their own space. Without this guiding ethic, The Neo-Futurists are just an assemblage of people fighting for stage time.

Over the past twenty-five years, The Neo-Futurists have matured. What started as Allen’s ideological baby at Oberlin has become a 501(c)3 with an education department, business manager, franchises across North America, and is able to provide some ensemble members a living wage (Dardai). What began with Allen and some friends and strangers is now a network of ensembles and alumnus spanning North America and the world. As Allen steps further away from involvement with the company with each passing year, and new ensemble members enter the company trained and familiar with Neo-Futurism from workshops and touring performances and books, the question for the Neo-Futurists today is the same as it was in the beginning: How can we do this better?
Bibliography


Ridarelli, Phil. Personal Interview. 26 October 2013.


