

**DIRECTING AS A JOURNEY:
A PERSONAL INVESTIGATION OF HOW AND WHY TO DIRECT A PLAY**

by
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Play directing is a personal art. While this thesis begins by making objective suggestions about how to direct a play, the majority of the document views directing through a personal rather than objective lens. This thesis principally explores how and why I directed Neil Simon's *The Dinner Party*. To answer these questions of how and why, I outline the journey I took to direct this play; my journey can be an analogy by which other directors can understand their own journeys. In what follows, I conclude that I chose to direct a play in order to better serve the education systems in which I will work as a teacher in the coming years. I also conclude that I specifically chose to direct *The Dinner Party* because the most important parts of my life are reflected in this play.

This thesis details many discoveries, both about the nature of directing and about my life. The main argument is that while life informs directing, directing also informs life. In other words, completing this project improved both my understanding of directing techniques as well as my understanding of my own life and experiences. The goal of finding unity, both in one's life and in a play, is a theme in this thesis project. As a director, I must actively pursue unity in myself, in my technical and artistic work on a play, and *between* myself and my work on a play. This argument regarding unity is the fruit of my directing journey and adds to existing scholarship on play directing.

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I directed Neil Simon’s The Dinner Party. A DVD recording of a performance is included with the thesis document.

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Part 1: Suggestions for Directing

This section provides brief suggestions about directing that may be helpful to other directors. The ideas presented here are based on lessons learned throughout the process of completing this thesis project. What follows is therefore not a comprehensive guide to directing, but can serve as a preliminary guide for any director, especially a young director. While the suggestions could apply to any kind of directing project, they are most appropriate for directing a play that comes out of the modern (vis. postmodern), realist tradition. To learn about the origins of these suggestions for directing, please review the fourth part of this thesis which details my own directing journey. That journey is the basis by which I direct plays and serves as one example of how other directors can conceive of their own work.

The discussion below divides directing into seven parts: (1) thinking about directing; (2) choosing a play; (3) analyzing the play; (4) building a cast and crew; (5) rehearsing the play; (6) having successful performances; (7) reflecting on the process. Each component has its own heading below.

1. Thinking about Directing

Think of directing as an epic journey where you, as the director, will learn about more than simply directing. Directing teaches a director incredible lessons about him or herself so long as the director actively considers what lessons can be learned from the directing experience. Challenge yourself to learn about yourself as well as the art of directing. To exemplify how powerful this learning experience can be, the lessons I learned about myself are documented in part four of this thesis. One strategy for ritualizing this personal

learning process is to keep a daily director's journal: write about directing, but also make a brief note of anything else that is on your mind, whether it seems related or not. After you finish work on the play, you may find, through reflection, some unity between things that were happening outside the theater and the work onstage. For reference, my directing journal is part six of this thesis document.

2. **Choosing a play**

If you are allowed to choose the play you will direct, choose a play that your intuition tells you is the right play for you. As William Ball suggests, a director must trust his or her intuition. He writes, "All intuition is perfect."¹ After following your intuition, make sure you relate to the action of the play, literally or analogously. In other words, if a director wants to direct Neil Simon's *The Odd Couple*, the director may relate to the play's action or characters literally: the director could be an estranged single parent who enjoys playing poker and cannot stand his ex-wife, as does Oscar. If the director cannot relate so literally, then he can relate to the characters' objectives: perhaps the director wants control over his life and wants to avoid close relationships with other people. The latter constitutes analogous understanding: if the director does not literally share the given circumstances of a major character, then the director works to relate to a character or characters' objectives. The director's relationship to the characters objectives must be personal and detailed, and is ultimately more important than literally sharing a character's given

¹ Ball, 13.

circumstances. Unearth the characters' super objectives and determine how they relate to your own. Make the characters' objectives as personal to you as possible. Even if the director cannot choose the play, the director must find empathy for the characters and their objectives.

3. **Analyzing the play**

Analyze the play to build a concrete understanding of what drives the action of the play and how you, as a director, relate to the through line or spine of the play.² At least one week prior to casting the play, complete rigorous script analysis exercises in writing, preferably those outlined by Francis Hodge in *Play Directing: Analysis, Communication, and Style*. One of Hodge's exercises, assigning an objective to every line or thought within the play, may seem unduly burdensome, but it is essential. If completing this task before casting the play will remove significant enjoyment from the process of directing, then hold off and only perform this exercise once for each scene the night before that scene is first blocked. Performing this exercise improves the director's ability to block the play organically as well as communicate with the actors through objectives.

In addition to Hodge's exercises, ask yourself, "Who is each of these characters to me? Is character 'x' my mother? my lover? my ex-boyfriend? Why?" A director should also ask similar questions for major events in the play: "When Hamlet dies, what is that loss analogous to in my life? How can I help the actors and audience feel a similar loss?" Asking these questions begins to

² Kazan, 7-8; Clurman, 23-24.

ingrain the play into a director's instincts. Finally, the director must determine the spine of the play. For an in-depth discussion of the spine, see part four of this thesis document.

While each of these exercises should be done in writing, they should not be set in stone. A director performs these exercises to acquire an intimate understanding of the play, not so much to plan how the play will be directed or performed. The analysis is an opportunity for the director to become an expert on the play; the director can then use that expertise to work collaboratively with the actors.

4. **Building a cast and crew**

A director must cast a play using his or her instincts—instincts which are rooted in the script analysis. Bring in a second or third opinion, an experienced director or actor or other confidant, and talk through your reactions to each auditioning actor. Many experienced directors recommend sleeping before making a final decision, and my own experience supports doing so: the casting choices I proposed before versus after sleeping were significantly different, and for the better. William Ball also offers great suggestions on casting in his text, *A Sense of Direction*.³

Building a reliable design and technical crew is also important, however, doing so was not a focus of this project. The only suggestion which this project yields is this: a director must be able to trust his or her design team's work ethic.

³ Ball, 37-43.

5. Rehearsing the play

Out of the dozens of directorial responsibilities that factor into running a rehearsal, two stand out: pursuing the spine, and understanding each actor's psychology to the best extent possible. In short, to pursue the spine a director must know why he or she is directing the play and then pursue that goal constantly. For a more in depth discussion of pursuing a play's spine, as well as how the spine can unify all of a director's responsibilities, see part four of this thesis document.

Understanding an actor's psychology—how and what the actor thinks—is the basis of working with any actor. To understand an actor's psychology, a director should employ three tactics: read William Ball's chapters on actor psychology;⁴ observe and get to know the actors both during and, particularly if an actor is becoming too self-conscious, outside rehearsal; write journal entries about each actor. In these journal entries, a director should ask questions like these: “what does the actor fear doing? what motivates the actor? when does the actor become confused? when does the actor hesitate? look to me for advice? not look to me? how does the actor respond to praise? What are the actor's weaknesses and how can we address them?”

The actual mechanics of a rehearsal are quite complicated to explain in writing. If you are considering directing for the first time and do not have a firm grasp on the elements of a rehearsal, the fastest way to learn them is by observing other directors' rehearsals, especially as an assistant director.

⁴ Ball, 44-69.

A note on warmups: some directors, especially those in educational theater, suggest leading a group warmup before each rehearsal; others require their actors to warm up individually before rehearsal. This project's rehearsals suggested that warmups should happen only when they have a purpose: when the actors' energies are low; when the actors request a warm up; when the warm up activity will help the actors to understand a concept that will become important later in the rehearsal. With regards to the latter, asking one actor to pretend to be a fly buzzing around the space while the other actors shoo him away may help establish a framework for blocking or character relationships later in the rehearsal. I found that having actors do warmups everyday removed a warm up's capacity to excite or energize actors; warm ups can become a labor instead of a stimulus when done in every rehearsal. Consider using warmups as an occasional stimulus, not a daily ritual. The exception to this, of course, is in matters of safety where stretching and vocal preparation may be highly advisable.

6. Having successful performances

A director must help each actor going into the performance period by limiting constructive criticism the night before opening and by ensuring a good audience turn out. Limiting constructive criticism the night before opening is not ultimately about protecting the actor's ego, but rather about allowing the actor to stop thinking as an actor and start thinking as the character. The work onstage must become more instinct and less conscious technique over time in order for the performance to be organic, and if the director continues to give

substantial notes before the opening night then the actors' performances will not be natural. Actors' confidence may also suffer, further limiting performance quality. Giving notes before a pick-up rehearsal is advisable, if appropriate for the theatre company.

The director should also endeavor to recruit a sizable audience for the performances; actors' confidence grows considerably when they know they are opening to a full, or almost full house. The correlation between audience size, actor confidence, and performance quality is often strong. Ideally, a production company will have a strong PR department to help attract audiences, but in educational settings the friends of the actors, crew, and director are the primary means to begin generating word of mouth. For this production, I individually emailed approximately 150 friends and acquaintances in the community, which ultimately accounted for over half of the show's audiences each night. This kind of personal PR work is not especially fun, but it is rewarding. To be clear, posters are not sufficient PR; word of mouth must be actively, deliberately generated, often in the form of personal invitations.

7. Reflecting on the process

Directing is a journey that yields lessons which fuse the personal with the professional. One or two weeks after the director's work on a production ceases, the director should reflect, in writing, about what he or she has learned about directing, about him or herself, and about any other subject. Part four of this document is a detailed example of such a reflection.

Part 2: Literature Review

This section briefly summarizes and critiques the most important texts used for this thesis project. To be clear, no text is discussed in its entirety, but only to the extent to which it applied to the project. For example, most directing texts offer chapters on working with scene designers, but as working with designers was not a focus of this project, such chapters do not feature in the discussion below. The texts are listed in order of importance to this project.

Hodge, Francis. *Play Directing: Analysis, Communication, and Style*. (2010)

This project drew primarily on the chapters related to script analysis of Hodge's text. In these chapters, Hodge equates directing to script analysis, and discusses how a director thinks about a text analytically, and how that analysis can apply to the rehearsal process. Hodge is careful to explain the unique nature of directing, namely, that there are many elements of directing technique which are objective, whereas as most jobs in art rely on the subjective. This insight is important, however, it fails to resolve the tension between objectivity and the director's reliance on personal experience. In other words, a director must rely on subjective understanding (his opinions, his experiences) in order to make objective decisions, such as which blocking scheme to use or how to explore humor in a scene.

The script analysis focuses on eight different areas: given circumstances, dialogue, dramatic action (beats, scene breakdown, etc.), characters, ideas (the playwright's deeper meaning), moods, tempos (pace of each scene and beat), and tone. Certain plays will draw more on different parts of Hodge's analytical process, but for this project, the analysis of the given circumstances and characters proved the most

useful. Defining each character's polar attitudes motivated character relationships and added tension to scenes. Hodge's emphasis on using past action (action from before the play's beginning) to motivate character choices supported the development of clear polar attitudes for characters. Hodge's description of the tone analysis is slightly vague, but may be more useful in a play that exceeds the one-act, one setting format. Based on my experience with this project, I would recommend that every new director read and perform the script analysis as per Hodge's text.

The shortcoming of this text is its discussion of working with actors. Without question the points provided are thorough and useful, but the arguments focus too much on working with actors as instruments instead of exploring how actors think and behave. While the ideas presented will help the production by developing tension through ground plans and encouraging strong acting choices, the text focuses more on goals for what should be happening onstage and less on how to discuss those goals with the actors. William Ball's text, discussed immediately below, more sufficiently details how to communicate with actors to achieve goals.

Ball, William. *A Sense of Direction: Some Observations on the Art of Directing*. 1984.

Ball's text explores how actors think and feel in different contexts, and makes apt suggestions about how directors can interact with actors. Ball uses his years of experience to examine actor psychology, and does so in ways that proved critical to the development of this project. In particular, Ball's suggestion that a director should direct through questions was helpful. Directing through questions allows a director to collaboratively shape actors' performances. Ball's insights into what limits the quality

of an actor's performance—fear, in particular—are especially useful. One problem of Ball's text, however, is that it does not clearly distinguish between good and bad blocking. This shortcoming is symbolic of the text's nature: it handles conceptual issues far better than concrete ones. Ball does not include diagrams, but he does spend a great deal of time discussing how actors often feel and think during blocking rehearsals. He does not, as another example, devote much time to explaining different curtain call configurations, but he does explain how an actor's confidence can be hurt or maintained depending on how a director plans a curtain call. Ball uses this concept-based approach with every topic fundamental to directing. His insights, while conceptual, are highly practical in their applications.

The opening to Ball's text differs from the more practical approach found in the rest of the book. Instead of focusing on how directors make actors feel during auditions, or what actors want during a blocking rehearsal, or how a director often feels during different stages of the technical rehearsal process, the opening examines why actors and directors do theater. This section may seem overly philosophical at first, but its implications—that why we do theater can determine how we understand ourselves—led to the most important lesson from this project. For more details on the latter, see part four of this thesis document.

Kazan, Elia. *Kazan On Directing*. 2009.

This text is an extensive collection of journal entries written by Elia Kazan throughout his career. His reflections are generally specific to the play he was working on at the time, and could provide great insight for a director working on one of those plays. Most of his entries seem to answer four questions consistently:

1. What am I, the director, doing wrong?
2. What did I learn about the actors today? About an actor's psychology and tendencies? What makes one actor or another nervous?
3. How well did we pursue the spine?
4. What institutional factors (budget, scheduling, administrative oversight) are affecting the quality of the work onstage?

The answers to Kazan's questions tend to be critical and sometimes derogatory, but they are insightful. These questions are helpful to any director writing a daily journal and should be the basis of a director's journal entries. Kazan asked these questions of himself in order to constantly improve the product he was seeing on the stage, and a director who asks these questions of him or herself will at least be thinking critically about the theater project underway. Above all, Kazan was especially meticulous about assessing (and criticizing) an actor's thought process.

Kazan also expanded the notion of the spine of a play (detailed in part four of this thesis document). Unfortunately, his notes do not go into much explicit detail about using the spine, but he does make it clear that spine should be personal. He asks, "How does the manuscript affect [the director's] soul?"⁵ This question is a theme in Kazan's journal entries and now informs my understanding of directing and theater.

The three texts that follow were not used or read in the level of detail of the above:

Clurman, Harold. *On Directing*. 1972.

Clurman's text, as with Hodge's and Ball's, deals with most elements of the directing process. This project focused on Clurman's handling of the spine. While

⁵ Kazan, 7-8.

Clurman ostensibly pioneered the definition of the spine, he did so in an objective fashion that lacks the personal imperative which Kazan later placed on the spine.

Clurman's analysis is helpful but lacks the heart found in Kazan's work.

Dean, Alexander and Lawrence Carra. *Fundamentals of Play Directing*. 2009.

This text would be extremely helpful for someone who has never directed before. Dean and Carra's text focuses, as per the title, on fundamentals, helping a director to understand the elements of directing in fine detail and in diversely practical ways. While I am by no means an experienced director, the level of detail provided by Dean and Carra often seemed unnecessary given the experience I already had, leading me to favor the texts listed above while only browsing Dean and Carra occasionally. In short, directors with some experience may find that this text, while thorough, does not innovate their understanding of directing on the level of the other texts discussed above. More than any other text, however, *Fundamentals of Play Directing* extensively explores blocking through diagrams. These diagrams are extremely useful and make understanding the fundamentals of blocking and stage pictures far easier than other texts reviewed here.

Hauser, Frank, and Russell Reich. *Notes on Directing: 130 Lessons in Leadership from the Director's Chair*. 2008.

This text is not especially unique but it serves as a good reminder of the lessons found in each of the texts discussed above. It is a quick read: this director read it while eating lunch. A director should read this text to remind him or herself of lessons learned elsewhere, but probably not to learn these lessons for the first time.

Part 3: Production Summary

This section outlines principal individuals involved in the production of Neil Simon's *The Dinner Party*, which I directed for this thesis project. The section summarizes the play and provides a brief overview of the timeline and logistical steps in the directing process. Reading through this section should give a reader who has not seen the play sufficient background to understand the analysis which follows in subsequent sections. While this thesis project sought to research the art of directing in general, it primarily investigates the processes of script analysis and working with actors.

***The Dinner Party* by Neil Simon. Performed February 27, 28, and March 1, 2014.**

Cast, in order of appearance:

Aaron Archer as Claude Pichon

Alex Hardin as Albert Donay

TJ LaGrow as Andre Bouville

Audrey Bittner as Mariette Levieux

Mallory Oslund as Yvonne Fouchet

Liv Burns as Gabrielle Bounacelli

Production and design crew:

Director: Michael Sugar

Set designer: Jason Rowe

Costume designer: Leah Bierly

Lighting designer: Echo Johnson

Lighting assistant: Mike Wilson

Sound designer: Bruce Van Ormer

Crew: Jennifer Sandgathe

Poster designer: Spice Walker

Videographer: Rachel Bracker

Set construction assistant: Thomas Varga

Rehearsal aides: Dylan Curran, Rachel Faught, Alexandra Fus, Jennifer Sandgathe,
Thomas Varga.

Character descriptions:

Albert: 20s. Love-sick rental-car lot attendant. Ex-husband of Yvonne.

Claude: 30s. Antique book collector. Ex-husband of Mariette.

Andre: 40s. High-powered executive with “more important things to do.” Ex-husband
of Gabrielle, used to date Mariette.

Mariette: 30s. Author. World traveler. The proverbial sexy librarian. Claustrophobic.
Ex-wife of Claude, used to date Andre.

Yvonne: 20s. Changes her mind constantly. Married and divorced Albert twice.

Gabrielle: 40s. Well educated. Plots and schemes. Ex-wife of Andre.

Summary of the play:

Neil Simon’s *The Dinner Party* is a farce, comedy, and drama combined into one play. The play follows six people, all recently divorced, who are invited to a dinner party in the private dining room of an upscale French restaurant. Not only are these six dinner guests recently divorced, but they recently divorced each other. Altogether, then, three divorced couples have been invited to a dinner party. However, the characters arrive at the party one-by-one, and through a farcical series of carefully timed exits and

entrances, none of the characters realize that they are at a party with their ex-spouses until five of the six ex-spouses have arrived. When the sixth ex-spouse arrives—Gabrielle—she reveals herself to be the organizer of the party and locks the dining room’s door to prevent anyone from leaving. The other guests protest being locked in a dining room with their ex-spouses, but Gabrielle refuses to disband her increasingly bizarre dinner party.

By the time Gabrielle locks everyone in the restaurant’s dining room, the play has transitioned from farce, through comedy, and into drama. Having solidified her control, Gabrielle makes a request of her now captive dinner guests: “I would like to ask each one of us here to tell us the worst thing your ex-spouse ever did to you during your marriage.”⁶ After some hesitation, the characters do so, hoping that once they fulfill her request they can leave the restaurant. While their statements are moving and in some cases turbulent, they are not enough to persuade Gabrielle to unlock the door and release them.

Gabrielle then asks everyone a question: “What is the nicest thing your spouse ever did for you during your marriage?”⁷ This question produces the most emotionally vulnerable speeches of the play. The characters confess the love and respect they still have for their ex-spouses, even if the love and respect remain overshadowed by other aspects of their former relationship. After these touching confessions, Gabrielle unlocks the door. Before anyone leaves, however, Gabrielle invites them all to stay for

⁶ Simon, 54.

⁷ Simon, 60.

dinner so that they might finally “get to know each other better.”⁸ Some, but not all, of the guests appreciate the opportunity and decide to stay.

Production timeline:

This project began in winter 2013 when I confirmed my primary thesis advisor, Professor Michael Najjar of Theatre Arts. Then, that spring, I completed the thesis prospectus course through the Clark Honors College. In order to perform the play using the Pocket Theatre, I needed the advance approval of the Theatre Arts faculty. Therefore, in May, 2013, I submitted my proposal to the faculty and, after addressing some logistical concerns, had the proposal approved that June.

Over the summer, I did some light reading in preparation for this thesis project, including relevant portions of Francis Hodge’s *Play Directing: Analysis, Communication, and Style* (2010). However, most of my attention was focused on directing *Julius Caesar* for Eugene’s Free Shakespeare in the Park. While that production was relatively successful, it would become a basis for comparison and growth that I would use throughout the process of directing *The Dinner Party*.

In fall 2013, I secured set, lighting, sound, and costume designers for *The Dinner Party*. I held two production meetings, but it quickly became apparent that meeting with designers individually made the most sense given the simple one-set, one-act nature of the production. The designers were reliable and did quality work. In particular, the set designer, Jason Rowe, devoted many hours of his time; the set greatly surpassed my expectations. As I met with designers, I was also doing the script analysis and other preparatory work. That November, the Clark Honors College awarded me a

⁸ Simon, 64.

\$600 thesis research grant to pay for the royalties and other costs associated with producing *The Dinner Party*.

Auditions took place on Sunday, January 12, which was the Sunday following the first week of classes after winter vacation. Callback auditions were held Monday, January 13, with the cast list posted by Tuesday, January 14. The auditions were open to students and the public. Rehearsals began Tuesday, January 21, following the Martin Luther King holiday. Rehearsals ran four days per week, for three hours each day, and were held in Chapman Hall 204. Chapman 204 was especially helpful because it allowed us to rehearse for three-hour periods of time. Had we rehearsed in Villard Hall (the Theatre Arts building) instead of Chapman, rehearsals would have been limited to ninety minutes due to the demand for those rehearsal spaces. Conveniently, Chapman 204 has dimensions that are similar to the Pocket Theatre (the performance venue).

Rehearsals moved to the Pocket Theatre (Villard Hall 102) for the week of technical and dress rehearsals and performances, February 23 through March 1. Performances occurred on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, February 27, 28, and March 1, at 5:00 pm. In addition to their role in my thesis project, the performances functioned as a fundraiser for Eugene's Free Shakespeare in the Park. In total, over 200 people attended the performances and raised over \$500 for Free Shakespeare in the Park. That over 200 people attended *The Dinner Party* is significant considering that the Pocket Theatre holds only 75 audience members per performance.

The opening night performance was recorded and is included with this thesis. The recording was done by local videographer and UO alumna, Rachel Bracker. Rachel also filmed *The Dinner Party*'s commercial, which was featured on social media

and personal websites. A local business, Crumb Together Cookies, generously covered the costs of producing the commercial.

Following the performance run, I waited two weeks and then began writing the critical reflection for this thesis. The two-week wait period was deliberately inserted to allow the proverbial dust to settle and thereby encourage a more thoughtful reflection on the entire process. The thesis defense took place on Monday, May 5, 2014.

Part 4: Critical Reflection

Section 1: Why direct a play? And why direct *The Dinner Party*?

Two thoughts were always on my mind as I worked on *The Dinner Party*: “The world is in trouble,” and, “I’m in love.” I chose to direct a play for my thesis project because I believed doing so would help me resolve some of the world’s troubles. I chose to direct this play, *The Dinner Party*, because I was in love. In particular, the recurring thought of “I’m in love” was poignantly motivating because it stemmed out of my own history with love, both familial and romantic.

To say that the two thoughts above were “always” on my mind is not an understatement: for years, most of my actions can be traced to these two thoughts, *The Dinner Party* included. However, before I examine how these two thoughts contributed to my work on this thesis project, it is important to understand the relationship between these two thoughts and *The Dinner Party* itself: For me, the world’s troubles, love, and *The Dinner Party*, are deeply connected on a metaphorical level. I describe this relationship as metaphorical because of an interview I conducted in fall 2013 with Professor Barbara Mossberg, Professor of Literature and President Emerita of Goddard College. During this interview, Professor Mossberg remarked, “When Einstein said $e = mc^2$, we considered that genius: the genius of it is understanding that “this” is like “this”—it’s the equals sign. It’s the metaphor. It’s understanding the connections. In the entering class of Cal-Tech., for example, 100% of the students play a musical instrument—not a coincidence. If we want scientists and engineers, and if we want people inventing and being creative, then look to music and the left side of the brain and then also consider the way that we organize information,

the ways that the left and right brain need to be integrated. That integration is poetry, that's music, that's arts—that's working those mental abs.⁹

Mossberg's argument is that within Einstein's genius insight, $e = mc^2$, the equals sign is poetry. Poetry, after all, gives us metaphor, which in turn gives us the ability to understand that variables like energy and matter, two apparently unlike things, are actually connected and even equivalent on a fundamental level. For Cal Tech., the equals sign between innovation and engineering is music; music is the lens through which we can think about engineering as innovation, and vice versa. For me, the equals sign between "The world is in trouble" and "I'm in love" is *The Dinner Party*; *The Dinner Party* is the lens through which I can see how being in love and the world's problems connect, and are equivalent, for me.¹⁰

Both love and the worrisome state of our world motivate me to invest time, thought, and emotions into people and projects. I do not always invest evenly or fairly, but my concern for the world and my unconquerable preoccupation with love consistently inspire similar levels of investment from me; they also inspire more investment from me than any other stimuli. In what follows, I will explain how I discovered that my concern for the world and preoccupation with love led me to both direct a play and to direct this play for my honors thesis project. I then explain how that

⁹ Mossberg, Barbara. "Professor Mossberg on Giving Back: An interview for *The Scholar*." Clark Honors College: 30 August, 2013.

¹⁰ If a logician evaluated these equations, she or he might find that the equations do not always work as well as I suggest above, especially when causality is introduced. For example, does engineering = innovation (where "=" is music), or is this a better equation: engineering + music = innovation? There are sound arguments for and against each equation, with the merits of each argument largely dependent on the person or organization from which the equation originates. Going into detailed logical support of these equations would require considerable length and would only prove loosely relevant to this thesis. I therefore omit the logic discussion since the equations above work well as general principles insofar as they apply to my thesis project.

discovery confirms directing scholarship and suggests methods for using and learning about directing scholarship.

“The world is in trouble” = “I’m in love”

How are these two recurring thoughts possibly equal to one another, and how does *The Dinner Party* connect them? They are related in that they form the infrastructure of my personal life as well as justify my involvement in theater. To begin, “The world is in trouble” is both my assessment of the world’s status as well as a personal call to action. Any frequent reader of The New York Times can report that the world faces severe challenges, ranging from climate change and economic fragility to international terrorism. In the United States, health care costs, poverty, and education are also significant issues. As a double major in history as well as theatre, however, I have witnessed increasing levels of alarm from tenured faculty who devote their professional lives to studying the historical background of these matters. Collectively, learning about these challenges in the press and formally in the classroom has led me to repeatedly think, “The world is in trouble.” This thought has been on my mind at least since high school, perhaps earlier.

My concern for the world added to my early college experience to shape the path of my life. In particular, the size of the world’s problems resonated with themes in the first book I read in college, Tracy Kidder’s *Mountains Beyond Mountains*. In summary, Kidder’s book traces “the quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, a man who would cure

the world.”¹¹ While the book is journalistic and probably paints a rosy view of Dr. Farmer’s work, Kidder provides more than enough evidence to show that Farmer managed to give free health care to thousands of impoverished people in Haiti, Peru, several African countries, and even Russian prisons. Farmer has worked relentlessly with remarkably few financial resources to provide this health care and his example offers a compelling argument for health care reform in the United States.

As a freshman reading Kidder’s book, I learned two lessons: first, that it is possible to provide health care at a fraction of the United States’ cost per capita; and second, that it is possible to overcome politically gridlocked challenges, national or global. If Paul Farmer can overcome political barriers and prove that what had been considered financially infeasible was increasingly practical for thousands of people, then people like me had the opportunity to make breakthrough level progress in other fields. For me, the lesson was that tremendous effort yields results. At least, this last idea regarding opportunities for progress was what I came to believe as a freshman entering college. That belief translated into a call to action: I want, need, and hope to help the world overcome its toughest challenges. To be clear, I am not suggesting that I think or ever thought that I would be able to resolve all of the world’s challenges myself. However, I came to believe that I can, through substantial collaboration, address one or two of these challenges. Specifically, I want to improve the quality of education in the United States.

My commitment to education reform has long roots in my personal history. To summarize, in eighth grade I had an Algebra teacher, Michael Heil, who was at least

¹¹ Kidder, Tracy. *Mountains Beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, a Man Who Would Cure The World*. Random House: 2004. Quote comes from book title.

three or four times more effective than any teacher I had had up to that point. I took his class in 2004, and every year since 2004 I have observed his and others' classes, taught small seminars, and studied several texts on pedagogy, all to try to discern how teachers like Mr. Heil are so successful. As I write, my passion for understanding teaching is about to reach its tenth anniversary and it will continue. I will, for example, teach high school English in Washington D.C. beginning next fall. More important, though, is that when I came to college in 2009 this already longstanding passion for teaching became informed by Paul Farmer's world-changing work.

The reaction between my long-standing passion for teaching and Paul Farmer's work was explosive: I decided I wanted to know everything I could about education so that I could begin to address the serious deficiencies of the United States' education system. I sought to learn about education not so much through books but through action. For example, as I became invested in the Clark Honors College (CHC) community, I realized that learning as much as I could about how that community functioned would both help me contribute to the community as well as improve my understanding of the nature of educational bureaucracy. Over the course of four years, I became modestly involved in everything from event planning to budgeting to new-student recruitment to curricular design to alumni relations to a Dean's search. I held the titles of tour guide, Student Association president, publications assistant, and even assistant-back-up receptionist. I am thankful for the many lessons I learned through these experiences, and I hope that the CHC has felt my constant gratitude. The most important lesson I learned from all of the above, however, was the value of arts in education.

My work for the CHC showed me how a well-rounded education benefits individuals and society. The usefulness of a well-rounded education became especially apparent to me after I conducted a research project where I interviewed fifty-seven recent CHC alumni.¹² After analyzing the body of interviews, it was clear that most CHC alumni valued the CHC's diverse curriculum; these alumni appreciated that the CHC had required them to study science and history and literature and foreign languages in depth. These alumni suggested that the curriculum's diversity helped them take advantage of more diverse opportunities after college. Only a minority of alumni, however, mentioned that they had had exposure to significant arts education in college, and that struck me as a problem because the arts ought to be a major component of a diverse curricular experience.

Art is important to our country's future. The arts, which at least include everything from traditional art to music to theater to design, are increasingly absent from all levels of school curricula in the United States. Considering that the arts feature prominently in our cultural heritage and that exposure to the arts often improves individuals' imaginations, I have decided that part of my education reform agenda is to revitalize and, in many cases, reintroduce arts education to schools. It oversimplifies the discovery to say so, but it is plausible that without a robust imagination (he was a poet, after all), Einstein would not have realized that "e" does in fact equal " mc^2 ."¹³ Ostensibly, if a society wants to produce insightfully creative individuals who in some way resemble Einstein, then that society must invest in the imaginations of its children.

¹² Sugar, Michael. "OAC: Outreach to Alumni of the Clark Honors College." Clark Honors College, 2011.

¹³ This argument echoes comments made by Professor Mossberg in the aforementioned interview.

Under the status quo, the imaginations of millions of children are tragically under-stimulated in the United States, and this status quo must transformationally change if we, as a society, want to find solutions to the divisive challenges we face.

Altogether, this series of interconnected ideas and experiences led me to direct a play for my thesis project: concern for the world, a passion for teaching, reading *Mountains Beyond Mountains*, serving the CHC, and discovering first-hand the value of arts in education. As a double major in history and theatre arts, I had many options for thesis projects. For reasons of time, I could only do one thesis (as opposed to one in each major, as is sometimes done). I ultimately decided on a theatre thesis because I believed that it would help me the most in my quest to improve education. I believe this because I need to be able to do more than abstractly advocate for arts in education; I need to understand arts on a specific and intimate level. I need to be able to prove to students, parents, businesses, other teachers, administrators, and lawmakers, that arts and education can and should work together. To prove that, I do not need (or want) to become intimately familiar with every art form, but being able to prove the viability and utility of one form can be powerful.

To intimately understand how theater works in education, on-the-ground experience is necessary. To make an analogy, a school principal without teaching experience is not likely to be a great principal. Such a principal often frustrates and loses the faith of his or her faculty. Similarly, someone who hopes to systematically revitalize or reintroduce arts into education needs to have personal experience working with arts in education. The decision to direct a play came out of my perceived need to better understand how to lead, for example, a high school theater. Given my leadership

experience outside of theater, I feel confident that I could learn to handle a high school theater in terms of logistical oversight and budgeting. Prior to this thesis project, however, I felt much less confident about my ability to artistically lead—i.e., direct plays in—a high school setting. I therefore set out to complete a thesis in theatre arts in order to better understand the artistic side of theatrical leadership.

To glean a better understanding of high school theater settings, the original intent for this thesis project was to direct a play in a local high school. I abandoned the high school element of the project for two reasons: first, the local high school theater's leadership proved difficult to work with within the confines of a thesis project; and second, my advisor convinced me that I would learn more about directing if I worked with college level actors who had legitimate acting experience over high school level actors who generally have minimal experience. Working with college level actors was a good idea: The actors I worked with on *The Dinner Party* set an example that I will take with me when I begin teaching high school next fall in Washington D.C.. Their example will help me frame artistic goals for the high school students I work with on theatrical projects.¹⁴

As an aside, I also chose to direct a play because I enjoy doing theatre more than I enjoy studying history. Directing a play, while challenging, seemed like fun at the outset, and I still believe it is. Furthermore, as I contemplated what kind of thesis project I wanted to do, I realized that I was far more comfortable studying history than I was directing a play, which made me want to develop my directing skills because they felt like a weakness. I wanted to improve my ability to work with actors, to block

¹⁴ Additionally, the skills involved in directing and acting have broad applications to a political reform movement. That, however, is another thesis.

action on the stage, to analyze a script, and to think on my feet in an artistic context. Directing a play was a scary idea, which made it exciting.

