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A Method to the Madness: My Quest for a New System of Acting

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A Method to the Madness

My Quest for a New System of Acting

Michael Osinski

Graduate Thesis

Master of Fine Arts in Directing

The Theatre School at DePaul University

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Embarking on the Quest

I've always liked art that keeps me guessing. I spent an entire day in the Centre Pompidou. I enjoyed reading *Infinite Jest*. I love Radiohead. And I think Caryl Churchill can do no wrong. As a budding director I knew I wanted to create work that eschewed realism and straightforward narratives, but I never had the right words to describe what it looked like, how to create it, and why I wanted to make it in the first place.

Then I went to grad school.

In my first year I took a course on Directing Theories. The ultimate assignment of the class was to direct a scene from a canonical text in the style of one of the great directors of the past 100 years. I chose to do *Angels in America* in the style of The Wooster Group. I mashed up Kushner's original play with lots of other seemingly disparate texts – scenes from *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Twin Peaks*, excerpts from instructional ballroom dance videos, and even the Super Mario Brothers. I used a live video feed, I staged moments where actors imitated pre-recorded video, and I didn't worry about what it all meant. I borrowed the methods of another artist while working off of my own intuition, and the result was spectacular.

I cast third-year BFA actress Daniela Colucci in the role of Harper. At least that's the role she had at the beginning. By the end of the process, it had morphed into a complicated hybrid of Harper, Blanche DuBois, and Blanche Devereaux from *The Golden Girls*. So it wasn't surprising when Daniela came up to me one day and asked, "Who am I playing here?"

I couldn't answer her.

I didn't think it would help her to know *who* she was playing in any given moment. All that mattered was *what* she was doing, but I didn't know how to convey that to her. I couldn't find the language to help her reconcile her realistic training – Stanislavski, Meisner, Shurtleff – with the abstract world she inhabited in my piece. And I didn't want to just give her blocking or choreography, because in my experience, that never yields a truthful performance. I wanted to create something puzzling and foreign for my audience to figure out, *and* I wanted to give them something human to follow throughout the piece.

This wasn't the last time I would ask Theatre School actors to take on this challenge. In Sophie Treadwell's *Machinal*, I asked them to embody larger-than-life characters without seeming fake or showy. In the first act of Caryl Churchill's *Blue Heart*, I needed actors to become human VCRs – pausing, rewinding, and fast-forwarding through the action of the play at a moment's notice – without any obvious reason why these interruptions took place. And in the second act, they had to communicate with each other as their language devolved into nothing more than consonant sounds.

I'm not the only one asking actors to do seemingly impossible things. Playwrights are getting increasingly bold in their theatrical gestures. Sheila Callaghan's *That Pretty Pretty; or, The Rape Play* asks two actresses to portray figments of a screenwriter's imagination as he writes and revises his screenplay. Sarah Kane's *Cleansed* features rats running across the ground, people falling from the sky, and large poles being forced up someone's rectal cavity.

How do I get actors to embrace work like this and imbue it with the same truth they bring to more realistic theatre? How do I prevent the actors from turning into robots performing meaningless gestures or choreography? How do I work in experimental ways while still giving my actors and my audience something human to hang onto?

I have spent the past two and a half years looking for answers to these questions. I have sought out a new way of working, a new system of acting to embrace the demands of the puzzling work I want to create. I have examined the approaches of other directors and ensembles, and I applied some of these techniques to devise my third-year studio production – *The Hamlet Project*. As a result of this exploration, I can now confidently describe the work I want to make, articulate why I want to make it, and collaborate with actors to create it.

Exploring Other Systems of Acting

The Stanislavski System

I began my exploration where most theatre students begin – Stanislavski. His acting approach served as the basis for my entire first-year acting class with Dexter Bullard. His autobiography *My Life in Art* was one of the first texts I studied in my Directing Theories class. So I came to my own understanding of Stanislavski's system before looking at the ways other artists rejected his approach and created their own systems.

