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BEYOND PERFORMANCE:
PORTRAYING A GAY CHARACTER TRUTHFULLY AND EFFECTIVELY

by

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B.A. Transylvania University, 2007

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Fine Arts
in the Department of Theatre
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Major Professor: Kate Ingram

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ABSTRACT

Queer culture is finding an ever-increasing voice in the arts. Plays like *The Laramie Project*, *Rent*, and *Angels in America* have contributed to making queer identity a very present voice in popular culture. In this thesis, I investigate the excitement and complexity of a straight actor becoming a gay character on stage. Using my interpretation of “Jack” in Debbie Lamedman’s new play, *Triangle Logic*, as a case study, I catalogue a three-month journey towards the effective embrace of truthfulness on stage. I expand the idea that actors must not layer on possibly offensive stereotypes to convey sexuality, but, instead, focus on telling the story through honest character relationships.

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INTRODUCTION

“The theatre is really the only public forum a gay writer has”

Taken from John M. Clum’s quoting of Lanford Wilson in his introduction to *Still Acting Gay*, this quotation struck me as both somber, in regards to the limited number of outlets available to gay writers, and energizing as an actor knowing that I am connected to such a powerful medium. It seems if live theatre was not the first forum for gay voices, it certainly stands as one of the most plentiful and supportive we have today.

While I do not call myself gay or align myself with queer identity, I do unquestionably support, defend, and wish to foster queer culture—especially its strong foundation in theatre. Being able to use my craft as a performer to amplify an often-muted voice invigorates me. But, at the same time, what is my role (and how far does it stretch) as a *heterosexual* actor in this theatre construct?

In this thesis, I explore the possible tensions in my portrayal of an openly gay character in *Triangle Logic*, a new work by playwright Debbie Lamedman. Is the actor’s (as opposed to the character’s) sexuality important and/or does it influence the production? Does it become a homophobic or heterosexist exercise for a straight man to play a gay character? Is it important? And, paramount to these theoretical questions, given the nature of my field, how can an actor play a character “other” than himself effectively and inoffensively?

Through this creative process (from being awarded the role through to the final draft of the thesis), I realized that I do not have the answers to all of these questions. And this thesis does not attempt to add to the philosophical conversation in the arena of Performance Theory. Rather,

the ideas to follow promote the process of creativity. They amplify the normally introspective process of character development.

I begin the thesis with a conversation on performance and some of the nuances and challenges associated with performing. I next include an in-depth, and purposefully unedited performance journal—intended to highlight an intimate struggle with my character creation. It is active, honest, thorough, practical, and spans the length of the creative process. The journal ends with a few entries written after my thesis defense with response to ideas thrown around in the defense discussion. Thirdly, I provide my functional character analysis of “Jack.” Theoretical questions and ponderings have their place in the theatrical process, but the inclusion of this analysis, I hope, emphasizes my conventional approach to the craft as well. Finally, my conclusion attempts to marry my theoretical findings with the practical information I learned from the artistic team and the audience responses to the work itself.

The document is intended for actors. I hope to add to the theatrical dialogue by providing an honest voice of an actor in performance; an actor fundamentally different from the character he played. It is my hope that after reading this thesis, future actors will avoid the worries and preconceptions that bogged down my creative process, and focus instead on connecting honestly with their fellow actors. Obviously, my journey would not have been the same without continually asking, “What does it mean to ‘play gay’?” But, hopefully, after investigating my search for that answer, future actors will see there is no answer, and, indeed, much more exciting questions can guide their process. (I would argue there is no way to *play* any type of person. By painting with such broad brush strokes the actor loses the sense of the character’s individuality, and comes dangerously close to offensive stereotyping.)

So who am I? As I mentioned above, I find it necessary and important to situate myself as a white, middleclass, straight, male (I know, I might as well be from Kansas right? Actually, it's Kentucky.) I understand I cannot speak *for* the queer community, nor can I fully engage with the idea of being an objectified other in the eyes of our right-leaning America. I do, however, wish to speak *with* them and support their voices. I am not a queer theory scholar nor do I fully comprehend popular gay culture. I am an actor. I want to discover an honest, realistic, relatable character and bring him to life on stage.

I used *Triangle Logic* as my forum and outlet—the showcase of my findings. It has been workshopped across the country for the last decade, and the world premiere was at the University of Central Florida in the Winter of 2009—for all intents and purposes a new work. But where did it come from? I begin my theoretical journey with an exploration of gay theatre (primarily American) to get a stronger sense of the world in which this play, as a theatrical text, is situated.

History

The majority of my historical research comes from two main sources: *Still Acting Gay: Male Homosexuality in Modern Drama* by John M. Clum, and *Out on Stage: Lesbian and Gay Theatre in the Twentieth Century* by Alan Sinfield. I first found these texts while trying to research gay performance theory and found historiographies instead. Sinfield tends to incorporate queer readings of theatrical texts into his historical timeline while Clum's theoretical incorporation of reviews and other primary sources creates a detailed and rich reading experience.

With those at my side, I have found a few phases of queer drama in this country worth noting in a conversation about *Triangle Logic*. As with every timeline, where one era ends and the next begins is anyone's guess, and tenants of one era can be found in most of the others.

Briefly, in the early part of the 20th century, some queer writers found the need to disguise sexually dissident themes. The desire for storytelling is there, but a receptive audience is not. The mid-to later part of the century moves towards queer theatre for primarily queer audiences—the Stonewall Riots provided a focal point for identification and representation. When HIV and AIDS affected a comparatively large number of gay Americans in the 80's, queer theatre bled into more of the mainstream popular culture. And that integration has continued ever since. Our postmodern sense of everyone getting a voice has allowed for the prevalence and popularity (if not commercial exploitation) of gay-themed culture to reach its current zenith.

So, where can we begin a deeper understanding of the gay voice in this country? “Queerness was most at home at the edges of society—waterfronts, boarding houses, red-light districts... all of these constituted places freed from the bonds of family and community:” Sinfield quoting John D’Emilio and Estell B. Freedman in their *Intimate Matters* (50). What I assume they mean by “family and community” are the shackles and prejudices associated with the mostly conservative (certainly on social issues) American public at the beginning of the 1900's. Greenwich Village and Harlem became two of the underground focal centers in our cultural capital. When your voice isn't heard, you start speaking further and further away from the middle. Little clubs and hole-in-the-wall shops in both London and the outskirts of NYC became the new theatres.

Private universities also allowed more flexibility in their acceptance of theatre practices. Edna St. Vincent Millay's *The Lamp and the Bell* (1921) was performed at Vassar College, at the time when it was an all women's institution, and the performance was cast from the alumni. A story of two women in love played by, and for, some of the most forward thinking women in the country.

America's little theatres such as The Provincetown Players and the Washington Square players also became the pedestal for art and ideas that were possibly too controversial for the larger playhouses. For example, Provincetown's last play, *Winter Bound* (1929) by Thomas H. Dickinson, is about "two women, one 'masculine' and one 'feminine', who withdraw together to a Connecticut farmhouse, only to find a local male who makes the relationship into a triangular struggle" (Sinfield 57). This description mirrors that of *Triangle Logic* too closely to ignore. As far back as 80 years ago, one can find an interwoven love story between a man and two women. *Triangle Logic*, with one woman and two men, increases the sexual tension with the addition of a sexual relationship between the two men in the one woman's life.

Playwrights such as Noel Coward and Tennessee Williams entertain and surprise audiences between The Wars, and their style allows it to become a sort of readers theatre: you see what you want to see (Clum 87). Clum uses Coward's *Design for Living* as an example of the multiple meanings in their plays. The two male protagonists never openly assert their love for each other, and their "relationship" could be read simply as close friends. However, in an attempt to rid the house of unwanted guests, the masculine pair successfully engages in profane camp spectacle. The audience finds humor in the guests' reaction to the obscenity on stage and do not realize that in laughing at the "guests" they are laughing at the dramatic recreation of themselves.

The guests (incarnations of the audience on stage) are horrified, but the actual audience is entertained. They watch the events through the filter of a play, and feel unthreatened enough to laugh.

Another interesting note regarding Clum's thoughts on this piece is that we as audience members might actually find it safer to have a bisexual protagonist:

Coward, like Harold Pinter and Joe Orton, removed the danger of homosexual relationship by making his characters bisexual. In doing so, he dramatized the instability of sexual desire. Homosexual desire is there for those who care to see it, neither asserted nor problematized... Coward does not in his plays deny homosexual desire or love, but he does deny exclusive homosexuality as a social identity. (87)

I mention this because Claire, *Triangle Logic's* main female character is safely situated as a bisexual, to use these terms. The audience still can safely hold on to the idea that she is partly straight.

To use a more American example, Tennessee Williams also seems to obscure the homosexual themes in his plays. Modern readings of both *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *The Glass Menagerie* and, possibly more obvious, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, have found links between their main male characters and homosexuality. The theatre timeline I have discussed so far has not made it to the point where the queer subject can be that obvious, but the audience can find it if they are looking and want to. [The film version of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* removes most of the homosexual tension and changes the ending to appease more conservative film producers.]

Progressing through the rest of the century one sees a movement towards acceptance of sexual identity and removal of the façade once needed to mask deeper questions. Plays written

by gay playwrights, about gay themes, for gay audiences, were becoming possible. While not always in the heart of Broadway, a number of off-Broadway houses provided the stage needed.

No conversation about gay theatre, and gay culture in general, can ignore AIDS and its affects. What started mysteriously killing gay men in the early 1980s was not identified until 1984 (Sinfield 314). And with the death of Rock Hudson and subsequently, Ronald Reagan's publicity of the "gay disease", it could not be avoided, and a new homophobic energy emerged. "HIV and AIDS reopened the whole question of the legitimacy of gayness: it still required justification, it still hurt (314)". It seemed like a major step back in what could have become the beginning of mainstream acceptance of queer culture.

This political shift brought a re-envisioning of absurdism. What the threat of nuclear holocaust was for Becket and Ionesco, AIDS was for many gay writers in the late 20th century. David Greenspan's *Jack* (1987), Harry Kondoleon's *Zero Positive* (1987), and Robert Chesley's (*Wild*) *Person, Tense (Dog)* are examples of employing Pinteresque or Becket-like dramatic handlings (316). The main character, or the threat and climax in the play, become non-human; it is unanswerable and lonely. Alan Sinfield provides a great example with Paul Sellig's *Terminal Bar* (1983): "...the last three people in New York. The radio is broadcasting the symptoms of HIV and groups of people all over the country are dying; all the mirrors have been broken because people can't bare to see the signs of their sickness" (315). AIDS is real and its threat is on par with the apocalypse.

