

Under Our Auspices:
The Changing Identity of Wesleyan's Second Stage
1973-Present

by

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This work is dedicated to Jan Eliasberg '74, and all those who followed.

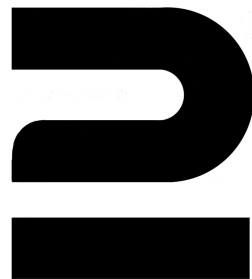
¹ Second Stage is... Ian Agoos, Tori Amoscatto, Nick Benacerraf, Zac Bruner, Jacqueline Chapman, Chiara DiLello, Emily Gallivan, Dakota Gardner, Anna Martin, Annie Paladino, Danica Pantic, Sean Richards, Ariela Rotenberg, Laura Shapiro, Rachel Silverman, and Ben Vigus

² Bernstein, Rebecca. “Quote Book” 14B Warren Street.

³ In a good way. Promise!

This is it. A notebook. A blue notebook. Inside of which... who knows what secrets lie. The mysteries of Second Stage not so much solved, but at least all written down so that later generations can ponder them as fully as we did. The confusion not so much clarified as just, you know, written down. Sort of.

*First page of a new Second Stage Minutes Book
February 1989*



Preface

Undergraduate thesis writers rarely happen upon an opportunity to write a work with the knowledge that it will continue to be read by a captivated audience long after their graduation. It is rarer, still, for them to have the opportunity to create a repository of knowledge (while adding to a still larger one) that is guaranteed to be maintained and contributed to beyond their residency. Here you find one of those rare projects: a compilation and analysis of the previously undocumented history, activities, and policies of an organization known to the Wesleyan University community as Second Stage, an organization whose history this work only begins to analyze.

This “compilation” of information should be considered to be both physical and verbal, in the sense that it is both this written work and a far more extensive collection of documents. Despite appearances, this thesis is not solely the bound pages in your hands. The bulk of the project is housed in Wesleyan’s Special Collections and Archives (SC&A), where the history of Second Stage is now carefully documented and preserved. Some parts of Second Stage’s history still remain in the recollections of those affiliated with the group, waiting to be included into this newly organized source of institutional memory. Some are already forever lost.

One of the larger goals of this project is to promote the continued collection of these memories, along with the preservation of those it already contains. To this end, a WESeminar based upon the contents of the newly organized and largely updated collection has been planned for this year’s Reunion and Commencement Weekend.

In addition, the position of Second Stage Historian has been created, and its next holder chosen, to ensure the collection's continued development. A call will be sent out in the coming months for more items to be added to the collection, specifically from the current undergraduate student population. Second Stage alumni will be contacted in the hopes that they will contribute documents and photographs to the archive. However, it is more important that they themselves return to their theater home – the most valued historical recollections lie not within one author's interpretation of a paper trail, but within the memory of those who actually lived the history that the paper trail documents. Staff members from all years will gather together to celebrate the Wesleyan Theater Community and the '92 – and to welcome each other home – at what will symbolize the start of Second Stage's 35th season.

This work is a collection of a collection – that is, a written account of the process by which not only the organization, but the archive itself came into being. It is the “History of Second Stage,” to be sure – but it is also the *history* of the “History of Second Stage,” a self-aware and self-descriptive work in which not only are a selection of the experiences of an organization and its participants encapsulated, but the process of the organization of an archive out of a cluttered group of materials also illustrated and explained.

As a documenter of history, it is important to be objective and clear, for it is not the role of historians to pass judgment upon that which they describe – at least a pretense of objectivity is expected. The personal reflections of the historian are not solicited in a work of history – though surely, the informed opinions of such persons are highly appreciated in appropriate situations. This work is intended both to

provide the basis of an unbiased version of history as well as to provide an analysis of those findings; the interpretation of the identity of Second Stage as an organization is based partially on written self-definitions and partially on the apparent practices of the group, all of which is discussed within an historical framework.

However, the personal circumstances of the author make this ideal somewhat challenging. For this project specifically, it is vital that I explain my personal relationship to this work. As a Wesleyan student, a participant in student theater, and a member of Second Stage, my close involvement with much of the history contained within these pages must be, in all fairness, expressed. And so, I take this opportunity to introduce myself and to explain my relationship with that seemingly furtive organization, Second Stage, and its newest companions and guides: this work and its corresponding archival collection.

I did not come to Wesleyan with an interest in becoming an archivist. Save for my Early Decision application to Wesleyan and the knowledge that I would work in the theatrical arts as a technician, I had no real ideas about a course of study. My freshman year, I took the Theater Department's gateway class, Basic Production Techniques, or BPT, and rapidly became involved in the Wesleyan Theater Community. I was the Assistant Stage Manger (ASM) for a Theater Department production my first semester, and joined the Center for the Arts (CFA) technical crew in my second semester, during which time I took what was to be the first of many courses in the College of Letters (COL). Also in my second semester, I worked on my first Second Stage production as the ASM and Costume Designer for an Alternate Space show in – where else – but the COL Lounge. My introduction to the College

of Letters and to Second Stage came congruently; it seems fitting that the project with which I culminate my academic pursuits, also serves as a closing to my “co-curricular” ones.

As I ended my junior year at Wesleyan, having completed the Comprehensive Exams required of my major, thoughts turned to the “capstone project” in which my education was to culminate. The College of Letters is a flexible department – its majors have a broad range of academic and other interests, and, as a result, we are given great freedom of expression in our regular assignments in our Colloquia, and even greater freedom in our choices for thesis topics. The study of History, Literature and Philosophy, in tandem with a language, lends itself to a remarkable breadth of subjects – and the sheer number of options available to me made a decision nearly impossible.

I discussed this with just about anyone who would listen, but it was a fellow Staff member who ultimately put me on the path that would eventually become this work. Laura Shapiro '09.5, at the end of the last Work Day of the season, said to me, quite simply – why not do your thesis in or on theater? And that is where it all began.

I had known that I wanted to do something that *mattered* – something that would be a service to people other than myself, something that people would enjoy reading, that people would actually seek out. It also needed to be something that would hold my interest for an extended period of time – something upon which I could focus, something that I would enjoy working on. I can honestly say that I have enjoyed working on my thesis every moment that I have spent on it – though, of course, there have been times when it has been hard, tedious, frustrating, and so on.

Half the time the information that I need to access physically is locked behind a glass door, mocking me – though Olin Library is open until 2:00am, SC&A’s hours are only 1:00-5:00, leaving me a four hour window in which to work (on days that I don’t have class – including the COL Senior Colloquium – right in the middle of it!). Then there are paper cuts to consider, loss of eyesight (I changed my prescription just before starting this project, and changed it again in a not-so-insignificant way about a month before completion), and, of course, scars: when I tripped and fell scurrying along to Olin Library over Winter Break, Second Stage’s so-called “member archive” sought and found the underside of my chin (I was quite the sight at SC&A that day, and I really do have a scar).

Despite these minor set-backs, I have always felt that the work that I was doing was important and beneficial, and I have never ceased, even now, in being interested in learning more, about archives, about Second Stage, and about anything else that I have encountered. In the course of working on this project, I have learned a lot about more obscure things that will get only slight, if any, mention in my thesis itself: the rising and falling costs of lumber, fabric, and other odds and ends (along with, of course, the fact that many of the places which supply Second Stage with such things now, have been doing so since the beginning), the changing technological methods of communication (my archive begins with typewriters and carbon paper and ends with email and digital cameras), and, my personal favorite, the development of the standardized paperclip (I now have a nice collection of rusty “Owl” and “Nifty” paperclips dating to the 1970s and 1980s).

In any case, after Laura's suggestion that I incorporate theater into my thesis, my mind quickly turned to the history of Second Stage – a direct result of my continual perusal of the '92's Green Room, the room in which Second Stage convenes. For the two plus years I have been on Staff – and, from what I gather, since the 2001-2002 renovation – the Green Room has been decorated with show posters dating back to the 1970s. Natural curiosity and an excessive amount of time spent in the space have led to a keen familiarity with these posters. However, it was obvious that there were years missing, and the decoration of the space with posters that dated to before the renovation seemed problematic. My personal sensibilities on historical preservation and general organization required action against the harsh thumbtacks that perforated the corners of these pieces; my curiosity, fueled by these same sensibilities, wondered at the missing posters. Surely, in its nearly 35 years of existence, Second Stage had put up more shows than these? It wasn't until this project that I finally found the excuse to spend my free hours investigating these and other questions.

I decided to research the history of Second Stage, and, in so researching, gather together any documents that I discovered into an organized and protected collection. My approach to this work began in the present day in perhaps a stronger fashion than as happens with many historians; my inherent involvement and interest in the organization makes it nearly impossible to have done otherwise. This work, then, will echo my own explorations: knowledge of the present, with a desire for an understanding of the past.

Originally, this project's written portion aimed to record the history of Second Stage, in word and deed, from its inception through the present day. However, upon beginning what was to be the forward to this work, it became clear that simply explaining what Second Stage *was* would be task enough. As a result, this text does not list productions, nor does it detail all of the intricacies of Second Stage week-to-week activities. This work chronicles Second Stage's developmental journey, from the founding group from 1973, through to the 16 strong members of today. This necessitates the context of Second Stage's history – however, the focus of the narrative remains on Second Stage's shifting definition and function over time. Second Stage is an ever-changing, yet ever-similar organization – alumni will find the current Staff simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar. Under a student-run group, the manner of ideological transfer and transformation is uncertain and unstable, yet understandable. Due to the intrinsic nature of any college group (that of rapid turnover), the members of Second Stage have been cyclically reintroduced to ideologies, approaches, and problems *without their knowledge*.

One of my hopes in the creation of the Second Stage Archival Collection (along with the writing of this document) is to prevent this “re-cycling”. At the very least I aim to provide a self-referential source of information which can be consulted by whomever the current membership of Second Stage might consist of, so as to provide precedent through past history and experience. Certainly, issues will continually recur under each new administration – shows will have individual problems, staff members will always have to be added, the budget will need to be proposed, and so on – but, past experience can inform these decisions by bringing out

arguments on different sides of an issue, some of which may not have ever occurred to the current Staff without the presence of the individual, who, at this point, could be more than 30 years out of the organization. The College of Letters is a major largely centered on context – this project aims to place Second Stage within the context of its own history, as well as that of Wesleyan University itself.

I leave this work and its corresponding archive in the hands of Second Stage Staffers, past and present, to care for, to contribute to, and to peruse – for that is the main purpose of this project: that Second Stage can better know itself. Though SC&A will always tend the archive and add to it when the opportunity arises, it is up to the Second Stage Staff to develop the collection to its fullest potential. Only with constant additions and careful attention from the members of the organization that it documents can the collection truly be a useful resource. The archive waits for the paradoxical “Historian of the Future”¹ to carry on the work that I have begun: I charge that person to continue to add to the collection and to the collective memory of whoever (and whatever) “Second Stage is” today.

¹ At a Monday Meeting during the writing of this thesis, the Historian-elect of Second Stage, Sean Richards '10, introduced himself to a production team as the “Historian of the Future” rather than the “Future Historian.” This implied that he had somehow been involved in time-traveling, while simultaneously leaving himself open to ridicule (not to mention the fact that the Historian – let alone the *Historian-elect* – is of little direct use to a show that opens within a month).

**Second Stage is...
An Introduction to the Organization's
Current Function and State of Operations**

“Second Stage’s main characteristic is its flexibility”¹
Second Stage Handbook, 1976

Before exploring the history of Second Stage, it is vital to have an understanding of the organization’s function and role on Wesleyan’s campus today. To this end, a firm grasp of the group’s personal and particular vocabulary and terminology is needed. Even the name “Second Stage” can lend itself to misuse through its multiple uses and meanings. Though the term does refer to both an organization and a group of people, it ought not to be confused with the physical space that the organization occupies. Prominent staff member John Cini ’78 was quoted in *The Argus*’ October 22, 1976 article “Who and What in the World is Second Stage” as saying: “The ’92 Theatre is a building. 2nd Stage is an organization – an entity. People continually confuse the two, thinking they are the same.”² This problem continues today.

Though Second Stage, or simply “Stage” or “Staff,” operates mainly from the Patricelli ’92 Theater (where its office is located), the organization also sponsors productions in ‘alternate spaces’ – not on the ’92’s Ring Family Stage, but rather in dorm lounges, dining halls, fraternities, classrooms and even graveyards. Thus, Stage’s association with the physical locality of the Theater is understandable, but the terminology is certainly not interchangeable; the complexities of ownership and

¹ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Administrative Documents Folder Fall 1976. “Second Stage Handbook.”

² Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Clippings Folder Fall 1976. “Who and What in the World is Second Stage,” *The Argus*. 22 October 1976.

responsibility when it comes to the '92 itself make such a misnomer more than significant. Second Stage has (and has had) a variety of functions, much in the same way that its name has a variety of connotations, and this ambiguity poses a challenge to those who seek to understand the true nature of the organization.

So, what exactly *is* Second Stage? A seemingly obvious question, to be sure, but not as easily answered as one might think. First, it is important to note the different connotations of the inquiry. If the question is to the inherent purpose of the organization, the direct answer is that – beyond a rather broad definition involving words and phrases such as “student-run,” “caretaker of the '92” and “production team” – it is difficult to say. But, as to what *was* Second Stage, or better yet, *what has Second Stage been* – at least, not in mission statement, but in practice – that question is the one that this thesis addresses. But, again, in order to explore that past, the present state of things must be understood. And so, the question stands, somewhat changed: what, then, is Second Stage today? Or, for alumni: what has Second Stage *become*?

Second Stage is, in its simplest of definitions, “a volunteer staff of students who oversee the operation and maintenance of the '92 theater and all shows that take place here,”³ according to meeting sheets from 1994, the “here” referring to the '92. This sentence appears in various forms beginning in the early 1990s, and the sentiment it contains is relatively consistent from even the 1970s, as will be shown later in this work. Prior to the renovations of the Patricelli '92 Theater (around 2000-2003), the word “here” was replaced with the phrase “under our auspices” – a move

³ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Administrative Documents Folder Fall 1994. “Four Week Meeting Sheet.”

that reflected the now certain role of Stage as a source of funding for events that take place outside of the '92 Theater itself. The word “auspices” has since become a sort of combination catch-phrase and inside joke to Staffers – the word carries a certain weight and will often prompt a giggle followed by a knowing glance. More importantly, those three words, “under our auspices,” have become the source from which Second Stage Staff draws its authority and, ultimately, its responsibility over the space and its contents today.

Defining this authority and these responsibilities has never been easy, for Staff itself is unsure of what, exactly, its role is. Ask any Staff member today and each will give a slightly different description of Second Stage’s purpose; in fact, the major commonality in their answers would most certainly be their length. And yet, for years each meeting of Second Stage has begun with the phrase “Second Stage is ...” – one would think that the words that follow would provide definition enough; however, in practice, over the decades they have proven to be all but fixed.

Despite its long and rich history, Second Stage lacks one of the most fundamental aspects of any organized group of people: a codified, well-defined and stable *purpose*. Stage doesn’t have a mission statement and, with the unavoidable turnaround in both body and leadership of a college organization, even the vague hint of such a thing is constantly changing. The organization has been well aware of this “lack of purpose” since its inception: the Second Stage Handbook from 1976 states that “Second Stage’s main characteristic is its flexibility.”⁴ This is almost certainly the only full sentence in all of the documents within the archival collection that will

⁴ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Administrative Documents Folder Fall 1976. “Second Stage Handbook.”

always be able to be attributed to Staff. Yet, Staff members tend to be steadfastly stubborn about policy; decision-making most cohesively falls within the traditions as remembered. But, without written records, especially in the years after the renovations of the '92 (when the documents from 1973-1994 were removed for safekeeping to the University Archives, where they would sit in disarray until processed in the 2007-2008 school year), institutional memory was not only faulty, but short-sighted, and more than lacking in historical precedent.

Earlier, Second Stage was given a cursory definition using the phrases “student-run,” “caretaker of the '92” and “production team,” but no explanation was given as to their usefulness in that regard. These three ideas could be said to be the basis of a description of today’s rendition of Second Stage, with a seemingly obvious oversight: the word “theater.” Second Stage’s somewhat complex relationship with theater would seem very foreign to its founders; its verbalization at first shocking and confusing to current members, though, at second thought, its concept clear and recognizable. Yet, it must be stated that Stage’s association with theater, in all phases of its existence, is clear. However, the definition of Second Stage, *in practice* is not dependent upon the inclusion of theater. Second Stage is a producer of *mainly* theatrical productions – its technicians refer to themselves as theater techs, and, naturally, its various mission statements nearly always include the word. But, there is an unwritten understanding that Second Stage will sponsor non-theater productions; the most specific (and common) example of this is dance. And so, Second Stage, today, is defined first as a group with three main, overarching characteristics:

“student-run,” “caretaker of the ’92” and “production team.” “Theater,” as it were, is included as a close runner-up, a not-so-distant fourth trait.

The most obvious of these three primary features is “student run” – Second Stage, as a college group, is run by students, more specifically, *undergraduate* students. The amount of responsibility, fiscal and otherwise, entrusted to Second Stage is huge, and the fact that this is all placed in the hands of undergraduates (versus graduate students or faculty/staff members) is nearly unheard of at peer institutions (the comparison being made to student-run *theatrical* groups, that being the category in which groups of this nature are to be found)⁵. This is one of the major components of the extraordinary nature of the organization in question⁶, for, it is often the case that, even at universities, the responsibilities of a student-run theatrical group are limited to the productions upon which its members work. Such groups often lack a “home” – a theater or other space that is more-or-less exclusively their own. This limits the group’s ability to amass tools, properties (“props”), instruments, equipment, and the like for lack of storage space. It also tempers any potential

⁵ This is one of the difficulties with attempting to compare Second Stage to similar organizations – there are few groups with many similarities to Second Stage, especially as founded. Conclusively researching student theater groups at other schools would be a monumental task for any scholar due to the sheer number of colleges and universities in the United States, let alone the number of theatrical troupes these schools house. Many of the conclusions drawn here come from the author’s personal experiences with students at other colleges.

⁶ A quick look at the websites at other prominent universities reveals the following generalizations: that while student organizations at other colleges may perform some of the same functions as Second Stage, none of these groups perform *all* of them. In some cases, various groups on a given campus have retained their independence while working in concert – resulting in an equivalent, but not identical, outcome. Schools under consideration included: Harvard College (The Harvard-Radcliffe Dramatic Club. April 2008. <http://www.hrdctheater.com>), Yale University (The Yale Dramatic Association. April 2008. <http://www.dramat.org>), Brown University (Production Workshop. April 2008. <http://pw.brown.edu>), Bowdoin College (Masque & Gown. April 2008. http://bsg.bowdoin.edu/bsg/sooc_organizations.php) and Williams College (Cap’n Bells. April 2008. http://www.williams.edu/admission/studentlife_theatredance.php).

movement towards a more professional-style theatrical company, simply due to the inappropriate and inconvenient spaces that they are then forced to utilize as well as their lack of a “base” from which to operate (such as Second Stage’s office). Second Stage’s function as a “caretaker of the ’92” is an impossible role for these groups as they have no space for which to care.

It is also common to find similar groups with requirements of membership, or of leadership – they are run mostly or entirely by (and, it seems, for) theater majors. This is untrue of Second Stage, where members of Staff often are not Theater majors, and some have never even taken a course through the Theater Department. Shows that are produced by Second Stage have an even higher instance of non-major activity, with non-majors taking on every role from Director to Costume Designer, from Stage Manager to Master Electrician.

Other student-run theatrical groups lack the autonomy of Second Stage – they have faculty leadership, often in the form of theater professors, and/or have very little financial support. Second Stage, again, is truly *run* by students, though it does work with faculty and staff members from various sectors of the University. Second Stage’s closest companion today is Edward “Ed” Chiburis, the current Facilities and Events Manager of the ’92 Theater (as well as the nearby Memorial Chapel and their connecting structure, the Zelnick Pavilion). The Facilities Manager sits in on Second Stage meetings in order to stay informed as to the group’s activities, and operates in an advisory capacity. Additionally, the position serves as another link between Staff and the Department, and is the most significant source of contact between the group and the University Administration. Second Stage also works with various members

of the Theater and Dance Departments, as well as Physical Plant, Public Safety, and other University groups. However, though each of these may have rights to the physical space of the '92 Theater, none of these groups of people have control over Second Stage.