Stanislavski lived and worked at a time when André Antoine was putting fully furnished rooms on stage, when Anton Chekhov was writing stories that more closely mimicked everyday life than any of his predecessors. As an actor, he couldn't figure out how to give a performance to suit these circumstances, to truly live on stage. So he sought out a repeatable method which actors could use to behave truthfully, no matter what play they were acting in.

My initial impression of Stanislavski's system had been closer to the bastardized American understanding of it, also known as "The Method." It conjured up images of actors who need to convey a particular emotion on stage, so they remember a grandparent's death in order to feel sad and produce tears. It encouraged actors to produce results, rather than behave truthfully.

Stanislavski based his initial acting approach around the idea that actors play themselves under different sets of imaginary given circumstances: "Always play yourself onstage but always with different combinations of Tasks, Given Circumstances, which you have nurtured, in the crucible of your own emotion memories." (Stanislavski 210) Actors must ask themselves "the magic if" – i.e. what would I do *if* I were the Prince of Denmark and my father just died under mysterious conditions? When actors cannot capture how their characters would behave under those circumstances, they turn to their Emotion Memory and recall a situation from their past to help them remember what they did and how they acted as an example.

Stanislavski's approach also requires actors to study the text for clues about their characters. They identify their objectives or tasks, and they break the text down into beats of action based on when those objectives change. All of these objectives combine to create one superobjective – the ultimate task they must accomplish over the course of the play.

"Everything that happens in a play, all its individual Tasks, major or minor, all the actor's creative ideas and actions, which are analogous to the role, strive to fulfill the play's Supertask. Their common link with it, and the sway it holds over everything that happens in the play, is so great that even the most trivial detail, if it is irrelevant to the

Supertask, becomes harmful, superfluous, drawing one's attention away from the essential meaning of the work." (Stanislavski 307)

Though I have no desire to create wholly realistic work, I learned a lot from Stanislavski. He was the first to create a structured system for acting, a "how to" approach. He broke down human behavior into units of *action* – not emotion – because action is something actors can play. He studied human behavior enough to see there is a want or need behind every action. And by establishing the idea of a superobjective, he strived for a sense of unity. The entire production works towards one specific goal, and every choice must serve that superobjective. His structured approach and his idea that a production should have one particular aim, these were things I could retain as I learned about the more experimental directors of the 20th century.

Yet his system can't handle all the demands of contemporary theatre. Playwrights no longer tell stories in chronological order. They jump back and forth in time, and they leave important details out. Actors don't have time to invest in the given circumstances, because the circumstances constantly change. Identifying a through-line or superobjective helps with interpretation, but not with performance. Actors need more tools than the ones provided by the Stanislavski system.

The Wooster Group & Task-Based Performance

During the winter quarter of my Directing Theories class, I volunteered to be the "expert" presenter on The Wooster Group. Over December break, I went to the library and took out the DVD of *House/Lights* – the company's take on Gertrude Stein's *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights*. From the moment Kate Valk started speaking in that ridiculously manipulated voice, I was hooked. Watching that performance made me appreciate – and even understand – Stein's play better than any of my script analysis tools. I loved how they played with production elements and technology. And most of all, I liked feeling like Liz LeCompte had given me a puzzle to figure out, instead of a story for me to digest.

Liz LeCompte started out as a visual artist, getting her BS in Fine Arts from Skidmore. She claims to have done a bit of acting in college, but insists it was terrible. When she came to New York, she got involved with Richard Schechner's Performance Group and found herself enjoying work by Robert Wilson and Richard Foreman. She wasn't interested in anything that veered towards naturalism. She believed "we cannot continue to have playwrights write these imitations of real life and put them on a stage, trying to recreate what the TV did 20 years ago and learned to do better." (qtd. in Shank 341)

The Wooster Group's work defies easy description. They stage spectacles of audio-visual technology with lots of things happening on the stage simultaneously. They create kinetic paintings, theatrical collages or mash-ups, "assemblages of juxtaposed elements."