Obviously, Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* (1991) could be the most popularly accepted piece of modern gay theatre to date. Its mix of fantastical scenes, poignant political commentary, and beautiful poetry make it a wonderful realization of the larger public conscience

in the early, post-modern 1990s. I would argue its theatrical success, and soon after hit HBO mini-series, paved the way for an onslaught of acceptance of gay culture. Once again, it made it harder and harder to ignore the infinite array of sexual identities in this country.

In a way, the few milestones discussed above lead us to the possibility of staging *Triangle Logic*: a story of a bisexual woman and her humorously dramatic relationships with two gay men. It is a contemporary story told in a new way, but representing gay identity on stage is at least a century old. What scholars and practitioners do not have is a lot of records of the sexual preferences of the actors themselves—and this is where I want to take my project next. Maybe this subject has never been recorded because no one ever thought it important enough to catalog.

Moving forward, I hope this will give a better understanding of the depth and prevalence of gay theatre and how audiences are now transitioning into greater acceptance of ideas that aren't their own. One of the great things we as a company have found with *Triangle Logic* is that it is a gay play that is not about being gay. It is about love, relationships, friendships, loss, and growth in a world where, hopefully, your sexuality is secondary to your humanity...

Next, you will find a discussion on performance on and off stage. I find it would be difficult to explain my former hesitations with what I thought 'performing gay' meant without a discussion of the idea of performance itself.

PERFORMANCE AND PERFORMING

What is performance? Is it an actor on stage, in front of an audience? Is it a person walking down the street? Could it be a person who deliberately chooses to be something s/he knows s/he isn't? I plan to explore the possibilities and difficulties of performance from an actor's point of view. When does one see (if ever...) a shift from creating a character through script analysis, rehearsals, and storytelling to effectively embodying the traits of another? When can those embodiments be taken as threatening or inflammatory, and how can an actor bring honesty to a character and culture of which s/he is not, in reality, a part?

In this chapter, I use Debbie Lamedman's new work, *Triangle Logic*, and my portrayal of one of its gay characters, as a practical testing ground for performance theory and acting challenges. By using the theoretical frameworks of Shannon Jackson and Peggy Phelan, I reevaluate performance as part of the actor's process—another tool for the actor's toolbox. What, if any, responsibility does the actor have to share her/his personal experiences with the creative team and, in so doing, does the actor complicate the production with racist, sexist, or homophobic portrayals? Or, is theory like the other tools an actor uses in rehearsal—to be dissected and then forgotten and/or immersed into the final performance?

It might be helpful to first define the terms that I explore in this chapter. The play text is the actual words the playwright has supplied. Without the consent of the playwright, they are to be taken as fixed. They are open to interpretation by the actors and director but must be given to the audience as written. A performance is what the artist presents to a viewing audience. It is the culmination of thousands of interpretive choices that have been synthesized into a final product that must then be received and interpreted by an audience. Finally, *performing*, as I use it here, is

the idea that we are products of a set of stereotypes and assumptions. We, as a society, have taken them as fact and therefore 'read' (and label) individuals by the signs we interpret from them. Conscious of the decisions we make or not, performing your identity can be anything from the clothes you choose to wear, to the way you speak, the words you use, the way you walk, or TV shows you watch.

That being said, how can *Triangle Logic* be an interesting testing ground for performance? Claire is an unsuccessful writer: both unsuccessful in getting published and unsuccessful in finding deep, lasting connections with others. Unaware of her true sexuality, she continually sets herself up for failure by falling in love with gay men. The most recent interest, Ben (who could possibly be bisexual), enjoys Claire's company as well. When Claire decides to introduce Ben to her best friend, Jack, she inadvertently opens a can of worms that destroys their friendship.

Jack takes a liking to Ben while, at the same time, warns Claire of the dangers of falling for another gay man who will not give her what she is seeking. Jack and Ben sleep together, and while on a weekend getaway with Claire, Ben learns that Jack never really cared for him. Ben sleeps with Claire while they are drunk, and later Claire debates whether or not Ben did it to get back at Jack. When Jack and Ben miss Claire's book signing (the most important event of her young career so far) because they spent all day in bed together, Claire ends her friendship with Jack forever.

While the play could be a story about friendship, loss, self-growth, or relationships in general, I wish to explore the idea of performing one of the characters. How does an actor go about portraying a gay character? Do they embody the same habits and stereotypes that some

members of that particular persuasion belong to? Could it be read as possibly offensive if they are only stereotypes and not supported by the text? One analogy to this is the horrible practice in American theatre of white actors applying black face and becoming black characters. It is read as offensive for those not part of an ethnic group to pretend they are on stage simply to entertain an audience.

Is it then that far of a jump to assume it could be offensive for a heterosexual actor to become a gay man on stage? If the actor starts talking with a lisp or walking with limp wrists is that not just as offensive as black face? Or is the fact that Jack sleeps with men enough to call him a gay character? In the text of the play, he never calls himself gay. There is a point in the play during a Claire/Jack fight where Jack calls her a fag hag, presumably referring to the way she defends Ben, but also it could refer to Claire's relationship with Jack who could, in her mind, be the 'fag' in question. She, in turn, calls him a faggot, and Jack reacts negatively. Since the text of the drama is more or less set in stone, even if we do not have definitive textual proof of Jack's sexuality, we can infer that if he reacts negatively to someone calling him a faggot (when we know he sleeps with men), then he could identify himself as part of the gay community.

An actor is still faced with the challenge of creating a character different from himself, regardless of his sexual orientation. Can the performance theorists mentioned heretofore shed any light on the subject? In her book, *Professing Performance: theatre in the Academy from Philology to Performativity*, Shannon Jackson details the often tenuous but always exciting clash of performer and theorist (sometimes embodied by the same person!) She also notes the challenging transitional space of drama and performance: "As it turns out, unsettling the equation between 'drama' and 'free will' goes a long way toward unsettling disciplinary and theoretical

debates between theatre and performativity as well (179).” Here Jackson begins to highlight the difference between creating a character as an actor and *being* the actor himself on stage.

She goes further into challenging the actor/performer identity when she quotes performance scholar Judith Butler: “For Butler, the thorny difficulty of this citational performativity is that it ‘consists in a reiteration of norms which precede, constrain, and exceed the performer and in that sense cannot be taken as the fabrication of the performer’s will or choice (183).” I interpret this as: the actor himself is a member of the larger world and therefore portrays his own stereotypes and idiosyncrasies. Because we all perform in some aspect or another in our daily lives, according to Butler, the actor is always already in a performance when she steps foot on the theatre stage. Given that, the audience cannot assume the movements and performance they are reading on stage is a conscious decision by the actor; in fact, it could be the unconscious movement of the actor.

Or, what if the actor playing Jack does display those stereotypes in his everyday life? Not because of sexual orientation but simply from habit and comfort—could that not then be read a certain way by the audience? The cycle seems to be an ongoing and possibly never-ending one. [I want to point out that I am using the masculine pronoun because I am, in this example, describing a male actor who would play Jack. I do not wish for the male pronoun to serve as a universal for all actors.]

Not only do we have the difficulty of the performer on stage trying to create a living character, but also we have the actor fighting against his unconscious performance as a member of the culture in which he lives. Jackson further blurs the performance line when she includes the audience in her discussion: “A work of art that provokes identification and self-recognition in

one audience member elicits ‘shock’ and ‘discomfort’ in another (186).”As I mentioned above, a vital component of theatre is its reception by an audience. And here we see that the audience is not always of one mind; they are comprised of a number of different backgrounds (sometimes in the thousands), and have their own personal reaction and relation to the performer and their performance. Since one could argue everyone in the audience believes the performer is talking to them, they could laugh or cry on the same line, according to Jackson. Again, this does not answer the performing question for the actor, but it does provide a complication that helps the actor to understand his/her responsibility in front of an audience.

Peggy Phelan, another notable performance scholar, suggests that performance is a synthesis between the real and the representation of the real. In her *Unmarked* she explains the theatrical context as: “Within the history of theatre the real is what theatre defines itself against, even while reduplicating its effects (3).” By definition then, theatre is the opposite of real, the act of representation itself, and therefore not real. But that does not mean the effects and affects are not felt, as the second half of the quotation suggests. Theatre does not get off easily; it must be aware of its effects. While a performer can simply claim to be making art, the portrayal could actually affect their audience, and, as Jackson would add, each audience member differently.

Interestingly to apply to a conversation regarding performance in *Triangle Logic*, Phelan continues by describing the actor/audience relationship when sexual identity is at play: “Unable to bear (sexual) difference, the psychic subject transforms this difference into the Same, and converts the Other into the familiar grammar of the linguistic, visual and physical body of the Same. This process of conversion is what Freud called fetishization (5).” I take this to mean the audience refuses to recognize a sexual other (in this case, the homosexuality of Jack or the

bisexuality of Ben) and instead imagines them as a female, or one that would fit within the “same” contextual relationship.

From the actor/performer perspective, this could be an interesting complication to think about as well: for example, if a straight performer is required by the text to kiss a member of the same sex, they might imagine the other actor as a member of the opposite sex, therefore negating the “other” context for a safer, more manageable “same” one. Is the performer then engaging in the same conversion process as the audience? [In conversation with Mason (the actor playing Ben in *Triangle Logic*) he expressed the same belief. When I asked him what he, as a straight man, thought about being attracted to a man he stated that he just imagined it was a woman and used those fabricated emotions as a starting point.]

Phelan continues her identity exploration with: “Identity emerges in the failure of the body to express being fully and the failure of the signifier to convey meaning exactly. Identity is perceptible only through a relation to an other—which is to say, it is a form of both resisting and claiming the other, declaring the boundary where the self diverges from and merges with the other (13).” This is of particular note because it seems it is in those very moments where we are confused about performance, interpretation, self, other, and meaning that we get the truer sense of identity! While failure may be a negative word for an actor/performer, maybe it is in those failures where we get an honest, believable identity and therefore successful characterization.

So, what then does a performer do with all this theoretical information? As I mentioned in the introduction, I liken it to the idea of what we do with all the other information we learn through the rehearsal process: we forget it. We play actions and we score the beats and breaths of our piece, and then we must get out of our heads when we are on stage, maybe the answer is the

same for performance theory. Yes, we must be aware that each audience member will interpret our performance from his or her own experiences and background. We also must be aware they could be looking at us as a subjective other and quite possibly could be negating that information and inserting something of the “same.” Audiences will read what we give them. It is our job to make the read as simple, easy, and efficient as possible. No distractions, nothing that does not further the story.

