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4000 matches on fire at once: Studies in memory and performance

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4000 Matches on Fire at Once:
Studies in Memory and Performance

A Project Presented to:
The Faculty of the Undergraduate
College of Visual and Performing Arts
James Madison University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts

by Lauren Elizabeth Chapman

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For Mary Jane Chapman, in love and gratitude. Thank you for the honor of safeguarding the memories you've shared with our family, and every pecan pie you ever made me.

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Introduction

“We are what we remember. If we lose our memory, we lose our identity and our identity is the accumulation of our experiences. When we walk down the memory lane, it can be unconsciously, willingly, selectively, impetuously or sometimes grudgingly. By following our stream of consciousness we look for lost time and things past. Some reminiscences become anchor points that can take another scope with the wisdom of hindsight.” - Erik Pevernagie

There is a particular genre of creative presentation - retrospective - that is, on the whole, reserved for real people who have achieved a certain level of success in their chosen field, are dead, or both. For fictional characters, like Fitzgerald's Nick Carraway, the retrospective is a device used to make sense of past events, ones that are often jumbled, conflicting, and murky. The retrospectives are usually the museum exhibits for which one must pay, or the novel with a narrator who gradually reveals that he is not to be trusted. In any event, the retrospective is a condensation of content, the precipitate that results from distilling a massive amount of data. Take for example MoMA's 1993 Matisse retrospective, which presented with painstaking curation over 400 of the artist's works. Put together, these works tell the story of a lifetime of compelling, beautiful work, and their narratives have been parsed down into digestible pieces.

It should go without saying that one does not craft retrospectives for three years of undergraduate theatre work in a medium that produces very little visual content. One especially does not do this when the majority of the content of that work is research and quotes from other people, rewritten and recontextualized. One *especially* does not do this when not one item in the presentation is a finished product.

Therefore, my senior thesis was most certainly not a retrospective, though I labelled it as such when it was a more pithy and sensible explanation than the one that follows below. Indeed, the idea of even being able to create a retrospective out of dramaturgical work is a questionable one. The process of dramaturgy is one of near-constant synthesis. Kierkegaard writes that “life must be understood backwards...and lived forwards.” The essentially chaotic process of meaning-making within the artistic life of a dramaturg, or any theatre artist for that matter, doesn’t allow the room for self-retrospective.

I labor upon this point because I feel that a definition of what my thesis was is crucial to understanding what was in it, the desired effect, and its overall meaning, if I’m allowed to ascribe that to it. So here it is: my thesis exhibition was an attempt to use the collected experience of myself and seventeen other dramaturgs in order to illustrate the massive network of ideas, connections, and memories that we are tasked with securing in a production room, and how often that task bleeds over into how we process our own lives. My goal was to create a space where past and present endeavors could mingle, and to lay groundwork for a new dramaturgical metaphor, a visual one. I created this by massing together my journals, notebooks, and first drafts - things that have indeed been finished. However, I joined this material with the aforementioned interviews, an attempt at artwork, and the curation of new visual art.

In this process paper, I will detail how I arrived at this explanation. I will outline the birth and refinement of the idea, the theoretical underpinnings of the work, and review the materials that were consulted and interrogated. I will conclude with an evaluation of the products, as well as commentary on their utility for dramaturgical practice and overall effect.

Background: On Dramaturgy and Collected Experience

The idea for this thesis was born less out of a spark, and more out of a mental *Place de l'Étoile*. I've nurtured many disparate interests for the entirety of my college experience, and the initial question I asked myself was: is there a unifying visual theme for the connections between memory, dramaturgy, art history, astrophysics, chemistry and feminism? (Disclaimer: I categorically did not answer this question. Give me thirty years and full funding, and we'll see.) I continued my tried-and-true method of asking questions that are slightly too big for the parameters of the assignment, and over the course of the semester, adjusted accordingly. The endeavor was refined to this: create an exhibition of some sort that combined the dramaturgical process, memory, and performance.

I note here that this was not an attempt to add to the laudable and already voluminous work that has been done on behalf of defining dramaturgy. Indeed, this is work I referred to frequently during the process, and with the knowledge that this project and process is going to be recorded in the JMU library, ostensibly for all time, some work defining the dramaturg would not go amiss.

Any discussion of the nature or parameters of dramaturgy deserves its own dedicated paper, and that work has been done.¹ Allegedly, the dramaturg is an in-house critic, researcher, directorial confidant, audience liaison, and advocate for a new work or production concept. This

¹ See Michael Chemers' excellent *Ghostlight* for an introduction.

laundry list of duties is both imprecise and uninformative, so instead, dramaturgs reach for the lengthy list of “dramaturg as *blank*” statements. While this example is less self-definition and more “love letter”, playwright Sarah Ruhl describes dramaturgs as “midwives, therapists, magicians, mothers, Rabbinical scholars, Socratic interlocutors, comrades-in-arm, comedians, and friends.”²

Hopefully these definitions illustrate two points. Firstly, “dramaturg” is not a word that provides as much illumination into the person performing the act as say, “lighting designer” does. Secondly, if one asks ten different dramaturgs what they do, one will get ten different answers. The work of defining what you do, whether to one’s parents, one’s potential employer, or one’s friends is almost always an act of conversational contortion: finding the right words or phrase to explain, in individual terms, just what a dramaturg does.

This contortionist act is perhaps the most apt explanation to use in this context. We take great pains to survey a production, understand the atmosphere, personality, scope, and theme of the room, and we do our best to become advocates for both for the play itself, and the production that supports it. This will often mean that our opinions are put in conflict with the opinions of the production team, or we may have a gut feeling that something isn't quite right. It then becomes our job to find the most suitable words to affect the desired change without mortally offending anyone else, or being imprecise, or too blunt. The word that springs immediately to mind is “nimble.”

It’s taken me nearly three hundred words for me to provide that definition, and that’s after three years of work and countless hours of conversation about this very topic. As a

² It’s worth mentioning that Ruhl’s definitions are excerpted from her book *101 Essays I Don’t Have Time to Write* - a statement in and of itself about the perceived importance of dramaturgy.

dramaturg deals in word precision and accuracy, one can imagine how much it chafes to cast about furtively for a full definition. Though the one I've provided is fairly general, we each have our favorites. My personal favorite is that the dramaturg is a memory-keeper for every aspect of the production.

I single this example out not because I believe that it's the most fitting for all sorts of dramaturgical endeavor, but rather that it suits my own very well, and this is the element that ties in the other half of my thesis preoccupation: humans are very good at accumulating stuff, and very bad at letting it go. I mean this in both the physical and emotional sense, because they both feed off the other. There are boxes from moves that we never unpack, there is the persistent and eternal junk drawer (usually in the kitchen). We fill our attics to the brim with Christmas decorations and paintings that could be worth a fortune. There are books and classes and television shows devoted to telling us how to declutter, but at the end of the day we still put things in the bottom of the hope chest or in the back of the junk drawer to save, to file for later, to use on a rainy day. This isn't a behavior born out of pragmatism. Instead, we hoard our things because there is an emotional link to their continued existence in our lives. With theatre artists, our clutter usually has a functional purpose: old elevations are helpful when designing in a similar space, lighting plots can be used in multiple spaces, and so on. Ultimately, these keepsakes are a direct link to our memories of a particular production, or a physical tether to an event that is, at its essence, ephemeral. I offer this as an illustration:

Alpha Psi Omega is the national collegiate honors fraternity for theatre students. Their inductions take place at the end of every semester, and always begin with the new initiates and graduating seniors sharing their favorite theatre memory. This presentation takes the form of an

object. Each inductee and senior member are required to bring an object that they feel best represents their favorite theatre memory, or is indicative of their time as theatre practitioner. Over the five inductions I've attended, the majority of students have presented one item that they feel encapsulates their experience - but they all note that this is one of the many objects they have saved.

While we present products, we remember processes. In many cases, a horrendous process will outweigh the pride at any product, and this isn't exclusive to theatre practitioners. This is where the dramaturgical endeavor makes a reappearance. While the minutiae of processes are catalogued in the back of the brain, dredged up when a similar experience occurs, or someone asks "Well, how was that show for you?" the dramaturg has likely physically recorded all of it. In my case, at least, this is true. I have hundreds of pages of notes, responses, drafts, and ideas that I've accumulated over the course of three years. In talking to a veteran dramaturg like Mark Bly, currently the resident dramaturg at The Acting Company, he indicates that he has double-digits of binders, full of every note that's been taken over the course of his career.

Having all of these notes bound together in one place is helpful from an organizational point of view — but is it the most productive thing? The particular magic of the theatrical presentation comes from the ability to share passion, emotion, and experience with an audience. This is just as available in prompt books as it is in *A Chorus Line*.

Project Goals

The collision of these elements — dramaturgical memory, massing of objects and writing, and the methods of dealing with things not-quite-finished — allowed me to craft a project for this thesis. Concisely, my project goal was to create an exhibition that combined text

and visual content, sourced from my archives, first drafts, and production materials, as well as curated content from a visual artist and the recorded experiences of other dramaturgs. In doing so, through processes and devising methods taken from art historical endeavor, multidisciplinary artist Tim Etchells, and the late work of Polish theatre director Tadeusz Kantor, I aimed to craft a presentation that would serve as a visual reconstruction of dramaturgical memory, reflecting past work and creating new work in the same gallery space.

SECTION II: PROCESS AND DEVELOPMENT

Research and Theoretical Background

As the nature of this project was multidisciplinary, the research and theoretical sources that underpinned this project were also drawn from a variety of disciplines and practices. In this section, I will outline the major sources, beginning with four museum exhibitions. These exhibitions were all ones that I attended in person, and my notes here are angled toward impression and experience, with these guiding questions: What is it doing? How is it doing it? What impression does it leave? Next, I will examine two performances that attempt to, among other things, recontextualize memory and present it in a performative way. The first is Paula Vogel's *How I Learned to Drive*, and the second is Tadeusz Kantor's *The Dead Class*. In making a piece about dramaturgy and collective memory, I realized early on that including only my perspective would be limiting the scope of the project entirely. To that end, I collected interviews and responses from more than a dozen dramaturgs of all levels of education and experience. The transcripts of all of those conversations are included in Appendix A, but in this section, I will detail general trends in responses. I will briefly detail my research into the neurological aspects of memory, and present figures that show several neurological systems and pathways mapped. Finally, I will detail the two intertwining theories that upheld the structure of this project, and guided the production of the content within it — Tim Etchells' listing process in *On Performance Writing*, and mnemonic device known as method of loci, or memory palace.

Studies of Four Museum Exhibits

My observations here are broken down into this format: content, delivery, aesthetics, and conclusions. This work was originally done in a progress journal from October 24th, 2016, and has been edited for inclusion in this paper. The full journal is available in Appendix A.

I: *A Japanese Constellation: Toyo Ito, SANAA, and Beyond*, Museum of Modern Art, New York City, New York (figures 1-4)

This exhibit was presented over the summer of 2016 in the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. It focused mainly on the influence of Japanese architect Toyo Ito and SANAA, a Tokyo-based architectural design firm, on the new generation of Japanese architects. The exhibition consisted mainly of detailed white models of realized buildings, paired together with ground plans and design sketches. There was no linear transition by time period or evolution of design, but rather a small featurette of each artist with information about their name and style on the wall near the models. The exhibit itself felt labyrinthine, with just enough of a path for one to steer oneself through, though the lack of defined path made the exhibit appear organic and closer to a cohesive body than a retrospective. The space was whitewashed, clean and simple in a way that inherently pleases the eye. The space at some points felt clean to the point of sterile. Everything in the exhibit felt as though it moved upwards and out. *A Japanese Constellation* successfully presented a wealth of ideas and objects not by linking them through an abundance of text, but considering the aesthetic from which they came. The white room and white objects made it appear sparse in content when viewed as a whole, but when the individual models were

examined, lush microcosms appeared. The idea of presenting isolated objects, linked together only with a unity of idea and visual composition, was a particularly compelling one. It is worth noting here that the space that contained this exhibit, while much larger than the space with which I originally worked, was the closest match visually to the space in which I presented my thesis.

II: Word and Image: Martin Luther's Reformation, The Morgan Museum and Library, New York City, New York³

The exhibit mixed paper documents from the period, illuminated religious texts, and portraits done mainly by Lucas Cranach the Elder to present the world in which Martin Luther went about shaking the foundations of European faith. The room in which these objects were presented was quite small, making it feel as though someone's Luther archive had exploded out from its vault. A hexagonal structure was built in the middle of the room to house Cranach's portraits of the Luthers. On the back of the back wall the ninety-five theses were written in English. This structure calls to mind the structure of a sculpted baptistry in a cathedral, emphasizing both the holy nature of the content and of Luther's position as the father of Protestantism. The rest of the exhibit presented documents in cases, with sometimes cluttered annotations on the walls and on the nameplates. Given that the Luther portrait was plucked from one of Morgan's library rooms and put on display in room just outside it, it is hard to tell if the exhibit was made to feel like an extension of the library, or the library was the core of the exhibit. The exhibit also juxtaposed the beautifully painted and bound illuminated books with non-paper objects that have survived the ages. The exhibit also lets the materials suggest sight

³ It's important to note that no images were available from the Morgan for this exhibition, and I was unable to take pictures of the space when I visited.

and sound to the reader, specifically with the choral music that is featured, and the parodical artwork both of Luther and the papacy. This model of presentation, as though items have been plucked from the archives and carefully displayed, is perhaps the model that feels the most like a traditional exhibition - and it partitions off the audience from the idea, and makes everything seem a bit more important than it is.

III: Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty - Victoria and Albert Museum, London, England

(figures 5-8)

This sprawling exhibit presented all or part of each of McQueen's shows, from his thesis show to his last runway show in 2011, *Plato's Atlantis*. Overflowing with garments, this showcase presented an artist's life by showing his product. There was little else besides the garments, though the exhibit itself was adorned so richly, it was hard to want for anything else. Roughly organized around a timeline, each of the shows that McQueen presented were given a different room and aesthetic, with narrow hallways leading to the next installation. It felt as though a visitor walked from one world into the next each time shows changed. There were large projections in nearly all of the rooms, as well. In some cases, loud music from the runways would play, but these moments of sensory overload were juxtaposed with moments of eerie quiet. For example, the transition into McQueen's *Widows of Culloden* show moved the viewer into a wood-paneled room, with each garment presented in a row as though one was viewing suits of armour. It was impeccably crafted, and presented a massive amount of material in a digestible way. The exhibit argues that McQueen, for all of his iconoclasm, is a romantic. Each of the rooms, therefore, spins a sort of romanticism upon each of his works. It's an intelligent way to unify hundreds of varying pieces of art, though it is occasionally too subtle in the face of

the sheer mass of objects, but compels the viewer to rethink normal assumptions about the surface-level ostentation of McQueen's oeuvre. I left the exhibit feeling as though McQueen spent his life as an armorer, not a designer - the aesthetics of the exhibit emphasized that edge in his work. Despite the dazzling spectacle of this show, it was, at its core, inaccessible to a person with no background in fashion. The moral of this exhibit is that pitching to the experts creates a lovely argument, but the nuance of the thing will be lost on those with no introduction to it. I frequently felt as though my thesis fell into this trap. However, I was interested in pilfering the projections setup from some of the rooms, and one of the first ideas I played with in my work was creating a project surface of glass, similar to the Pepper's Ghost installation in this exhibit.

IV: Peacock Room REMIX: Darren Waterston's Filthy Lucre, Smithsonian Museum of Asian Art, Sackler Gallery, Washington D.C. (figures 9 and 10)

Now that the Freer is under extensive renovation, this room is the reference point for the jewel of its collection. The exhibit presents Whistler's Peacock Room, re-imagined and remembered as the site of bloody conflict concerning art and money. On rotating exhibit around the room are Whistler portraits and sketches, as well as contemporary sculpture that presents a meta-commentary on the fascination with and acquisition of oriental art in the United States. The remixed room itself sits in the middle of the Sackler's largest open exhibition space, with black walls and gold paint pooling on the floor in the corners. The pictures and sculptures around it are laid out more traditionally, with larger sculptural elements in the middle and an explanation on the sides. The room is dark, with nearly black walls and deep blue carpeting. Because exhibits rotate around the room the context of the peacock room changes. In the room, the carefully ordered and ornate shelves, walls, and oriental pottery has been smashed, melted, or otherwise

corrupted. What is remarkable is the sense of each broken, shattered object representing a moment in the life or specific story. I became fascinated with the idea of the object as textual representation through this exhibit. It's also delightfully creepy, with red light spilling into the windows, violins occasionally plucked through the soundscape, and whispered voices that seem to be coming from the fireplace, or from the enormous painting hanging over it. I began doing some of the listing work (explained later in this paper) in this exhibit in the summer of 2016. I was fascinated by the varying levels of engagement it offered to the viewer, and also fascinated by the critique of western acquisition that it offered while sitting right next to a horde of Indian sculptures with no provenance. The juxtaposition was remarkable. Despite my love for it, I treat this exhibition with caution, as it's the one that steered me so off-course in the first few weeks of the spring semester. I believed I had to start with a presentation that nuanced and complex if I wanted to do things properly, forgetting entirely that this was a "remix" of an existing room. All of these presentations dealt with the display and interpretation of objects that had a significant historical presence, though some more contemporary than others. Though I took careful note of the content, the important information here was *how* the content was presented. This research was immensely productive for me in that regard.

Two Case Studies: Paula Vogel and Tadeusz Kantor

If it feels like a stretch to extract lessons about the presentation of dramaturgy and memory from four non-connected museum exhibits, then I offer this equally productive element of my research. Both of the aforementioned productions are plays, through their genres differ wildly. I begin with an exploration of Vogel's 1998 Pulitzer Prize-winning play, *How I Learned to Drive*. The play is part of a larger genre of works termed "memory plays," plays where the

lead character narrates the events or action, which is usually something autobiographical to them. In Vogel's work, a young woman named Li'l Bit narrates her childhood and teenage experience, colored and marred by her uncle's sexual abuse. I single out this example because it does tricky work, both textually and in my own memory. While the play is a recollection of memory, the scenes are largely out of order, presented as though they are remembered spontaneously by Li'l Bit. Other conventions are utilized as well, including a contemporary greek chorus, comprised of various members of Li'l Bit's family, and interludes where the story is taken out of memory and into more omniscient narrative, when scenes are presented of which Li'l Bit had no direct experience. Though I had an incredibly difficult time seeing this when I was the production dramaturg, this play is more than a narrative of trauma. Instead, it is the outburst of a collection of memories too powerful and raw to be contained by one person. The content is ostensibly fictional, played out with enough dark comic relief not to feel abrasive in its honesty. Li'l Bit's story is like the supernova from a dying star, powerful, chaotic, and at times impossible to view. I still feel the intensity of the play because *How I Learned to Drive* generated my first first draft. It was the first show that I dramaturged in any full capacity, and as a result, it has left an indelible mark on me. Dealing with memory that is fictional is difficult. Dealing with memory that is altogether too real is another thing entirely. That, I think, is one of the crucial elements of a memory play. Their devices allow us to tell stories that would be too hard to tell if there was no distance. The memory play constructs a character not only as a character but as a moderator, as an intermediary between event and process. This distance is a crucial component of the dramaturgy of *How I Learned to Drive* and also became a crucial component of curating my thesis. A substantial portion of the material that I worked with was self-generated content. The

model of *How I Learned to Drive* encouraged me to find a structure that would present my memories and experience in a way that was authentic, but not too close.