The actual delineations of power and responsibility over the physical space of the '92 Theater between the University-at-large, the Theater Department, the Dance Department, Second Stage and other groups is complicated and quite possibly less codified than Second Stage's mission statement. However, the things that Stage has done and continues to do in and for the '92 Theater, often in conjunction with one or more of these departments and groups, is not insignificant. The most lasting of these, in a physical sense, is the maintenance and inventory work that it does for the building and all it contains.

Second Stage's role as "caretaker of the '92" is, as previously stated, somewhat ambiguous, and yet, it is this function that most separates it from similar organizations. Second Stage is not singularly responsible for the financial sponsorship and technical support of productions – it also uses its finances and manpower to maintain the '92 Theater and increase its inventory as well as its technological capabilities. The idea of Staff supervising "the operations and maintenance" (as they call it) of a campus building is unique for a group of their composition. With their own keys, and a full knowledge of the physical space (including the now almost mystical tunnels that connect much of Wesleyan's campus, but that have been largely locked in recent years), many individual Staff members' knowledge of the '92 could rival that of Wesleyan's Physical Plant, as well as that of

the constructors (and renovators) themselves. Staff's dedication and passion for the space is certainly unmatched.

True, the delineations of responsibility are changeable: upkeep of the physical structure of the '92 as well as the restocking of its stores can be expected of a number of existing university-related entities, administrative, academic, and otherwise, sometimes in conjunction with one another. In some cases, these fiscal and other necessities are clearly ascribed to specific persons: for example, Second Stage would never be asked to pay for the electricity bill generated by the '92 Theater, and no department would be asked to put this energy use into their academic budget. Second Stage, does, however, paint the stage once or twice a year, and perform and/or supervise regular maintenance on the equipment within the space. Its financial and historical position allows Second Stage to have a certain amount of freedom within the '92 – it has full control of its own office (to which only Staff members hold the key), and can rearrange the Work Shop, Dressing Rooms, and other spaces as they see fit, without consultation of the University at large, or even the Theater Department. The basement of the '92 is seen, by both parties, for the most part, as the domain of Second Stage – but it is always recognized that the Theater Department, in conjunction with Wesleyan, has the true ownership of the space.

Second Stage's role as a production team would be impossible if it weren't for the funding given to it each year by the student body through the student government at Wesleyan – first by the College Body Committee (CBC), and now by the organization that replaced it: the Wesleyan Student Assembly (WSA). Second Stage is one of the most highly funded groups on campus – along with *The Argus* and

WESU, both of which allow for outside funding. Second Stage's only source of funding aside from the WSA is through a generous fund, given in memory of a student. Second Stage does not charge admission to its shows, nor does it expect the production teams of its individual shows to cover the costs incurred by rehearsal and production. Stage pays for the rights and royalties of scripts and librettos, as well as for the props, costumes, make-up, lumber and other items required for each production. Admission is free to anyone – whether student, faculty or staff, whether Middletown resident or out-of-town guest.

Second Stage takes on another function that is the direct result of these three characteristics – that of advisor. Second Stage is a staff of students who advise fellow students; Staff members help to facilitate the use of the theater and its contents and teach other students about their areas of expertise. Their role as producer doesn't end with their financial backing of a project, as Staff members spend long hours helping the productions they sponsor actually make it from paper to proscenium. Those with specific technical skills will often be consulted on design plans; all will be called upon to help strike, or take down, the show once it is over. Second Stage offers these groups more than money – they offer them the contents of the '92's Prop Room and Shop, as well as the collective experience, knowledge and advice of each individual Staff member. The support that Second Stage provides is physical, mental, and monetary.

The WSA places Second Stage under the category of “performance” on its website, inadvertently furthering common misconceptions about Staff made by

students and pre-frosh alike. Second Stage is not a group of thespians – it is not an acting troupe. Today, Second Stage calls itself:

a volunteer staff of students who oversee the operation and maintenance of the '92 Theater and all shows that take place under our auspices. We are funded by the WSA and we use that money to produce student theater as well as to keep the place running. We are here to advise and assist student productions and to make sure the theater continues to run as safely and productively as possible. (WSA Website, 2008)⁷

This is largely true. Second Stage is known in its capacity as “sponsor” or “money-giver” to those students seeking to put on theatrical (and other) productions.

However, most students are unlikely to realize that the jobs of individual Staff members extend far beyond the allocation of funds to others, though, certainly, those involved in the theater community (socially or otherwise), would also be aware of the time commitment that membership in Second Stage requires. The application to join Second Stage Staff reads, as of April 2008:

The minimum time and energy requirements while on staff include attending Monday meetings from 4:30 pm till [sic] about 7, Saturday night strikes, representing staff at shows on weekend nights, occasional Saturday workdays (approx. 2 hours long), and weekly Wednesday afternoon riser setup. In addition, each staff member serves as Technical Advisor for at least one show per semester, and maintains a certain area of the theater.⁸

Unfortunately, this description is largely out-of-date, and so requires some explanation, details, and quite a few additions in order to fully explain the experience of being a Staff member today.

⁷ Wesleyan University Web Page. Wesleyan Student Assembly Website. “Second Stage.” April 2008. https://wesep.wesleyan.edu/cgi-perl/portfolio_maker/get_info.cgi/?portfolio_type=Student&expire=04/13/2008_07:30_PM&is_custom=yes

⁸ Second Stage. Sponsorship Applications. “Application for Second Stage Sponsorship.” April 2008. <http://www.2ndstage.org/Sponsorship%20Application.doc>.

The least definable aspect of being a member of the Second Stage Staff today is only referred to in the application with a short “Staff can be a big mental energy requirement too”⁹ followed by an encouragement to speak to current Staffers with any questions. This advice is sound. However, there is no real way to explain the experience of being on Staff, specifically due to the changing nature of Second Stage, and, of course, the natural differences between seasons and shows. However, most requirements of being a Staffer are well-defined enough to get a sense of the time commitment as well as the responsibilities that the position requires.

Staff duties, currently, include the steady time commitments of the Monday Meetings and Wednesday Riser Set-Up (or, “Riser Call,” known more commonly as simply “Risings”), as described in the application. However, in practice, as noted, many of the details outlined in this short description are incorrect. For example, currently most Staff members act as the Technical Advisors, or TAs, for around *two* shows a semester – an effect of having at least two TAs per show, rather than one, and an increase in the number of productions per semester over time. The TAs act as liaisons between individual shows and Second Stage as a whole – it is their responsibility to keep track of how their shows are progressing, and to bring up any issues to Staff. They also advise their shows, providing them with information, supplies, and permission when required – they are on-call to approve any additions to the show’s budget.

In addition to their roles as TAs, Staff members have other responsibilities. At least two Staff members must be present for each performance of a production as Staff Representatives, or SRs. The SRs arrive at least an hour before curtain (the

⁹ Ibid

beginning of the show) in order to help with any issues that may come up before showtime, as well as to manage the Ushers (provided by the show in question, in the form of friends of the company) and to organize ticketing. Today, these SRs act as House Managers as well – making the pre-show announcement, monitoring seating, and supervising the House (most commonly, the part of the theater where the audience is seated). An individual production can be expected to run for three days – typically Thursday, Friday and Saturday – with a production at 8:00 p.m. each evening, and at 2:00 p.m. on Saturday, commonly referred to as the “8-8-2-and-8” choice. There can be a number of productions on a given weekend, normally not to exceed four, and so showtimes can vary greatly, in order to accommodate audience and Staff attendance. Generally, the maximum number of productions permitted in the space on a given weekend is two, though this, like most “rules” of Second Stage, is very much a guideline, and changes depending on the situation.

Staff members are expected to attend every Monday Meeting in its entirety, as well as each Riser Call, Strike, Show Flow and all Workdays, along with any additional meetings that are required. The term “Strike” is a generic theatrical term for the process by which a show is taken down after the production is over. It includes, but is certainly not limited to, taking down the risers, disassembly of all newly constructed items, disposal of all trash, taking down all of the lighting instruments, as well as a general clean-up of all areas of the theater. This usually occurs Saturday nights, with the next show moving into the space directly following. “Show Flow,” or, as it was known previously, “Scheduling,” is the day when Second Stage sits down to schedule the next semester’s season of productions. Applications

are traditionally due before this date, but are sometimes accepted as late as the evening before or the morning of the meeting. Show Flow also refers to the process by which these decisions are made; Staff members both attend Show Flow and take part in it.

At each Monday Meeting, Staff discusses general issues, such as inventory, future plans and applications. This is also where students can consult Staff members about problems pertaining to any of the current season's productions. Each individual production team, collectively referred to by the name of the show that it represents, will come in to see Second Stage Staff at least once before the show's opening night, regardless of location. Most commonly, a show's production team will visit Staff three times for the so-called "4-Week," "2-Week," and "1-Week" meetings that take place on the Monday four weeks, two weeks, and one week (the last of which, to be more accurate, is a mere three days) before the show. One of the two TAs will run this part of the meeting for each individual show, while the entirety of the meeting is facilitated by the ML, or Managing Liaison – the closest thing Second Stage has to a president.

The ML is part of a trio of liaisons to the Theater Department, who are paid for some of their services (unlike the rest of Staff, who serve entirely as volunteers). Joined by the BML (Building/Maintenance Liaison) and the Lighting and Rigging Liaison, the ML effectively represents Staff to the Department as well as the student body. The roles of these liaisons (and, indeed, their names, duties, and very existence) have changed dramatically over time. However, recently, their tasks and

areas of responsibilities have been more clearly defined and delineated, and are actually rather extensive.

The Managing Liaison is the effective leader of Staff, and is generally viewed as having the final say on all Staff matters. The ML acts as the facilitator for all Second Stage meetings and conversations (including those held over email); as a result, the Staff member filling this role must possess strong communication skills, as well as conflict resolution skills. Overall, the Managing Liaison can be seen as the physical embodiment of the “production” aspect of Second Stage – responsible for the WSA Budget Proposal each year, the ML is the face of Second Stage to the student body, the Department, and the Wesleyan campus at large. The Building and Maintenance Liaison oversees the actual space; this Liaison could be said to be the “caretaker” role. The BML takes care of inventory and safety in the shop, and trains students in the use of the facility and its equipment, working closely with the Facilities Manager and the Department for advice, assistance, and approval of plans. The last Liaison is the newest addition to the three: the Lights and Rigging Liaison, whose purpose is to maintain all aspects relating to lighting and electrical equipment, including inventory and training. All Liaisons act as TAs for non-Second Stage shows (i.e. those done through the Dance and/or Theater Departments), and must run and attend the strikes and riser-calls for these shows, which no other Staff member need attend.

Three members of Staff fill these extensive and important positions, but these are not the only additional individual responsibilities available. The obligation to one’s position on Staff is a real “hidden” obligation of being a Staff member – and

there are, today, nearly as many positions as there are Staffers. In fact, the position of Historian was only created in conjunction with this archival collection at the end of the Fall 2007 Semester. As of April 2008, Staff positions include: Props Lender, Publicity, Sound, Costumes and Make-up, Outreach and Development, Rights and Royalties, Strike Coordinator, and Website Coordinator. Each of these positions comes with its own additional workload beyond those laid out for Staff, and positions come and go pretty frequently.

With the understanding of what Second Stage is, in practice and “mission statement” as of the 2007-2008 academic year, it would seem that Second Stage should have a decent grasp of itself, and the scope of its services. On the contrary: even today Second Stage cannot clearly and succinctly describe itself. While it is true that its purpose has changed over time, and that its “mission statements” have left room for this change, it is clear that there never seems to be a complete paradigm shift. Yet, as time passes, the language that Second Stage uses to describe itself becomes less and less clear. Growing pains are evident, but so is adaptability, and a desire to extend the scope of Second Stage’s services. For instance, the closest thing to a self-definition that Second Stage has today is the description on its website. It was written in 2005 by the then Managing Liaison Elizabeth “Liz” Thaler ’05, who expanded on the existing description outlined above. It reads:

Second Stage is a volunteer staff of students who oversee the maintenance and operation of the Patricelli '92 Theater and all shows that take place under our auspices. We are funded by the WSA and we use that money to produce student theater as well as to maintain the building and the equipment it houses. Our goal is to offer all students the opportunity to participate in every aspect of theater production. Student theater is a time-honored part of the Wesleyan experience. It creates a community where theater majors and non-majors pool their talents to make exciting, challenging, and important works of art.

Second Stage is devoted to this spirit of exploration, and does not dictate or judge anyone's creative vision. We are here to advise and assist student theater/dance productions and to make sure the theater continues to run safely and productively.¹⁰

And so, even today, these hints at an identity crisis loom: does Second Stage produce “student theater” or “student theater/dance”? Can it produce something that is neither of these? Should it? Countless times Staff members have gathered to discuss the potential sponsorship of an art exhibition, a concert, a party, a Dance or Ball, and each time the decision has changed, just as Staff has changed. Sometimes these decisions are based on available funds (both from Second Stage and outside sources), other times it is a “matter of principle” – but then the question becomes, whose principle? The flexibility of Second Stage is one of the reasons that it continues to exist today, and this flexibility should not be compromised. However, past decisions, and the reasoning behind them, should be left for future members to access, to better inform those issues currently up for debate.

With this understanding of Second Stage's current role on Wesleyan's campus, as well as the reasoning and context behind the decisions and actions it takes, an effective introduction and cursory exploration into its history can begin. The search through Second Stage's past will be followed through explanations of its ever-changing identity. This identity is defined through the words of past Second Stage Staffers, through the writings of *Argus* journalists, through the paper trail left from 35 years of (largely) theatrical production. Second Stage's practices and its descriptions of these practices are not always perfectly aligned – however, the manner in which

¹⁰ Wesleyan University Web Page. Second Stage. “About Second Stage.” <http://www.2ndstage.org/about.php>.

Staff sees itself is helpful in understanding the role that Second Stage is, at any given time, filling for the Wesleyan theater community and the campus at large.

Making Sense of the Past: The Organization of the Second Stage Archival Collection

“The Second Stage historian makes an auspicious debut, arriving 45 minutes late to the meeting and missing what [was] deemed “all the decisions.” Sheepishly asking for a recap, the historian is promised one.”¹
Minutes, February 13th, 1989

The frustration of this “historian” is understandable – documenting the history of Second Stage, indeed the history of anything at all, is akin to arriving late to a meeting. Everything has been decided, conversations have been had, sides have been taken – all that’s left are the repercussions, the after-effects. Sifting through these, one attempts to put together what has happened, in order to record it for others. My 45 minutes are more like 35 years; my promised recap is, I hope, contained in the papers I collect.

At times this has been delightfully true – papers dated, minutes dutifully taken, posters and programs conserved, everything organized into folders and subfolders. However, more often than not, this is simply not the case. The Spring Semester of 1989 provides an excellent example of this constant change in record-keeping and organization levels. The first entry in the minutes book of that year is the quotation above: the introduction of a historian, note-taking underway, all indications of a detailed and helpful source. The next entry of this particularly promising book, nearly a month later, begins with “Just nobody has been taking notes. Just nobody at all,”² a lament that I myself have been inclined to utilize while searching through old notebooks and piles of loose-leaf paper, finding skipped dates,

¹ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Oversize Items Spring 1989. *Minutes Book*. 13 February 1989.

² Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Oversize Items Spring 1989. *Minutes Book*. 6 March 1989.

missing pages, and one-subject notebooks that purportedly cover a range of up to three years.

This situation is indicative of Second Stage Staff's general lack of focus over the decades when it comes to the more mundane aspects of organization. At times, papers are almost obsessively neat and labeled, to an unnecessary degree, and every scrap of paper seems to have been retained. Other times, this is not the case. Both the Spring and Fall Semesters of 1998, part of Second Stage's 25th season, are entirely devoid of so much as a file folder. More common to the Second Stage collection are varied levels of record-keeping – for one show, contact sheets, production notes, a program, a poster, receipts and a thank you card, for the next weekend's performance, nothing but an empty folder, if that. Some years, Second Stage's bookkeeping has been kept on file, other years there is no information as to Second Stage's budget allocation and use. Some folders appear promising, but, upon inspection, contain only photocopies of handouts that had been accounted for earlier in the collection. Other folders, especially those which were not in the original order, contain all manner of things, many of which I had first deemed lost, or had not even considered before. These were the homes of some of the more exciting finds, before the collection came to be in the form it is today.

The organizer of an archival collection must mimic Second Stage's flexibility, for, despite all plans, a collection will undoubtedly turn up surprises. This project underwent a dramatic change in scope and direction upon the discovery of items belonging to Second Stage of which the organization (in its current form) had been entirely unaware. The sheer amount of time spent going through this information, as

anyone who has ever organized documents to form an archival collection can tell you, was substantial in and of itself. I will detail that process later.

The consolidation of documents relating to Second Stage began with my own investigations in the summer and early fall of 2007, though one could claim that my investigations had begun at the moment I first entered the Green Room of the '92 Theater. In my quest for information, my first point of contact was clear: the obvious starting point for exploration into the history of Second Stage would be within its own domain – namely, the Patricelli '92 Theater itself.

Since the completion of the renovations of the '92 in June 2002, Second Stage has had its own office, which has been used for an assortment of purposes. Every member of Staff has the privilege of keeping a key to this room, giving them access to its contents. The office is where all expensive, dangerous and one-of-a-kind props are kept; it is where keys and instruction manuals are stored; it is where Second Stage nametags, forms and files are made available.

The average student, even the average actor/technician, may not even be aware that Second Stage has an office in the bowels of the '92; it is easily missed as one walks down the stairs to the basement of the theater. For those who may have noticed it, they will quickly find its mysteries safeguarded – it is the one room that Stage Managers cannot access with the two keys that they are given upon Load-In. Indeed, despite possession of this third key, the average Staff Member rarely uses this room for much more by than the pick-up of nametags before an SR shift. The office is primarily the realm of the ML – to the newest member of Staff, it is the room that show folders call home, the room in which the budget proposal to the WSA is

penned, the room from which all manner of things emerge. On a Work Day, while everyone else is painting and cleaning and building, the ML can spend hours at a time in this room, sitting at the computer, papers splayed over the desk.

A quick perusal of the office revealed instances of orderliness among a general sense of clutter – I immediately set to work setting it right, which meant putting similar items together, throwing out what was useless and/or irrelevant, and putting things back into the order that they had once been in (as evidenced by the remnants of categorization throughout the space). Not much was thrown away – mostly scraps of paper, wrappers, broken pencils, and things of that nature. What was kept was organized, or at least grouped together with similar items for further investigation (this was especially true of documents). Naturally, part of this involved standard operational organization of office supplies and props. What is relevant to this project is what I discovered within the disorder – specifically, papers relevant to the operational procedures of Second Stage.

My discoveries can be divided into two sections: one being the presence of items that other Staff Members were fully aware of (information for my own edification), the other being items that most people were not aware of, or that they had not paid much mind to (to be added to institutional knowledge). For the former, I will describe the general layout of the space and its organizational state as I left it. For the latter, I will give a general inventory of what was found and where – the information contained within them is used throughout the body of this thesis, and makes up about half of the Second Stage archival collection. I will also specify the ultimate resting places for the items that I chose to keep – most of the items were

filed in the archive, though some of them were kept in the hands of Second Stage, while still others were sent to sections of pre-existing archives, to which they more appropriately belonged.

The Second Stage office, currently, has two sets of filing cabinets used for paper documents, and a third used for the storage of expensive and/or fragile items, such as lenses for lighting instruments. Of the first two, one holds the instruction manuals and operating instructions to all of the equipment in the '92. This covers all of the power tools in the Shop, all of the technology in the Booth, as well as the sundry items in the office (such as flashlights, computer programs, and our label-maker). It also had some manuals that had been kept despite the replacement or loss of the item to which it belonged, as well as catalogues upon catalogues of all manner of items. Having found some instruction manuals in the Shop before, I had no idea that we had this repository in place (and neither, I soon discovered, did the rest of Staff). Newer instruction manuals were removed from other locations and returned to this cabinet. Staff met to sift through this find, recycling old catalogues, and keeping only those documents pertaining to items still in our possession (specifically, items still in use). This drawer was relieved of about three quarters of its contents. The second drawer of this filing cabinet contained what can only be described by that word most loathed by archivists: miscellaneous. Documents here were, for the most part, uncategorized and in a state of complete disarray. Photocopies of documents from the mid-1940s were found, some Department-related information from the mid-1960s, the announcement to the campus of Second Stage's founding, personal correspondence from the mid-1980s, attempts at "bylaws" from the mid-1990s ... all

manner of documents had found their final resting place here, before I disturbed their chaos in favor of the order and safety of SC&A. This drawer would find itself emptied in the name of posterity as I relocated most of its contents to the archive.