"They combine radical restaging of classic texts, found materials, films and videos, dance and movement works, multi-track scoring, and an architectonic approach to design. Through a process of overlaying, colliding, and sometimes synchronizing systems, the structure of a piece gradually emerges during an extended rehearsal period and the various elements fuse into a cohesive theatrical form." (Shank 327)

The Wooster Group "are not beloved readers. They are browsers who skim the pages of books, randomly collected." (Marranca 2) A lot of their work comes from slamming together seemingly disparate elements and allowing them to co-exist and interweave on stage without trying to figure out what it means. "In the view of LeCompte it is not for the artists to make meaning that can be abstracted from the work itself." (Shank 330)

Often the texts they choose represent the tension between high art and more populist entertainment. In *Routes 1 & 9*, they incorporated scenes from *Our Town*, re-enactments of Pigmeat Markham minstrel routines in full blackface, re-creations of a 1965 teaching film on Thornton Wilder, and pornographic movies. In *House/Lights*, they started with Gertrude Stein's *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights* and a 1964 B-movie called *Olga's House of Shame*, before adding excerpts from Mel Brooks' *Young Frankenstein*, an Esther Williams movie, and a recorded performance by Desi Arnaz.

They also work with the interplay of the live actor and technology:

"In *To You, the Birdie! (Phèdre)*, one actor speaks in an electronically-modified voice on behalf of another actor, the director communicates from her seat in the audience to the actors through their wireless microphones, the actor's body interacts with a video camera to create an image on stage that is part digital, part live." (Marranca 14)

This work asks actors to behave and respond to their environment in a very different way. They don't study a text, break it down into beats, and develop a character from what they interpret. They don't try to represent reality by investing in a set of imaginary circumstances. They simply respond to what's happening in the room, no matter how bizarre that may be. So how do actors find their place in a work that seems to reject all their training? It comes down to tasks.

Stanislavski stressed the importance of identifying a character's "task" (though previous translations referred to this as an "objective"). For him this task meant an action rooted in a psychological need or want. Gertrude wants Hamlet to stop raising a ruckus, so she *calms* him

or *coaxes* him to stop upsetting everyone. She may also try to *excite* him with the news that his friends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have come to visit.

The Wooster Group bases entire performances on performing a different kind of task, one that completely removes any psychological needs or wants. “LeCompte is interested in presenting actual events onstage rather than the fictional ones that could result in a compelling narrative and psychological acting...[because] the only truth is in reproducing what somebody actually did.” LeCompte distracts actors from trying to create an emotional reality by giving them a task which they must really accomplish on stage. They don’t give the illusion of accomplishing it, they don’t fake it, they do it. LeCompte refers to this as “real naturalism.” (Shank 337-38)

The tasks vary in complexity. In the first part of *L.S.D. (...Just the High Points...)*, the actors read randomly selected passages from scattered books on the stage, so the text changed with each performance. In some of their later works, the actors tried to imitate the action projected on an onstage monitor, so the audience witnessed the same action being performed simultaneously on the screen and live in front of them.

LeCompte hasn’t necessarily created a codified system of acting, but she does create a very rigid structure in which she and her actors can work together to “embody and express the multilayered emotive chaos of contemporary urban life.” (Shank 341)

Actress Kate Valk has been with The Wooster Group since 1979 and has grown accustomed to performing tasks. When she played Faustus in *House/Lights*, her main task in performance was to speak lines as they were fed to her via an earpiece:

“Liz sets up a situation that liberates you from these tendencies [to generalize]. You have to approach it like a game or like an athlete. You have to approach the text, the words, the physical score, your relationship with the video, sound, lights and then just respond, just be in the moment with the material. You have to try to be open enough, so that you can surprise yourself.” (qtd. in Quick 217)

This made perfect sense. Who doesn’t get satisfaction from playing a game? I wish I’d had this language when Daniela asked me for help on my *Angels in America* piece. But I wondered how LeCompte got actors to play the game without worrying about *why* they were playing it. Maybe there was a reason why she worked with the same actors over and over again.