If *How I Learned to Drive* provides structure, then Tadeusz Kantor's work is an incredibly close model to the work I attempted to create. Kantor, a true theatrical master, had an effect on the production of modern theatre both in his native Poland and throughout Europe. Kantor's particular mode of theatricality places the actors in liminal spaces, forcing audiences to confront the essential weirdness at seeing another human across the room from them, but not acknowledging their existence. *The Dead Class* (1975) is perhaps Kantor's most famous work, and trades in his favorite subject matter: memories. Kantor's childhood memories are resurrected, with the continual understanding that they are firmly ensconced in memory, never able to be revived to a productive purpose. Additionally, the people present in those memories are dead, so the actors themselves are dead. In *A Journey Through Other Spaces*, a collection of Kantor's plays and manifestos, Kantor addresses the importance of the school benches in the production. In a set that divided the audience and the performers (as well as the living and the dead) with rope, the school benches were at once a set piece and a mechanism in the play for the author himself to serve as conduit between the living and the dead. Kantor paced up and down the benches during the production - therefore his presence, and the physical availability of his memories - facilitated the continuation of the play. What's important to remember when examining Kantor's work is that his explorations of memory are deeply entangled with his explorations of death and "deadness". Kantor's performance theories and practices are also deeply entangled with the politics of theatre making, and the catastrophe of war. This theatrical preoccupation with memory and death echoes the majority of the mainstream research and

studies into memory, and presents a particular theme: We are not all that concerned with our memories, until we begin to lose them. There seems to be an implication, perhaps due to the increased study of memory loss in the elderly, that there is a strong connection between memories/remembering and death. Theatrically, the presentation of personal memory is rarely celebratory and never didactic. Rather, memories are drudged up and displayed as a sort of therapeutic measure or morality tale. It is often, then, not the memory that it presented to the audience, but the scar tissue where potential memories were removed to make room for an unwelcome one. I believe that Kantor's presence in the theatre and on the set works exceptionally well to conjure the memories of his childhood, and re-member them. However, it also reflects a sense of done-ness and loss, of an inability to flee back to the places that once comforted him. On a note more applicable to the development of my thesis, I was taken with Kantor's method of describing a memory as though he was designing a set or writing the introduction to a play. In this way, where the language is often terse and unembellished, an incredibly clear picture of space was conjured.

Neither of these examples contradict one another. Rather, they offered me an intersection through which to view presentations of memory, and I landed somewhere in between - in the role of curator.

Primary Source Gathering: Interviews with Dramaturgs

Both *How I Learned to Drive* and *The Dead Class* take as their content the examination of personal memories - singular lived experiences - my thesis work could not be considered cohesive without the input of other dramaturgs. Like any other profession, one does not do dramaturgy in a vacuum. I've had the pleasure of working with and learning from several dozen

dramaturgs, and have found two fantastic sources of knowledge and networking: LMDA, the Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas, and the Kennedy Center’s MFA Playwright Workshop. LMDA is the primary source for dramaturgs to network and collaborate across North America, and their dramaturgy listserv connects hundreds of dramaturgs, playwrights, and LMs. I sent an interview form out to this listserv, as well as on several of the Facebook groups that LMDA runs. I also emailed my contacts from the Kennedy Center, and nineteen dramaturgs and dramaturgically-minded people responded. I crafted these questions with the intent of gathering narratives, descriptions, and memories. As stated before, the full transcripts of each of the interviews can be found in Appendix A, but below are the questions, and general trends in responses.⁴

- How long have you been a dramaturg?
- What was the first show you dramaturged?
- Would you work on that show again?
- What is the strongest memory you have of any production you dramaturged?
- What’s your favorite explanatory metaphor for dramaturgy? Your least favorite?
- If you had your choice of any location in the world, what place would you pick as a “thinking place” - somewhere to dream, scheme, and work?
- If you could steal a prop from a show you worked on, what would it be?
- What was your worst day as a dramaturg?
- Who is your favorite visual artist? Why?
- If you weren’t doing theatre, what would you be doing?
- If you had to chose a verb that describes how dramaturgs move through a text or work, what would it be? (prowling, ambling, tumbling, etc.)
- Is there one visual that could unite or sum up your dramaturgical experience?

To the question: “What was the first show you dramaturged” the answers were all over the place, with no two productions overlapping, however, a Shakespeare play was the answer four times, and a musical or opera six times. When asked if they would work on that show again, only one person said “no”. When asked what their favorite and least favorite metaphor for dramaturgical

⁴ Questions concerning personal and contact information have been omitted from this paper, and from the appendix as well.

endeavor was, not one respondent had the same answer. However, eight responded that they loathed the metaphor of the dramaturg as midwife. Worst days are highly individualized, but a common theme that emerges is that there is a feeling that the dramaturg has failed in their capacity as communicator or interlocutor, in a way that the dramaturg felt was detrimental to the production and the process. Across the responses, these incidents show themselves to be highly emotionally charged. For example, one response notes this interaction:

I was running box office AND dramaturging a play, which meant I was running back and forth between working on my lobby display and organizing the concessions closet. My lobby display included a poetry wall with words that excluded the letter "E" to tie in with the play's themes of artistic censorship, and as I dashed back to work in the box office, I overheard the actors laugh at the display and point out all the E words that accidentally made it onto the wall. I had just been let off from my day job, was exhausted from rushing to the theatre in terrible traffic, and had worked tirelessly on the display -- so I broke down sobbing. Turns out the actors and directors could hear me as well as I could hear them.

This example illustrates several common elements to dramaturgical practice, including the multiple responsibilities a dramaturg often bears, and how infrequently that dramaturgy alone pays the bills. It also illustrates an overarching desire to be meticulous with the work, going over every element with a fine-toothed comb - and refusing to admit that often, the teeth on those combs break. The response of the actors and production team also illuminate a key problem in the practice of dramaturgy: despite multiple valiant deconstructions⁵, the dramaturg is often presented as the in-room expert; the resident know-it-all who can conjure answers to obscure questions out of thin air, and who sits back, waiting for the next person to make a mistake. This is obviously an isolating feeling, one only emphasized by a mistake.

⁵ See Andrew Hartley's excellent *The Shakespearean Dramaturg*, particularly his introduction, aptly titled "The Shakespeare Police".

This isolated feeling also seems to be a shared theme. In the question regarding a favorite workspace, only one respondent indicated that they would seek out other people in that environment. Every other response focused on being alone, or feeling alone in a sea of people. Further light was shed on this in my two in-person interviews with Derek Davidson, a dramaturg and professor at Appalachian State University, and Mark Bly, the aforementioned veteran dramaturg. I asked both individuals a point-blank question: Do you ever feel completely alone?

Mark's response was this:

Of course. You have no idea - well, I think you actually must have some idea. I go home, I see [my partner], I talk to her. But she doesn't really know. People don't really understand how our work lives with us, and how deep we get into it. I may have a list of playwrights and directors in my phone that I could call at a moment's notice, but I don't. Sometimes I just have to sit and make peace with the incredibly pompous idea that I'm the only person in the whole universe who feels this way about this work in this moment.

In fewer words, Derek responded with this:

Yes, and you're going to feel the same way if you do this, and it's going to piss you off. You have to find the people you can really live with, the ones who have the same kind of wavelength, and make it work with those people, the ones who make you feel like you're part of what is happening. Otherwise, you're going to fight for every production you do. Find people you love, and lean on them. Don't let a play become your entire existence.

I haven't collected enough anecdotal or empirical evidence to assert that the practice of dramaturgy is one that is more conducive to isolation or feelings of loneliness than any other theatrical or artistic vocation, but I feel that there's almost irony in the idea that a person whose sole occupation is to collaborate and be in the thick of a process that is inherently interpersonal would also feel isolated and alone in that process. It's also indicative of how our emotions bleed into our memories, coloring them in ways that the event itself wouldn't illuminate.

Like any form of theatre artistry, dramaturgy is an individualized process, but the collective trends that the interviews reveal, and I detailed above, were cornerstones in the

development of my thesis. I wanted to use these interrelated experiences to form a network of experience - something that mirrored the way that our brains feed us information about the world around us.

Theoretical Underpinnings

I had a collection of memories and experience, both of my own and others, that I wanted to make into a thoughtful, meaningful study. The structures for this meaning-making grew rather organically out of my research in the spring of 2016. Both the process of the method of loci and the work of Tim Etchells' *On Performance Writing* were familiar to me, and I had implemented both in different ways before combining them in this thesis work. Both of these practices are, essentially, theories about how content can be generated, stored, and presented. The former concerns itself with memory retention and recitation, and is accurately termed a mnemonic. The latter is an article that offers up a new method of crafting and presenting text for the stage.

A Memory Palace

Allegedly devised by Grecian lyric poet Simonides of Ceos, the method of *loci* (latin for places), or, as it is more frequently termed, the memory palace method, is a memory device that functions in two different ways. Say, for example, that someone is trying to memorize Macbeth's Act II soliloquy. When using the memory palace, the actor would imagine a place, inside or outside, with a discrete number of places. Let's say that this actor is intimately familiar with downtown Harrisonburg. Therefore, the actor would imagine walking through downtown Harrisonburg in her mind's eye, assigning a line to each discrete place she passed. In this way, "Is this a dagger which I see before me" becomes the library, and "The handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee" becomes the children's museum, and so on and so forth, until the

entirety of Macbeth's murderous premeditation can be recited simply by strolling along the streets of downtown. While this may not seem to be the most expedient solution to memorizing, the memory palace method is startlingly accurate, mainly because it forces us to reconstruct experience in the same way our brains do. When someone says the word "dog", our brains don't just spit up the perfect idea of a dog. Instead, our entire cerebral mass is involved in relaying to us our sensory experiences of dogs, dredging through memories to discovering if this thing called "dog" has hurt us before, recalling the dozens of different kinds of dogs we've seen - all in a fraction of a second. The memory palace also forces our brains to pull together different pieces of memory to recall information, activating more of our brains. This method is useful for quickly retaining information, and it is something I use to memorize information for Art History exams (I place the images on the wall of a room I've spent a lot of time in at the National Gallery, and I mentally pace through them and recall their information when I'm in front of them). It also shows that human memory responds incredibly well to the presentation of objects and sensations. Read the newspaper during breakfast, and you may be hard pressed to remember what was on page four. Spill hot coffee on yourself while reading page four? You're more likely to remember what you were reading. In the same way that the memory palace is helpful for quick study, it also has another functionality - preserving already-existing memories. More than just organizing a collection of knowledge, the memory palace can become a complex system of mental categorization designed to hold our memories and collective experience. For instance, if I wanted to remember everything I knew about Georges Seurat, I'd mentally plop myself down in front of *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*, and have all of the associations I'd built

come back to me. I do this for each different kind of subject, with a different object, in a different room, until I build a “palace” of sorts.

As far-fetched as the latter implementation sounds, both Arthur Conan Doyle and Thomas Harris use the memory palace as a literary device. Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes says that he must occasionally clear the scrap lumber from his mental attic, in order to keep things organized. A later Holmes evokes the memory palace more directly, in the recent Benedict Cumberbatch-led incarnation of the detective. Harris uses it as a way for Dr. Hannibal Lecter, his brooding, manners-obsessed cannibal, to retreat into his creature comforts of fine dining and classical music while incarcerated. The latter of these examples is how I discovered the idea, and became fascinated with it. As previously explained in the museum section, I am compelled by the presentation of objects and ideas in space, and this mnemonic illustrates the act of internalizing spatial organization and memory.

Though “building my own memory palace” was indeed a concept for a hot second, it was too self-centered and esoteric to be the only theoretical ground I tread upon. Instead, I asked myself what would happen if the memory palace had to be written out? What if it had to be sketched out, or rendered in binary? How do I dig out memories from the archive? This is where Tim Etchells’ *On Performance Writing* became absolutely crucial to curating and crafting content.

Performance Writing and Listing

A visual and theatrical artist from the United Kingdom, Etchells is the founder and artistic director of Forced Entertainment, a theatre company where, according to their artistic statement, “The work we make tries to explore what theatre and performance can mean in

contemporary life and is always a kind of conversation or negotiation, something that needs to be live. We're interested in making performances that excite, challenge, question and entertain other people⁶." Under the direction of Etchells, the company often works with text-rich pieces, weaving in personal narrative and absurd elements. A foundation of the theory that Forced works with is found in *Performance Writing*, and it became *the* primary way I developed and sifted through content: listing. Below, I summarize Etchells' endeavor in the piece, give examples of his process, and illustrate why it became crucial for me.

Etchells' writing concerns itself with "the task of making text for performance" that talks about "writing words to be seen and read onstage rather than spoken" and "it talks about lists, it talks about improvisation, about reading, about whispering, and about collage as a form⁷." Etchells weaves third-person narrative, first-person memories, and instructions together with numbered lists of different kinds of texts - modeling the methods he embraces. In one of the first-person memories, he explores the beautiful space of forgetfulness when he watches a movie, only to find that the characters are speaking lines that are from an earlier piece his company performed. After a moment, he realizes that the lines are familiar because he must have ripped them from the film, not the other way round.

To people who collect scraps of words, ideas, and phrases, these sort of events are a common occurrence. Etchells voices this later on in the text, when he says "The house full of shelves, full of notebooks, full of overheard and copied lines... Shit-I'm like some teen burglar - I've nicked so much stuff I can't even remember what is mine anymore." While this essay

⁶ Tim Etchells. "On Performance Writing." Print. Rpt. in *Experimental Theatre Sourcebook*. Comp. Dennis C. Beck. 2015. 31-37.

⁷ Ibid

functions as a primer for using different performance writing techniques for devised theatre, Etchells also wrestles with the idea of authorial voice, whether it comes from the playwright or actor. Etchells writes that nearly all of his students claim to have some sort of deeply-rooted, embodied voice that guides their creative endeavors, and that voice is personal and unique to them. However, he argues that performances and conversations (both onstage and off) are a conglomerate of stolen ideas, repeated phrases, and the perception that “What I am now, at least, is no more (and no less) than the meeting-point of the language that flows into and flows out of me.” The essay and the content serve as a collage, with memories, prompts, and silences bleeding into each other and occasionally serving as more than just example, like the three-point list on page 107.

- “1. A text which sticks in the mouth, begging you not to say it.
2. A text that spills and slips and runs.
3. A text that no-one will ever hear.”

Etchells models some exemplary dramaturgical behaviors in his essay. For example, his words are sharp, sure, and honed to create a clear (or sometimes deliberately murky) image of the thing he is describing. He also serves as an expert weaver – an artist and artisan who pulls together several modes of delivering his idea into one coherent fabric. Etchells also isn’t afraid to make a mess on the page. He ignores convention and traditional methods of delivering his idea (which is the very point of his idea) in order to create the text that speaks his truth. I think my fondness for this paper stems from the sense that can be made from its mess - this is a person who strings together the flashes of words and images that are usually resigned to the creative scrap pile like so much spare fabric, and this is almost to the letter what a dramaturg does - they take the almost-remember, the halfway useful, and the might-have-beens, and keep them

together in order to track where a production has been, and where it is going. The listing process itself is also appealing in its simplicity. There's a prompt - a person, place, thing, or idea, and based off of that prompt, you list everything, including associations, that come to mind. The following is the listing exercise I did while in the Peacock Room Remix Exhibit, for example:

Types of Rooms

- Locked rooms
 - A playroom
- A room blocked by a chest of drawers
 - A dining room that is never used
 - Someone else's sitting room
 - A room where someone died
 - A room to hold treasure
 - A room behind a cracked door
 - An ex-girlfriend's bathroom
 - A room converted from a not-room

Dozens of these lists populate my journals and are the foundation of many of the pieces I presented in class work - in many ways, listing has become a default way for me to streamline my ideas, thoughts, and arguments.

Clearly, the lingering question here is "So what?" Here are two loosely related devices, for lack of a better term; how do their abstract concepts turn into content? These questions underpinned the spatial representation of my thesis. From that idea, I wanted to create a room or a space that used collected objects to represent memory, just as the Alpha Psi Omega initiates do with their items. I used the listing exercises to populate this room - they were occasionally on the walls, but always at the foundation of each project. In the next section, I will provide an outline to content production, and the sources used.

Producing Content

The content for this exhibition was in equal parts devised work, presented from my sources, and curated work, presented from artist Sarah Phillips. Sarah is a theatre major, as well as an art major with dual concentrations in photography and art education. In addition to being a charge artist for the majority of mainstage and studio productions that have occurred over the last four years, Sarah is also a skilled fine artist. Sarah was a blessing to my process, and the addition of her pieces made the entire exhibition cohesive, coherent, and workable. In this section, I will list my sources, outline both parts of the content and gloss the role of dramaturg as curator.

Sources

The materials and sources for the exhibited pieces came from multiple sources, but were primarily drawn from the first drafts and prototypes of my work as a dramaturg, playwright, poet, and literary catch all over the past four years. One of the immediate obstacles I encountered was the unfortunate demise of my laptop in the summer of 2016. None of the files that weren't saved to a file-sharing service were recoverable, which severely limited the resources from which I was able to pull.⁸ The sources I did pull from are as follows: my production notebook, first drafts of plays, papers, and poetry, and a massive selection of art history slides.

My production notebook was a small red moleskine journal that had been in my possession for note-taking since my third semester at JMU, which was my first full semester as a dramaturg. It contained approximately two hundred pages of production notes, including ones on the show I directed in January of 2016, *The Beaux' Stratagem*. Also included were personal journal entries, random to-do lists, small bitchfits thrown in different classes, and other detritus from three years of doing theatre. If there was any particular object or collection that "said" the

⁸ The text of all of the materials included in the exhibition can be found in Appendix A, ordered by the piece in which they were included.

most about my experience as a dramaturg, it would be this notebook. In re-membering the notebook, I was informed by John Peña's *Letters to the Ocean* (figures 11 and 12). This exhibit consists of three thousand letters that the artist has written, over the course of twelve years, to the Pacific Ocean, all returned to sender. Peña has displayed these, neatly lined up against a wall, since 2003.⁹ I was struck by the systematic display of a period of work, particularly text-based work. I was also intrigued by how much or how little was revealed by the fact that the letters were sealed, and this piece compelled me to display the contents of my notebook in a dissected fashion - spread out and reorganized throughout the exhibit.

My second key source came from the documents I was able to salvage from the wreckage of my first laptop. They include the first drafts of two plays, a lobby display, dance research, and a draft of the artist's statement for this thesis. I included all of these because they were, ostensibly, finished drafts that I returned to after they were "completed". They had become drafts again, continual works in progress.