The second filing cabinet is dedicated to the business operations of Second Stage. Aside from yet more office supplies, the cabinet was home to old copies of the Second Stage handbook and a file folder on WSA budget proposals going only as far back as 2004, in addition to two and a half drawers full of show folders. I personally had only ever accessed the cabinet before in order to look at the show folder for a specific show of the current season, so I knew to expect files of each season's show going back at least a couple of years. What I found dated as far back as 1995, which came as no small surprise to me, upon first perusal. In the most recent years, each show folder contained a poster, a program, budget information, contact information, Monday Meeting sheets, notes from the TAs, and any other additional information pertinent to the production side of a show. Most of the folders here were intact (meaning that they contained several to most of the above items) – but there were many that were missing programs or posters or both.

Looking beyond the show folder section, I found two drawers dedicated entirely to show posters, most of which seemed to have found their way here due to their over-large size. A lot of these dated to the 1970s and 1980s – it was clear that this was the source of the decoration of the Green Room. Mixed in with the posters were some newspaper clippings and some photographs of productions. The contents of this drawer had been separated by green oaktag and labeled with the year of the production by some unknown hand. The final (and largest) section was aptly labeled

“Unclassifiable” – I added that to my list of things to solidify, and my growing list of “words that archivists find frustrating.”

In a corner of the room, crumpled, I found something really exciting – architectural drawings dating from the mid-80s to early '90s. Some showed ideas for the proposed renovation of the '92, others had instructions for building a standard flat, others simply showed the layout of the '92, others were proposed light plots for use in the '92, and still others were dimensions of alternate spaces such as the basement “Grotto” of the Alpha Delta Phi Society’s Chapter House, the Multi-Purpose Room (MPR) of the Davenport Campus Center (now defunct, with the addition of the Usdan University Center), and the ground floor of the Eclectic Society’s Chapter House. Some of these drawings were clearly done by students (some were even labeled for specific Theater Department courses), others done by professors, and still others were names as yet unrecognizable to me.

Perhaps the most mysterious – and certainly the most entertaining – find in the office was a standard letter-sized white envelope dedicated to the exploits of a small figurine named “Terrance.” Apparently a mascot of Second Stage, Terrance ultimately becomes “fed up” with his treatment and “runs away” from the '92. His identity, purpose – indeed his very *existence* – had long since been erased from institutional memory, though his goodbye note dates to 2001. The photo documentation, and his personification through the goodbye note, is reminiscent of the Wesleyan tradition of the Douglas Cannon – Terrance being Second Stage’s very own world (or, at least, campus) traveler.

On a shelf in the office I found three binders of information – one, called “Member Archive,” contained membership lists, the second, named “Seasons,” contained season-by-season production listings, and the third was a photo album from the '90s. Both the member list binder and the season-by-season binder were missing large amounts of information. The “Seasons” binder only begins in the Fall of 1987 and abruptly ends in the Spring of 2004. The Member Archive does much better in that regard, beginning in the Spring of 1974 and continuing to today. However, the member binder is notably missing lists from the late '70s and early '80s as well as a few scattered semesters throughout.

Much of the information within the Member Archive is recorded in the same style and font and on the same paper – obviously, a collection of names acquired, or at least typed up, at the same time at some unknown date. I later pinned this on the 1998-1999 Staffers who, in preparation for Second Stage's 25th Anniversary Season, went to the trouble of reorganizing and partially inventorying the contents of the office. Their efforts have been an endless source of bother to my work – their attempts at determining Staff lists from years previous are often at odds with the information that I discovered, and are not documented with sources. Additionally, the '98-'99 group seemed to have enjoyed writing on the backs of posters and other documents in pen – often, the dates they scrawled on the back of these historical items are incorrect.

At the start of this project, I thought that this, treasure trove though it was, was all that I had with which to begin organizing the Second Stage archive. I expected long months of oral history interviews, and hoped for bits and pieces of paper from

the Theater Department, Public Safety, Physical Plant, and so forth to make up for the time before 1995. Perhaps that bottom drawer of “miscellaneous” would miraculously have all of the information that I needed in order to fill in the holes of Stage’s history. This was certain to be a small, short, and very incomplete archive. How very wrong I was.

Upon my first lengthy visit to SC&A, I was greeted by not one, but *five* “Paige Boxes” (file boxes) of information – more than I, at least, had hoped for or expected. My thesis advisor, Suzy Taraba, University Archivist and Head of Special Collections, directed me to Valerie Gillispie, Assistant University Archivist, for help in learning how to approach the collection. I was told to read *Understanding Archives and Manuscripts*, by James M. O’Toole, as well as Valerie Gillispie’s informational handout on “processing” an archive. “Processing” a collection is the act of arranging the contents of an established body of documents and other items into a useable and maintainable form. This job occurs only after “the arrangement of records, the process of refining intellectual and physical control over them.”³ It is vital that an archivist approach a collection with thought to all possible uses, both past and future. The “intellectual work of arrangement”⁴ is in the archivist’s ability to ascertain the best manner of organization – “not making them up according to the archivist’s own inclination, but trying to discover and reestablish the natural order that is already there, even if it has been obscured.”⁵ In order to determine exactly what the “natural order” had been for the Second Stage collection, I needed to

³ O’Toole, J. M. *Understanding Archives and Manuscripts* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1990). Pg. 65.

⁴ Ibid, 65

⁵ Ibid, pg. 65

familiarize myself with its contents. And so, my plans changed – it was time to inventory what was already a rather substantial archive, even before the papers I had located in the Second Stage office were added. But first, I was to learn more about archiving.

Archivists develop a set of knowledge unique to their profession. O’Toole divides this knowledge into four sections: “Knowledge of Individuals, Organizations, and Institutions,”⁶ “Knowledge of Records,”⁷ “Knowledge of the Uses of Records,”⁸ and “Knowledge of Archival Principles.”⁹ These are, for the most part, self-explanatory. “Knowledge of Individuals, Organizations, and Institutions” is the information that archivists naturally acquire by working with the “paper and electronic remains of human activity.”¹⁰ The “Knowledge of Records” is more specific – it encompasses the “subject content” of collections, as well as a “generalized understanding of how records function.”¹¹ “Knowledge of the Uses of Records”¹² is the appreciation of the “wide range of purposes”¹³ that these archives can have. Archivists understand that “records will lose their original usefulness”¹⁴ and “take on a secondary usefulness, one that will make them important for different reasons.”¹⁵ This “shift” in function must be accounted for when an archivist organizes a collection. However, guidelines must be adhered to; and so a

⁶ Ibid, pg 49.

⁷ Ibid, pg 51.

⁸ Ibid, pg 53.

⁹ Ibid, pg. 54.

¹⁰ Ibid, pg 49.

¹¹ Ibid, pg 50.

¹² Ibid., pg 53.

¹³ Ibid, pg 53.

¹⁴ Ibid., pg 53.

¹⁵ Ibid pg 53.

“Knowledge of Archival Principles”¹⁶ is vital. During the “process of establishing *intellectual and physical control* over their holdings,”¹⁷ an archivist must rely on their unique combination of knowledge and experience, as well as the archival principle of “provenance,”¹⁸ the “deceptively obvious insight that the person or organization producing the records determines their content.”¹⁹ The intentions of the original users and creators of the body of documents and other items should be preserved, while maintaining a balance between original order and chaos.

In the case of Second Stage, this became an all-too-complicated issue. I read each and every scrap of paper in those boxes, getting an idea for how I could ultimately structure the archive. I took notes in an attempt to keep track of it all – these would inform my decisions as to the eventual organization of the collection. I did the same for the found documents in the Office, and ultimately for the poster collection, including those on the walls of the Green Room, as well. Later, as I would process the collection, duplicates would be removed. These items, referred to as “archival trash,” would be retained in case of mistake. The hanging folders which were abandoned in favor of acid-free archival folders were returned to Second Stage, and all other items given back to the organization. Staff decided that they would use the posters, programs, and other colorful items to re-decorate the Green Room.

After taking inventory of all of the available documents, it was time to determine the structure of the collection. There did not seem to be an overarching “natural order” to Second Stage’s records. With each change in leadership – at times,

¹⁶ Ibid, pg 54.

¹⁷ Ibid, pg 54.

¹⁸ Ibid, pg 55.

¹⁹ Ibid, pg 55.

as frequently as each semester – the filing system utilized by Second Stage would alter. Additionally, the occasional “standardized” sections of the files were often incomplete. However, my organizational decisions were not made at random. Due, I think, to the “missing” files from 1973-1994, the records from 2000-2008 were kept in a standard form, based upon those from 1995-2000. The files from 1990-2000 closely resembled the organizational system used in 2000-2008, and aspects of this system can be seen as far back as 1978. The major commonality, absent only from the oldest files, were “Show Folders” FN. Each individual show was given its own folder, within which, I inferred from the collection, contact sheets for the production team, budgets, notes, and other relevant items, such as posters and programs, were to be kept for future generations. Within the same season, some of these folders were delightfully complete and detailed, while others would turn out to be entirely empty and devoid of information. However, it was clear that these Show Folders would serve as the basis of the Second Stage archival collection.

O’Toole states that every archivist must attempt to answer the question: “How were the records kept originally, and how can that original system be reconstructed so as to enhance rather than obscure their meaning?”²⁰ Suzy Taraba would echo this thought as she would say to me, in one form or another, that the archivist’s purpose was, yes, to preserve original order, but it was not to “preserve chaos” either. This advice was especially apt when it came to discrepancies in the contents of the Show Folders. “Show Applications, or “Show Apps,” as they came to be called, were sometimes filed with the show and other times filed separately. This was also the case with Sponsorship Contracts (which the Stage Manager and Director of Second

²⁰ Ibid, pg 50.

Stage productions must sign to show their understanding of Second Stage policy). Staff Interest Notes (or, “Staff Applications”, or “Staff Apps”) had no chronological home – that is to say, they were found scattered throughout both filing cabinets in alternately relevant and irrelevant folders. When the Show Apps were kept with their shows, there might be a folder for rejected applications, though, more often than not, this folder was conspicuously absent. In years where Second Stage responded to these applications, both positively and negatively, copies of the letters could be found with the Show App (either in the Show Folder or in the Show App folder), but were also found in the “miscellaneous” folders. Staff Lists, Season Lists, Budgetary materials, End of the Year Reports, Director/Stage Manager Contact Sheets, Monday Meeting Schedules, and other administrative papers could be found in all manner of locations.

The structure of the collection is based on guidelines that the remnants of organization offered, as well as my own speculations as to past use in conjunction with my predictions for the archive’s future use. It is my opinion that the archive will be most sought by researchers seeking information on specific persons, plays, and buildings (the ’92 Theater, as well as the Zelnick Pavilion, Memorial Chapel, and various alternate space locales). It would also be useful in tracking information about budgetary information, general Wesleyan and Middletown history, and other campus groups (including Departments, Physical Plant, and Public Safety).

To this end, each semester begins with a folder entitled “Staff and Season Lists,” containing a single copy of each version of the Staff List and Season List for that semester. This is followed by chronological Show Folders, in which Sponsorship

Contracts remain. The records from the early 1970s were so lacking in information that sufficient documentation was not available to necessitate the creation of a Show Folder. Instead, a folder named “Productions” takes on the role of “Show Folder” – within it, all notes and papers pertaining to all shows for that season are listed in chronological order.

Show Apps follow in a separate folder, filed in the same order as the season ran, with rejected applications at the end. Show App Responses follow in a separate folder. Staff Applications are next, with any responses in the next folder. Then, in a generic folder called “Administrative,” all paperwork related to the operations of Second Stage can be found. These include Director/Stage Manager Contact Sheets, Monday Meeting Sheets, and handouts. Other folders exist as needed, such as “Correspondence and Notes,” “Clippings,” and “Photographs.”

The Fall Semester season is directly followed by the Spring Semester season (beginning with the “Staff and Season Lists” folder). Academic years are divided by “Budget and Finance” folders dedicated to the budgetary activities of Second Stage, when available. These folders are named by year (for example, “Budget and Finances 1979-1980”), and begin with the budget proposal to the WSA for that year (created at the start of the Fall Semester), as well as End of the Year Reports and Annual Reports (written at the end of the Spring Semester). Any items relating to monetary issues were removed from other sources and placed in the budget folder for that academic year. Minutes have been, for the most part, filed separately, as the minutes are often contained in books that correspond to multiple seasons and years and tend to be large and bulky. The only minutes to be found filed directly within its

season are individual sheets of paper where only a few pages of minutes were taken. These were filed as the first item in the Administrative folder for that season.

As my thesis explains, the documents that make up the Second Stage archival collection provide an excellent view into the movements of the organization. The most noticeable trend in the collection is that of recurring ideas, problems, solutions and ideologies. The major commonality between the Second Stage of 1973 and the Second Stage of 2008 is this cyclical tendency. Even the idea of historical preservation is a cyclical one. The first recorded mention of creating an archive was in the minutes of March 22, 1977, where Second Stage decides to conserve 3 copies of each audition poster, show poster and program for the archive, and sets the basis for the “Show Folder” concept. There is no evidence that the plans for extensive historical preservation from this meeting were ever carried out, other than these Show Folders, due to how little of it (if it ever existed) remains.

Often in the first years of Second Stage there is talk of reorganization of files, of systems of order that might be utilized in order to better preserve the documents relating to Second Stage’s past. Whether these ideas were ever enacted is hard to say, other than the noticeable 98 intrusion. Second Stage’s files had been accessed many times over the years, and some aspects of them were certainly re-ordered. For example, one especially large hanging folder was labeled as “Old Ideas” and contained documents from the 1960s through to the 1980s. Second Stage continually expresses a desire to preserve its history, but never seems to act upon it in an enduring way. However, it is this inclination to preserve that has allowed this

collection to be as extensive as it is – without these documents, the archive would, quite literally, be nothing.

Notably, the minutes show no record of conversation about the relocation of documents to the Library, nor do they suggest that it had occurred to any member to research accepted archival processes. With Staff's recurring interest in preserving Second Stage's history, it seems remarkable that they never thought to place their belongings into the safekeeping of SC&A staff. However, the act of historical preservation was likely far from the minds of the students who put in such time, thought, and energy into the running of Second Stage. With thoughts constantly bent on the present moment, and at many times, the future progress of Second Stage, it would make sense that there was never a push for Staffers to actively preserve their past in this manner, though a need for it seems to have been acknowledged.

This thesis is, in some ways, the culmination of the thoughts of the countless Staff members who have sought to organize and preserve the history of Second Stage. In creating the archive, by gathering materials as well as inventorying and processing them, I now know more than (arguably) anyone about Second Stage's past. It is certain that there are individuals who know more intimately than I the intricacies of the group at various times. However, it is my general knowledge of Second Stage's progression through time – its *development* – that makes my understanding of the organization unique. My sentiments about the creation of this archive are nicely described by O'Toole when he explains that “[u]nderstanding archives and manuscripts opens the door to understanding ourselves, and that remains one of the

enduring challenges and enduring joys of archives work.”²¹ This thesis has certainly been a joy, and a challenge – just as Second Stage can be.

²¹ Ibid, pg 5.

Securing a Home Second Stage and the Theater on College Row

“With lights, slides, avant-garde music and the use of the entire ’92 theater, an amoebic group called Second Stage initiated its contribution to the improvement of campus life”¹
The Argus, September 25, 1973

With these descriptive words, Second Stage was introduced to Wesleyan’s student body. “Amoebic” even in name, the organization actually began its life as “the Second Stage” – a reference, presumably, to the ’92’s status as the second of two stages on campus; second, in age, size and resources, to the newly constructed stage in the Center for the Arts (CFA). This name was quickly shortened, though without a distinct changing point; the organization was referred to as both “Second Stage” and “the Second Stage” for some years after its inception, with some writers favoring one or the other. At times, both names are used within the same document. “Second Stage” stuck, and the iconic stylized “2” stencil became its symbol.

In the September 25, 1973 issue of *The Argus*, an article entitled “Second Stage Offers Alternatives to Noon-Time Wes Lunch Lines”² became the first of what would be many stories about Second Stage happenings. It details Second Stage’s birth, as the “brainchild”³ of Jan Eliasberg ’74, who “figured it was just what Wesleyan needed”⁴ when she decided to co-found it with Samuel Miller ’75. The inspiration came from Eliasberg’s experience with “Dartmouth’s summer repertory

¹ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Clippings Folder Fall 1973. “Who and What in the World is Second Stage,” *The Argus*. 25 September 1973.

² Ibid

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid

theater”⁵ after which she “yearned for additional opportunity [sic] for students to act and direct beyond the formal program of the Theater Department.”⁶ After acquiring backing from both the Theater Department and the College Body Committee (the C.B.C. – precursor to the WSA), Second Stage, with blessings from the theater faculty, began producing “lunchtime plays, poetry readings, dance performances and improvisational workshops”⁷ in the '92.

Beginning in 1929, the Theater Department was housed in the '92 Theater. There it would remain until 1973, the year that the construction of the CFA was completed, and Second Stage was born. Prior to the Department's move to the CFA, the '92 Theater was still often referred to by its original name: Rich Hall.⁸ The building originally housed the University Library, remaining so from its opening in 1868, until the completion of Olin Memorial Library in 1928.⁹ Rich Hall would reopen to the Wesleyan community a short year later, this time as a theater, under its new name “The '92 Theater” after the class of 1892, who provided the bulk of the funding for the conversion.

The Theater Department began as a small major but developed quickly. Its rapid growth soon demonstrated a need for extensive investment towards its future, if it was to operate at a similar level to theater departments at Wesleyan's peer institutions. An article on its replacement, the CFA, recalled the chaos of the space:

In the '92 Theater, all acting classes, dance and production were done in one space. Sets could only be built right in the performing area, which meant such

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Wesleyan University Library Page. “Olin Memorial Library History.” April 2008.
<http://www.wesleyan.edu/libr/olinhome/olinhist.html>. 2008.

⁹ Sarah Vollman. “Building on history in the '92 Theater and Memorial Chapel.” April 2008.
http://www.wesleyan.edu/argus/archives/aa_archive_aug302001/dateyear/f5.html.

work had to be scheduled outside of class and rehearsal hours. Faculty members shared 6x8 offices downstairs.¹⁰

In the 1960s, the University pledged to construct a “Creative Arts Center” – a series of buildings into which the expanding department could soon reside with similar disciplines, in state-of-the-art facilities – and with a strong architectural presence on campus. The promise of this construction held all the hopes of the theater major at Wesleyan – much time, energy, and finances were put into its planning and realization. The Department waited impatiently, while struggling within the bounds of their resources and space. It would prove to be a long wait.

In the Theater Department’s annual report for the 1965-1966 academic year, the ’92’s vast inadequacies are displayed in a decisive manner. The department stipulates that the problems “for the first time, begin to seem hopeless of solution.¹¹” The issues facing the department in the coming years seem to have been reduced to farce. Department founder and Chair, Ralph Pendleton, describes the situation as dire, but shows a remarkable sense of understanding:

All of this must seem painfully obvious to the reader. “After all,” he may validly say, “the inadequacies of the theater plant have already been made clear. The decision to build a Creative Arts Center proves they have been made clear. Why go on beating a dead horse? You’ll just have to live with it.¹²”

¹⁰ Alphonsus J. Mitchell. “The Wesleyan University Alumnus.” Fall 1973.

¹¹ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Pre-Second Stage Folder. Annual Report of the Theater Department. 1966.

¹² Ibid

Pendleton's direct response to this was a simple "Agreed."¹³ The Theater Department would continue to "live with it"¹⁴ for another 7 years – 2 more than they were predicting in 1966.

When "[f]inancial considerations forced the cancellation of a second performing space in the CFA Theater building"¹⁵ it seemed, at first, that Wesleyan would ultimately be unable to match its peer institutions in resources and available space despite the new center. In the end, it was decided that the Theater Department would retain the '92, converting it to a "black box theater" – an easily adjustable space, with seemingly limitless possibilities. A true black box has no stage – no proscenium. It is the most flexible space in which theater can be produced.