One of these actors is original Wooster Group member and Academy Award-nominated actor Willem Dafoe. Dafoe finds the complexity of physical and vocal scores at play in a Wooster Group piece “liberating.” When he loosely portrayed John Proctor in *L.S.D. (...Just the High Points...)*, which mashed up Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible* with recordings of interviews with

Timothy Leary, he never had to interpret a role. He merely had to “[re-enact] decisions based on the evolution of the...personae made in the construction of the piece”:

“I never think about John Proctor. I do think about what the effect of a certain speech should be, or a certain section should be. I do respond to ‘here, you should relax a little bit more because you should have a lighter touch, he should be a nice guy here. Here, he can be pissed. Here, he’s had it.’ And ‘he’ is me because ‘John Proctor’ means nothing to me. There’s no real pretending, there’s no transformation.”
(qtd. in Auslander 43)

I won’t be working with Willem Dafoe anytime soon, but I can spot the takeaway in his words. I have to find the right language to liberate my actors the same way LeCompte liberated Dafoe. That could mean using metaphors and referring to my actors as the “painters” or “live mixers” of the piece we create. It might even mean appropriating some Stanislavski language. I’m still asking actors to perform an action, just like they learned from their training, but in this case, that action masquerades as a chore or a challenge. Most of all I have to get them to see how fun it is to let go of the need to convey one singular meaning. Like Liz LeCompte, “I want as many interpretations as possible to coexist in the same time and same space.” (Savran 53)

Robert Wilson & The Lack of a System

The next director to pique my interest in Directing Theories was Robert Wilson. Until that point, my only exposure to Wilson had been through a friendly anecdote. When I first moved to Chicago, a friend told me a story about how director Jonathan Berry asked one of his actors to perform an action with such care and deliberation that even Robert Wilson would think it was too slow. Then I watched the documentary *Absolute Wilson* and saw clips from *Einstein on the Beach*. His work reminded me more of church than of theatre. I found his work sacred, captivating, full of indelible moments and images.

Wilson sought to create theatre that communicates with its audience using means other than language. As a young man, Wilson worked with children suffering from autism and other mental and physical handicaps. He saved a 12-year-old African-American deaf-mute boy named Raymond Andrews from arrest, when he noticed the boy was emitting strange indecipherable sounds. He later adopted Andrews and tried to educate him. “He began to make drawings to point out various things to me that I wouldn’t notice and that he would be more sensitive to because of his being deaf. Then I realized that he thought, not in words, but in visual signs.” (qtd. in Holmberg 3) Wilson later put Andrews in some of his works and used some of his drawings as the basis for *Deafman Glance*.

Wilson pays attention to “visual composition” and “movement and sound for their structural values.” (Shank 125) Like LeCompte he steers clear of explicit psychological motives and linear narratives. “Wilson translates the drama of the soul into visual metaphors; spatial relationships and movements in Wilson reveal psychological secrets.” (Holmberg 28) He spends a lot of time using light to sculpt the space, and he tries to show his actors how to move inside and around that light. His work has also explored the ideas of altered perceptions, reduced consciousness, and extreme slow motion. As a result, performances of Wilson’s work have lasted anywhere from four hours to one week long.