I was presented with my third source through the sort of serendipity that is also present in the best dramaturgical discoveries. While attempting to work through another permutation of this thesis, a fellow resident advisor, Kevin Johnson, dumped a massive bag of slides on my desk. These were old-school slides made for a projector that had likely long surpassed its utility, and Kevin unceremoniously dumped about a thousand of them onto the desk I was using. The conversation focused on the idea that this was likely someone's lifetime collection of teaching material, and there was an inordinate amount of care that was taken in organizing and labelling all of them. At the time, I was desperately searching for a material or source that wasn't text

⁹ Images of Peña's work are included in Appendix B.

based, and was creating solutions that were increasingly ridiculous, and the slides presented an opportunity to build an entirely new structure. These entered into the work late in the hour, and went through several iterations (of increasingly questionable structure) before a final set of sculptures was produced.

The final sources for the presentation were Sarah's photographs and paintings. Sarah and I have worked as collaborators since the beginning of 2014, when we crafted a lobby display together. Since that time, we've worked as peers, but not as collaborators. Coincidentally, Sarah also brought in some of the art history slides to use in her work in the scene shop. I struck up a conversation with her, because it seemed our interests had overlapped. At the time, which was late in 2016, Sarah was also interested in senior exhibition of her work, but not of the finished materials that she was used to presenting. Like me, Sarah was interested in interrogating her process, and had begun to craft color-field paintings on the back of the massive drop for JMU's fall 2016 production of *The Tempest*. Now that the drop, a product of nearly a hundred hours of work, had no real utility, Sarah felt compelled to create something new.¹⁰ In the fall of 2016, Sarah was the teaching assistant for the scenic painting class I was in, and during the course of that class, we began a conversation about our work and, particularly relevant to that course content, our unfinished work. As I began to search for a space in which to present my work, Sarah and I decided to collaborate and use a gallery space in Duke Hall.

¹⁰ If I seem to speak like an omniscient narrator to Sarah's thoughts and motivations, it is because she has graciously permitted me to do so, and the commentary is a result of three years of friendship.

SECTION III: Final Products

This section will present each of the finished pieces that were installed in the gallery space, explain their concept, outline their production, and offer a suggestion of their meaning within the larger exhibition space. It will also mention some of the associated theoretical and practical challenges inherent to each piece.

Before the pieces are detailed, I want to offer a note on the space of the gallery. It's really bare, really white, and really square. It is, essentially, an empty white room with a window on the far end, and a small track system in the center of the room and on the sides for hanging lights and material. Sarah and I struggled with this system, but eventually molded the space into our own.¹¹ In the following pages, I will illustrate that point by moving piece-by-piece through the exhibition.

Compositions

Triptych (figure 17): This piece was situated in the middle of the room, on three pedestals. Without a doubt, this was the most difficult piece to put together. The combination of slides and light went through three iterations before arriving at the final one: the first was that each slide would be hung from the ceiling with a small line of fishing wire, creating an intricate, glittering network of slides. This idea was promptly scrapped once I ran into reality, which was that an installation like that was going to take me several weeks to finish, which was time I didn't have. I then shifted to the concept of holding the slides together, and creating three chandelier-style

¹¹ See figures 15 and 16.

“towers” of slides that would hang in the room. I got as far as installing one of these on a piece of steel lath before it crashed to the floor, totally destroyed. This is where the piece arrived at its final iteration, which I’m very fond of: three towers of varying height, situated together and illuminated with small candles. In order to see the small projections that the light gives off, one has to stand very closely to the structure. I thought this was a fit metaphor for a dramaturgical method of looking, where one takes a mass of combined thoughts, images, and emotions (usually embedded in a text) and breaks them down into their base parts, turning them over in hand and evaluating them.

First Drafts of Five Projects: This piece began as a dialogue with the remaining first drafts of work that I’d done since my sophomore year, and ended up instead, in my opinion, being about the fragments, pieces, and ideas that I began to explore but never fully interrogated. This manifests itself in various degrees. For instance, the dance research that was featured in the piece never manifested, as I had to withdraw from the project early on. In others, the exploration felt unfinished only in my head, like the *Shakuntala* lobby display. To be succinct, the process of dramaturging and producing a Sanskrit play within a collegiate setting was...truncated. It was also important to me to resurrect some of the darlings I had killed - including a devised text based off *The Tempest*, and a monologue I intended to deliver as part of the exhibition. The play text was reconstructed in its entirety, though scattered across the composition. The monologue was recreated in photocopies from my journal, which were the background of the composition and also were transferred into the fibers with a solvent that was later forcibly removed from the room by my advisor. Sarah and I collaborated on producing the wash of color that I felt it needed - this was done late in the hour because we’d both found throughlines from *Sunday in the Park*

with George that we wanted to include, therefore, an addition of color and light was called for. The work with some of these drafts inspired me to drag them back out of my archive and see if they have any merit as a future project, and I've put it on my artistic to-do list for later in the year.

Notes from my Red Journal (figure 20): As evidenced from this paper, this was the composition I had envisioned for the longest time, and was the composition that cooperated with me the most. Cutting and hanging the lath from the grid proved to be the most irritating part of installing the thing, but otherwise, the whole process was clear cut. The aforementioned red journal was disassembled, and I categorized each page depending on content. This was the only piece in which I showed any censorship; not all of the pages of the journal were hung onto the lath. The main reason for this was that I felt some of the personal material in the book was ultimately, irrelevant to the composition, especially with pieces that had little or nothing to do with dramaturgy. Since I incorporated not only my responses, but the interview responses of others, I didn't want other personal ephemera clouding some of the content. The final count of letters I hung up was nearly two-hundred, and by the time the exhibit closed, I had less than fifty still hanging. This was exactly what I wanted, because this was the composition that included audience interaction. In the artist's statement, I invited viewers to take any of the messages or letters that spoke to them - I'm so pleased that they did.

Sarah's Work

Incorporating Sarah's work into the exhibition was a process of collaborative curation. Some of Sarah's pieces were already named, and she was looking for an outlet for them to be seen. Others were work that she had produced and wanted to talk about, in the hopes that she

would also interrogate her process. As previously mentioned, both Sarah and I are besotted with Stephen Sondheim's *Sunday in the Park with George*, and in particular, a line from the number "The Day Off": "Work is what you do for others, liebchen, art is what you do for yourself." After Sarah picked this line, we decided to build names and lists of materials around this concept.

I Stole These from my Sister (figure 21): Sarah's younger sister, Cate, has reluctantly become a charge artist for the school of theatre and dance. Charge artistry is messy work, and often ends with more paint on oneself than on the drops or luan. Sarah has spent four years covered in paint, and more than a conversation piece, it has become an embodied representation of the process of making work, as have her clothes. Isolated, they make a statement about the interconnection of body to work, and the amount of time it takes to make something worthwhile. In the spirit of full disclosure, Sarah also issued this to me as a challenge. She said: I'm going to take off my pants and pin them on the wall, and I want you to make something of it.

(Paint Screen) Wash Your Damn Brushes (figure 22): In a parallel to my work with the slides, this was a composition born out of frustration. Paint screens are placed in the bottom of shop sinks in order to prevent large hunks of oil or latex-based paint from clogging the drains or polluting the water. In the JMU scene shop, they are instead used as a repository for unwashed brushes that end up ruined. Since approximately ninety-five percent of Sarah's time is spent in the paint shop, this became more than a little irritating. The paint screen became a representation of the collected frustrations of being a charge artist and a theatre artist, and the nagging sensation of a thing left unfinished.

Undrafted I (Work is what you do for others)/Undrafted II (Art is what you do for yourself): These are two color field paintings that were created on the back of the painted drop for *The Tempest* (staged at JMU in the fall of 2016). The drop took several months to create, as it was multiple stories tall, and required paint applications and washes of various intensities. As in most cases with college productions, the very expensive cloth used for the drop was taken down and trashed on the day of the strike. Sarah salvaged several pieces for these works, and for color studies. We chose to highlight the two here because they came from pieces of the drop that Sarah felt were particularly well executed. In *Undrafted I*, only one light is focused on the center of the canvas, leaving the rest of the work translucent, and the initial drop visible behind the new paint that was laid down. To the close viewer, the temporal difference in the work may be discernable, but from a distance, only the newer paint is visible. For the second work, there were three lights focused on the canvas, rendering it white from some views. The duality in this composition sparked a conversation between Sarah and I about how much of our work is our own, and how much is everyone else's. We both feel that the theatrical work we do causes some kind of erasure in identity, especially if done well. Good scenic painting and good dramaturgy should blend into a production, elevating it and amplifying the elements already in play. How does this mesh with the desire to stand out, be noticed, and be seen? These are some of the questions that these works ask.

Dye Drop Studies for *The Tempest*: These are Sarah's "first drafts", presented as a mirror to mine. Unlike me, the work of a charge artist is often done on a large spatial scale, and once the utility of the work has run its course, the materials are discarded. Here, instead, we presented the most recent first drafts. When I first saw them, I remarked that they put me in mind of Kandinsky

and his work with color and form. Sarah rolled her eyes at this. Nevertheless, these three pieces of raw canvas show a massive variety of color, texture, and intensity. None of this is by accident. All of the applications of paint were intentional, meant as experiments to gain an understanding of how best to create the drop for the show. The pairing and arrangement, however, were not planned.

The exhibition was presented at the end of February, and a closing reception occurred on March 3rd. Installation took three days, and deinstall about two hours. I didn't save any of the individual pieces, though Sarah sold several of hers. Roughly twenty people came and went during the closing reception, but I have no count of how many people walked through while the exhibit was up. My hope and educated guess is that it was quite a few, given how sparsely placed the envelopes were.

SECTION IV: Conclusions

What does any of this work do in the world, either for the school of theatre and dance, my collaborators, or me? Was it successful? What have I learned? To conclude, I will address these questions and offer my thoughts as to the place of this work in a larger body of experience, and its utility.

To the first question, I think there are some lessons implicit in the product and the process that are worth sharing. The first is that our rough drafts, the things that don't go well, or behave exactly as we'd like: they're worth sharing. As artists, we learn not just from examining our performances and our past behavior, but also the documentation of our behavior in the liminal spaces between rehearsals, production meetings, or work calls. To that point, I think it's crucial that we write things down, or take pictures, or have some sort of documentation that points to how we behave as artists. In the wider world, the attempt at a project of this nature is something that I hope will encourage other dramaturgs and artists to rethink their archives. Rather than storing them in impeccably organized file folders, perhaps value can be found in turning them into a collage of related material, or in reformatting research into new categories. Perhaps value can be found in compiling every single program note or lobby display chronologically, and examining the ways in which that skillset grows. In a convoluted way, I'm saying "Dramaturg, research thyself."

Was this project a success? This is supposed to be the part where I say that “success is a variable, rather than a strict black-and-white value judgement. Nevertheless, yes, I do believe it was highly successful in implementing the ideas that have bounced around in my head for several years, and in making tangible work out of pieces of a process. This also afforded me the opportunity to collaborate with another artist, and expand my experience as a curator. Was it successful on a larger scale? No - it wasn’t complete. With everything that was included in the work, three things were cut. The pile of collected almosts was much, much higher than the included materials. However, this is true of nearly all artistic work, and when that work is undertaken, you have to become uncomfortable with unfinished things. A perfectionist dramaturg is not a workable model or metaphor.

Ultimately, this dissection of memory, work, and a short cross-section of a lifetime is a first draft for using that work to capture the same thing from others. My grandmother is currently in stage two of dementia, and every visit I have with her I play the fumbling, over eager dragon without a horde, anxious to amass as many experiences and memories from her before they all slip away. I hope one day to be able to compile them with grace, insight, and skill, using this work as a model. I think the better scientists test out the questionable experiments on themselves before ever inviting another person in as a test subject.

There are two points I desperately wish to impress upon anyone undertaking a similar project, or any long-term project like this: don’t do something you won’t love, and the moment that you sense you don’t love it, run. Going through waves of loving and loathing in equal measure is par for the artistic course, but over a long period of time, it’s truly exhausting. Find what you love, even if it’s obscure and terrifying and nowhere on the path you’ve been

following, and devote yourself to it. The second point is that it is crucial to be gentle to yourself, especially to the moments of growth that you have. We have a tendency to duck our heads in shame when we see the first performances, or someone mentions the work that we did before we really knew what we were doing. I believe it's imperative that we instead treat these as precious, and regard them with gratitude. Each less-than-stellar moment has dragged us exactly to where we are as artists and people - and while you are affording that grace to yourself, be sure to extend it to others. I believe it would be nearly impossible to interrogate someone else's memory and experience in a complex fashion and not come away with a sense of empathy.

In ultimate conclusion, it's fair to say that this undertaking was specific, exhaustive, and had a very defined niche in theatrical research. However, it also functions as a model and a morality story: record your memories and your first attempts, your failings and the same experiences of others. Cultivate your inherent ability as a dramaturg by sifting through those files, and finding new ways of interrogating them. By doing so, a rich and complex understanding of the way that you and others move through the world will emerge, ripe for use in your artistic and personal life.

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Appendix A

Journal Response 1

9/11/2016

Reading(s):

Linda Dalrymple Henderson, “*The Large Glass Seen Anew: Reflections of Contemporary Science and Technology in Marcel Duchamp’s ‘Hilarious Picture.’*”

Summary:

Marcel Duchamp’s “The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)” is an allegory, a time capsule, and an obnoxiously complex piece of art. Driven by the Dada principles of “anti-art”, Duchamp used this piece (which he produced from 1915-23 and is still unfinished) to give flesh to the idea that art without the artist’s notes was gibberish. Duchamp, like many of his Berlin and Paris contemporaries, sought to relocate the importance of art to the mind of the artist, rather than the primitive abstractions supplied by Expressionist art. Indeed, *The Large Glass* makes no sense without context, unlike, for example, Kandinsky’s *Winter Landscape*, which is more in the garden-variety of weird. More than just an illustrated point, however, *The Large Glass* is also a time capsule - Duchamp’s layers of symbolism and allegory touch electromagnetism, chemistry, atomic theory, sexuality and sexual acts, and humor. The combination of these concepts results in Duchamp presenting an unfinished time capsule of an adventurous, tumultuous, frantic age of discovery and recovery. Henderson’s detailed examination of the piece provides insight into an artist who believed process was key, and reunites his work with the context it so desperately needs.

Relevance:

I find a rich connection between Duchamp’s desire for his notes to be illuminated (he published all three sets) and the bulk of the physical documentation of the dramaturg’s work. His work in the metaphor of the piece also reminds me of the frequent endeavor to explain exactly

what dramaturgy is to the general public. Though Duchamp takes a typical sharp left turn into the French variety of weird, I'm enamoured of his ability to create a visual theme and unite it under so many different disciplines. Duchamp was entranced as equally with the idea of atomic free will as he was with the containment of inert gases, and found a way to express that fascination in a piece of art.

Personally, I aspire to somehow tie up my interests into one neat bundle, as Duchamp has. If I could find the visual theme for the connections between dramaturgy, art history, astrophysics, chemistry, etc, I think I'd have a lot less trouble figuring out what exactly goes *in* this thesis. The trouble is, anyone viewing *The Large Glass* is going to have a devil of a time discerning the richness of the piece without some serious background reading. This is the exact opposite of what I'm going for in the installation.

I am fascinated by the function of the piece as a cross-section of an age - I like the visual of the piece being under glass, but in the open air so it feels accessible from all sides.

Journal Response 2

9/18/2016

Reading(s):

Tim Etchells - "On Performance Writing."

Summary:

An essay that examines and models a new method of performance writing, Tim Etchells' piece concerns itself with "the task of making text for performance" that talks about "writing words to be seen and read onstage rather than spoken" and "it talks about lists, it talks about improvisation, about reading, about whispering, and about collage as a form." Etchells weaves a third-person narrative, first-person memories, and instructions together with numbered lists of different kinds of texts - modeling the methods he embraces. In one of the first-person memories, he explores the beautiful space of forgetfulness when he watches a movie, only to find that the characters are speaking lines that are from an earlier piece his company performed. After a moment, he realizes that the lines are familiar because he must have ripped them from the film, not the other way round. To people who collect scraps of words, ideas, and phrases, these sort of events are a common occurrence. Etchells voices this later on in the text, when he says "The house full of shelves, full of notebooks, full of overheard and copied lines... Shit—I'm like some teen burglar – I've nicked so much stuff I can't even remember what is mine anymore." While this essay functions as a primer for using different performance writing techniques for devised theatre, Etchells also wrestles with the idea of authorial voice, whether it comes from the playwright or actor. Etchells writes that nearly all of his students claim to have some sort of deeply-rooted, embodied voice that guides their creative endeavors, and that voice is personal and unique to them. However, he argues that performances and conversations (both onstage and off) are a conglomerate of stolen ideas, repeated phrases, and the perception that "What I am now, at least, is no more (and no less) than the meeting-point of the language that flows into and flows out of me." The essay and the content serve as a collage, with memories, prompts, and

silences bleeding into each other and occasionally serving as more than just example, like the three-point list on page 107.

“1. A text which sticks in the mouth, begging you not to say it.

2. A text that spills and slips and runs.

3. A text that no-one will ever hear.”

Relevance(Edited for inclusion in body of paper): Etchells models some exemplary dramaturgical behaviors in his essay. For example, his words are sharp, sure, and honed to create a clear (or sometimes deliberately murky) image of the thing he is describing. He also serves as an expert weaver – an artist and artisan who pulls together several modes of delivering his idea into one coherent fabric. Etchells also isn't afraid to make a mess on the page. He ignores convention and traditional methods of delivering his idea (which is the very point of his idea) in order to create the text that speaks his truth. I think my fondness for this paper stems from the sense that can be made from its mess - this is a person who strings together the flashes of words and images that are usually resigned to the creative scrap pile like so much spare fabric, and this is almost to the letter what a dramaturg does - they take the almost-remember, the halfway useful, and the might-have-beens, and keep them together in order to track where a production has been, and where it is going.

Statement of Purpose - 9/25/16

In examining the journey that has brought me to the position I am in as a dramaturg, artist, and person, it would be at best rude and at worst irresponsible not to acknowledge the universe of people, productions, and ideas that have molded me. Just as plays are composites and amalgams of ideas, emotions, styles, and themes, so is an emerging dramaturg. My experience is both entirely my own, and not my own at all. In reflecting this experience for my thesis exhibit, I feel it's important to isolate those individuals and ideas that have molded me.

By presenting their stories, styles, and experiences, I have a framework to weave in my own experience and artifacts. I still feel that the methods and readings that I have explored are useful and have a place in the final presentation. Dramaturgy is most frequently explained through a collection of metaphors, and rather than trying to find one perfectly crafted mother metaphor, I believe that it would be more beneficial and make more pedagogical sense to match the interviews and resources from these dramaturgs with a metaphor. In this way, a universe of dramaturgical practice emerges visually, where the viewer can choose which sort of "planet" to visit, and when.