However, these plans had their own major drawbacks. Due to promises of a black box theater in the new structure, the Theater Department understandably avoided investing in any large overhauling repair and upgrade work on the "old" building, despite the great need. Naturally, the students within the Department during this time were "fully aware of the new theaters on other campuses"¹⁶ – including many black box theaters – and certainly frustrated with the state of affairs at Wesleyan in comparison. Ralph Pendleton places much of the success of the Theater Department during these difficult years on these dedicated and creative students:

[that] the problems lowering upon us will be met and solved is due in very large part to the loyalty, the patience, the humor which our students [...] bring to the primitive circumstances [...] under which they are expected to produce

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Correspondence and Notes Folder, 1985. John Carr, "Capital Improvements- '92 Theater".

¹⁶ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Pre-Second Stage Folder. Annual Report of the Theater Department. 1965-1966

and under which they succeed—sometimes gloriously—in producing important examples of good theater.¹⁷

The students described here, the distant precursors to the group that would found and develop the Second Stage, can certainly be said to have been the saving grace of the theater community at Wesleyan. Likely, they passed on this dedication, determination, and passionate creativity to their successors. And, certainly, their – and Ralph Pendleton’s – humor lives on.

The protection of the '92 Theater, and its continued use, is in many ways indebted to that financial oversight. When the '92 became the black box replacement, the Theater Department planned to use it as a teaching theater, hold classes and workshops within its walls, and use both the stage and the house as theatrical spaces. However, in the excitement over the newly-constructed CFA, the '92 was abandoned by audiences; with no intention of utilizing the space in its former function, the Department consigned the theater to classroom space. The '92 that Second Stage would ultimately inherit had been essentially untouched insofar as maintenance during the years between the creation of plans for the CFA and their final completion. It is no wonder that when, finally, in the Fall of 1973, the Theater Department moved into the new high-capacity, high-tech CFA Theater, it all but abandoned the '92.

Ralph Pendleton asserted that “during the productions of 1965-66, Rich Hall did burst at the seams—all the seams—and Operation Dead Horse began.”¹⁸ As commander of the “operation” he served well, seeing the entire project through; he would not retire from his position until the end of the 1972-1973 academic year, with the CFA due to open its doors in the Fall. In his last annual report, he states:

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Ibid

The academic year 1972-1973 has strongly resembled (if my memory is accurate) those last days on the Ark. Too many bodies, too many activities, competing for room in quarters which seemed to grow smaller each day. Nerves getting as taut as zither strings, tempers beginning to flicker, frustrations all over the deck. And in the distance, above the troubled waters, the summit of Mount-Center-for-the-Arts-Ararat becoming more enticing every day.¹⁹

Retaining his humor at the situation, Pendleton continues to show his strength as a leader. He allows that “all things considered,”²⁰ the department had “maintained a difficult course with considerable success.”²¹ His down-to-earth approach and realism is apparent in his predictions for the coming semesters:

It is already vividly clear that in 1973-1974 the problems confronting the Department will be as monumental as the Center itself. It is highly possible, however, that with many of these problems – not all: many – solved, the members of the staff may be alive and relatively sane a year from now.²²

Though Pendleton was perhaps a bit overzealous in his predictions, it is true that the Theater Department was quite busy in the years after the move. With the added space, and added interest, the Department would suddenly be capable of work of a much higher caliber than that to which the campus had grown accustomed.

Yet, even as the completion of the CFA finally came within view, the Department could not fully leave behind its former home. When it became apparent that the new theater would not be prepared to open for the fall of 1973, the Theater Department found itself relying upon the '92 for one, purportedly final, semester. Though the Theater Department would “be the last to realize the full advantages of

¹⁹ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Pre-Second Stage Folder. Annual Report of the Theater Department. 1972-1973

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Ibid

²² Ibid

the center”²³ it made great use of the “three seminar rooms, a dance studio, design workshop and new offices”²⁴ immediately, moving in during the summer of 1973. Meanwhile, the faculty worked on its next season of productions, to be housed in the old, dilapidated theater building, left with no other choice but to use it to “accommodate productions suited to a small-scale auditorium.”²⁵ More so at this moment than ever, as noted in the alumni magazine that fall, “the new building [was] anxiously awaited.”²⁶

The space left in the wake of the Theater Department’s scramble to the CFA became available at the perfect time for a potential student-led production team on Wesleyan’s campus. The ’92, suddenly available in blocks of time, seemed an ideal location for theater students to gather – this was, after all, where they were taking many of their courses, and had been the Theater Department’s home for much of the undergraduate careers of many students. Ralph Pendleton, who had described the growing interest in theater within the student body early in his career at Wesleyan, described the continuance of this phenomenon further in his last annual report:

More important than the influence of any new course, however, is the fact that a major change seems to have taken place in the undergraduate attitude towards theater. For many years the audience for productions in the ’92 Theater consisted primarily of faculty members and members of the Middletown community; student attendance, with rare exceptions, was relatively small. Today that situation has reversed itself completely; the audience for this year’s productions in both theater and dance has consisted primarily of students. Furthermore, there is a growing interest in productions sponsored, directed and acted by students for student audiences.²⁷

²³ Alphonsus J. Mitchell. “The Wesleyan University Alumnus.” Fall 1973.

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Pre-Second Stage Folder. Annual Report of the Theater Department. 1972-1973.

Wesleyan's campus had become a breeding ground for creative student performance. Student energy was greatly augmented and amplified by the promises of the new opportunities that the CFA would ultimately offer. Second Stage was just waiting for an opportunity to develop – the student body was looking for an artistic outlet, beyond academics. All that this movement needed was a leader – and it found one in Jan Eliasberg. The impetus that sparked the founding of Second Stage, was the newly free '92 Theater. Seemingly headed for evenings alone, “abandoned, idle and empty,”²⁸ the building could not compete with the newly opened CFA Theater which took most of the attention of the faculty and students alike. However, with Second Stage, the reality of this prediction was quite the opposite – as students at the time observed, “'92 has, if anything, appeared even busier than usual this semester”²⁹ once Second Stage had made its debut.

The Argus describes the '92's progression from library to home of Second Stage in its September 25, 1998 article “History of '92 Opens Dramatic New Doors.”³⁰ The progression from Department-run to student-run productions was rapid:

The whole outlook of the theater department changed in 1973 when the Center for the Arts was built. The theater department, with a much larger state of the art facility at its disposal, suddenly began to attract a lot more students. The new crop of majors wasted no time in requisitioning the now vacated '92 building to be the home of a fledgling student theater group, and Second Stage was born.³¹

²⁸ The Wesleyan University Alumnus. Fall 1973.

²⁹ The Wesleyan University Alumnus. Fall 1973.

³⁰ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Clippings Folder Fall 1998. “History of '92 Opens Dramatic New Doors.” *Argus*. 1973.

³¹ Ibid

The birth of Second Stage was “officially” announced through the Wesleyan University News Bureau on October 17, 1973. The group is described as a “bring-your-lunch entertainment program including theater, music and poetry”³² – a rather different definition than that used today. Eliasberg herself is quoted as saying “[y]ou can bring your lunch or not bring your lunch. We’d just like to have you come.”³³ Interests peaked, the student body required more information. Second Stage held an Open House and explained in its own words what its purpose and membership would be. When Eliasberg graduated in 1974, the campus was sure that Second Stage would “continue playing to packed noon audiences in her absence.”³⁴

It would not be until 1976, through that year’s Second Stage Handbook, that Second Stage would provide a self-written definition for purposes of clarification:

Second Stage is a student-run entertainment organization funded by the College Body Committee. It was founded in 1973 to produce lunch-time theatre: experimental works, student playwriting, informal readings, one-acts, improvisations – a variety of short productions which take place at noon. It is a testing ground for new talent as well as a workshop for experienced performers.³⁵

At this time, it is clear that Second Stage’s involvement goes beyond that of producer. The name suddenly takes on a location, making more understandable the confusion over Second Stage and the ’92 Theater, and Staffers seem to behave more like a traditional troupe than a production team and facility managers.

The idea of Second Stage being both a “testing ground” and a “workshop” would likely seem a simultaneously foreign and familiar concept to the modern

³² Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Clippings Folder Fall 1973. “A Bring Your-lunch Entertainment Program.” Wesleyan News Bureau. 1973.

³³ Ibid

³⁴ The Wesleyan University Alumnus. Fall 1973.

³⁵ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Administrative Documents Folder Fall 1976. “Second Stage Handbook.”

group. Today, just as then, Staff expects, encourages, and enjoys having participants of all majors, years, and skill levels. However, if a statement to that effect were to be made today, it would be preceded by an indication of separation – Staff can expect, encourage and enjoy, but not directly contribute. In these first years, Staffers were known to participate in all parts of theater as members of Second Stage, the organization, rather than simply through it as individuals. This is not, of course, to say that Staffers don't participate in theater produced in their own organization; on the contrary, Staff members are highly involved in many of the shows that they produce, both as technicians and as actors. Second Stage, the modern version, sponsors productions; it is not an “entertainment organization”³⁶ – it is a producer and caretaker.

In the summer of 1976, Managing Director John Cini '78 discovered that he would be leading the Second Stage team on his own. In a letter, fellow Second Stage member Sharon O'Hare '77 apologetically declared that she would be taking a leave of absence, effectively “dumping the duties of 2nd Stage into [his] lap.”³⁷ News spread quickly, and members of the theater community not previously engaged with Second Stage offered help to keep the still young organization alive. Cini himself was confident – as he might be: Susan O'Hare described him as “a one-man (superman) lighting-tech-design show”³⁸ and “budding technical genius.”³⁹ In his

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Correspondence and Notes Spring 1976. Letter from Susan O'Hare '77 to John Cini '78.

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ Ibid

response to her, he explains that the “tech end of it all is well under control”⁴⁰ with “good people lined up – and more organization than ever before.”⁴¹

However, the amount of interest in working *through* Second Stage was much greater than the interest in working from *within* it. Cini expressed concern about being “flooded w/eager directors”⁴² and asked for advice in finding people “who would be good help on the paperwork end.”⁴³ Clearly a very skilled technician, Cini was about to learn how to become a manager. He asked Sharon O’Hare for help with, among other things, C.B.C. policy, the Theater Department office, and, finally “Anita’s wherabouts”⁴⁴ (a reference to Anita K. Hersh ’75, who served as Managing Director over Cini, prior to her graduation). Suggesting a full-length *Argus* article as a potential source for visibility, Cini was “confident that Second Stage [was] rolling onward to its best and most rewarding season ever.”⁴⁵ At the same time, he quips that he “had hoped to have someone else with whom to share the responsibility and the success.”⁴⁶ However, it is clear that Second Stage’s survival through this “short staffed”⁴⁷ period can be fully credited to an enthusiastic and creative student body led by the multi-talented and dedicated John Cini.

The accessibility created by Second Stage’s need for personnel, combined with an increased interest in the theater major, significantly boosted Second Stage’s numbers. This was mostly due to the manner in which Second Stage viewed itself –

⁴⁰ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Correspondence and Notes Spring 1976. Letter From John Cini ’78 to Susan O’Hare ’77.

⁴¹ Ibid

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ Ibid

⁴⁴ Ibid

⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶ Ibid

⁴⁷ Ibid

as a group made up of the Wesleyan theater community, but led by a small staff of theater technicians and aficionados. With membership, of course, came responsibilities. Anyone who worked on a Second Stage show was expected to attend the “Final Strike” of the semester, to aid in cleaning, maintenance, and other work. It was everyone’s theater – and so, everyone was expected to help run it. By holding everyone accountable for the space that they all shared and loved, the future of both the ’92 and Second Stage seemed assured.

In the October 22, 1976 issue of *The Argus*, Second Stage’s function on campus is further explained (and advertised) in the article “Who and What in the World is Second Stage.”⁴⁸ In the eyes of the journalist, and, it can be inferred, the campus at large, Second Stage was “a group of students who create[d] their own theatre productions [...] an alternative, or experimental, theatre group.”⁴⁹ This definition is somewhat misleading, for Second Stage did not consider itself such a group at the time.

In 1977, Stage addressed the issue of being “experimental,”⁵⁰ wondering at the idea: “we are the experimental theatre?”⁵¹ The idea of Second Stage being the home of “alternative” theater has less to do with the organization than it does with the ’92. The ’92, as previously stated, was retained to be used as the “black box” – the “experimental theater.” Though the space had been reserved for such use, this definition need not have been applied to Second Stage. As evidenced by its own

⁴⁸ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Clippings Folder Fall 1976. “Who and What in the World is Second Stage,” *The Argus*. 22 October 1976.

⁴⁹ Ibid

⁵⁰ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Administrative Documents Folder Spring 1977. “Minutes, March 7, 1977.”

⁵¹ Ibid

Handbook from 1976, Second Stage even took issue with the idea of being a “theatre group.” While admitting that “[t]hus far this handbook has talked mainly about theatre,”⁵² they emphasize that “Second Stage also sponsors dance, poetry, films, workshops, and concerts.”⁵³ The Handbook states that “a varied program is one of Second Stage’s main goals.”⁵⁴

Though it is clear that Second Stage sponsored primarily theatrical events (as it continues to do, to an even greater extent today), the emphasis that the group placed on funding other performance pieces should not go unnoticed. The desire to fund non-theatrical projects has not left Second Stage as it continues to consider applications for less traditional (and non-theater) works. It would be incorrect, however, to say that Second Stage is as open to this sort of funding now as it was then, for, as time has passed, precedent has become policy. Second Stage forgets its beginnings in the “entertainment”⁵⁵ business, and sees itself as a theater production team that will, on occasion, if deemed possible and permissible, sponsor other events. Today, at least, it is undeniable – Second Stage’s primary function revolves around theater.

It was in 1977 that Second Stage first began actively questioning its purpose and identity. At the same time, Staff seemed to begin to recognize its own role in Wesleyan history, and take a more active position in campus-wide affairs. Minutes from March 7th of that year show the groups attempt at forming an identity, asking questions that Second Stage Staff today would be able to answer easily. The question

⁵² Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Administrative Documents Folder Fall 1976. “Second Stage Handbook.”

⁵³ Ibid

⁵⁴ Ibid

⁵⁵ Ibid

“do we owe allegiance to the students or the department?”⁵⁶ For example, would receive a quizzical look and a quick response: the students. However, the issue becomes less puzzling to the modern Staff when it begins to take the ideas under debate at that time under consideration. With questions such as “can we call ourselves a student organization?”⁵⁷ on the table (a question that, today, seems easily answerable solely due to precedent and WSA funding), one can imagine the debates occurring in the Green Room of the '92 in attempts to determine the future role of Second Stage.

Other questions from this time period would be familiar to modern-day Staff. With the broad question of “purpose” under discussion, Staffers explored their production options. They looked to their only concrete text for answers: their name. As “Second Stage,” they argued, their primary function *must* be theater. However, despite being “traditionally [a] student-run theatre,”⁵⁸ Staff saw itself taking an interest in a new direction: “attract people who are interested in Arts (not just theatre).”⁵⁹ Directly after this strong assertion, and almost apologetically, Staff goes on to explain that “[a]dmittedly our main focus is staged plays.”⁶⁰ However, this commitment to “the Arts” never disappeared from the unwritten philosophies of Second Stage.

With theater now firmly placed at the core of Second Stage identity, Staffers wondered if their role was to “serve those interested in theatre? [or] just majors?”⁶¹

⁵⁶ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Administrative Documents Folder Spring 1977. “Minutes, March 7, 1977.”

⁵⁷ Ibid

⁵⁸ Ibid

⁵⁹ Ibid

⁶⁰ Ibid

⁶¹ Ibid

Today, just as then, the answer was found in the idea of serving all Wesleyan students, and was met by encouraging all undergraduates to participate in theater. In practice, however, *Second Stage Staff* – not those who work through it, but the group of students who run the organization – has been primarily made up of theater majors. Later in the Spring 1977 season, the minutes would show *Second Stage*'s desire for separation from the Theater Department and its majors:

We need to be independent of the Theater Dept & it [sic] students in so far as we aren't subservient to them. *Second Stage* should be more than just a theater major's playground.⁶²

This sentiment is echoed today by non-majors and majors alike.

The relationship between *Second Stage* and the Theater Department is not, and has never been, a written one. If asked today, faculty members and students alike would each explain the situation from different perspectives. In 1977 the question was phrased by Staff as “what do we have power over?”⁶³ Shared spaces, equipment, goods, and people (the cross-over between Theater majors and *Second Stage* is, naturally, high) all make this differentiation difficult to understand, and even harder to explain.

The question of paid Staffers is one of the most confusing complexities of this relationship. Today, only the Liaisons are paid for their work – just as in the past, only the Managing Director and Facilities Manager were paid positions. These Liaisons, though employed by the Theater Department, are selected by *Second Stage* Staffers, not the faculty. These delineations were in some ways clearer in the early

⁶² Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. *Second Stage* Archival Collection. Administrative Documents Folder Spring 1977. “Minutes.”

⁶³ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. *Second Stage* Archival Collection. Administrative Documents Folder Spring 1977. “Minutes, March 7, 1977.”

years of Second Stage – in the 1976 article, *The Argus* goes on to explain this inherent difference, when describing the role of John Cini '78 in the upkeep of the '92 and the running of Second Stage:

Cini heads the 2nd Stage staff [...] as managing director [...] Cini is also the technical director/facility manager of the '92 Theatre Staff – another committee altogether. This staff, hired and paid for by the Theatre Department, acts as a liaison between the Department and 2nd Stage.⁶⁴

These two distinct groups were bound to fuse – the overlap in membership as well as in interest, technical skills, and care made this an indisputable outcome. However, this separation endured for many years – in Fall 1984, a letter to “All Directors using the '92 and/or receiving Second Stage funding”⁶⁵ begins with “Greetings from the Second Stage/'92 Theater staff,”⁶⁶ and the Budget Request for the 1984-1985 academic year shows a clear division of power between the Managing Director (the effective “president” of Second Stage in charge of finances – what would become the Managing Liaison) and the Facilities Manager (the person in charge of the physical space of the '92 – a position that, ultimately, would be taken from students and re-created as a staff position within the Theater Department).⁶⁷

The first attempt by the group at written explanation of the Theater Department's role in Second Stage was made in Staff's 1976 Handbook, under the heading “Second Stage and the Theatre Department.”⁶⁸ It states:

⁶⁴ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Clippings Fall 1976. “Who and What in the World is Second Stage,” *The Argus*. 22 October 1976.

⁶⁵ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Correspondence and Notes 1984. “Letter”

⁶⁶ Ibid

⁶⁷ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Budget and Finances Folder 194-1985.

⁶⁸ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Administrative Documents Folder Fall 1976. “Second Stage Handbook.”

There is no official tie between the student-run, C.B.C.-funded Second Stage and the Wesleyan Theatre Department. However, the theatre/dance faculty is singularly open, and Second Stage enjoys a fine rapport with the department. The Theatre Department's contributions to Second Stage start with the donation of the '92 Theatre space and run all the way through faculty advisorship and financial co-sponsorship to borrowed props. Most Second Stage policy is discussed at open department meetings...⁶⁹

It is clear that the relationship between Second Stage and the Theater Department was strong at this time, despite the denials and desperate attempts at separation that occurred congruently with the writing of this document. Staff members in the 1970s were primarily Theater majors, many were employed by the Department as CFA staff, and some were even a part of the Theater Majors' Committee. This is still true today, despite the fact that Second Stage is (and, importantly, has always been) open to all students regardless of major and affiliation. The membership is somewhat limited to those affiliated with the Department, though, in all fairness, such an affiliation is largely unavoidable, not necessarily detrimental, and often quite useful.

It is worth noting that this explanation of Second Stage and Theater Department relations refers to a Theater Department that consists of both dance and theater faculty. The Dance Department, though founded in 1976, would not become an independent department until the mid-1980s – an important detail in the story of Second Stage's continued presence in the '92 Theater, as will be more fully explained later. Equally important is the fact that though Second Stage thanks the Theater Department here for their assistance and advice, they fail to recognize the biggest Department contribution to Second Stage – that historical lack of a black box theater. The absence of the experimental theater preserved the '92's role as a performance space, a building which, in turn, took in Second Stage and allowed it to form into the

⁶⁹ Ibid

organization that it did and has become. True, a theatrical group operating primarily in alternate spaces could have manifested itself. However, this theoretical group would be missing one of the key features of Second Stage: a home.

Today, thanks to this “missing” building, it is clear that the '92 has become crucial to the function of both the Theater Department and Second Stage. In the November 26, 1985 letter, “Capital Improvements – '92 Theater,”⁷⁰ the Theater Department itself makes this clear, flatly stating that “The '92 is not our “extra” space, it is one half of our performance space and every bit as important to our program as the CFA Theater,”⁷¹ while simultaneously expressing the building’s importance to Second Stage and student theater at Wesleyan. Safely based in the '92, Second Stage has since grown to be an organization whose existence on an ever-changing campus seems perpetual – and whose continued residency in the '92 appears to be more than ensured.