What we as actors must do is forget about audience reception when the curtain rises. My character wants to have sex with another man; that is what the text says and that is what the story is about. As an actor, I do not know anything about my character’s “performativity” (to use Jackson’s word) or stereotypes. The safer (and better) bet, I would argue, would be not to try and incorporate stereotypes into a performance at all. They are unnecessary. Not only would a good portion of the audience find them offensive but, as we have seen, they could be read as the actor’s habits anyway— therefore not effective acting choices. Portraying objectives and tactics as honestly and specifically as possible (without extraneous clutter) is all the production needs of its actors, and all the audience needs of the production.

I found guidance listening to other actors detail their process of creation as well. For example, Tom Hanks won an Oscar for his performance of a gay character in the movie *Philadelphia*. When asked what he strives for in performance he answered with, “I shoot for a degree of truth [with the character’s predicament] (Tom Hanks).” I agree. I appreciate his insistence on honesty; that truth has become the crux of my argument. Acting is not about layering on extra characterization, but, instead, stripping those layers off to reveal a core of honesty.

I became elated when I heard Jake Gyllenhaal describe his character creation for *Brokeback Mountain* in many of the same terms I used to express mine. He answered an interviewer question on “playing gay” with, “I don’t think he [director Ang Lee] would cast actors who would really want to ‘perform’... My style of acting: I don’t enjoy putting on a mask and walking into a scene... And having a character fit you is better than you trying to fit into a character (Jake).” I believe we’re speaking the same language. What I call adding unnecessary layers he calls putting on a mask. ‘Performing’ does not gain you much; creating something honestly is better than ‘fitting into’ a forced character.

While Tom Hanks and Jake Gyllenhaal provide a, no doubt, valued opinion on the subject of performance, my conversation with Mason about his characterization brought the topic closer to home. He mentioned he had worries the audience wasn’t going to get his sexuality, and he too wanted to avoid playing stereotypes, (interesting he and I were going through similar struggles.) After the run, he felt there was never a time the audience didn’t believe his character. He discussed that he has played a gay character since *Triangle Logic*. It was basically the other extreme of what we did together. This new director wanted to make his character of Starveling (one of the rude mechanicals in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*) gay to get laughs. There is little in the text that supports that choice so he had to use more of the common stereotypes to convey the director’s wish. After having worked on this thesis, I would argue this arbitrary addition solely for comedic effect borders on offensiveness. When asked which style he preferred Mason said he would use the *Triangle Logic* approach, if given the opportunity, in the future.

Why risk trying to incorporate stereotypes? A cheap laugh? What I’m finding with playing Jack is the possibility of offending the audience (if only a small proportion) with

synthetic behaviors greatly outweighs the shallow depth those behaviors add to the character.

Instead, play what the text gives you. Trust the *words* to guide you and the audience through the story.

Sadly, as we can see with Mason's example, there is a caveat. The director, in American theatre, does have final say on all creative choices in his/her production. If they want your character's sexuality (or any defining trait) conveyed in a certain way you can argue against it, but they have final say. If it offends the audience they might blame you, they might blame the director, or they won't take time to place blame and simply think negative on the production as a whole. (Luckily, Professor Weaver with *Triangle Logic* was very open to my playing Jack how I wanted, and did not force any character choices on me.)

This process started with me asking "is it offensive?" Having gone through this production, the question for me shifts to, "how do I play the character affectively?" We actors live in this precarious, paradoxical world where it becomes very difficult to turn down work, even if we originally find objection. The director finds something in us that works well for the character. We then bring that vision to life: honestly, effectively, and ultimately, without judgment.

PERFORMANCE JOURNAL

The following is an in-process account of my ups and downs, personal thoughts on the rehearsal time, and my interactions with the cast, the director, the playwright, and the audience. I have endeavored to leave it as unedited as possible to better highlight the realism on and off stage. [Brackets] indicate me commenting well after the date the idea was first written.

9/5

Big week as far as preparation for the Thesis goes. I have more or less confirmed Professor Earl Weaver's status as sitting on my committee. He is the director of *Triangle Logic*, so it seemed a good fit to ask him to be on my thesis committee. I met with Professor Ingram to discuss not only the possibility of being on the committee but also serving as my chair. I thought she would be a good choice because I enjoy working with her and actually being pushed by her so to have her in an advising position I think will be good for me. She was good at providing honest reservations against being chair forcing me, in a good way, to evaluate the situation again.

Ideas discussed in preliminary Professor Ingram meeting:

What is it I'm trying to convey?

Performance—are there times when the character doesn't want to perform, does the character always need to perform? Times when he doesn't need to?

[Interesting that the idea of performance was thrown out very early in the process. I imagine this to be when the character is 'performing' and not the actor.]

Explore questions not always to find answer but simply try to come to conclusions

I have worked with Pinter before; think about the characters in *Betrayal* and *The Lover* as constantly (or only at times) performing.

Look at *Design for Living* by Noel Coward, 2 woman/1 man play. Coward was gay.

[This play is discussed in the “history” section of my introduction.]

My journal:

Should contain moments of frustration.

First Rehearsal:

There is an added challenge to this rehearsal process: we open the second weekend in December but I am in a show that closes the week before this opens, which makes rehearsing close to opening almost impossible. We had our first read through September 3rd and will actually be starting blocking rehearsals next week. It seems all this will make detailed note taking all the more important. I have to remember notes, intentions, ideas that worked and affected my partner for maybe a month! New, but exciting, prospect.

Notes from first rehearsal:

The play sounds much better brought to life and off the page. It must be the levels that aren't so obvious on the page.

Claire has about as many lines, if not more, than both Ben and I combined. It is up to the guys to make the most and bring the most character to those lines to balance the stage.

Character thoughts:

I (Jack) find Ben smart and relaxed. Maybe that is what attracts me to him. Yes, he is young but he is very smart and mature, in a way, for his age. He enjoys words and I work in the word field.

I might be too uptight, professional, teachery at times, and Ben provides a positive antithesis for me.

I am quick with words (sardonic? acerbic?), sarcastic, I am a guide with words of wisdom (whether she wants them or not) for Claire. I am quick to energy/excitement (maybe somewhat of a short fuse or short attention span?). **I try to find ways to be proud of Claire, I want her to be happy and to succeed.** [The boldness here stands out to me. I like that I knew I wanted to be a positive force in Claire's life from the beginning. That makes the end of our story even more tragic.]

She calls me a faggot. Serious for me. But I did call her a fag-hag... why do I not have a problem with that term? [I later developed a problem with that word to convey some idea of my personality and sexuality. If I take offense to that word then we can start to see a deeper side of me.]

I use my sarcasm as a defense mechanism.

9/8

Today was my first meeting with Dr. Claudia Schippert, a professor in the Philosophy Department who has agreed to serve on my thesis committee. I know that I want to add some sort of queer theory to my written thesis so it is probably a good idea to have someone more qualified to help guide me. It was as thought-provoking as it was entertaining as it was informative.

The first thing she asked was “how do we know he’s gay?” Which is a great way to start off a conversation about performance (or the lack there of) with a philosopher. Exactly, how do we know? Of course, I answered with the idea that he has sex with a man... But is that really enough? Quite literally, simply because you have sex with a man does not mean you call yourself a homosexual. Is that how you can tell? What you call yourself? If that is the case, do I ever actually call myself anything? Or maybe I “say” it by the way I behave... if that is the case, then if the behavior is not written into the script am I then trampling down the path of creating the character as I want him to be? I am called a faggot, but it is a derogatory term with which I react negatively...

How do you know the identity of the character? That is what I want to convey/portray and the guiding question of this thesis. Stereotypes are boring.

What do I do to create this character?

Are there actors that have done this before?

Tom Hanks in *Philadelphia*

Brokeback Mountain [See Performance chapter for further thoughts on these actors.]

What is it they do to convey their character without stereotypes...

There is a distinction between queer performance and queer identity.

Take a look at identity based theatre performance, there is a different motivation.

What does it mean to queer it... not just reinscribe

My character is actually an accessory in this story. It is not about me, it is Claire's story and I am an accessory. So then what is the role of the "gay man"

Her relationship is a fag-hag (a woman who enjoys the company of gay men) with me; I actually call her that.

History of **CAMP**. The term camp came up a lot in this conversation. There must be something about this idea that she sees as a connection to this work. An in-joke? Something the gay community has embraced as their own...?

Is this 'gay performance' that I am talking about any different for gay actors? Would they not be asking the same questions?

What does it mean to play a gay man? (nothing, according to Schippert). [The thesis of not "playing" anything might have been born here.]

9/20

Today, I started reading the selections of theoretical works that Professor Schippert gave me to peruse to see what interests me and where I could delve deeper. I am currently looking at Eve Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet*. One of the first points Sedgwick brings to light is the idea that silence is just as strong as voice. There are varying types of silences; this is certainly a technique used in acting, too. The times when we are not speaking are just as involved and exciting for the audience... On page 8 of her introduction she explains that there are many things that go into a person's sexual orientation. It seems, for the most part, her work is well-written but purposefully dense. She has a lot to say, and I believe a lot to say that doesn't necessarily pertain to my project.

Professor Schippert also sent along Jose Esteban Munoz's *Disidentification*, which I actually read while attending FSU. I am a little way through the intro at the moment and I am excited to see the crux of his positions come from performance—excellent for my work! In his intro he mentions Margo Gomez's bedroom as the sight of her disidentification performance; a sight that is transgressively brought to the forefront of our heteronormative world. We never see Jack's private life. We see Claire's apartment, Ben's apt., a hotel the two of them share, and then a coffee shop... does that further limit my view of expressing myself? I want to argue that the story is definitely told from Claire's point of view but even Ben (whose sexuality is even more complex than my own) gets a room. I have become even more accessorized. The only way the audience judges me is by what they see on my person, they can't interpret anything by the way I decorate my house or by the shape I keep it in, etc. I think it could be hard to "disidentify" with this work because I am not actually bringing a queer identity to light... it's not my story and the project of the work is more about relationships, and loss of them, then the power of being an other.

Did Jack ever invite Claire over to his house? Maybe he tried to keep her away from his private life...

9/21

Brooke (the actress playing Claire and one of my dearest friends) and I had a pretty big break through as far as rehearsing goes. It actually was pretty amazing what happened. We thought it would be a good idea to score our second fight scene; we thought it simply was getting too long and we weren't sure where the builds, tactic changes, and realizations were. We ran

through it a few times, and I actually noticed that I apologize to her seven times in that one scene. I think maybe only two of them are legit apologies though. After reading through it, Brooke and I started talking about the scene, and we wound up defending our characters' positions (imagine that). She was trying to explain to me where Claire was coming from while I was trying to respond with how Jack would feel about it. That evolved into me talking as Jack and, at one point, I actually called Brooke Claire! We then improvised the scene.