Presenting these stories, and the moments where they intersect with mine, creates a sort of performance text for me to then curate and dramaturg. I am confident in my ability to craft this text in a way that is both visually appealing and elegant in narrative. I want to do this by using the methods that I've already explored - there doesn't need to be a drastic change to my annotated bibliography. I'll be adding more short-form articles about curation and dramaturgy, as well as primary source documentation.

Many of the questions I began with in the spring were questions that combined concepts I wanted to explore in my thesis, and concepts that required only my own soul-searching. As I've moved into the work in earnest, I've discovered that I'm asking some questions that have two, five, ten, and twenty year answers. I want to ask the questions that I can answer in the next five months, and let the rest of the answers grow with me.

Journal Response 3

10/18/16

Reading:

The Quest for Other: Space/Memory - Tadeusz Kantor - pages 315-322

Summary:

This article examines Kantor's desire to create a sense of fundamental shock at an audience member seeing another human being standing opposite the room, like them and yet so unlike them. Kantor's work suggests that rather than his actors being placed in reality, they are instead placed on a liminal plane that is both real and fundamentally defies reality. The article then describes the multiple valences of the school benches in Kantor's production of *The Dead Class*. In a set that divided the audience and the performers (as well as the living and the dead) with rope, the school benches were at once a set piece and a mechanism in the play for the author himself to serve as conduit between the living and the dead. Kantor paced up and down the benches during the production - therefore his presence, and the physical availability of his memories facilitated the continuation of the play. The article also reminds the reader that Kantor's explorations of memory are deeply entangled with his explorations of death and deadness. In *The Dead Class*, for instance, it is the Old People who sit on the school benches during the performance carry the memories of their childhood and wish to perform them as a way to reclaim the totality of their life. As if transported back in time, the Old People are gradually brought back to their youth with a trigger of light, sound, or noise. As soon as the moment occurs, there is a disintegration of the bodies of the Old People, and they return to their original state. All the while, Kantor is pacing. The eerie nature of this scene is generated from the implication (and, later in the play, confirmation) that these people are dead or dying

themselves. Kantor's performance theories and practices are deeply entangled with the politics of theatre making, and the catastrophe of war. Nevertheless, his ideas about the performer creating an augmented reality, and the use of the author as agent of recall are both useful to my thesis work.

Analysis:

In the articles and studies that I have come across while looking for information for this thesis, nearly all of the articles that dealt with memory also dealt with death. There seems to be an implication, perhaps due to the increased study of memory loss in the elderly, that there is a strong connection between memories/remembering and death. Theatrically, the presentation of personal memory is rarely celebratory and never didactic. Rather, memories are dredged up and displayed as a sort of therapeutic measure or morality tale. It is often, then, not the memory that is presented to the audience, but the scar tissue where potential memories were removed to make room for an unwelcome one. While it has never been in dispute that I need some form of therapy, I know that I must work to separate the presentation of my memories from a sense of melancholy or finality in their overall tone. It leads me to ask: what is the tone of this project? Is it reflective? Meditative? Celebratory? I believe that Kantor's presence in the theatre and on the set works exceptionally well to conjure the memories of his childhood, and re-member them. However, it also reflects a sense of done-ness and loss, of an inability to flee back to the places that once comforted him. I feel very little of this finality in my life, and hope not to reflect it.

On a more practical note, I am very taken with Kantor's method of describing a memory as though he was designing a set or writing the introduction to a play. In this way, where the language is often terse and unembellished, an incredibly clear picture of the space can be conjured. I want to try to use this method, as well as the Surrealist *corps d'exquisite* method to re-member and reorganize these memories, so that I have material to put up against the shared information of so many others.

I also think that considering not only the curation of memory, but the curator of the memory in the space is important to consider when I may be representing people through only their words, rather than their physical presence.

Journal 10/24
Reflections on Four Museum Exhibitions

While all of these exhibitions have accompanying books and articles, I've chosen to reflect upon my own experiences visiting each of them. Beyond their content, each of these exhibitions models a different method of bringing a visual argument to life. Importantly, the chosen modes of presentation and aesthetics in the exhibits represent different but equally effective ways of working. By reviewing their content, delivery, aesthetics, and argument, I hope to poach effective ways of presenting my thesis in an exhibition space.

A Japanese Constellation: Toyo Ito, SANAA, and Beyond, MoMA, New York City

Content: This exhibit was presented over the summer of 2016 in the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. It focused mainly on the influence of Japanese architect Toyo Ito and SANAA, a Tokyo-based architectural design firm, on the new generation of Japanese architects. The exhibition consisted mainly of detailed white models of realized buildings, paired together with ground plans and design sketches.

Delivery: The exhibit was presented as a mixture of white models and projected, realized buildings, grouped by architect or firm. There was no linear transition by time period or evolution of design, but rather a small featurette of each artist with information about their name and style on the wall near the models. The white models were not kept under glass, so visitors felt as though they were able to peer into the world of the design unobstructed. The exhibit itself felt labyrinthine, with just enough of a path for one to steer oneself through, though the lack of defined path made the exhibit appear organic and closer to a cohesive body than the more linear, time period based exhibits in MoMA.

Aesthetics: The exhibit was whitewashed, clean and simple in a way that inherently pleases the eye. The few accent walls that were not white were a grey or blue, and contrasted nicely with the

colors of the white models. The lights were diffused around the models and texts, making each object seem to glow from within. The space at some points felt clean to the point of sterile. All of the fonts were sans serif fonts, and none were raised in any way - there were few identifying plates on the display tables. Everything in the exhibit felt as though it moved upwards and out.

Argument: The exhibit argues that there is a school of Japanese architectural design that mentors and encourages a collective of designers to promote a cohesive style. This is oppositional to the western approach to architectural design, where firms rarely collaborate with others. In this way, the “Japanese constellation” of designers has created a lasting impact, with designs that focus on emphasizing the world around the structure, and push the boundaries of buildings that are functional and avant-garde.

My Notes: This exhibit successfully presented a wealth of ideas and objects not by linking them through an abundance of text, but considering the aesthetic from which they came. I enjoyed walking through this because of its deceptive simplicity. The white room and white objects made it appear sparse in content when viewed as a whole, but when the individual models were examined, lush microcosms appeared. The actual structure of this exhibit is perhaps closest to the structure I will have in Duke, albeit on a smaller scale. The exhibit was clean, simple, and soothing, but perhaps at some points lacked passion.

Word and Image: Martin Luther's Reformation, The Morgan Museum and Library, New York City

Content: The exhibit mixes paper documents from the period, illuminated religious texts, and portraits done mainly by Lucas Cranach the Elder to present the world in which Martin Luther went about shaking the foundations of European faith. The exhibit is installed in the Morgan until March of 2017.

Delivery: This exhibit has a more traditional set up, though the space in which it was presented was quite small. The room is more octagonal than it is square, with no opportunities for hallways or any extra wall fixtures. Instead, a hexagonal structure was built in the middle of the room to house Cranach's portraits of the Luthers. On the back of the back wall the ninety-five theses were written in English. This structure calls to mind the structure of a sculpted baptistry in a cathedral, emphasizing both the holy nature of the content and of Luther's position as the father of Protestantism. The rest of the exhibit presented documents in cases, with sometimes cluttered annotations on the walls and on the nameplates.

Aesthetics: Given that the Luther portrait was plucked from one of Morgan's library rooms and put on display in room just outside it, it is hard to tell if the exhibit was made to feel like an extension of the library, or the library was the core of the exhibit. Certainly, the deep blues and reds used for the wall echo the lush wallpapering and old wood present in the library itself, which is arguably the jewel of the entire museum. The exhibit also juxtaposed the beautifully painted and bound illuminated books with non-paper objects that have survived the ages. Among these objects were a robe with an embroidered crucifix worn by Luther, and a chest made specifically for paying St. Peter's indulgence. The exhibit also lets the materials suggest sight and sound to the reader, specifically with the choral music that is featured, and the parodical artwork both of Luther and the papacy.

Argument: The exhibit argues that what Martin Luther had to say about reform in the church (which began only as a plea to strike down indulgences) was as important as the images that were presented of and about him. Luther lived in one of the first ages where print was relatively more affordable, and books were no longer limited to the ultra-wealthy. The exhibit also takes a small side argument, which is that the maelstrom around Luther actually progressed the presentation of reading materials to a wider audiences, with appeals for and against Luther published in Latin and German.

My Notes: This space was perhaps double the size of the space I will have to use, and yet I could easily imagine generating enough paper ephemera to plaster it. The exhibit presents these papers to varying degrees of success, though at points is overwhelming in its similarity. What I found striking was the architectural features built into the room for the exhibition, which focused the attention in a center point that was detached from the linear narrative of Luther that one experienced if they walked clockwise around the room. For me, I believe the most effective choice that I could steal from this exhibit is the elegant way it presents a narrative without a direct timeline or labeling system.

Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty - Victoria and Albert, London

Content: This sprawling exhibit presented all or part of each of McQueen's shows, from his thesis show to his last runway show in 2011, Plato's Atlantis. Overflowing with garments, this exhibit presented an artist's life by showing his product. There was little else besides the garments, though the exhibit itself was adorned so richly, it was hard to want for anything else.

Delivery: This exhibit was *enormous*. Roughly organized around a timeline, each of the shows that McQueen presented were given a different room and aesthetic, with narrow hallways leading to the next installation. It felt as though a visitor walked from one world into the next each time shows changed. There were large projections in nearly all of the rooms, as well. In some cases, loud music from the runways would play, but these moments of sensory overload were juxtaposed with moments of eerie quiet. For example, the transition into McQueen's "Widows of Culloden" show moved the viewer into a wood-paneled room, with each garment presented in a row as though was viewing suits of armour. It was impeccably crafted, and presented a massive amount of material in a digestible way.

Aesthetics: I can't properly give voice to the varying aesthetics and intricate details of this exhibit, so I'm bringing the exhibition book along to our meeting. Suffice to say, each of the rooms not only supported but intertwined with the shows that were presented, and the tech in the exhibit was sleek, glitzy, and expertly intertwined with the exhibit. Arguably, the setup of the exhibit itself was art worthy of study.

Argument: The exhibit argues that McQueen, for all of his iconoclasm, is a romantic. Each of the rooms, therefore, spins a sort of romanticism upon each of his works. It's an intelligent way to unify hundreds of varying pieces of art, though it is occasionally too subtle in the face of the sheer mass of objects, but compels the viewer to rethink normal assumptions about McQueen's desire to clothe the female form - which he does, in a way. I left the exhibit feeling as though McQueen spent his life as an armorer, not a designer - the aesthetics of the exhibit emphasized that edge in his work.

My Notes: Oh, what I could do with the massive Scrooge McDuck-worthy piles of cash that the V&A and Swarovski pulled together for this exhibit. It was stunning, overwhelming, and, unfortunately, a fashionista's show. While it would be very easy for someone with no idea of McQueen's importance to be bowled over by the exhibit, it takes the expert to fully enjoy the richness of the work. It took me about three hours to go through the whole exhibit, (admittedly because there were moments where my jaw just *dropped* and I had to stare dumbly at a dress) but it felt like a much shorter time. The moral of this exhibit, however, is that pitching to the experts creates a lovely argument, but the nuance of the thing will be lost on those with no introduction to it. I feel this is an easy trap for my thesis to fall in. However, I am interested in pilfering the projections setup from some of the rooms, and one of the first ideas I played with in my thesis work was creating a project surface of glass, similar to the Pepper's Ghost installation in this exhibit.

Peacock Room REMIX: Darren Waterston's Filthy Lucre, Sackler Gallery, Washington D.C.

Content: This is truly the gem of the Sackler's collection, now that the Freer is being renovated. The exhibit presents Whistler's Peacock Room, re-imagined and remembered as the site of bloody conflict concerning art and money. On rotating exhibit around the room are Whistler portraits and sketches, as well as contemporary sculpture that presents a meta-commentary on the fascination with and acquisition of oriental art in the United States.

Delivery: The remixed room itself sits in the middle of the Sackler's largest open exhibition space, with black walls and gold paint pooling on the floor in the corners. The exhibits around it are laid out more traditionally, with larger sculptural elements in the middle and an explanation on the sides. The room is dark, with nearly black walls and deep blue carpeting. Because exhibits rotate around the room (and I've been there four times now) the context of the peacock room changes.

Aesthetics: For this, I will focus just on the remixed peacock room, which is arguably a set on which a drama has already played out. I am also bringing along images for this exhibit, as I can't properly describe each element just with words. What is remarkable is the sense of each broken, shattered object representing a moment in the life or specific story. I became fascinated with the idea of the object as textual representation through this exhibit. It's also delightfully creepy, with red light spilling into the windows, violins occasionally plucked through the soundscape, and whispered voices that seem to be coming from the fireplace, or from the enormous painting hanging over it.

Argument: This exhibit is less about arguing a point and more about reframing a relatively obscure point in history. It also presents the opportunity for an incredible conversation about the intersection of art and money, which is particularly relevant given the current Smithsonian restoration. The context and argument of the peacock room changes as new installations are brought forward, but I find it remarkable flexible to these changes.

My Notes: As I mentioned, I've been to this exhibit four times. Each time, it does something slightly different for me. I began doing some of the listing work for my thesis in the exhibit in the summer. I was fascinated by the varying levels of engagement it offered to the viewer, and also fascinated by the critique of western acquisition that it offered while sitting right next to a horde of Indian sculptures with no acquisition history. Despite my love for it, I treat this exhibition with caution, as it's the one that steered me so off-course in the first few weeks of the semester. I believed I had to start with a presentation that nuanced and complex if I wanted to do things properly, forgetting entirely that this was a "remix" of an existing room. To be fair, though, isn't my thesis work a remix of dramaturgical experience?

Conclusions: Reflecting on these exhibits, which have been my four favorite over quite a long time of museum-going, has given me multiple ideas and aesthetics to interrogate for my thesis exhibition. As I play with ground plans and concept ideas in the coming week, I will be keeping their successes in my mind, but with a grain of salt.

Lists

- Is there one visual metaphor that can unite my dramaturgical experience?
- Is it less valuable or unethical to present a product without notes on the process?
- What is the machine/Rube Goldberg setup/automaton/gumball machine that illustrates the dramaturgical process?
- What are the components I need to teach dramaturgy?
- Do I need my drafts and notes somewhere in a neat pile to sift through?
- How can I blend a way of making knowledge and humor?
- Is it inauthentic to not be funny is you believe something if funny?

Things Under Glass:

- Bugs
- Butterflies
- Delicate Oil-Paintings
- The Declaration of Independance
- Blood Samples
- Dinosaur DNA
- Hair from a Mummy
- Dead Dictators

Questions and Lists from the Reading:

- What would it look like to follow the format of memory-list-instruction-annotation in the gallery installation?
- At what point does the absorption and reconfiguration of text become theft?
- What memories do I pull from?
- How “bloodless” is this installation?
- How do you create and organized mess?

- Where do you leave room for the audience to move to their own conclusions?

Stolen Things:

- Something with only sentimental value
- Something just purchased
- Someone's innocence
- Museum archives
- An assistant's idea
- Cultural heritage
- The spoon I stir my coffee with
- A picture of a former lover

Kinds of Rooms (originally written in March at the Freer-Sackler Gallery in DC)

- Locked rooms
- A playroom
- A room blocked by a chest of drawers
- A dining room that is never used
- Someone else's sitting room
- A room where someone died
- A room to hold treasure
- A room behind a cracked door
- An ex-girlfriend's bathroom
- A room converted from a not-room
- The room where it happens

Things Under Glass:

- Bugs
- Butterflies
- Delicate Oil-Paintings
- The Declaration of Independence
- Blood Samples
- Dinosaur DNA
- Hair from a Mummy
- Dead Dictators
- An ancient piece of pottery
- A fossil
- A first lady's inauguration dress
- A high school diploma

- Elements that react to oxygen
- Ice core samples from Antarctica

Shows/Pieces I Worked On: (This is my archive?)

- *Peter Pan*
- *Dark Play*
- *A Fear of Falling*
- *Much Ado about Nothing*
- *How I Learned to Drive*
- *Assassins*
- *Millennials*
- *Bent*
- *Milagros*
- *The Burial at Thebes*
- *Blithe Spirit*
- *Shakuntala*
- *One-Half Santa*
- *The Beaux' Stratagem*
- *The House on the Hill*

Interview Question Form

Thank you so much for expressing your interest in participating in my thesis! I truly appreciate your time and energy. As I stated in my post, the goal of my thesis project is to examine and re-member dramaturgical practice through retrospective. In doing this, it is impossible to narrate the dramaturgical story with only my voice - this is where I need yours.

Below you will find thirteen questions, some of which have short answers and some that require more words. Please feel free to answer as few or as many of them as you like. I will be interweaving your responses with the responses of others, and my own experience, to create a dynamic narrative for an audience.

Before I finalize anything, however, I will make sure you have the opportunity to peruse the material and approve the manner in which I have used your answers. At any time, you may ask for me to strike your response or alter the manner in which I have presented them.

Again, thank you so much for your time. If you're inclined, I would be delighted if you would include a picture of yourself attached to this response, so that I can put names to faces in the gallery. Additionally, I would love the opportunity to gather video content, so if you would prefer to answer these questions over a platform like Skype or Google Hangout, and are comfortable being recorded, do let me know.

Best,

Lauren Chapman

How long have you been a dramaturg?

What was the first show you worked on?

Would you work on that show again?

What is the strongest memory you have of any production you dramaturged?

What's your favorite explanatory metaphor for dramaturgy? Your least favorite?

If you had your choice of any location in the world, what place would you pick as a "thinking place" - somewhere to dream, scheme, and work?

If you could steal a prop from a show you worked on, what would it be?

What was your worst day as a dramaturg?

Who is your favorite visual artist? Why?

If you weren't doing theatre, what would you be doing?

What are you getting out of doing this thing?¹²

If you had to choose a verb that describes how dramaturgs move through a text or work, what would it be? (prowling, ambling, tumbling, etc.)

Is there one visual that could unite or sum up your dramaturgical experience?

Interview Responses

How long have you been a dramaturg?

- 3 years
- Five years
- Roughly a year.
- On and off since 2007.
- About a year.
- 17 years.
- I have been dramaturg since I was in high school, but it was never my primary role. ex. I would be a director and a dramaturg, or be an actor and dramaturg. I was not aware that a dramaturg was a role someone could have in a theatrical process. I did not know what a dramaturg was or what they did. I would help research the material in the show and any questions anyone had.
- 10 years, give or take.
- 5ish years
- 10 years
- dramaturged 1st show, 1996; 1st show @ professional theatre 1999
- 8 yrs in professional field, 12 years counting undergrad
- Since 1967
- 20 years
- Since my senior year of college so about five years
- 10 years
- Approximately 9 years.
- 2 years

What was the first show you worked on?

- "Voices: A People's History of the American Past"
- The Magic Flute

¹² This question was cut - the responses indicated that the question was not clear in its intention.