This, however, was not always the case.

The 1984-1985 and 1985-1986 academic years marked a strong movement towards theater’s permanent residency in the '92, as well as advancements in the technological aspects of the theater building. Staff members Daniel Handelman '86 and Matthew Berlin '87 corresponded throughout the summer months, discussing plans for reorganizing, restructuring, and the general future of Second Stage and the '92. Handelman quipped that “I still haven’t had any time to go into the '92 t [sic] work, but your spring cleaning of the office that left half of it on the floor will HAVE

⁷⁰ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection.. Correspondence and Notes 1985. Letter. “Capital Improvements – '92 Theater.”

⁷¹ Ibid

to go.”⁷² Later, he talks about his conversations with Brian Rieger, of the Theater Department, who appears to be the first person to broach the subject of doing some intense upgrading to the '92 facility with Second Stage:

Brian Rieger (our boss) got me excited about fund raising to re-do the '92. Beginning with rewiring the lighting equipment for grounded pin connectors, we should make a list for the administration and a leaflet to send to theatre alums. [...] Brian sounded very interested in helping us out on this, and also thinks we should drag out the old 2nd Stage rules and intentions to get “some sense of continuity.” Perhaps we need a secretary to do that filing you’ve started.⁷³

The disorganization of Second Stage’s files is apparent, but so is the persistence and dedication of the group that created them.

Fall 1984 saw the hiring of John Carr, known almost exclusively as “Jack,” as the Technical Director for the Theater Department. Professor Carr would later go on to serve as Chair of the Theater Department, a position he continues to hold today. It was his interest in the '92 and its odd inhabitants that would change the direction of the building and the organization dramatically. Professor Carr should be credited with the '92’s rise, with the salvaging of Second Stage’s role in the physical Theater, and with the preservation of one of College Row’s more recognizable buildings. His faith in Second Stage’s cause helped to save the organization from its second near-collapse (the first one being that of the summer of 1975).

Yet, Professor Carr’s first interactions with Staff members could not have suggested his later prominent role as rescuer and friend. In a letter from the summer of 1984, Handelmann excitedly reports Professor Carr’s first encounter with Second

⁷² Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Correspondence and Notes Spring 1984. Letter from Daniel Handleman '86 to Matthew Berlin '87. 27 July 1984.

⁷³ Ibid

Stage to Berlin. He explains that he will be meeting with Professor Carr to show him the light board, and expresses interest and concern for the new faculty member: “I hope Jack turns out good, it’s always rough (a) on him to make a first impression and (b) to read them.”⁷⁴ Handelman’s only assessment of “Jack” was as “tall and kind of doofy looking”⁷⁵ – he could not have known the impact that Professor Carr was destined to have on his (and Second Stage’s) life, beginning only a few months after this first introduction.

With the ’92 Theater rapidly falling apart, along with Professor Carr’s new enthusiasm for the space, the Theater Department turned its attention back to its former home. A change in language from this time period shows the heavy influence of Carr as mentor, and the Theater Department’s renewed interest in the ’92. The 1984-1985 Budget Proposal states that Second Stage was “[a]cting in concert with the Wesleyan Theater Department.”⁷⁶ Second Stage allies itself with the Theater Department in an unprecedented manner through the word “concert,”⁷⁷ while clearly maintaining its independence. Stage almost clings to any semblance of a student-run identity in its request for funding, stating that:

Because Second Stage is entirely student-run, it provides a wonderful theater alternative to audience and participant alike. Today, when professional theater is often prohibitively expensive and inaccessible, this service to the Wesleyan and Middletown communities should not be overlooked.⁷⁸

Additionally, though Second Stage Staff had produced 35 “events”⁷⁹ on campus the previous academic year, they state that “[t]his year due to a shift in operating

⁷⁴ Ibid

⁷⁵ Ibid

⁷⁶ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Budget and Finances Folder 1984-1985. “Budget Proposal.”

⁷⁷ Ibid

⁷⁸ Ibid

⁷⁹ Ibid

procedure regarding Theater Department shows in the '92, we expect to sponsor only fifteen productions,"⁸⁰ promising that the quality and attendance levels would "remain at their usual high planes." This marks a drastic change in Second Stage procedure and participation, instigated by an expanding Theater Department. Over the nearly 15 years since the CFA construction was completed, the student body had grown, along with student interest in the arts. The Theater Department was continuing to attract faculty, students, and visiting artists – and it needed more room.

With pressure coming from the Theater Department to repair, clean, and otherwise upgrade and professionalize the '92, Staff found themselves overworked and overextended, though excited and willing. To deal with the immensity of problems facing both the '92 and Second Stage, it was clear that a larger workforce would be required. Managing Director Matthew Berlin '87 and Facilities Manager David Cassuto '85 had requested that the WSA provide additional funding for two Work-Study students in their budget proposal from Fall 1984. This was denied. In Second Stage's 1984-1985 End of the Year Report, Susan Sterne '87, Managing Director, and Dan Handelman '86, Facilities Manager, echo this request, stating that:

increased interest and the use of the building has made apparent the many flaws in the existing managerial system. Two full-time students are not sufficient to keep up with the demands that the theatre community places on the '92. If, as has been mentioned, more students were paid to assist in maintaining this facility, it would be of invaluable service to us.⁸¹

Though neither group was willing, or, perhaps, able, to provide the labor, or the financial backing to secure the personnel necessary, the ultimate outcome seems, overall, positive. However difficult this made things for Staff at the time, this

⁸⁰ Ibid

⁸¹ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Budget and Finances Folder 1984-1985. "End of the Year Report."

decision created a precedent for leaving the '92 Theater to those who truly love and care for it. As Staff numbers increased, as they eventually would, more people were involved in helping the Managing Director maintain the Theater, ultimately resulting in the dedicated group of Staffers in the '92 today.

Berlin and Cassuto were looking for funding to provide assistance – with low numbers and no pay, it was next to impossible for Second Stage to do all of the required work as fulltime students. The idea was to use the extra funding in an attempt to secure people – anyone at all – to come into the '92 and help with organizing, cleaning, and other less technical jobs, while Berlin, Cassuto and Staff would rebuild, repair and restock the place. Later, in a different approach, Sterne and Handelman, as the only paid Staff members, looked to provide financial compensation to the rest of the Second Stage Staff. This has never been achieved, though Second Stage members have, upon occasion, been paid for their work on Department shows. The Theater faculty has always known that Second Stage Staffers are skilled and dedicated workers, and, today, will often turn to them after asking for assistance from their students and student workers, especially if the work under question takes place in the '92 itself.

At the end of the 1984-1985 academic year, things began to shift. Susan and Dan state in Second Stage's "End of the Year Report" that "[s]ince the new Technical Director Jack Carr arrived, the Theatre Department has shown a more serious interest in improving the building."⁸² At the same time, Second Stage, with renewed energy and increased interest and attention, began, once again, to discern exactly *what* it might call its "purpose" and how it might go about restructuring itself in order to

⁸² Ibid

better serve such a thing. In Handelman's "End of Semester Notes"⁸³ from the Spring Semester of 1985, he explains that the "expansion of staff to seven members has come under question; but this seems to be the best and maximum number."⁸⁴ This would prove inaccurate – Staff today totals 16 – though debate still exists as to what size is "best" for the organization.

With a larger amount of people on Staff, it became harder to keep everyone on the same page. It should come as no surprise that it was at this time that Second Stage began to move away from the philosophy that had governed the organization for so long: that all members would be involved in every aspect of the organization, from finances to make-up kits. Handelman states that Second Stage had only now discerned the "benefits of "beurocracy" [sic]"⁸⁵ – a discovery that would change the manner in which Second Stage would continue to function to this day. To this end, Handelman asserts that "organizing the staff to individual responsibilities and creating the projects book have been indispensible[sic]"⁸⁶ to the future operations of the group. The "projects book"⁸⁷ kept a record of all things that required the attention of Staff – either to take care of by themselves, or to delegate to some other party (i.e. the Theater Department, Physical Plant or the manufacturer). This practice does not continue today, as, with the onset of technology, most issues with the space are quickly emailed in to the appropriate Staff member and dealt with accordingly.

⁸³ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Administrative Documents Folder Spring 1985. "End of Semester Notes."

⁸⁴ Ibid

⁸⁵ Ibid

⁸⁶ Ibid

⁸⁷ Ibid

However, the division of Staff to specific duties within Second Stage is a practice that ultimately developed into the highly specialized positions that now exist.

Notably, Handelman describes a Second Stage debate about the “possibility of defining 2d [sic] Stage with a constitution,”⁸⁸ a suggestion that Second Stage ultimately dismisses. The flexibility of Second Stage is highly valued, and with the varied visions of the organization held by its members, no conclusive mission statement could be achieved. More difficult, still, was discerning policy – “case-by-case basis” is still one of the groups more favored terms. In lieu of bylaws, Handelman suggested that Staff ought to consider “at least finding a way of writing things down so the same arguments do not occur every week.”⁸⁹ Second Stage members, periodically, seem to be aware of that problem which this work attempts to alleviate. Second Stage’s archive shows the cyclical rise and fall of interest in minute-taking, and retention of notes, letters, posters, programs and other related items.

Other problems facing Second Stage at this time could be called “periodic”: Handelman expressed distress over the fact that “Loaning out equipment has become haphazard and almost uncontrollable,”⁹⁰ a complaint that seems to recur cyclically, as it is solved, over and over again, in the same manner: “sign-out sheets [...] should be posted somewhere to indicate the whereabouts of missing tools, etc.”⁹¹ Other issues cannot so easily be solved, though they reappear just as frequently in Second Stage discussions. For example, the “need for a communication [sic] among the staff and

⁸⁸ Ibid

⁸⁹ Ibid

⁹⁰ Ibid

⁹¹ Ibid

between the staff and the theatre community, especially the crews of shows funded by 2d stage [sic]⁹² is an issue that recurs itself more often than all others in the history of Second Stage. Today, this topic comes up, directly or indirectly, at nearly every Monday Meeting, and, in some form or another, in many outside discussions among members of Wesleyan's theater community. This issue is not primarily one for Second Stage, nor is it an issue unique to the college experience: it is symptomatic of any group who attempts to organize and serve a large body of people. However, just as any other organization, Second Stage continues in its attempts at providing more and better communication between all groups and individuals with which it works.

Through collaborative efforts between the Theater Department, Physical Plant, and Second Stage, serious work began to be planned for upgrades in technology and physical structure in the mid-to-late 1980s. Second Stage compiled a list of requests for building maintenance in the '92 to give to then Physical Plant Director, Peter Tveskov, who they claim had stated that "No real work has been done in that building in at least ten years."⁹³ Facilities Manager Dan Handelman warns Tveskov that "Some things may be extremely expensive or simply not under your jurisdiction"⁹⁴ and asks that he "Please feel free to distinguish what can and cannot be done by Physical Plant."⁹⁵

These were clearly not minor requests, nor were they small in number.

Requests were made for major maintenance upgrades, with problems being divided

⁹² Ibid

⁹³ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Budget and Finances Folder 1984-1985. End of the Year Report.

⁹⁴ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Correspondence and Notes Folder Spring 1985. Second Stage letter to Peter Toveskov, head of Physical Plant. 16 May 1985.

⁹⁵ Ibid

between what was deemed “structural,”⁹⁶ “paint,”⁹⁷ and “electrical.”⁹⁸ Structural concerns were addressed with projects such as “Re-patching or re-laying of concrete floor in shop”⁹⁹ and “Rebuild forestage/sand down entire stage,”¹⁰⁰ as well as painting and staining just about every surface of the theater. Smaller requests ranged from more minor jobs (“Mirror remounted in rear bathroom”¹⁰¹), to luxuries (“Cup dispensers or water fountain”¹⁰²), to small, but vital, details (“Fix all doors”¹⁰³). Notably, it is on this request that the first mention by Second Stage of the iconic “’92” light is seen.

The problem of light was of no small concern to Second Stage and the Theater Department. Only one of the seven “electrical” requests proposed by Staff did not concern lighting. Problems included consolidation of light switches, specifically of the “ghost lights,” or lights that remain lit while no one is in the theater, partially due to theater lore, partially on a more practical level of safety. More important was the lack of visibility in hallways, Green Room, and, somewhat amusingly, the “[l]ight storage room,”¹⁰⁴ or “Brig.” Of greater consequence though, was a much larger problem – one that was beyond Physical Plant’s abilities, and beyond the normal financial capabilities of both Stage and the Department. These were not just additions and piecemeal quick-fixes, but rather an overhaul of the ’92 Theater’s lighting system, equipment, cabling, and structure.

⁹⁶ Ibid

⁹⁷ Ibid

⁹⁸ Ibid

⁹⁹ Ibid

¹⁰⁰ Ibid

¹⁰¹ Ibid

¹⁰² Ibid

¹⁰³ Ibid

¹⁰⁴ Ibid

It was, of course, Jack Carr who led the charge for the extensive upgrades, stating “It is my highest priority to install a safe and efficient lighting system in the ’92 Theater.”¹⁰⁵ In a strongly-worded letter to the Budget Committee on November 26, 1985 (around a year after his appointment to the University), Professor Carr writes:

The stage lighting system in the ’92 is rapidly becoming obsolete, inoperable, most importantly, unsafe. The lighting control board and distribution circuits were installed in the mid to late 1950’s. There have been no significant improvements or upgrades since that date. It is significant to note that from 1965 to the early 70’s it was thought that a smaller “Black Box” theater was to be part of the CFA Theater. As a result of that assumption, no long term maintenance projects were initiated during this period. Since the opening of the CFA Theater, the ’92 has continued to survive on “band-aid” repair and maintenance¹⁰⁶

The dire state of affairs at the ’92 is plain; the lighting system, at this point, had “reached its limit of stop gap repairs.”¹⁰⁷ Carr states that “the ’92 is long overdue for an upgrading of its production equipment”¹⁰⁸ and warns that “It is only a matter of time before a staff member or student is injured.”¹⁰⁹ Carr’s proposed upgrade was for “a system that, without being extravagant, would adequately serve the production needs of the department for many years,” a system that could “stand up to heavy student use.”¹¹⁰ His proposed figure, without labor, was \$62,000¹¹¹ – nearly

¹⁰⁵ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Correspondence and Notes Folder Fall 1985. Letter to Budget Committee from Professor of Theater John Carr. 26 November 1985.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid

¹⁰⁷ Ibid

¹⁰⁸ Ibid

¹⁰⁹ Ibid

¹¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹¹ Ibid

\$120,000¹¹² in today's money, and certainly a large portion of any budget. For comparison, Second Stage's average budget from 1979-1983 was \$10,000¹¹³ – almost \$20,000 today. Second Stage's budget for the 2007-2008 academic year was, in fact, \$20,793.¹¹⁴

In the semesters leading to the University's decision to upgrade the '92, Second Stage had been actively assuming a more prominent "caretaker" role. With encouragement from Jack Carr along with the motivation and dedication of its few members, Second Stage began to give the '92 the care it needed. Enlisting the help of Physical Plant, Staff once again drew up a list of projects, presenting them on January 15, 1986. Many of these were repeats of the previous semester's list – more lighting in rooms, new locks and keys for rooms and outside doors. The requests were divided into four sections: "security,"¹¹⁵ "electrical,"¹¹⁶ "heating system,"¹¹⁷ and, of course, "very important"¹¹⁸:

There is a large, asbestos-insulated pipe in the shop. The asbestos has cracked and with people working down there, hitting it with lumber as they pass, a lot of dust is flying around. Would you please have this removed. We know it involves hanging clamps for some other pipes but...please?¹¹⁹

The '92 was clearly in perfect condition – for repairs, maintenance, and an upgrade.

¹¹² MeasuringWorth.com. "Six Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a U.S. Dollar Amount, 1790 to Present." These figures were calculated using the Consumer Price Index available through the website. April 2008. <http://www.measuringworth.com/calculators/uscompare/index.php>.

¹¹³ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Budget and Finances Folder 1985-1986. 1985-1986 Budget and Finance Proposal.

¹¹⁴ Wesleyan University. Wesleyan Student Assembly. "Annual Mid-Year Report – Fall 2007." April 2008. <http://www.wesleyan.edu/wsa/WSA%20Mid-Year%20Report%20v2.doc>

¹¹⁵ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Correspondence and Notes Folder Spring 1986. Letter from Second Stage to Physical Plant. 15 January 1986.

¹¹⁶ Ibid

¹¹⁷ Ibid

¹¹⁸ Ibid

¹¹⁹ Ibid

Of course, additional funding would be required for much of this care – not all could be done by the Theater Department and Physical Plant, each working within their specific limitations (be it budget, time, or skill-set). Second Stage requested this additional financial help in the Fall of 1985, through its WSA Budget Request for the 1985-1986 school year. Berlin and Handelman describe how the student body showed interest in their cause, stating that “when the Student Assembly threatened to cut our budget, 30 students showed up to support us at our appeals hearing.”¹²⁰ This certainly aided in securing financial backing from the WSA for the group, for, ultimately, “[t]he budget was not cut.”¹²¹

On January 23, 1986, in a sign of Second Stage / Theater Department solidarity (or, perhaps, simply similar interests and mutual benefit), Carr’s letter was followed by an appeal to the Board of Trustees, President and “Financial Planners” of Wesleyan University from Berlin and Handelman on behalf of Second Stage and the student theater community at large. While Professor Carr had made clear the importance of the ’92 to the Department, citing the disrepair and disregard that the space had seen for nearly 20 years, Second Stage’s passionate and practical plea made the request stronger. Explaining their Departmental positions along with Second Stage’s increased role in the ’92, Berlin and Handelman state:

As directors of the ’92 we are paid to work 6 hours each week in the building; as Second Stage staff we put in triple, supervising, advising, cleaning and improving the building. [...] There are 8 other students on the building staff who volunteer their time to work. Physical Plant has noticed our work; Art Pongrantz told us how glad he was that someone has finally taken full responsibility for the theater and at our request has had Physical Plant make

¹²⁰ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Budget and Finances Folder 1985-1986. Budget Request 1985-1986.

¹²¹ Ibid

much needed building improvements. [...] The '92 Theater is on College Row yet it is generally unnoticed by the University and until a year ago has been in horrible condition.¹²²

They take credit for the increased care that the '92 was beginning to receive, and call attention to Second Stage's, and indeed, the student body's dedication to the space. Offering funding as well, they state that they have reserved \$2,000 of their hard-fought \$10,000 budget for development of the physical space (half for a new sound system, the other half to go towards the potential lighting system). They are practical, though, stating that they "realize this is not much money"¹²³ while reminding them that it makes up "a full 20% of [their] budget going towards major, long-term capital improvement."¹²⁴ Calling the '92 "the student's theater, whether it be for Department or Second Stage shows,"¹²⁵ Berlin and Handelman explain that "[s]tudent interest in theater, and in maintaining our theater, has grown."¹²⁶ Second Stage would require "backing from the university in order to use this momentum"¹²⁷ – backing that they ultimately received.

While work began on plans for the '92's future, Second Stage continued in its dual role of caretaker and producer. Using its newfound voice and identity, it found itself in the midst of a campus-wide concern for an old, iconic building – the Eclectic Society House. Eclectic's house is of historical import – tours given by the Office of Admission never fail to name its architect, Henry Bacon (of Lincoln Memorial fame).

The house and the Society have rich histories; both have played a strong role on

¹²² Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Correspondence and Notes Folder Spring 1986. Letter to the Trustees, President, and Financial Planners of Wesleyan University. 23 January 1986.

¹²³ Ibid

¹²⁴ Ibid

¹²⁵ Ibid

¹²⁶ Ibid

¹²⁷ Ibid

campus. The Eclectic house had caused the Society to suffer financial hardship from the beginning. Only a few years after its completion, Eclectic found itself in debt due to operating expenses. By the mid-1970s, they were no longer able to afford to retain ownership of the house, and sold it to Wesleyan for a mere \$1.¹²⁸

Eclectic continued to exist as a residence hall for members and friends of Eclectic until 1986, when the University began considering using the building for administrative purposes. In response, Second Stage threw their support behind current Eclectic members and undergraduates; on January 29th of that year, they sent a letter to the Dean of the College, in addition to the Eclectic Alumni Association, both the Dean and the Director of Housing, as well as the Student Affairs Committee. Protesting the proposal to “force Eclectic to vacate its present location,”¹²⁹ Matthew Berlin represents the Second Stage perception that “Eclectic is a positive contributor to campus life.”¹³⁰ Describing the Eclectic’s ballroom as “a rehearsal hall and performance space,”¹³¹ Berlin argues that the house was, at that time, “one of the last student controlled spaces on campus willing and able to be used for theater”¹³² – an all-too convincing line of reasoning. It was impossible for Staff to know that, in less than a month, Second Stage would suddenly have an eviction of their own to worry about.