I have done extended improvisations before, but I think what made this one different was that I understood more about the character. I think we normally do improvisations at the beginning of rehearsal processes before we really get a handle on the character and therefore we don't have as much to bring to it. But, by this point, we have run the show a few times, I know where my character is coming from, how he should feel about certain issues, and how he would go about explaining those feelings. When I would be at a loss for words I would sneak a peek down at the script and see where the scene progressed from where I thought we were. There were times where I used the actual lines but I tried to more-or-less paraphrase the text and make it my own.

I found I say, "I'm sorry" a lot. I seem to say it when I don't really have anything else to say. I also was surprised to learn that my answer to fix the friendship is that Claire and I should have sex. Now, whether that was joking or not, it is interesting to note that the first thing I use to fix problems is more sex... it doesn't mean anything to me. I do it with anyone, and it can serve any purpose for me. I also am never really hearing Claire when she says the problems between us are not about Ben but about something more and something bigger. She has to say it two or three times before I "hear" her. I also say something along the line of "I've noticed over the past five

minutes that you won't be a good friend." And, even after an hour or so of intense text work on this scene alone, I can't seem to pinpoint an exact moment or even collection of little moments where I would have come to that conclusion. Of course, I think that means I just have to keep looking, but it's hard to find even when you are looking, so it could be that it would be nearly impossible for an audience....

9/24

I tried to incorporate some different movement into the rehearsal today. I feel like when I watch a play, the times that I am truly invested and believe there is genuine acting going on is when the movement seems believable. At the same time, I also think that "believable" movement is not always what the actor moves like in real life. I watched David Lee (a UCF directing professor) walk down the hall a few days ago. While he is not the sole inspiration for my character, he certainly is someone I look to as part of Jack's makeup (he is gay, he is intelligent, proud, and confident). He was holding a stack of books close to his chest, but at the same time kept his elbows close to his body. His feet were slightly pigeon-toed, and he had a noticeable sway of the hips from side to side. None of these movements were drastic or over-pronounced but useful to someone watching him for movement tips. I thought of my movement today in rehearsal as almost leading with the top of my head—a few inches north of my forehead. That made me stand a little taller. I also kept my elbows close to my body and tried to sway a little in my hips. [I did not ultimately use his physical choice. Was this also an unnecessary layer?]

At first, I thought it was pretty weird to have rehearsal in a space with mirrors on two sides, but now I pretty much love it because you can sneak a peek at how you are standing,

sitting, leaning, etc., and see if that “position” is appropriate given everything else you’re trying to create. Tuesday, I also tried chewing gum in the first couple of scenes. I almost wanted to take the Freud approach and think that since I am so obsessed with sex, then I probably have some sort of oral fixation, and chewing gum is one way to do that. I liked the way it felt. It gave me an added energy (somewhere between unorganized and excessive) and gave me a reason for talking down to Claire at times. Brooke expressed she was pretty sensitive to the fact of me basically talking with my mouth full the whole time, so I don’t think I am actually going to use it in performance, but I have noticed I do like working with gum if only, much like particular movement, it adds something a little extra to the character. [Looking back, it seems this is me trying to add on extra layers. Not with sexuality, but with gum chewing... is there a balance then of what to add and what not? Maybe there is less chance of gum chewing being taken as offensive.]

9/29

Today we ran the show for the run crew... it was fun to have an audience, but not as fun as it normally would be for a situation like this. Mason (the third actor in our play, and a fellow grad student of Brooke and I) loves entertaining, which is certainly one of his strong suits as a performer, but I think having an audience and having it so close to the playing space caused him to break and, instead, took the already joke-filled rehearsal process to the extreme.

I’ve noticed that my energy also has not been as high as it should be anymore. I’m not sure if it is the routine we seem to have entered in our process, or the lack of answers to the questions about the script I’m having; it’s not exactly a chore, but it’s not completely fun either

(and I realize that not everything is to be fun all the time, but I usually at least have some type of fun while rehearsing... if not, why do it?) I think something I am noticing is that our lines are structured in short bursts of one or two words or we talk for days, and by “we” I mean Claire has lines that seem to go on forever. I’m finding it difficult to justify why I let her talk for so long or why I simply stand there and take it... It will come. I noticed, since I was trying to get off book (or at least not look at the script while the other person is talking), that when I am not looking at the pages, I have some nice reactions. The quicker I can get the script out of my hand the more of those good acting moments I can find.

Today seems like a Debbie Downer kind of day, but I’m tired, so it could be that it wasn’t all bad. I’m letting my emotions affect my work... negatively....

10/6

Whose play is it? Who is the protagonist? Jack is not a one-dimensional bad guy. I actually try really hard to help Claire with her life.

It’s like really asking the question on stage. You have to really believe the things that you are saying. What if I’m really trying to help her with everything I say? [Yes, play the words you’re given. This is a good note taken from Shakespeare training: try asking questions honestly, even if you think they are written as sarcastic or ironic, just try it.]

I had a big conversation about the play today. Brooke and I started going over lines today, and it actually started with me saying that I thought one of the pages could be cut completely: she justified leaving it in because it was a part where she thought I wasn’t being nice to her. On top of that, she thought we should cut another part (actually I think a whole scene)

because I sounded nice and that wouldn't fit with who she thought I was. That led us to have the conversation about whose play it is. We have talked about this before, and I basically said the same thing I did last time. I think I am the protagonist of the story. Now, I said this about my character in a different play Brooke and I were working on together, and she said that that was the right thought to be having, so I thought she would be proud of me for saying that here. Not the case. My point was that the protagonist does not necessarily have to be the main character, nor do they have to be the "good guy" (both of which we can safely say I am not in this show) but that doesn't mean I am not the character the audience sides with.

The more we talked the more I kept finding ways of replaying the lines or justifying them with the fact that I really am trying to help her at all times. In a way, it is tragic that we don't end up friends (and that could be changed when the playwright sees what we have now). It becomes a piece commenting on the unfairness of life when we don't become friends. Which is cool, and possibly not what the playwright intended... which is always a sticky subject.

Tonight's rehearsal was very powerful. Maybe it was that my point of view had been solidified or maybe it was just the excitement of something new being brought to the process, but we all could tell something had changed. I think this also supports the way I like to act: I'm not big into playing actions (and when I say that I mean the scoring of every line with a verb that you want to do to the other person). That becomes very robotic, in my opinion, and takes any connection away. That being said, if we spend a good 45 minutes before the rehearsal working through ways our characters feel about the subject and each other, then that gives me a lot of stuff to work with. I know there are other tools out there, and I understand I could not be giving

“actions” the credit it deserves but fleshing through the themes before we rehearse is a huge help for me...

10/11

Notes from *Feminist and Queer Performance*:

Most all the books I have read have made the 1980's a focal point for discussion. If my character is in his early-to-mid 30s that would mean I was a child of the 1980s! Jack is probably around 34, which would make him 10 years older than I (the actor) am and born in 1975. Which would mean he was six when Reagan was elected, and in middle school during the height of the AIDS scare...

“Along with scripting, bodily practices and modes of self-representation were perceived as coded: how one dressed, from within or without the regime of fashion; how one moved, walked, and gestured; even how one situated oneself within social spaces (proxemics) constituted either a patriarchal inheritance, or a new feminist ‘consciousness.’” (Case 106) This will work well with my conversation about performance. It is another example of how we are judged by what we do and wear by the patriarchy.

Notes from *Professing Performance*:

Jackson quoting Adrian Piper: “it was not until the late 1980's, when the topic of gender, race, and difference became fashionable in critical circles that I was rehabilitated.” (177)

We see here a public open to her otherwise unthought-of behavior because it was trendy. That could be where I am with straight/queer performance. Gay rights and performing gay is

certainly a hot topic right now, maybe that will make my public open to talking about it from this perspective.

Where do I go? Maybe it's not about trying to perform or not perform; it's about being honest to the text. Yes, we all know the text is where we should always return. And this semester's emphasis on Shakespeare has taught me more than anything the importance of allowing the text to have all the answers. So, why perform at all? Deliver the text honestly. If I said I had sex with him because he was there, then it doesn't have to be full of forced performance... it could mean I had sex with him. There doesn't have to be a conversation about sex identity, which I think is what Dr. Schippert was getting at when she asked how do we know he's gay. Because he has sex with men? Is that what does it? And we know that sex identity is not a blatant question the play is asking. So let the audience know I/ Jack is interested in having sex with men and that could be the end of the conversation...

10/14

Might be worth talking about the difference between drama, performance, and performativity.

[See intro to "Performance and Performing"]

10/18

Notes from Peggy Phelan's *Unmarked*:

"Adrian Piper, the visual artist and philosopher, has demonstrated that part of the meaning of race resides in the perpetual choice to acknowledge or ignore its often invisible markings." (7)

“But the performance of drag does not and cannot reproduce ‘the woman.’ It re-enacts instead the performance of the phallic function—marking her as his.” (17)

[I have used these quotes in my Performance section.]

10/28

I have spent the last couple of days simply running lines to get off book. I am always amazed at how much more difficult and different the memorization process is for verse plays as opposed to prose ones. And older works versus new works. Obviously, new works rarely rhyme, but at the same time, they also are more fragmented and jump around between thoughts and characters. They can repeat a lot, and nailing the subtleties of the repetition is vital and difficult. Needless to say, we have been running the lines a lot and not making as much progress as we would like. Unfortunately, I have started *Learned Ladies* rehearsal (which is a department show and therefore must take precedence over *Triangle Logic*). Ironically, I am completely off book for that show. The director isn't being completely willing in sharing me among all my projects, so we have been forced to meet on random nights and run lines on Saturday mornings.

I do find that the times during rehearsal when I don't have to look at the page I am able to get to a deeper and better place with Brooke and that, while it may go without saying, is fun and exciting. Also, by being more off book, I have been able to steer my focus more to my surroundings and not just the script. I have found that my character and I have become more comfortable with the furniture. I remember early in the rehearsal process that Professor Weaver commented that one time when I lifted my leg up on a chair arm while sitting in it, it was just like the real Jack would have done. I took that to mean Jack feels comfortable in his surroundings. I have been able to find more times that I either sit on the bed, put feet/legs up on

the couch or chair, and get more comfortable with the furniture while in it. I think this not only adds a degree of naturalism to the piece (which is always good for a realistic play like *Triangle Logic*), but it also speaks to my character's movement, which makes it more of a character and not simply Trent delivering lines, always a goal of mine when I am creating a character.