In light of the discussion of the last few pages, it should be clear that this paper's opening statement was a simplification: While I did regularly think "The world is in trouble" as I worked on *The Dinner Party*, this thought was not always my mind. However, this thought is a symbol of other thoughts that closely relate to it and these were always on my mind. As I worked on the play, I would remember lessons about Mountains Beyond Mountains, leadership lessons I learned from the CHC, and teaching techniques I had picked up from Mr. Heil (teaching and directing are not dissimilar). I would think about the interviews I conducted with Professor Mossberg and the dozens of alumni. And then I would daydream about teaching in Washington D.C. and would consider how my current directing work might become useful there, and beyond. Thus, in a symbolic sense, "The world is in trouble" was always on my mind, it just took a variety of forms. Unfortunately, this last sentence is also a simplification: In truth, the symbolic "The world is in trouble" was almost always on my mind.

The worst mistake I made on this project was that for short but specific periods of time I would stop thinking "The world is in trouble." As I indicated earlier, this thought was with me continuously: when I went on walks, when I met with actors one on one, when I led production meetings, and when I was in rehearsal working with the actors. It was ingrained in my subconscious and I would draw on it in a variety of contexts. However, this thought was not on my mind when I went home at night to write my journal and prepare for the next day's rehearsal. It was not on my mind because I deliberately removed it from my thought process. I removed it because I

(incorrectly, astoundingly) believed they were not relevant to what I was doing. After rehearsal, I would come home and semi-consciously decided that I was working on my formal theater work, and therefore only my theater skills should be used to prepare for the next rehearsal; anything else was a distraction. I was checking approximately half of my available creative stimulus at the proverbial door.

The deliberate suppression of “The world is in trouble” and its related thoughts negatively impacted the quality of the preparations I made for each rehearsal. I did not, for example, actively discuss the thoughts related to “The world is in trouble” in my director’s journal (see part 4 of this thesis document). There are only echoes of “The world is in trouble” within the journal entries, and these echoes are buried between the lines. An entry from Tuesday, January 21st, illustrates this point:

The read through was odd. I feel like Aaron Archer (Claude) had a great time. He was grinning at me almost constantly, although he had the most experience. I feel like Audrey was uncomfortable. Alex was fine. Mallory was really quiet. Should I have cast her? I’m a little concerned she won’t gel with the cast.

Asking people to pair up to walk home with the ladies is awkward but necessary. Maybe it’s a sexist move? Out of fashion? No, safety isn’t out of fashion, just safety couched in gendered terms.

In general, I feel like the play was well cast, though I’m a bit worried about whether or not Mallory and Audrey are in the right places. Liv is really tired, but I have faith in part because everyone seems to have faith in her. And we get along well. She reminds me of her character and vice versa.

The actors all seemed tired after the read through. I'm going to need to give them more energy each night.¹⁵

This journal entry reads as if it were based on casual observation, when actually it came out of careful, practiced observation techniques: One of the earliest lessons I learned from my inspirational Algebra teacher, Michael Heil, was to start relationships with students on the first day of class. From his example, I learned to check in with each student from the moment I met them, to ask how he or she is doing and to both observe and remember how receptive the student is to me and to other students. With a class of thirty students, checking in with everyone on the first day is sometimes impossible, but with a cast of six actors it is an easy task. That is not to say that I thought of the actors as my students, but the relationship was similar in that the quality of our relationship would ultimately be reflected in the quality of our work.¹⁶

I had entered the rehearsal room on the first day with several specific goals: to greet each cast member before we started the rehearsal (i.e., while people were still arriving), to see how open each cast member was to conversing with me, and to see how willing each cast member was to talk with the other cast members. I set these goals to try to learn how comfortable each actor felt and to discover how I could improve each actor's level of comfort. I did mention each actor in the journal entry above, which does echo my intent of checking in with each actor, but does not go far enough to explain the mechanism behind my observations. I mentioned, in the entry, that Mallory was quiet. Here is what I could have written: "I asked Mallory, 'How are you?' to

¹⁵ Director's Journal, 21 January, 2014.

¹⁶ For critical work on the role of relationships in teaching: Farr, Steven. *Teaching As Leadership*. Teach For America: 2010. See especially pages 72-98.

which she responded, quietly, ‘Good!’ I followed up with, ‘It’s good to have you here,’ to which she only nodded in response. That was the end of the conversation. She did not say more to me or anyone else, except her lines, for the rest of the night. And her lines were rather timidly said.” I could have made similarly in depth comments about my interaction with the other actors.

The omission of these thoughts in my journal hindered these thoughts’ development. The adage “writing is thinking” comes to mind in this circumstance: Because I was not writing about my thought process in full those unmentioned thoughts were left unnourished and underdeveloped. If I had written about my entire thought process with Mallory, I might have begun to trouble shoot my observations in a more effective manner than merely observing. I might have realized, for example, that as Mallory became more comfortable then she might feel right in the part I cast her (she ultimately did). I needed to have patience, but instead questioned my casting choice. I may also have developed a strategy for the next rehearsal to subtly help her become more comfortable. Unfortunately, I have no memory of taking steps to increase her comfort level, which may have delayed her progress building her character.

The lesson from my initial interactions with Mallory was that my teaching background could help me in my directing work. In short, I needed to use all of my skill sets, not just my theater background, to direct the play, but when it came time to prepare for rehearsal I generally limited myself to thinking in theater terms (with the exception, early on, of addressing “institutional factors”). Thinking primarily in theater terms is important, but a failure to introduce other life experiences into the formal preparation betrays both good sense and the inclusive spirit of theater. I am not sure

why I excluded “the world is in trouble” and its related thoughts from the rehearsal preparation process; for certain, my conversations with my primary thesis advisor, Professor Najjar, suggested that I should invest this project with as much of myself as possible. I can only guess that I must have carried a stale assumption into this project about how artists complete art: with art skills alone. This assumption had especially negative effects on my handling of the spine of the play, a subject which will be discussed in the next section of this critical reflection. Fortunately, the act of writing writing this reflection has begun to erode that assumption.

Similar to how “the world is in trouble” represents a group of thoughts, ideas, and experiences, “I’m in love” also represents a group of ideas, thoughts, and experiences. The “I’m in love” group heavily influenced my decision to direct *The Dinner Party*. However, before discussing how “I’m in love” influenced this decision, it is important to understand the role of logistical factors: For example, even before Professor Najjar agreed to be my advisor I was almost certain that I wanted to direct a Neil Simon play. I had first worked on a Neil Simon play, *The Odd Couple*, in high school. I served only as an underutilized stagehand on that production, but by watching the play perform repeatedly I came to adore Simon’s sense of humor and the realist genre. I sensed common threads between Simon’s and my own senses of humor, and I have ever since wanted to work on one of his plays. Until *The Dinner Party*, I had not had the opportunity to do so. When I met with Professor Najjar to open discussion the project, he acknowledged my interest in Simon and encouraged me to look into directing one of Simon’s plays. During that meeting, Prof. Najjar said words to this effect: “Whatever play you direct you will have to read over and over, and you will

have to sit with that play in rehearsal night after night. Sometimes you just know when you've found the right play, or at least the right playwright. ... From what you've said, I think you need to direct Neil Simon." I could not have agreed more. I let my intuition guide me, and given my longstanding thirst to work on a Neil Simon play, I determined that I was going to direct something by Neil Simon. I liked his work, and I trusted him to have written a script that would translate well onto the stage.

After deciding to direct a Neil Simon play, determining which play to direct was surprisingly straightforward, especially considering that Simon has published over thirty plays since 1961. The Theatre Department's constraints on performance time for student productions (ninety minutes) were what made the decision easy: Out of all of Simon's plays, *The Dinner Party* was the only one that ran at the required length.¹⁷ Additionally, when I read *The Dinner Party* for the first time, it was immediately familiar to me on a personal level. My intuition told me to direct it. This familiarity probably came out of the "I'm in love" refrain in my head, as I will explain shortly. However, it is important to note that if *The Dinner Party* had not felt familiar to me—if it had had only small personal significance—I would not have directed it and would have looked for a play by a different playwright. At the time of my decision to direct *The Dinner Party*, personal familiarity made the play's action seem manageable to direct; now I understand personal familiarity to mean not only that but also to motivate why and how I direct a play (this subject will be discussed in detail later).

¹⁷ This statement is a simplification. I did not check the length on every Simon play, however, *The Dinner Party* is the only one of his plays regarded as a one-act, whereas the others are full-length plays (typically two hours or longer). Possible exceptions are Simon's one-act collections, like *London Suite* (1996), but the one-acts in these collections are intended to perform together, not separately. In terms of run-time, then, these one-act collections likely exceed ninety minutes.

The Dinner Party felt familiar because of the thoughts, experiences, and ideas that fall under the umbrella of “I’m in love”—and I have been carrying that proverbial umbrella with me every day for as long as I can remember. The “I’m in love” umbrella, however, is large, and extends to the love in all parts of my life, from that which I have shared (or haven’t shared) with family members, friends, and romantic partners. At the risk of making the analogy more complicated, “I’m in love” should be considered an umbrella both in the sense that it is a symbol for a group of thoughts and ideas (as with “The world is in trouble”), but the image of the metaphor is also important: “I’m in love” is a large umbrella, and as a large umbrella it has a tendency to catch the wind in a storm. When it catches the wind, it can flip violently inside-out or topple me over.

To begin the explanation of “I’m in love,” it is important to note that I was in love with two different women during my work on *The Dinner Party*. As love is a collaborative affair, I am not at liberty to go into as much detail as I did above with “The world is in trouble.” More important than the relationships’ details, though, are the questions that the relationships made me ask myself many times. Here is an excerpt from a “to-do list” I wrote myself in June, 2013. The to-do list was regarding a woman I had dated for over a year, who I will rename “Sarah” for the purposes of this paper:

Questions I need to figure out answers for: What is love? Do I love her? Do I not love her? I tell her I love her, but do I really? Does she love me? Yes, I’m sure she loves me. Her actions and words and especially her eyes make it obvious. Do I just love being loved by her, or do I actually love her? Is love just a feeling or is there a scientific test for love? If so, what is the test? [I drew a diagram here to explain what such a test might include] What if we love each other differently? Is it possible to love someone

and not want to be in a relationship with them? Can I break up with someone I love? Or is that one of those horrible mistakes that people regret thirty years later? Mom talks about those. Even if I decide to break up with “Sarah,” why would I? Because I couldn’t intellectually decide if I loved her or not? How do I make someone understand that I love them and yet I don’t want to be in a relationship with them? How can I even understand that?

These questions were often on my mind in 2013 and they factored into my decision to direct *The Dinner Party*. In particular, with Sarah, the question “Is it possible to love someone and not want to be in a relationship with them?” was new and serendipitously timed for *The Dinner Party*. In fact, serendipity has played a helpful role in this project, but that discussion must wait for the discussion on liminality, which closes this section of the critical reflection.

Understanding how it was possible to love Sarah and yet not want to be in a relationship her was paramount for understanding *The Dinner Party*. My mixed feelings for Sarah mirrored how Andre felt about Gabrielle: I would argue that Andre loved her, but he would not marry her again. In my case, the state of loving but not wanting the relationship to continue made it difficult for me to trust my own judgement: there were many times, even after I wrote the to-do list above, when I believed that Sarah and I were going to live happily ever after together; times like this I completely forgot the reservations I wrote about in the to-do list. Over time, I gradually became aware that my self-doubt was affecting my behavior within the relationship, and I used this realization in my work with the actors onstage. This doubt, for example, is how I helped Andre understand why he would kiss Gabrielle despite loathing her: such things

happen because love and discontent (in my case), or love and loathing (in Andre's case), are not mutually exclusive emotions. They can exist simultaneously within one heart.

Thus, I contextualized much of Andre and Gabrielle's relationship in terms of my own romantic experience. I did the same for every ex-couple in *The Dinner Party*. For example, by the play's beginning, Yvonne had divorced Albert twice. I have never been married or divorced, but I have been in love with someone (not Sarah) who I started a relationship with and then broke up with twice; in other words, I have been in Yvonne's shoes. In yet another relationship I stood in Albert's shoes, and I know precisely how heartbroken he was and how much he loved Yvonne. During an argument, Yvonne says to Albert,

And do you know what you did to make me that angry?...You loved me too much. ... It was all about your feelings, your emotions, your need to tell me how wonderfully happy you were. Gushing all that love and devotion for me...Never once thinking that I may be having a terrible day but no, you're too busy fawning all over me to ask me how I'm feeling.¹⁸

Three years ago I made Albert's mistake as Yvonne describes it here. My worst nightmare would be making a similar mistake again with my own version of Yvonne. It is worth noting that I did not even recognize this as a possible mistake to make until I began working on *The Dinner Party*. Thus, working on *The Dinner Party* taught me to pay close attention to my romantic partner's wellbeing. "How are you?" can be a critical question that is sometimes forgotten when in love.

¹⁸ Simon, 40.

It is easy to use hindsight to contextualize the characters' relationships in terms of my own. Admittedly, I attempted but had less success doing so when I wrote the script analysis in the fall of 2013. For the reader's knowledge, I wrote the script analysis during a time when I believed I was completely in love with Sarah, so the comments in the script analysis section of this thesis may seem to omit much of what I just imparted. As it happens, in January 2014 (one week before *The Dinner Party* auditioned but months after completing that portion of the script analysis), Sarah and I agreed that we should end our relationship. Going into the rehearsal process having just ended a relationship where my feelings resembled those of Andre's proved to be insightful.

In addition to helping me understand the characters' given circumstances, my experiences with love also helped me understand each character's super objective in the play. In most plays, the characters have different super objectives, however, in *The Dinner Party*, every character has the same super objective: to find love. The super objective is a character's single, unifying objective that motivates the character's actions throughout the entire play. University of Oregon Professor Emeritus Robert Barton defines the super objective thus:

Everyone has something she wants out of life (or in the course of the play) more than anything else. For most of us this is the driving force, the cause we would go to the mat or even to war for. By moving through the character's given circumstances ... the super objective may become clear. It is usually actor-detective work because playwrights rarely come out and state it. It should always be emotional rather than intellectual and strong enough to involve "our whole physical and spiritual being" [no citation given].

It should be stated in the simplest, most active terms. The super objective unifies all the tiny objectives that occupy moment-to-moment living into a major motive for living.¹⁹ As Barton suggests, finding the super objective for a character is detective work. I could initially sense each character's super objective, but by mid-fall 2013, I still could not articulate the characters' super objectives well. Intellectually, I always understood the value of using objectives in acting and directing, but finding and using objectives practically proved difficult. Without the help of my primary advisor, I fear I never would have devised as accurate or succinct a super objective for each character as "to find love;" I certainly would not have realized I could articulate a super objective that included all six characters at once.

Although I could not articulate it when I first read the play, I argue that *The Dinner Party* felt personally familiar because each character's super objective—to find love—was the same as my own. I am always trying to find love. This commonality between the characters and myself gave me insight into how and why the characters take certain actions, how they might feel during those actions, and even influenced suggestions I made about each character's outlook at the end of the play. For example, I entered the rehearsal process working under the assumption that I search for love because I perceive an absence of love in my own life. I can only hypothesize why I have felt such an absence of love in my life since at least first grade, but this hypothesis helped me rationalize the characters' actions.

I hypothesize that I began to constantly feel an absence of love because, as a child, numerous close relationships that I treasured and took for granted suddenly

¹⁹ Barton, 123.

became distant. For example, when I was six, my parents and I moved from California to Oregon and left behind a large, loving Italian family. In particular, I missed my grandmother Zoe, who at the time was the most important person in my life. After moving to Oregon, I called my grandmother every weekend, and many times cried to her on the phone because I missed her so much. In the sixteen years I have lived in Oregon I have never stopped missing her. Back in elementary school, I tried to fill the void of missing Grandma by making friends, but I had the misfortune of being socially underdeveloped. Sadly, all but three of my elementary school classmates seemed to dislike me. Thus, there was a great absence of love in my life that my parents, friends, and teachers could not fill.

How much I missed my grandmother helped me understand Claude and Albert's uses of their shared super objective, to find love. Both Albert and Claude had lost the most important persons in their lives: their wives. I saw their losses as analogous to my experience leaving my grandmother in California. I knew exactly how lonely Claude and Albert felt, and I also knew what they wanted: they wanted to reclaim the love they lost, and if that was impossible, then they wanted friends. At the beginning of the play, both Claude and Albert are in the process of failing to reclaim the love they have lost, so they want friends (friendship being another form of love). It was therefore important to me to find a sense of camaraderie between these two characters. I wanted Claude and Albert to meet and work to find a way to love each other—not as romantic lovers—but as brothers.

The brother metaphor explains Claude and Albert's relationship: they fundamentally love each other while repeatedly antagonizing one another. Often,

siblings love one another while also disliking each other; their love can be mandatory on a submerged level. Albert and Claude's love is similarly mandatory: they were desperately lonely and were willing to befriend anyone who would be friends with them. Their desperation explains why Albert would become friends with Claude despite Claude's enormous ego, and why Claude would become friends with Albert despite Albert's enormous social shortcomings. They overlook one another's faults in favor of filling the love-void they both feel.

How desperate Claude and Albert feel also justifies their mutual antagonism. Internally, both characters know that they are vulnerable—they miss their ex-wives terribly—and they take action to hide that vulnerability. In Claude's case, hiding vulnerability means assuming the role of the proverbial older brother: he takes every opportunity to elevate his status over Albert's. Claude demeans and belittles Albert throughout the beginning of the play, and tries to establish his intellectual, professional, and social superiority. Albert rarely notices, however, and attempts to politely outclass Claude by demonstrating his own familiarity with car rentals, abstract paintings, and fine dining, but his attempts only make him look foolish.

In total, these characters are quite flawed: Claude is highly egotistical while Albert is a naive clown. Their flaws are significant because they are these characters' respective defense mechanisms for hiding vulnerability. This defense tactic is familiar to me because I took the same approach when I was in elementary school: I was emotionally vulnerable and that led me to hide that vulnerability by trying to appear smarter than everyone else. As stated above, I had very few friends in elementary school, and that lack of friendship no doubt came from my ill-advised attempts to

repeatedly outsmart all of my classmates. With one exception, the few friendships I did make were with people who were grappling with a significant absence of love in their own lives. To return, then, to the metaphor of the umbrella in a storm, my quest to find love had a tendency to topple me over: I protected myself rudely while latching on to any friend I could find. An absence of love hindered my social life. So, too, with Albert and Claude.

By bearing my own experiences in mind, I worked with the actors to build a specific tension in the opening scenes: Albert and Claude had to find love in one another, but they also had to hide their vulnerability. For shorthand with the actors, I referred to this tension as “the brother formula.” Once Andre enters, we explored his relationship with Claude and Albert as an extension of this formula. As I indicated earlier, I had a similar understanding of Andre’s objectives based on my relationship with Sarah: unlike Albert and Claude, Andre is not desperate for love. He still wants love, but he is confident enough to find it outside this dining room. Of all the characters in the play, he is the least desperate and the least vulnerable, which makes it possible for him to leave and not return at the play’s conclusion.

Similarly, with Gabrielle, I interpreted her lustful, unconditional love for Andre through prior relationships of my own. I had my heart broken in a similar way to which she did, allowing me to sympathize with her impulse to lock her ex-husband and two other ex-couples in a restaurant. Gabrielle had an empty heart and was using control over others’ lives to fill the void within her. Rehearsing the scenes with Gabrielle sometimes exhausted me because I had to relive my most painful break-up experience during those rehearsals. That exhaustion made theater in general more personal for me

than it had ever been before. I had often heard professors say that theater is a personal art—and I thought I knew what the professors meant—but the rehearsals with Gabrielle made me realize that theater can be more personal than I previously thought. For me, the farce of the play was painfully realistic: I could not help but respect Gabrielle for trying to lock everyone in a restaurant.

The umbrella of “I’m in love” was also on my mind during *The Dinner Party* because after my relationship ended with Sarah, I promptly fell in love again. This experience gave me great insight into Albert’s feelings for Mariette. In my case, I believed I had found an amazing woman who I felt unusually compatible with. As I was sorting through those feelings and attempting to discern their validity, I was also watching Albert pursue Mariette approximately once per week in rehearsal. The timing for all of this was serendipitous for both me and the scene where Albert and Mariette meet. For the scene, I could use my uncontainable excitement about the new woman in my life to inspire Albert to pursue Mariette with every fiber of his being.

Further, the fact that Albert pursues Mariette for almost no reason other than that she arrived at the party made me carefully consider my own actions. I thought to myself, “I just finished a relationship. Am I rebounding? I know I am already prone to look for love because of my family history. Even if I am not rebounding, am I chasing this new woman just to fill an old absence of love in my heart?” By asking myself these questions, I eventually slowed down my pursuit of this new woman, and for the better. Altogether, the events in my life and my work on *The Dinner Party* were informing one another. I found that, once again, my life had lessons that could help *The Dinner Party* and that *The Dinner Party* also had lessons to teach me.

While I was able to use my own relationship background to understand why and how Claude, Albert, Andre, and Gabrielle were looking for love, I was less successful at understanding Yvonne and Mariette's pursuit of their super objectives. I failed, for example, to develop something akin to "the brother formula" like I developed for Albert and Claude. That failure had the effect of making the scene between Gabrielle, Mariette, and Yvonne feel unmotivated. Eventually, after consulting with Professor Najjar, I asked the actors in that scene to struggle for control of *The Dinner Party*, which helped significantly, but that objective lacked the comprehensive quality which "the brother formula" provided to the earlier scene.

Part of the challenge of understanding Yvonne and Mariette was that neither of them are looking for love with as much urgency as are Claude, Albert, and Gabrielle. Despite that, I was able to loosely assess how Yvonne and Mariette searched for love through the lens of my parents' divorce. Suffice it to say that my parents had an incredibly expensive three-year-long divorce which might have been shorter and less expensive if they had had stronger communication skills. Ostensibly, if Gabrielle had locked my parents in a restaurant's dining room and demanded that they reveal the worst and the nicest things they had done to one another, their divorce would still likely have happened, but it would likely have been smoother. Unfortunately, no one locked my parents in a restaurant, their divorce took a long time, and they concluded the legal matters essentially hating one another.

Yvonne and Mariette had similar experiences with their ex-husbands, and while they both wanted a divorce, they did not want the hatred and sordid communication that came out of the divorce. As Mariette says, "I think it was right that we divorced,

Claude. I just think we did it a little too soon.”²⁰ Mariette wanted the divorce, she just wanted Claude to remember the love, not the literary rivalry, that they shared. If he remembered the love, then their relationship could have been more positive post-divorce. Yvonne basically wanted Albert to stop hating her as well: She wanted Albert to be comfortable loving her without being married to her. These goals which Mariette and Yvonne shared influenced theirs and their ex-husband’s outlooks at the play’s conclusion.

My experience with my parents’ divorce shaped several characters’ outlooks at the conclusion of this production. Outlook, in this case, refers to each character’s expectations and hopes at the play’s conclusion. Gabrielle and Andre’s final outlooks are clear: Gabrielle wants to remarry Andre, Andre refuses to marry her, and there is almost no chance for their relationship in the future. Gabrielle’s outlook is grim, while Andre’s is cautiously optimistic. However, in terms of the script, the relationship outlooks for the other two couples, Albert and Yvonne, and Claude and Mariette, are left slightly ambiguous. If a director so desired, he or she could work with the actors to suggest that there is potential for these two relationships. For example, at the end of the play, the manner in which each character decides to sit at the table could give the audience hope for that character’s relationship. If the characters sit down, beaming romantically at their ex-spouse, that could indicate that they will give their relationship a second chance. In our production, I wanted no such hope to remain for either marriage all the while preserving the hope that each character could have an amicable relationship with his or her ex-spouse.

²⁰ Simon, 30.

It was important to avoid hope for re-marriages because doing so preserves a moral that is imbedded within *The Dinner Party*. In my view, it is generally unrealistic to hope that we can rekindle our old relationships. Such things happen, but almost exclusively by accident and not by design. However, we can hope to build relationships by design that avoid hatred. Moreover, we can build a healthy non-romantic relationship with someone in spite of the fact that we may disagree with or even dislike aspects of him or her. The moral of *The Dinner Party* is that we must actively remember to look for both the worst and the nicest things about someone, not just the worst. After divorces and even “break-ups,” too many people see only the worst in their ex-partners.

The Dinner Party's moral, which suggests building trust through communication, also applies to building healthy relationships outside the marriage-divorce context. The possible applications are diverse. For example, imagine if *The Dinner Party* were rewritten as follows: The premise would remain similar, such that divorced couples are tricked into attending a dinner party. However, Neil Simon's couples are replaced with the following: Barack Obama and John McCain, Benjamin Netanyahu and Mahmoud Abbas, and lastly, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI and Jesus. The show would retain its farcical elements: the couples are all well known heterosexual males, for example; the political rivalries would likely prove hilarious as well. However, Jesus would have organized the party, meaning that the play would eventually descend into a passionate drama that produces mutual respect in spite of severe differences.

As a play, this scenario could be politically powerful. I argue that in real-life, finding something nice—something to love—about a political adversary can be a path to fruitful diplomacy. Doing so is incredibly difficult, but not unthinkable. It could, at least in theory, be a powerful starting point for Mahmoud Abbas and Benjamin Netanyahu to find deep respect for one another despite their political and moral opposition. Someone just needs to lock them up together in a French restaurant.

I also have personal experience that follows *The Dinner Party*'s process for building or maintaining an amicable relationship despite uncomfortable differences. When Sarah and I ended our relationship a week before *The Dinner Party* auditioned, we did so in a very Dinner Party-esque fashion: We met and talked about the best and the worst parts of our relationship, and through that dialogue we decided to end our relationship but agreed that we should remain friends. That conversation was long and it actually took place in segments over several weeks. Nevertheless, the experience of talking through the best and the worst elements of our relationship proved productive: It may sound clichéd, but remaining friends (and only friends) with Sarah has been much easier than with any past relationship, and I credit *The Dinner Party*'s example with that success.

When applied to real life, *The Dinner Party*'s model for finding love for an adversary is what equates the thought, “The world is in trouble,” and, “I’m in love.” Or, in its equation form:

“The world is in trouble” = “I’m in love.”

As discussed in the beginning of this reflection, these two metaphorically equivalent thoughts are symbols of larger groups of experiences, ideas, and questions: “The world

is in trouble” refers to my awareness and concern for deepening world crises; my Algebra teacher, who sparked my burning interest in teaching; Mountains Beyond Mountains, which inspired me to take on great challenges; and my work at the Clark Honors College (CHC), which, in dialogue with my theater studies, led me to believe in the value of arts in education. “I’m in love” is an umbrella that covers the following: my longing for my family in California, and my constant need to replace the love they once gave me daily; my related tendency to fall in love quickly and then question the validity of that love; and finally, the failure to look for love that I observed in my parents’ divorce.

The equivalence of these two groups of thoughts, ideas, and experiences, emerges when we consider them in theater terms: underlying each group is a super objective of my life. To return to Professor Barton’s definition of the super objective, he writes,

Everyone has something she wants out of life (or in the course of the play) more than anything else. For most of us this is the driving force, the cause we would go to the mat or even to war for. ... The super objective unifies all the tiny objectives that occupy moment-to-moment living into a major motive for living.²¹

Treating this critical reflection as if it were the play-script of my life, two super objectives are clearly present: to improve education, and to find love. These objectives dictate the priorities in my life, from serving the CHC to joining Teach For America to trying to build a new relationship with a woman months before I move to Washington D.C.. They also motivated me to direct a play, and to direct this play. I disagree with

²¹ Barton, 123.

Barton, though, in that I would not likely go to war over these objectives; I would, however, use them to stop a war.

The Dinner Party is the lens through which I first saw these two super objectives in my life as being connected on a deeply personal level. They are not literally the same thing, but the role they play in my life is equivalent. I also find love in education, and vice versa. In light of these two super objectives, it is clear that directing *The Dinner Party* it bridges my two passions of education and love. Admittedly, the reasons to do this project are easier to articulate in hindsight, but the roots of the reasons were clearly present at the project's inception.

Finally, directing this show at the end of my undergraduate career was serendipitous because I am in a liminal state, that is, I am standing on multiple thresholds at once: I am transitioning from being a student to being a teacher; I am moving from Oregon to Washington D.C.; I recently ended one relationship and began a new one; I am once again leaving a family behind for a place where I know only three people.²² Each of these transitions relates to love and education, and it is therefore fitting that I directed *The Dinner Party* now. It is truly a capstone project because it signals a stepping over the threshold, the conclusion of one act of my life and the transition into the next. My super objectives remain the same, however, and they will continue to guide me.

²² The concept of liminality was serendipitously introduced to me during my last undergraduate theater course. I took this course while directing *The Dinner Party*. The course, taught by Professor Lowell Bowditch, focused on Greek tragedy. Oedipus is the archetypal liminal character.

Section 2: Goals and outcomes of the project.

This project's original goal was expressed as a question: "How do I direct a play?" To my surprise, the answer to that question came in the form of another question: "Why do I direct a play?" When I began this project by asking "How do I direct a play?," I set goals of learning more about working with actors, analyzing a script, and determining blocking. I learned many lessons about these topics, a selection of which I discuss in the third section of this reflection. But more important than any of these lessons was realizing what motivated me to direct a play and to direct this play. As section one argues, I chose to direct both a play and this play for my thesis project because of the super objectives in my life: to improve education, and to find love. However, the relationship between my own super objectives, play directing, and *The Dinner Party* yields other lessons about directing as well. These lessons are the outcomes of the original goals of this project and the subject of this section of the reflection.

Directing is a fulfilling process because it requires the director's entire being and, through that requirement, is powerfully educational. By requiring my "entire being" I mean that directing drew on many parts of my life, from my relationships, to my understanding of my parents' divorce, to *Mountains Beyond Mountains*, to my eighth grade algebra class. To make analogy: in dating, when someone appreciates and is interested my entire being—emotionally, physically, professionally, intellectually—the relationship tends to feel more fulfilling because it engages all of me, not just a percentage. To be clear, the other person does not have to like all of me, but they do

engage all of me. Similarly, directing engages all of me, which is a fulfilling workout for the mind and spirit.

By using my entire being, the act of directing *The Dinner Party* improved my understanding of myself. For example, while I used my love life as source material for *The Dinner Party*, directing *The Dinner Party* reciprocally informed my love life: *The Dinner Party* made the finale of my relationship with Sarah substantially more amicable. I now better understand other experiences, such as how missing my grandmother as a child affects me today. Furthermore, I mentioned in section one that my understanding of why I chose to direct a play and this play was partially retrospective. By “retrospective,” I meant that only after completing the process of directing could I begin to articulate in depth why I undertook this project; until that point, the decision to direct had been based significantly on intuition. Thus, directing *The Dinner Party* helped me identify my personal super objectives in greater clarity and to understand how they motivate my actions. Put another way, working on this project helped me understand how such disconnected experiences as reading *Mountains Beyond Mountains* and my parents’ divorce are actually connected: they both have applications to my directing process—they structure who I am—and my understanding of these experiences deepens through their use in a directing context. Altogether, an important lesson from this project, then, is that directing teaches the director about himself as well as directing.

Play directing will continue to be instructive for me. Based on this experience, I can see how I could learn new lessons from directing different plays at different times in my life. I cannot know whether I would learn as much from directing another play as

I have from directing *The Dinner Party* at this time in my life, but that is one reason to direct again: because I do not know what I will learn. I have to assume the same is true for other directors as well. Earlier, I mentioned the adage, “writing is thinking,” which to me means that through the process of writing about an idea that idea often grows, becomes clearer, and connects to other ideas. In the same vein, directing is thinking. Directing this play was a process of constant revelation that grew my self-understanding: I found connections between parts of my life that formerly felt completely unrelated.

Directing is thus a process by which one can find unity among his or her feelings and experiences. This idea connects with the acclaimed director William Ball’s argument concerning art. In his text, *A Sense of Direction*, Ball writes,

My particular prejudice is that the theatre is an art form...The most important characteristic of a work of art is unity. ... Unity means harmony among the component parts; and the greater the harmony among the component parts, the greater the unity and the greater the art. What we seek are the techniques that will increase the harmony among the component parts.²³

Ball’s views on unity simultaneously explain why I directed *The Dinner Party* as well as how I directed it (and, to some extent, how I now believe I should have directed it). As a reminder, section one of this thesis discussed why I directed *The Dinner Party*: to use Ball’s terms, I directed the play because it provided me with an opportunity to find greater unity within myself and to use that unity to create quality art. This discovery of

²³ Ball, 3.

greater self-unity has led me to the answer to my original question: How do I direct a play?

I direct a play by finding the unity within the play; I also direct a play to find the unity within it. Unity motivates everything from blocking to character development to how a director works with designers. In theater terms, a play's unity is sometimes referred to as its spine. Another way of thinking of the spine is through this comparison: a super objective is to a character as a spine is to a play; both a spine and a super objective motivate action and provide unity. This definition of the spine is developed in greater detail in the next section of the critical reflection. However, with regards to this basic definition, the point is that when I began work on *The Dinner Party*, I understood the spine as an isolated concept: I treated the spine of the play as if it were local only to the play-text and I did not actively connect the spine of the play to the super objectives in my life (to improve education, to find love). Thus, another important lesson I learned from *The Dinner Party* was that a director must unite his or her own super objective(s) with the spine of the play. As a director, I must find unity between myself and the play. In so doing, my super objectives inflect my production's spine and fulfilling the spine becomes more important to me because I am personally invested in it.