¹²⁸ Wesleyan University. Wesleyan Newsletter. “Eclectic House Celebrates 100 Years of Campus Residence.” April 2008.

<http://www.wesleyan.edu/newsletter/campus/2007/0607eclecticturns100.htm>.

¹²⁹ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Correspondence and Notes Folder Spring 1986. Letter in defense of Eclectic. 29 January 1986.

¹³⁰ Ibid

¹³¹ Ibid

¹³² Ibid

While these and other arguments were being presented in efforts to safeguard Eclectic's future, the '92 Theater had continued to become a very appealing location. It should really have been of no surprise when, on February 6, 1986 Professors Cheryl Cutler and Susan Foster sent a letter to President Colin Campbell stating that they "would like to propose that the Dance Program, including faculty and secretarial offices and studio space, be moved to the '92 Theater,"¹³³ gifting the Dance offices to the Theater faculty, and the Dance Studio as the '92 replacement – as the missing black box.

The Dance Program – soon to be Department – had good reason to seek the '92 Theater as its new home. For one thing, it would "expand the size"¹³⁴ of its "principal studio by 30%,"¹³⁵ while additionally giving "the geographical integrity that the Dance Program merits."¹³⁶ Though the Dance Program insisted that it "would like to emphasize the fact that our proposal is in no way related to the current request for a separation of Theater and Dance in to two departments,"¹³⁷ the move would certainly have assisted in the differentiation between them. However, as Foster and Cutler asserted, the move would be beneficial to the Dance Program, whether or not it became a department. As they put it "Anyone to whom we have mentioned it recently [...] has thought for a minute and then replied, 'It makes a lot of sense.'"¹³⁸ – which it certainly did.

¹³³ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Correspondence and Notes Spring 1986. Letter from Professor Cheryl Cutler and Susan Foster to President Colin Campbell. 6 February 1986.

¹³⁴ Ibid

¹³⁵ Ibid

¹³⁶ Ibid

¹³⁷ Ibid

¹³⁸ Ibid

The Dance Program, as part of the Theater and Dance Department, regularly utilized the '92 before the creation of the CFA. The '92's ability to be used "reverse house" – that is, "backwards," with the audience sitting with their backs to the proscenium stage, and the performance taking place at the rear of the house – lends it nicely to Dance productions. The Dance faculty was already comfortable in the space, and, now, with the planned improvements of the space, the potential for development towards their needs became very high. With renewed interest in the '92 Theater coming from the Theater Department *in conjunction with* Second Stage, Cutler and Foster knew that their proposition would need to address the future of Second Stage as well. They state:

We also propose that the Second Stage organization be moved to what is now Eclectic House. This building would be designed a special interest house, providing a center for students involved significantly in theater productions by placing a main, student run theater performance space, production shop and dormitory under one roof.¹³⁹

This suggestion must have been shocking to Second Stage Staff members. From the student's perspective, this move would have been socially disastrous. With a large portion of the theater community housed under one roof, the impossibility of preventing all individuals to be in perpetual "Hell Week" – as the last week of production before the first performance is called – is obvious. The noise levels of students working saws, drills and other equipment at all hours of the morning and night would have been unbearable to those not involved, if such a state of isolation would indeed be possible under such conditions. With an inability to escape from the theater, an entire house working on a production would have resulted in augmenting

¹³⁹ Ibid

the already present arguments that nearly always develop under the levels of tension that the last weeks of production consistently create.

In addition to its plans to oust Second Stage and the Theater Department from the '92 Theater, the Dance professors explained their reasoning, which, for Second Stage, amounted to a classic example of “adding insult to injury.” They state:

It necessarily scales down the activities of the Second Stage at the technical level to a size more manageable for Theater faculty who are called on to oversee, if only in the interests of technical safety, its production activities and brings these activities into proper focus as student run, student produced events. At the same time, the new location for Second Stage would perpetuate and enhance a supportive community for the student run theater. [...] It restores the old brownstone library to its original magnificence, making it a show-place for the campus. (A small budget would allow us to restore the original windows, refinish the floor, and paint the interior white).¹⁴⁰

Second Stage, in the height of its potential, having just demonstrated the “momentum”¹⁴¹ that the campus was experiencing in regards to student theater to both the WSA and the University President, was being questioned as to its abilities. Knowing their shortcomings thus far, knowing the much needed repairs that the '92 still required, Staff members could not have been sure that they would be able to single-handedly prevent a departmental takeover. Luckily, they wouldn't have to do so.

Naturally, Second Stage was much more vulnerable than the Theater Department – though loss of the '92 would have been a hardship for the Department, they could almost certainly be guaranteed a replacement, financial or physical, and would never be left homeless or property-less: they had the CFA. However, the

¹⁴⁰ Ibid

¹⁴¹ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Correspondence and Notes Folder Spring 1986. Letter to the Trustees, President, and Financial Planners of Wesleyan University. 23 January 1986.

Theater Department was just as upset about the proposed move, and certainly more shocked – at this time the “Theater Department” was still, officially, the “Department of Theater and Dance.” The Dance *Program*, still seeking recognition as a department in its own right, in its excitement over the idea, did not take the time to confer with then Department Chair, William “Bill” Ward.

In Bill Ward’s response to the proposal, he comes across as rational and practical – magnanimous in his understanding, knowledge and experience, while at the same time forcefully refuting all intentions of the Dance faculty to take control of the ’92 Theater. In his letter to President Campbell, he asserts:

It is unfortunate that this situation was not discussed within our joint department before it was taken further because many of the misconceptions and ignorances of needs should have been discussed rationally and without unnecessary haste. [...] This is not an acceptable proposal for several clear reasons. First and foremost, it should be well understood that the ’92 Theater is a vital and extremely heavily utilized part of the Theater’s educational operation. It is now more densely scheduled than it was before the Center was built. This building is not Second Stage as most unwittingly believe. [...] The Theater Department has had two theater facilities for over 20 years and of course the CFA was originally designed with two theaters. When the small experimental theater was cut from the Center due to cost considerations, the University readily understood our need for a second theater and promised the continuing use of the ’92 Theater for that purpose.¹⁴²

Bill Ward’s advocacy of both the Theater Department and Second Stage was steady in presentation and tone. By asserting the staying power and requirements of both groups, in addition to recalling the promise that entrusted the building to Theater, he created the basis for the argument against the move. He concludes:

Over my nearly 30 years at Wesleyan I often have been involved in advocating the needs of my department and programs, but I have never

¹⁴² Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Correspondence and Notes Folder Spring 1986. Letter to President Colin Campbell from Theater Department Chair William Ward. 14 February 1986.

advocated the taking of someone else's [sic] resources to their detriment for my gain. This to me is not what a University Community is about.¹⁴³

This "community" certainly included Second Stage, who had thus far been far removed from the dispute. Though Cutler and Foster had copied the Vice President for Academic Affairs, the Vice President for University Relations, and the Director of the CFA in addition to Professor Ward, they did not include Second Stage Staff members on their memorandum. Neither did the Theater Department with its response. It is perfectly understandable that academic and administrative decisions be discussed, first, within the groups concerned. However, one of those groups, though student-run, was Second Stage, and they had not, at least officially, been informed.

On February 28th, Second Stage added its own voice to the debate. It is unclear from the documents in the archive how long Staff members had been aware of the Dance Department's plans – however, based on the close relationship between Second Stage and the faculty of the Theater Department, it can be inferred that they were informed rather quickly. Just as the Theater Department and Second Stage had collaborated to secure funding and support for the new lighting system, they again joined forces to retain the theater. However, Second Stage was, understandably, more shaken by the proposal than the Theater Department. There seemed to be no justice in removing the student group from its "home." The students' frustrations, particularly at this time period, seem appropriate, considering their history with the space, their still fairly recent WSA fund appeal, their new accord with the Theater Department, as well as the friend and mentor they had found in Jack Carr. This doesn't even begin to account for the lost time and energy, not the least of which was

¹⁴³ Ibid

the preceding Winter Break, during which Dan Handelman and Matt Berlin returned to campus “before New Years to work on the building,”¹⁴⁴ a move which saw the “theater, shop, and chapel storage areas [...] cleaned and organized, a loft built, the tool cage revamped, lighting instruments rebuilt, the table saw cleaned, lumber racks sorted and dozens of tiny projects [...] completed.”¹⁴⁵

Staff’s letter to University President Colin Campbell was direct and concise. Matt Berlin, writing for the group again, describes Second Stage’s devotion to the ’92, and emphasizes the time, effort, and skill that its members bring to the building, stating: “[w]e take our job very seriously and do it very well.”¹⁴⁶ He continued rather bluntly, explaining that Stage found “Susan Foster and Cheryl Cutler’s proposal [...] particularly distressing for two reasons. They suggested that we do not properly maintain or use the ’92 Theater’s technical capabilities. This is untrue.”¹⁴⁷ More hurtful, perhaps, was the fact that Second Stage had been working with (and providing for) the Dance Department for an extended period of time:

Second Stage has always been supportive of the Dance Department. We go out of our way to take care of details like headsets, work lights, and the sound system. The lighting instruments, lamps, the sound system, tools, the window shutters, and other pieces of equipment and parts of the ’92s structure were bought and are maintained by Second Stage with volunteer labor and our WSA budget. We let the Dance Department use this equipment. This semester we moved a play ahead one month so that the dance theses could be performed at the date most convenient for the dance students. We put aside a weekend each year for a dance department benefit party, after which Second Stage absorbs the costs of washing and refinishing the floor.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Correspondence and Notes Folder Spring 1986. Letter from Second Stage to President Colin Campbell. 28 February 1986.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid

¹⁴⁶ Ibid

¹⁴⁷ Ibid

¹⁴⁸ Ibid

Second Stage was understandably upset by the proposal, given these services. Clearly dismissive and offended, Berlin does not even begin to explain the infeasibility of a move to the Eclectic house. One of his earlier statements within the letter stressed Second Stage's simultaneous dedication, frustration and vulnerability in this situation – “[w]e love the '92 and do not want to lose it.”¹⁴⁹

Ultimately, President Campbell would allay these fears. Campbell was in a singularly useful place to assess this situation accurately; entering the presidency in 1970, Campbell observed the construction of the CFA Theater, the Theater Department's move, Second Stage's formation and rise, the acquisition of the Eclectic house, the creation of the WSA as a replacement of the CBC, as well as the developments that led to the formation of the Dance Department. He “was known for his skill in bringing different groups together and for his ability to strategize effectively”¹⁵⁰ – both of which were certainly utilized during the struggle over use of the '92.

The combined histories of the CFA's lack of the planned black box theater and the Dance Department's failed takeover of the '92, places the Theater in a unique position today. Protected by the promises of Colin Campbell and the University, the '92 will almost certainly remain a theatrical building. Due to the extensive use of the '92 by both the Theater and Dance Departments, the '92 is indispensable to Wesleyan academics. As a result of continued investments in the Theater building, the prospect of a change to its physical structure and/or current function would be unthinkable

¹⁴⁹ Ibid

¹⁵⁰ Wesleyan University Web Page. Wesleyan's Thirteenth President – Colin Campbell. April 2008. http://www.wesleyan.edu/175/presrow/colin_campbell.htm.

today. And, thanks to the dual role played by Second Stage (with a joint WSA and Department affiliation), it seems that Staff is “safe” too.

With Second Stage’s double role as student group, funded by the WSA, and University and Department fixture, backed with funding and other resources from both groups, its identity seems certain to always be slightly confused. In their End of the Year Report for the 1986-1987 academic year, Staff offered a glimpse into the relationship between the organization and the Department in the year since their “final stand” together:

Problems still exist due to understaffing and the need for more paid positions. Cooperation between Second Stage and the department concerning use of the building was somewhat clarified this year and it is our sincere hope that a healthy atmosphere of cooperation between the two groups will continue.¹⁵¹

The fact that the “healthy atmosphere” is mentioned at all implies its slippage. Second Stage, strong again, had already begun to lessen its dependency on the Theater Department. The “clarification,” though professed, seems to be under more scrutiny, with each group pushing limits in order to get what it wants as each expands in scope and interest (and numbers).

The strongest evidence of the squabble can be seen in a letter from Staff to Professor of Theater Fritz deBoer, in the Fall of 1986. It came in response to a request from Professor deBoer that Second Stage look over the Department’s newest handout entitled “’92 Theater Guidelines,” a handbook of sorts that the Department intended to give to any Theater major working in the space. The relationship between Theater and Stage seems to be one of mutual respect, as the Theater Department

¹⁵¹ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Budget and Finances Folder 1986-1987. End of the Year Report 1986-1987.

chose here to solicit advice from the student group. Second Stage, however, found the document puzzling, and used the opportunity to work out the complex relationship between the two entities as they attempted to work together within the space. Second Stage enjoyed a close friendship with deBoer, who they called simply “Fritz.” Frank and candid as always, they seem to have felt comfortable putting difficult questions to Professor deBoer, and in mentioning issues that, at this time, would perhaps still seem raw. Second Stage paid close attention to the wording of the document, as evidenced by this discussion of name order, using it as a catalyst for further discussion of rights and place:

Here you list the Dance Department before us. In other places you list us before them. Are you trying to establish a hierarchy? If so what is it? Are you trying to purposely be obtuse for political reasons?¹⁵²

Ever political and ever wary, Second Stage continues in its search for identity, complicated by the Dance Department’s newly acquired independence and own search for a place and a clear identity.

More legitimate an issue, however, was the confusion over the contents of the ’92 and the role of Second Stage. Staff, it seems, felt that in conversations with the Department they had been given power and responsibilities that were not fully explained in deBoer’s new document. They argue that:

We felt here that the statement did not acknowledge that Second Stage has maintained, equipped and improved the ’92 Theater and that Second Stage continues (and will continue) to fill the de facto role of curators of the ’92 and correspondingly de facto supervisors of all activities there.¹⁵³

¹⁵² Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Correspondence and Notes Folder Fall 1986. Letter to Professor of Theater Fritz deBoer. 20 October 1986.

¹⁵³ Ibid

This was a bold statement from the group that would ultimately shape the way that they saw themselves in the space and in relation to all work that took place within it. Naturally, it was Second Stage's opinion that they should have a say in any matter that would include the use of instruments, tools, and other resources purchased through Second Stage (and therefore WSA) money:

We believe that, since we must supervise everyone in the '92, and since we own much of the equipment and maintain all of it, that we should have some jurisdiction over who operates it. We would like Second Stage and the Technical Director to decide, jointly, who may use the '92's equipment.¹⁵⁴

This belief continues to this day, and the ownership of many of the items within the '92 and the CFA could be hotly contested, if desired.

Today, for example, costumes bought through Second Stage automatically go to the CFA, as do oversized props and other items that Second Stage simply cannot store due to lack of space. Meanwhile, both Second Stage and the Theater Department have, for years, contributed to the large number of lighting instruments and other more expensive items over the years, at times even pooling funds, as in the case of the new lighting system. Meanwhile it is Second Stage who cares for most if not all of the contents of the '92 on a daily basis – yet, three of its members are paid by the Department to do specifically that. A divorce between Second Stage and the Theater Department would be very complicated and bitter – certainly, the Theater Department, would keep the “house.” But the items within it? Without a home, Second Stage would likely be forced to leave its belongings with the '92, or, somehow, “loan” them to the Theater Department in exchange for their storage.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid

In a moment of quirkiness mixed with genuine curiosity, Second Stage ventures the question: “You mention full-year scheduling. Does this mean that Second Stage can join the open field and request certain dates or will the department continue to tell us which dates are available to us?”¹⁵⁵ Even to a Second Stage still “feeling out” their new role with the Department, the answer to that must have been clear (it was).

¹⁵⁵ Ibid

**The Act of Remodeling:
The Renovation of the '92 and the
Foundations of the Modern Second Stage**

“But it's hard to know, coming into a place that isn't one's own, what is important and what isn't. What parts of this place are steeped in the most memories? But whose memories of what? And as a memory is changed when a building is renovated, what is removed? Or added? Will the changes become "memories yet to be" for someone else?”¹
Student Description of '92 Theater Renovations, Summer 2000

Second Stage's continued presence became more assured with the passing of each season; a “home” had finally been secured, and resources (including capital, inventory, and personnel) were increasing. The first steps towards this came in the Spring of 1988, when a familiar name returns to the Second Stage archive: Dan Handelman. Handelman “drove around the country between September 1986 and December 1987” until becoming “employed as Assistant Technical Director at Connecticut College.”² He writes of his interest in holding a “Student Theatre Group Convention”³ at some point in future. Ever the comic, Handelman explains the lack of movement on this front as being “[d]ue to the necessary hazards of life (I had to find a job).”⁴ However, his temporary solution, a first step towards this, was asking regional college groups to answer some questions in an effort to explain their form and function. This request, responded to by Rachel Henderson '85, has proven to be exceeding helpful in the understanding of Second Stage's past.

¹ Wesleyan University Page. “Wesleyan's '92 Theatre – A Celebration.” Summer 2000. <http://www.wesleyan.edu/av/92.html>. April 2008.

² Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Correspondence and Notes Folder Spring 1988. Letter from Daniel Handelman. 18 February 1988.

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid

On the question of membership, Henderson explains that “There is no “membership” in Second Stage. Everyone who is in any way involved in a Second Stage production should feel themselves a part of Second Stage,”⁵ going on to explain the role of the Second Stage *Staff* as entirely different, in its role as caretaker, producer, and overseer. As it would remain for much of its existence, Henderson asserts that “Staff is not elected; rather, the existing Staff asks new members to join.”⁶ Today, this is often referred to as “tapping.” Even with a Staff of fourteen, “about half techies and half actors or directors,” “[d]ecisions are come to by consensus and the authority of the Dept. employees is generally serendipitous, as these two students are often those who know the building best and have been working there the longest anyway”⁷ – all aspects of the organization that still hold true today. Not surprisingly, Henderson describes the weekly activities of Staff much the same way as they have been and continue to be described: “The Staff meets once a week. At these meetings general Second Stage business (and, all too often, ideology) is discussed, as well as meeting with the staffs of the shows we sponsor.”⁸ The response, in total, is four pages long – it is the best record of Second Stage operations and procedures from that time.

It is obvious that in the late '80s Second Stage was taking itself more seriously, while becoming more and more experienced as to the ways of the WSA, the Wesleyan administration, and the general movements of the campus at large. In

⁵ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Correspondence and Notes Folder Spring 1988. Response from Rachel Henderson.

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

its 1986-1987 report to the Theater Department, Staff shows itself taking on new responsibilities in thinking about the changing campus:

This year Wesleyan has seen the rise of many student theater organizations...Second Stage recognizes the need for these groups, but hopes for there to be more communication amongst them so that the community does not become splintered. It is our hope as the oldest and most experienced theater organization that we can coordinate an on-going forum of cooperation and sharing.⁹

Second Stage has only just begun to equate itself with long-term campus entities, such as *The Argus*. Having experienced a rapid increase in abilities, Stage finds itself in a position to become more effective, more efficient, and more useful. However, as always, a balance must be maintained.

In May of 1986, Roger Lee '89, a long-time student theater participant but never Staff member, wrote a letter to Second Stage reminding them of just this fact. His words should perhaps be immortalized somewhere in the office as a testament to his understanding of one of the extremes to which Second Stage was turning: "Efficiency and regulations are fine in their place, but in the end, a little more friendliness and concern go a lot further to the service of all our goals than any amount of suspicion and policing."¹⁰ Second Stage, from Lee's perspective, seems to be moving more towards cliquishness and brusque business-like operations, and further from the helpful, open group that it professed itself to be. Lee continues in his criticisms of Second Stage, but not without compliment; indeed, for him, the two necessarily go hand-in-hand:

⁹ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Budget and Finances Folder. 1986-1987. Annual Report.

¹⁰ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Correspondence and Notes Spring 1986. Letter from Roger Lee. 12 May 1986.