- The Tempest
- The Rocky Horror Show.
- I co-dramaturged Andrew Lippa's "The Wild Party."
- The Water Engine by David Mamet
- No Show / Exit
- Jordan Harrison's play "Amazons and Their Men" at Clubbed Thumb in NYC. I don't think I was credited as a "dramaturg," though. I think the title had something along the lines of "researcher" in it, but I don't remember for sure.
- Henry IV Part 1
- Wine Country by David Usner
- King Stag (college production); Cabin Pressure w SITI Group (professional)
- In school - Susannah Centlivre's A Bold Stroke for a Wife, out in the field,
- I co-dramaturged a production of Doubt at Actors Theatre of Louisville as an intern there
- Coriolanus
- Mystery of the Rose Bouquet
- King Lear
- The Recruiting Officer
- Little Women The Musical
- I was a dramaturg alongside the rest of my class for First Lady Suite

Would you work on that show again?

- Yes
- Sure, if I had the opportunity
- A strong "maybe"
- Yes.
- Absolutely! It was a great experience.
- Maybe. It would depend on the venue and production team.
- Yes
- Sure. It was a strange experience because I wasn't really trained, and I was just plunged into this work firsthand with a director who needed a good researcher. So I had no idea what I was doing, but in a way it was on-the-job self training. And I liked the play.
- literally any time
- Nope
- not the King Stag. Yes to Cabin Pressure
- Yes
- Yes
- Sure
- Yes, luckily; I'm dramaturging another production this summer!
- Absolutely

- Sure
- Yes

What is the strongest memory you have of any production you dramaturged?

- It was my first time acting as a full-fledged Dramaturg...I had no clue what I was doing.
- I worked on a process devising Gertrude Stein text into songs exploring American genres of music which was extremely rewarding.
- I was able to interview the lead male and the costume designer for *The Tempest*. I loved doing so because it really made me notice the different kinds of individuals involved in a production, and I relish in the fact that they (ordinarily) would not have come together had it not been through theatre.
- Working on *Everybody Loves Opal* in 2010, I went to the second production meeting and the props master asked if I had gathered images of the period props. I had no previous experience with that task as part of dramaturgy and was embarrassed. It stands out in my memory because it was a learning experience in asking upfront if there were specifics the technical staff would need.
- During "*The Wild Party*" I was in charge of the lobby display, and had so much fun setting it up. It turned out quite nicely, and I was so proud of it.
- I told the director of "*Amadeus*" that I thought Salieri's orgasmic response to Mozart's music at the end of Act I was a very original and exciting choice. The director had not noticed the actor making this choice (or had not interpreted it in the same way), disliked the choice, and cut it.
- The strongest memory I had was researching mental disorders. Researching mental disorders was a complex and unique experience. Each mental disorder is different because of each person. Two people might have depression but the underlying causes of the depression can vary between them. The interesting thing to research was what the baseline for each disorder. What emotions and characteristics do people with similar mental disorders share. In researching mental disorders it was interesting to see the affects it had on the body.
- My first dramaturgy job out of grad school was the first regional production of the revised version of *Angels in America*. That play is one of the things I love most in the world, and I had just finished writing my MA thesis on revival, memory, nostalgia, and *Angels in America*. I was hired to work on the production based on that paper, which was really special -- it showed firsthand that academic work can be constructive on the practical side, too, which is something that is really important to me. I felt like the luckiest nerd in the world going to work every day. I always knew that was a play that I wanted to work on "some day," but I was so in awe of the fact that I was 25, and "some day" was today for almost a year. Our director is someone who really uses his dramaturgs, trusts them, and truly collaborates. I felt valued and valuable and so deeply

respected, and I'm still so proud of my work on that production. It was the production I always hoped I'd get to see, and I got to be there to make it. It was the happiest year of my life. Angels is a hard play to live with and in for so many months, but I remember every moment so fondly. I have measured every single experience I've had since then up against that one.

- At a final rehearsal before the invited reading, the playwright waning over to me, asking me to give her a better word than the one in the script, and then stopping the rehearsal and running the scene again with the word I'd suggested.
- The moment in THE METHOD GUN when the pendulums drop and the actors perform the piece you have seen them rehearsing throughout the show (over nine years, in the fiction of the play): The beauty and real danger, the technical skill and poetic leap between life as we anticipate / project / philosophize about it and as we put our body and self on the line in the thick of it; the difference between the awkwardness of rehearsals, where we practice and fake it and catch something real but then try it again and the performance where the audience creates that something other.
- It's a moment made for a dramaturg to love. (There are others. But this is the strongest.)
- So many! One that sticks out -- I don't know if it is the strongest memory, but. -- when I was working with a playwright on her play, we had agreed that there were a few scenes that we thought needed to shift "about fifteen minutes" earlier in the play, in terms of launching a couple dramatic arcs. So we met in her dining room, and we taped copies of all the scenes up on the wall, and started shifting those scenes to the left, "the ones we think need to happen 15 minutes sooner," and within about 10 minutes, we had shifted every scene of the play about 5 feet to the left. "Great! Mission accomplished! It all happens 15 minutes sooner!" (That's memorable because it became a joke between us -- but all my strong memories are of working with writers, talking through structure. It's my favorite thing to do.)
- The Wild Duck, Arena Stage, directed by Lucian Pintilie
- Tom Stoppard's The Invention of Love was one of my favorite shows because the research was varied, the director was thrilled to have a dramaturg's assistance and the play is wonderful.
- I recently closed a production of TAME. -- a feminist adaptation of Shrew written and directed by DC artists -- that changed my life. I had the honor of working with a group of forward-thinking, generous artists whose ideas converged to positively impact everything from conception and script development to marketing and audience engagement activities. I also had the resources to craft an immersive dramaturgical experience for our audience that put the play in conversation with the current political climate (we opened the day before the election).
- While there are certain tools I bring into any rehearsal process, the things that stick out the most (and the moments I am the most proud of) are the ones where I've used creative

strategies to enhance and supplement my regular dramaturgical process - creating a multi-layered timeline, setting up a meeting for the playwright with a field expert, mapping out the neighborhood locations of a play, and crafting a play-specific audience survey.

- The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged) [revised]- More interactive work.

What's your favorite explanatory metaphor for dramaturgy? Your least favorite?

- The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged) [revised]- More interactive work
- I love thinking of dramaturgy as a sort of chemical process like developing a photo negative. Someone else composes the picture, decides which baths to dip it in and for how long and what dramaturgs do best is provide a variety of baths. I really hate the idea of dramaturg as critic. Even though we can often serve a critical function, there's such a stigma around it, that I think we should maybe drop that bit all together.
- Favorite (modified:) "The person who knows the most [about the text and its possible meanings] in the room" Least favorite: "The person who does whatever can't be given to someone else on the team. We don't really know what they do."
- Favorite - "it's like a theater having a historian on retainer."
- I like to say that I am the envoy of the world of the play to the cast and creative team, and then the envoy from the cast and creative team to the audience. Mostly when I explain dramaturgy to people, though, I just say "I'm the one who does all the research," which doesn't sound nearly as cool.
- Favorites: "Resident expert in the world of the play" is a good one. I also like "information designer." Least favorite: "Midwife."
- Favorite: The historian of the group, you always know why things happen and the deeper meaning. Least favorite: a dictionary: you only assist people with words they don't know. Dramaturgs are so much more than tell you what Dissociative Identity Disorder is. We can provide a history to the text and help create a realistic world.
- I don't think I have a least favorite, but my favorite is that we serve as "curators" for the audience, in that our work is similar to what a museum curator does. I also like "audience surrogate."
- Comparing the -urgy in dramaturgy to the same suffix in, say, metallurgy (which is probably etymologically suspect, but whatever)-- it's about the craftsmanship of drama. I hate anything involving nannies, babysitters, therapists, or midwives.
- I like "the audience before the audience" as I feel it communicates most clearly to the largest group of people. I like almost all metaphors for dramaturgy, though the "dispassionate observer" trope bothers me greatly.

- "Early audience member, articulate about my experience." vs "midwife" or some other apologetic "don't worry! I'm not saying I wrote it!" construction of our work.
- I don't like metaphors for dramaturgy. I believe in general that it increases the level of misinformation about what dramaturgs do, at the expense of talking in detail about our actual work. We'd never tell a costume designer or sound designer that we can't explain what they do to the general public without giving them a metaphor that may only reveal as much as it conceals. We talk about their work in simple and deliberate terms, and the same should go for dramaturgs, even if what we create is less tangible. Least favorite metaphor is easy though: midwife.
- Favorite: Guardian angel. Least favorite: Conscience of the theatre.
- Favorite: I tend to avoid metaphors because they are all too inexact. Instead I've started to say we're context and storytelling people. Least favorite: in-house critic. The connotation is too negative.
- Favorite: when I have to describe this position to serious laypeople, I describe myself as getting to live out my dream of being a professional nerd. It's overly simplistic (and I hate it when directors use me as a research mule), but I still love it. Least favorite: nurturer or midwife of plays...basically anything to do with birth or maternity or motherhood
- I suppose I'm partial to anything that conveys the dramaturg's ability to transmit, organize, and generate meanings across disciplines: "conduit," "bridge," "curator," etc. I do not like the antiquated notion of the dramaturg as the "keeper of the script."
- I frequently use the metaphor of cartography. My job is not to create the world of the play, nor to lead the expedition and establish a settlement in the world. But my job is to make not of the hills and the brambles as well as the glorious vistas, to suggest that the journey of the crew might be made easier by way of an alternate route, etc. No more baby/midwifery metaphors please. Just stop.

If you had your choice of any location in the world, what place would you pick as a “thinking place” - somewhere to dream, scheme, and work?

- On top of a hill, in a big meadow, overlooking the world around. Quiet. Still. As the sun is going down.
- My tiny apartment works fine so far. That or a cozy seat in a library.
- Anywhere surrounded by other intellectual individuals (so...library?)
- A tie between Manhattan and Tallahassee. More specifically, I thrive while walking around NYC and the Florida State University campus.
- A coffee shop. There's something about being alone in a place that is bustling with people that makes it much easier for me to zero in and focus. The more character the coffee shop-- comfy chairs, big wooden tables-- the better.
- The Newberry Library in Chicago or the Bibliotheque de l'Arsenal in Paris

- A room with a comfortable chair and an option of a desk. I would listen to music with noise canceling headphones and have a friend with me. There is no need for interaction but it is comforting to know you have another person near you.
- I'm one of those people who thinks best in motion. When I was writing my thesis in college, I'd go for long walks or randomly ride the subway around just to get away from the pressure of trying to have intelligent thoughts while sitting at my computer. I guess I'd like to sit and stare at the ocean and think for a while. If I could work anywhere I suppose I'd choose to (sustainably, this being the operative term) work in New York.
- somewhere in London #stereotypical
- Sarajevo.
- A second-floor open porch, with a breeze, view of a nice old tree, a desk for some longhand writing, comfy chair for some reading, and room for others to think alongside me. (Plus something to distract my kids, so I can actually get some dedicated work time.)
- An office with a water view
- Any library with access to prompt books, production videos, textual variants, imaginative colleagues, and coffee.
- A wood-paneled library with comfy chairs and lots and lots of books
- On lake, surrounded by books on a gently rocking boat.
- Regent's Park, London
- Any place where there's a body of water to gaze out upon.
- A coffee shop in NYC

If you could steal a prop from a show you worked on, what would it be?

- I would steal the Voss water that we used in a production of "Bad Jews" by Joshua Harmon.
- There was a great writing desk in a production of Nina Variations that I coveted.
- Caliban's ripped up robe
- I'm more envious of costumes than props
- Probably one of the flapper dresses we used for the "Wild Party" display. They were gorgeous.
- The gaming table/writing desk from Les Liaisons Dangereuses.
- Anything on the set that had been broken and disregarded. ex the broken teacup from the Crucible.
- Prior's peep stones from Angels.
- none
- Judith Malina's long white dress from my days in the Living Theatre.
- I'm partial to the game of Privilege I helped pull together for STRAIGHT WHITE MEN this past fall.
- Huh, nothing comes to mind

- The combination crucifix / stiletto in my own play BELLA DONNA.
- None comes readily to mind.
- Can it be a costume piece?! I got to wear one of the Paris Original dresses to my theatre's gala a few years ago and I never felt sexier.
- The stake from Dracula
- The dog tags from Dogfight

What was your worst day as a dramaturg?

- The day that I realized that I had no idea what I was doing/what to do on that first show.
- I was in school and was working with a local playwright to which I had been assigned. She, evidently, had misunderstood the point of the class and sent me a very long, very mean email asking how dare I suggest anything in her play needed a second look.
- When I got a grade for my job. It was as if someone was saying "I think your learning effort is worth a ____." It almost - ALMOST - made me not want to continue dramaturgy because I thought "is this grade a projection of my capabilities as a dramaturg?" Then I realized it wasn't, and I moved TF on.
- During my production of David Henry Hwang's "The Sound of a Voice" I was both director and dramaturg, which (though necessary) ended up being a much bigger task than I had realized. When I was writing the dramaturgy note for the program a few nights before opening, I was on the floor bawling my eyes out from the stress.
- I interviewed a famous playwright in front of a large group of people. The playwright was very uncomfortable with the size of the room and the format of the event (neither of which had been my decision). I did my best to make the playwright comfortable and lead a productive discussion, but the whole experience was disappointing and embarrassing.
- The day I was trying to explain to an actor that this show is exploring the hierarchy between students in a drama club and they said this is just a fun show stop looking into this so seriously. The worst days are when people don't think dramaturgy is important and disregard its importance in a production.
- I can't think of one specific day, but any day where I was treated as a human Google machine was pretty lame.
- When a playwright asked me for every note I could think of regarding their script, as it was going up off-Broadway in a few weeks, and I responded with an 8-page treatise including cutting two characters. I was a new dramaturg.
- Ugh. Alienating the director by not intervening on a fellow artistic staff member giving much-too-specific notes.
- Once a playwright told me he wanted to replace the program note I had written with a 700 word excerpt from a dry and dull 19th century history book. It took me a while to realize that it wasn't really about what I had written; it was about justifying part of the play he felt vulnerable about.
- The day I got fired from Arena Stage.

- One of several days where the conversation with the (same) director clearly indicated he had no idea how to relate to a dramaturg and was completely uncomfortable and threatened.
- I was running box office AND dramaturging a play, which meant I was running back and forth between working on my lobby display and organizing the concessions closet. My lobby display included a poetry wall with words that excluded the letter "E" to tie in with the play's themes of artistic censorship, and as I dashed back to work in the box office, I overheard the actors laugh at the display and point out all the E words that accidentally made it onto the wall. I had just been let off from my day job, was exhausted from rushing to the theatre in terrible traffic, and had worked tirelessly on the display -- so I broke down sobbing. Turns out the actors and directors could hear me as well as I could hear them.
- I was working as a new play dramaturg on a piece written by a relatively green playwright and found myself becoming increasingly concerned with the direction he was taking his female protagonist. To me, she was a walking book of cliches about women, and despite my gentle questions as we developed his script for production, the character remained disappointingly one-dimensional. I eventually articulated my feelings more candidly than perhaps I should have, and I regretted doing so.
- The day the director and actors teamed up to bully the writing team into making changes.
- When a good bit of the website didn't save and I had to do it all over again. I learned to always back it up into Word or Google Drive.

Who is your favorite visual artist? Why?

- Banksy. Love the mystery. Also, anyone who uses a lot of colors. I love colors.
- I really like Magritte. Magical realism always gets me jazzed.
- Abby Guissepe because I am ignorant of historic visual artists and believe in supporting local artists go abby
- Ben Glenn, as he was the first artist I ever saw work live. His pieces are gorgeous.
- Alfons Mucha. I think his depictions of women have the perfect balance of realism (in the body shapes and proportions) and magic and mysticism. Plus, he did play posters as well!
- Georges de la Tour for his use of light. I've always liked Rene Magritte for his sense of play.
- Pablo Picasso
- Picasso. It's hard to say why, because I just decided that he was my favorite artist when I was about 8. And if you really think about it, Picasso is kind of a disturbing thing for an 8-year-old to be super into. But I think I was drawn to the abstraction, and I was interested in his life, and the variety of work he produced. The way sometimes you recognize a Picasso as a Picasso immediately, and other times you'd have no idea.
- Robert Mapplethorpe - I love the chances he takes.

- Rothko. The subtlety.
- I have lots of favorites: Tara Donovan, Kara Walker, Caravaggio, Robert Rauschenberg, Damián Ortega
- Rembrandt, and the man who invented Dogs Playing Poker. Isn't it obvious?
- Seurat. Because I fell in love with Sunday in the Park with George when I was in high school.
- Edward Gorey. I'm a deep lover of all things macabre, especially when they're mixed with satire and miserable children. I especially love how his drawings tell complex visual stories outside of the written narratives themselves.
- Edward Hopper. There are always doorways, windows, shadows, alleyways in his paintings, hinting at mysteries waiting just around the bend.

If you weren't doing theatre, what would you be doing?

- The Culinary Arts
- Probably working at a minimum wage job and crying myself to sleep at night.
- Some kind of research. Most likely I'd be a scientific researcher of some kind - probably cancer researcher. Or I'd be developing pharmaceuticals.
- I have actually been a stay-at-home mom for the past five months, after a cross-country move.
- I'd be a full-time writer. It's still not out of the question. Or maybe I'd be working in a non-profit, or teaching English somewhere.
- Teaching French
- I would be a martial arts instructor. I would be learning how to run a business
- Probably something in a museum.
- Academia, probably
- I think I'd be dead.
- Pastor
- Something with words and stories -- journalist, English professor, etc
- Selling mutual funds.
- Perhaps be a historian. Traffic engineering fascinates me.
- Journalism, probably. I was editor of my college newspaper and interned at a few old-school print newspapers. I fell in love with editing, inDesign, interviews, and unabashed curiosity -- but would hate being a journalist in the world of social media (and now Trump).
- I'd either be a doctor or a museum curator.
- In reality, I'd likely be something like a teacher or a librarian. If anything were possible, I'd like to be a pilot.
- Hopefully not sitting behind a desk somewhere

If you had to choose a verb that describes how dramaturgs move through a text or work, what would it be? (prowling, ambling, tumbling, etc.)

- Inching. (Slowly. Methodically. Taking it all in.)
- I think it depends on the dramaturg. I know a bunch of prowlers, but I'd say I'm more of a crawler maybe; I like to keep my nose close to the ground and turn over lots of rocks.
- Hoarding and Nit-picking
- Sleuthing?
- I'd use "combing." I tend to go through the text over and over again in layers, examining different things each time.
- Sifting
- finely searching
- I doubt there's one answer for all of us, since it's such a personal thing, but I think I kind of burrow and dig around.
- perusing
- Verbs don't satisfy. Voraciously, I would say.
- Depends on the text & the place in the process: there's the early spelunking phase to get to know the unknown territory; the deep-ocean sonography to map the crevices with some subtlety; but then the mid-range flyover; and the otter on its way down the riverbed, there for the ride (and 'just a few' observations.)
- Huh, maybe surfing -- sometimes we're riding the wave with the text, other times we're jockeying back to the side But the question also brought to mind -- I co-dramaturged this production where a playwright, in a newspaper interview, described working with dramaturgs as follows: "Did you ever have the crabs, and you have to use that comb that they give you? It's like using one of those combs, searching, searching. Are there any mistakes? Searching. Are there any problems? Timeline issues?"
- All of those choices, plus sneaking, rolling, jumping, soaring, and correcting the spelling error in the question.
- pinballing
- Dissecting
- On a good day, "navigating," on a bad day, "stumbling."
- Excavating
- Scouring

Is there one visual that could unite or sum up your dramaturgical experience?