My limited personal investment in the spine limited the quality of my direction: For example, I sometimes forgot to pursue the spine during rehearsals. There are a number of reasons for this, but the leading cause was that I did not sufficiently understand how to integrate my own life into the play. Fortunately, through this reflection, I have developed enough self-awareness to understand how to use unity

between myself and *The Dinner Party*: my experiences resonate with and uncover urgency in the action onstage. Because of my work on this project, I predict I will discover unity on future projects sooner and then pursue that unity with greater conviction.

In the next section, I discuss some important steps I took to direct *The Dinner Party*. Through this discussion, it becomes clear that I conceived of these different steps as being disconnected from one another. My approach to directing did not have unity. To use a metaphor, I can now see that I equated directing a play to caring for a large number roses: At first, I saw many roses before me. I thought the roses were a vast garden of lonely roses, spread out over a distance. Of course, each of these roses needed to be watered. To handle this watering chore, I designed an extensive sprinkler system that could water any number of roses no matter how large the garden. What I did not realize, at least until now, was that I was actually looking at one very flowery rosebush from a close distance; there was no garden of roses. All I needed was a hose to water the one bush.

Using the hose represents the integration of the self with the spine of the play that I have explored through the first two sections of this reflection. Aligning the self with the play's spine allows a director to fulfill the many responsibilities of directing through the pursuit of the spine. The next section explains how and why this is so. In what follows, I assess the so-called "sprinkler system" I designed: I argue that I successfully watered the one rosebush; however, that I built a sprinkler system to accomplish that task ultimately detracted from the project. Metaphorically, if I had

simply used a hose, I could have redirected the time and energy spent building the sprinkler system to completing other tasks, like removing aphids.

Section 3: How did I direct *The Dinner Party*? Methods and lessons learned.

I first conceived of directing as a group of semi-disparate tasks. I found the number and scope of the tasks overwhelming, so I devised a system by which I could learn to handle each of these tasks individually. In my prospectus, I defined the tasks of directing as follows:

- Deciding which play to direct / being hired to direct a play.
- Determining the spine for the production.
- Adapting / editing the script, if appropriate.
- Researching the playwright, the play's history and setting, and references made in the play.
- Analyzing the play.
- Recruiting actors to audition for the play.
- Holding auditions and casting the play.
- Building and leading the team of designers, actors, and crew members.
- Giving artistic freedom to designers.
- Working with the stage manager and crew.
- Resolving conflict between team members.
- Listening to and considering other team members' ideas.
- Respecting the theater administrators' stipulations (financial, PR, or otherwise).
- Conducting rehearsals

- Blocking the play with the actors
- Working with actors to improve their performances.
- Along with the stage manager, maintaining the efficiency and timeliness of the entire rehearsal process.
- Giving life to the play and making sense of the play's plot and themes.
- Considering the audience's experience during a performance.
- Maintaining humble, respectful authority over the production and its constituents.

When learning to direct for the first time, thinking of each of these tasks separately can be especially important for skill development. And at any skill level, focusing on one task can improve proficiency with that task. When directing a longer play, however, the individual tasks need to be addressed collectively; they need unity, as Ball's argument about art and my own experiences suggest. In the list above, I gave no indication of the relationship among these tasks, which indicates I did not have a firm understanding of how or why they can unite.

The number and diversity of tasks intimidated me, so I made a three-part plan to build my proficiency with the various tasks. This three-part plan was the metaphorical sprinkler system mentioned at the end of the previous section. First, I would read over twenty respected acting and directing texts in order to learn about approaches to these different tasks. Second, I would discuss the lessons of these texts with my primary advisor and use his additional reflections and insights to balance my own. Third, I would take the lessons learned from the readings and discussions and apply them in the theatre by directing *The Dinner Party*. The three parts of this plan were the sources of

my research on directing, and while I learned many lessons, the lessons of the research were not what I predicted. The most important lesson I learned, about why I direct a play and why I directed this play, is discussed in sections one and two of this introduction. The discussion below outlines other significant lessons learned through the research process, as well as how the research process changed over time. This discussion also highlights how the unity (or lack thereof) in my directing process influenced different parts of the production.

Discussions with my advisor taught me to pay close attention to the spine of the play, primarily through script analysis. Initially, the script analysis was based on the model developed by Francis Hodge in *Play Directing: Analysis, Communication, and Style* (2010).²⁴ Under Hodge's model, I examined the given circumstances of the play and characters, the dramatic structure of the play text, and the deeper ideas which the playwright communicates through the play. In retrospect, the most useful part of the script analysis was the analysis of the characters' polar attitudes (part of the given circumstances), that is, a comparison between how each character feels about the other characters at the beginning of the play versus the end of the play. Establishing these poles gave me a sense of each character's development from beginning to end, and I referred to my analysis of the characters' polar attitudes throughout the rehearsal process.

My advisor also gave me additional script analysis questions that would help me develop and personally invest in the spine of the play. These questions included, "What

²⁴ Hodge, 54-56.

is this play about? Why is it important to me? What is the spine of the play? What are the characters' super objectives? Who are these characters to me? How do my own relationships help me better understand the characters?" I believe my advisor intended these questions to connect me to the characters and to the spine of the play. On some level, that connection happened. At the time, however, I thought of myself in an over-compartmentalized fashion: I did not consider that how much I missed my grandmother or that my reading of *Mountains Beyond Mountains* could influence my work on this project. My self-awareness was lower than it is today, and it would likely have improved the quality of the project if I had recognized my limited awareness sooner and discussed it with my advisor.

Above all, my advisor emphasized the importance of the spine, and that led me to investigate the spine through readings. In what follows, I discuss my journey to better understand the concept of the spine of the play. During this journey, my original goal to read over twenty theater texts unravelled. Nevertheless, through the readings I completed, further discussion with my advisor, and the rehearsal process, I learned that a commitment to the spine of a play fulfills most of the aforementioned tasks which a director must carry out. In other words, the spine of the play gives all of the director's tasks unity, adding to the quality in which each task is performed as well as adding to quality of the production overall.

The journey to understand the concept of the spine began by trying to identify the spine of *The Dinner Party*. Through discussion with my advisor, I decided that the spine of this production of *The Dinner Party* was the same as the characters' super objectives: to find love. I wanted to prove that it is possible for one person to

simultaneously love and hate another person, and I believed that the spine of “to find love” would accomplish that goal.

Through readings, I discovered that the spine is a concept found throughout modern theatrical history, but it most notably heralds from Harold Clurman and Elia Kazan. Clurman gave the spine an objective definition, while Kazan took that definition and made it profoundly personal. Clurman writes,

What the director should establish for himself is the script’s content in dramatic terms. He may begin by asking himself what the audience is to feel and enjoy in seeing the play. Still, even this is not sufficiently basic groundwork. . . . the simplest terms must be found to state what general action motivates the play, of what fundamental drama or conflict the script’s plot and people are the instruments. What behavioral struggle is being represented? It is best . . . that the answer should be expressed as an active verb: for drama (and acting) are based on doing and action . . . [and] the answer to the questions I have just put is [called] the play’s spine.²⁵

For Clurman, finding a play’s spine is a matter of analyzing the script to gain an objective understanding of the playwright’s intent. While Clurman may have intended for the spine of a play to reflect the director’s personal investment (“to find love,” in my case), he does not directly say so in *On Directing*. Clurman therefore seems to argue that a play’s spine could be agreed upon by multiple directors. That Clurman defines the notion of the spine is important, however, his omission of the personal value of the

²⁵ Clurman, 23-24.

spine robs directing of some of its excitement. Without personal investment in the spine, the consequences of failing to pursue the spine in a play are far less than if the director is constantly, intimately invested in pursuing the spine at every opportunity.

Clurman's protege, Elia Kazan, advanced Clurman's definition of the spine by making it personal. In his text *Kazan on Directing*, Kazan writes,

The director has to restate succinctly the play, its meaning and form, in his own terms; he has to reconceive [sic] it as if he had created it. What does it mean to him? what does it arouse in him? How does the manuscript affect his soul? In short, what is his relationship as an artist to this document, this manuscript?"²⁶

When Kazan refers to the play's "meaning and form," he refers to the play's spine. Before directing *The Dinner Party*, I did not consciously understand what the play meant to me. I had guesses and could see significance, but the real reasons did not appear until I could reflect on the process by writing this reflection.

In the early stages of this project, then, I found that defining "spine" in a simple way was not difficult: the spine of a play, similar the spine in the body, is a central idea that connects all parts of the play and motivates every component of the work onstage, from the acting to the scene design. As per Kazan, I also acknowledged that the spine needed to have personal relevance to the director, but I did not understand that idea in a practical way. The process of directing *The Dinner Party* allowed me to understand both Clurman and Kazan's ideas in practical ways. This understanding-through-doing

²⁶ Kazan, 7-8.

leads me to suggest that to understand directing scholarship a director must actively apply that scholarship in a theater setting.

Historically, Clurman and Kazan's definitions date back to Stanislavsky's concept of the "through action" as articulated in his text *An Actor Prepares* (1936).²⁷ However, I never carried out a thorough study of Stanislavsky's texts for this thesis, so I will not delve into a discussion of the "through action" vis-a-vis Clurman's "spine" here. That I cannot do so here is another lesson I learned about directing: It is important for me to read directing and acting texts only at a rate at which I can apply their ideas in a rehearsal setting. My failure to realize this early on is what unravelled my goal of reading over twenty texts. Fortunately, reading over twenty texts was not necessary to direct *The Dinner Party* at, I would argue, a respectable quality.

In the end, I read significant portions of Harold Clurman's *On Directing* (1972), Elia Kazan's *Kazan on Directing* (2009), Francis Hodge's *Play Directing: Analysis, Communication, and Style* (2010), Alexander Dean and Lawrence Carra's *Fundamentals of Play Directing* (1989), William Ball's *A Sense of Direction* (1984), and Frank Hauser and Russell Reich's *Notes on Directing* (2003).²⁸ I read many parts of these texts simply because they seemed important but I did not have a particular application in mind. I eventually devised a system of reading based on the questions I had in mind at given time. For example, when I was working on the script analysis, I read Hodge; when I was wondering about stage pictures and blocking, I referred to

²⁷ Stanislavsky in Clurman, 24.

²⁸ I also referred to texts I had read previously, such as Robert Barton's. However, the texts for this project were intended to be new.

diagrams in Dean and Carra; when I wanted to better understand an actor's mind, I read selections from William Ball.

This system of reading texts based on my needs came about later in the rehearsal process. For much of the time, I was reading scattered selections without considering why I was reading them. In retrospect, I can see that this had the effect of making my conversations with my advisor vital for my understanding of directing: he provided unity when my readings did not. My scattered approach to reading was likely an adverse reaction to the over ambitious nature of my reading goals, but I had set that goal for familiar reasons: In part, I wanted to do the reading out of concern for my ability to handle a director's multitudinous responsibilities (listed above). Additionally, I can see now that this goal related to my personal super objective of improving education. To improve education, I needed to be a highly competent director, and an expression of competence is being well-read. This goal was not practical for a number of reasons, some obvious (the volume of material), but others were more subtle. The lack of practicality taught me important lessons about myself and directing, but also made me value the lessons in the readings which I did effectively process. I will now discuss the most significant of these lessons.

Even after trimming the list of texts from twenty down to six, the volume of material still posed some challenges. Because of the volume, I encountered three problems: As an amateur director, the first problem I encountered was, unsurprisingly, one of memory: how do I remember the large amounts of new information I am learning from these texts? Further, if I cannot remember the information, how will I ever apply it? I began by trying to write out extensive notes (see my journal entry from

June 24, 2013), but note taking proved to be exceedingly time consuming and exhausting and, to make matters worse, I discovered that I was still having trouble remembering the lessons I hoped to take into rehearsal. I am a kinesthetic learner—I must learn by doing—and reading the texts before I had a rehearsal setting to test the ideas made the reading feel much less accessible.

The second problem involved the actual process of testing the new directing ideas I learned from these texts, even once rehearsals were underway: I found that experimenting with too many directing ideas at once clouded my focus. For example, while working on the scenes at the end of *The Dinner Party* where all six characters are on the stage simultaneously, I became so preoccupied with blocking movement and stage pictures that I had significant difficulty remembering to focus on the spine until the final two weeks of rehearsals.²⁹ Thus, the tasks of blocking and pursuing the spine were at odds and my attention went mostly to the blocking. I now realize that spine of the play should inspire the blocking. In principle, I knew this about the spine from the beginning, but only by the end of the rehearsal process did I begin to understand the relationship between the spine and blocking on an intuitive, practical level. Thus, for most of the rehearsal process, I believed I needed to ingrain blocking and stage-picture techniques further into my instincts before I would be ready, as a director, to pursue the spine of a play. I now disagree with this belief.

I found that the relationship between blocking and the spine of the play is deceptively simple. About halfway through the rehearsal process, I learned that

²⁹ The definition of “blocking:” “The movements of the actor that are set by the director at some point in the rehearsal process” (Barton, 189). With more advanced actors, the movement is defined as a collaborative process between actor(s) and director.

thinking of blocking as “approaching / attacking” or “moving away / retreating” made blocking much easier to plan. To accomplish blocking in this manner, I only needed to understand the character’s objective: does the character’s objective take him or her closer to or further from the other character(s)? Then, after establishing that basic motivation, I could ‘rough-block’ the scene with the actors. As we became proficient with that rough model, we could then incorporate the more complicated aspects of blocking, such as using different planes of the stage (back, front, center), different elevations, and making sure that the action predominantly took place along diagonal lines. The problem I had was trying to do everything at once: rough-block in ways that included levels, elevations, and so forth. Sometimes the more complicated elements come naturally, and that is great, but I found gradually adjusting the blocking over time to increase its complexity, diversity, and emphases, worked better than trying to make it be an exemplar of textbook blocking from the first rehearsal.

To develop the blocking, I relied on lessons from my directing coursework with Professor Joseph Gilg (second reader on this thesis), my own experience from directing *Julius Caesar* the previous summer, and examples from Dean and Carra’s text.³⁰ Professor Najjar also offered me blocking suggestions after he observed rehearsals. The knowledge from these sources was particularly helpful for blocking the final twenty pages of the play when all six characters are onstage at the same time. This scene was especially difficult because of the small, narrow nature of the Pocket Theater stage. It would be too tedious to discuss every blocking decision here, but in general, I had two major goals with this scene: that there would not be a mob on the stage (five against

³⁰ See examples from Dean and Carra Chapter 6, pages 68-145.

one, etc.), and that the stage picture should either emphasize the character giving a confession or, when no confessions are occurring, Gabrielle should be emphasized. To emphasize the character giving a confession, that character took center stage. To emphasize Gabrielle, she either came downstage of all the other actors and the other actors (ideally) watched her, or she stood upstage center, at the point of a “V” made by the other actors (this can be seen after she asks them to “move around”). I also used different planes by having at least one character on each plane at most times.

Elevations were also used, but not to an extreme, by having one or two characters sitting, either on the couch or the barstool or a chair. Altogether, blocking the final scene was like solving a rubik’s cube, but there were guiding principles for maintaining an elegant overall composition. Despite determining the spacial technique behind the blocking, I did not often think of the blocking as motivated by the spine. I will do so in future productions.

Returning to the issue of reading too many texts, the third problem I faced was one of isolating variables: Applying multiple techniques at once made it more difficult for me to assess the effectiveness of one technique over another. One example of this bridges the first show I ever directed, Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, and *The Dinner Party*. Prior to directing *Caesar* in summer 2013, I read William Ball’s *A Sense of Direction* (both for *Caesar* and for this project). The most important lessons I learned from Ball’s book centered on working with actors; Ball’s assessment of actor psychology helps me in every rehearsal I run, but it was only through the contrast of my work on *Caesar* versus *The Dinner Party* that I began to develop a system for implementing some of Ball’s ideas.

Ball's text taught me to give actors direction through questions, not commands.

Ball writes,

A director thrives when he puts his ideas in the form of questions. You have known directors to come into rehearsal crying, "I want this. I want that. I see it this way."...This is an amateur at work. ... A skilled director's sentences are questions. "How could we improve this? How could we clarify this? How could we get across the idea that she is looking for help? How could we simplify this entrance? Where has he come from? ... Could we pick up the pace?"³¹

With Caesar, I learned to direct with questions, at least more often than not. I asked questions like those above, but also noticed the usefulness of asking questions in every context. I remember asking the fight choreographer, "Since the park we're performing in has a tree growing right out of the stage, could we use the tree in the fight?" I did not say, "I want the tree in the fight choreography." I would also ask actors questions such as, "How fast can you run onto the stage? Oh, extremely fast? Ok! That's great. Why might you run extremely fast? Because your husband is about to be killed? Yeah, I agree with that line of reasoning." This, as opposed to "You are worried your husband is going to be killed so run onstage extremely quickly, please." The latter asks the actor to obey orders and problematically presumes that the actor both can follow the order and agrees with the order. I also found that blocking the show through questions made blocking a collaborative process.

³¹ Ball, 51.

I discovered that asking actors questions instead of giving orders had two other positive effects: first, I noticed actors would seem more confident about their work when I asked them questions they could answer. For example, when I asked the rather athletic actor, “How fast can you run onstage?” of course the answer was going to be some version of “fast,” but by asking the question, I sensed that the actor felt like her skills were unique and useful, not just taken for granted. The actor must feel that her skills and abilities, even simple ones like running, have value. By being asked and not ordered to employ her skill sets, the actor likely chooses to invest herself in the acting work, which improves the actor’s morale. The actor may also feel like she was impressing me, the director, because she was able to do something that I signaled, by asking a question, that perhaps not all actors can do. If I just told her to run extremely fast, it may seem like I assume all actors can do so, and if she cannot do it, she is perhaps not as good at acting as someone else. If that happens, then the actor begins to doubt herself and her performance will lose quality. In summary, I found that giving actors direction through questions increases actors’ investment in their work, improves the quality of the acting, and boosts actors’ morale. The relationship between actor and director also improves through the use of questions, not orders.

I applied these lessons to *The Dinner Party* and observed similar results. When working the scene where Claude and Mariette first see each other, I asked Alex Hardin, who played Albert, “I’m sensing that your cross to the couch isn’t working, do you feel that way too? Yes? Then could you find a way to cross up to the bathroom door instead?” to which Alex responded in a confident, cheery manner: “Yes!” The subtext of his answer was as follows: “Yes, Director! I have the skills necessary to adjust my

blocking by myself and instead of coming to the couch on this side of the stage, I will find a way to be by the bathroom on the opposite side of the stage!” If I had simply told him to walk to the bathroom and not the couch, he could have felt like it was his fault for spending too much time on the couch; instead, he felt good because he realized that he knew how to solve a problem that we, not just he, were experiencing onstage. After Alex made the adjustment, I checked to see if he motivated it with an objective (he did: escaping Claude). If I had not sensed an objective, I could have asked, “Why did you move to the bathroom?” and from that question we would discover an answer together that had dramatic purpose.

The second benefit to directing through questions is that the quality of the show improves logistically and artistically. In *Caesar*, I observed that asking the actors questions invited them to let me know when an idea was not going to work. For example, I asked an actor, “Can you take this bench off stage with you when you leave the stage?” to which the actor responded, “No, when I get offstage, I have to immediately help another actor change costumes, and carrying a bench would slow that down.” If I had simply said, “Take the bench offstage,” the actor might have been too afraid to tell me about the costume change. If the actor decided not to tell me, then the actor might have spent considerable time trying to figure out how to adjust the costume change’s timing so he could take the bench off—potentially creating a domino series of logistical problems backstage—whereas if I ask the the actor a question then the actor has an invitation to let me know taking the bench will not work. Then I can simply ask another actor if he or she could remove the bench. By asking questions, the inner logistical workings of the show remain in tact.

Asking questions also improves the quality of acting choices. In *The Dinner Party*, asking questions allowed actors to contribute their own ideas, which often resulted in useful discoveries. During a rehearsal with just Gabrielle and Andre, I asked Gabrielle (Liv Burns), “On the line you just said, ‘I want the rest of our lives together like you promised,’ could you intimidate Andre?” to which she responded, “I could, but I wondered if I could use that line to make him feel loved?” “Yes,” I replied, “try it.” She tried it and the way she did it made my heart break for her character. As a director, I learned that asking actors questions allows them to answer with questions of their own, which may produce more beautiful work onstage than I had envisioned.

The practice of giving direction through questions relates to the aforementioned problem of isolating variables when learning to direct. Asking questions of actors seemed effective in *Julius Caesar* because I could observe the effects asking questions had on actors: When I made the mistake of giving orders, I could feel actors’ confidence lowering and resentment rising. However, *The Dinner Party* made me realize that directing requires not just asking questions but also knowing which question to ask.

Asking good questions requires instincts that are rooted in strategic preparatory work. Without going into too many details, I now realize that I asked many bad questions in *Caesar* because I had not done the preparatory work necessary to develop such instincts. For example, I never articulated a spine for *Caesar* (I did not realize the importance of articulating one). I remember asking the actor playing Cassius, “In scene seven, can you greet Brutus like a long lost brother?” to which Cassius responded, “Yes!” and the actor did so very well. Unfortunately, neither the actor nor I realized

until after the show opened that the entire show worked much better if Cassius greeted Brutus by threatening his life in scene seven. I mistakenly turned a powerfully dark and threatening scene into a jovial albeit boring reunion. Altogether, I did not ask bad questions in the sense that they were not unfair questions to the actors, but they were bad insofar as they did not always make the most sense artistically and dramatically. Having a concrete spine for the show (perhaps, to seize power?) could have made it clear that Cassius would not jovially greet Brutus but instead threaten him.

While directing *The Dinner Party*, I asked the actors better questions because I had developed a spine for the play (“to find love”) that grew out of each character’s development across the play. The contrast between my work on Caesar and *The Dinner Party* made the relative effectiveness of my questions during each show apparent: When working on scenes in Caesar, to evaluate progress I would ask myself, “Does the scene work? How entertaining is it?” If the answers to these questions were negative, I asked the actors questions to help make the scene work (maybe some lines or stage business were not making sense), or to make the scene more entertaining by adding in a laugh or dramatic tension as we desired.

By contrast, with *The Dinner Party* I could ask myself, “Does the scene work in the context of the spine?” and if not, I could ask the actors questions to help guide the scene closer to the spine. Granted, as my director’s journal makes clear, I forgot to ask myself that question as often as I should have. If I had realized how invest my own super objectives (to improve education, to find love) into the spine of the show, I never would have forgotten the spine. The spine would have been too important to me to forget. Despite that setback, I still had a basis for deciding what kinds of questions to

ask actors during *The Dinner Party*. For example, when Andre confesses to Gabrielle the best thing she ever did for him, I had to decide whether to ask “Andre, how much do you love Gabrielle at this point in the scene? A lot? Ok, a lot. Can you try to get her back?” versus “Andre, do you want to leave this party? Yes? Ok, then how can you use this speech to make Gabrielle hate you? Not like you anymore? Let you leave?” The first set of questions follows the spine of the play—it looks for love—while the second does not, therefore, I ultimately chose the first line of questions. I say “ultimately” because it took me until late in the rehearsal process to realize I had forgotten about the spine with regards to Andre’s speech. If this had been Caesar, however, I could have led the actors to follow the second line of questions and never realized that doing so was not appropriate.

The learning curve between Caesar and *The Dinner Party* taught me the value of learning directing strategies one at a time. I used Caesar as a laboratory to learn how to give directions in the form of questions. To that end, a significant part of my rehearsal preparation was spent thinking of and writing out questions I wanted to ask the actors in rehearsal. While I could prepare questions effectively, I had a difficult time improvising questions when the need arose. However, with time, I improved and began to think in questions, both before and during rehearsals. Barring a few exceptions, I found giving question-based direction in *The Dinner Party* to be almost second nature. Thus, only once question-based thinking became instinctual could I then begin to refine the focus of the questions I was asking. Whereas Caesar was my laboratory for directing through questions, *The Dinner Party* was my laboratory for spine-based-questioning. If I had begun Caesar by focusing both on the spine and learning to think in terms of

questions, I doubt I would have been able to distinguish the usefulness of directing through questions with a clearly defined spine in mind versus asking questions without a spine in mind. Because of the contrast between the two plays, I am now a better judge of questions I ask in rehearsal.

This distinction between spine-based questions and “spine-less” questions is what I referred to when I brought up the problem of isolating variables when learning to direct. Thinking in terms of questions and thinking in terms of a spine are two distinct and large variables; learning to do either one takes up considerable mental bandwidth, both while preparing for rehearsal and during the rehearsals themselves. By learning about each variable at different, succeeding times, I now understand the merits of each variable individually as well as when combined. As with mathematics, isolating a variable is important for understanding that variable’s role in an equation. So too with directing, learning to think in terms of questions was important because it taught me the value of questions. Subsequently, being able to devote some of my focus to thinking in terms of the spine has allowed me to understand the added benefits of thinking in that manner. Thus, adopting two variables simultaneously does more than overload mental bandwidth: it can actually limit the director’s ability to understand the usefulness of each variable individually. I suggest that gaining an understanding of each variable individually enhances my ability to use them together. Therein lies the problem I had with reading many directing texts at once: reading the texts presented so many variables I could neither process nor isolate them effectively. More experienced directors may not encounter these problems, but I suspect such difficulties would be common for new directors.

Before concluding this section, here is a brief summary of the three problems I encountered by attempting to read too many directing texts: the problem of remembering many new ideas, the problem of trying to focus on those many new ideas at once during rehearsal, and the problem of evaluating the effectiveness of each new idea on its own if I am experimenting with other ideas simultaneously. To be clear, it is possible to experiment with multiple small ideas at once, such as a new blocking scheme alongside a tactic for improving a monotone actor's vocal range, but simultaneously experimenting with two or more large new ideas (new ways of thinking, for example) is unadvisable. Learning to give directions in terms of questions took considerable focus, planning, and energy during *Caesar*, whereas in *The Dinner Party* it came almost naturally. Similarly, remembering to work on the spine in *The Dinner Party* was a constant battle, and one I lost often; however, for future, know I can maintain the spine's priority by thinking of my other directing responsibilities in terms of the spine.

To conclude this section of the critical reflection, I will discuss one more consequence of not prioritizing the spine throughout the entire rehearsal process. The consequence was this: I had a difficulty thinking in terms of actable objectives. This had two major effects: first, any time I wished to give an actor direction, I knew how to give that direction in the form of a question, but I often failed to articulate the question in a way that included an objective. For example, I once asked Claude, "Claude, when you say to Mariette 'And in case she's still interested...', could you cross to the bar?" when I should have asked, "Claude, when you say that, how does it make you feel? Embarrassed? Like crying? Ok, both. Do you want to look for comfort from her, by

being close to her, or do you want to hide from her?” The latter series of directions combines questions with objectives that suit the spine of the play. These questions show how character development, blocking, and the nature of the directing all emanate from the spine. When this kind of spine-based direction is multiplied across every rehearsal, then the action of the show becomes unified by the spine; the action becomes more coherent and moving. In contrast, the former question, “can you cross to the bar?” is merely logistical and includes no dramatic function or unity with other directions given. I unfortunately made this kind of mistake many times during rehearsals for *The Dinner Party*, but by reflecting on those mistakes here I predict that I will improve on them in the future. Thus, to learn how to use a spine to unify and improve the quality of the work on a play, a director must actively practice using the spine throughout the process of directing a play.

Section 4: Other reflections

This section briefly lists reflections I have on directing *The Dinner Party*, with special attention given to elements of the performances. I discuss parts of the action onstage that I believe worked and did not work, with some suggestions as to why. More of these kinds of discussions are treated in the Director’s Journal (part 6 of this thesis document), but those tend to be less articulate as they were “in the moment.” With regards to these final reflections, I generally argue that the show worked well, but there were of course several shortcomings.

Reflections on what did and did not work in this production of *The Dinner Party*:

1. I was pleased with the level of laughter the show received from the audience. As this was a Neil Simon play, I was concerned about our production not being funny

enough. In general, I would have liked a few more laughs, especially with regard to Yvonne's double-entrances, but on the whole I was pleased. I do not know how I would have improved the laughter with regard to those entrances. The laughs I am most proud of are two of Claude's lines: "Puzzle solved!" and "We all will, Al." The laugh after Albert speaks to Yvonne by accident was also a proud moment—having Albert bang his head on the door was a good idea, though I no longer remember whose idea it was. Also, laugh-placement vis a vis the spine is something I will think more about on future shows. I think the actors pursued laughs too often instead of objectives, especially on closing night.

2. On the theme of humor, I should have been firmer with TJ LaGrow (Andre) about playing the beginning of the show straight. On opening night, he played the beginning of the show straight, and then started to "ham up" his character. The audience loved his increasingly eccentric actions. The problem was that on the second performance he started in that eccentric mode, and the audience did not respond as well. I decided not to give him a note about it for closing night for fear of making him too self-aware onstage. If we had had a second performance weekend, I would have worked this note into the pick-up rehearsal.
3. The performances had a poignant quality at the ending, though it could have been sadder. I wanted more hope that Andre would stay but we did not quite find it.
4. I am extremely pleased with the cast. I worked hard to get experienced actors at the audition, and it payed off. Casting was a bit of a puzzle, but after the first week of rehearsal I did not second-guess my decision. The cast was very reliable. They were

punctual, off-book when needed, and consistently contributed their creativity to rehearsals.

5. Mallory Oslund impressed me as Yvonne. She has a three page monologue that she made feel effortless. She worked hard on the beats of that speech.
6. In terms of blocking, the hardest parts of the show to block were “the sneeze” when Albert speaks to Yvonne by accident, and the “move around” direction that Gabrielle gives the other characters. Both took meticulous work.
7. The sequence of Mariette reaching for the air vent never worked for me. I wanted it to be hilarious, but it seemed like a distraction. I am tempted to blame Neil Simon for this problem: Mariette’s air-vent ordeal is pages long but she has very few lines during the sequence, making it hard to balance her reaction to the claustrophobia while other things are discussed onstage. I would like to see how another director handles this. We tried at least six approaches, and eventually resorted to minimizing it.
8. The pace for the beginning of the show was a good discovery: while I classified the first third of the play as a farce, the opening scene with just Claude and Albert needed to move slower than typical farce speed. We discovered that if Claude and Albert played the scene too fast, then it felt impatient and the rest of the show became considerably less humorous. We devised a deliberate “pick up the pace” moment when Andre came in, which then allowed the pace to evolve normally for the rest of show.

9. I am proud of the business with the doors, with actors coming in and out of the restroom and main door and just missing one another. The timing was exactly what I wanted.
10. The first scene between Mariette and Albert does not completely work for me. I wanted them to have a brief, intense romantic interest, but why Mariette turns off of Albert never quite made sense to me—I could not find the point where she changes objectives, which perhaps suggests we had the first objective wrong.
11. The timing of the beat where Albert is caught between Mariette and Claude, who are fighting, worked well. The objectives felt clear to me every time I watched the beat.
12. I was especially pleased with Audrey Bittner’s growth during the rehearsal process. The diversity of what she did with Mariette was not enormous, but she gave the character authority and confidence that did not falter. Early on, Audrey also had a habit of smiling through everything she did onstage, which she worked hard to break.
13. I am conflicted about the extent to which the actors played character over action. Sometimes, I know they did this, but I never found myself disliking it. That I had only an intellectual understanding of how to use the spine likely led me to unconsciously favor character building over pursuing objectives. I also suspect that I find character acting to be more sincere than do many of my fellow artists; I may have seen the characters pursuing objectives that others find weak or fake.
14. The week before we opened, both Aaron Archer and Liv Burns—the two most experienced actors—lost confidence and their performances suffered. Meeting with

each of them one-on-one for a drink to read the script with them and answer questions solved the problem.

These are just some of my reflections on different parts of the play and the directing process. For “in the moment” reactions that discuss these points and more, see the director’s journal.

Section 5: Conclusion to the critical reflection

This critical reflection has focused on major personal discoveries. These discoveries are functions of my own journey to and through directing a play. Smaller discoveries are treated in section four of this reflections, and in the director’s journal. However, the directing techniques involved in these smaller discoveries are already covered by directing textbooks in thoughtful detail, and I do not have much to add to what the experts have already written. Importantly, there may be major discoveries about this project still waiting to be found, but I do not have the perspective necessary to see them yet. Time will likely yield more lessons.

If I were to use my own discoveries to help a theater student about to embark on his or her first major directing project, here is what I would suggest: (these complement or reinforce the suggestions made in part one of this thesis document)

1. Find a professor or someone with directing experience who you can meet with for advice when needed.
2. Do the entire script analysis process. I thought I understood plays until I used Francis Hodge’s model to score a script. Hodge asks you to hypothesize an objective for each scene and each line: Revisit these objectives the night before the rehearsal for that scene.

3. As you do the script analysis, write down potential spines as you think of them. Then, think about experiences and things you have done in your life that seem completely unrelated to theater. Use these experiences to determine (if you do not already know) your personal super objective(s), and then invest your super objective(s) into the spine of the play. After doing all of this, ask a directing mentor for feedback on the spine you developed.
4. Directing has many responsibilities: think of them as coming out of the spine. For example, blocking and the spine do not compete for your attention; rather, the spine motivates blocking. Remember, directing should feel like taking care of a rosebush, not a garden overrun with roses.
5. There are many excellent directing and acting books you should read, but read them at a pace that works for you. Many of these texts are intended to be practical, so if you are reading about so many ideas that you cannot manage to apply them, consider slowing down your reading pace.
6. Keep a journal and write in it after most rehearsals. I found it especially helpful to write about what bothered me: doing so was both therapeutic and helped me find solutions to problems. Be sure to ask yourself, in writing, how the scene you are working on tomorrow relates to the play's spine and your own super objective(s). Remember, "Writing is thinking."
7. "Directing is thinking." Two or three weeks after the play closes, ask yourself, in writing, what you learned about directing and about yourself. Ask yourself, "Why did I direct a play? And why did I direct this play?"