My only request is that in the future when problems occur instead of saying “No, there is no way that can be done.” say rather, “That’s a problem, let’s see if we can resolve it together.” I understand that you each have only 24 hours in a day but I ask that you constantly monitor the balance you are striking between efficiency and friendliness, because this is a crucial dichotomy. 2nd Stage is about 50 times more organized, friendly and generally well-run than my freshman year (days of Ron Cohen and VBJ Masterson). I applaud your efforts and hard work, but remind you not to rest on your laurels.¹¹

Lee’s association of Stage’s level of “efficiency” and “friendliness” with its leadership seems apt. The archival collection shows that it was the work of Cohen ’85 and Masterson ’85 that added to Stage’s general direction towards organization in every sense of the word.

Lee’s letter sheds light on yet another cyclical occurrence, beyond the pendulum swings of Staff from order to disorder. The issue at hand is the secrecy surrounding the issue of sponsorship. Second Stage, then as now, attempted to produce as many shows as possible each season. However, due to the shared space, only some shows were allowed to use the ’92. By now, lunchtime theater was a distant memory – for unclear reasons, the student body was, and remains, much more interested in putting on (and seeing) longer works than one-acts. Many shows were asked to share the space over one weekend. Many others were asked to secure their own location in an alternate space. Additionally, with the number of weekends in a semester as well as financial and personnel difficulties, some shows would ultimately not be sponsored. Some factors that would put a show in danger of not receiving funding or support from Second Stage included past history with specific directors and designers – the individuals who made up the production teams. This is always a difficult area for Staff – though the discussions of a specific student’s behavior is

¹¹ Ibid

important to the evaluation of the proposal, these discussions are largely based upon recollections from the current Staff members. They are, for the most part, not informed by former Staff members, by members of the theater community not on Staff, or, importantly, by the individuals themselves. Second Stage, charged to care for the '92 and funded by the student body, must ensure that the students with whom they are entrusting the space will care for it and its contents, and that the production that they sponsor will be responsible with monetary and other backing.

Lee's issue with Staff is one reiterated by many over the years. His experiences with Wesleyan theater seem to have, at least up to this point, been poor. He confesses that he "had some conflicts w/some (self-) Important People"¹² and that he feels that he has "been paying for it ever since." His request is simple and straightforward:

All I ask is that when my name next shows up in the Wesleyan Theatrical Tribunal's (one of the only judiciary systems where the defendant is never present and hearsay is considered sufficient evidence for conviction) docket, all these things be considered before judgment is passed.¹³

Lee is looking for a fair "trial." His rendering of Wesleyan theater, particularly of Second Stage, implies a self-involved and self-interested community that is quick to judge and slow to forgive. Understandably upset, Staff chose not to reply to this letter, at least in print.

However, in May of 1989, "[a]lmost exactly three years after the original letter was written,"¹⁴ Henderson makes a startling realization:

¹² Ibid

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Correspondence and Notes Folder Spring 1989. Letter from Rachel Henderson. 1 May 1989.

Roger – in the last three years, we have done our best to meet your suggestions, without realizing that they were yours, but coming to many of the same conclusions ourselves. As I have moved to the older generation of the organization and found myself more influential in the direction of Second Stage, I have attempted (and others have attempted) to strike the delicate balance of which you write.¹⁵

This was to be Second Stage’s first conscious decision to appear more friendly, open, and helpful while maintaining the power that came with the duties prescribed to the group both by the Theater Department and by the Staffers themselves.

Henderson gives an idea as to why she finally chose to reply at this time, stating that she, to, had “been a victim of your [Lee’s] ‘Tribunal’.”¹⁶ This experience, which she does not detail, may have resulted in her push towards a more caring theatrical environment. It also must have influenced her decision to reply to Lee. Her response is helpful and humble as well as defensive and critical. To Lee’s accusations, she puts forward the idea that Second Stage Staff’s “politics/power-games/whatever are only more visible than those of the population at large, no more developed.”¹⁷ Henderson asserts that “There is nobody in the Wesleyan Theatre Tribunal who is not us – you, me, any member of the community”¹⁸ and contends that “We are a group, our problems are problems of group dynamics.”¹⁹ She clarifies her position in her closing sentences: “please, let it be noted, I in no way refute that we are in a backstabbing, power-hungry community. All I’m saying is that it doesn’t have to be that way.”²⁰

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Ibid

As evidenced by the growing feelings of unease expressed by both Lee and Henderson concerning Second Stage practices, Staff entered an era of exclusivity and extreme organization in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Increased interest in the organization caused an expansion in membership numbers – between Fall 1984 and Spring 1985 alone, Staff doubled in size from a mere five members to a substantial ten, finally hitting an as yet unparalleled eighteen in the Fall of 1997. With increased interest and a larger membership came a demonstrated exclusivity that was especially noticeable in the late 1990s and early 2000s, specifically in regards to Staff membership. The group’s attempts at maintaining a manageable size, in combination with an increased number of applications, led to many rejected applications.

Staff concerned itself with creating an atmosphere of professionalism, holding the directors, actors, designers and other students that worked through and with them to very high standards. Issues concerning communication and transparency caused tense debates as Second Stage’s self-perception changed. Issues that had been previously simple to deal with became complicated as Staff (and the student body) grew. Policy began to be composed and debated on in the mid-1980s, while the handbook, originally a mere five pages, *including* Staff phone numbers, ballooned to nearly ninety by 1997.

Discussions about policy and operations were prominent in the 1990s – minutes from September 18, 1990 record a “long argument about autonomy from the department,”²¹ an issue common to all phases in Second Stage’s history, which at this point became an issue of great debate between Staff members. This time period was

²¹ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Administrative Documents Folder Fall 1990. “Minutes, September 18, 1990.”

marked by “lots of big scary talk,”²² as one such debate was described by a Staff member in the minutes of November 11, 1997. It was in 1996 that Staff first began to think about having “an official policy on admission.”²³ This is a great change from the '70s and '80s, when new Staff members, as explained by Rachel Henderson, were asked to join by being tapped by a member of the current Staff. New Staffers are “tapped” to this day. In response to the strong desire that Second Stage expand student participation in the theater community, the 1990s saw the emergence of the “Staff Interest Note” (or “Staff Application”). An attempt at attracting non-majors, the application was also part of an effort to prevent cliquishness, a natural occurrence at a time when members would select individuals that they knew for Staff.

The biggest problem with opening the application pool to all students, known to current Staff members or not, was determining their ability to work well within the group dynamic. Under the previous “system,” Staff members were acutely aware of whether or not a potential candidate had the skills and personality to be on Staff. Now, with individuals applying from outside of the social, academic and work circles that Staff members were familiar with, the ability to discern between candidates became fraught with problems and complexities. It was no longer the case that everyone knew the potential Staffers, and so not everyone was able to make informed decisions. Minutes show these discussions to have been dramatic ordeals; as one

²² Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Administrative Documents Folder Fall 1997. “Minutes, November 11, 1997.”

²³ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Administrative Documents Folder Fall 1996. “Minutes, September 23, 1996.”

Staffer groaned in the minutes from April 29th of that year: “Now we vote on new staff...this could take forever.”²⁴

It seems that many Second Stage debates took as long. The years 1996 and 1997 saw a new issue on Staff – students using their own money to fund the shows that they worked on, supplementing any Second Stage reimbursement requests that were refused. This issue, among others, caused Second Stage to look to their founding principles for guidance – and found that none had ever been written (within the minutes of February 3, 1997 is the remark: “check our charter = doesn’t exist”²⁵). Second Stage then brought the idea to the Department, asking if funding from an individual could be allowed to go towards a show. According to the minutes of February 10, 1997 the “Department [said] “its your group” [sic]”²⁶ – and so, with little guidance – and after much internal debate – members decided that the issue was out of Second Stage control. The minutes of the next week argue that “[t]here are no real rules. This is Wesleyan.”²⁷ While somewhat true, dropping the issue was essentially tabling it – the subject was doomed to cycle through group discussions again and again. Each time, the quandary of self-funding is ultimately determined to be uncontrollable, though problematic.

²⁴ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Administrative Documents Folder Spring 1996. “Minutes, April 29, 1996.”

²⁵ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Administrative Documents Folder Spring 1997. “Minutes, February 3, 1997.”

²⁶ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Administrative Documents Folder Spring 1997. “Minutes, February 10, 1997.”

²⁷ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Administrative Documents Folder Spring 1977. “Minutes, February 17, 1977.”

This newfound interest in establishing Second Stage policy is only one of many changes in Second Stage operations. The '90s also heralded an unprecedented level of organization in Second Stage operations that has remained unparalleled to this day. In the Fall of 1997, Second Stage Staff went as far as to attempt CPR certification for all members. Though the plans for this ultimately fell through, the idea behind it shows Second Stage Staff taking on more professional and responsible roles within the theater space. During the 1994-1995 academic year, Second Stage used its budget to purchase a “new computerized lightboard and remote focus unit”²⁸ that greatly added to the technological standards and design capabilities of the space, as well as the level of professionalism experienced by those who worked within it.

Second Stage also invested in beepers²⁹ – one would be given to the Stage Manager of the show, the other to the Staff member assigned to it. The idea was to facilitate communication between Stage and its sponsored productions. This also motivated Staff to make handouts for just about every aspect of theater – from tips for designers to strike checklists, Second Stage had a document to give in answer to just about any student’s question. The level of organization and drive necessary to allow Second Stage to accomplish these and other feats is significant. It is no wonder that the minutes from 1996 boast that “Second Stage [was] more organized than the

²⁸ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Budget and Finance 1994-1995. Annual Report 1994-1995.

²⁹ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection.

Administrative Documents Folder Fall 1997 “Minutes September 29, 1997.”

Theater Department,”³⁰ or that, less than a year later, the group would describe itself as “just a big exercise in administrative problem solving.”³¹

Second Stage’s increase in organization was accompanied by a desire for interaction with its past. In 1996, Staff members decided that they wanted “to do something with the old posters, such as hang them up. Fun tak was suggested. Also masking tape and pushpins.”³² This explains the state of some of the posters and other items in the collection, and was likely the precedent for the later Green Room décor. In November of that year, Staff decided to create a “newsletter to send to former staff members”³³ for the purposes of potential “donations,”³⁴ “networking,”³⁵ and “fun.”³⁶ No records of this idea coming into practice exist in the current archive. The Fall of 1998 was the 25th Anniversary Season of Second Stage. Staff celebrated at the end of the academic year with a festival in May of 1999, consisting of numerous panels and performances.

The 25th Anniversary Festival was the likely cause of much of the disturbance of Second Stage’s records. However, it also saw the first active attempt at chronicling Second Stage’s history. Staff also asked for alumni assistance in hanging a repertory plot, or “rep plot”. A rep plot is a carefully chosen configuration of

³⁰ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Administrative Documents Folder Spring 1996. “Minutes, February 26, 1996.”

³¹ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Administrative Documents Folder Fall 1997. “Minutes, September 29, 1997.”

³² Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Administrative Documents Folder Fall 1996. “Minutes, September 9, 1996.”

³³ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Administrative Documents Folder Fall 1996. “Minutes, November 25, 1996.”

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ Ibid

lighting instruments that is used by any group who needs lighting in a theater. More lights can sometimes be added to this plot for individual performances, but no light that has been hung as a part of the plot can be moved or removed. The idea behind this was to allow for more inexperienced designers to work on lighting through Second Stage, and was intended to lessen the amount of time spent hanging and taking down lighting instruments during Load-In and Strike.

As Second Stage moved towards an era of professionalism, Staff seemed to feel that others should acknowledge their efforts. In April of 1990, Second Stage asserted that the central issue in the conflict was that the Department did not “take [Stage’s] role seriously.”³⁷ It could be argued that the Staff of the 1990s took their roles *too* seriously – between beepers and handouts, their assertion of power over the students who endeavored to work through the organization was strongly felt. There existed a general feeling about the Theater Department among Staffers that the faculty had a sense of “animosity” over the idea of Staff members having “full rights over [their own] equipment.”³⁸ Second Stage’s territorialism, though not altogether unwarranted, could lead nowhere but to this hostility between the Staff and the Theater Department faculty.

The relationship between Second Stage and the Theater Department became tenuous, but no less beneficial, with time. With an increased number of non-major students joining Staff, the Department no longer knew all of Second Stage’s members as intimately as it had in the past. Minutes from 1990 record a conflict between Stage and a Theater student in which Staff members made clear “the tension that was

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Administrative Documents Folder Spring 1990. “Minutes, April 9, 1990.”

created by circumventing the need for [Second Stage's] auspices."³⁹ This assertion of power is based upon the "under our auspices"⁴⁰ clause that was added to Second Stage's Monday Meeting description during this period. The addition of this clause gave Second Stage Staff the vocabulary necessary to fully embrace the duties that they felt were theirs.

Yet, despite these clear instances of conflict, Stage continually turns to the faculty in times of need. In the case of the self-funding issue, the Department was seen as an alternative to Second Stage's lack of written documentation – Staff members turned to the faculty for guidance. Second Stage continues to enjoy this relationship with the Department– when large changes in policy are under discussion it is uncommon that the faculty is not consulted as well. During the 1994-1995 academic year, Second Stage approached the Department for funds for improvements to the electrical systems in the '92 Theater. In what could be seen as a sign of camaraderie, the Department agreed to support the upgrades. However, after what Staff asserted to be a verbal agreement with the faculty, Second Stage was charged the incurred fees for the repairs and additions – causing Staff to go over their allocated WSA budget. In their annual report to the Theater Department, Second Stage complains of this issue; the archive does not detail the faculty's response. Miscommunications such as these contributed to the growing feeling that the relationship between Staff and the Department needed clarification.

³⁹ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Administrative Documents Folder Spring 1990. "Minutes, April 9, 1990."

⁴⁰ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Administrative Documents Folder Fall 1994. Four Week Meeting Sheet.

In the annual report, Second Stage explains the balance that must be maintained between the two groups: “It is important to note, however, that the Theater Department and Second Stage are two separate entities; our policies and procedures reflect that we are student, and not department, funded.”⁴¹ This description seems to be more of a reminder to Staff than an explanation to the Department – it is an indication of the self-reliance and independence that Second Stage would strive for in the latter half of the decade.

Part of the push for this independence would come from an unexpected source. In 1997 there was a “[r]umor of a possible donation”⁴² – a rumor that proved true when Second Stage was approached about the creation of a grant for student theater. The “J. P. Adler Memorial Fund” was “established [...] in honor of J. Peter Adler ’90, who was killed in an automobile accident on May 30, 1995.”⁴³ J. P. Adler had been very active in the Wesleyan community, specifically in theater, during his time as an undergrad. Throughout the Fall of 1997, Staff attempted to decide what qualifications would determine J.P. Adler sponsorship. They also determined that, their status as a WSA funded group would not be jeopardized by receiving \$1,000 from an outside source each year. However, in doing so, they would lose \$1,000 from their WSA budget. Today, the J.P. Adler Memorial Fund is a source of pride to those directors who receive it. The “eligibility requirements” mandate that the sponsored show must be directed by a student who is not a Theater major, and that

⁴¹ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Budget and Finances Folder 1994-1995. Annual Report 1994-1995.

⁴² Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Administrative Documents Folder Spring 1997. “Minutes, January 20, 1997.”

⁴³ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Oversized Folder 2003 . “Second Stage Student Handbook.” Pg 17.

this production would be the first one directed by the student in the '92. This description is often shortened to “first-time director,” however, the student may have directed in alternate spaces prior to the production and remain eligible for the award. During Show Flow, Staff determines the recipient of the Fund.

This contribution is an important step in Second Stage's development, as it was the first time that Second Stage received funding from an outside source. An annual donation to Second Stage allows for a certain level of independence from its two main contributors: the WSA and the Theater Department (and University). The money from the Fund is directly given to and distributed by Second Stage. Due to the amount of money that is required by the group, the J. P. Adler Fund cannot allow for complete financial independence. However, it does give the group a sense of identity beyond its obligations and allegiances to both the WSA and the University – and it is this attribute that makes this donation so significant in the history of Second Stage. The J. P. Adler Memorial Fund supports the group's activities by conveying interest in and approval of its activities, while also expressing faith in the organization's staying power. This gift furthers recognition of Second Stage's contributions to the Wesleyan student body, confirming the fondness and dedication that students continually demonstrate for the activities of the organization.

The fact that the award cannot go to a Theater major, or to anyone who has directed in the '92 before, reinforces a perpetual Second Stage ideology – that of inclusion. The guidelines by which Stage chose to define the recipient of this award show the organization's commitment to supporting those who are, as yet, not highly involved in the Theater community. Furthermore, these eligibility requirements force

any future connotation of Second Stage to continue in this pursuit, simply as a result of these stipulations. The J. P. Adler Memorial Fund's conditions manage to somewhat codify an aspect of Second Stage policy – an act that would not have occurred without this motivation.

Nevertheless, as noted, Second Stage was (and is) still financially dependent upon the WSA. This is inherent to the nature of the organization – it is funded by the student body tax, and this money provides the entire community with free admission to all Second Stage productions. Without WSA backing, Second Stage would be forced to charge for tickets – this, as many Staffers have noted over the years, would undoubtedly cause a major upheaval to the manner in which Second Stage operates. The effects on the quantity and quality of productions would be extreme – during Show Flow, Staffers would necessarily have to take into consideration the appeal of the show in question. Projected attendance numbers would become vital to Second Stage's existence. Popular directors would be favored; unknown works would be shunned. A Second Stage season run in this manner would be nothing like those seen in 1973 or since.

Second Stage's financial dependence upon the WSA brings with it a responsibility to the community that, for the campus, is certainly desirable. The amount of support given to Staff requires Second Stage to allocate and monitor their funds responsibly. In 1998, Second Stage was held accountable by the WSA for repetitious purchases. Due to their sizeable budget, the WSA specifically targeted Stage to reduce their budgetary requests – Second Stage was granted a substantially lower budget than it had received in many years. Acting on behalf of the student

body, the WSA asked Second Stage to explain the replacement of items that it requested each year. Staff was hurt by the suggestion that they were careless in their management of the '92's inventory. The minutes of September 21 of that year suggest that the members of the WSA thought that Staff consisted of "irresponsible incompetents" who simply watched as "random thieves" appropriated items purchased with student money.

After the initial shock over the accusations, Second Stage Staff allowed that the WSA had a point and decided to "implement more frugal practices." The direct result of this was something Staff referred to as the "kick-your-ass rule"⁴⁴ – a "Wonderful New Policy [sic]"⁴⁵ that required all shows to be particularly careful about locking up the '92. The rule was harsh – shows were given one warning, after which all technical work would be halted and use of the equipment would be revoked. This policy would come to be known as the "Strike Policy"⁴⁶ – the word "Strike" being a reference to "striking out" (in the manner of baseball), rather than to the theatrical term. In recent years, Strikes have been given to shows for extreme violations of Second Stage regulations. The first offence is a warning with no penalty. After the third offence, production is halted, no matter the stage of completion. The second Strike has been a source of contention – it originated in 1998 as the loss of all "tech" abilities, and gradually became either this or a cut in

⁴⁴Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Administrative Documents Folder Fall 1998. "Minutes, October 8, 1998."

⁴⁵Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Administrative Documents Folder Fall 1998. "Minutes, September 21, 1998."

⁴⁶Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Oversized Folder 2003 . "Second Stage Student Handbook."

reimbursement. During the Spring of 2008, Staff decided that a new program needed to be established due to the lack of flexibility that the Strike System provided.

The Second Stage Staff of 1998 was very concerned about the effects of the new policy. They had no desire to shut down their productions. However, in the interest of implementing a system to deter theft, as well as to protect the '92 building itself and to encourage safety measures, Staff found itself "policing"⁴⁷ their shows. The minutes reflect this: Staff members develop a policy that during Strike members should act as overseers, explaining that "you're not working, you're directing work,"⁴⁸ suggesting that "it really makes a difference in speed."⁴⁹ The exclamation that "2nd Stage Staff members equal 10 normal men!"⁵⁰ should come as no surprise. Minutes from November of that year show the changing attitude of Staff. As one Staffer explained: "[o]ur job requires certain things which will lead people to see us as assholes."⁵¹ Others agreed and jokingly suggested that members should "trade off the responsibility."⁵²

These hostilities were doomed to implode as Second Stage became increasingly strict in its internal policies. At this time, Staff attempted to create the missing Second Stage charter by establishing pseudo-bylaws that governed the structure of Second Stage and the behavior of its Staff. One of the most intimidating of these was an exit policy established to prevent what Staffers called "burnout."