11/4

Tonight Brooke and I ran lines for the good-bye scene. I had had an incredibly long day and was extremely tired, which actually worked really well for this scene. It is one o'clock in the morning in the scene, and my character has had a long day as well. I could really feel the frustration and how the two of us could have had such a miscommunication over everything. It's late, I'm trying to apologize, just take it! I don't want to fight, and now you're leaving me! I can't take this. I don't have the energy to even put up a wall, and without that wall it's easier for her to break me down. The lines are still hard to get down but at least we are trying; again it's so amazing how differently Shakespeare (and verse in general) is to modern playwriting. The task now is to find a way to be that tried during the scene.

11/7

We had our first Saturday afternoon rehearsal today. Brooke and I have been running lines all week in hopes of getting off book. I don't know if the language is still too difficult or we had the preoccupation of trying to get out of town quickly, but we did not get far before putting the scripts back in our hands. We all know that rehearsals get longer when you are spending time

calling for line, so I kept the script for that reason. We still, fortunately, were able to find more detailed connections now that we didn't have to look down at the page and break so much.

Professor Ingram also came to the run as the Chair of my committee, so it will be interesting to see what a person who has not seen the show yet thought of it.

11/24

I thought today's run was probably the best I have done. Professor Weaver said he really noticed that Brooke had done some nice things today. Maybe the selfish actor in me believes it because I had something to do with it as well. [Does it really matter who did what? Can't the production simply be good? I have to work on my pride...] I was playing around with the idea of being fidgety or not comfortable in the final scene at the book signing. It makes sense, as we have discussed before, that I am making a big trip out here and don't like the idea that Ben is raining on my parade so I was more frantic to leave. I thought it not only gave my character another side but made me more human as well. Of course, there are still long times when Claire and Ben speak that I guess I need not to feel that way or feel that way without being too distracting to them...

I thought we were really listening to each other tonight. Which again was something Professor Weaver had said afterwards. I think I was relaxed as the actor and confused as the character as to why I am not able to get through to Claire, or not able to understand what she is saying, which is exactly what Jack is feeling.

11/25

Brooke and I met with Professor Ingram for an individual coaching session. We found a two-page section from our second fight scene and worked through that. Since the session was mostly for Brooke, we focused on her. She wanted to find more levels so we could avoid simply “yelling” at each other for 10 minutes. She actually did a lot of really good work. Having Professor Ingram there reminding her to use the words to get what she wants was nice. She explained when you are upset with people you really want them to hear you. You don’t start yelling, you do the exact opposite. You get closer and slow down your words. Brooke has a tendency to move back with her body while bringing her head forward which contorts her neck. By bringing her closer to me, we eliminated that body contortion and I could actually hear what she was saying. I think Jack doesn’t listen to her most of the time because she is simply loud and he doesn’t have the energy to listen to the cacophony. When Brooke/Claire forces me to listen, I have to take it in. That certainly gives me a lot more to work from. The blocking and moving around the space came naturally and was secondary to connecting; which is what I think the rehearsal process should be. Simply working on blocking for weeks on end is a complete waste of time and a very college theatre thing to do. [I’m not sure why I am so negative here. Directors have their own way of working and each has its pro’s and con’s.]

What Brooke and I did is exactly what I feel rehearsals for real shows should feel like. We focused on a very specific and small piece of the text. Worked it through a few times. Asked questions of the person watching it, learned things about our characters, found levels, really connected, and was affected by our partner. And it was 45 minutes long! Who could ask for more?!

11/29

Brooke and I have gotten into a nice routine of running the lines, and they are coming easier. We also have decided to start with the last scene (which is brutal) and then start at the beginning and run through so we can end on a more positive note. I think that definitely makes the running easier. Also, I had a beer while I was running the lines. I think it not only gives me a prop to play with (the beer bottle itself), but I think it opens me up to play a little more. I always have thought I would do better work if I had a drink before going on stage; of course, I would never do that, but it helped me here. We were playing and having fun with the lines and actually found a lot of things I thought would work. I think it is about separating the thoughts a little more. When working on a monologue, it is easier to see how it could be a wash if you played all the lines the same way. The same is true about small bits of text as well. There are many different actions played in those little bits. Take your time, let things affect you, react to what your partner is saying. They are so easy to say and recite, but when you actually do it, you can feel you are on to something and it is natural. We are acting so it doesn't look like we're acting! Play with your partner!

12/3

The playwright, Debbie Lamedman, is in town! She got in yesterday. There certainly was a buzz of nervous energy floating around Brooke and me. Not only are we bringing her characters to life, but we are personifying real people in her world as well. That is what I keep coming back to as a very fascinating side note of this whole process: we are based on real people.

was actually written. Jack flies across the country trying to patch things up, sees her flirting with Ben and sees she hasn't changed and doesn't have the strength to fight anymore. [In my opinion.] It's quasi tragic. I can get some sympathy with how much I try to help her out, but she never listens to me. But now I just don't think it's worth it? (I really hope we don't take those lines out of when I am actually supportive; that is what makes me a real character.) I want to help, and she is my friend, but we just don't see the world and friendships the same way. I love how I say, "you don't try hard enough to be a good friend," and now Claire in the last scene does not say "I'm not a good friend" but she says instead, "I was not a good friend to you..." Come on! Like my character is there now only to move the plot along and change Claire but not be a real person?

I mean maybe I am over-reacting about all this. What I think I am certainly noticing is that I don't like change very much. But I don't think it's that. I think it is because so much of this process has been trying to make what is in the script work, that when I finally start to get comfortable (which the playwright never saw!) is when it is changed.

So what do we do? Start working with the playwright sooner? If you know it is going to be workshopped you can't become that attached to the character or it will really hurt when it changes? (And again these are changes that I do not see as good... as of right now... it might be different if the first changes I learned of were 'positive' in my mind). I need to find a way to get into the mindset that every decision made is the best one for the show. I guess it's not my place to saying anything until they ask me what I think. I don't like that at all... I am a person who wants to be part of the collaboration. And what I mean by that is not only tell people when I agree, but when I feel things don't work too! Maybe the trick is only to talk about my character?

Let them worry about the other ones? I want to fight for what I think this character has become. Even if that wasn't the text I was given...

Man, that really changes this whole process up! I think it will be fun to work with Debbie though. I hear she is positive to work with, which is always a pleasant thing to hear. I need to go into it with a positive attitude. "Hi, I'm Trent and I love acting..."

(30 min later...)

Ok, I re-read the new ending, and it is not as bad as I thought... although Ben does wind up getting to go to dinner with her... what makes him different than me? I fought more for her right?

12/6

Working with Debbie is pretty fun. I think the biggest thing that stands out at this point is that she has a very positive attitude about the play and our part in it. (Maybe Brooke is right and my (Trent's) love language is words of affirmation.) I do like knowing that Debbie is pleased. I also like all the character work we did before we actually got into working it. It is also good to hear Debbie say that Jack is a good guy. I still think she might be a little biased as to the presence of all the characters in her mind. She has made it very clear that this is Claire's story. And I don't think it is worth trying to fight that battle with her. [I never understood why the fight for whose story it was was so important to me. Did I want the artistic team to make my role more focused in the production? If they're not making me change my acting choices, what does it matter? As a take away, I need to be more willing to let us all work on getting the show on its feet and not worry about making points that don't affect the final product.]

It is a cool and challenging thing knowing the characters are from the playwright's real life. When she asks questions of us, it is obvious she already has the answer. So then what does she want us to do? Come close to her answer? Try to top her real life?

Brooke introduced the idea of working with Debbie as having another pair of directorial eyes on the piece, and I completely agree. It is working with two directors: one practical and one text/character based. But also I did feel, interestingly, tonight that Debbie asked why Jack did a certain thing (chose to ignore her when she goes on her rants) and I think it is because she actually wanted to know why the real-life Jack did it. Like the words were hers but it took someone else bringing those words to life as a character to be able to answer the questions she has been asking of herself. I think that is a pretty cool thing. Either that, or she is really good at asking guiding questions in rehearsal because I thought that she asked it honestly!

12/8

We moved into the space today. Like with every transition, moving into a new space felt awkward and distant. The space is huge (for a black box, high ceilings, etc.) and we had to re-block most of the trio scenes, and we might find tomorrow that those blocks will be changed as well. Normally, it is a natural step in the process to move, but I think it is slightly before 2 or 3 days before the opening... right? [The more shows I work on, the more I realize there is not always that much time once you move into the space. I guess I had been spoiled up to that point.]

It seems they are not interested in the actors' opinions in the new work. I think I need to simply come to terms with the idea that we are not changing or affecting the show. We are simply trying to get it on its feet. Which I think is a valuable part in the process. I just wasn't expecting that. I am excited to hear what our audiences think!

12/9

Well, we certainly tried to cram as much stuff into one night as possible. It was the first night we are no longer calling line, the first time wearing costumes, the first time cramped behind the space—everything in one day. Of course, it didn't go as smoothly as we would have liked. Brooke has been talking about the idea of Professor Weaver not seeing the good side of us, and I think she is actually right. I too would not be very happy with our progress at this point. There were all kinds of nervous energies tonight, and we skipped a major section of the first fight scene and totally crashed and burned in the second. Luckily, no one was quick to point fingers, and Brooke seemed alright with everything. We had to have a decompression walk afterwards to talk about everything and, of course, it led to another talk of how we are surprised they are not willing to change the text. We can't blame everything on the actors, or can we?

12/11

Opening night! I think it was a success. I think the most important part was actually warming up. Tonight, and last night, I did my normal 45-minute warm up, and that actually freed my mind and allowed me to calm down and simply go with the flow. We talk all the time about how great a warm up can be, but it actually makes a difference! To go from a complete bomb to a magical final dress and then a fun opening is quite the turn around. The audience did laugh a lot more than we were planning. At times, it wasn't exactly where Debbie was going for laughs, so I wonder if she will be changing anything because of it.

The talk back afterwards also was informative for us. We took a poll asking everyone whose side they were on. Jack was hands-down the biggest response. Which is what I have been arguing from the beginning. [Let it go Trent!] Again, we need to change something about the play or realize that the story is not the one Debbie wants it to be. We'll see what they say again tomorrow...

12/14

Post partum depression is in full swing. The show is over, we've had the cast party, the set has been struck, and now it is simply time for reflection. I thought the show went well again the second night. The audience was not as energetic, but they did pay attention and stayed for the talk back. I liked my performance. It seems like there is a balance of the stuttering and searching for the words that I've been working on. I was losing it during my final monologue and I hate to always use tears as a benchmark for good acting, but the emotional state I was in was fun. It was as if I had to get the words out over the emotion; like when you are actually in a fight or a powerful situation you have to work through or over/beyond the emotion to convey your opinion. The emotion was big and I had to calm it down to speak. Bigger than it needed to be? It was fun to lose control though. It was as if I couldn't control my body but was aware enough to finish my thoughts. Is that what acting is? Getting to a place where you can release yourself but still have a point of view. And it is about release... we talk about that all the time, but I wasn't pushing to make the emotion happen. I relaxed into it. I also can say taking the emotional armor off does help a lot. [Emotional Armor is an actor exercise I learned where the actor pretends to take off heavy metal armor that covers their entire body and protects them from being affected

by outside emotion. Once the actor has removed the armor they become more open and vulnerable.] “Opening” my heart and guts to my partner puts me in the vulnerable place that we try to get to with relaxation... And more than me noticing, the crew heard a difference every night (maybe this is what people talk about when they say it is different every night. Usually I think it is the exact same thing and if it’s not then the actors aren’t very good. Maybe the trick is to be good enough to change things up and keep the energy consistent.