My answers to these last two questions were the major discoveries of this thesis project. In short, I directed both a play and this play in order to fulfill my own super objectives: to improve education, and to find love. I have realized that two recurring thoughts, “The world is in trouble,” and, “I’m in love,” are symbols of deeper motivations that are always inspiring my actions. As a result of this discovery, I am seeing new connections between experiences that used to think of as disparate. To salute William Ball’s argument, I have found a new level of unity. This unity has changed how I will direct plays—how I approach blocking, how I ask actors questions, how I read critical directing texts—forevermore. More importantly, my experience directing *The Dinner Party* has changed how I understand different parts of my life, from education, to love, to theater: they are all connected.

Part 5: Script Analysis of Simon's *The Dinner Party*

Introduction:

This script analysis is based on a model developed by Francis Hodge in *Play Directing: Analysis, Communication, and Style* (2010).³² Elements of the script analysis were also suggested by my primary thesis advisor. Importantly, I completed the script analysis as preparatory work, and therefore it does not necessarily reflect my understanding of the script or characters after completing work on the play. Script analysis is done primarily for the director, and its nature may seem informal, almost like a student's notes taken for a class. However, the ideas found and recorded in the script analysis are formal in that they follow a specific set of guidelines designed to help a director understand the connective tissue that underlies a script and its characters.

As a warning, the script analysis can be dramatic: I often analyzed characters as if they themselves were speaking. These "invented monologues" sometimes include profanity because doing so was the best way I could remember and communicate how I believed a character would feel or react in a certain circumstance.

Finally, the script analysis involved scoring the script with objectives, beat changes, scene divisions, and other notes. Scanned copies of my scripts are included as appendices to this thesis document. The second script, which divides each of the scenes into beats, was an incredibly important exercise that I will always repeat.³³ I learned, through this project, that I do not have a good intuitive sense of where beat divisions lie.

³² Hodge, 54-56.

³³ Beat: "Small units in the scene that can be isolated asactable events unto themselves in which a single transaction is taking place" (Barton, 15). An example from popular film: in the beginning of *Star Wars IV: A New Hope*, the portion of the film when Darth Vader's forces attack, board, and take over Princess Leia's ship constitutes a scene; a beat is when Vader asks Leia what she did with the plans for the Death Star.

Forcing myself to mark the beats down in the script helped me prevent the beats from blending together, meaning that

Note: page numbers are noted throughout the script analysis in parentheses as references. These refer to page numbers in *The Dinner Party* script. Unfortunately, these page numbers refer to a different edition of the script with different pagination than the script included in the appendices.

There are two visual aids to this script analysis, found at the end of this section of the thesis: [Editor's note: these were unfortunately lost during the set strike]

1. A map to show each character's factual relationship to the other, including age references.
2. A hand-drawn "arc chart" which briefly describes each character's worldview at the beginning and end of the play respectively.

Script analysis part 1: Given Circumstances:

1. Environmental facts about the play:
 - a. Geographical location & climate
 - i. Paris, Fancy Restaurant La Cassette
 - ii. Historic location, Napoleon used to visit.
 - iii. A dinner party hosted by a 1% attorney, Paul Gerard.
 - iv. Fragonard mural on the back wall.
 - b. Date: year, season, time of day
 - i. Play was first produced in October of 2000, but cell-phones clearly weren't considered. The play comfortably fits into the early 90s.
 - ii. Evening. 8:00 pm.

iii. Cold time of year, but not arctic.

c. Economic environment

i. High-class restaurant. Private dining room.

d. Political environment

i. Politics is the game of capturing and controlling resources. In this play, the resource in question is love.

e. Social environment

i. People who divorced one another.

ii. Middle to upper class. (who's which class?)

iii. No waiters. "Intimate."

iv. Mystique—no one knows exactly what's going on until late in the play.

f. Religious environment

i. Not super religious—divorce is a norm. It's modern.

2. Previous Action in the play:

a. See character map to understand who divorced or dated whom.

b. Albert hurt his finger putting on his tie. He has also been stalking Yvonne.

c. Andre has been in 18 meetings over 3 days.

d. Gabrielle set up this dinner party.

3. Polar attitudes of characters at beginning and end of play.

a. Claude (#1): Antique book collector.

i. How do I feel about my world?

1. Beginning: See arc chart.

2. End: See arc chart.

ii. How do I feel about my relationships?

1. Beginning of the play:

- a. Albert: My new sidekick. Damn he's irritating; I should teach him manners.
- b. Andre: WHAT A POMPOUS ASS. I'll get him out of the picture.
- c. Mariette: I still love her, but there's no hope for us. Pain is all she is, keep her away. She stole my talent and I can never forgive her for that.
- d. Yvonne: Don't know her, she's strange. More like Albert's twin.
- e. Gabrielle (whoever set up this party): I will figure out who did this, why, and will make it work to my advantage over others', but I will share the spoils. Once she actually appears onstage, I loathe her and am embarrassed to be in the same restaurant with her.

2. End of the play:

- a. Albert: A new friend. Someone who I could learn something from about love.
- b. Andre: Too bad he didn't stay.
- c. Mariette: I know her, now, and I remember why I loved her, and she knows why. Maybe there's hope for us. I was the one who needed to be forgiven.
- d. Yvonne: What a darling girl. If I don't get Mariette, I get her.
- e. Gabrielle: Crazy lady but I completely understand what she was going through and why she put us through this party. I'm thankful to her. No way am I even going on one date with her.

iii. How do I feel about myself?

1. Beginning of the play: I may have got divorced, but that's OK because I am smarter than others and can figure everything out and ask the right questions to come to the right conclusions about anything that matters. I may be down and out, but I have the skills to climb back. I'm hiding all of my feelings because they might hinder my success.
2. End of play: I feel like smiling, like I'm relaxed and don't have to hide anything. I am confident in my ability to find happiness and I don't need to constantly look for it, ask questions, etc. I no longer need to be a detective all the time.

iv. How do I feel about my prospects?

1. Beginning of the play: My prospects are good: I am incredibly lonely and have no love in my life BUT I know I can find the solutions to my problems.
2. End of the play: I have options, three of them, at this table! Though I don't really want Gabrielle, and frankly, if I go home and never see any of them again, that would be relatively OK. I am no longer yearning for women, my ex-wife or otherwise, every two seconds. I am at peace with Mariette for the first time...ever. Something interesting might come out of this. I have romantic prospects and I am not desperately pursuing them.

v. Character Notes:

1. Still wears a wedding ring. (5, 29.)
2. Divorced.

3. Knows art and old books.
 4. Early. Not prompt, but early. He's desperate for attention and a mate.
 5. Loves the food at La Cassette. 10.
 6. High status.
 7. Wearing a tux.
 8. He's nervous (jealous?): constantly counting the odds, trying to figure out what's going to happen next; as soon as Andre steps out, he declares it's "3 women for the 2 of the remaining guys" (24) he also barter a lot for which girl should be his.
 - a. Sex starved?
 9. Claude yells more than others (see, for example, 31)
 10. Worst thing Mariette did to him: Mariette forgot Claude's name. 56.
 11. Nicest thing he did for Mariette: Got her earrings and a beautiful note to go with them. 61.
- b. Albert (#2): Love-sick rental-car lot attendant.
- i. How do I feel about my world?
 1. Beginning of the play: I love Yvonne more than anything, think about her every minute of every day, write her love letters, follow her everywhere because I hate her for not loving me. The world is UNFAIR and FUCKING AWFUL because it won't let me have her. I have no friends besides her and my father, and I don't talk to her. She is my world. I am optimistic about my situation, however; it will work itself out.

2. End of play: For the first time in two years I have friends and I am not out of control: yes, I love Yvonne, but, similar to Mariette, I'm ready to meet new people. My world has so many people in it to meet and explore relationships with.

ii. How do I feel about my relationships?

1. Beginning:

a. Claude: Hooray! Company! I think he's nice, he sure is smart. I'd like to be smarter than him, though, just in case. Perhaps Albert' the older brother I never had—I both defend and compete with him.

(Perhaps, out of loneliness, he makes bonds quickly with strangers? The desperate "friend"?)

b. Andre: Where did this jerk even come from? He's late and ill tempered. I'm sticking with my first friend, Claude. I better keep Claude from leaving me for him.

c. Mariette: Wow, pretty woman, and we've hit it off! She's perfect for me!

d. Yvonne: I'm NOT talking to her. I love her so much I hate her.

e. Gabrielle: Who is this person? I think she might be crazy. We should go.

2. Ending:

a. Claude: My feelings towards Claude are not as desperate as they were before, but I imagine we could be friends for a long time. I trust him and know him.

- b. Andre: How sad that he left. He left like Yvonne did, and he needed to. I can respect that, though he was such a jerk originally. I feel like he's still the same guy, he's just more tactful now. I can respectfully dislike him now. He's not repulsive.
- c. Yvonne: I love her but I accept that we cannot be together. Will always love her, but I do not need to stifle her and can, finally, move on. I am looking to build a new future with someone else, not fix something with her that cannot be fixed. I have learned a lot from her. I love her so much I can let her go.
- d. Mariette: What a nice lady, incredibly sexy, too. Maybe things will work out between us.
- e. Gabrielle: She has so much courage and did what I could not do by confronting the lover who hurt her terribly. I have respect for her.
- iii. How do I feel about myself?
1. Beginning of the play: I'm so lousy. I have no friends, probably for a reason.
 2. End of the play: I'm pretty good. People like me. I feel smarter, like I understand how and why people do things in new ways.
- iv. How do I feel about my prospects?
1. Beginning of the play: Prospects? What prospects? Yvonne is the only prospective prospect.

2. End of the play: The whole world is my prospect. Yvonne was the moon and had eclipsed the sun. Now she's out of the way and I can see the sun as well as all it illuminates.

v. Character Notes:

1. His father snapped his bow-tie and hurt his finger. Lives at home?
Possibly avoids dealing with more mature issues. (4) Simple ideas are complex to this guy (renting out paintings 7).
2. Divorced. Had married twice, both to the same woman. (5)
3. Has a secretary who reminded him about the dinner (6)
4. Didn't remember it was Paul who hosted the dinner.
5. In the auto industry. Rentals. Bored to death by it (6-7.)
6. Actually an artist who paints abstract cars. Artsy in a useless kind of way.
7. Has a watch.
8. Takes even the most ridiculous thing sincerely.
9. Low status.
10. Wearing a tux.
11. Maybe his arc is finding his nerve across the play?
12. Calls himself "reserved"==31
13. Reminds me of Niles in Frasier.
14. "A gentleman" (36)
15. More bean-counting between Claude and Albert: 38-39. If their relationship is overall positive, perhaps their first impressions are positive.

Claude is the big bean-counter, though, Albert's mostly reactionary.

Good point: Claude acts, Albert reacts.

16. Always wondering where Yvonne is.

17. Pathetically protests the wrongs in his life: asks for apologies but doesn't get them. Follows Yvonne everywhere but never gets her. FEAR stops him.

18. Yvonne to Albert: "You loved me too much."

19. Worst thing Yvonne did to him: Burned his ties and divorced him and didn't understand why he burned the love letters he wrote her. 59.

20. Nicest thing he did for Yvonne: bring croissants every morning. 60.

c. Andre (#3) (Original: Len Cariou): High-powered executive with "more important things to do."

i. How do I feel about my world?

1. Beginning of the play: The world is inane and should get out of my way so I can get everything done when I want it done. Half the people I have to work with are shits, and the other half are on there way to becoming shit. I'm really ready to go out and do what I'm capable of. I'm thinking about the future, not the past. The world is satisfactory, I do not need anyone's help to survive.

2. End of the play: I'm much more peaceful than I was coming in. I still look to the future, but am more respectful of the past. I have revisited it, I know it's a bad idea to pursue anything with Gabrielle, and I can move on, but I owe her at least some respect. I will peacefully withdraw from what

I now consider to be an important, not inane process—it just so happens to be a process I do not need to partake in.

ii. How do I feel about my relationships?

1. Beginning of the play:

a. Claude: I hate this guy. I really do not need to be around him. He's a nut.

b. Albert: Poor fellow, but he's so pathetic I want nothing to do with him. I really don't need to invest any time in either of these guys. What low-lives.

c. Mariette: Been there, done that. Good to see you again, I guess.

d. Yvonne: You're a pretty little thing. You're awfully attractive, though I'm getting married, so I suppose that won't matter.

e. Gabrielle: YOU FUCKING OBSESSED WITCH I KNEW YOU WERE BEHIND THIS. GO AWAY.

2. End of the play

a. Claude: It was nice knowing you. Thank you for pouring me a drink. You're a bit strange though, you know that? I can handle being around, I wouldn't mind crossing paths with you again, but I'd never do so intentionally.

b. Albert: Same as with Claude.

c. Mariette: I appreciate you a little more, but I am not nor will I be interested in dating you again.

- d. Yvonne: You are really nice and caring. A little too sappy for my taste. I wish you the best.
- e. Gabrielle: I respect what you've done—you have courage. I thought for a moment it might work between us, but I know it will never work between us. Thank you for what you've done, but I must bow out. Thank you for trying, I'm sorry to disappoint you.
- iii. How do I feel about myself?
1. At the beginning of the play: I'm the man, and these people I've just met are not. I need to get home to my fiancée, why am I even here? These people are just not important to my life or goals. I am a little uncertain whether or not I should be marrying my fiancée.
 2. At the end of the play: These are some nice people, unfortunately, it's not appropriate for me to really remain here with them. I am emotionally exhausted, but I now know, without this experience, I would not be as confident about my decision to remarry. I'm making the right choice by leaving and marrying the woman (who is never named in the play).
- iv. How do I feel about my prospects?
1. At the beginning of the play: I feel good about my business life, my personal capabilities, and relatively good about my love life. There are jitters before any marriage, I'm sure it's fine. This dinner party, however, is a waste of time.
 2. At the end of the play: I feel great about my life and my upcoming marriage. This dinner party, however, surprised me and was useful. I feel

much more confident about the path I'm on, I'm sorry I had to hurt a few people to get to it.

v. Character Notes:

1. Divorced.
2. Initially thought Albert and Claude were waitors.
3. Loses track of details (didn't notice it was black tie)
4. Wealthy, has a plane and a pilot and 18 meetings in 3 days (14-15)
5. Claims to already have a girl (23)
6. Is actually somewhat considerate. He urges Albert to leave to the room (40) to give Claude and Mariette a moment alone.
7. He's the go-getter, the person who is always making the calls, stepping out of the room to call Sardinia. He actually has resources. Will get things done.
8. He's extremely frank and to the point--cold, even. A doer. He's like Rico Maloney. Secretly emotional, but a go-getter in the extreme that masks that emotional quality. ("So what if my ex is dead?" 53).
9. Cold and callous: 46
10. Worst thing Gabrielle did to him: "That you let us continue...that you never asked me for a divorce." She wouldn't let him go and that hurt him. 58-59.
11. Nicest thing he did for Gabrielle: Everything. 61.

d. Mariette (#4): World traveler. The proverbial sexy librarian. Claustrophobic.

- i. How do I feel about my world?

1. At the beginning of the play: I'm a mediocre person in a pretty good world. I can do OK, but I'm not great. The world has opportunities for me, but I don't feel like they include the love I want.
2. At the end of the play: I can get anything I need in this world. There are great opportunities out there, and I deserve them.

ii. How do I feel about my relationships?

1. Beginning:

- a. Albert: Well here's a nice attractive fellow—this is the kind of person I'm out to meet. Tell me more. This gentleman boosts my self-esteem (he offered me a drink! does that mean he thinks I'm important?)
- b. Andre: You womanizer, go away, I really don't need to talk with you anymore. I feel embarrassed in front of you; you know my kinks and I don't want to be around you because you might bring them up. It also kind of hurts me you found someone else so quickly. You hurt me, you are a hurtful kind of person, and you know things that can hurt me.
- c. Claude: You selfish pig I loved you and you made me angry, how dare you! You make me nervous and I don't want to be around you and I DEFINITELY don't want to tell you what I think. You're too much to think about, I don't WANT to think about you. I wish we could have stayed together longer, how dare you take our marriage away from us.

- d. Yvonne: I feel bad for you, but I could help you. Let me be your older sister for a day!
- e. Gabrielle: You offend me. I wish I had your confidence, though.
- iii. How do I feel about myself?
1. At the beginning of the play: I feel crappy. I'm trying to meet new people but it hasn't been working out, romantically, at least. My books are OK I guess, but they pretty much ended my marriage.
 2. At the end of the play: I'm a rising star. I have romantic experience, my books are selling, and I'm meeting new people.
- iv. How do I feel about my prospects?
1. At the beginning of the play: Not very good. I've been striking out. I suppose my books sell, but what does that matter if I can't find love?
 2. At the end of the play: Love, laughter, literary success, friends, are all within my sights. I may not love these people, but I know I (not Germaine) am worth it.
- v. Character Notes:
1. Initially reserved: pleasant and socially adept, sharp, but doesn't reveal much. Then says she's "out to meet new people." (30) which might indicate a uncertainty beneath. She doesn't get out much.
 2. Andre describes her as wearing a black evening suit (33)
 3. Claude references her blonde hair (35)
 4. Has had great literary success (44).
 5. The jewelry Claude gave her means something to her. (43)

6. She's very literary. Says, "she spoke without commas or periods." (48).
 7. She has dated, or might date, all the men in the play. She gets around the most.
 8. Andre describes her as not exactly innocent (23)
 9. Phobia about closed doors: 53.
 10. Worst thing Claude did to her: Had an affair with her fantasy sister, Germaine. 57-58.
 11. Nicest thing she did for Claude: Remember the best of him. 61.
- e. Yvonne (#5): Changes her mind constantly. Married and divorced Albert twice.
- i. How do I feel about my world?
 1. Beginning of the play: The world is a delicate place and I must be extremely careful not to harm it.
 2. At the end of the play: The world is not as delicate, I'm free from having to take care of the world all the time.
 - ii. How do I feel about my relationships?
 1. Beginning of the play:
 - a. Albert: I hurt this poor man too much for him to bear. He's broken and I'm responsible. I wish I could help him, I hate him for hurting me so much, both during our marriage (burning the letters) and now, by following me everywhere.
 - b. Claude: Not my type, he's kind of nice, but I can't believe how he treats Mariette. What a jerk. She deserved and deserves better.

- c. Andre: I don't have anything polite to say to this...person, so I won't say anything.
- d. Mariette: Thank goodness, the friend I've been looking for. I bet she gives good advice. She's really supportive. This party would be much better if she were the only one here, or if there were more people like her.
- e. Gabrielle: This lady is abusive and strange. She would have traumatized Albert BEYOND repair. I'm so glad I am NOT this woman. She is CRAZY.

2. End of the play:

- a. Albert: He may have been broken, but he's fixed now. I actually love him, though I could never be with him again. I just wasn't happy and probably couldn't be. But he has the biggest heart of anyone I've ever met, I just wasn't happy when we were together. I'm happy we can be together at this party and be friends, at least while we're here. I'm lucky to know him, I want him to know that, but I don't feel like it's necessary for him to hear it--he can stand on his own two feet now. He loved me enough to let me go.
- b. Claude: What a romantic thing to say: that he realizes he loved Mariette not Germaine. I feel kind of bad for him, never being able to get what he wanted, but he still shouldn't have done what he did. He's still not my type, but he's just as human as the rest of us, and I can respect that.

- c. Andre: for such an ass, he's relatively understanding, I suppose. I can't believe he didn't come back, at least just to be supportive for one more day.
 - d. Mariette: She's the best, and wow, she put up with a lot, too.
 - e. Gabrielle: I respect her. I could learn something from her, even if she is crazy.
- iii. How do I feel about myself?
- 1. Beginning of the play: I'm not free, I'm not capable of being free, I must be very polite and behave delicately or all hell will break loose. I hurt people when I'm not careful. People like Albert. I'm dangerous to date.
 - 2. End of the play: I'm free! I'm not a horrible person! I can say what's on my mind and not hurt people!
- iv. How do I feel about my prospects?
- 1. Beginning of the play: My prospects are terrible. I have no hope of finding love because Albert will never love me because I hurt him so badly.
 - 2. End of the play: My prospects are great: Not only do I have a positive relationship with Albert, but I am free to pursue other relationships and just be myself and be appreciated for that. I can say FUCK if I want to.
- v. Character Notes:
- 1. Gives the short comic monologue. (48). Instantly reminded me of Liv Burns. "Her Royal Crisis."

2. Internal monologue: “I don’t believe in spooks I don’t believe in spooks...” she’s constantly fighting the reality around her to believe it’s something she wants.
 3. Wasn’t free: 38
 4. Worst thing Albert did: Burn love letters he wrote her. 57.
 5. Nicest thing she did for Albert: Divorce him the second time because it taught him about stifling people. 62.
- f. Gabrielle (#6): Well educated. Plots and schemes.
- i. How do I feel about my world?
 1. Beginning of the play: The world is my chess board and I am THE expert player.
 2. End of the play: The world is a chess board, but I lost the game.
 - ii. How do I feel about my relationships?
 1. Beginning of the play:
 - a. Claude: A pawn in the game.
 - b. Albert: A bishop—he’s the other person here who I know is trying to reclaim true love, desperately, madly.
 - c. Andre: My love and anguish, I want you more than anything and nothing will stop me. For you, the ends justify the means.
 - d. Mariette: Another pawn.
 - e. Yvonne: Another pawn.
 2. End of the play:

- a. Claude: I'm grateful to him for his part in this. We might be good acquaintances.
 - b. Albert: I have such sympathy for him, but don't really know him. I suppose we could get to know one another—his obsession with Yvonne is maggot-like, though I could NEVER have any romantic interest in him.
 - c. Andre: I still love you. I love you ridiculously.
 - d. Mariette: A friend in the making, but not like me.
 - e. Yvonne: An acquaintance in the making, but DEFINITELY not like me. Too innocent.
- iii. How do I feel about myself?
- 1. Beginning of the play: I am a maggot, but what is wrong with a maggot? Maggots still love.
 - 2. End of the play: I am still a maggot, but I'm the only maggot. I feel like I don't belong, but I'm so alone I'll try to belong anywhere.
- iv. How do I feel about my prospects?
- 1. Beginning of the play: My prospects are great. I don't believe in the no-win scenario. I'm Captain Janeway and I'm going to get home.
 - 2. End of the play: This captain went down with her ship. I lost and have no prospects except to keep trying...but I don't think I can even try, I can only wait for Andre to come back to me. And he's not coming.
- v. Character Notes:
- 1. "She's strange." 44.

2. "My attitude is good." 45
3. "I don't enjoy pain. I just like the pursuit of it." 46.
4. Worst thing Andre did: Make her love him unconditionally, and therefore she could never hate him. 55.
5. Nicest thing she did for Andre: That all she wanted from him was honesty. (62)

Script analysis part 2: Dialogue analysis.

The characters' rhetoric and speech are generally quite similar; however, each character and especially Gabrielle have unique dialogue characteristics or ways of speaking that I'll point out here:

Claude: He asks more questions than anyone else in the play. He's the investigator, a "detective who does dinner parties."

Albert: He's the show's thesaurus and yet is the most oblivious when it comes to colloquialisms. He responds to "tell me about it" with "it's a long story." (9)

Andre: The least interrogative of the characters. He answers questions briefly. "No." "Not at all." (12).

Mariette: I can't find anything unique about her dialogue. She does mention "Christ" more than anyone else.

Yvonne: Speaks in speeches more than anyone else (enters on a short comic monologue, has long speeches to Albert), and is the only person who says 'Fuck' in the entire show (60). She talks more than listens, I think, 60 / 40 talk / listen.

Gabrielle: The most interesting in terms of vocabulary, she is perhaps the most well-read, or eclectically read. She references the Greeks (43) and has several odd lines:

“But if you’re a maggot, is it wrong to love another maggot?” and “Wouldn’t the world have cheered if the Elephant Man found an Elephant Woman?” (45). Her imagery is bold, odd, and often repulsive.

Script analysis part 3: Dramatic Action analysis. See scripts in appendices.

Script analysis part 4: Character Analysis.

In his rubric, Hodge asks that this part of the analysis be separate from the given circumstances. However, in the context of this play it makes little sense to do so. I decided to incorporate the character analysis components such as moral stance, will, desires, etc., into the characters’ relationships with each other rather than to write out an entire section listing each character individually. Doing so would have been repetitive: I argue that each character’s morality, desires, and will, are wrapped up in and expressed through their relationships.

Script analysis part 5: Idea analysis

Meaning of the play’s title: *The Dinner Party* has three functions as a title: one, it is the literal location where the play takes place, at a dinner party; two, it is one of the most important place in these characters lives thus far, it is the place where they are finally honest with themselves and with their former life partners. There is a saying that plays happen at the most important times in characters’ lives, and I believe that is true here: these characters’ lives, at least thus far, climax at this dinner party. Third, the title reminds me that amazing things can happen in ordinary places, like at a Dinner Party.

Playwright’s philosophy and truths:

Page 15: “I think Paul’s most interesting quality is his sincerity.” Yes, his openness. Sincerity is honesty coupled with good intentions. It’s a step on the healing process.

Later, Andre says, “What was the nicest thing Gabrielle did for me? That I could commit no sin against her, as long as I was honest” (62). Honesty was the best policy. It’s the real politik of relationships.

Page 24: “It’s already farce...we’re heading for a much higher form of absurdity.”

Page 39-40: “In marriage people are always cruel to each other.”

Page 40: “Love is not an emotion shared only by the best people ... the unscrupulous are as entitled to love as anyone else.”

Page 47: “A woman who isn’t insulted now and again ceases to be interesting.”

Page 50: “Love is easy, Andre. Eternal desire, however, is a bitch to break.”

Page 53: “It’s a goddamn Agatha Christie dinner.”

Page 56: “Love is a state of mind, not a legal agreement.”

Page 58: “What man doesn’t have a fantasy? What woman, for that matter?”

Page 62: “Some good will come of [tonight].”

Summary analysis of truths: These quotes outline arguments about love, marriage, and the nature of the play itself. The ‘spine’ of the quotes indicates that love endures while marriage may not, with love at times constituting “eternal desire” while marriage can just be cruel. “Love is a state of mind, not a legal agreement [which marriage is].” *The Dinner Party* argues that love is something of a right that we all share and can never really shed, but getting us to admit that we share it as a state of mind and, further, that once we love someone we can’t ever completely let go of that love, is extremely difficult. Getting us to admit to sharing and chronically feeling love for people we’ve left includes both farce and elements of mystery (“It’s a damn Agatha Christie dinner.”).

Emergence of these ideas from the outcome of central characters' struggles: The characters arrive at these conclusions themselves after sharing what their partners' best and worst acts towards them were. Whether they state it directly or not, they all articulated care and love for one another, whether or not they decided to act on it. In particular, Albert has the most difficult time sharing his feelings, and once he does, I argue he feels much more at peace and much less lonely than before. He has shared his feelings and shared in others'. Some 'good came of tonight' for him, especially. He loves Yvonne, realizes that's normal, but can now love other people and she won't dominate his life.

Script analysis parts 6, 7, and 8: Moods, tempo, and tone analysis.

I found these analysis sections to not be useful and, upon agreement with my primary advisor, did not complete them for this project. They would have been useful in a production with significant lighting and or sound elements, however, *The Dinner Party* was very simple from a technical perspective. For example, understanding the mood of the scene can help set the scene's lighting, however, meticulously categorizing each scene's mood, tempo, and tone in a unique way was having no measurable effect on my direction or the actors' work, so I stopped. However, I did broadly conceive of the tempo as changing as the play transitioned from farce to comedy to drama (fast pace, medium pace, and slower pace respectively).

Other script analysis questions from my primary thesis advisor:

What is this play about? Why is it important to me?

I am lonely and still in love with people from my past, even though some of them, most of them, I would never go back to (Maybe one of them I would revisit). The

point, though, is that for me, loneliness and old loves linger on. I believe that the persistence of these feelings is not unique to me, that most people experience this, but they do not realize it or, at least, admit it. This play helps people recognize and / or admit their loneliness and love for people who used to be in their lives, and the relationship between loneliness and love.

This play is about the making and breaking of relationships, about finding love, and three feelings that accompany relationships: love, hate and apathy. An important question for me is: How do I feel about the making and breaking of relationships? Another reason that this play is important to me is because it made me realize that perhaps many, maybe an overwhelming majority of people feel lonely romantically and still feel something for their past relationships, even if they don't want to act on those latent feelings.

As for the making and breaking of relationships, I suggest that relationships are made and broken once our actions catch up to our hearts, but our hearts are ultimately out of our control. I refer to the Iliad, which goes so far as to put love in the hands of the gods. For Homer, love was something the gods used to control and manipulate the hearts of men.

I think the importance of this play relates to the question: Why did Paul Gerard [the attorney] agree to throw this party for three divorced couples? (As an aside, I think Simon's saying something about the ethics of lawyers here). I suspect Paul threw the party because we so rarely talk with the people we break up with / divorce—the people who we wound or who wounded us. We rarely open up to those who we hurt or who hurt us—it's vulnerable. Communicating with our "ex-partners" is such a hard act to

carry out but, as Paul Gerard's actions suggest, there can be really solid reasons for doing so. I imagine it's something like talk therapy: as you learn about yourself and the effect you have on other people you feel less alone because you find common ground. Reconnecting with others is emotionally difficult, sometimes damaging, but, probably, informative and productive. Claude asks the question on 14, "Why did Gerard throw this party?". It is also useful to think of Paul Gerard as Neil Simon: Mr. Simon, after all, is the party responsible for bringing these characters, though he never shows up in the play.

The reconnections the characters make relate to my own life: I have a pact with myself to talk things through with girlfriends I want to break up with—I don't like leaving misunderstanding, and I believe that ending a relationship amicably and through mutual understanding is important. This play, I think, supports long-term practice I've tried to maintain. This approach hasn't always worked well, however. For example, when one girlfriend was so emotionally vulnerable that mutual understanding was impossible. What I've forgotten in my own approach is that time is needed, for even in this play several years have intervened between the divorce(s) and *The Dinner Party*.

Finally, I also believe that communication, or lack thereof, led to the breakdown of my parents marriage. While I don't necessarily think they should have been married in the first place, I do think lack of communication—a lack of honesty on par with what the characters in this play share—was the main fault of their relationships, court wars, and the respective challenges faced in their subsequent relationships. Someone should have locked my parents in a restaurant together.

Idea: Although I've used the word "communication" above, it oversimplifies what the couples are forced to do in this play. They do not just communicate, they connect. Communication is just the act of sharing ideas. Connection includes that, but it also includes the sharing of feelings and goals. Communication, then, is a first step in connecting: one must begin by communicating ideas in order to share the emotions behind those ideas.

Who are these characters to me? They are me, my (ex)girlfriends, and my parents.

(Note: names of real-life people have been changed)

Claude and Mariette: In terms of roles, not necessarily personality but perhaps in part, Claude is my Dad and Mariette is my mom. See her entrance on 23, definitely Mom. She won't even talk to Claude. At the same time, though, I'm Mariette while Claude is Amy at a more rational, accepting, reflective time in her life, someone I broke up with rightfully, but perhaps earlier than she would have preferred. "I think it was right that we divorced, Claude. I just think we did it a little too early" (30). Amy was angry about that. I have a much easier time, though, thinking of Amy as the sexy librarian, not Mom! Oh no, Amy is a younger version of my mother. Claude gets his high-status from me, though, not my dad.

Yvonne: Very much reminds me of me with Amy. I tried to make it work, twice, couldn't. She convinced me to come back. A slightly more high-strung version of me who, like me, prepares everything she wants to say before coming in the room. Trouble is she just spits it all out then leaves. Her tactics are like mine: attack and run, attack and run. She's very rational and doesn't like hurting people at all, that's probably why she left the party, not because she was afraid for her own emotions, but because she feared

the continuing lack of resolution of her past marriage with Albert and wanted to avoid repeating past problems. Most importantly, she doesn't want to hurt him, something that drives most of my relationships. But she returns to try and help him, and by helping him, helps herself. The bit where she says "you loved me too much" (64) is what Ellen would have said to me if we'd dated longer.

Andre: Similar to Mariette, he's sharp, figures things out. A dark version of the go-to guy. He has no patience. He's me dealing with people I can't stand—like that guy from high school who follows me around on campus and says idiotic things. I am the go-to guy who can use his "more important things to do" to put down others when I feel like they're wasting my time. Albert: Definitely Amy. Emotional, almost unable to talk, unable to connect with the partner because the feelings are too much. His humor, though, is mine: the pursuit of the absurd objective followed by clownish drops.

Gabrielle: Comes in an absolutely pompous ass. She's like Bibi in Frasier, that devilish agent. Someone who manipulates constantly for her own ends, and those ends justify the means. She's like a few teachers I know: Barbara Mossberg turned manipulative, or better yet, Barbara Faunce. Uses poetic imagery left and right, lots of exclamations, very excited about love and life and achieving goals. I think she's me when I have to control a situation that's precariously out of balance—lots of spectacle to turn a desperate situation into a more hopeful one.