- Zachary Dorsey, in a coffee shop, surrounded by books, scripts and ballet dancers.
- Maybe a giant wheel with each spoke being a different method of dramaturgical practice and a different influence on my own practice.
- The meme of that guy with the veins popping out of his forehead

- The day I got the email that I had been accepted for the dramaturgy internship at the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis. I was stunned, because I didn't think I was a very good dramaturg and I had basically written it off as a possibility after (what I considered) a pretty bad phone interview. This was my "oh, I guess I CAN do this!" moment.
- If so, it would be a Rob Gonsalves painting with books creating a world. (Written Worlds; Space Between the Words; or Towers of Knowledge)
- a cubism painting
- I have an Angels in America tattoo.
- Nope.
- No. but that's why I love it.
- Huh, nothing comes to mind.
- No
- No
- A mug of black coffee

4000 Matches on Fire at Once

Lauren Chapman

I am supposed to deliver to you an impeccably curated, polished, manicured, preened-to-perfection artist's statement that neatly encapsulates seven semesters of work. In a flourish of words, I'm supposed to make you understand intricate, complex connections between the practice of dramaturgy, the lived experience of theatre artists, my memories, my mountains of drafts, papers, and things that almost were.

There's supposed to be some sort of secret I keep from you, or some critical knowledge and evaluation that I give that will color everything you see in this room in a revelatory glaze.

This is supposed to be about a page long.

(Just to be clear: I can't, and it won't.)

Instead, I can offer you three things: an explanation, a chronology, and a series of questions.

The explanation is about dramaturgy. The word "dramaturgy" refers to the thematic, structural, and narrative elements that make a theatrical production work. The *dramaturg*, however, is the individual responsible for making all of the different parts of a production sing the same note. *Or* is responsible for sitting behind and to the left of the director, guiding her through the production. *Or* maintains and develops audience relations through workshops and talkbacks. (There are about forty more *ors*, but I'll stop there.) There is no universally accepted truth about dramaturgy. Hell, we can't even decide how to spell our own name - is it dramaturg, with a hard germanic *g* at the end, or the softer dramaturge? The only thing we can all largely agree on is that we question. We question everything in different ways, and that is how we move through productions and the world, and make meaning.

Dramaturgy is unique in that in terms of description, it's a bit like dark matter - the stuff we know exists in space only because of how normal matter warps around it. You have to explain dramaturgy through metaphors. A dramaturg is like:

A doctor a fixer a bartender a scholar a priest a student a monk an activist a lawyer an advocate a collector a dragon with a horde a knight in shining armor a mirror a detective a chef an evangelist an astronomer a soothsayer a soldier a general a mother a midwife (that one's loathed collectively) a well-tended fire a miracle worker a translator and on and on and on and on.

A memory-keeper. A well for the repository of critical thought, emotion, artistic sensibility, and personal feeling necessary to create good theatre. This one is my favorite.

These host of literary metaphor are how I defined my work as a dramaturg for three and a half years. I began doing dramaturgy with a fairly disastrous genderbent production of *Much Ado About Nothing*.

(Here's the chronology)

I thought the best way to teach Shakespeare and gender roles was through Judith Butler. I gave the actors assigned readings. If you take away nothing else from this thesis, please take away that ***this is something you should not do.***

Shortly after that, I was assigned to dramaturg a play called *How I Learned to Drive*, then Stephen Sondheim's *Assassins*, and then I was up and running. The nature of theatre is transient and ephemeral, so the only actual relics I have left of the fifteen or so productions I've worked on are my notebooks. These were meant just for me, as a way to remember the productions and my personal growth.

Those are what are hanging up in envelopes behind you. **Please take them if you want them.** I'm occasionally funny, a fair-to-middling poet, and I want to share my eight semesters of work with you. They're the physical rendering of my memories, in the way I imagine them organized.

Additionally, the memories of seventeen other dramaturgs are embedded within those envelopes. Their shared experience and rich perspective grounded me through this process.

I'm a visual person. I need to see something enflashed and rendered to understand it. So I set out to build a visual metaphor for dramaturgy, using my favorite literary one. This work started in the spring of 2016, was carried through with much wailing and occasional rending of sackcloth, and completed, well, on Tuesday. (I've still got a paper to write.)

What I want to say about all of these pieces is that they are constructions/studies/experiments that attempt to make sense not just of the dramaturgical process and detritus, but the way we call up memories, and use them. If I get to say what they're about, then they're about process, and processing. Nothing here is a final product. Below are some questions that I asked myself, and I offer to you in the hopes that they are useful as you look through this space.

What's your favorite memory?

What's your favorite painting?

What's your worst first draft?

What's your best?

What's it contained in?

What sticks in your brain like accidental superglue on fingers?

What do you remember that tastes sweet?

When did you burn yourself?

How long has it been since you hugged your mother, and meant it?

What filing system does your brain use?

What was your first job?

What was your first passion?

What's your favorite memory?

Who told you the most hurtful lie?

What's the hardest thing you've ever done?

Who taught you how to make good art?

What's your favorite memory?

Take what you want from this exhibition. I hope that you start asking questions. I hope I inspire a dramaturgical sense of questioning in you.

I hope that you start evaluating and sifting through your memories to find sweet and bittersweet things you'd thought you'd forgotten. I hope you make those memories dance, and saturate them with color and light.

THE CREATOR

HATCHED OUT OF A GOLDEN EGG, THE FOUR-HEADED BRAHMA IS TASKED WITH THE WORK OF CREATION UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF SHIVA AND VISHNU. HIS FOUR HANDS CAN REPRESENT THE FOUR VEDIC SCRIPTURES, THE FOUR STAGES OF LIFE, THE FOUR CASTES, OR THE FOUR CARDINAL POINTS. BRAHMA HAS NO SECT DEVOTED EXCLUSIVELY TO HIS WORSHIP IN CONTEMPORARY HINDUISM.

THE SUSTAINER

VISHNU POSSESSES TEN AVATARS (CHIEF AMONG THEM RAMA AND KRISHNA) AND OVER ONE THOUSAND DIFFERENT NAMES. HE IS REVERED AS THE PRIMARY DEITY DURING THE TIME OF THE MAHABHARATA (400 CE). VISHNU MANIFESTS A PORTION OF HIMSELF WHENEVER MORAL LAW OR PRACTICE ARE IN DANGER, THOUGH SOME OF HIS AVATARS BRING ABOUT GREAT DESTRUCTION. IN FIGHTING FOR GOOD, AND OCCASIONALLY CAUSING GREAT EVIL, VISHNU KEEPS THE WORLD IN BALANCE.

THE DESTROYER

SHIVA IS THE AGENT OF CHANGE WITHIN THE TRIMURTI, AND HIS MANY FORMS ARE REFLECTIVE OF HIS ROLE. HE IS ALTERNATIVELY DEPICTED AS MALE OR FEMALE, ASCETIC OR FERTILITY GOD, PROTECTOR OF HUMANITY OR ARCHITECT OF ITS DESTRUCTION. THE WORSHIP OF SHIVA AS THE PRIMARY GOD, KNOWN AS SHAIVISM, IS THE OLDEST SECT OF HINDUISM.

Misericordia

Four Related Scenes

Lauren Chapman

CHARACTERS

ANTONIO SFORZA - early thirties. Duke of Milan.

CECILIA D'ESTE - middle twenties. Duchess of Milan.

ANNA SFORZA - their eldest daughter. Born 1483

BIANCA SFORZA - their middle child. Born 1491

GIAN SFORZA - their youngest child, a boy. Born 1492

PROSPERO SFORZA - Antonio's elder brother. The rightful duke of Milan.

MIRANDA SFORZA - Prospero's daughter.

MARIA - a Milanese whore

[SCENE ONE]

Milan, 1495. The small hours of the morning. Palazzo Sforzesca.

Dim candlelight gradually illuminates a massive room. It has a coffered ceiling with painted panels, and walls with a frescoed geometric program and several tondi. Stacked in neat rows on ebony shelves are dozens of books, leaves of parchment, and rolls of paper. There is one chair and a sturdy writing desk. A long bench is also present. The furniture is arranged with no clear purpose. The room is a maze of precious things. The desk is piled with correspondence, strange objects, and books. The fireplace is lit along the stage right wall and the windows are pulled shut.

Enter ANTONIO SFORZA, with several whores. Their continual noise shatters the tableau of the room.

ANTONIO is clearly in his cups, dressed only in his undershirt and pants. His boots are half undone. He wears an ornate chain of office around his neck. He saunters into the room, trailed by his retinue.

The whores are stunned by the display of wealth. They whisper to one another loudly. ANTONIO beckons them towards the desk, laughing to himself. He scans the desk for something, and, finding it, crows his achievement.

ANTONIO holds up an elaborate, jewel-encrusted bible. Assuming the position of a priest at mass, he spreads his arms to a congregation.

ANTONIO: Kneel.

The whores comply, giggling.

ANTONIO *flips open the Bible to a random page.*

ANTONIO: [*While making the sign of the cross*] In nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti. Amen. [*As he recites the Hail Mary, he picks jewels off the cover of the Bible and tosses them to the whores. He grows increasingly amused as he continues*] Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum. Benedicta tu in mulieribus, et benedictus fructus ventris tui, Iesus. Sancta Maria, Mater Dei, ora pro nobis peccatoribus, nunc, et in hora mortis nostrae. Amen.

The whores chorus an "Amen" with the conviction of nuns. There is another Amen, said out of sync and sounding further away. No one notices.

ANTONIO: Had any of you known my brother?

The whores signal that they didn't.

ANTONIO: I'm not surprised.

ANTONIO *sweeps off the debris of the desk, including a cup of wine, which spills over the parchment. He sits upon it with the carelessness of a child.*

ANTONIO: Prospero couldn't be bothered when the French were knocking down walls in Lucca, much less with any of you. Or his wife, really. Don't feel slighted.

[*Long pause. The whores can sense that ANTONIO's mood has shifted.*]

Wouldn't have had the money for you, anyway. It was in his books. Do you know why they cost so much?

Two of the whores shrug. One, MARIA, looks curious.

ANTONIO: Of course you don't. You can't read.

MARIA: I can read.

A beat

I know why. They cost what they cost because they're hard to make, and easy to destroy. They take an expert's hand to make.

ANTONIO: What's your name?

MARIA: Maria.

ANTONIO: Of course it is. [ANTONIO tosses the Bible carelessly to MARIA] Read that passage on the top there.

MARIA: "The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away. Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:

ANTONIO AND MARIA: But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered awhile, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you."

ANTONIO: I have had my suffering. I have been humble. I have served. And now, I have been given grace.

[*Beat.*] You're right about the books. They are hard to make. And easy to destroy. You have to take all of the disparate pieces of knowledge and bind them together. Make them beautiful. You have to make the words worthy. You have to keep them together, in order. And they're quite easy to destroy.

ANTONIO *crosses to the fire. He throws in scraps of paper from the floor.*

ANTONIO: It isn't a terrible metaphor for politics. Or brothers.

[CECILIA, ANTONIO's wife, *appears at the door.*]

ANTONIO: Out. All of you. And not a word that you haven't been paid properly.

The whores leave. MARIA retains possession of the Bible.

ANTONIO: Well?

CECILIA: The children are still asleep. What shall we tell them in the morning?

ANTONIO: Absolutely nothing.

CECILIA: What was his price? Which of my daughters am I sending to Naples?

ANTONIO: Anna. When she's old enough. She'll marry Alonso's son. She could do worse than be a princess.

CECILIA begins to pick up the aftermath of Antonio's revelry. She gathers the papers from the desk and replaces them. She notices that an astrolabe that sat on the desk has broken.

CECILIA: What is this? *She attempts to fit the broken pieces back together. This infuriates her husband. He crosses to her, rips the pieces out of her hand, and dashes them against the wall.*

ANTONIO: What is it?

CECILIA looks at him with steel in her eyes.

CECILIA: Spill your bile as much as you like tonight. But do not bring it to bed. I shall have our things moved into the main apartments tomorrow.

She withdraws. When she leaves, it is as though the air in the room leaves with her. Something different fills it up.

ANTONIO: *[spitting rage]* My brother stayed at his books when we first received word that the French had sacked Lucca. The plan he had orchestrated to save our skins had failed. We had word of bodies impaled in the streets, of the scouts hacking off the ears of nuns and drinking the blood of children. He said that he would send some letters. I fortified the walls. I arranged the canon, and then I prayed. And we lived. My brother stayed at his books when we had word of what happened at Forli. When the pope's bastard tortured our nephew in broad daylight and Caterina begged for our help, Prospero said that he would address it after dinner. Where is Caterina now? In chains in the Castel Sant'Angelo. My brother stayed at his books when plague ran through the city. He stayed at his books when my son died! I was the one who organized body collectors! I was the one who saved our fortunes from the Florentine coffers! I was the one who had to tell my wife that she could have no portrait to remember her son, because her brother-in-law had deemed it an unwise expenditure!

[Beat]

My brother holed himself up in here the day his daughter was born. He never even went near his wife. I ran up to tell him, I thought, perhaps, he was scared. He never was well with words. I burst in here, kissed him on both cheeks, and told him that he had been blessed beyond measure. He didn't look up from his letter. I asked what he would name her. He told me "Whatever Beatrice prefers."

[Beat]

I could have thrown him out the window. I should have. I have never felt closer to God than when I held a sword to his neck. When I told him where he could study. When he saw a papal seal affixed to his death warrant.

[Beat]

ANTONIO *considers a curious figure on the floor, carved of red wax. He holds it to a candle flame. It begins to melt over the candelabra and gradually, his hand.*

ANTONIO: I delivered all of us. They should make a statue of me as David. I should have ruined books at my feet, instead of a helmet.

Suddenly exhausted, ANTONIO casts his eyes over the books and papers that CECILIA righted. Catlike, he examines each title before tipping it off the desk and onto the floor. The sunrise is creeping through the bottom of the window. ANTONIO surveys his mess proudly, and slowly exits.

There is the faintest suggestion of a sound. Perhaps it is a voice. Perhaps words are said.

The candles extinguish all at once.

[END SCENE]

[SCENE TWO]

Milan, 1497. The windows are flung open - it is summer in Lombardy, hot and humid with only the occasional respite of a breeze. The frescoes are only partially viewable, covered now in detailed maps of Tuscany, the Romagna, and the lower regions of France. The mess left by Prospero was never cleaned, instead, the mess of political affairs has consumed it, creating a layer of papers, books, and objects not unlike a forest floor. The room is empty and still. It feels stifling and smells like a newly extinguished candle. There is movement under the great desk.

ANTONIO enters the room and begins digging about for something, perhaps a map or correspondence. His clothes befit a duke now, and he still wears his chain of office.

Noise from the piazza below seeps into the room. There is the sound of footsteps, the bubbling of conversation, and occasional shouting.

ANTONIO finds what he is looking for and collapses into his desk chair, looking exhausted. He rereads the letter and begins to reach for his pen and ink. The inkwell turns over, covering his sleeve in its contents.

ANTONIO holds in an invective and attempts to wipe off some of the ink with a piece of parchment. He is unsuccessful.

The noise from the street grows in volume until ANTONIO must close the window. It is too distracting for him to work. He resumes his writing. This should take a while. We notice the debris of the room, and how out of place ANTONIO still seems in it. It is bright daylight, but there is still something "off" about the room. Perhaps the sound outside the window becomes more distorted, or the whisper is heard again.

ANTONIO is dealing with the consequences of closing the window. He is insufferably hot. He crosses to wrench open the window again.

There is a clap of thunder, sounding frighteningly close to the window. ANTONIO jerks back as an onslaught of rain hits the buildings and streets.

A scramble is heard below, the process of people protecting their wares and running for cover.

The noise is heard again. It is perhaps feminine, and upon hearing it, a shiver runs up ANTONIO's spine. He looks about the room fervently, and, upon finding nothing, exits.

Today, the library has won.

[END SCENE]

[SCENE THREE]

A few years later. Early morning. It is still raining, though now it is early fall. The rain is a good sign, and no one is put out by it. ANTONIO, still wearing his ducal robes and looking older and more put upon, sits at a great chair by a library table, consulting a map. He moves various pieces about, considering and reconsidering their position.

CECILIA enters, smiling at her husband. She has the air of someone set on getting exactly what they want. She opens the

window, and noise is heard again. This time, it is the sound of children playing in the rain.

ANTONIO *looks up, regarding his wife fondly.*

ANTONIO: So, what are you doing to endanger the lives of my children today?

CECILIA knows he is teasing. They both share an intimacy and ease around each other that is born of enduring hardships and uncertainties. CECILIA perches herself on the arm of his chair.

CECILIA: I've done no such thing. It was their prerogative entirely to go outside. I merely wanted to visit my husband's study and read.

This is a flimsy excuse. The room is a disaster now; Prospero's books and other items are carelessly scattered in with Antonio's affairs of state. The room is messy in a way that feels uncomfortable and anachronistic.

ANTONIO: [*still teasing*] Lies. All of it. You've cooked up some scheme with them, haven't you?

CECILIA: Not at all! I was merely sent as a messenger to his grace to inform him that there are children who would very much like to see their father go play in the rain with them.

ANTONIO: It's a flood out there. They're going to catch their death.

CECILIA: Then you shall catch it with them.

ANTONIO: Cecilia, I really don't think I have the time--

CECILIA: [*suddenly quite serious*] You will make the time. You're leaving for Naples in two weeks, Christ only knows when we shall see you again. [*She leans in*] Personally, I'd rather not have my most recent memory of you be slaving over reinforcements for the Venetians.

Knowing that she can get away with it, CECILIA sweeps her hand across the table and clears it of ANTONIO's work. The table is bare, and neither of them notice the carvings that seem to be burnt into the wood. Some of them are words, and some of them are sigils. They live on the legs of the table and on the surface.

ANTONIO: I find I can't argue with you. Let me find clothes that I don't mind thoroughly ruining, and I'll be right out.

CECILIA: [*smiling*] Somehow I knew you would see it my way. I've already had the maid lay something out.

ANTONIO exits. CECILIA is left alone in the room. She takes a long beat to explore it, lifting papers and examining correspondence.

She notices the etchings on the table. She traces one with her hands and recoils immediately, as if burned. The whispering voices are heard again, the loudest they have ever been. CECILIA is overcome with a desire to run out of the room. The sound seems to get closer and closer to her. She crosses herself.

ANTONIO re-enters and surveys the scene. He is terrified, but cloaks it in anger. He jerks CECILIA away from the room.