Michael Hatori, one of Debbie’s friends, came in from California and he said he was almost torn apart by the emotional performance he saw... I like where this is going!

Jack, again, won the “which side are you on” debate during the second talk back. But I’ve learned that that is neither here nor there. [Finally!] The play is not going to change so this is what we have to work with. There were more questions this time about the play structure and intentions, which is better for our process. One person asked if the fact that Jack is gay made Claire insecure. I thought that was an interesting way to look at it. My sexual orientation (which is not really an issue in the play) could possibly be leading Claire to making the decisions she does, which would then strengthen our relationship even more.

A number of people have also mentioned the ease of the dialogue in the last scene and in our Jack/Claire scenes. This makes the process fun because we know that people can relate to it. And they definitely said our fight seemed ‘real.’

As far as my sexual performance question no one really got at what I was trying to ask which I could interpret as no one caring enough to notice. [I acknowledge this thought, as well as others from my journal, in my conclusion.]

4/1

April Fools Day. The play closed fifteen months ago. Interestingly enough, I am currently in another new work at the Orlando Shakespeare Theatre; putting those lessons I learned with *Triangle Logic* to work! In my “Conclusion” section I discuss a few ideas I would try and put into practice the next time I do a new work— getting off book as soon as possible, for example. I’ve tried to do that during this rehearsal period and it’s helped. Prose is difficult and must be ingrained over and over to get it exactly right. I also mention that I would take more advantage of the fact that the playwright is in the room. Unfortunately, with this latest production the playwright was not there during the rehearsal period so I was not able to pick her brain about my character’s place in the world of the play...

Also, during these fifteen months I have written and defended my thesis in front of my committee! Our hour and a half together discussing the production, my ideas on performance, and ultimately my written archive of the process in this document was scary and exhilarating. As with any difficult, complex, and hot button topic, my thoughts on acting and performance on stage were not completely clear in my written document. This entry, and those to follow, is my attempt to clarify my thoughts and expound where my committee suggested.

Professor Schippert gave me a great piece of advice as a closing thought. She suggested I take risks with my writing like I would take risks with a character on stage. My committee thought my writing was confusing at times because I tried to hard to cover my ass and protect my image in my writing and in so doing, came off as too PC and jumbled. Schippert helped me by saying the clearest thoughts are the simplest; trust your impulses when your write just like you would on stage. In an effort to put that note into practice the words to follow are an attempt to speak more off the cuff and to explain my thoughts in the clearest way possible.

I don't exactly know how to organize the "revisions" contained in these last entries so I plan to simply walk you through my defense and address each of their concerns as they were presented to me.

It began with Professor Ingram taking the lead and one of the first things she brought up was that my writing was too politically correct. She had mentioned that a few times before in our meetings and I took it to mean the writing was too formal, but possibly the way I was handling it was still ok. I was fearful in changing my tone because I was (am) very concerned about offending any possible gay readers of my text. It is one thing for people who already situate themselves as part of the queer culture to discuss their ideas of portraying a 'queer' character on stage, but I think it is an entirely different exercise for the straight, white, male (the position of cultural power) to discuss how he sees those same characters. I have tried to be more delicate and avoid offending anyone because I strongly believe hurtful, even if unintentional, words can. Much of this anxiety comes from reading the introduction to Richard Dyer's *White*. Here, Dyer discusses how whiteness is a race unto itself and he goes to great lengths to let his reader know he is aware of his favored position in society, because once you are aware of it and have covered your bases you can discuss that position more openly.

Professor Ingram has told me before, "dare to be obvious" and I like using that mantra on stage because the simplest choice is usually the best. But for some reason, when she told me to do that with this thesis I took my thoughts much more personally and was therefore more stubborn in expressing myself. The struggle is to find the balance between conveying my thoughts on a sensitive subject succinctly and clearly, while at the same time being aware of my cultural power as a straight man.

Another point Professor Ingram accurately pointed out was my lack of discussion with Mason in the document. I was able to get an interview with him well after the closing of the show, but I never really sat down and had a conversation about my thesis topic with him during the rehearsal process. Mostly, I would say Mason didn't strike me as an outgoing or energetic person about our process. I assumed (and we know what that does...) he was homophobic because he seemed to never really feel comfortable with our close contact or our male/male relationship during the show. He is also very quiet and having a conversation with him could prove difficult at times. Of course, I am putting all the blame on him, which seems wrong and unprofessional after the fact. But, for these reasons, I was reluctant to talk with him about it at the time.

[Now, I didn't want to bring that up in the document before the defense because I did not want it published that I didn't feel comfortable relating with one of my fellow actors. We actors live and die by our reputation and if someone reading this thesis has second thoughts about me as an actor because I speak about a collaborator than I didn't want to take that risk. That is one of the struggles of this process: we have to simultaneously be theorists and scholars and balance the politics and artistry of being part of a collection of artists.]

Looking back, it would have been helpful to talk about our struggles as straight men playing gay characters. He was going through the exact same process I was right? A presumably straight man portraying a gay character. Whatever thoughts or advice he would have had, regardless of pertinence, might have been helpful in situating my personal struggle. We're both actors, we might have been able to help each other.

4/3

Professor Weaver also brought up the interesting caveat that he is/was a gay director during our process and asked if that affected me. I answered that I felt safer knowing his eye was on my work as well. If I offended him with something I did then we could nip it in the bud during rehearsal and not have to deal with the possibility of negatively affecting our audience. He reassured me he never really had any concerns with my choices and that should have relieved me of any worry about what the audience would have thought. He also thought one thing missing from the writing is a scene between Jack and Ben, the two men. Having that scene in the play somewhere could help shed light on our relationship and could help the character and the actors find some sort of stronger connection with each other, like the connection each of us get to have with Claire. Or, for example, what if the “sex” scene between Ben and Jack had gone further? Would that have helped with the Mason conundrum in the piece? We would have had to force ourselves to deal with what we are doing on stage and hopefully would have gotten to some deeper connection. I think because I (and probably Professor Weaver?) sensed that Mason was uncomfortable with the subject that we never pushed the boundary, and theatre is supposed to be all about pushing boundaries right? This was certainly a missed opportunity. I can take some of the responsibility for it and will not judge my fellow actors without at least asking them their thoughts first.

Professor Schippert brought up my use of the term “authentic” early in my document and thought that was a tricky term. This is good because one of the reasons I wanted her on my committee was to notice those words that stood out like that. She rightfully brought up that there are many more similarities than differences between Jack (my character) and Trent, the actor; and indeed between gay men and straight men. I was so worried about trying to create something

different than myself that I forgot (at least in the writing) that the difference is not that big. We also had a nice conversation about why I was so concerned with sexuality and defining Jack by that. I suggested that our culture has chosen sexuality as one of the prime ways we define each other (race, sex, and disability could be other major defining attributes) and therefore must be handled with more care than if I were talking about hair color or favorite food, for example. She smiled and said, “That’s right.” I think I answered correctly. That made me feel really good.

Professor Schippert also thought it would be beneficial to my thinking of the subject to research the idea of “fag-hag” to get a better sense of how Jack sees Claire, that is what he calls her in the heat of a fight after all. I defined the term as a heterosexual woman who enjoys the company of gay men, mostly because there is a reduced threat of an unwanted sexual encounter. After a little bit of unscientific internet research I found that the idea of the fag-hag is multi-dimensional. There is the definition I gave above about women seeking non-threatening relationships with men. But there is also the branch of fag-hags that consider themselves “mommies” and want to take care of the gay men in their lives; wash their clothes, feed them when they’re sick, etc. There are also the women who choose not to recognize the sexuality of their partner or wish to “convert” their gay partner straight. It could be that this is close to the category that Claire in *Triangle Logic* falls into. She refuses to listen to my advice about getting involved with Ben and/or really knows Ben’s sexuality but so desperately wants to be in a loving relationship that she will try and convert an openly gay man!

A major part of our defense discussion revolved around contextualizing my thesis question, adding a personal response to my question, and bridging the gap between the question and my final results. I mention in the document that what started as me asking “is it offensive”

became, “how do I do it effectively?” Professor Schippert questioned my jump from all this discussion on performance and performance theory to ultimately siding with the fact that none of that matters and you have to play honest relationships and truthfully connect with your partner. I can totally see how that can look like a big jump. I think I made that decision for a number of reasons. First off, I do say in my writing that there is a time when you have to throw all your historical research and rehearsal choices out the window and focus on nuts-and-bolts acting, that is true. As far as the discussion in the thesis goes that probably is too big of a theoretical jump. My struggle could come from that fact that I realized, as an actor, I don’t want to ever discount myself from being able to play a role. If I develop some sort of major thesis on performance theory that will then preclude me from playing more roles in my life, that will not be a good business move! So maybe I was scared to take too strong of a stance.

Maybe it’s that I never found a hard and fast answer. All the book research led me to believe the audience won’t always get what you’re trying to do on stage anyway so don’t force it too much. All the interviews with actors I watched focused on honesty and truthfulness so I convinced myself that must be the answer. We also say that it is okay to ask the question but not ever find the answer. But how do I go about asking and exploring the question for 50 pages and then find a way of saying, but I don’t know the answer...

If anything this process has reinforced the acting idea of stripping down characters to the bare essentials. After having worked on this role, and this thesis, I can better analyze the major conflict and relationship between characters. That alone might be the invaluable lesson to take away from the process.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

1. What is a typical day for my character like? What is the most important element to my character: family, love, or career?

I like to take my time in the morning. I feel I'm a pretty meticulous person and because of that I like having everything in order. I make my cup of coffee and then read *The Times* to figure out what to talk about all day at work. I like reading things that have some sort of current relevance so I need to know the country to figure out what's relevant. I take the train to work and then sit and read manuscripts all day trying to find the next best seller. There aren't many good things written these days but at least I get to get paid for working in the field I enjoy. By the middle of the afternoon I have heard from Claire and have decided whether or not I'm going over to her place that night. She needs me and I feel like I'm doing some sort of community service by helping her with her issues.