Giving people the chance to connect cheat-sheet (pages where people connect to one another):

Mariette to Claude: 28, 56-58.

Claude to Mariette: 30, 56.

Yvonne to Albert: 36-37

Albert to Yvonne: 62

Gabrielle to Andre: 48, 55,

Andre to Gabrielle: 50.

Part 6: Director's Journal

Introduction:

This journal was intended to be a completely candid and non-redacted journal that reflects on the directing process as I went through it, with entries on an almost daily basis during the rehearsal period. The journal was highly personal, and often informally written. The intent of the journal was to capture live, personal reflections on my self-identified areas for growth and the challenges of each rehearsal.

The journal entries are modeled after the journals of Elia Kazan, the famous director. I did so to try to understand Kazan's thought process. I do not believe I learned anything significant about Kazan by doing so, other than that he was obsessed with maintaining a critical eye. As far as I know, Kazan never explicitly defined the themes of his journals, but upon reading many of them, I observed that Kazan consistently addresses these questions:

1. What am I doing wrong?
2. What did I learn about the actors today? About an actor's psychology and tendencies? What makes one actor or another nervous?
3. How well did we pursue the spine?
4. What institutional factors (budget, scheduling, administrative oversight) are affecting the quality of the work onstage?

The answers to Kazan's questions tend to be critical and sometimes derogatory, but they are insightful. He was constantly trying to improve the product he was seeing on the stage, and I did the same.

I realize in retrospect that some of my journal entries are too much like Kazan, that is, they are harsh. For example, I was particularly flustered while writing some of

the entries on institutional factors. To be clear, I was not so much upset because these institutional factors hindered *The Dinner Party*'s progress; rather, I was upset because these factors represented a deficient system that, in my view, negatively impacted theatre students and faculty, a community which I care about. In the entries, I do suggest how to resolve some of these problems, but as I was often angry when writing I suggest not taking these suggestions too seriously. I nearly deleted these harsher reflections from the journal before submitting the final draft, but in the end, I decided that even if my reactions were harsh that sharing how I felt at those times is important me. A failure to do so would betray the otherwise brutally honest nature of this thesis project.

Finally, the journal includes annotations from my thesis advisor, Professor Michael Najjar. His notes are underlined. For reasons of time, I eventually stopped submitting journal entries to him for his review. In retrospect, I wish I had submitted journal entries to him on a daily basis. His feedback was invaluable.

Journal Entries:

Sunday, June 9th, 2013: After reading *The Dinner Party* for the first time:

Professor,

You've consistently encouraged me not to rush and to take my time this summer—meanwhile I've been gunning to get through as much as possible, quickly. As it happens, I should have listened to you. Long story short, I'm not yet finished with the script analysis, and I've just got my notes together again. I've typed up my directors' journal (thus far) I'd be thankful if you could look at it (below) and give any feedback you have and / or respond to the questions I include. I'm happy to discuss what's below over the phone, skype / "g-chat," in person, or email, and all of the above at your convenience.

Below: The first few entries in my "directors journal" with questions bolded for your convenience. I hope that by giving you the journal you can see my thought process thus far, giving some context to the questions I have. Feel free to respond to any / all.

1. General reaction: Fantastic play: Funny, moving. Might be difficult to make Gabrielle read as legit. May need to make her crazy to justify the keeping of everyone in the room. She's going through something really difficult and thus acting out? (From Najjar) Be careful of this idea of making characters "crazy" because it either makes your characters less dimensional or it moves the play into farce. Search for compelling motivations for all actions in the play. I had trouble finding compelling (consistent) motivations for actors in Caesar, Act I.
2. Questions: I've either directly experienced or closely observed every relationship in this play, minus experiencing the length of the relationships; nevertheless, the

situations are familiar. If the right (wrong?) people see the play, I fear they'll read into my play selection. Does that count as scary? The more you personalize the play, the scarier it becomes. You will know in rehearsals if you are doing work that really delves into your own experience. Do your best to make the characters different aspects of yourself that are expressed on stage. That underlined bit is really useful to me.

- a. What will my (divorced) parents read into it? Should I stop them from reading into it? Or just wait and see their reaction? I would argue that you should not say anything and see their reaction when they see the play. If you direct the play with a deeply personal connection, they will see it.
 - b. How do I make use of my relationship background in directing? Again, find a personal connection with each of the characters. Make each character an aspect of yourself. Remember, they are all symbols/metaphors of the various aspects of your personality, so make it so. That's the kind of personal character analysis that is necessary. It's no wonder that Stanislavski loved directing, and acting in, Chekhov's plays. He knew those characters so deeply that they all resonated with him. When he played Astrov, he lived and breathed that character. It was all about him.
3. Question: How will I handle the age of the characters? Similar to the plan for Jake's Women, I imagine, but this show's a little different: Casting college students may become practically distracting since the characters self-reference their ages SO VERY FREQUENTLY. However, 2 college students could be believable for the youngest couple (not sure who that is, need to read it again to get it straight), along

with some older actors. However, using ENTIRELY college students could make the play more relatable for a college audience, assuming, of course, that the constant age references don't break that relatability altogether. It's a tough call. In the end, older and more experienced actors bring that depth to their work. You saw how Jonas brings depth to the roles he plays that cannot be matched by younger students. In the end, you work with actors at their experience level and do your best to help them find the characters with great depth no matter their age or experience.

4. Script analysis:

- a. Question: I would like to make a map explaining every character's relationship to the other, and a cheat-sheet documenting every age reference in the play. Should I show the map to the cast or ask them make one themselves? I think the former, but... No, don't show them your work. Directing is deception—you need to work with the actors and let them believe that they came to those conclusions themselves even if you knew the answers. The idea is that you've done your homework but don't talk too much, don't show them your work. It's like rehearsal—your rehearse forever but when it comes time to perform, you just perform. The audience doesn't need to see your rehearsal script—they see the work in the moment when you perform. The same happens with directing. Once rehearsal starts, throw out your book and work with them in the moment knowing that all the work you've done will be there for you when you need it. I can do that.
- b. Question we've already discussed, I just need to look into it: In what ways is this play a farce? A comedy? What's the difference? (I should look at Hodge style

analysis to review) A comedy is to a farce as a drama is to a tragedy. It's a matter of degree. If you want the play to have real emotional resonance, it should stay on the comedy side of this spectrum. If you want the play to be funny but not have that kind of emotional depth, then make it a farce. Comedy can be very serious in its own way. I would argue this play is more comedy than farce.

Agreed. This play is a comedy.

- c. Things I want to be able to explain: Why am I doing a play that's in the realist tradition? What is realism? What is post-modernism? Why not post-modernism? What is the role of post-modernism in this play? I wouldn't call Simon a post-modernist. He came from an older tradition—a modernist tradition. He believed in the well-made play, the well-structured play. He drew three-dimensional characters and put them in realistic situations. Mac Wellman and Caryl Churchill are postmodernists. Simon is realism. Realism is a dramatic form that is recognizable to the audience—characters in realistic situations speaking in a way that is easily recognizable in stories with exposition, rising action, climax, and falling action. It's all very classic. Keep it simple stylistically. There's no need to set the play on Neptune or to have the characters speak the language in halting, jarring tones. I would argue that you should leave the style alone. Keep it simple. Simon did all that work for you. Now you need to go for depth—take what he's given you and go deeper into the psyches and emotions of the characters.

Question: What kind of background work should I do on Neil Simon? Should I read other plays by him? Other related playwrights? A biography? I would focus your

energies on his late period plays—“By 1973, Simon was a major voice in contemporary comedy. But, that year he entered a low period in his life, when his wife of twenty years, died. Some time later, he met the actress Marsha Mason, and they were married. His 1977 play, Chapter Two, dramatizes the grief of a newly remarried man trying to start over after his wife has died. Chapter Two was considered one of his finest works and he followed it with a musical, They’re Playing Our Song. Throughout his four-decade career, Simon has drawn extensively on his own life and experience for materials for his plays. Many of his works take place in the working-class New York neighborhoods he knew so well as a child. One of Simon’s great achievements has been the insightful representation of the social atmosphere of those times in New York. With his autobiographical trilogy, “Brighton Beach Memoirs” (1983), “Biloxi Blues” (1985), and “Broadway Bound” (1986), Simon created a touching portrait of an individual, his family, and the world around them. With these plays, Simon found his greatest critical acclaim, and for his 1991 follow-up, “Lost in Yonkers,” Simon was awarded a Pulitzer Prize.” (<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/episodes/neil-simon/about-neil-simon/704/>) His late work is deeply influence by the deaths, divorces, and grief of his later years. If you focus on anything, focus on that period. Also, read his book Rewrites: a Memoir. That’s important too.

5. Actors: Actors who come to mind (in other words, people I want to be sure get the invite to audition):

- a. Bruce Lundy (age 50)
- b. Thomas Varga
- c. Jean Sidden

- d. Theresa May (I hear she auditions for things...)
- e. Michelle Yeoman
- f. Rachel Faught
- g. Jason Rowe
- h. Jonas Israel (age 50+)
- i. Jordan Tunstill
- j. Donella Elizabeth-Aston (the one from Leebrick's Next Fall):
donella@uoregon.edu (age 45+?)
- k. John Jeffries?
- l. Melanie Moser
- m. Barbara Mossberg
- n. The middle-aged older woman who was in VLT's Arsenic and Old Lace (figure out who that was) [Christina Jamerson?]
- o. Sydney Behrends (age 30 ish)
- p. Shamra Clark (age 30 ish)
- q. Karen Scheeland (age 60 ish?)
- r. Naomi Todd (age 25 ish)
- s. Tony Stirpe (age 45 ish)
- t. Michael Walker (age 40 ish)
- u. Question: Anyone else? What a great list! I don't have any additional names to add.

6. Second reader on thesis: I'm thinking that a clowning background would be useful for actors in the play (clowns are not farce-only, but how do I explain that?).

Methinks that clowning bent could make John Schmor an appropriate secondary advisor. Yes, I think so, but I think John's background with Shakespearean comedy is more applicable than the clowning in this respect. There's a sorrow to Simon's later comedies—much like the sorrow in Shakespeare's later work like Twelfth Night and The Tempest. I would always advise you to work with John.

Notes on Hodge, Chapters 1-2: June 24, 2013.

1. Cool quote: “A play is a flying machine”: 3.
2. Understanding & motivating characters and actions comes through careful script analysis:
 - a. Directing defined: 2 (an objective rather than subjective art), 10 (improvisation)
 - b. Director's goal: 3 (how to & self-discovery).
 - c. Summary of perspective (obj. vs. subj.) and outline of script components (Given circumstances, dialogue, dramatic action, characters, idea, tempos, moods: 6-7.
 - d. A play defined: 11, 19
3. Script analysis component 1: Given circumstances:
 - a. Work with actors through the script: 8
 - b. Characters' attitudes towards facts matter most: 16, 19
 - c. Overarching concept: past action impacts the present. Deepens characters.
 - i. Technique: underline the past (18). Compare past and present (21)
 - ii. Goal: Help actors find the beginning & end “polar attitudes” of their characters. 19 (set out the polar attitudes on a table and dissect them)

- iii. Understanding past action keeps the audience interested (SO TRUE) 20.
 - d. Inner environment: Great examples 20
 - i. The attitudes towards & relationships w/ all other characters at beginning and end.
 - ii. What does a character like and dislike at a play's beginning? At a play's end?
 - iii. Concept: The action of the play will test each characters' attitudes.
 - e. Notice obvious environmental factors: Time, place, temperature, etc.
 - f. Note: I'm curious how past action fits into objectives, stresses, etc., to build urgency. I presume this comes in the "dramatic action" chapter.
- 4. Script analysis component 2: Dialogue
 - a. Defined: 21
 - b. Technique: Ask myself what does a given line say about the character's relationship / attitude towards the given circumstances? How does the nature (verse, grammar, etc.) characterize each character?
 - c. Question: Hodge tasks the director with "transforming dialogue into actions." How do you conceive of this transformation? How do you map it out? Is this task simply understanding how dialogue and motivations work out?
- 5. Style:
 - a. Realism at a glance: 9

Not sure why I took these notes. In retrospect, the notes are essentially an index, but I think they indicate how new Hodge's ideas are to me. Taking these notes was too tedious to continue in this fashion.

Sunday, July 7, 2013 catch-up with Prof. Najjar and partway through Hodge's Play Directing.

"Of Simon, actor Jack Lemmon said, "Neil has the ability to write characters — even the leading characters that we're supposed to root for — that are absolutely flawed. They have foibles. They have faults. But, they are human beings. They are not all bad or all good; they are people we know."

1. Question: I would really like to have Hallie Day be my stage manager for this project.

Do you have any objections? Her schedule books up quickly so I'd need to set it up pronto. Why Hallie Day?

a. Supporting evidence: In short, I just want to work with her again. During the *Crucible*, I remember thinking, "If I were a director, I'd want her. She takes good, accessible notes, and she gives actors notes but the right kind of notes-- when I didn't follow through on something T. May asked for, if T. May didn't notice Hallie did, and Hallie let me know." She's the overall favorite stage manager I've worked with (about 10 thus far, not a huge menu, but a fair few), both in terms of personality and experience. She also values the job—I want the experience of working with a stage manager who values being stage manager, and isn't just stage managing because they "have to" or it was "the only job open" or "they're too afraid to act but that's what they really want to do so they're stage managing until then." She keeps her cool when things get squirrely—something I

look for. She knows a lot more about props and tech than I do, too, which is comforting. A lot of directing is going with your gut instincts—if Hallie is the first person that comes to mind it is because, intuitively, you believe in her. That’s very important! Go with that impulse with your work. Your “gut” knows more than your mind as a director.

2. Question: So I’ve been trying to work on THE SIMON PROJECT for the past few weeks and my progress has been slow. I find that every time I try to analyze the characters in *The Dinner Party* or read anything on directing I wind up thinking about Brutus, Antony, Cassius, Caesar, etc. The question: Could it be counterproductive for me to try to work on two projects at once? Should I just be taking notes on what I’m reading now (for example, see above), use those notes for Caesar as I’m able and then apply them to Simon (script analysis, etc.) after Caesar opens? I find I’m superimposing Caesar motivations and through-lines onto Simon’s characters. I’m afraid that even if I do complete the script analysis on Simon now, I fear that the analysis will feel foreign when I actually turn my full attention to it. In short, I want to suggest we put our conversations on hold until Caesar opens (August 3rd), by which time I think you’ll have returned / almost be returned from Lebanon. What do you think? By that time, I’ll have buckets of questions on Hodge, Dean and Carra, as well as Stanislavsky (I now have the short text you suggested by Sonia Moore, will start there). I think I’d be much more productive simply reading and note-taking until Caesar’s open. You need to “dream” *The Dinner Party*. Don’t forget, a lot of script analysis happens when we read scripts. We don’t have to be writing everything down all the time. Work on Caesar now and read *The Dinner Party* every

night before you go to bed (or parts of it). Dream the play. Always read it before you go to bed so your mind can work on it overnight. You'll be amazed what you come up with the next morning!

3. Question: Hodge recommends Herbert Blau's The Impossible Theatre. Have you read it? Do you also recommend it? How relevant would it be to this project? Blau's work is fantastic. Of course I recommend it for any director. Right now, though, I would argue you should read Elia Kazan. His meditations on directing are so beautiful. If you can read Kazan on Directing you'll be better off right now. He has a more modernist sensibility that will inform you in a better way than Blau right now. That's my opinion. Good. Not going to bother with Blau for now. Kazan first.

Script Analysis:

Reading Hodge has been great and highly informative, but slow due to note taking and processing. I'll try to get through the script analysis ASAP, but again, I'm wondering if it would be better to wait at this point. I feel guilty about the delay--please accept my apologies.

Idea: in addition to the distraction of Caesar, summer's a beehive of procrastination.

I'm going to start assigning myself reading... I'd like to send you my assignment schedule for accountability's sake, if you wouldn't mind. :-)

Michael, I have no doubt that you're going to do the work. Remember, this is not about me, it's about you. You need to do the work that helps you and makes you a better director. I'm here to help guide you, not to dictate what you have to do. Work at your own pace. You'll get it all done when the time comes. Do what you can, but just make

sure you feel you're making progress every day. That's all that is important. Keep up the great work!!!

Thank you,

Michael

Sunday October 6, 2013:

I'm going to begin with what's on my mind:

1. Here are some lessons I learned from Julius Caesar, which, for the record, I directed this past summer (2013) for Eugene's Free Shakespeare in the Park:
 - a. Working with a cast of 15 was logistically challenging. I'm looking forward to a cast of 6 in Dinner Party.
 - b. I didn't understand Act one (first half of the play, in our cut) until it was too late. It was an act of people talking and plotting, which I couldn't figure out how to raise the stakes on effectively. The actors kept relaxing the scenes. It felt like planning a football game, not an assassination of the world's most important leader. In retrospect, I would have made the other conspirators threaten Brutus, increase the tension between all the conspirators, make it more than just a gradually growing lump of conspirators. That finding stakes-raising relationships between each character is important, I think, is the lesson.
 - c. I didn't understand the script well enough before we began, especially Act I. Script analysis of Dinner Party will be paramount (doing so right after I write this).
 - d. Rehearsal schedule lessons: I free-blocked the play with the actors in the beginning, which worked OK, but not great. It took 2-3 weeks out of 8. In future,

I think I'd do so again, but spend less time in this part of the process. In short, I'd free-block the whole play in a week or less, refer to it as a "useful, thoughtful, but scrappable starting point." I found blocking on the fly with actors often let the tension deflate and scenes without obvious conflict relaxed.

- e. I found that a brief bit of table work to go over the arcs of the play and the scenes and to answer questions was good, but it needed to be over with quickly. I found that brief "what's the point of this scene" (mini table work) interludes before we started working on a scene were quite useful.
 - f. Julius Caesar was exhausting and I needed a break before I could begin working on this project again. I feel guilty about this, but I know it was necessary.
 - g. Working with actors: I am a firm believer of the "If you give actors super-specific direction in the beginning, then they will come to you for every little thing and stop innovating themselves" theory. I avoided this pitfall in Caesar, however, as we approached opening night, I needed to become more and more specific about what I wanted to help refine what actors were doing. The trouble was that I needed to substantially change what a few actors were doing, not just refine, which may suggest that I should have given more specific direction to those actors, earlier.
2. Something I want to keep in mind: What parts of my personality could each Dinner Table character be?
 3. Recurring note: "A comedy is to a farce as a drama is to a tragedy."--Najjar This play is more comedy than farce.
 - a. Also: "Your "gut" knows more than your mind as a director."--Najjar.

4. I should read Simon's *Rewrites: A memoir*. Simon is very autobiographical in his plays. Good grief my reading list is long but awesome.
5. Who should be my secondary advisor? Schmor, of course, sounds great, but (1) I'm not sure he'll be around spring term, when the defense may have to happen, and (2) he's such a dominant personality in the department it might be odd working with him in a secondary position. I just sent him an email to meet with him this week to see what he thinks. Schmor agrees to be secondary advisor, 10/15. Exact role of secondary advisor is open to discussion (what I wanted).
6. Hallie Day will be my stage manager—YES! "Score!" as they say.

Wednesday, Oct. 16th through Oct 19, 2013:

Ideas:

1. What about having a door sound effect and just a door frame? Imply stuff with sound? I can do sound effects.
2. Implying all objects through sound. The sizzling of the food.
3. While Albert's alone in the room, eating hors' doevres, he could come up with a fun clowning routine, and each time he pops an imaginary Hors dorves into his mouth, there's a synchronized sound effect, one of which must be the toilet flushing with Claude. Repeat flushes will be necessary to interrupt the scene with Mariette.
4. Set description: 45. There's a main entrance door, a bathroom door, and possibly one more door.

Also, script analysis is hard. Useful. Exciting. Every time I start reading I come up with ideas. I'm concerned, though, that I might stick to my first impression of a character. I need to be able to erase and revise.

What about blocking the last scene, first? Or the scene that is the most important / intuitive to me? I think that makes more sense, like writing: Write the scene that's in your head first, and go from there.

---Why was I so sad about the loss of Alec's girlfriend in Continuum? Because I related to her. I liked her. She died and I was sad because it was like losing someone I liked.

Sunday Oct 20 through Wed Oct 23, 2013: I've been watching lots of Frasier. Why? Somehow useful. Relationships, heart + humor, characters who are lightly farcical yet sincere. The energy also feels right, and we "know" these characters instantly. They're familiar. I want the characters in Dinner Party to feel familiar like those in Frasier.

Problem: Claude, Albert, and Andre don't know each other, they don't have the pre-made relationships that Frasier and Niles do, which I think is what interests me as an audience member.

In light of what's it like meeting someone new? What is Albert's first impression of Claude and vice versa? I sense it would be helpful if these were strong for actors, characters, and audience to have something to work with. I want to have a very specific sense of who these characters are when they walk in the door—a perspective I can ease the actors into / adjust with them, but that will remain constant in its level of specificity, even if its articulation changes.

Update on farce: the play describes itself as farce on 36.

Concept to remember: Couples connect, not communicate.

People to invite to the show: (and reserve seats for)

1. Thesis advisers (duh)
2. Louise Bishop and Jim Earl

3. David Frank
4. Dave and Lynn Frohnmayer
5. Barbara West
6. Scott Coltrane
7. Irene Alderman
8. Sharlene Barnum
9. Jim Torrey
10. All CHC staff
11. May-Britt
12. Jessie
13. David and Jill Niles
14. Dr. Stevenson
15. Nancy Nathanson
16. Terry Hunt
17. Dr. Stockstad--ask for donation.

What is this thesis? How will it work?

I want to handle this thesis in a scientific manner: there is the pre-lab work (identifying and cataloguing the processes I go through to prepare), the lab (directing the play and using the preparation), and then reflection on the entire project. .

Thursday, October 31, 2013:

I had a great meeting with Michael today. I'm going to keep *THE DINNER PARTY* by my bed. I really want to clear off my calendar so all I have to think about is this thesis project. FUN. That's what this is: FUN.

Sharing the essay on freedom and my own understanding of why divorce happens was really useful.

Idea: have Claude looking for cell reception at the start.

Production Meeting #2 agenda (will take place Dec. 13):

1. What can we do about the doors? See p. 29
 - a. Also: 53.
2. What can we do to make this seem older, like 90s.
3. Lighting changes.
4. Bruce: Does the set design work for making the bathroom sound? Enough room for the board, speaker, etc.?
5. Budget needs from each designer
6. Jewelry: Leah. Claude's Ring, Mariette's earrings.

Monday, Dec 9, 2013:

No, scratch the cell phones. Don't use them. There are too many lines that make this a problem. We'll have to set this in 1990 or earlier, will choose the period based on costumes available.

What does Mariette almost ask for on 47?

Monday, Dec. 16, 2013:

I've been thinking about why Yvonne leaves and comes back when she first enters.

When reading the play quickly, it seems she left because she saw Albert and didn't want to hurt him, but that's not actually the case. We never learn why, in the taxi on the way to La Cassette, Yvonne decides that she can't attend a dinner party of which she knows nothing. Only having decided this does she come in, deliver her "short comic

monologue” and leave—and then, only when departing, does she see Albert and decide to leaves with even greater haste. However, once in the taxi, her chance seeing of Albert convinces her that their silence is bad and so she returns. So she has courage, albeit latent courage, to face a situation that’s painful for him and, therefore, her. Returning to the original question, I think this is Yvonne’s character: she has commitment problems. She married Albert twice before leaving. She had to come to the party twice before leaving. She even leaves it twice at the end of the play before staying. She knows what’s right, she just has to take time to summon up the courage to act on it. There may, however, be a mix of impulsiveness in there: maybe it’s not that she has to take time to summon up the courage to come to the party or stay or divorce Albert, but instead makes decisions impulsively and later thinks better of them. I think that a character who initially veers away from the courageous act but later returns is more interesting. It adds to her resolve when she finally arrives, resolved, to stay at the party, or when she divorced Albert, etc.

Sunday, Dec. 22, 2013:

Entry house music: Sinatra: Come fly with me. Some Brubeck would also be good. I might try to date the show using music, which would solve the cell phone problem.

Tuesday, Dec. 31, 2013:

I just realized who I had in mind for Claude’s “detective who does dinner parties” persona: when Claude goes into detective mode he’s like Data in Star Trek pretending to be Sherlock. Data’s Sherlock is cheesy as all get out but he thinks his work as Sherlock is both cool and useful, which is exactly what Claude thinks of his own sleuthing skills.

See “Elementary, Dear Data:” [http://en.memory-alpha.org/wiki/Elementary, Dear Data \(episode\)](http://en.memory-alpha.org/wiki/Elementary,_Dear_Data_(episode))

Claude is an arrogant, loving, Sherlock Holmes wanna-be.

Wednesday, January 1, 2014:

I’m homing in on summaries of Hodge, Kazan, and Clurman, as well as the improv text, Truth in Comedy, recommended by Prof. Schmor. I just dug up notes from a conversation with Michael where he asked me to include, in the summaries of the texts, both the theoretical and practical applications of these directors’ ideas. I started, above, an outline for lessons learned from Hodge, but it does not feel particularly useful at this point. I need to relate my notes to practical applications. I will endeavor to complete these summaries pronto, though I suspect doing so will bleed over into the rehearsal period, but the texts must be read before then....

In light of all this, Hodge seems extremely complex in and of himself. I have a lot to learn just from Hodge. What about limiting my primary focus to hodge, and looking at the others more casually?

Note on tone: In the discussion of the written script analysis, Hodge calls for a tone to be written out for each scene, but earlier suggests that a tone is the sum of each scene’s mood. I’m going to write out a mood for each scene (sensory and metaphoric) and then come up with a tone for the play.

Wednesday, January 8, 2014:

This just in from the costumer, Leah Bierly. I had asked her to give me her own one-sentence description of what she saw each character wearing.

Claude: A Tuxedo, a nice one. I imagine him with glasses and a nice watch.

Albert: A Tuxedo, not as nice and maybe all the pieces don't match, as he's accumulated them from different sources.

Andre: Not a Tuxedo, but a dashing nice suit, because he knows how to dress well.

Mariette: Women's dress pants with an appropriately nice blouse, either with a women's suit jacket or a shawl (which is in the script). Something that is equally professional and casual so that she could go from a book signing or something to a dinner party without seeming out of place.

Yvonne: A nice, youthful, but not too extravagant dress.

Gabrielle: An elegant and dramatic dress.

I [Leah] can honestly say that I still don't have a clear vision in my mind what Yvonne's or Gabrielle's costumes will look like exactly, but this is essentially what I'm aiming for.

Saturday, January 11, 2014:

Finally figured out what I'm looking for in Yvonne. She's like a little mouse who summons up courage and squeaks her mind until the world listens. She's something like the brave little mouse we all admire.

Mariette, on the other hand, is cool and ordered and holds her ground naturally but suddenly comes unraveled when her weakness is brought out: claustrophobia.

Also, Ian Stewart just made my day: He let me know that he isn't posting the cast list of his show until I'm done, in other words, we're kind of doing a group audition, which given the clumsy glut of auditions this week makes much, much more sense as a practice. In his diary, Kazan often assesses the production company's

structure / actions and how the company's nature or actions influence his production. I can safely say that, as far as I can tell, a group audition would be a much, much fairer situation for the actors and would likely result in shows with better casts. As it is, actors are auditioning for shows at the beginning of the week, getting cast, having to say "yes" while they could possibly prefer and be cast in a show that auditions later in the week but they never see that audition. I hope Ian runs for the Pocket board. I'm concerned that the Pocket Board lost 2, possibly 3 board members including its 'CEO' between the end of fall term and beginning of winter term and can't organize itself well enough to send out a list-serve on time needs considerable attention. I hear that the pocket board is frustrating for directors to work with, which has been my experience (they can't send out a list serve and can't tell me whose responsibility it is to send out a list serve—a weekly routine operation!). It also seems that the board members are frustrated, hence why they're leaving in droves. Something is wrong, I think I'm going to avoid supporting the pocket as much as I wanted to with this show, that is unless Ian manages to join the leadership and make systemic changes.

I just realized a problem in Amy's and my relationship that relates to this play: I wanted to be a good dancer, but was and am not. Amy, however, was and is a fantastic dancer and I was always jealous of her and the guys she danced with. Quite similar to how Claude was jealous of Mariette's literary success.

Things I need for the audition:

1. Audition forms
2. Rehearsal schedule outline
3. Script selections

4. Laptop w/ spreadsheet notes or notepad. Notepad is better.

Sunday, January 12th, 2014

My letter to the actors who auditioned, announcing the callbacks:

Dear all,

Thank you for auditioning. I had a great time working with each of you. It was also nice to see that so many people enjoy Neil Simon's work. At the end of the day, though, I have to narrow down the list of actors from 20+ to 6. Note, though, that if you do not see your name on the call-back list below that I encourage you to audition for another university production before this school year is out. **Do not just wait for next year.** Everyone who auditioned brought something worthwhile to the stage and I hope you will try your talent with another project.

List of actors to attend callbacks:

Aaron Archer

Mallory Oslund

Audrey Bittner

Liv Burns

Nick Bussey

Amy Hall

Anna Klos

TJ LaGrow

Bruce Lundy

Alex Hardin

Call backs will take place today, Monday, January 13th, beginning with brief individual interviews followed by readings of the scenes. You do NOT need to prepare for the interview, but please arrive 5 minutes prior to your interview.

Interview: Takes place in the Pocket Theater (Villard 102, same place as the original auditions). *Arrive 5 minutes before your interview* and make sure you're back at the pocket theater door by 7:30.

7:00 pm: Aaron Archer

7:02 pm: Mallory Oslund

7:05 pm: Audrey Bittner

7:07 pm: Liv Burns

7:09 pm: Nick Bussey

7:12 pm: Amy Hall

7:14 pm: Anna Klos

7:16 pm: TJ Lagrow

7:18 pm: Bruce Lundy

7:21 pm: Alex Hardin

Call Back audition: 7:30 pm to 9:00 pm, pocket theater (villard 102). All actors will read scenes from the play with partners. We'll begin the callback promptly at 7:30. Please be nearby!

One last note: You may know that directing this play is also my thesis project. My thesis advisor, Prof. Michael Najjar, may sit in on parts of the call back audition. Do not be alarmed: he will be watching me, not you. :)

See you tonight!

-Michael Sugar

541-912-4981

Some time should be spent analyzing what happened today: I want to address what I did (and could have done better), what institutional factors played in, and then I'd like to begin analyzing the actors.

How did I do?

It's all fine and well to say I did "good" but Kazan pretty much never compliments himself. There's little practical benefit for me if I praise myself *unless* I do something that surprises me. Two things happened during this first round of auditions that surprised me: I remained on schedule (having a schedule is good), and during one scene I looked to Aaron Archer while he was acting onstage and I pointed at a prop (suggesting he use it for some business during the reading) and he used it very well. Our instincts connected and I found it hysterical.

One problem I have is actually following along with what people are saying in their auditions, especially the monologues. I lose track of the content and instead pay attention to how they are saying the piece; I start thinking about what their performance says about their training, their experience, their personality, their insecurities, their range. What they are saying has so very little to do with my assessment, rather, how they are saying it is what I can't avoid looking at. It's like in teaching: without a good delivery the most important material is lost. The result is that I think, during an audition, I fail to laugh at what I would ordinarily laugh at during a performance were I just a spectator. I remember one person in particular, Nick Bussey, started with the opener to *The Good Doctor* and he included some *Complicite*. He paused and when I noticed an

odd gap I looked up from my notes puzzled and he smiled or had some other natural reaction and carried on, but he took me with him into the piece. His instincts for complicity (I believe that's the clowning term) were courageous and effective and I respect that. He told me right there he can listen to an audience. I think the good auditions are the ones that make me pay attention to their content, the ones that force a connection, that make something happen in the room (as I once heard Prof. Schmor say).

I'm also concerned that I didn't laugh that much. A few times I did quite loudly, but considering it's Neil Simon, I wish I'd laughed more. I'm not sure if that's a product of actors' experience levels, my engagement with what they're doing (going back to that "problem" of hearing the technique and not the text), or how I set up the audition. I also notice that inexperienced actors have a tendency to find one spot on the stage and stay rooted there, shifting slightly in space, but are mostly doing micro blocking and little else. Little to no risk taking. Part of me thinks I didn't have time to fix this, but really, I could have. Next time, I'll suggest to them that on "this line" they should approach person X and on "that line" run away (RUN, don't walk) away from them. I think that would give them a lot to do if I sense that it's not happening. I will implement this in the callback.

All that said, I had a good time during the audition, and I did NOT have a difficult time matching actors to parts (thank you, script analysis—so many of the problems I had with *Caesar* over the summer are not repeating themselves, thank you. Prof. Najjar accurately diagnosed that problem). I need to look more at the motivations at work in each scene, but I'm in a good place as far as script analysis is concerned.

Note: I will include the audition form I used in an appendix.

What about the spine?

I gave no thought to the spine of the play today: to find love. I want these actors to look for the love in the scenes, but almost without realizing they're doing it. I'm going to select scenes for tomorrow night that involve love and see if they can find it amidst the anger and loneliness and clumsiness of everything else going on.