ANTONIO: I am having that table burned.

CECILIA [*softly*]: I'm commissioning you a new study. It will be ready when you return.

They exit.

[END OF SCENE]

[SCENE FOUR]

A few weeks later. The library has been emptied completely. ANTONIO is alone, picking through the remainder of the books. The room is covered in the same writings and symbols as the table. Antonio feels as if he has been cursed this entire time. The room echoes uncomfortably.

There are books stacked carelessly amid folded maps and papers, tucked neatly into their folios. ANTONIO packs his papers in a large chest. He is undoubtedly readying for a journey.

He takes his time in packing, considering the objects around him. After a long moment, he stands up to survey his surroundings. True to his word, the table was burnt.

He picks up a letter left to him on his desk. He reads it aloud.

ANTONIO: "With all our love, we wish you a safe voyage and easy travels." Signed Cecilia, Anna, Bianca, and Gian. Postscript: Please father if you are able bring us back a treasure or two when you sail to Africa. We shall be most grateful signed Gian."

He tucks the letter away into his coat pocket.

ANTONIO: Every night that I fell asleep in here, I had dreams of drowning. I would dream that I was still in this exact room, and the water would rush in so fast that I couldn't run away. I drowned, and I wasn't even the most interesting thing in the water. When I woke up, I always thought something was here with me, as though it was watching me, and willing me to drown. I didn't--

He realizes he's talking entirely to himself. He can't or won't finish his sentence, because it would acknowledge a truth he refuses to believe.

ANTONIO: It's no matter. I'm having everything burnt. Cecilia is having Mantegna paint the walls in the new study. It faces the courtyard. I will seal this room up, and it shall be the last thing of my brother I have to deal with.

Antonio closes his chest. He pushes one bookcase over, and it topples with an unholy thud. He kicks the books on the floor about. He revels for a moment in his childlike destruction, and the lights close on his continued action, an attempt to carve his brother out of his life and out of the space.

[END OF SCENE]

CAUGHT UP

“I love these words as a unit and as individual words. It seems to me that there is *movement implicit in their individual and collective meaning(s)*. The phrase is rife with possibilities: *being caught up in something or someone to such an extent that all else falls away*. Being caught brings many images to mind and could certainly be a starting point for movement improvisation. The same goes for "up." It is a movement direction but it can also be seen as a metaphor. Heaven is "up there," for instance.”

Definitions, Uses, and Synonyms

CAUGHT/CATCH/CATCHING

1. to seize or capture, esp. after pursuit: *to catch a thief*.
2. **to trap or ensnare: *to catch fish*.**
3. to take and hold (something thrown, falling, etc.): *to catch the ball*.
4. to surprise or detect, as in some action: *I caught them cheating*.
5. **to receive, incur, or contract: *to catch a cold*.**
6. to be in time to get aboard (a train, boat, etc.).
7. **to lay hold of; clasp: *He caught her in an embrace*.**
8. to grip, hook, or entangle: *The closing door caught my arm*.
9. to allow to become gripped, hooked, snagged, or entangled: *He caught his coat on a nail*.
10. **to attract or arrest: *to catch our attention*.**
11. to check or restrain suddenly (often used reflexively).
12. to see or attend: *to catch a show*.
13. **to strike; hit: *The blow caught him on the head*.**

14. to become inspired by or aware of: *to catch the spirit*.
15. to fasten with or as if with a catch.
16. to deceive: *No one was caught by his sugary words.*
17. to attract the attention of; charm: *caught by his winning smile.*
18. to grasp with the intellect; comprehend: *I caught the meaning.*
19. to hear clearly.
20. to record; capture: *The painting caught her expression.*
21. to become gripped, hooked, or entangled.
22. to take hold: *The lock won't catch.*
23. to play the position of catcher in baseball.
24. to become lighted; ignite.
25. catch at, to grasp at eagerly; accept readily.
26. catch on,
 - a. to become popular.
 - b. to fathom the meaning; understand.
27. catch out, to catch or discover in deceit or an error.
28. catch up,
 - a. to overtake someone or something moving (often fol. by *with* or *to*).
 - b. to lift up or snatch suddenly.
 - c. to do enough so that one is no longer behind: *to catch up on one's work.*
 - d. to involve or interest intensely (usu. in the passive): *caught up in the moment.*
29. the act of catching.
30. anything that catches, esp. a device for checking motion, as a latch on a door.
31. any tricky or concealed drawback: *There must be a catch somewhere.*
32. a slight, momentary break or crack in the voice.
33. something caught, as a quantity of fish.
34. a person or thing worth getting, esp. a person regarded as a desirable matrimonial prospect.
35. a game in which a ball is thrown from one person to another.
36. a fragment: *catches of a song.*
37. the catching and holding of a batted or thrown ball before it touches the ground.
38. a musical round for male voices with the words in overlapping parts contrived to produce humorous or bawdy effects.

CAUGHT UP

Absorbed
 Engrossed
 Engaged
 Enthralled

Immersed
Lost
Rapt
Recovered
Spellbound

Movement Questions

- How does a body move when it is caught in the gravitational pull of another body?
- How do two people move when they are caught up in each other's eyes/bodies/faces?
- Can a body that is "caught up" move freely, or is it bound or limited in movement in some way?
- What is the best way for a body to get "up"?
- Does getting up mean reaching with the highest part of a body or the lowest part?
- How do we "catch" other people? Is it with our bodies, our body language, our words, or all of the above?
- What is the subject/object relationship when someone is "caught up" in their screen? A book?
- When we are caught up on our work or on a TV show, we imply that we have reached a state of equilibrium. What does that look like on a body? Is it stillness? Balance?
- How do our bodies catch the light?

Images

I took a lot of inspiration from [this exhibit](#) at the Sackler Gallery in Washington. It shows how we can be caught up in money, power, art, accumulation, and beauty. There's a few lovely videos about the exhibit [here](#).

I also enjoyed thinking about the works of contemporary artist Paul Fryer, who has created several really evocative sculptures that show myths being caught up or bound, like [this one](#) or [this one](#).

When I think about images and inspiration for being caught up, some of the most movement-oriented works that come to mind are those of Judith beheading Holofernes. The essential story of the paintings can be found [here](#), with some text about Caravaggio's painting. These theme combines movement, some of the synonyms of our phrase, and asks questions about women and violence. More renditions of the theme can be found [here](#).

Videos

Frantic Assembly's Chair Duets

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LC-dkYZOUVo> - from 5:07

FKA Twigs is a singer/performance artist who originally trained in modern dance. The majority of her work focuses on sorting out relationships that have been caught up in different directions or distorted in some way.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8A43M0GJ0tA> - Wet Wipez

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2jhTiLuGezI> - Video Girl

Music (I'm not sure on your preference for lyrics or no lyrics, so I've included a mix, but didn't pick any songs based on their lyrics.)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IXdIxKQ-qWQ> - Headlock - Imogen Heap

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AOwwihJpAVg> - Running - Disclosure feat. Jessie Ware

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bHSJ6CdB1Lk> - Phantogram - Fall in Love (Until the Ribbon Breaks)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xARF_ZSaPjw&list=PLs9URTObuuCbeAOmNU7e2LNWQnNHijL60&index=8 - Lostmyhead - The 1975

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CHQiQC-GPxc&list=PL845A5E5321C3836D> - The Orphee Suite for Piano - Philip Glass

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rrq4is3A10w> - Tenebrae - Now Sleeps the Crimson Petal (Upon a Bank)

The relationship between American leaders and the American people has been tumultuous since the country was founded. From the 1791 Whiskey Rebellion to 2010's Affordable Care Act, American history is riddled with dissension and dissatisfaction among her people. This is reflected in twenty-seven recorded presidential assassination attempts. The first was in 1835, when Andrew Jackson was the sitting president. The would-be assassin's pistols misfired, and Jackson beat the man into submission with his cane. Thirty years later, the American public would suffer the first successful presidential assassination at the hands of John Wilkes Booth. The nation was sent into a state of collective mourning, and in the midst of the calamity of the Civil War, a new caution was instilled in the American people. This mourning has occurred four times, each time a president was assassinated.

What, then, is the psychology of an assassin? Many of the would-be assassins were declared mentally ill or unfit to stand trial. Still more were politically motivated, with every ideology from anarchism to Zionism. However, somewhere within this spectrum of insanity and political zealousness, there are deeply human elements to the act of assassination. The first is purpose and honor. Many assassins left writings, letters, and recordings indicating pride in their accomplishment. John Wilkes Booth writes in his diary that: "I do not regret the blow I struck. I may before my God, but not to man. I think I have done well." Thirtysix years later, Leon Czolgosz's last words before being executed by electric chair were "I am not sorry for my crime."

More deeply within these assassins and their assassination attempts is the particularly American sensibility that one person can make a difference. Each assassin, both in reality and in Sondheim's iteration of their personalities, decides to act because they believe, as common

people, they can make a difference. Every one of the people who have tried to or succeeded in killing the president truly believed that by committing this act, they would be able to effect a positive change upon themselves and the nation. If that's the motivation for these people and the characters in Assassins, then they become extraordinarily relatable. Perhaps the truly disturbing aspect of humanizing these assassins is that we begin to sympathize with the desire to make America a better place.

A SINGLE FIGURE BEFORE THE VAST EXPANSE

A Play in Two Parts: Part I

By Lauren Chapman

CHARACTERS:

WHIM, preferably a man

QUINCE, preferably a woman

JULIE, bright, will play various roles

DEATH, absolutely no need to suit a gender binary. Should be painted head to foot in white body paint

GOOD INTENTIONS: should be dressed normally, empathetic

TIME:

Present day. Evening.

PLACE:

Departure gate C6 in Dulles International Airport. Four chairs should be in a row center stage, facing the audience. A

cyclorama should hang as a backdrop, displaying Barnett Newman's *Vir Heroicus Sublimis*.

SCENE ONE: DIGNITY

(Whim sits in a wheelchair at departure gate C6 in Dulles International Airport. It is evening. His wheelchair sits at the end of a row of chairs. Behind the wheelchair stands. Death. The character playing Julie should exit on and offstage intermittently, with continual purpose. There should be an atmosphere of movement, noise, chaos. Whim is an island in this sea. His carry on bag should rest in his lap.)

WHIM

(calmly, with a warmth)

At the end of the day, what I'm after is some peace and quiet. Death, in my opinion, is noisy and messy and essentially undignified. In the same way birth is, I suppose. In the same way pain is. I'm very, very familiar with pain and have been for seven years now, and perhaps the most heinous element of pain is that it is loud. In that noise, pain can burn, it can freeze, it can electrocute, and it can rob. It has worked as a thief in me for those seven years. Noise and robbery have disoriented me. Taken my movement. My ability to walk, to move from chair to bed unaided, to do anything autonomously. I've been a conduit for the noise as gracefully as possible, but now I am ungainly, and weak, and ready to die. I've decided to do exactly that. I am flying to Zurich, Switzerland.

DEATH

(didactic, no emotional investiture)

He's employed the services of Dignitas. It's one of the few organizations in the world that actively assists people in dying. Fairly quick, fairly painless. Very thorough. Here, look-

(Death holds out the Dignitas brochure. It's weighty, and looks more like a binder than an informational pamphlet. They read from it.)

"to die with dignity."

WHIM

If I'm honest, I haven't decided to die. That implies that I'm resigned to some sort of miserable fate. In reality, I've paid several very lovely and welcoming Swiss people nine thousand three hundred forty eight dollars to supply me with poison, watch over me while I drink it, and then have my body cremated.

(He pauses for a moment, taking in his own words.)

That's actually extraordinarily crass of me. But there's nothing exalant in what I'm going to do. I'm not trying to glorify it. I'm not advocating some grand canyon carved into our moral landscape that sanctions the death of people on a lark. This is an intimate choice to me, and I guard the right to make it jealously. (Beat) So don't for a moment think I'm after anything but peace.

END SCENE

SCENE TWO: TAXONOMY

(Quince sits down in one of the chairs and puts her backpack on the floor. Her actions are measured, focused but she is not fully aware of the frenzy around her. Whim is reading the Dignitas brochure. Death, interested, drifts behind Quince's shoulder while she speaks.)

QUINCE

I guess you could say I'm mad. You'd be right. I'm furious. I'm furious that my brain is being burned away, and there's nothing I can do about it. I go to bed forgetful and wake up disoriented. I lose names. Not just for people, for everything around me, but I lost the people first, something in my short-term memory short-circuited and now I couldn't remember your name even if I met you ten minutes ago.

(She pauses.)

After that, I lost the things. I spent five minutes trying to explain to my dad what the hell a toothbrush was last week. I wrote the word down on my hand. Just like I did with glasses, coffee creamer, nail polish, debit card. I filled up sheets of paper and stained by hands with blue ink trying to take notes on all the shit I forgot. (Beat.) But then I forgot the ideas. It kills me because each morning I wake up with some sort of cerebral numbness to a new concept. (Intense) I wish I could take a scalpel and score out the parts of my brain that didn't

work. Just so they'd be gone. I can't. I can't stop the inexorable progression of a disease hell-bent on taking away my ability to be an autonomous, functioning human being.

(Death, rapt, fixes Quince's hair and lays a hand on her shoulder.)

I've decided to take away its ability to function before it is allowed to take mine. I was told I had three good months ahead of me. That was ten weeks ago. I am going to Switzerland, before I forget how to put one leg in front of the other. Once I'm there, among the mountains, I will meet a doctor and two escorts at a little blue house in Zurich. They will confirm my ability to make a sound decision, and then I will kill myself. I will die and transcend into whatever exists after with something of myself intact. To me, that sounds a lot like victory.

SCENE THREE: AN INTERLUDE FOR DEATH

(Death leaves Quince's side and moves to stand in front, center stage, dominating the space. *Vir Heroicus Sublimis* should appear washed out and whitened. Death is a teacher, indulgent and patient. They are an usher, ready to lead a spectator to their seat.)

DEATH

The entire reality of my existence can be distilled into the phrases of "I am." and "I am not." I am not ravenous gluttonous, gelatinous vainglory. I am not wretched villain prowling predator nighttime. I am not lurking skulking skeletal, anticipatory stalker. I am not sucking bleeding wet. I am not desiccating unslaked dry. I am not a lingerer. No (Beat.) I am present. I am immediate. I am attentive.

(Death considers)

I am not unkind. Perhaps I am a void. I have no physical manifestation.

(Death's words are measured, careful in their revelation.)

I am an observer. I watch the march, the progression. I am a companion of sorts. (Beat.) You hate me. It's impossible to deny, you hate me. You hate a process. I don't take from you -

that's the intent of disease, of karma of kismet of a primordial evil that soaked into humanity. All I do is process.

(Death takes a significant pause)

I don't care if you hate me. Amendment: I can't care if you hate me. I can't care about the fear and revulsion laden in every conversation about me, just as I can't care about anyone with whom I come into contact. What does interest me, what beckons me, is being called before I am expected to be beckoned.

(He looks back at Quince and Whim. It is important that both actors are lit throughout the show. Both may be occupied with reading, eating, etc.)

One wants silence, the void. One wants a crowing victory.
(Beat.) I am what they make me.

BLACKOUT

SCENE FOUR: PLEASANTRIES

(Whim is highlighting lines from the brochure. Quince has moved closer to him with her things, perhaps with some coffee or food. The polite silence between the two should build. The scene begins when Whim drops his highlighter. Death is sitting in the chair on the far left.)

WHIM
(Thoroughly annoyed.)

Damnit. Excuse me ma'am, would you mind picking up that highlighter for me?

QUINCE
(Brightly)

Sure. (She picks it up.) Here you go.

(Whim notices the ink stains on Quince's hands as she gives it back.)

WHIM

Thanks. Run out of paper for your grocery list? (He gestures to her hands.)

QUINCE
(Caught off guard)

Oh, yeah, it's an old one. Don't need it anymore, it just won't come off.

WHIM
(dry)

So maybe don't write it in permanent marker next time?

QUINCE

Yeah, not such a bad idea. I've just got a pretty miserable memory.

WHIM

Fair enough. (He smiles; social cues indicate it's the end of the conversation.)

(Julie enters as an airline representative. Pick from Lufthansa, Austrian, Air France, or United. NOT Delta.)

JULIE

(Pleasantly, with the attitude of someone not easily offended.)

Hello, sir! I just wanted to let you know that we will begin pre-boarding shortly. Do you need assistance with anything besides seating?

WHIM

I believe I have everything I need, thanks.

JULIE

Excellent! Please let us know if you need assistance with anything at all for now or during the rest of the flight, we'll be happy to help.

WHIM

Thanks very much. (To the audience.) I'll happily admit that my logistics are a little tricky. As I mentioned, I need help getting in and out of chairs. Going to the bathroom on a twelve hour flight will be interesting too. At least I'm flying first class. I've hired someone to take me to Dignitas from Zurich, as my family was not interested in coming with me. (Beat) I don't blame them. I'm not terribly sure I'd want to go myself, if the shoe was on the other foot.

(He considers.)

I love them all dearly, of course. I'm not married, but I've got a large enough family. Not extremely religious, but enough to rankle at what they perceive as a - and I quote "ghoulish, Kevorkian-esque attempt to cash in on my life." They love me. They want to see me duke it out to the end, to take care of me. What they fail to understand is that they will be taking care of a man who has bricks sitting on his chest. Eventually, I won't be able to breathe unaided - that's the culmination of the disease in my body. A very slow suffocation. I can't allow that. I won't put myself and everyone around me in pain for the sake of a few more increasingly fearful months. (Beat) I'd wager the prison sentence that comes along with helping someone to die dissuaded them as well. I don't mind being alone, really. I like the time to think. To sum up. To culminate. Not that I'll be sending a will along. I sold my house and car when I was unable to walk. I've lived with my sister since then.

(Quince has opened a book on hiking and mountaineering - Krakauer's *Into Thin Air* or *Eiger Dreams* would be appropriate.)

QUINCE

Before I forgot things like "belay", "crampon", "absell", and "bivouac", I loved to climb. I've been to Switzerland before, to try to hit the Eiger and Jungfrau in the same summer. Jungfrau happened. The Eiger didn't. Actually, I've climbed everywhere. I guess you could say I'm a climbing bum. I work enough to pay for the next trip, and then I'm gone for some springs and the summers. Best climbing weather then. Two years ago, I went to Pakistan. I won't lie, I was gunning for Nanga Parbat. It was a hell of a climb, but I couldn't summit. The storms kicked up

over the summit a couple hours before our ascent. It'd have been suicide to attempt it. (She smiles.) Maybe I should have gone for it. The records have already been set, but I wouldn't have minded serving as a really macabre signpost.

(She pauses)

Wow, that was sick. Sorry. My sense of humor's always been rather black. (Beat) I never climbed it, but I flew over Everest once. From above, you can see how ugly of a mountain it really is. (She laughs) No one thinks about that, but it really is the least pretty of the eight thousanders. It certainly didn't look small, flying above it, but I started thinking about all the bodies left up there. There's a couple dozen now, I think. The altitude preserves almost everything about them. They're route markers. (Beat) Some of them are missing - avalanches, the icefall, and the crevasses are good at hiding bodies. People say that dying on Everest isn't painful. It's a numbness, either from the lack of oxygen or the frostbite, and then a sleep. That sounds appealing to me. I hope that whatever they give me is like that.