I would say career is the most important thing for me. I left my family back in Connecticut a long time ago. I still see them on major holidays but I'm not near them enough to constantly be in contact. I'm not sure if I think Love exists or not. I know everyone loves to write about it in the works I read, but is it really that important? I've never been in "love" and I seem to have turned out just fine.

Which I guess leaves career. Why do anything unless you can be successful at it?
This publishing job is only a step in the path towards being a writer myself. I write and now I have to find a way to get paid for what I enjoy!

2. What person or fictional character does my character most remind me of?

Jack reminds me a lot of David Lee. A 30-something gay male, who is successful, artistic, and bold. I see a lot of myself (as Jack) in David because I see David as strong and sure of himself in the world and in his sexuality. But there could be a side that he is keeping from those even closest from him. That's what is dynamic about Jack. Deep down he truly cares for Claire and would be hurt if their relationship ended; he wants love, and doesn't want to admit it.

3. How old is my character?

I am 32 years old. Young enough to still change things about my life and not have my future set in stone, but old enough to have lived and seen the best and worse of people and know a little about how the world works. I feel like I know a good deal about people, which is why I am so confident that Claire doesn't really ever know what she's talking about and I am the one person in her life that can guide her.

4. Does my character have children? How does (s)he feel about them?

I don't have kids. Actually this country, that I take great pride in living in, does not let me have kids of my own! Fuckers. I don't know if I would really want them

anyway, but it's always frustrating to not be allowed to do something cause I'm gay. Kids are loud and expensive. I don't think raising them in the city would be the best option either and I don't have enough money to live on Long Island so I got to go with the career once again...

5. Who lives with my character and what are their relationships? Discuss each character.

I am lucky enough to be able to live with myself. I enjoy the seclusion and quietness of a place by myself. It's almost as if the empty apartment is a character in my life. Not having anyone there is comforting. I am able to bounce ideas and vent to the darkness. It doesn't judge me and it always listens, who could ask for anything more?

6. Who else heavily influences my character? How does my character relate to the outside world?

I like following the path of successful people I know. Whether it's the higher ups at my office or knowing some of the bios of the writers I read. I know that a possibility of success exists and you just need to work at it. I have become a typical New Yorker having lived here for almost 10 years. I don't think the world is necessarily out to get me, but I know now that no one will help me. You have to fight for what you want!

7. What kind of self-esteem does my character have? What are my most attractive or unattractive physical features? How do I exhibit them? How do I hide them?

I'm the kind of person that makes up for his possible lack of self-esteem by being bigger than I need to be. I'm louder, more confident, more sure of myself than is normal to over-compensate for what could be read as a lack of sufficient self-esteem.

My most attractive feature is my posture and fashion sense. I enjoy showing myself off and therefore enjoy going out in public and when in public I try my hardest to make myself look like I am on the pulse of the latest fashions.

8. What is your character's physical rhythm? Flowing, Staccato, chaos, etc.

I, the actor, tend to lean towards being fairly flowing, so that is something I always have to remind myself of when creating a character. Since I am basing some of Jack off of David Lee I would like to add a touch of staccato, or dab'ing energy to him. Dab tends to be quick, light, and direct. The energy is sharp, to the point, and focused. I like this because it implies I am fast thinking and shift my energy quickly. My speech can be in loud bursts, which will also mirror some of Claire's movements and become a personification of our relationship. Having so much quick energy as a norm will make it easier to convey tiredness since there are a few scenes that happen in the early hours of the morning. Here I will no longer be quick and focused, but rather slow, both in movement and in speech; maybe I spend more time in one location or position than I normally would.

9. What is physically quirky about my character, what is funny?

I think what makes me funny is my sarcasm. This is more of a vocal or personality quality and not really anything physical. To go along with my thesis topic I am not going to let gay physical stereotypes be what is funny about Jack. If the audience starts to laugh at Trent with a lisp or limp wrist we lose all the humanity and honesty in the character and no one is listening to the text anymore, just my physicality.

10. Is my character very religious, political, or otherwise a member of some other kind of organization?

I don't ever talk about religion or politics... judging by my understanding of the character in the situation of the play (and what I can infer from the playwright) I am a liberal. I feel I could be of the class that feels they are too smart for religion. Since I am such an independent person, I bet I don't go to church or I would have a stronger sense of community or at least how to act like I'm part of a community. I probably don't have a lot of money but like to feel like I have more than I do, so I try to give to politicians and love it when I'm invited to political fundraisers.

I am probably also a member of some sort of national board of publishers and/or editors. This allows me to feel like I'm well connected within my field and I travel from time to time going to these conferences.

11. What is my character's biggest goal within the play?

My biggest goal within the play is to bring Claire to her senses. I want her to be happy but I also want her to know when she's being immature and moronic. When she

starts talking about being with new men I know it won't end well for her, and I simply want to show her that before she gets bogged down with all the drama (which is what always happens!). Once I lose her, my goal is to win her back. I'm not sure if I will succeed, but she has meant too much to me to not at least fight for her when I need to.

12. What props or scenic elements could my character relate to within the play?

I seem to enjoy Claire's couch a lot. I fall over the back of it, slouch in it when I first get into her place, etc. I also feel very comfortable on her bed. I guess since I'm not physically attracted to her she is not threatened by me being in her room. There are times that I just sprawl out on her bed, flop down on to it, or help fold her clothes on it. For not being mine, this is definitely a place in which I feel comfortable. I don't go to the bathroom in the script so that becomes an area I stay away from. There is also an interesting relationship I have with the front door. I feel a certain energy the closer I get to it, like I know that I am about to leave (or am being kicked out) and the energy is heightened. Something interesting to think about.

13. How do those props/scenic elements develop my character?

Again, one of the more interesting aspects about me, and my relationship with the props/set, is that the audience never sees my house, my set. At the beginning of the play I am very comfortable with Claire—with her atmosphere and her apartment; made apparent by my conformability with her furniture. I'm crawling all over her bed and rolling over her sofa, etc. By the final scenes in her place, I am no longer sitting and find

myself in the middle of the room. What I can see about myself with this is when I am in uncomfortable situations or stressed I tense up and do not seek release on the furniture. I become less expressive in an attempt to avoid contact with my surroundings. An interesting example is in the final scene when I'm trying to give Claire my business card and I can barely keep my wallet in my hands. I do not feel comfortable with the surroundings (I do not sit in this scene) and now I do not even feel comfortable with my own belongings because the nerves and stress of being near Claire has taken over.

14. What emotion should the audience feel toward my character? Sympathy, hatred, friendship, lust, admiration, etc.?

I have spent a good amount of time during this process trying to figure out whether or not I am the protagonist of the play. Yes, we see the story through Claire's lens but I want to believe the audience can actually relate to my point of view and perspective more. I can sometimes serve as the voice the audience knows to be true, but is too nice to mention. We all know Claire will get hurt if she keeps seeing men like this but I am the only one that will tell her (in an effort to help). Given this, the audience should feel empathy with me. They might be annoyed, and at times, shocked with the things I would say and how I could treat Claire, but they ultimately would understand my reasons for doing/ saying them and would wish she wouldn't leave me like that.

15. In the beginning of the play, what do we discover about my character?

From the beginning, the audience should see me as friendly, sarcastic, and warm. I don't think there is a lot of conversation about my sex life so we are not exactly sure of my sexual orientation. Yes, I am a man over folding laundry at his friend's house but that doesn't have to denote anything. We see a person who is willing to speak his mind and influence those closest to him.

16. In the middle of the play, how does my character grow and change?

While I'm not sure this is necessarily a character change (because I am known to have done this before) but I sleep with Ben—someone possibly already in a relationship. I become more annoyed and aggressive with Claire after sensing her resentment and negativity towards me. I might have actually done it because I have lost faith in Claire being a good friend to me. She doesn't listen to me when I am trying to help her. So do I sleep with Ben to get back at her or because I want him?

17. At the end of the play, what will happen to my character?

By the end of the play I believe I have learned my lesson. I fly all the way across the country to make sure I am at a book signing... It is the only way I know how to apologize, and I'm not sure if Claire sees it that way. After months of being without Claire I realize that she actually is a good friend to me, and that I have hurt her very badly. I still don't know how to communicate, but I know that I want to make things better.

18. When does my character help the plot along and how?

With a play that only has three characters basically everything one of the three of us does moves the plot along. I add dramatic tension to the plot by suggesting that Claire not date Ben; when she does, the audience will have to begin to formulate which side of the debate they're on. The actual sleeping with Ben is certainly a plot mover; without this there isn't as potent a conflict between Clare and I.

19. Does my character have a hidden agenda or a deep secret?

If by secret we mean something I don't care to let people in on, then I would say my secret is that I actually want to be loved and cared for. I put on a big show with how much I like to distance myself from emotions or how I think I know everything and am impenetrable to hurt. But that doesn't mean I don't want something to think about and truly care for me when I need someone. I tell myself love doesn't exist because I don't want to admit there is no one I think that loves me...

The biggest take away I find from rereading my character analysis is my sense of isolation as Jack. I certainly come off as a man who is proud of who I am, but who would also like people to understand me on a deeper level. I do things I think a man in my position should do, but know that I want to find my individuality somehow. Maybe that is one of my senses of conflict: I am mostly defined by my relationship with Claire. Maybe I resent her for defining me because that means I can't define myself on my own. Also, there is not much talk about my sexuality in this analysis. It is not something I care to define myself by. [See Conclusion where I talk about this play being a play with gay characters not solely about being gay.]

CONCLUSION

The performance is over. Actually, it has been over for quite some time now, allowing for a more objective, outside reflection of the process from inception to curtain. I went through my rehearsal journal again— always a nostalgic and warm feeling to look back at months of frustrations, discoveries, and emotional moments you have had with a piece of text and a creative team. The journey from assigning a committee through to the post mortem stretched from the first week in September to a few days before Winter Break.

The Character

I will say my focus shifted from concentrating on Jack's sexuality, and his identity (or lack thereof) as a gay man in New York, and moved toward character relationships, motivations, discoveries, and other practical actor tools, fairly early in the game. I bring this up for two reasons. First, it supports the crux of my theoretical hypothesis that honest commitment to actions and relationships on stage trumps layers of superficial character additions. And, secondly, the shift marks a transition from *thinking* about the role and actually *working* on the role. Yes, there must come a time in any rehearsal process where you put the theoretical books down, trust your character research, and you start with the nuts and bolts actor work: crafting the small moments and character relationships.