Institutional notes:

Almost half the people who signed up on the audition list did not show up for their audition, meaning I went from an audition pool of 30 to 16. If that's normal or even somewhat typical for pocket shows at UO then something policy wise is amiss. If people RSVP there needs to be a culture of commitment, especially in show business where one's reputation for follow-through makes and breaks you. I am coming to believe a high profile (like, everyone-on-campus-knows, high profile) group audition each term, sponsored by the pocket board, would work. GTF and PHD pocket shows, I think, ought to be in the group audition, and they could have some kind of "first pick," I'm guessing, to mollify any concerns. I do not agree with what I've heard from some Pocket Board execs who have said that "the pocket can't include GTF / PHD shows on its publicity because ASUO would revoke our funding." I have the personal experience to prove that that statement is under-researched, but it would take a dedicated relationship with ASUO to add flexibility to that funding relationship, not a relationship of sporadic necessity. Cleaning up that relationship could also lead to more funding, i.e., to renovate the Pocket. There was a great victory in securing funds for student tickets a few years back, but I wonder what has happened to that relationship. It

certainly isn't high profile at the moment. As an aside, I was privy to a campaign meeting earlier this year where one of the ASUO campaigns nearly made renovating the pocket a campaign promise (and in no joking way, it was almost part of a long term political strategy to support humanities) but they felt they couldn't guarantee the return on the investment (i.e., the pocket board's stability was in question) so they dropped the idea. Damn it, right? Cross sectional (Undergrad through PHD), consistent (little to no flaking) student support and more demand than supply for acting & technical roles would build a strong case for facilities upgrades for theatre students on the students' dime. The fly system in the pocket sure could use it, as could the spotlight (or lack thereof), and the tattered curtains, and the PR (posers, signs, video work), for that matter. New seats would also be nice. You might even come by some more rehearsal space to allow for more performances. We do have nice new rehearsal benches, though. The Robinson and Hope were renovated, and now we have student tickets, which are signs of picking up steam, I just hope that the "picking up steam" graph will be linear over the long term, not a sine wave.

The snag, of course, is that I don't fully understand the system by which actors would be divided up among productions in a group audition. Ian Stewart claimed it worked at Emerson much better than the grab-and-go we saw week one of winter, and I'm inclined to agree just based on his judgement, but I'd have to see it in action and a plan does not spring to mind. One audition date would be easier to market across campus. The question, then, is whether this would end up competing with main stage shows, which would likely raise a number of hackles and quite a few meetings.

To be clear, the pocket does produce some great, original work. It just seems under-used relative to the size of our university. The logistical snags and lack of follow-through I experience likely contribute to that under-use. Increased use, however, can lead to depersonalization and might limit the ability of someone like me when I was a freshman or a sophomore (or even now) from getting in. I like the liberal arts model where everyone can participate and learn from theater without becoming a conservatory, I just don't feel like the pocket situation is fulfilling that open to all liberal arts goal as much as it could.

Notes on actors: During the callback interviews I will draw on this material. I'll ask for them to clarify any conflicts they might have, and then any question they have for me. I'm trying to pick up on the psychology of the actors. Prof. Najjar says it was something of an obsession for Kazan to probe the actors' psychological makeup, and I am beginning to sympathize. Understanding how they work and what they love leads to more effective analogies and improvisation and a more varied product.

Liv Burns: Guaranteed to play Gabrielle. She's funny and tragic and, thanks to John Schmor, understands her own sense of royalty. She also knows how to enjoy language in a way I have a hard time getting others to do. I wonder what makes her cry. When does Liv feel lonely? Question I want to ask her in the interview: Will you tell me about someone who loves you? What are they like? (I want to repeat this question for Amy Hall).

Aaron Archer: He had by far the best chemistry with Liv when he read for Andre. I want to test TJ's chemistry with Liv. The problem, though, is that he can play any of the men in this show, and I'm stuck because there aren't enough good men to go

around. There's another actor who was great as Andre but likely won't have the same chemistry as Aaron did, but with time he might. Aaron, however, could play Claude while almost no one else could be enough of a prudish ass. He has done so many shows, but I wonder what his technique is. Interview question: What is the actor's job? I remember Joseph asking me this question and I think I flunked it; I wonder what Aaron would say. His technique has become instinct and he sometimes loses sight of the objective, despite his ability to personify a role. I wonder how much of a go-getter he is as well as a "be-er."

Mallory Oslund: Definitely the most timid person to get a callback, but she had a mouse-ish quality that would work for Yvonne. In part I want her to come to the callback to make sure that the other person I want to read for Yvonne doesn't relax too much. Mallory is effectively a high school actor, she would need a lot of work. She is VERY concerned about people looking at her, I think. There was a tremendous incentive to please me and give me what I wanted to hear during the monologue section and not be true to the question she was answering. I feel like confidence is something she, like Yvonne, has not found. Which brings me to the interview question: What do you have a right to in a romantic relationship? What do you have a right to feel? I want to give her a chance to show me that she has a right to feel good and valued and confident and independent, which is the end of Yvonne's character arc.

Audrey Bittner: Doesn't know how to change pace, but could be taught. She takes direction when she knows what it means ("slow down to 1/10 the speed" didn't work!) but she could adapt to a mouse-like situation easily from a more dominant approach. She's funny, attractive, can read as older, which would work well with any of the

Alberts. She naturally has strength and confidence, but when I made her try things she couldn't do well THEN out came the shy mouse, the more stereotypical "I can't do it" indecisiveness. In any case, Audrey might naturally have the arc that Yvonne makes from indecisive and unconfident to confident and ready to go, whereas Mallory would have to build up that confidence through the rehearsal process. Audrey's instincts were not always right with the timing of confidence vs. unconfident, but with the right nudging she would get it right. Her improv skills were also great. I need to know more about what she's like when she's uncomfortable. I should rephrase that I saw timid but not uncomfortable, when it's uncomfortable that I need. Love makes Yvonne uncomfortable, it smothers her, it doesn't make her afraid so much as it frustrates her and prevents her from being herself. When she's afraid of hurting someone, when she can't rely on that strength and confidence that she falls back on BECAUSE that confidence will hurt someone else, that's the quality I need in Yvonne. I hate to pull one of Kazan's nastier tricks, but I think I need to see what Audrey is like when she's uncomfortable, when she doubts herself or, at least, can't be her confident self.

Interview questions: Did you notice I gave you a different amount of interview time than everyone else? (I didn't, of course). Why do you think I gave you a different amount of time? I'll give you a hint: you put down Yvonne as your preferred character. Why? And then move into questions about the rehearsal schedule and questions for me.

I WILL FESS UP TO HER LATER.

Nick Bussey: He was clever and funny and well blocked and inventive and prepared. He had a neurotic quality that I felt suited Albert really well. I don't know him, though, and my reliability bells are going off. He's just kind of a weird guy and I'm concerned

that weirdness and flakiness go together. I am going to ask him the Teach For America question: How do you keep yourself organized? Keep track of your engagements? Things you have to do? What's your major? I want to know that he keeps things in order and that he has the capacity to commit to something and stick with it.

Amy Hall: Very standoffish. She's puzzling. Kazan would have found her psyche fascinating. And her energy is good. I just keep feeling like she is too young for the show. She's someone who will be excellent in some part (like Gus in *Arcadia*, which she was) but I just can't picture her in this show. But she has smarts and I want to see if I can fit her in. She's very negative, though, and I want to see a brighter side: I want her to tell me about someone who loves her. Not WHY they love you, but who loves you and what they are like. I want to feel what it's like for her to be grateful, something which Gabrielle is at the end of the play.

Anna Klos: Pretty much the only person I wanted to play Mariette. Though I'm now realizing that Amy Hall's smarts might make her an interesting Mariette. I just can't see Amy across from anyone. She doesn't have a pair, whereas Anna would be great with anyone physically. Her instincts are a little diminished, she's acting for camera not stage, but that can be remedied. Her instincts are right, they're just too small. She has debate instincts and I like that. I don't need to know a lot about her right now, I feel like I'm going to leave her alone, let her be the unprobed. She's used to defending herself well (she's a debater), how about not making her defend herself? Will she be arrogant? I'll start with this: anything to add to the conflict list? Any questions for me? Given time, I'll ask what is the actor's job? But I want to see her in her natural state, not defensive.

TJ LaGrow: Amazing as Andre, but I feel like his range is limited. I need to see his simple, conversational side. What's your favorite food? Are you dating anyone? Then move onto the logistical stuff. Can he be quiet? That is a question I have. He would give Liv a run for her money, which is what I want, but I need to see different sides of him, not just strength. Andre has a professional disregard for others that comes off as calm and fed up, not superman.

Bruce Lundy: A runner up for Albert. I am reminded of the advice that William Ball gives on auditions. Paraphrased, when choosing between an actor who might be really good for the part but makes you nervous in terms of his experience and the actor who is perhaps not as good for the part but has greater experience, go with the experience. I can't decide yet. Bruce's age is also a problem: he's older, and I don't think I believe that he can work with an actress in her 20s and make us believe he's her husband. Maybe in the 19th century, but certainly not now. That said, I need to see if he could work across from Yvonne. But I can't ask him about that. Bruce is someone who does NOT cold-read audition well but his performances are generally good. He's really shy. Default interview question: What, in your mind, is the relationship between loneliness and love?

Alex Hardin: A less experienced version of Bruce. If Nick scares me I will likely go with Alex or Bruce, and will have to decide. I know Alex so well I don't feel like asking him a question, so I'll go to the default: what is an actor's job?

To do list for tomorrow:

1. Put together the questions for the actors into a cheat sheet

2. Assemble some scenes that make people look for love. The first scene between Albert and Claude. The scenes where people connect. I have to push Albert around a lot. In terms of actors, Aaron Archer will have to go where he's needed.

Monday, January 13, 2014:

I think I need to revise some of the questions I wrote out last night, and leave time to ask "what do you expect from a director?" In particular, I feel stupid about the question I wanted to ask Audrey Bittner. Sure, that effect might be useful to see, but my approach, I think, was on par with a plot devised by a 1960s Bond villain.

Questions for the callback, revised from last night:

7:00: Aaron Archer: What do you want from a director? What is the actor's job?

7:02: Mallory Oslund: What do you have a right to in a romantic relationship? What do you have a right to feel? What is the actor's job?

7:05: Audrey Bittner: Why did you put Yvonne down as a preferred character?

7:07: Liv Burns: Will you tell me about someone who loves you? What are they like?

7:09: Nick Bussey: How do you keep yourself organized? Keep track of your engagements? Things you have to do? What's your major?

7:12: Amy Hall: Will you tell me about someone who loves you? What are they like?

7:14: Anna Klos: Anything to add to the conflict list?

7:16: TJ LaGrow: What's your favorite food? Are you dating anyone? Then move onto the logistical stuff.

7:18: Bruce Lundy: What do you need from a director? What, in your mind, is the relationship between loneliness and love?

7:21: Alex Hardin: What do you look for from a director? What's an actor's job?

After the audition:

Not much to report other than that I changed my mind after leaving: I liked both Nick and Alex so much I want them both and have decided to put Nick in as Claude and keep Alex as Albert. The two of them WILL feel like brothers. In future, I will map out the Callback permutations more clearly: I missed two, today. First, reading Amy Hall as Yvonne with TJ, and second, reading Nick as Claude against Alex's Albert. I feel OK removing Amy from the mix, something just doesn't feel as good as I do with Audrey, however, Nick feels like a sure thing even though I did not read him that much for Claude. I'm taking a risk here, and that's OK, I just need to see how it pays off.

I laughed a lot tonight. Thank God.

I'm also wishing I'd asked Nick Bussey to read one of Albert's monologues from the end of the play. I feel like he can't do the arc, like he's really good at Albert at the end of the play but not the end of the play. I need to believe he's healed, which is what I know Alex Hardin can give me, but not Nick, I don't think. Alex has the energy I want that will carry the show, as well. I'm voting Alex right now.

The morning after: Tuesday, January 14, 2014

I remembered how much I liked TJ's Andre the first day, and had forgotten that, at the start of the callback session, I set out to try and put him in positions that would show me his other colors and then neglected to check on his Andre thoroughly afterwards. In short, I stopped considering him for Andre when really I loved him in that role.

Additionally, Aaron Archer, I think, has the greatest sense of humor on the cast, and thus putting him in Andre's shoes (the "straightest" character) does not make sense to

me. I want Aaron to play Claude, and considering how well I liked TJ as Andre, this works for me. Finally, I can see Aaron and Audrey together as Claude and Mariette much better than TJ and Audrey; TJ seems too lovable, which is what Andre was to Gabrielle: endlessly lovable. Also, after sleeping on it, it's clear to me that Amy Hall is just too young for this show, she'll feel out of place. I think, therefore, I have a cast:

Andre: TJ

Gabrielle: Liv

Claude: Aaron Archer

Mariette: Audrey Bittner

Yvonne: Mallory

Albert: Alex

I am not very worried about not casting Nick Bussey at this point. He was good, but his energy was too low, I realize *now*. I wish I'd given him direction to raise it, but I couldn't figure out what was bothering me until now.

Also, I am reminded of the advice I've received from both Michael and John: let the actors surprise you in the audition. I did allow for some of that, but I didn't structure enough in. I came to the callback almost certain Alex Hardin wouldn't get a part, but wound up loving him and finding his energy to be the most appropriate and the most malleable. In future, I will set up every permutation I can think of to allow for surprises. There were some structured in, but the permutations I missed (listed above in

“after the audition”) could have been considered in advance, which would have been useful.

At the end of the next show’s callback, I will ask everyone to “take 5” while I make sure I haven’t missed anything.

Taking notes on the callback was really difficult. I found watching more useful than writing this time, whereas on the first day I took tons of notes. I have a good memory for most of the scenes I saw yesterday, so I’m not worried, but I could have taken better notes on Nick Bussey and TJ’s work in the first scene I had them do. I need to write down the answers to the questions I have about their performances as I see the answers.

It just occurred to me that Alex’s apparently young age will work great: he’s been divorced twice and he’s HOW OLD? Claude will eat him alive.

Letter to the callback actors:

CAST LIST for Neil Simon’s *The Dinner Party*

Dear all,

Thank you for a fantastic callback audition. Based on the quality of the work last night, I think you know how difficult this decision was for me because there were only good options. Please note that I have added each of you to my list of people to contact if / when I hold an audition for another local theatre project. I really enjoyed our work together, and hope we cross paths again. With regard to this production of *The Dinner Party*, however, I have determined what the most effective ensemble will be. Thank you, though, everyone, for your time, creativity, and inspiration over the last few days.

Also, if you LOVE Neil Simon: Keep an eye out and audition / attend shows at the Very Little Theatre and LCC directed by Chris Pinto. Mr. Pinto directs a Neil Simon show about once every other year in Eugene, they are consistently high caliber and he's good to work with.

***The Dinner Party* cast: PLEASE confirm by responding to this email OR by initialing this sheet on the bulletin board in Villard (I prefer an email).**

Gabrielle: Liv Burns

Andre: TJ LaGrow

Claude: Aaron Archer

Mariette: Audrey Bittner

Yvonne: Mallory Oslund

Albert: Alex Hardin

Cast members: Look for an email from me to schedule the first read through this week (we can have it Thursday as planned, but I'd like to find a time that works for everyone.)

Thank you all,

Michael Sugar

I still feel good about this decision. I realize now I felt limited by Amy and Nick's personalities in ways I can't completely nail down. I feel like there are more creative options with the cast I selected.

Friday, January 17th, 2014:

Najjar likes the actors energy.

Notes on the audition:

1. Maximize actors' time. Liv sat around for a long time.
2. Pre-set the sides so that people can think about it in the hall.
3. Consider whispering notes in an actor's ear as opposed to telling them aloud to the group.
4. To build romance:
 - a. Ask actors' to find something on their partner's face that they would keep forever, and another part that you would take off with a scalpel.
5. Consider who has grown up in the intervening years since their divorce, who has become more beautiful, who hasn't.
6. Aaron: Perhaps not as far in the world of the play. Are actors playing to Neil Simon's style, not pop-comedy?
7. Silence the cell-phone.
8. Use names to call out actors, not "you."
9. Use ("the floor is on fire") not ("jump up and down")
10. Stage manager: Get someone to handle sides.
11. Getting extra perspectives is good. Well done with that.
12. For all CROSSES AND ACTIONS, give purpose to it.

Matthew Broderick is a Neil Simon actor.

Next journal entry: to defend the process, play, approach, and philosophy.

Saturday, January 18, 2014:

Things to tell the actors on Monday:

1. Rehearsal schedule isn't flexible. Please prioritize this show over other pocket productions. The only flexibility I have is to hold rehearsals later and later at night, day switching is almost impossible. We have 1.5 hours of material to get through in 5 weeks, we must use our time carefully.
 - a. Prioritizes couples, then the end of the play.
2. Defend your time. The schedule I've put together uses your time well, but it probably won't do so perfectly. If we're rehearsing something and you think I might be done with you but I haven't said anything, please speak up. Same thing: look at the pages we're rehearsing the night before the rehearsal and text me if you're wondering if you should show up a bit late. I may not be able to accommodate every request, but sometimes I've missed 15 minutes here or 30 minutes there that you don't actually have to spend in rehearsal. Not drives me crazier, as an actor, than a rehearsal schedule that wastes my time.
3. If you have scheduling questions or concerns, please call me.
4. We will have a spotty, rotating series of stage managers until I can nail someone down. You'll be very responsible for writing down your own blocking.
5. Actors homework: 10 minutes. What is homework? It's this kind of nebulous idea of stuff actors do outside rehearsal which, in an education setting, I find rarely gets

done. Do what you need to do (character bio if you find them useful), but here's what I want:

- a. Review last night's objectives: what did you want and where (blocking) did you go in the scene(s) to pursue it. If a new idea strikes you, write it down and make sure you tell me about it. Review blocking and objectives as one concept.
- b. Make sure you know the context of tonight's scenes. Do they take place before or after the scenes we did last night? This play is easy to understand as an audience member, but it's easier to lose track of where we are when reading. Make sure you know where we are each night. We jump around.
- c. This show relies on knowing the context of past action. Doing these two things will root you in the past action and make sure you have a roadmap of the play firmly in your head.
- d. Learn your lines by Monday, Feb. 10.

Monday, January 21, 2014:

A challenging series of questions: Why this approach? Why this play? Why these directing texts? My committee (Prof. Carey) asked me to be able to be able to defend my answer to these questions in a scholarly way, but I'm concerned I can't. I feel like, for starters, I have the 2-year-old's logical problem here: "Mommy, why is the sky blue? *Because God made it that way. Why? He likes the color blue. Why? It's prettier than the others.* Why does God exist mommy? [Etc.]" My point is that I'm having trouble finding the scholarly roots necessary to answer these questions.

Why this approach? In short, because I like this approach and I believe it tells the story in ways that most effectively comment on love and relationships. To briefly define what I mean by “approach:” the style of the production, from set design to acting [modern vs. commedia vs. something postmodern], and the period in which I set the play. My approach is a modernist realist approach, setting the play in the relative present, with the actors acting as they would in a real restaurant, with real people, in real relationships to which we, as an audience, can easily relate and see ourselves. The restaurant is only suggested through the setting (it’s not kitchen sink realism because I don’t think we need to that level of detail to believe we’re in a restaurant—suggested realism will work fine, but again, that’s a personal belief, not a scholastically informed decision). There are elements of farce thrown in (maybe I should research farce?), and I think of farce as “realism plus” but I don’t believe that telling this story on the moon, or in slow motion, or as if the play were taking place in Moliere’s era tells it as well. The problem I have is proving that. Do I have to explore postmodern concepts for *THE DINNER PARTY* to prove that they are inferior in x,y,z ways to my modernist realist approach? Or is it enough that I just don’t like the idea of warping the play from the context which, it would seem, Neil Simon intends? Is it enough of an argument to suggest that directing a play in a way that feels right (intuition being critical to directing) is enough to justify directing it that way? Directing the play this way certainly suits the text, but is it necessary to defend why I should follow the text?

Which brings us to the next question: why this play? I don’t know that there needs to be scholarly justification for this question. I really like, no, love this play. I love Neil Simon (we even share our birthday, July 4th). It’s important to direct a project

that I feel passionate about—above and beyond any scholarly concerns—and since I have been passionate about Neil Simon for years I think it's appropriate to direct a great play from him. Practical concerns also factored in to this decision—I needed a play that was an hour and a half to suit the (*perhaps* under researched) scheduling precedents of the TA dept. and the pocket.

Also, why these directing texts? In short, because Prof. Najjar recommended them and they make sense: Dean and Carra address fundamentals—planning, blocking, talking—while Hodge deals with analysis and Kazan gave me an example of how to evaluate myself, our work, institutional factors, and the overall success of the production with regard to pursuing its spine. I think I have to go with “my advisor recommended these, and they were comprehensive.” I wonder, though, if I shouldn't be reading more about Simon, actors who play Simon, and comedic theory.

Aside: I just decided that part of my final conclusion on this project will be a recommendation on institutional practices that would make this kind of project easier for students over time. I don't just mean thesis projects, but student pocket productions—GTF or undergrad. In short, students get the answer of “no can do” all too often, whether it's literally about which door Mr. Varga can bring in over-size props to the pocket, what kind of advertising is allowed, whether the pocket will support WITH A TITLE LISTED ON A POSTER AND A LIST SERVE my thesis show even though it's not technically a pocket production but I'm offering them \$100+, the length of a pocket show, the availability of funds for royalties, etc.. Audience turn out for mainstage shows is also a problem, as is supply of actors and actor-flakiness. These hang-ups are particularly frustrating because I know first hand that this university has

the resources to support more extensive (longer, more expensive, a larger number of) projects if students want to pursue them in addition to devised theatre work already underway (not to mention mainstage work). I'm especially bothered because I have the experience to know that if I were running the pocket most of these problems to do with rehearsal space, performance time conflicts, as well as logistical, liability, safety, and under-researched budget matters would be substantially improved. That sounds arrogant but I've done something analogous before and know it can be done here with the right team. But again, this is personal experience talking, not scholarly research on the business of theatre departments and their relationship with their affiliated student group(s).

Tuesday, Jan. 21, 2014:

List of things to talk with TJ and Liv about:

1. Beats of the scene. Beat names: Fire chase to dark to relaxed to the spell is cast.
2. Take them outside individually. Toilet lick (not really) exercise with TJ; sexy turn on for liv (not with me, obviously....). These are their secrets for the rehearsal process.
3. Talk about the kiss. [Note from later: I foolishly talked to them about the kiss together. OF COURSE they'll say they're ok with it in front of one another, I should have done so individually. I didn't realize TJ was a freshman, he could have been (but wasn't) very uncomfortable with it).

Reactions from the read through and TJ - Liv (Andre / Gabrielle) rehearsal:

What could I have done better?

The read through was odd. I feel like Aaron Archer (Claude) had a great time. He was grinning at me almost constantly, although he had the most experience. I feel

like Audrey was uncomfortable. Alex was fine. Mallory was really quiet. Should I have cast her? I'm a little concerned she won't gel with the cast.

Asking people to pair up to walk home with the ladies is awkward but necessary. Maybe it's a sexist move? Out of fashion? No, safety isn't out of fashion, just safety couched in gendered terms.

In general, I feel like the play was well cast, though I'm a bit worried about whether or not Mallory and Audrey are in the right places. Liv is really tired, but I have faith in part because everyone seems to have faith in her. And we get along well. She reminds me of her character and vice versa.

The actors all seemed tired after the read through. I'm going to need to give them more energy each night.

Scene 21: Gabrielle and Andre's private scene. I had trouble finding **the spine**. What do I want with this scene, anyway? The notion of giving TJ something really horrible to think about with her (the toilet) and her something really nice was a good place to start, but I think it may have cancelled out some of Andre's love for Gabrielle. I want to find more of that, but where? I can't seem to focus on it because...

I am so concerned with blocking. Preoccupied. I think it will get better, but just blocking the scene in a way that seemed to work took all of my attention. I need to find a way to get more bandwidth. I feel like my sense of the characters served the blocking, not the other way around, which is a problem. Character objectives should motivate blocking, which they did, but not often enough.

One problem in particular: I want Gabrielle to chase Andre and have all this stage business as she corrals him like a horse in the arena. I just can't figure out how to

do it. We arrived at a barely working watered down version today. It's not funny, just awkward at this point. Maybe I'm going for a laugh when I shouldn't? The energy of that kind of chase is what I would want, though.

Actor psychology: No idea. I was too focused on blocking, which is a problem I would like to try and rectify. I note, though, that both of these actors innovate blocking on their own, which shows confidence. I'm sure Aaron Archer will be the same, but I'm really worried about the rest. What if I have to focus even more on blocking with them? How will I ever get to work on characters? Tech week? No way. Need to address this.

Also: TJ has a wonderful and powerful voice, I'm wondering, though, if he'll use it all the time. Probably something I'll have to break, no time now, though. I also want him to keep his beard.

Institutional factors: Not much worth noting at this time. The rehearsal space is very convenient.

Wednesday, Jan. 22, 2014:

First rehearsal with Mallory and Alex (Yvonne and Albert).

I cast these two well. They have good energy, but right now, I'm not laughing. I'm worried about the lack of laughter. I'm wondering if that's something they'll get. I'm remembering the advice Bill Ball gives, paraphrased, to compliment the actors' work over the first few rehearsals. **THEY NEED TO KNOW THEY'RE OK**, that's what Ball says.

I feel like half the time they're tracing the blocking, not pursuing objectives. That's part actor experience, but also, I need to learn to think in objectives, but I feel

like with these two I need to give them an objective for every line to give the scene its shape. They feel a lot like high school actors, I'm having to give them everything.

They contribute too, just not as much as did Liv and TJ.

The humor is set up, it's just not happening yet. For the first rehearsal, though, that's probably OK. They will get better with practice.

The pace is almost perfect.

I'm finding that the pauses I marked into the script are not happening where I thought they would (well, they are, but rather, I have found the occasional new one).

I give direction at too much length because I am trying to find objective-based language, not "go there, feel like this" (except that works better than objectives with Alex for some reason).

Actor Psychology:

These actors are a joy to work with. They are forth coming and work HARD. They are always eager to get it right.

Odd thing: speaking in objectives does very little for Alex Hardin. However, when I describe how something feels, he gets it instantly and it works every time. He and I think similarly, I suspect.

I worked with Mallory alone today to learn about her relationship history. I want to know if she understands what it is like to break up with someone. This relates to the spine:

Did we work on the spine?

Yes. Yvonne looked for love, and Alex tried to get commitment (love personified). I can't feel the tension yet, we NEED tension, to feel what they want.

That said, the colors are there, which, along with blocking, I think counts as substantial progress. Next time we run these scenes that's what I'm going to focus on entirely: being able to feel what they want. There is one amazing moment where Albert cries "DON'T SMILE AT ME" that is just wonderful because we feel him resisting love, and thus, we know what he wants. We need to feel that all over.

Institutional notes:

The rehearsal space is a pain to set up, it takes time, but it's SO NICE to have a dedicated rehearsal space even with improvised furniture. I wonder if Pocket Shows could acquire dedicated rehearsal space through EMU scheduling (yes, of course, I did, but it would take some understanding from UO scheduling and designation of classrooms that are NEVER used for events after hours.)

Additionally, the Pocket board declined to promote my show today. Their letter to me (they cite the bylaws, that means they're concerned about me taking them to ASUO, which I won't):

Michael,

We have taken a vote on advertising for your show in the season poster, and we have unanimously decided to not add your show to the season poster. This is not a personal issue with you or your show, but the fact is that we would like our season poster to just include shows that are in our season; shows that have been proposed and approved by the Pocket Playhouse.

I, and the rest of the board apologize that we took so long giving you a definite answer, but we wanted to handle this democratically.

We decided that:

1) If we added your show to the season poster, we would have to add all the graduate student shows. This would not only crowd our season poster, but also putting less emphasis Pocket Playhouse shows.

2) We would also be responsible being present at all performances of "*The Dinner Party*," and other graduate student shows to usher audience members and run door.

3) In section 5.07 of our bylaws, it states:

"Any director who produces an Academic Needs production in the Pocket Playhouse does not answer to the Pocket Board. They are not bound by the Pocket Playhouse Technical Guidelines, Directors' Contract, or Bylaws. Their production is regarded as a University Theatre production, and any questions or concerns regarding their production must be submitted to the University Technical Director." It doesn't say anything about the Pocket Playhouse advertising graduate student shows. University Theatre would be responsible for advertising your show, technically speaking.

I realize that you made an arrangement with Naomi about us advertising for you in exchange for collecting donations for the Pocket Playhouse. However, Naomi stepped down from the board at the end of last year, and we have made a democratic decision among the board.

Regards,

Gabe Carlin

Technical Director

Amber Ball

Co-Chair

Andrew Nguyen

Co-Chair

My response:

Dear Gabe, Amber, and Andrew,

Thank you for your thorough consideration on this matter. I appreciate your careful attention. I'm naturally disappointed but I understand and am thankful for your time. For the record, I disagree with the precedent your decision sets for the pocket's interactions with outside groups, whether that outside group takes the form of an Honors thesis like mine, or shows of grad students [which I'm not, in case that wasn't clear]. I would argue that limiting the pocket's network by not working with outside(ish) groups will limit / keep steady state, but definitely not increase, the average turnout at pocket show auditions and performances. This precedent will also limit the quality of casting across shows due to shows' poorly timed audition schedules between pocket and outside (GTF, and the occasional undergrad thesis like mine) productions.

To be clear, I'm not making an argument for you to reconsider my involvement; I've begun making alternative arrangements and don't want to inconvenience you especially if you're short staffed. However, as you consider future proposals from other directors I hope you'll take what I've said into consideration.

In any case, thank you for investigating this show and our possible partnership in good faith. Good luck with your season!

-Michael

What I didn't say: Their bylaws citation is pattern behavior, namely, if there's not a rule on the books for it, they aren't likely to do it. University bureaucracy is ultimately here to serve, not obstruct, and I find the pocket's response akin to those that inspire faculty rebellions against administrators. Also, I think the pocket and I hold different assumptions about what educational theatre should be. My preference is for a "the best theatre for everyone by connecting it to the most people possible over long and short term" model, theirs is a "the best theatre by keeping it selective [hedge out competition from grad students] on a term by term basis" model. The trouble is that "selective" in the pocket's case means not-networking with graduate students and other campus units, which I'd call a PR mistake. Promote all shows in the pocket, add them to your resume, promote the hell out of all of them, and you'll have people pouring in from different departments to work on and in pocket shows, and whether they're technically directed by grad students, undergrads, or me, wouldn't matter at a group audition. In my experience, networking everywhere drives up attendance across the board even if you wind up doing more things. Holding 10 events across the year in 2009-2010, CHCSA (Clark Honors College Student Association) had a gross event attendance of about 150 students, give or take. By 2012-2013, we hosted 100 events across the year and had a gross attendance of 3000. This might be more than the pocket's attendance all year, and we're not even a theatre, which leads me to believe the pocket HAS to be missing opportunities. Other stats: The average CHCSA event attendance went from 15 to 30 over 3 years, and the highest single event attendance went from approximately 40 to 200. The leadership team also grew from 5 students to 15, not without problems, but it's still working. These are the kind of numbers I think

an educational theatre ought to boast to be serving its community, and more networking is part of the path to get there. Administrative structures would also have to grow to adjust to new work loads that don't always suit the rules, and those rules **MUST** bend through consensus as the field changes.

Altogether: If you let people know you're easy to work with and offer a good service (PR, programs, house management) then they'll come audition for your shows, direct shows, etc. They will even become dedicated leaders in your organization. Don't network and practice "no can do" with outside groups and then they will avoid you.

Additionally, the Pocket Board has some level of infamy with the ASUO controllers, which concerns me. When I investigated some sketchy advertising rules the pocket claimed came from the ASUO controllers (it turned out said rules don't exist...), the controllers all but groaned when I said the Pocket Board's name. This is a **HUGE** problem for securing more funds in the future (reputation being indelible in the ASUO controllers office, and it bleeds from office to office down there...), especially for renovating the pocket space when that comes around. If the pocket ever becomes ultra-negligent, it could become a problem for the department's other ASUO interests.

As damage control for my project, I took a few minutes to line up a poster designer and will make sure to ask John Schmor if he can include me in Circus for my performance week (I hope he's more understanding than the pocket, though he protects his list serve like a kitten).

Speaking of networking: I'd like to do a curtain speech to thank businesses, and in lieu of giving donations, I'm going to turn this into a Free Shakespeare in the Park

Fundraiser. The program should also include a nod to upcoming University Theatre shows. Thank the businesses because they support students and theatre: students and theatre, can you think of groups that are more worthy of support? I certainly can't think of groups that are as worthy and as impoverished.

Thursday, January 23, 2014:

I unfortunately wrote tonight's journal out by hand and then lost it, so this will be brief. We had the scenes with with Albert and Mariette first meeting, then Claude and Mariette alone.

The Claude and Mariette scene has great fire. Where's the love, though? I suspect it's around the wedding ring, but the scene can be so angry that it doesn't feel loving.

This scene really blocked itself.

The Albert and Mariette scene is not working, though we blocked it well enough. I'm seeing their backs a lot, especially Mariette's. I want Albert to REALLY, really, really like her, and he tries. Her entrance isn't working. We need to instinctively feel like he loves her, that he's "a horny little bastard." I resorted to trying to get Mariette to seduce him, which I don't feel the script directly supports, but I could not find a more subtle "flirty" direction to go in. They needed to have chemistry, which I couldn't find, so I forced it into seduction. Maybe that's a mistake?

I need to memorize the character names with the actor faces.

Friday, January 24, 2014:

What did I do wrong?