(She closes her book.)

No one's coming with me or meeting me in Zurich - and I'm terrified because I'm barely able to speak English, let alone French or German, at this point. (Beat) I didn't tell them what I was doing. I told them I was going to have one last go at the Eiger while I could, to sort of round out my bucket list. They were so excited for me. That's where I'm going to ask the people to put my ashes.

(Whim notices the book Quince holds; he's interested)

WHIM
(politely)

Planning on doing some climbing?

QUINCE
(more than happy to engage on this subject)

Yeah, we'll see what happens. Ever been to Switzerland before?

WHIM

This is my first trip. I've spent most of my life in Vermont.

(They both laugh. Quince notices the brochure in Whim's lap.)

QUINCE

Dignitas, huh? You a journalist?

WHIM
(casually)

Yes. They're something else. Apparently it's the only country that offers in home assisted dying. It's a crime here, for the most part. Makes you ask who owns your body.

QUINCE

Oh. Wow. Sounds like a hell of a story. Where can I read it when it comes out?

WHIM
(slightly flustered)

Uh, I'll let you know. I do mostly freelance work. (Quickly) You got a mountain in mind?

QUINCE

Oh. Yeah, I do. Ever heard of Finsteraarhorn?

WHIM

Gesundheit.

(Quince laughs)

WHIM

I'm not sure I can say it, let alone know anything about it.

QUINCE

Beautiful mountain. (Beat) Well, don't miss CERN, if you get a chance. It's pretty cool.

WHIM

I won't, thanks.

(Quince goes back to her book, smiling. Occasionally, we see her on her phone, looking up the meanings of words. Whim has abandoned highlighting and note-taking for doodling. He is drawing mountains. From stage left, Good Intentions enters. She reaches out as if to touch *Vir Heroicus*. She traces her hands along the lines against the red background.)

GOOD INTENTIONS

(Wistful. Good Intentions is pre-emptively grieving)

I want them to stand on the peaks of mountains in the cold air and shout their victory. I want them to *stand*. I want them to see the fiery nimbus encircling their heads as they move through the world. I want them to know their value and the way I exalt when each breath is inhaled and exhaled. Their light, their holiness before the universe is impossible to neglect. Man is heroic. Woman is sublime. Humanity stands as a single figure before the vast expanse of night, time, the universe, the void. They are brave beyond comprehension. Strong and resilient in an environment designed to kill them. (Beat) I love them dearly. I want the best for them. Their families. Their lives. I will not sanction a secession of will.

SCENE FIVE: PRE-BOARDING

(Whim and Quince still sit in their respective seats. Good Intentions follows Julie's every move. Death sits next to Quince. He listens intently to their conversation.)

JULIE

This is the preliminary call for flight 684 from Dulles International Airport to Zurich, Switzerland. We're going to begin boarding in about five minutes, and will begin with our pre-board passengers. If you have your pre-board information or you are a minor under the age of twelve, you are welcome to board at this time. Thank you!

WHIM

I have given some thought to what heaven will be like. The closest thing I can liken it to would be looking at stars. I took a very late night plane to Houston once. We'd been delayed at the gate for a couple of hours, and the pilot promised to make up for lost time. We flew quite high above the cloud cover.

It was a perfectly clear night. As I looked out the window, I saw more stars than I'd ever seen in my life. I saw them curve with the arc of the earth, and I saw gatherings and clusters and close ones and near ones and the vibrancy of the galaxy and the pinpoints of ancient celestial light. I stared out my window at the world I had never seen before and I cried. I sobbed for what felt like hours. I felt interconnected with the heavens. I felt...one with the universe. So I suppose heaven, or whatever comes after death, is that oneness. (Beat) I'd quite like to be a star. Something radiant and powerful and capable. I wouldn't mind watching the universe sculpt itself anew. I look forward to it.

DEATH

I am not unkind.

QUINCE

Heaven is...perhaps a possibility. Maybe it's hand-tailored to you, that'd be pretty nice. I hope it's the summits I didn't hit. Maybe it's a void. Maybe it's the bottom of the Khumbu crevasses at night. I don't know. Ideally, it's limitless and, if not happy, it's content. Contentment. That's what heaven is. The perpetual state of hunger filled and thirst slaked, with the continual motivation to adventure and move and explore. (Beat) My heaven is probably very, very cold. I hope I'm not alone.

QUINCE AND WHIM

(Together)

I'm going to die alone but I'm not lonely.

QUINCE

I will be able to collect the rest of me that has fallen into the other end of an hourglass.

WHIM

I will sprint.

DEATH

I am not unkind.

QUINCE AND WHIM
(Together)

Death is a retrieval a renewal a rebirth.

WHIM

I will be at peace.

QUINCE

I will win.

GOOD INTENTIONS
(desperate, angelic)

If I could, and you would let me, I would drench you in a love undeniable. So irrefutable that you would feel it from this world and the next. I would clothe you in it, and there would be no space between tightly woven silken threads to ever doubt your celestial center.

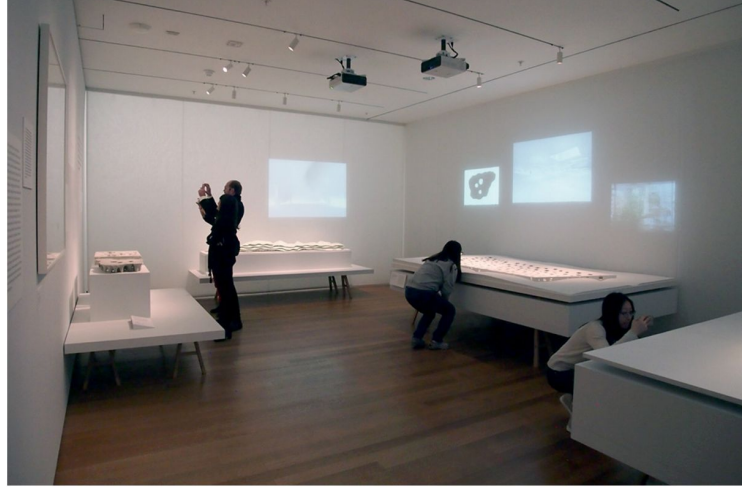
(The stage should be dark. All characters should be silhouetted by *Vir Heroicus*.)

DEATH

I am what you make me.

END OF PLAY

Appendix B
Museum Exhibitions



Figures 1, 2,3 and 4 (clockwise from top left) *A Japanese Constellation: Toyo Ito, SANAA, and Beyond*. March 13-July 4, 2016. Museum of Modern Art, New York. All photographs courtesy of John Hill/World Architects

Figure 5: *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty*. March 14th-August 2nd 2015. Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Detail: *Widows of Culloden* (Fall 2006 Ready-to-Wear)



Figure 6: *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty*. March 14th-August 2nd 2015. Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Detail: *Eshu* (Spring 2000 Ready-to-Wear)

Figure 7: *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty*. March 14th-August 2nd 2015. Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Detail: *Cabinet of*

Curiosities. Image courtesy of Drue Bisley



Figure 8: Alexander McQueen, Dress from *VOSS* (Spring/Summer 2001). Ostrich feathers, red glass medical slides. Image mine.



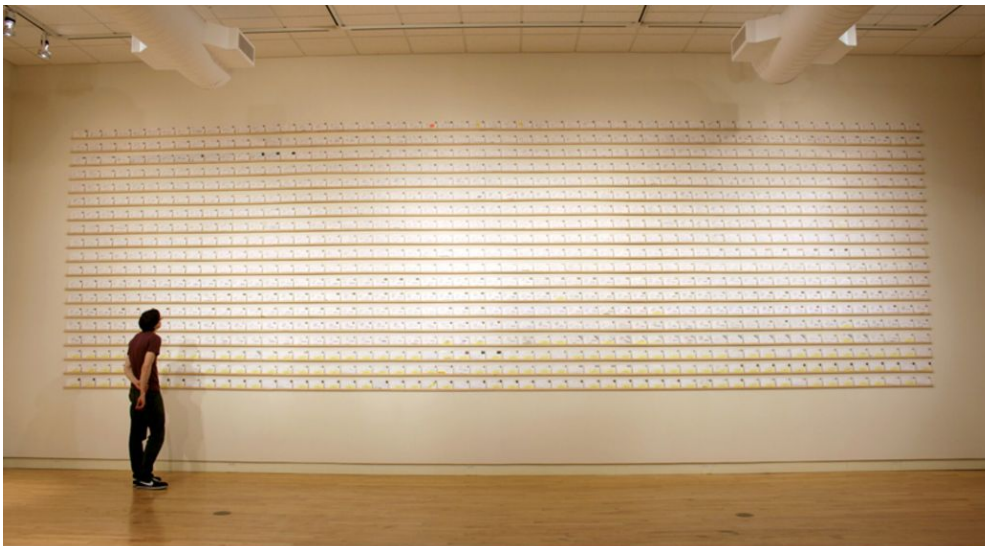
Figures 9, 10 (top, bottom) Both: *The Peacock Room REMix: Darren Waterston and Filthy Lucre*. Ongoing. Sackler Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Images mine.





Figures 11, 12 (top, bottom) Both: John Peña, *Letters to the Ocean*.

2003-Present. Paper, Envelopes, and Stamps. Images sourced from the artist's website: www.johnpena.net



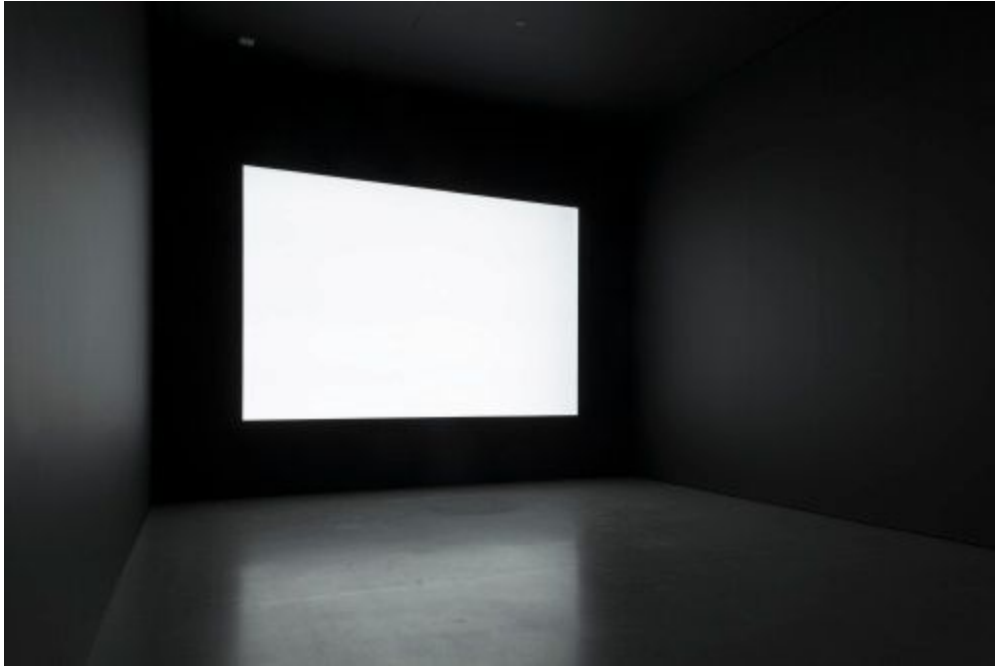


Figure 13: Alfredo Jaar. *Lament of the Images*. 2002. Plexiglass text panels (texts by David Levi Strauss), light wall, and mixed media. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

This was the publicity image for *A Sort of Joy*.



Figure 14: *A Sort of Joy (Thousands of Exhausted Things)*, April 4, 2015, The Museum of Modern Art. Photo: Manuel Molina Martagon.

Exhibition Images



Figure 15: Overview of Thesis Space (Central View)



Figure 16: Overview of Thesis Space (Corner View)

Figure 17: (detail)

Triptych

1960s-2017

392 slides, superglue, tape, plethora of invective,

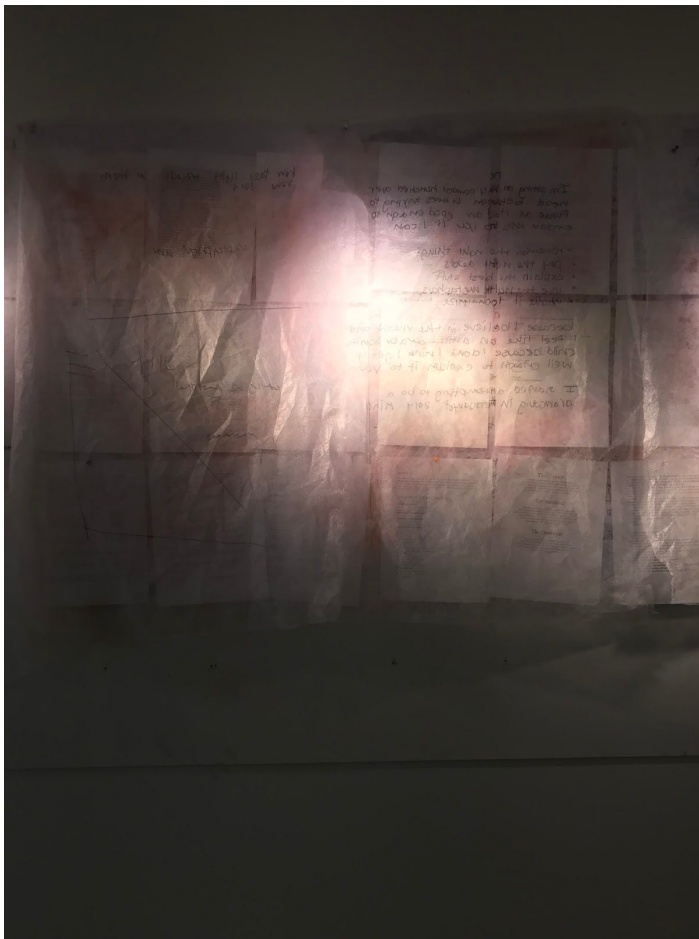


Figure 18:

First Draft of Five Projects:

2014-2017

*Two plays, one lobby display, dance
research, artist's statement, chalk pastels,
fiber, healthy dose of revision*

Figure 19:
First Drafts of Five Projects (side view)



Figure 20:
Notes from my Red Journal
2013-2017
Red thread, steel lath, paper and pen, joy, misery, sarcasm

Figure 21: **I Stole These from My Sister**
Sarah Phillips

2015-2017

Cotton, house paint, petty theft

Paint Screen (Wash Your Damn Brushes)

Sarah Phillips

2013-2016

Metal, wood, scars from feckless painters



Figure 22(left to right):

Undrafted I (Work is what you do for Others)

Sarah Phillips
2016

Scenic paint, house paint, canvas

Undrafted II (Art is what you do for Yourself)

Sarah Phillips
2016

Scenic Paint, house paint, canvas

Dye Drop Studies for *The Tempest*

Sarah Phillips
2016-2017

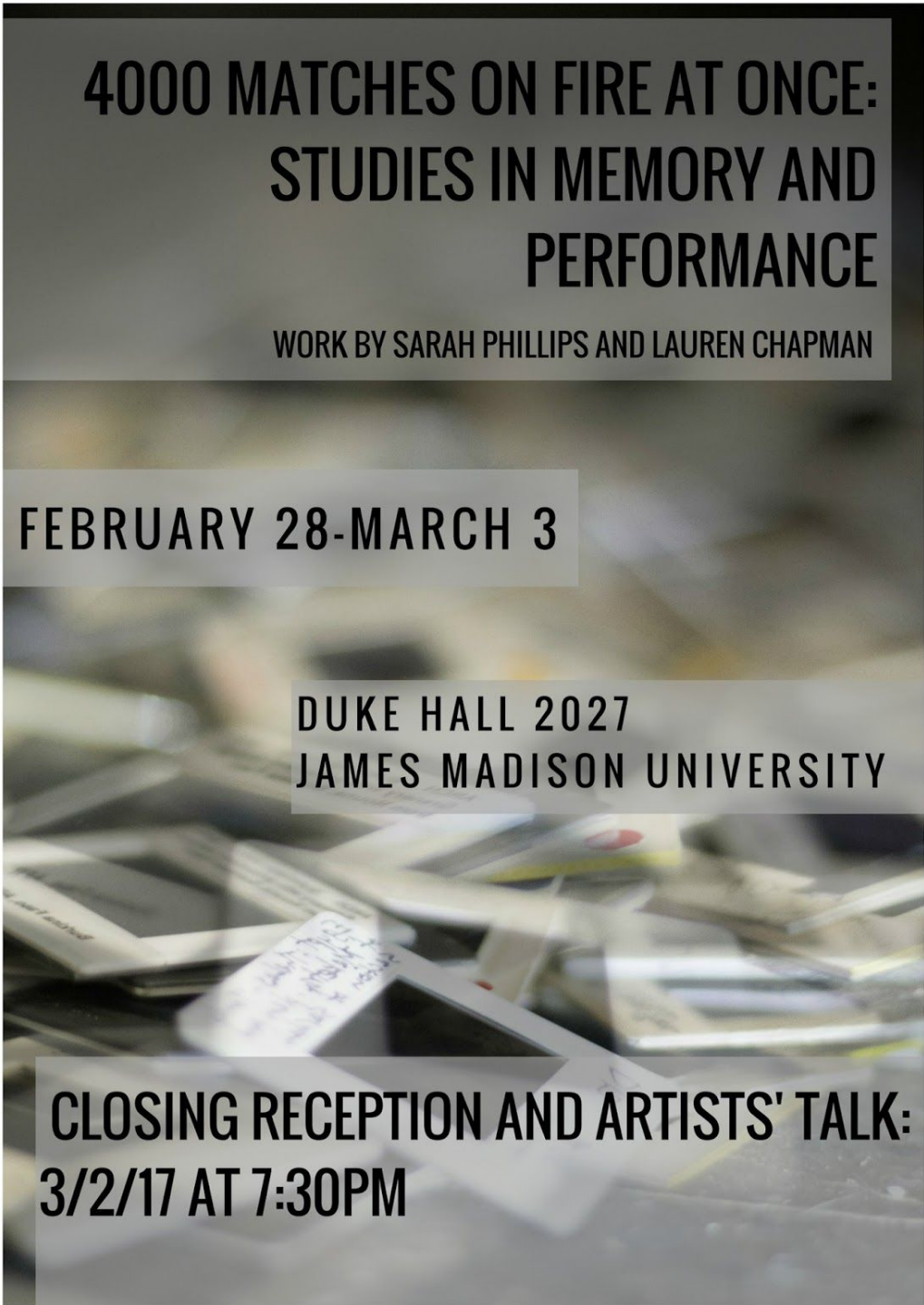


Figure 23:
Thesis
Poster