⁴⁷ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Correspondence and Notes Spring 1986. Letter from Roger Lee. 12 May 1986.

⁴⁸ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Administrative Documents Folder Fall 1998. "Minutes, October 12, 1998."

⁴⁹ Ibid

⁵⁰ Ibid

⁵¹ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Administrative Documents Folder Fall 1998. "Minutes, November 2, 1998."

⁵² Ibid

Second Stage members would be under a trial period for their first semesters on Staff, and older members would be part of a “tribunal”⁵³ of sorts that would judge the behaviors of other Staffers. If a member was not actively completing their duties, they could be asked to leave by other members. Other policies of the time period are not as harsh, but just as methodical: for example, new Staff members were forcibly divided into “groups” that would maintain certain areas of the theater, and were required to switch groups each semester. This particular policy had some merit – each Staff member gained experience and knowledge of all aspects of Second Stage operations and the physical building in which it is housed.

The decision to “[e]rr on the side of anal retention”⁵⁴ as suggested by Joshua Briggs ’99, would ultimately result in a change – this time for the better. By April of 1999, the “asshole issue”⁵⁵ had worsened to the extent that Second Stage Staff found itself asking “what can we do to be nicer?”⁵⁶ December of 1999 showed the development of new ideas about open work days and strikes – Staff invited anyone interested in learning to attend these events. On January 5, 1999 the minutes state that Second Stage had “started an archive”⁵⁷ – the probable results of which were certainly visible on the Second Stage archival collection as found. March of 1999

⁵³ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Correspondence and Notes Spring 1986. Letter from Roger Lee. 12 May 1986.

⁵⁴ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Administrative Documents Folder Fall 1998. “Minutes, September 21, 1998.”

⁵⁵ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Administrative Documents Folder Spring 1999. “Minutes, April 12, 1999.”

⁵⁶ Ibid

⁵⁷ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Administrative Documents Folder Spring 1999. “Minutes, January 5, 1999.”

shows Staff coming to the realization that members (and policies) should “critique systems, not people”⁵⁸ – and the idea of Staff Evaluations was dropped.

Though much of the organizational style of this time period has since been lost, a few of Second Stage’s structural and managerial policies from this time have endured. Some of these losses have been detrimental – such as the handouts – but much of the missing policy has led to a more amicable environment within the ’92. With so much activity during this time, a great number of the changes have remained in the manner of both the Staff and the organization as a whole. The general attitude of professionalism has lingered in the ideologies of many – but not all – Staffers, some coming to those ideas individually, others being indoctrinated by older members prior to graduation. More concretely, Second Stage has continued to meet at the same time – 4:30 on Monday afternoons – since September of 1990, when the decision to change from a 4:00 start time was made “because everybody [was] always late.”⁵⁹ The Strike System is another example of the effects that this particularly political generation had on Second Stage operations today.

With the onset of the 21st Century, the surge in popularity that Second Stage had enjoyed in the 1990s reached its pinnacle. Meanwhile, interest continued to develop from nearly every part of the University. Students were keen to participate and apply in unprecedented numbers. It was during the Spring 2000 season that Second Stage funded *In the Heights* – a production that has since made its way to

⁵⁸ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Administrative Documents Folder Spring 1999. “Minutes, March 24, 1999.”

⁵⁹ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Administrative Documents Folder Fall 1990. “Minutes, September 18, 1990.”

Broadway.⁶⁰ The musical, written by Lin-Manuel Miranda '02, one-time member of Second Stage Staff, has been well received.⁶¹ This production is the single strongest testimony to the creativity that Second Stage encourages through its existence and enables through its resources. Fittingly, during this moment of particular enthusiasm and inspiration the University decided to invest substantial amount of money into the '92 Theater and its surrounding buildings - the Administration had turned its thoughts to renovations.

“Restrooms are located everywhere but here,”⁶² quips many of the programs of productions that went up in the '92 Theater in the mid-1980s. Programs from the years leading up to the renovation gave directions to the nearby Olin Library, Judd Hall, and the now defunct Davenport Campus Center (among other locations) for the use of such vital facilities. In the Spring of 1986, Second Stage included this need in a letter to Physical Plant. Under a sub-section of “'92 Theater Repairs”⁶³ called “Dreams,”⁶⁴ Second Stage suggests something much like what would ultimately occur throughout 2001 and 2002 – “Could we, and we know were dreaming here: lower the shop floor, dig out from the basement to increase storage or work space, and find a place (perhaps underground on the east side) for audience toilets[?]”⁶⁵ The successors of the Second Stage Staff members who had this dream were not so keen

⁶⁰ Low, David. Wesleyan Magazine Web Page. *Scaling the Heights*. http://www.wesleyan.edu/cgi-bin/cdf_manager/template_renderer.cgi?item=53211. April 2008.

⁶¹ Roth on Wesleyan. *From Wesleyan to Broadway*.y March 12, 2008.

<http://roth.blogs.wesleyan.edu/2008/03/12/from-wesleyan-to-broadway/>. April 2008.

⁶² Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Production Folder Spring 1985.

⁶³ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Correspondence and Notes Spring 1986. Letter to Physical Plant. 18th March 1986.

⁶⁴ Ibid

⁶⁵ Ibid

on the idea, stating in the minutes of Spring 1999 that Staff should “stop efforts to add restrooms to the ’92”⁶⁶ for fear that “people will want to come and take our space.”⁶⁷

However, plans continued. Casey Davison ’02, served on the “Chapel/’92 Theater Working Committee” with Jack Carr and other faculty and staff members who made use of these facilities. Again, Carr would play a crucial role in assuring Second Stage’s involvement in the process. In a Spring 2000 article from *The Argus*, former ML Mary Winn Heider ’00 explained that “from the beginning there have been numerous efforts to include [Staff]”⁶⁸ adding that “Jack deserves so much credit for making sure Second Stage stayed involved.”⁶⁹ This involvement was mostly provided through Davison’s contact with both the planning committee and Staff, serving as a liaison between the two. It was Davison who would bring Second Stage’s input into the discussions about renovating the space.

These renovations were “part of a complex, multimillion-dollar project to modernize [...] two emblems of the university’s history”⁷⁰ – namely, the ’92 Theater and the Memorial Chapel. Peter Patton, University Vice President and Secretary, stated that the ’92 Theater/Memorial Chapel renovation would ultimately “[set] the

⁶⁶ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Administrative Documents Folder Spring 1999. “Minutes, Spring 1999.”

⁶⁷ Ibid

⁶⁸ Schwartz, John. The Wesleyan Argus Online. “’92 Theatre Renovations will utilize large donations.” May 9, 2000. <http://www.wesleyan.edu/argus/may900/n4.html>. April 2008.

⁶⁹ Ibid

⁷⁰ Vollmann, Sarah. Wesleyan Argus Online. “Building on history in the ’92 Theater and Memorial Chapel.” http://www.wesleyan.edu/argus/archives/aa_archive_aug302001/dateyear/f5.html. April 2008.

tone for the construction of needed improvements throughout the Campus”⁷¹ – lending even more significance to this much-needed work. The project would also include a so-called “Link”⁷² building (the Zelnick Pavilion), that would provide both buildings with two necessary amenities: restrooms and handicap access. Both Second Stage (through Davison) and the Theater Department weighed in heavily on the decisions involving lavatories:

Finally, the group asked that as many toilets as possible be provided in order to eliminate lines and the resulting delays at intermissions. The building code should not necessarily be taken as the limit on the number of fixtures to be provided.⁷³

The restrooms were placed underground, in what turned out to be not all that dissimilar to the proposed location suggested by Second Stage in 1986.⁷⁴

The financial support for the project came from many sources, but it is the names of the two main supporters that grace the '92's physical structure. The Ring Family Stage is named after siblings Justin and Chessa Ring (class of '98 and '02, respectively) and their parents, George and Dee Ring, who donated \$1.3 million towards the renovations. The University also “received a gift of \$2.5 million from the Robert and Margaret Patricelli Foundation”⁷⁵ – the source of the *Patricelli* in “Patricelli '92 Theater.” *The Argus* reported that “Robert Patricelli said that his

⁷¹ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Correspondence and Notes Folder Spring 2001. “Memorial Chapel – '92 Theater Executive Committee Meeting Minutes, 4 May 2001.”

⁷² Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Administrative Documents Folder Spring 2000. “Minutes of the Chapel/'92 Theater Working Committees Project Review Meeting, 13, June 2000.”

⁷³ Ibid

⁷⁴ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Correspondence and Notes Spring 1986. Letter to Physical Plant. 18th March 1986.

⁷⁵ Schwartz, John. Wesleyan Argus Online. “'92 Theatre renovations will utilize large donations.” May 9, 2000. <http://www.wesleyan.edu/argus/may900/n4.html>. April 2008.

donation to the '92 Theater [was] a memorial to his father, Leonard Patricelli '29"⁷⁶ (a total of eight members of the Patricelli family have graduated from Wesleyan). Prior to this effort, made possible by these and other gifts, "the building had been pretty much abandoned by the University,"⁷⁷ according to Davison. This sudden interest in the theater on College Row was long overdue, and much welcomed.

During the months where the '92 Theater was entirely unusable, Second Stage found itself running an entirely alternate space based season. When *The Argus* ran an article under the title "'92 Theater changes inconvenient"⁷⁸ it predicted that the "closing of the '92 Theater next year is going to create chaos within the theater community. But it also may inspire some innovative ideas."⁷⁹ By far, the largest problem Second Stage faced was storage – with the building being effectively gutted, Staff needed to move its ever-expanding collection of Props and other equipment elsewhere.

In the Spring of 2000, Second Stage preformed an extensive inventory of all of its possessions, from power tools to hair gel.⁸⁰ In the end, the time without the '92 did not hamper the creativity of Wesleyan students. Years before the renovations began Dane Berry '01, who had directed a show in the Freeman Athletic Center in 1998, expressed a preference for alternate spaces saying that "by taking theatre out of the theater it forces a reexamination of it as an art form. It forces viewers to deal with

⁷⁶ Ibid

⁷⁷ Sisson, Alana. Wesleyan Argus Online. "'92 Theatre changes are inconvenient." http://www.wesleyan.edu/argus/archives/aa_archive_feb012002/dateyear/a4.html. April 2008.

⁷⁸ Ibid

⁷⁹ Ibid

⁸⁰ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Administrative Documents Folder Spring 2000. "Second Stage / '92 Theater Inventory of Properties, Compiled April 2000 for the Wesleyan Student Assembly."

situations they're not used to.”⁸¹ Whether the idea of a performance happening in a non-traditional performance space appealed to many students or not, there was little choice for the hundreds of students who worked with Second Stage that year. At the end of the experience, it seemed that not everyone subscribed to Berry’s idea of “never using the ’92,”⁸² as performers and audience members alike flocked into the vastly improved building.

While discussing the renovations, *The Argus* quoted Professor Carr as saying “The ’92 has got to be the busiest theater I’ve ever seen [...] There’s actually no more room for growth. We have eight events going up there this semester and that’s just outrageous; but in a good sense.”⁸³ The busy nature of the ’92 has been a direct result of the efforts of both the Theater and Dance Departments in tandem with Second Stage, and this schedule has all but decreased with time.

The ’92 Theater has proven itself to be as adaptable as the organization that inhabits it. Between its various upgrades and renovations over the years, and its “experimental theater” design, the physical space has been put to a variety of uses over the decades. So long as the student body has an interest in and a desire for creative productions, Second Stage will always exist – and, so long as that is true, the ’92 Theater will continue to be “the soul of Second Stage.”⁸⁴

⁸¹ Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Second Stage Archival Collection. Clippings Folder Fall 1998. “Performing on the Margin.” *The Argus*.

⁸² Ibid

⁸³ Burson, Dan. The Wesleyan Argus Online. “History of ’92 Opens Dramatic New Doors.” September 25, 1998. <http://www.wesleyan.edu/argus/sept25/a3.html>. April 2008.

⁸⁴ Ibid

“The first issue I’d like to address is that of writing things down. Things people have been wanting to write down recently include:

- 1) minutes from meetings (a la Matt Berlin)*
- 2) a constitution (a manifesto, says Jake)*
- 3) a statement of our relationship to the department*
- 4) stuff for people to figure out what’s going on.*

Now, I have been heard saying degrading things about minutes and constitutions and statements, and I admit that I still feel these things to be of dubious value, BUT ... I have nothing against writing things down. I love to write things down. I like it even more if other people read them. I think it would be wonderful if we all wrote things down and saved them in the minutes notebook. It’ll be terrific for archives, information, etc.

HOWEVER, anything formal that we try to compose towards some end (like a constitution, manifesto, statement, etc) is just silly. We write it down, or we argue about it and try to write it down, and then it sits there. We perhaps resolve some questions we have (about our view of 2nd Stage’s relationship to the department or whatever), but we can’t do anything once we decide. I think it is much more important to write down the questions than the answers to them.”

*Susan Sterne’s personal reflections on Second Stage
Second Stage Meeting Minutes, March 26, 1985*

Young, Friendly and Attractive Since 1973 Second Stage's Continued Existence as a Flexible Entity

“The flexibility of the space mirrors the flexible goals of the second stage [sic] organization and is ideally suited for experimentation and learning from mistakes (provided they aren't fatal ones).”¹
The Argus September 25, 1998

“Amoebic.” “Flexible.” These are the kinds of words that are used to describe Second Stage again and again – twenty-five years later they were still applicable. Thirty-five years later, Second Stage continues to be adaptable and accommodating in its way. The only charter Second Stage has is this changeability, this lack of identity. That is partially what has kept it going all these years, and what will see it through the foreseeable future. Whether Second Stage would have survived if it had been more specific in its ideals is unknown. However, it would not have been nearly so interesting if it had succeeded in doing so. It is this “amoebic” nature of the organization that makes it unique today.

With each passing year, Second Stage becomes more deeply imbedded in Wesleyan's identity and history. Tours from the Admission's Office always stop at the '92 Theater, and it is rare that there is not at least one interested pre-frosh in the crowd, if not more. Second Stage's budget from the WSA, along with participation from the Wesleyan community at large, increases nearly every year. The Second Stage Staff, in cooperation with the Liaisons, provide an invaluable service to the Theater Department with their work involving the maintenance and use of the '92 during the academic year.

¹ Wesleyan University Web Page. The Wesleyan Argus. Dan Burson “History of '92 Opens Dramatic New Doors,” April 2008. <http://www.wesleyan.edu/argus/sept25/a3.html>. 25 September 1998.

The balancing act that Second Stage must continually perform between the Theater Department and the student body is aided by the protection, care, and interest that it receives from both parties. It provides theater majors with the unique experience of directing their own shows long before they would be offered the opportunity if they stuck strictly to Department-sponsored coursework. At the same time, it offers opportunities that might not exist to students who, despite a real interest in theater, opt not to major. In this way, the organization serves both the Theater Department and the student body at large; however, it is to the students and to the physical space of the '92 Theater that Second Stage truly owes its allegiance.

Second Stage's relationship with the Theater Department, though largely undefined and, at times, strained, is a mutually beneficial one. The Theater Department generously gives of its time, energy and resources, and is the direct recipient of the promise to retain the '92 as a theater. The Department affects all students who work through Second Stage – major or not, many students who are involved in theater at Wesleyan take a theater-related course at some point in their time here. Those who don't are indirectly affected by the teachings within that department through the students who have studied under these professors. Additionally, in attending the performances that grace the CFA stage – whether produced by visiting artists, faculty members, students, or some combination thereof – the Wesleyan theater community absorbs the styles, interests and lessons of these productions and adds them to the collective memory of the campus. Over time, the trends, which begin within the Department, filter down through the campus.

The student body's interest in not just performing in and designing for these productions, but attending them as well, is what keeps Second Stage running. The students who come up with these productions lend their creativity and passion to the space, and to the history of both Second Stage and Wesleyan. "For hundreds of students, the '92 has represented the ideal opportunity to learn and participate in theater"² – and it will continue to represent this ideal for its future inhabitants. To date, Second Stage has put on over 600 productions, involving countless members of the student body, witnessed by countless more. A few hundred people in the world can, with accuracy, refer to the '92 as one of their homes – though many of them might not have ever known each other. In a statement to *The Argus* in its September 25, 1998 issue, Joshua Briggs '99 catches this idea perfectly: "I know that when I leave Wes, the most important place for me will be this building. [...] And I'm by no means unique in that."³

It is clear: just as it is certain that the '92 will remain a theater for the foreseeable future and beyond, so shall Second Stage remain its ever-loyal resident. So long as the student body remains creative, dedicated and passionate, there will be a need for Second Stage. All who have left their mark on Second Stage – faculty, staff, or student – have done so through their dedication and love for the space and the cause, but mostly for their love of theater. Those who have loved the '92 have left an enduring mark upon it, though all trace of their existence may have been erased by renovations, paint jobs, and the lack of institutional memory. As Joshua Briggs noted:

² Ibid

³ Ibid

It just makes sense that there should be ghosts in the '92 [...] Some of the most inspirational work I've ever seen happens in here, because people are doing it for the love. With hundreds of people loving over the years, it has to create ghosts, and that can make you feel kind of edgy. But its also feels good, because you can think about all the people who have been here, and know that there will be more to come.⁴

To these future members, this work is most important. Each generation of Staffers – really, each connotation – will run the '92 and Wesleyan student theater in a slightly different way. And, thankfully, this is fine – without a true mission statement, Second Stage can continually reinvent itself to match the needs of the modern student.

The year 2004 saw the establishment of Second Stage's "motto": "Young, Friendly and Attractive Since 1973." This catch-phrase was part of an attempt at improving relations between Second Stage and the Wesleyan community by then ML, Liz Thaler⁵. Although it was only intended as a joke, the phrase is much more poignant than Staff themselves may have ever considered. This text, like the J. P. Adler Fund's stipulations, has managed to pass down a bit of Second Stage ideology simply by being *written*. The word "young" can be seen both as a reminder and an admission of inexperience, as well as an indicator of innovation. The word "friendly" serves as an instruction to current Staff members, while the word "attractive" recalls the humor that has seemingly always haunted the '92 Theater. Together, they remind Staffers of the enduring ideals that the documents within the Second Stage archival collection demonstrate. The part of the phrase that is easily dismissed is "Since

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Personal electronic files of Jacqueline Chapman. Elizabeth Thaler to Zachary Bruner, March 25, 2008.

1973.” However, it is this portion that serves as a reminder of the legacy of Second Stage’s history; it is this phrase that will keep Second Stage mindful of its past.

Today’s Staff has only recently become aware of its history as documents have been slowly unearthed from the discord of the Second Stage office. Their ignorance of Second Stage’s inception and development is understandable – with no Staff member remaining long enough to absorb the entirety of Second Stage’s history, combined with the absent files from 1973-1994, the rest of which were in a discouraging state of disarray, there was very little accessibility to these documents. Additionally, many Staff members of recent years had no knowledge of the existence of the back records (neither those in the office nor those in SC&A). The fact that over 20 years of information had been transferred for safekeeping had been entirely forgotten.

The lack of knowledge of Second Stage’s more recent past is more troubling and harder to understand. With the overlap between “generations” – as Staff is never wholly replaced – it should be that both history and culture linger through the influence of older members. This transfer of ideology and practice is evident throughout the history of Second Stage – through the more obvious connections between enduring Staff positions, as well as the continuity in basic philosophies (such as an interest in funding non-theater events, and an insistence on separation from the Theater Department). However, the recurring ideas presented in the Second Stage archival collection prove that this transfer has not been as perfect as Staff members, then and now, may have thought. Staff members today, confronted with handouts

and handbooks from the late 1990s and early 2000s are astonished by the ideas that they contain, and what they imply.

Second Stage can now benefit from a recognition of its cyclical nature, and put a stronger effort into the passing down of ideas – even if these ideas are ultimately changed or otherwise dismissed by later generations. One of the enduring ideologies that Second Stage *has* managed to pass on, albeit indirectly, is that of its changing nature. This characteristic should never be compromised by exclusive reliance on the past and “tradition.” However, Second Stage’s history is so varied that it is impossible to “stay in line” with its essential characteristics and policies – for there are none. Second Stage’s function is heavily dependent on the interests and designs of the students who comprise its membership, as well as the expressed needs of the student body at large. Yet, it is important that each connotation of the Second Stage Staff preserve their unique approach to the organization. This is partially for purposes of historical research, partially for the abstract notion of “posterity,” and partially for Staff’s own edification. It is through preservation, through the writing down of the mundane and not-so-mundane activities of daily existence, that future generations will be able to better understand the former.

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