It was helpful having Prof. Najjar in the room. I had a constant reminder to do the things we talked about (not that I was always successful) but I was more conscious of using objective language. I have improved, since the first rehearsal, at using objective based, not activity based language (You're a missile, blast over to him; not "cross to him."). Each night has improved, but I think last night was the best, and Prof. Najjar's presence helped reinforce that. That said, one problem I had was getting stuck wondering what Prof. Najjar was thinking instead of focusing on what I was doing so I decided to ignore him completely, lest I start taking cues from his micro body language. He was smiling when left, and while I'm sure he did that to help us (confidence builds success onstage), I'm hopeful he was legitimately happy with what was going on. I'm confident he'll have notes for me (we're meeting in half an hour), but I'm hopeful he thinks I'm on the right track.

And while my objective language is getting better, I find I have to think out loud with the actors to get to the direction that works. I can feel what I want, but what I want is in feelings not words, not immediately articulated. What I mean is that I talk too much, and I have a feeling whoever is reading this will not find that surprising.

Also, I managed to make a good connection with Audrey (in part via text message), which I was worried about since the read through. She had been really quiet and made me wonder if she wanted to be here. We're in good shape.

Institutional factors?

Nothing to note except that I decided last night that props will not be needed until the scripts are out of their hands. Jason Rowe will be handling properties.

Spine:

We made progress today. As I plan for next week I will think, as I take walks (it's how I plan) more about what I hope to pull out, but the bottom line is that I'm trying to prove that these characters still love each other, i.e., that love and hate are NOT mutually exclusive (Something I mentioned in rehearsal and Aaron ecstatically agreed with). You can love and hate someone at the same time. In particular, the Mariette / Claude scene has good energy.

Actor psychology:

Audrey Bittner is the most stoic at the start of rehearsal, but she was showing greater variety (Dean and Carra: variety is everything) by the end of the rehearsal.

Aaron Archer has great instincts, but I feel like he's one of those actors who practices the way to say a line and detaches it from the objective. But he manages to say it the same way every time. It's an older style but he does this work really well, he understands Simon intuitively and takes direction instantly.

Alex: He gets it and will master the humor, it's just going to take work and framing it in ways that make sense to him. I need to think more on how to communicate with him. His posture needs to be more formal for Albert, then we can break that posture as Albert is broken in the play. We started working on this just after Michael left.

Other notes:

Blocking is far easier than expected, but I'm going to have to figure out a way to make the funny parts funny with actors who do not fully understand how the humor works.

I'm also avoiding a mistake (I think) I made with Caesar over the summer: when I see something onstage I don't like, I ask to work on it and we fix it then, not waiting for the next rehearsal. The balance I'm having to find, though, is what makes sense to work on at this point

Every time I go to give an actor direction, I think of Michael Najjar's notes to me on using direction in objectives. Whenever an actor does something onstage, I think of William Ball: praise them, inspire innovation, give direction through questions.

I need to use character names and not "YOU!" to get an actor's attention. I'm naturally bad with names, even with friends, so I really need to ingrain these peoples names into my head. This is a note Najjar gave me.

Scenes not completed yet:

Very end of scene 16, the last beat. Will take 10 minutes.

Monday, January 27, 2014:

I have to start being briefer with these journals. They're exhausting me. Instead of writing out a ton for each sectional heading, and thinking of each heading (actor psychology, institutional factors, etc.) as mandatory, I'm going to only bring them up if I really want to. In particular, I feel like I want to pay more attention to spine and less to the institution. Not sure I know exactly how, yet. *I'm going to touch on the same themes of institutional factors, spine, actor psychology, and what I can improve, but in a more combined fashion, not one heading at a time.*

And so: Today we started the big scene at the end of the play with all 6 characters. We had to start at 9:00 instead of 6:00 due to the *Spring Awakening* call back. Several actors, therefore, did a marathon of theater. They remained undaunted.

Very kind of them, as I let them know. We all adjusted and rehearsal went until 11:20 pm and no one was bitter. People were tired but I received several thanks for making rehearsal happen “despite everything,” so no harm done, I think.

Note: Moving the door to the USR corner as opposed to center is working well. I also like the reorientation of the bar.

Tonight went surprisingly well, if slowly. This scene, when we run it, takes 40 minutes right now, which is about twice as long as I expect it to run. The actors are working well with one another. The problems I can't seem to avoid: sometimes I feel like I'm just blocking for blocking's sake. For example, I can't seem to figure out what the women want when they aren't speaking, which is especially the case with Mariette. Audrey continues to be assertive, which is good for her character, but that assertiveness feels monotone. There was one exception that I'm not sure how to handle: she moved in the direction cheesy sweet on the letter she memorized. I have no idea how to fix that but it does not work AT ALL. It needs to be a tool in her belt, not a mopy recollection of some bygone love letter from Claude.

I feel like the end of the play has parts that are funny if not hysterical to us but will not be funny to the audience. I am not regretting casting Audrey as Mariette, she was definitely the best possible to cast in the role, I should think, but her limited experience with comedy and emotionality is making me work pretty hard. All that said, I think we found some really funny things to do with silverware. I avoided working on the claustrophobic part. It needed so much work and energy that I decided it would be a problem to work on tonight. I'm worried that it's written poorly: It goes on for a LONG time but has basically no lines to motivate it.

The “move around” portion works well.

Also a problem, Audrey has a tendency to turn her back on the audience. In general that’s a problem with having 6 people onstage (I sense I have some tweaking to do, but very little), but her in particular.

Spine: Shoot, I didn’t even have time to think about it. I tried to get Andre to soften up but he didn’t get it tonight, or maybe only 10% of the way there. Need to think more on that.

Tuesday, January 28, 2014:

Catch up from what we couldn’t finish last night given Spring Awakening’s rehearsal, plus the scene at the end of the play:

Running the end of the show went fine. We blocked it, we have a sense of what’s going where. FIGURING OUT who would be sitting in which seat was a bear. I had drawn a diagram beforehand, but it was still a challenge. It’s a puzzle with moving parts: who has a line of sight to Gabrielle so she can suggest where they sit but who can’t stand next to whom and who can or can’t sit next to whom and in what sequence—these are the variables. Remind me never to become a party planner for the Queen.

Gabrielle: I do not believe her character right now. I can feel her reaching for power. She just needs to own it. How do I help her own it? I’m getting concerned about her having to go to KCACTF. That’s going to make character development tough.

Claude: I feel like his speech at the end is moving. WOW. Aaron shared with me, over a drink tonight, how his heart legitimately is broken right now and has been for over a year. I knew that doing this show age of the actors would be an issue, not only for believability by an audience (“these people aren’t as old as they claim!” says the man in the front row)

The scene with the women (scene 18): I don’t have a formula like I do for the guys (“You’re brothers, competing and then taking cover behind one another from Andre...that will likely work well), but tonight with the ladies do not work. I also can’t figure out how to relate this scene to the spine—do Mariette and Yvonne want to befriend Gabrielle? Or not? I remember saying “If something feels like it’s missing, it’s the alcohol and props to use”--which was idiotic. It’s not that, it’s that I realized I couldn’t figure out what Gabrielle wants from them and them from her, despite my scene work before hand. I need to talk about this scene with Michael.

The ladies, Yvonne and Mariette, also need more blocking help than do the guys, which makes it harder for me to focus on objectives. Again, the blocking distracts me. I was surprised by Mallory: she was more confident in the scene with Albert than here, maybe because her objective was obvious then. I need to think on this. I felt like apologizing to the actors after the rehearsal tonight. I didn’t, but I might have done.

Wednesday, January 29, 2014:

We did the opening scenes today, the ones that involve only Albert and Claude (skipping Andre’s scenes, those are tomorrow). As I had hoped, the formula for building a relationship between Claude and Albert worked well. I explained that they are brothers, and they found sibling rivalry. There are a couple of things that I’m afraid

are not working, for example, there's a bit with them having a drinking competition that seems like I'm just desperately trying to seem like I have a plan when it's really just something that occurred to me and I wanted to try but didn't ultimately have the courage to say "sorry guys, this isn't working, but I don't know what will." Saying that would probably be bad, I can find something else that works later. Aaron Archer is really funny, Alex is getting there.

It's interesting, when I give Aaron notes while we're working a scene I only have to get halfway through my sentence and he says "got it," at which point I stop talking, he does it, and 99% of the time, yes, he's got it.

I'm running a little late at each rehearsal. 5 minutes or so. Is that a crime? I know I should stick to the schedule, the actors sure are. People are being punctual.

I think these two will be a hilarious start to the show. I'm a little concerned about how Andre will fit in. We're going to need to run this sequence a lot for the timing to feel right. This show isn't funny enough. Aaron shared with me a tactic Chris Pinto used in a show Aaron was in and that I saw (actually how I met Aaron): Go through and make a laugh happen every 4 lines. That doesn't quite work in this show, of course, but I wonder if I may have to do that (later, of course, once they're off book).

Prof. Najjar had asked me to look for the beats and to begin at the beat each time we "go back." The trouble is that I can't keep track, in my head, of where the beats are. Sometimes it feels like the beat started so long ago that going that far back is a poor use of time. Not sure how to go back to the beats in light of these problems. I trust that it's important....a stage manager would be helpful here, but I can't seem to find one that's available!

Thursday, January 30, 2014:

Originally I had wanted to do all of the Hodge analysis before rehearsals began. I'm glad I left the "assigning an objective to each line" until the day before rehearsal. Doing it the night before makes the scene more ingrained in my instincts. However, doing so takes me hours. I can tell that by the final week of doing this I will be sick of it, but doing it is helping me think in terms of objectives much more, and the humor (especially Albert's clowning) really comes out.

I want more clown out of Alex Hardin. I feel like Albert is too watered down. I would like to see his neuroses become so strong that the audience instantly recognizes them such that every mention of them throughout the play produces a hearty laugh. We'll get there. I remain convinced, though, that Albert's farcical nature comes out of something real: he's hurting, badly, and trying to cover it up. Ignore it. He does not have enough friends to come to a third wedding and he misses the love of his life terribly.

Adding in Andre was easy: He comes in and I love how Claude and Albert are instantly allied against him, which is perfect. The trouble is that I worry if TJ is going to be able to be less hammy. I sense him going for jokes, but if he plays it straight, THEN he will be funny. His energy is great though.

One problem I'm having is that TJ seems to get so into character that he becomes rude and I almost have to shake him out of it. I'm not sure if it's an affectation or legitimate. He's really sweet and sincere and softspoken when I pull him out in the hall but onstage he's Andre all the time, which is vaguely comical but proving difficult for me to work with at times. It makes me fear to give him a note for fear of

pissing of an actor who I want to have on my team. Given the voluntary nature of this project, I am reluctant to get on actor's bad sides. I need them, so I don't want to push too hard.

Monday, February 3, 2014:

Institutional problem: As per Queen Victoria, I am not amused. 4 of my actors are in this week's Pocket show, all of which were told they'd be done with the run of the show BEFORE our rehearsal started. I just got a call from all of the actors (it's 10 minutes past our start time) to tell me that the directors haven't even begun the run yet. I remain skeptical of pocket leadership and its capacity to plan ahead. They're running a show with 40 actors, they needed to have masterminded the schedule for tech week, not figured it out on the fly. [Later note, from end of week: the actors put in extra time and we got caught up, it took patience and gratitude to the actors who were NOT in the pocket show for adjusting. We managed to stay on schedule despite all of these hoops and morale is high.].

We ran the last 20+ pages of the show (from Gabrielle's entrance). There are a lot of actor notes that I don't care to go into; I know I'll see them next time we run this part of the show and correct them. We corrected a lot today, more to do. I didn't hesitate on what to prioritize (fix now, or later?) as I had been doing last week (I think it was), so that's a step up.

The scene with the ladies is still weak and I don't know what to do with it. It's slow, I can feel the nature of the show disappearing. I fear it may become one of those "The play was good except for that one scene" scenes. I vacillate between "they want to be her best friend" and "They can't stand her and want her out of there." I'm missing

something. The entire end of the show is running long. It took us over an hour to do 20 pages. That needs to be fixed, but will be better with time.

I'm noticing how good Claude's energy is. He comes in at the end of the (not working yet) scene with the ladies and the energy immediately picks back up. However, his energy is topping Gabrielle's, which isn't right. She needs to be in command, which is perhaps not an energy thing so much as a status thing, but right now energy is what's laying claim to status.

I have gone through and named all the scenes for the play. I suspect that in retrospect I will want to rename them. They feel very different onstage than they do on paper, though my sense of the humor is not far removed.

Another challenge for me is determining Claude and Gabrielle's relationship. A part of me wants to say he's attracted to her, another part says that he doesn't care and wouldn't because he thinks she's a fruitcake. Do I want him to look for love in her? Is that a violation of the spine of the play? I am not sure. I went in the direction of him really liking her tonight, and Aaron went along, but I can tell he disagrees, and I have to say I'm starting to. I'm going to watch this.

Prepped the actors for the commercial tomorrow. I'm excited! The commercial is taking a significant amount of attention from me, though. Oh well! Too late now. I'm still getting everything done that needs doing, but I think it's diverting some of my energy.

Tuesday, February 4, 2014

We filmed the commercial today. Not much to report other than it went well and timely. I'll include the script either here or in an appendix. Outside of the pocket board, there is no specific system for accessing the equipment in the pocket theater, which I would suggest is a problem given the pocket board's limited accessibility and lottery-based decision making.

I cheated on one thing that made me sympathize with Kazan's "anything for the shot" reputation. In rehearsal, I NEVER give line readings (i.e. , "say it this way"), which is conventional directing wisdom, or I gather. However, for the commercial, with limited time, I did anything I could to give us the shots we needed for the story to make sense. I'm fine with that, we're not going back and the actors had minimal exposure to the concept, so we had to be performance ready on a moment's notice, and we're only talking about a few lines. I'm wondering if such coercive, poor form directing is commonplace in film.

Wednesday, February 5, 2014

Tonight we had a Mariette focused night, which was worthwhile. I can't specifically pinpoint how, but I feel like Audrey's sense of her character and presence onstage has improved noticeably. Just in general, she's "acting better" (though I curse myself for using the phrase). Perchance this is representative of William Ball's recommendation that one must, must, must praise the actor's work in the first week to get them through it. She's through the first week, and is perking up. Nothing is really sticking in my mind, though, about her work tonight, other than that we need to keep working, and I'm going to have to work on getting her to stop smiling. I got a little

tough on her tonight, “MARIETTE, YOU CANNOT SMILE.” and only had to do it once. I suspect I’ll have to do it again...she laughs during fight scenes, but she knows it and is working on it.

The challenge tonight, for me, was actually Yvonne. At the beginning of the night we ran scene 17, which is the very short scene between Yvonne and Mariette just before Gabrielle’s entrance. Yvonne has to cry, which is what tripped me up. I have some background in helping actors cry, and I wasn’t sure what to do. So I just said, “Can you cry for us?” and Mallory responded, “Yes.” And she faked it. She faked it WELL but there weren’t real tears. That she has really pale skin I think helps, because when she fakes crying it happens to make her face rosy and gives a great illusion, but she’s not really crying. Should she be really crying? I keep thinking back to Morris class, and wonder if I should have her do a coffin monologue or something emotionally exhausting like that. However, I don’t think so. I buy the “fake crying” so much that I don’t feel like we need to go there. I’m also afraid that while the coffin monologue tends to work once, I don’t have enough experience to know it works elsewhere. The result is that I fear I could get her to real tears once, and then she’d feel like she was failing every time after that, which could make an otherwise great performance feel awful to her, which I don’t want to have happen.

Also, the point of this short scene just dawned on me as we did it: it’s a chance for Mariette and Yvonne to really become sisters, to have the moment that Claude and Albert never quite get to have but that we feel in them.

Thursday, February 6, 2014

Cancelled rehearsal tonight due to the snow. In the middle of the afternoon it looked like the snow might not be that bad, but I decided to call off the rehearsal anyways for another reason: I was exhausted. So I'm actually thankful: I was worn out. Preparing for four rehearsals per week is proving difficult, not so much because of time but focus. I don't enjoy mapping out the objectives line-by-line, but I know I HAVE TO otherwise I can't block the scene well. It proved to be too much for my stamina this week.

It worked out: the snow kept dumping down and my call looked like a good one, but frankly I was just lucky. Of course had there been no snow I would have pushed through and done the prep, but my heart wasn't in it today. No clue why.

Monday, February 10, 2014

Today was the last day of blocking, and for some reason, I can hardly remember it. These scenes were not my favorites—they were essentially the leftovers, the scenes that, because of who was in them, or their length, were inconvenient to call actors in to do. So we did all the “inconvenient to schedule” scenes at the same time. They felt a little disconnected. In a brief meeting, Prof. Najjar recently mentioned to me that it's getting close to time to “start running sections of the show,” and I have to agree. Running things out of sequence is killing the energy and character development. In terms of the show, I almost wonder if we should have ignored blocking these scenes separately and instead just blocked them when we got them during a run of a section of the show. Logistically, that wouldn't work out—too many pages—but in terms of how the acting feels to me, I feel like a blocking rehearsal was anticlimactic. We're ready to

start running. We need to start running sections, so I'm glad that's what's scheduled for tomorrow. Without the arc of a larger run, it's almost impossible to feel or find the love (the spine) in these sporadic, intermediate scenes.

We did scene 7, where Mariette and Claude see each other for the first time, but Andre and Albert are still in the room. The scene's energy is fine, it will pick up, I'm just concerned about the physical blocking we've worked in. There's one point where Andre takes Mariette and swoops her downstage under his arm and another where Claude and Mariette are basically slinging Albert back and forth between them like some kind of rotating puppet. I think it's fun, but as I believe I mentioned before, I'm concerned that what's funny to me won't be funny elsewhere.

Audrey does not have comic timing ingrained in her (at least it doesn't seem so). However, after explaining and working with her on the timing of "line" action "line" action (or vice versa, depending on what needs accenting) and keeping the pace up between the actions, I think the moments are working quite well.

I feel like Andre is too hammy, especially in scene 13 ("OH YES"--it's like he's having sex, which is funny, but it won't be funny; it feel like it's supposed to be a joke the way he's doing it, which means it won't be funny), and I can't figure out the alternative. I sense it's funnier if he plays the character straight, but what's the dramatic justification for doing so?

We also did handshakes at the top of scene 14. I hate handshakes. We had them in Caesar, everyone else has to shake everyone else's hand, and it takes forever to block it, it's the gigantic rotating puzzle.

Yvonne continues to do her speeches very strongly. I'm impressed. Which, it occurs to me, is lucky seeing as she didn't do a monologue for the audition, so I was flying by my instincts on that one. She's put loads of time in on them outside of rehearsal, I can tell, and it's paying off. That never works for me: if I work on a monologue outside rehearsal, aside from memorizing it, it gets phony.

One of the hardest moments of scene 14 is not giving away the point of the play when Yvonne walks in. I was reminded of a lesson from Joseph's directing class where I gave away the surprise ending of my 10 minute scene in the first 10 seconds (or so). In *Dinner Party*, Yvonne and Albert must see one another but must give no indication that anything is wrong. It took work, but I think we're getting it. Albert and Alex (who plays Albert) and I continue to think alarmingly alike.

Tuesday, February 11, 2014

Tonight was too exhausting for me to write much. It went well enough, we ran everything from when Mariette and Claude see one another through the instant before Gabrielle enters. The play felt angry and not funny, but I can't tell if that's just the nature of this section (the "comedy" section, the mid section of the play). Anger can be funny, I just can't sense if the context will add in the humor. We are not playing comedy as an emotion, though, thank god. We ran through twice, once working the scenes, another time without interruptions. I feel like I need to let them run through the show more before I really delve in deeper into pulling the spine out of this play. They're ALMOST off book, which impresses me.

Wednesday, February 12, 2014

Same comment as yesterday. I gave lots of notes and worked the scenes, but I have to wait until we have a full run-through to actually understand how this feels.

Nothing to report.

To that end, we are scheduling a full run through for Saturday, which Prof. Najjar will attend. I think then I'll finally have more to think about. For now, it's just helping the show get out of the script and onto the stage, then we can get back to the spine.

Thursday, February 13, 2014

Same as the last two days, we're tightening things up and just getting the show to work off-book, which sends everything back a few steps, but it's improving. To be clear for anyone reading, I asked a lot of them in rehearsal, and we worked on numerous things, like Andre's voice and making sure Gabrielle controls the play, doesn't beg for control, but with lines being a struggle, working the play was a struggle. I was reminded today of something my piano instructor says: "You have to find the music behind the notes." We're trying to find the play behind the words. We're getting there. I'm very excited for the run-through. I feel like that will give me a sense of what's next.

Saturday, February 15, 2014:

First Run-through notes: Start time: 6:50.

Scene 1:

I'm the first to arrive: more.

Let Albert's hand hurt longer.

Show off the establishment, Claude. The napoleon door.

We have to show Albert's hand to know he's not wearing a wedding ring, or it has to be more Clouseau.

"My secretary." ---can you be proud of having a secretary?

Why isn't it funny enough? Possibly more enthusiasm from Claude for his brother?

I wonder if Albert can be much more reserved? Quaint. Things are simpler.

Reserved. The energy from the end of the play is bleeding into the beginning.

More like a mouse ambassador from England.

I'm losing the competition between the two of you.

The arm business doesn't work just before Andre comes in.

Scene 2:

Claude's high status is gone. Claude, look at your blocking.

For some reason they wound up in a line

What's Andre looking at DSR?

Albert's lost the attempt to please Andre.

What do you (najjar) think of Andre's voice? I'm sensing that it could be much more layed back. He's so loud.

We've done this sequence FAR better. They've forgotten what they want but they 95% remember the blocking. Is this a consequence of them just being off book?

Push on, PEEchon.

Albert is the most on with his objectives. I wonder if that's because he's my character?

Why did Andre cross in front of Albert and Andre as they're debating "I thought that was very necessary."

Claude picks up his status on "I think Paul's most interesting quality is his sensitivity."

I still like the casting.

The beginning of the show could use more Judi Dench from Albert and Andre.

It's that brisk, brief, refined, caustic quality.

Good timing on "With the right suit, no one notices it."

Scene 3:

The door exit for Claude needs to be cleaned up.

Albert, we changed the blocking here.

Scene 4:

I still don't like it when Albert sees her the first time. She needs to be closer to him, and his reaction needs to be like seeing Aphrodite incarnate.

Need to perfect the handshake between Mariette and Albert. They don't quite get it when she pulls his arm in.

The "referred to as numbers" bit is WAAAAAY too long. The seduction came out of nowhere, it needs to come in the door with Mariette.

Mariette is no longer trying to seduce him, though Albert is still playing to it, thank you, Al.

The reversal “but not to me” from mariette isn’t motivated because she didn’t play the objective earlier...

Can you take a bigger drop albert on “I’m sorry”?

Scene 5:

GREAT entrance Claude. I have a suspicion that the middle of the play is going to work well tonight, the end will drag a bit, and the front was just objectiveless.

Scene 6:

There’s a mention of a “black evening suit” on Mariette. Fix?

Andre, minor blocking oops. Albert had to tell you where to go.

Scene 7: WOW the pace picked up.

Mariette’s reaction to Andre needs to be an addition to seeing Claude.

Mariette is delivering a bunch of lines to the back wall. She needs to deliver them over her shoulder.

The pace is a little lumpy, but the energy is still up.

Why does Albert say “I don’t think she---”. To mean she doesn’t want to get back together with Claude?

Scene 8:

The “ex” pun needs to be louder.

Whenever you took that drink when fighting with mariette, Claude, was fantastic.

Scene 9:

Contemplate Albert’s entrance timing. Should he beat the door slam? “Slam” needs to be a lie?

Scene 10:

Scene 11:

Paused just before Voltaire, you're so close.

On her speech to Claude, she's pointing upstage too much.

Mariette has to back up too much when Yvonne comes in.

Scene 12:

I want Claude and Mariette in the same spot during.

Scene 13:

Andre's booming again. I'm not sure what I want instead.

Scene 14:

I need the hair out of the ladies faces.

I'm wondering how Yvonne feels about Claude and Andre hitting on her. I want her to resist or like it.

"Good for you Yvonne"---compliment a lady's will power. Feminism.

Wrong line, Claude "Looking forward to that Andre,"

Do I like the "hungry besides me"???

"It's painful to be ignored for the rest of my life." --- IGNORED, we need to understand it's a special kind of ignoring.

Work on the points of "quiet talk" and "half talk" with mariette.

Scene 15:

Good timing on the "two" fingers Albert?

Shaking of the head is too strong. I want something small and gentle.

Maybe Albert's actions are late. Make them preemptive, natural, except for the two fingers. In short, they're reactions, not communication.

"You were always sweet and gentle, Albert," try to take his hand.

Yvonne, you continue to rock this scene.

Great work reading "NEVER" Yvonne.

Scene 16:

Yvonne's recognition of Albert's mistake is too slow, and maybe needs to be redirected to him. She shouldn't get to pour the drink until just before she toasts.

Albert's "descent" from "How are you...Yvonne" could be withdrawing a step.

"So... are you seeing anyone." PAUSE needed there. Need to feel them finding new ground. Albert would then need to return to the original Judi Dench smallness.

"Was I the one following you all over the city?" Yvonne, point around the city.

When Albert crosses up, run up, maybe to the other side of him.

need to fix the head-banging.

Need to feel her looking for a solution and then using Gesundheit.

Scene 17: ONE HOUR to this point. We could carve 5 or 10 minutes off of scenes 1 through 7.

Never, never, never was a bit fast.

Scene 18:

What if "door prize" is sincere?

WAS? (your father)

Yvonne's drink is on the table --- PERFECT!!! DRAIN IT???

Toast the greeks, Gabrielle?

Other deserving...DEAD wife...(as if there are many)

Jump back on your line, Yovvne. ARE you saying---jump---he's a murderer?

Gabrielle, you crossed to the bar on "she was a poor girl" I liked that.

The pace dropped after "maggots." We're looking for lines.

Take your drink with you on elephant woman. After elephant woman, drain your drink, go back.

Pursuit of it: put your arm around Yvonne.

Scene19:

I wonder if Mariette finds SEANCE hysterical?

Gabrielle: Wait until "I think not!" to begin your advance. Maybe begin to recline.

Scene 20:

Andre, shove the chair out of your way.

Not saying what? A huge protest, please.

Scene 21:

Stunning was never your problem--a huge compliment.

OK, Andre feels the same at the end as he does at the beginning. We need to soften him a lot.

Gabrielle, I love the sincerity on "it's the boss I want." Can you make a visible transition to "mommy wants you back." I want us to see you putting the armor back on.

Andre, when you get away from her, pour a drink.

“you sad!” Gabrielle, can you kick with glee?

Andre, review the “oh stop it” “oh for gods sakes” lines, they’re tripping you up.

Find a way to know which is which.

“Replace the batteries” toast him?

Just tell me what kind of hopeless gesture...I felt you trying, we need more.

WAIST LINE: Can we get rid of it?

Look at her on Children, Andre.

Love is easy, eternal desire is a bitch to break---that was NEW. NICE. Liv, beautiful, real sincerity. Nice work.

I kind of felt the build up to the kiss, but there needs to be more.

Can the kiss be longer?

Scene 22

Wrong stop.

Still need to fix Mariette’s running into Andre.

Can we see Andre in the back during the line up? Can we get Gab center, Andre in the window?

Mariette: When Claude brings up Alimony and Andre that has to get up you up?

In for a penny, in for a pound...cross dsl to get out of the way, Gabrielle.

Mariette: Need her to go crazy. Gabrielle, be sure to react to her.

Maybe wait on when Mariette picks up the knives until “I don’t have an opinion.”

Gabrielle's cross up to Andre has problem: Albert doesn't get out of the way naturally. Claude, be into what Gabrielle has to say, It has to perk you up to hear what the worst thing Andre did. Full posture and attention.

What does Mariette do for most of the scene while she's waiting for "let us out of here I'm starting to circulate my own breath." Also, the knives are awkward while she's in a fight with Claude.

Did Albert cross up to Yvonne early.

Mariette, no, I PARTICIPATED! Take joy in it, let it turn you on.

Yes, Yvonne, react to being asked if you have a fantasy.

The speech after Negligees. Does it need more.

Why does Mariette sit down on the same couch as Claude after the negligee speech?

When Albert "You left me out" bigger step apart, Andre and Gabrielle.

THAT is the worst thing she ever did to me. (REVERSAL) Since then I've moved on with my life.

When Claude and Andre try to leave, should we feel them take a beat to decide to return?

Claude, can you watch Yvonne ONLY during her speech, then turn on "Al."

"I remember every word." You didn't use it to impale him.

Watch comic looks, Andre.

Gabrielle, are you calling "Albert?" too soon after Claude's speech?

"He wouldn't stand up to scrutiny under a microscope" == Point at Andre for evidence.

“But he’s the kind of man”...start pointing into Andre at that point. We missed the end of that speech. The question, the look away, the decision to leave.

Albert, keep your focus on one thing when Andre terrifies you during the abberation speech.

Abberation speech lost some of its sincerity. We need to find that point at the end of the play. Don’t begrudge it, enjoy saying it? When you sit in the chair, it should draw Gabrielle to you. Maybe let her put her arm on your shoulder?

“I’m going to stay for dinner”--lead the charge, then back off just like you have.

I want to work the Andre, Gabrielle speech where she tells him what the best thing he’s done.

Claude? “Gimme a minute to think”...immediate response.

“On my left...” or anywhere you like needs to be begging him.

Should Gabrielle cry on the phone???

Notes from Michael Najjar for the same day (I wrote these based on our conversation):

Have people sit on the far end of the couch almost always.

Have the testifiers in the end of the show: 60.

Key into objectives. Listen to the line before you, react to it. What sets you off?

Work beats, laughs, and pauses into objective structure. How to get them out of character and into objectives? Work up a strategy.

How do we find where it hurts for the actors?

Have them sit back-to-back and give the lines to each other in a way they can only listen.

Albert really needs to engage the other actors. He has to fight to disengage. He can't disengage.

Every time you drink, you tell a little more truth.

Can Gabrielle find more hope from Yvonne's return?

Can Andre more actively listen during his pages off?

Use the scenes from the couples together needs to be mirrored by the other scenes.

Keep Gabrielle grounded. She's playing character over action.

Gabrielle needs to find a rise and then it drops: "he was in a foul mood,"

TJ wasn't gesturing very much. Same with Audrey. Activate gestures. Maybe vocal-physical warm-ups.

Let each story sink in. Pause.

When Claude attacks Albert, could be darker. This gives us a better sense of the journey.

Gabrielle can hang longer at the door looking for Andre.

Direction for Liv: She's dying inside but can't show it. She's strong, she can do this, but it's going to kill her.

As this journal is for me, I am NOT going to go through and analyze the notes I made above at this point, they tell me what I was thinking and are what I will review to structure tomorrow's rehearsal. I'm going for a walk tonight to think things over. I will, however, use them to influence my final reflection.

Monday, Feb 17, 2014:

Alex, you've figured out your character, and that's made you confident which is good and reads onstage, the trouble is that that confidence has become Albert's confidence. We need to find where he fights but loses.

We worked on the opening scenes tonight with Claude, Albert, and Andre. I learned from the run-through that these really set the tone for the entire play. Mess these up, and bad things will happen. For example, if these scenes are slow, the ENTIRE PLAY feels slow. These were EXTREMELY slow on Saturday, and the rest of the play felt sluggish, but I think it was an illusion. Likewise, finding the love in these early scenes is important. Albert and Claude have to hate one another like brothers, but more important that that hate (ok, perhaps competition is a better word than hate) is the underlying love between them. They have to find support for one another in one another, against Andre, but also, ultimately, with him. The dynamic between Claude and Albert sets up the spine for the remainder of the play: love planted in acrimony, aching to bloom.

We cleaned up some bits that weren't working. Reversing the alcohol was a good idea, too. It's not really strong alcohol, it's really good.

Also, the lines are coming along. They were pretty good on Saturday, but they need to stop being an obstacle. I wrote the actors to that affect, saw an improvement today from all but Aaron Archer. I remember he had this issue with Caesar, where he was really strong for a long time and then started second guessing himself close to opening. He needs to stop that.

Tuesday, February 18, 2014:

We ran the middle scenes tonight, up through Yvonne's entrance (Yvonne was not called.)

I love the pace in these scenes. But what can I do better? I can remember the spine more proactively. Blocking fell apart tonight in a few places, and in general the Mariette - Albert scene felt far from good to me. I need to see it again, but I just don't feel like he's attracted to her—it needs to be OBVIOUS--and I don't believe the moment when she gets turned off by him. I feel like I'm missing the point of this scene, the dynamic, but I want so badly for her to like him a bit at first—to find some (out of nowhere) love between them to legitimately give Albert hope—even though I fear it may not be well supported by the script.

I also need to find a few places where Mariette actually likes Claude, where her love for him shows despite the ire of these scenes. That's the spine of the play for me, finding that. I saw a few spots tonight that I think are candidates, but I need to talk with Audrey beforehand because loving onstage subtly is not something I've been able to direct her to do easily.

Wednesday, February 19, 2014:

We ran the section of the show between Yvonne's entrance and Gabrielle's entrance. Mallory is doing a fantastic job, she's very prepared and I feel like I have almost no notes for her. Her scene with Albert really touches me. I've been both Yvonne and Albert in that scene (in real life, I mean) and I believe her. 100%.

I feel like now that I've seen this portion of the play, scene 17 (the awkwardly performed / directed / acted scene with just the ladies when Gabrielle enters) will work

better. I'm wondering if it will solve itself, but I still feel like it needs a formula like I devised for the men, but that scene just doesn't make sense to me in the same way. I almost wonder if Neil Simon couldn't decide.