We, as actors, discuss that the performance is playing the choices that you have worked on in rehearsal. For example, athletes are loose, experienced, and ready for anything during game time. They don't have time to think about their fundamentals and techniques in the heat of the moment; the same holds true for actors on stage. We rehearse possibilities, movements, and

motivations for weeks so when the moment hits to be “spontaneous” and “real” it is believable and open to flexibility. I bring this analogy up simply to show there is a necessary transition between rehearsal and performance (practice and the game) and, similarly, a distinction between prep for rehearsal and the rehearsal itself. When I put down my scholarly books, it was simply the normal train of events; I had to start focusing on the art itself.

It is much more exciting, and applicable to my thesis, to know I stopped concerning myself with questions of sexuality and performance because it is actually not as important to playing honest moments on stage as I first imagined. I was so preoccupied with the theory and political correctness in the work, because I knew I was going to write on the role as my thesis project, that I let the artistry and creativity take a back seat. But, as I said earlier, theory is not “playable,” I can’t take that on stage with me. Acting is more about committing to relationships and your character’s needs.

I also tried to avoid playing stereotypes because I knew that is one place that I could easily streamline my character; focus on the essentials and not the distractions of extraneous characteristics. I can relate this to our neutrality work in movement class. The goal with neutral mask work, and ultimately neutral work without the mask, is not to put on this layer of stone-faced-ness or to hold your body and face in a position that seems to convey neutrality and efficiency. The work instead blossoms by doing the exact opposite: you are at your most neutral, vulnerable, open state after you have stripped all the tension, performance, and excess energy from your body and your face. It is not the addition of a mask but the peeling away of one that leads to the more honest foundation.

Jacques Lecoq, in his *The Moving Body*, discusses his ideas of neutrality as:

...a neutral mask puts the actor in a state of perfect balance and economy of movement. Its moves have a truthfulness, its gestures and actions are economical. Movement work based on neutrality provides a series of fulcrum points that will be essential for acting, which comes later. Having experienced perfect balance, the actor is better equipped to express a character's imbalance or conflictual states. (38)

I wish to show that more honesty (or conflict and imbalance, to use Lecoq's words) comes from a stronger understanding of balance and ease. Much of the early stages of neutral mask work involve learning our tensions and habits, controlling them, and working easier without them there. [I have often wished to use a neutral mask in early stages of practical character development work but have yet to do so, something I hope to ratify in the future.]

My character work with Jack's sexuality went through a very similar Lecoq-based, stripping down process. Yes, I (Jack) become romantically involved with a man. We see glimpses of that on stage and infer a greater amount through changing relationship dynamics. I did not need to add on a layer of "homosexuality," however one would go about doing something like that, but rather needed to strip away all those extraneous movements and character thoughts that distracted from the more powerful, honest relationship between Jack and Ben.

Total commitment to given circumstances and honest character relationships trumps any sort of extra-ordinary, extraneous, and forced movement, behavior, and/or acting choices. In other words, what I have found is the audience knows Jack is gay (if they were ever in doubt to begin with) not because I added a stereotypical gesture, but because I committed to being attracted to Ben, and the audience has no desire to *not* play along.

I only need to look at my rehearsal journal to remind myself that our audiences had no desire to question my sexuality. No one commented that they didn't believe my attraction to Ben. I even went as far as flat-out asking the audience if they ever questioned my sexuality, they never did. And why would they question it? Or why was I so worried they would? They are willing participants in theatre. They wouldn't doubt that I was a king, or a beggar, or a robot if they play called for it. Then why would they doubt that I was attracted to a man? I've learned that I have to trust the simplicity of the story. All the audience needs to know is that I had sex with Ben. I don't need to force extra characterizations on them to make sure they get my sexual preference. The audience wants the story to work!

The Play

Thus far, I've covered a brief reflection of my thoughts on the performance and my role in creating a character, but what about the idea of *Triangle Logic*'s place in the American Theatrical Canon, or the Queer Theatre Canon, (or are they the same thing)? Having just completed a Contemporary American Theatre course has given me a few interesting insights into the world of theatre in this country over the last 100 years. A major topic for our semester was the idea of identity.

You could say theatre is used as a source of national identity in many European countries. Playwrights overseas can be slightly more political and certainly more boundary pushing (I'm thinking of Britain's Caryl Churchill and Sarah Kane in specific) and often have a clear, distinct relationship with the other works of their time and place. Do we see something similar in America? We in America like to think we cannot be categorized, that we are beyond labels and, indeed, those labels become more like stigmas than rallying points. We have almost become

united by our never-ending search for identity. That's who we are: a people constantly asking 'who are we?' Those themes are then reflected in our art... in our theatre.

Contemporary American Theatre has almost become about the minority voice and its struggle to find a home. Whether it's LeRoi Jones's *Dutchman*, Albee's *Goat*, Susan Lori-Parks' *Topdog/Underdog*, or even Wasserstein's *The Sisters Rosensweig*, these plays are more about resistance to hegemonic dictatorship and embracing our postmodern culture than they are about ideas on a smaller, more specific level (whether the playwrights intend that or not). Who is the quintessential American playwright? The greatest thing about theatre in this country right now is we cannot answer that question. But search for identity seems to be the uniting theme between the talented artists from myriad backgrounds.

So where does *Triangle Logic* fit in this new identity construct? Brooke M. Haney (the actress who played the female lead in the show) brought up an idea early in our process that this play contains queer characters but it actually doesn't want to be about sexual identity. Yes, there is a gay man and possibly two bisexual characters, but it is more about their relationships as humans, Americans, lovers, friends. Their sexuality is important but not its *raison d'être*.

We are approaching a new realm of Queer theatre, one not based on the search for identity but one that embraces and explores the intricacies and complications *of* an identity. We see it with television in shows like "Modern Family", "Will and Grace" or others where there are gay characters. They're not about *being* gay. *Triangle Logic* has become a great example of the future of Queer theatre, and, in turn, American Theatre! Again, I turn to John Clum's *Still Acting Gay* for clarification:

The greatest change in gay drama in the past five years is that playwrights no longer feel the need to see gayness as a problem to be explained. Homosexual desire is a presence and gay characters don't have to talk about why they're gay. Insofar as homosexuality and/or homophobia underlie the action of a play, they do so as part of a larger social critique. (xv)

Sexuality isn't on trial in *Triangle Logic*, friendship is.

The Audience

We've looked at my theoretical process within the production, and the written text in American Theatre framework, so what about my process as a studying graduate actor? This show has been in our brains for over a year, what have I learned? What would I have done differently/wished I had tried more of?

The show was very well received by our UCF audience, comprised mostly of our classmates, students, and colleagues, which makes them intelligent theatergoers but possibly slightly biased. I must say, people did enjoy the show and reacted more positively than I thought they would when first starting down this journey. I see looking back at my journal that I was concerned about possible confusion regarding protagonists and main characters, length of show, and dialogue. All these concerns seemed to be moot once the curtain went up.

There does seem to be a fairly prevalent fear among contemporary theatre practitioners that the audience won't "get" something or we need to "show" them a specific moment so as to guide them down the appropriate path of the narrative. While easier said than done, we (yes, I'm including myself) need to find a way to calm that fear. This show's run certainly reinforced the idea that we can never assume the audience will like or not like a particular piece. I need to stop

thinking of ways to help the audience, either with my blocking or delivery of lines. They will go on the journey if we play it truthfully!

The Text

Speaking of the delivery of those lines, I see I devote a good portion of my journal to venting about the difficulty (and, at times, near impossibility) of memorizing the lines. I have done a good amount of classical theatre and have found plays in verse are much easier to commit to memory. The musicality is easier to find and the rhythms give it a recognizable and repeatable pattern. Most actors would agree a certain amount of rhythm and musicality exist in even the most deconstructed pieces of texts (that could be one of the ways we can classify it as art), but verse uses those rhythms as its foundation not as an after product. Brooke and I experienced a similar memorization problem when rehearsing a production of Harold Pinter's *The Lover*. The non-linear and quasi-absurd quality to the dialogue, in particular the pauses and repetition of phrases, made finding the pattern and duplicating it challenging.

We found many of those same repetition and pausing issues in *Triangle Logic*. While they probably did not speak in iambic pentameter in everyday Elizabethan England, I would venture to guess they used much more complete sentence structure to express their thoughts than we do today. Modern language is open to so much subtext and double-meanings that keeping it all straight in your head becomes difficult. Debbie Lamedman, the playwright, (based on audience response) has masterfully captured our contemporary speaking patterns. We take pauses, we invite non-linear jumps, and we repeat. An incredible number of the responses in the talkbacks had to do with the believability of the dialogue. "That is how I fight!" became a frequent comment.

It then becomes our job as actors to play the text as written, without ad lib or paraphrasing. Much like my thought on trusting the audience above, it seems obvious but still is pretty difficult in practice. Nailing the exact pause and the exact comma placement can be an incredibly difficult task. But no one ever said this job is easy. I have learned now I cannot trust my verse memorization prowess to get me through a contemporary play. It's not the same thing. The audience relates to the modern speaking patterns, so I must replicate them as exactly as possible. Spending a good amount of time earlier in the process to getting precisely off book has become a pretty major take away.

The Playwright

I will conclude with one final area of improvement. One of the fabulous things about this production is that it was my first show working with the actual playwright. Lamedman became another pair of eyes, at times an almost assistant director of sorts, and, since we were working with a semi-autobiographical piece, an invaluable resource for character development and understanding. I have never had the pleasure of knowing the source material while working on a piece, and it is a delight I hope to have again.

That being said, I never really sat down one-on-one with her to pick her brain about intentions, motivations, history, etc. It is not like she did not make herself available, so it must have been my inexperience with the playwright/actor relationship that kept me at a distance. In my future working with playwrights, I must find some boldness and feel comfortable approaching them as actual people. Why not use all resources available to me? It will only add a unique, personal, human touch to my work! I will establish the relationship early and find ways

to relate with them both professionally and personally. I have always said the real art in theatre starts with the script; I must learn to love and cherish the real artists.

Final Thoughts

As in any project worth doing, the constant passion provided for some ups and downs. There were fresh faces and veteran partnerships. I have learned that I appreciate the relevance and importance of new work to the theatre canon just as much as the classics. It is a field that is often overlooked as second-rate and unworthy of investment (I must admit I shared those sentiments before embarking with *Triangle Logic*— I felt anything written within the last five years has not yet proven itself as meaningful.) While cliché, all work was at one time new work! There is an exhilarating feeling to know you are the first person ever to create this character, a feeling I hope to experience again.

This project was not a requirement. It was a reward. It exemplified all the pleasures of independent theatre (artistic freedom, professional atmosphere and respect, and cutting-edge subject matter) while being held by the safety net of an educational theatre department. I must describe the entire process as creative, fulfilling, long, stressful, new, experimental, thought-provoking, complicated, fun, and one I hope never to forget!

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