As to the spine, there is so much love coming out of anguish in the Albert - Yvonne scene, from both directions. Now, of course, we don't want to think that Yvonne will come back to him (or do we?...), but that she has love is important.

Thursday, February 20, 2014

Run through of the show up through Gabrielle's entrance (because Liv is at KCACTF). We ran these scenes twice.

Start: 6:10

Gerard--we all need to say the

Gerard pronunciation.

Sorry, did I do that? can that shock you more?

When showing bowtie, keep hands on it.

Wedding band, couldn't hear band.

Wedding bands sliding on and off. Teach him.

When you first hear that he paints cars. Can you find...dumb?

Lines were a bit rough in the opening.

Albert, when do you see the Fragonard painting?

Clever. Immediate. Disdain.

Einstein's relative, do you think---Can you normalize the question? "Alex" it?

When Albert takes your arm, how does that make you feel? Someone you barely know took your arm?

Where can they be friendly? Where can you gloat, Claude, and it makes you happy? Putting down Albert? “Bowties are a bother”? When you mention the napoleon door. Flaunt your knowledge. “They don’t exactly walk into the shop.”

Andre’s entrance: 6:20

Bowtie injury: A serious problem.

Good job on the looks at Albert, Claude.

Andre, look at all lines beginning with “For gods’ sakes” or something like that.

Lines are a little tough.

Don’t cut off “painful,” claude.

Claude, when you wait DSR, get further.

You guys need to run the “Paul’s most interesting quality” dialogue.

Claude, when you approach Albert and Andre at the bar, make sure you are even with Andre, don’t edge upstage.

Albert, can you take greater victory in each of the “he got you on that one” lines

AFTER the first one?

Albert, in general, I felt more Alex. That’s good. He felt more like a real person with quixotic qualities. Not a quixotic person with a few normal qualities. Good.

Mariette’s entrance: 6:30

Albert, when clearing your throat, cheat downstage a bit to collect, then turn back to her?

When you finally get your hand free, it needs to be clear that you were struggling. Big backlash.

More spit up, Albert.

Albert, can you tenderly take Mariette's hands when you go to stop her?

Oh Jesus, you're here as well! (Shout it!)

More definitive on "I'm leaving before this turns into a farce." Wait to turn and go until your line is over.

Doesn't it bother you? Something doesn't make sense to me in Claude's response.

In the history of speech, that sentence has never...let's take it fast. A gut reaction

Smudge: 6:40

Next boyfriend, etc., Claude, be more downstage.

Ex, ex, ex, let's punch them. Huge.

Look at the "club" line, Claude. It's often a struggle.

I'll go--wait until you're right in front of her for I'll Go, Claude.

"Where's Claude" Can we make that a real question? It's very concerning.

Did you know that Napoleon? Cross 2 steps towards door. You're hidden behind Mariette.

Mariette, "You taught it ALL" to me Claude. Make that powerful.

Yvonne: 6:47.

Great on the "oh yes's" Andre.

"No need for me to stay then" How big can you make it?

Andre, can you cross to Chair as soon as Claude finishes his line? Would that work?

Claude, could we make it three looks? ALbert, Yvonne, Albert, PUZZLE SOLVED.

EXCUSE ME to Andre, like you're calling him out on Abuse.

No one could revive yours.... can you sit there and think about how awful Andre is for a moment? Then proceed?

Yvonne, can you follow Albert around as he walks past?

Even less headshaking Albert, SAME DURATION though.

Albert, can you say thank you and then walk? After sneeze.

Albert, the cross on "against you" doesn't feel motivated for me. Can you struggle to be near hear and that pushes you away? After Yvonne crosses to table.

Yvonne, when you reveal that he's been following you everywhere, can you be sure to make a big deal of that?

Ok, Albert, let's tone it down a bit on "I loved you too much?" Can you struggle to understand? Alex-struggle? I started fearing too much for Yvonne's life.

Albert, when you cross up after the LOVE line can you go further up, to the chair by the table, Yvonne, can you wait until your next line to join him on the plain of the chairs?

End on 42: 7:07.

Total: 57 minutes.

Run through #2: Start Time: 7:35

Much more boyant. Happy. Thank you. That was funny.

Claude Pichon, can you gloat more on your name?

Bowties are a bother, disdain him to his face. Look at him.

That door, then move, Claude. Albert, “REALLY?” look downstage on that.

Great reactions to Albert’s employment.

Test him on Fragonard. New beat. New attack.

Today is the 17th, isn’t it? That’s once you’re en route to the door.

Car series. Abstract cars. Endow these with disdain.

I can see your point? A question?

Andre enters.

Is THIS the Paul Gerard affair? PERFECT.

Albert, make sure you stay clear of Claude on your lines immediately after

Andre’s entrance.

When Albert compliments Andre on Bouville’s, can that make you jealous?

I have a question for you Andre. Take a beat before that because it’s a new beat.

You’re right, Albert, faster on Painful. I almost couldn’t hear it.

Albert, can you retreat 6 inches when Andre comes into kissing distance? And

then use your words to continue to be brave

Claude, when you’re thinking about what Paul has said, need to be pointed away

from them. You’re cheating upstage, makes me think you’re listening to them.

Albert, in what leads up to “soothe our aching hearts” can you be sure to focus

on whoever is talking. Your reactions are good, they just need to be to the

people saying, not to the dream in your head.

I like the look after “he got you on that one too” claude.

Andre, can you wait to show us your pompous ass until after your line?

Get my pick of the next two---wasn't super audible.

Mariette, after he offers you champagne and you counter-cross, make sure you look at him and you walk over there to get a better view.

Overdressed: You're totally selling it. I'm sorry, the direction was my mistake.

Can that really piss you off? You spent 4 hours on this outfit.

Albert, your recovery needs to happen in a different spot. We need a different beat.

Don't laugh, guys, when things go wrong on stage. Remember, you have to fix it.

Mariette, can you keep your hand on Albert's shoulder, not around his back.

Albert, on the Helena bit, make sure you're even with Mariette, otherwise she has to talk to you upstage.

Mariette seemed very upset--can you hold Claude more accountable?

Of course, I have a smudge on my face. Can you keep that one polite? Only the last one "I don't know what to do in there anymore" will we keep the frustration.

Albert watch being trapped upstage of Mariette or Claude behind the bar.

Nightmares like Kafke.

Did you say something to her? Immediate. Same energy and intent.

Mariette, can you wait for Claude to begin to introduce himself to step away? I feel like you're anticipating his handshake with Yvonne.

I love your scoot away from Claude, Yvonne.

Good timing, Albert, on dead wife.

Mariette: How conciliatory you Yvonne--can you admire her? Then kind of make fun of Albert how you have? Let's add in one more color to that line.

Albert, make sure you're reacting to her line when you hold up your two fingers.

Needs an instant more.

Aaron, let's talk how to hold for laughs. Rules? Stop talking. Hold onto your objective, the energy of what you were saying, pick up once the laugh begins to dip.

Struggle to move away from Yvonne as she approaches Table, Albert.

Why do you still want me. Can you make that really serious?

Yvonne, good holding your job. Running all over the city, cross towards the bathroom. That's "all over the city."

End time: 8:30. 55 minutes.

Friday, Feb. 21, 2014:

After watching the run throughs of the play (without Gabrielle) this week, I sensed this:

I feel like the pace goes comedy, farce, drama.

I feel like the characters develop farce, comedy, drama.

Sunday, February 23, 2014

Started at 4:25.

Albert needs a haircut.

Albert, as, we talked about, "Really" downstage.

What's hanging off of Albert's coat?

Rushing the beginning? Maybe go slow and pick it up once we get to Paul.

Take time to enjoy and evaluate what another character is like and what their actions say about them. Twice, for instance, I'm not feeling how embarrassing it is for him. The "we heard twice six times" isn't reading.

That mural, trace the outline with your hand.

Albert's watch.

Tell me about it. It's a long story. Pause, Claude, puzzle at him.

Even bigger yell on the handshake with Andre.

Longer pause after "I haven't a clue what you're both talking about." Can you feel the shame, Claude?

Push on, Pichon. Couldn't here PEEchon.

Claude, during the "Paul's most sincere quality" never talk up to them. Be sure to cut them off. Those lines need to hop on top of one another.

I wish you were a cigarette.

Are you insinuating Paul will Pimp for us---ask them seriously.

Albert, when you sit on the couch just before Andre leaves, be sure to sit on the far end of couch.

Albert, sorry, you can't call the food body functions because you like it too much later.

I feel like the first half of the play isn't working.

In the black evening suit.

On. Then off. Then I married her. WHY would Paul do that? Pauses for laughs.

Whenever you're trying to leave before it turns into farce, make sure you're always going for the door. A couple of times you went for the Napoleon door. Oh, and Claude and Albert, make sure you open up for your Napoleon door business at the beginning. Really downstage.

History of speech. Can the statement astound you?

No, I've decided I'm staying. Start that line from the door, still push Albert out of the way and head for the same spot down of the couch.

Thank you for sharing your knowledge of literature. Can you find something difficult.

Can we get a bell on the door?

Paul's line is busy, I head the door.

Louder knocks, Yvonne.

Hungry besides me: Yvonne, can you stand up immediately. Then, escape completely when Mariette comes in her line.

Albert, when you're trying to leave and fighting look at Yvonne. Can you actually steal glances at Yvonne.

Albert, can you wait outside the door a beat, then come back in. Make us wonder if you're coming back. Then do it again, faster. Yvonne, can you take a moment once he's stopped moving to figure it out?

How have you been, Yvonne. I feel like that's a bigger reversal. Could it force you back a step?

I loved you all the time: Can you really try to get her back on that line?

When Yvonne does the hand gesture, you need to think about it, Albert? Let it sink in what she's doing?

Gabrielle, when you come in in 18, could you cross to get a carrot, could you instead put the chair back? Notice it when you come in, too. Your castle in disarray.

Gabrielle, can you keep the sincerity, but I feel like you're tired. Can you find a clown's level of delight in meeting both of them. They need to turn you on.

For example, for years we tried to recreate it. Like it's the best thing. Can you endow each of these ladies and every memory to with Andre with something propels you. You need to find excitement impressing these girls with Andre.

With wanting to keep them in.

Can picking up the wine bottle punctuate a line, Gabrielle?

Good on caricature, Andre. Rather sincere.

Your demented energy, Gabrielle, is fantastic.

Spark diminishing or getting older. Sincere that.

Children. Pause.

I'm getting married next month. Pause.

Eternal desire: remember, that's your eternal desire.

Desperately need to iron Andre's pants.

The Dinner Party goes on. Can you say that from behind Andre looking up at him.

Greeting Albert has great energy, Liv.

Claude, when Albert slams Andre "dead wife" cut the reaction, please.

Now, this is very interesting: can that be interesting to you, Gabrielle?

Interesting things are exciting.

This one's locked as well: Hold for the laugh.

Would you rather not hear what Andre did to me? (Think about it Claude. Pause).

I really didn't think we were going to get that personal. Anticipate what's coming. Fear it? Anticipate it?

Is this how couple's would get back to gether again? Pause for the laugh.

Gabrielle, you have to stay glued to the action.

And as for you Andre (after the fight). Can you react to the violence? Does it make you afraid to talk? What if they turn on you?

Andre was right about you from the beginning: more threatening, Albert. Which I felt you going in that direction, absolutely, take it there. Without a used car in sight, can you use that to make Claude laugh?

Albert: Worst thing she ever did to me. Mariette: Are we through? Can we hold, let it sink in, feel his heartache, then move along.

Has no one here done a decent thing for their spouse? Then I've been wrong.

This has got to kill you inside. These are the most sincere questions of the show.

His eyes were warmer than the croissant. Is that slightly funny to Yvonne?

More pause before we all will, Al.

Claude, can you drag yourself back in. Change the line to “come back, Claude.”

Sorry, the show has moved too far into drama to allow for that. Claude, stand and take it. After Claude sits, Gabrielle, let the feeling of that speech sink in.

Gabrielle, your speech to Andre, from “he’s the kind of man focus on him and him only. Andre, can you actually sit up and keep looking at her, never look away, really think about getting back together wither her.

Andre, your speech to Gabrielle: can you try and get her back? “This night is an aberration, but...” **Andre.**

Thank you Yvonne. / Are we through? (Claude) Pause needed.

Give me a minute, will you? Ask someone else. Claude.

Andre, on your way out, make sure you shut the door behind you if it’s open.

Thank you for doing that.

Gabrielle: It’s killing you inside, but you can’t show it.

Yvonne, shut the door on your way back in.

Gabrielle, please look out the door.

From Prof. Najjar on Monday, February 24, 2014, regarding Sunday’s tech run through:

Hi Michael,

Overall, you're doing great work with the play. I think you've timed your opening and rehearsals well.

1. Costumes: TJ's pant hems look odd. Aaron's shoes should be black. All men's shoes should be polished. Men should shoot their cuffs (pull them as far as they can so they show below the suit jacket arms.

2. The pre-show music works well.
3. Glad you are going to put some blacks to cover entrances--I kept seeing actors behind the door.
4. Where is the wedding band?
5. Beat changed rushed: "So, any idea what this party is about?"
6. Look up at the Fragonard--they are huge paintings.
7. Can Albert get more excited about Claude's profession when he describes it?
8. Think of "ups" and "downs": for instance--6 frames (up); No paintings (down).
9. The "body function" part is pretty pausy--can they pick up cues?
10. The water is fine for champagne, though ginger ale or Martinelli's would be better.
11. Rushed beat change: "So, what business are you in?"
12. Don't let actors cue each other--one actor gave another their cue on stage!
13. Andre's cross stage left on "this is idiotic" is unmotivated.
14. Great! "I wish you were a cigarette!"
15. TJ's concentration seemed off last night.
16. Perhaps a bathroom sign on the door?
17. Lock the door unit wheels so it doesn't travel when opening or closing.
18. Nice Albert/Mariette scene on couch.
19. Albert is dropping line endings (lines start strong and fade at end).
20. When actors cross off--have them cross all the way off.
21. Mariette/Andre scene worked well.
22. Cladue had good reactions to Mariette's asides.

23. The cross on "history of speech" (the cross downstage right to upstage center chair) is superfluous.
24. Rushed beat change on "well, aren't you popular!"
25. Rushed beat change on "Claude, you know what I never got to.."
26. Can the door actually slam? It's such a weak exit when it taps close.
27. Tell the actors it's more important that they make the dialogue believable than to repeat lines they accidentally missed. (if they forget a line, make it natural, not trying so hard to get the line back.)
28. Good anger on "jealous" monologue and scene (Claude).
29. Mariette needs to ask real questions.
30. Mariette needs to focus when she's sitting on the couch--she looks at her shoes and drifts off. She must listen to the dialogue even when she's not a part of it!
31. Yvonne's monologues are really good.
32. Why don't they react to "dead wife"? They seem pretty calm.
33. Albert's shoulders are not sagging.
34. More of a beat pause on "I'm sorry I caused you so much pain."
35. I don't believe Albert on his huffing and puffing on "farewell, Albert."
36. More grief on "God bless you. Goodbye."
37. Gabrielle is dressed so casually. She should be the most dressed in the play.
38. Wait until people leave before starting the dialogue. Over and over they just started speaking while people were exiting.
39. The "demented" speech needs work.
40. Gabrielle needs to really ask "What is it you do want?"

41. Andre's kiss is not motivated enough. We need to see his desire build to that point.
42. The actors are not lined up when they say they are.
43. Don't rush "The worst thing Albert did" (Yvonne's line).
44. Andre needs to build his "let me" lines.
45. Much more important pause needed before "Are we through?"
46. Gabrielle needs to play the repetition on "kind/kind/kind/kind" speech.
47. Andre's "kindness-received" needs to be more touching--he needs to be more touched by her.
48. More reaction on Mariette's re-entrance.
49. I still think that Gabrielle can wait longer at the door and be more crestfallen when he doesn't return.

Break a leg tonight!

M.N.

Monday, February 24, 2014

Start time: 5:13

Albert, more pain.

Move plant over.

Wedding BAND.

TWICE. Pause. BOTH TO THE SAME WOMAN.

Wait until he gets through to the end to react, Claude.

Albert, cut the bow tie "is nice" isn't it?

Before Clever, take him in. "CLEVER" then go.

"Don't even go there." Just make him quiet.

Claude, study the food, not the paintings on the wall.

Your car series. Pause.

Long story. Pause.

Pace pick up landmark: Hard to put your finger on.

I'm afraid not. Can you belittle Andre more?

I like the sock experiment, but prefer black socks. Sorry. Didn't work for me.

I haven't a clue what you're both talking about... more condemnation? Andre.

Longer stare on "he has an excellent point there." Claude.

Undershirt Claude?

Did we miss a cross up to the table, Claude?

What a huge pompous ass. PAUSE. But in the right suit, no one notices it.

Andre.

Overdressed. ANGRY.

Spit take, Albert, flee from it before right sorry. Spit, run, and scramble for the next part of the line.

Albert! Albert! Too slow, Albert.

Claude, let's talk through laugh lines in the beginning of the show. We're on different pages.

More anger at Claude, Mariette, on your entrance.

Hand on Albert's closest shoulder, Mariette.

History of speech line needs to be said open to the audience but STILL looking at Albert, then cross to get food? Wait until their line?

Good, Mariette, on “thank you for making me a better writer.” Can you go sadder?

Why shouldn't I write what people want? Who today could write like they did!

Albert, after your cruel remark, deliver the first part of your apology downstage?

We started losing the pace after Yvonne's entrance. It wasn't her fault, that's just when we did.

Albert, that look she hates, what prompts it. The real world? How DARE she say that. Whirl on her.

Sagging shoulders, hunch them forward.

Yvonne, when Albert goes to stare at the wall, can you wait for him to get there before you continue?

Albert, good business with the door. Can you stay out there for 5 seconds.

Make sure you close it like you're leaving. Step away from it so we can't see you through the crack.

Good on the question “why did you like me so much,” Yvonne.

Andre, whenever you sit on the couch, make sure you sit on the far end.

I loved you ... all the time. Look for “all the time” ALBERT.

You loved me too much. Yvonne, more, can you make it the big reveal.

God bless you, goodbye. More love. Softer. Hate that you have to leave,

Albert?

If they were men then they'd be in here.

It was her last words before she died: Gabrielle, that's when you should decide to take the entire bottle.

Gabrielle: Very deadly serious all the way through foul mood. I liked the pause after stake through the heart. Make it longer.

Come in like a queen. You have this dramatic entrance with both doors. Let it carry you through. The energy was better, we have more room. Could we meet and talk tomorrow? I think we picked up the end of the show. I want to talk through scene 18.

The lines were better. We had line troubles, Gabrielle.

Good, Gabrielle, after you ask him what he does want. You found some great things tonight.

Gabrielle and Andre: A witch>>>hate yourself, stay focused downstage. Andre, run up and kiss her. Make her feel better.

Gabrielle, in for a penny, in for a pound. PAUSE.

Gabrielle, face downstage when you're talking to the group downstage of the couch.

Mariette, wait to pick up the silverware until "I don't have an opinion." Don't drop the silverware. Mariette, let's talk

Gabrielle, take a pause after Albert's question "how we'd get couples back together again." Before Mens'ware.

So I PLAYED Germaine for him. PAUSE.

When you sit, Mariette, on swell party, can you give that to Claude.

Self-help group.

Gabrielle. Don't go low status on "decent thing for your spouse." Ever. Make them feel bad.

Lilly and Milly: Talk downstage please.

Gabrielle, andre, all: good job on pausing after these confessions.

Gabrielle, I want to work that speech at the end. It was stronger and more focused, I want to help Gabrielle find more confidence.

Andre, great on the speech at the end. Can you start it by threatening Albert, then apologize to hi through words? Andre, look downstage at the end.

You're going low status, Gabrielle.

Claude, on give me a minute to think, cross to downstage right.

GABRIELLE. ON YOUR LEFT.

Tuesday, Feb. 25, 2014:

Start time: 5:12. End time: 6:52.

Hello, wait to see him Albert.

Claude, yes. YES. That works.

Albert, step out of the way, to look at it, "really?"

Both to the same woman. LOOK at him, then go, Claude.

Even longer on I see.

I like how when you first told him about

Fragonard, by the way, is a HUGE painting.

MMmmm... Clever.

ABSTRACT CARS. Sound it out.

Oh but they do come into the shop.

Your car series. HOLD FOR LAUGH LAUGH.

Late entrance, Andre. Can you come in on Maybe he's good at legal things.
Come in on LEGAL.

Claude, whenever you go to look away in disdain, it has to be AT the person.

Andre, when you answer Claude with NO (you're not married), can you answer with a question, like, "are you asking if I'm gay?"

He's got a point there as well. Slow on that, Albert.

Claude, I liked how you dealt with explaining that Paula and Helena were divorced.

Andre, I love completely inane. I love how big you make it.

Yes, the downstage bits around cigarettes and paul's most interesting quality worked.

ANDRE. Fix: But in the right suit, no one notices it. Come in, stop.

Deliver it dead-pan. Leave.

On eating, Albert, ECSTASY for the entire thing. The end of which is an orgasm.

I love how awkward you are with mariette, Albert. I need bigger head gestures, Albert, when checking out Mariette. You're doing it.

Remember to actively try to calm yourself down, Albert, when sitting next to Mariette. It feels showy. Remember it's for you, then we'll like it.

Mariette, can you over-enunciate the numbers when you first use them? One and three, two and four? Like the first time we're hearing names?

I missed overdressed, Mariette.

Mariette, on the LAST time you go to leave, walk around Albert downstage, not upstage.

Yes, poke your head back in and say Albert, Mariette.

Albert, when you come in for the “NO, that’s against the rules, Claude” portion, can you make it more real? Same intensity, just “Alex” it a bit?

Mariette: Why didn’t you tell me that? Sooner.

Good on the shoulder, Mariette! It looks great. Keep your hand there until “you went public with that”. Stay there and watch the action while making Albert feel like a king and the rest like paupers.

Wow, this scene has great pace.

Andre: When you cross up before the fight between Claude and Mariette, go to get food, wait up by the table and then take center on the calm down line. The cross up isn’t motivated anymore.

Claude, please keep your eyes on who’s talking when you’re not talking.

Claude, clarity, on Gee furniture in the club. Why’d I pay all that alimony.

Let’s keep the glasses away from the side of the table.

Nightmares like kafke—get it right, Claude!

Something happened to the lines between Mariette and Claude. Good save.

That’s exactly how you should handle it. You kept the poitn of the scene even if the lines changed.

Good pause in your speech, Mariette, on the question about who can write like they did.

Where do these people keep coming from. Claude, stare at Mariette for a moment to figure out what happened. Then “where do these people keep coming from.

Andre: Thank you for not showing off the socks.

Thanks, Albert, for sitting on the end of the couch when Yvonne entered. It looks awesome.

Great short comic monologue, Yvonne.

Albert: I find it intolerable. Too late.

Claude, if you don't, why do you care if we do, too late as well.

The pace dropped off on these lines. It picked up again on “you've known me for 8 minutes.”

Albert, you're starting to drop the ending of your lines once Yvonne enters.

Yvonne, I like how you expect him to talk to you when he walks past.

The headshaking needs to be like you're fighting resistance, Albert, too quick.

Step out of “our world”—Albert, start letting the anger physically affect you there.

Good, Yvonne, when you think he's left, can you look downstage, show us how you feel about that?

Great timing, Albert, on staying outside.

Yes, Albert, please hit your head on the door. If the audience laughs, take a pause, do it twice. If they laugh a second time. Mallory, do you think you can hold through the end of the laughs to start your next line?

I loved you all the time. Look for “all the time” ALBERT.

Albert, can you not clench your fists when you're mad at Yvonne? Looks like you're going to hit her.

Albert, can you try to make her stop crying, not want to leave on "goodbye" when Yvonne starts crying? I want you to stay, please make us think you might.

Gabrielle: You look stunning. Marry me?

Yes, Gabrielle, you found the right energy.

I love the disdain for Yvonne's question, when you took the wine bottle to the couch.

Good, on the step back, Yvonne, can we creep back, not square dance.

Gabrielle: Maggot. Make that special. Find the word.

Yvonne: You mean it's you? OUTRAGE. You're responsible for that HUGE FIGHT I just had with Albert?

Gabrielle, Yvonne, Mariette: Great eye contact.

Gabrielle: Yes on the shiver with brilliance and murkiness.

Claude, when you came into to talk to Gabrielle, the diction was a little muddy.

Claude, I loved the grin you gave Mariette as you left.

Gabrielle, the kisses you gave Mariette, awesome.

Andre, I like those socks. Keep them. Don't show them off like you did yesterday.

Gabrielle and Andre: I'm halfway through your scene together. It's awesome.

So real. Gabrielle, you're really confident but calm. I like your real quality

Andre.

Gabrielle, don't walk backward before getting older. Wait, then move.

Gabrielle: So what is it you do want. YES. That's where the confidence started to break tonight, YES YES YES.

Gabrielle: Yes, play with his hair. Also, after I'm getting married this month (Andre, I couldn't quite understand it) silence. PAUSE. Oh shit.

Andre: Very interesting what you did with your speech just before you kiss her. I like it. Can you keep it that vulnerable?

Gabrielle: Sorry, *The Dinner Party* goes on, can you give us that downstage? Smile for us, you were just kissed!

Gabrielle: Hold on the in for a penny, in for a pound. Let the door joke land.

Mariette: just pick up a knife and threaten Gabrielle.

Yvonne: Let her finish. Command Claude, he's being horribly rude.

Everyone: The end of the play had more momentum than ever before.

Gabrielle: I like when you played with Claude's hair as well.

Gabrielle: Pause after Albert's excuse me, is this how you thought you'd get couples together again?

Mariette: "do what you want, I'm about to get on my knees." -- cut them off.

Claude, MY NAME. Hit them both. Like a plane taking off. Forgot. MY NAME!!!

Yvonne: I love how you watch Albert come down.

Mariette: I participated. MORE.

Mariette: I had my own fantasy. Can you use that right on the heels, bounce of what Claude said "wow, how did he get in here?"

Mariette, good look at Claude. Keep it there until he charges at Albert.

Albert, when you stare Claude down, make it real, no cheese, please.

ANDRE: Great worst thing. It was straight and honest. NICE.

Albert, on “Andre was right about you from the beginning. THAT was good.

Can you cut any little-kidness from the end of it? Really condemn him. You know what, Alex, you’re a bad actor—as if I told you that sincerely.

Albert, nice hair cut.

ALL: When Gabrielle says, “we’re not quite finished.” sit up straighter, turn around and look at her. WHAT? WHY?

GABRIELLE. YES. AGAIN. HAS NO ONE EVER DONE Anything decent for their spouse? Ever? YES. Well done. You’ve got it.

Yvonne, that he brought you tea and croissant every morning. Can that make you turn around and smile at Albert?

Also, can you make sure to cheat out? Albert, when she starts to talk, move down of her so you can see her.

Gabrielle, no audible reaction when Milly and Lilly are brought up. Keep your attention on them, not our attention on you.

Claude, holy shit, you turned a great speech into an even greater speech. Wow.

Gabrielle: Can you please wait a little longer after Claude finishes? Let it sink in more.

Gabrielle: Great speech.

Andre: Her speech needs to bring you to the edge of your seat. You look very relaxed back there.

Andre: You have a habit of smacking your lips or your tongue before your line. Work on stopping it. Be ok with starting a line on the word even if there's a little silence before it. A speck of silence is OK.

Gabrielle, step partially through the door when you look for Andre.

Albert, calm yourself down after you've moved away from the spit take. Regain your calm like after you just shook someone's hand.

Claude, too soon on the "is that it" and can you be tender about it?

Claude, when you cross stage right, go further. To corner of the couch.

Gabrielle, longer pause after Andre leaves. Take three drops. Then, reverse to "small parties can be fun too."

Gabrielle: Fun, I like it when you say the surprise

Wednesday, Feb 26, 2014: 5:05 pm start.

Albert, right on with your entrance.

Albert, yes, on the finger ouching.

Good job with the door, guys.

Claude, spot on.

Good on the mural.

It's a long story>>can you make sure he gets that one out? Line. Beat.

Reaction.

Pace leading up to legal things. It didn't cook as much. And then transferred into the Andre scene. Cues were slow. Albert and Andre, you start the show at a lower pace and that's good. It gets the audience in synch, then, leading up to

“what if he sent us by mistake” make a note, we need to consciously pick up the pace at that point and then carry that pace into the Andre scene.

Andre, good on the cross to eat. Can you select food only once and then watch?

Albert and Claude, nice save on those lines. Claude, please take a look at the “Paul’s most interesting quality lines” too.

Handshakes are slow. Make sure you shake Yvonne’s hand right after the previous person has shaken her hand. This is gradually taking more and more time.

Andre, I’m guessing this is because you are sick. Your objectives were clear, but your cues were consistently airy.

Albert, make sure you’re snappier on the cues within the “I find it intolerable” and “Do you know about my situation”?

Albert: when you’re outside the door “twice” make sure you stop walking once you’ve left.

Albert, you started adding in big pauses to your time with yvonne. If you feel you have to hesitate, could you stutter? Or just start talking?

Albert, after you leave the stage at the end of the Yvonne scene, will you try to brush off your pants?

Albert, good on your exit from the Yvonne scene

Mariette, make sure your hair is up.

Gabrielle, wait for “well not her very last words” to disdain them and take the wine to the couch. Disdain and cross with wine on the same line.

Just before Claude enters, Gabrielle, Yvonne and Mariette were all looking at the door.

Gabrielle, sorry, the backwards walk don't work. Please just turn and deliver as much of the line as possible facing us once you've reached the upstage area.

Andre, still slow on the cues during the scene with Gabrielle.

What happened to the kiss?

Claude, did you forget to exit when "we're all splitting, which is what we did anyway."?

Mariette, yes, that worked. Now: walk along the SR side of the table. When you see the vent right after Andre's line, stretch out your hand, and start walking towards it?

Mariette, I know Albert's weird, but don't back up when he approaches you.

Try to stop him with your hands. If you move back you get hidden behind Claude.

Free Shakespeare in the Park promo: For After curtain call:

Thank you for coming to the show tonight. We believe it's important that local theater supports local theater in our community. Once you leave this theater tonight, upstairs in the hallway you'll have the opportunity to make a donation to Eugene's Free Shakespeare in the Park. Shakespeare in the Park is really great: they have provided the Eugene community with free shakespeare, in the park, EVERY SUMMER for the last 16 years, and average about 1,500 audience members each summer. It's a great experience for both actors and audiences. Families love it, and from the acting side, it's especially great for middle and high school student actors who get to spend their

summer outside in amazon park with experienced actors from the community. If you can donate \$1 to them upstairs, or if you already have, please know your donation goes a long way towards funding costumes, sets, sword fighting lessons for actors, and sound equipment (which is VERY expensive). I know a lot of us are students, but if you even \$1 goes a LONG ways for Shakespeare in the Park. Thanks for your support!

Goodnight!

Performances, February 27 through March 1:

I did not take notes. Running box office was a tremendous chore, but a worthwhile one. I personally invited over 100 people to see the show, many of which brought their friends. We had 50+ people in the house on Thursday, sold out Friday and Saturday. The audiences are responding well.

One thing I noticed was that I wish I had kept a laugh journal, and marked where the audience laughed each night. Saturday was very strange, the audience laughed one beat behind almost every time.

I noticed that Andre started hamming it up in the middle of Thursday's performance, and the audience loved it. However, he BEGAN by hamming it up on Friday, and the audience liked it less. I assumed he noticed and said nothing to him; he hammed it up more on Saturday and the audience rarely laughed with or at him. It may be faulty cause and effect, but I wonder if his over-hamming on Saturday tipped the audience towards laughing at odd places throughout the show. Or maybe the audience laughing in odd places led him to ham it up more. Whatever the case, I decided NOT to give any notes to the actors. Saturday's performance may have been a little better had I done so, however, I fear that it would have made the actors too self-aware and tripped

them up. If we had had a second week of performances, I would have used the pick-up to give notes, but as we only had one week, I decided not to run the risk.

Liv got her character. I receive compliments from so many people in the lobby and by email about her performance. If only they knew that she found it 2 days before we opened and before that her character was becoming increasingly lost and less confident.

We video taped Thursday's performance.

Last journal entry, after closing night:

1. I would have liked real tears from Yvonne. That would have added to the drama element of the play, which I don't think we consistently reached. I asked for the representation of tears, but I never called for real ones.
2. I was very concerned with the play being funny, not with finding love. Be true to the text, not just my desires.
3. I wish I had made a laugh journal to compare the laughs in each performances.
4. I somewhat wish I had included more dramatic tension even though I don't always agree with it—will Andre and Gabrielle get back together? What about Albert and Yvonne? My view was that no one will get back together, but maybe I should have moved in that direction? Tremendous happiness for Albert, followed by the sudden crash to Gabrielle's loss, could have been dramatically powerful.
5. In the written reflection, don't forget practical and theoretical applications of directing texts.

APPENDICES:

ANNOTATED SCRIPTS BASED ON HODGE SCRIPT ANALYSIS

AVAILABLE IN CD INCLUDED WITH THIS DOCUMENT

“Objectives and French scenes script”: *Scenes are designated and numbered, with objectives given to each character for each scene and each line.*

“Beats, Laughs, and pauses script”: *The beats of the script are defined, with goals for laugh lines “L” and pauses “P” marked.*

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