Wilson demands considerable endurance and precision from his actors, but he has no interest in creating a system for them. He just knows that the current system doesn’t work:

“The way actors are trained here is wrong. All they think about is interpreting a text. They worry about how to speak words and know nothing about their bodies. You see that by the way they walk. They don’t understand the weight of a gesture in space. A good actor can command an audience by moving one finger.” (qtd. in Holmberg 49)

The closest that Wilson comes to offering a system is through choreography. “Since Wilson’s movement patterns are so complex and precise, he breaks them down into numbered sequences to help actors learn them – the way one learns a tap dance routine.” (Holmberg 138)

Many actors have horror stories about auditioning for Wilson and learning this choreography. Thomas Derrah, from *the CIVILwarS* at American Repertory Theatre, describes the trauma:

“One by one the actors staggered out. We quizzed them on what he had asked them to do. The first said ‘I had to walk across the room in a straight line on a count of 10, sit down on a count of 21, put my hand to my forehead on a count of 13.’ The second said ‘I had to walk across the room in a straight line on a count of 26, sit down on a count of 42, put my hand to my forehead on a count of 18.’ By the time that tenth actor stumbled out, we were petrified.” (qtd. in Holmberg 137)

Once actors have learned the choreography, though, they have the freedom to invest that choreography with whatever life or psychological reality they want, because Wilson won’t discuss it. “The visual effect comes first, but, in the context of a play, psychological implications follow. ‘Get the effect first,’ says Wilson, ‘a million causes can be found later.’” (Holmberg 147) Wilson prefers to separate the movement from the text, because he thinks spatially first.

Of course actors differ in how they feel about this method of working. Sheryl Sutton, an actress in Wilson’s *Einstein on the Beach*, felt like “[it] was a process of personal growth,” and that she was “working as much on the self as on the work.” (qtd. in Holmberg 4) Marianne Hoppe, who acted in Wilson’s *King Lear*, chastised Wilson for focusing more on light than on acting and for

staging the play as if “Shakespeare [had written] the part of Lear to be recited by an autistic child.” (qtd. in Holmberg 138) Stephanie Roth offered a compromise, saying “it was difficult to work with Wilson until [she] stopped thinking about it as theatre and started thinking about it as a dance.” (Holmberg 138)

At first I thought there was no takeaway here. Wilson works more like a dictator than a collaborator. There’s not much wiggle room for actors, and there’s no real acting “system” to adopt or adapt. I didn’t learn so much about working with actors as I did about embracing my role as a director in this kind of work. It is my job to pay attention to the actors’ movement and to the images created by bodies and objects in space. I can encourage actors to communicate as much with their bodies and physical gestures as with their words. And if I can’t find a way to get at it organically, it’s not wrong for me to impose something specific and choreographic on my actors. If I’m trying to create the kind of indelible images Wilson creates, the kind that appeal more to our subconscious than to our intellect, there might not be a system – just a structure. Sometimes it’s just about telling an actor when and where to move.

Anne Bogart & Viewpoints

I couldn’t apply what I had learned from studying LeCompte and Wilson right away. Most of the work I did towards the end of my first year of school was based in realism. I knew I wanted to find a less intellectual way of working, something that could help me awaken the physical life of my actors. I had heard a lot of good things about Viewpoints, but I never knew exactly what it was. Fortunately during the summer after that school year, two members of Anne Bogart’s SITI Company came to Links Hall to offer a two-week intensive in Suzuki and Viewpoints work. Taking that intensive has proved to be one of the most valuable investments I’ve made.

Over the past twenty years, Anne Bogart and SITI Company have worked extensively in Saratoga Springs and New York City, devising their own work and staging work in conjunction with resident playwright Charles L. Mee. Bogart has gained a reputation for staging “innovative, physically based work,” often riffing on artist biographies and classics, and she has garnered much praise for it:

“In a culture where the best acting is done from the neck up, Anne’s work is an obvious antidote. In a theatre where we’ve wrung every drop from Naturalism, Anne’s work takes us into new territory...It’s rife with visual composition. It’s dance done by actors in the service of dramaturgy.” (Jory xv)

Bogart has consciously sought out a different way of working, believing the Stanislavski-based approach (and especially its bastardized incarnation, The Method) can only do so much:

“The inherited problems and assumptions caused by the Americanization of the Stanislavski system are unmistakably evident in rehearsal when you hear an actor say: ‘If I feel it, the audience will feel it,’ or ‘I do it when I feel it.’ When a rehearsal boils down to the process of manufacturing and then hanging desperately onto emotion, genuine human interaction is sacrificed. Emotion induced by recollection of past experience can quickly turn acting into a solipsistic exercise.” (Bogart 15)

Bogart turned to the world of dance. Long-time collaborator Tina Landau recalls Bogart saying that “the work she did was ‘stolen’ from a myriad of sources, most prominently...from a dance teacher at New York University named Mary Overlie.” She also took “the notions of composing for the theatre from a woman named Aileen Passloff, who taught...at Bard College.” (Landau 16) Over time she and Landau developed and codified the system to make it more applicable to actors and theatre directors, and their version of Viewpoints and Composition was born.

Bogart describes Viewpoints as “a philosophy translated into a technique for (1) training performers; (2) building ensemble; and (3) creating movement for the stage.” (Bogart 7) In its simplest form, it breaks down movement into the basic components of Space and Time. These components then become “tools and ladders,” “[providing] a structure for the artist so she can forget about structure.” (Landau 17)

Under the heading of Space, there are five Viewpoints:

- Shape – the outline a body makes in space; curves, lines, or both; static or moving
- Gesture – movement using parts of the body to perform a task (Behavioral) or express an inner state (Expressive); “shape with a beginning, middle, and end” (Bogart 9)
- Architecture – the surrounding environment and how the body interacts with it; Bogart divides it into Solid Mass, Texture, Light, Color, and Sound
- Spatial Relationship – the distance between two things in a given space
- Topography (Floor Pattern) – the pattern made by a person or object moving through space; for example, the path left behind if someone walked through sand

Under the heading of Time, there are four Viewpoints:

- Tempo – how fast or slow something happens
- Duration – how long something continues happening before it changes
- Kinesthetic Response – “a spontaneous reaction to motion which occurs outside you” (Bogart 8)
- Repetition – repeating a movement, shape, gesture, word, or phrase

Viewpoints makes actors more aware of their movement, so they “become the individual and collective choreographers of the physical action” of the work. It gives directors knobs to turn

and sliders to adjust, as if they were DJs live-mixing a performance. It gives everyone in the room a common language, “a shorthand for communication.” (Landau 25)

During the summer SITI Company intensive, I learned how Viewpoints could be used to train actors. I myself participated as an actor. It drew my attention to the effect my physical presence had on fellow actors and on the audience. By scattering ourselves throughout the room, and then increasing and decreasing the distance between us, we learned that a more extreme spatial relationship creates more intrigue than the safe conversational distance we usually maintain. By moving around the room at different tempos and assigning number values to each tempo – all without any verbal communication between us – we enhanced our physical listening skills and developed into an ensemble. And by making shapes with the architecture of the room, we discovered how to make the space come alive and not ignore its existence.

I immediately saw how this newfound knowledge could work in the rehearsal room. I could make my blocking tell a better story and define character relationships by paying attention to spatial relationship. I could help my actors define their characters by having them establish characteristic gestures or floor patterns. And if I’m working with actors who have trained in Viewpoints, I could ask them to “play with architecture” to come up with solutions, rather than engaging them in a discussion that would eat up valuable rehearsal time.

Actress Ellen Lauren, a long-time member of SITI Company, believes Viewpoints opens up a playfulness in adult actors that has been buried for far too long. She has watched new cast members walk into the first rehearsal, initially wishing they could spend a few days around a table taking notes, then embracing the idea of being on their feet from the very first day.

“In the best of rehearsals, the body’s priority over the text allows a truer emotional response to surface. One is simply too busy to ‘act.’ When the body informs the psychology, the language is startlingly alive. The actor is available to a much greater range of musicality, and breathing becomes stronger, quicker.” (Lauren 64)

Bogart claims Viewpoints can generate the same truthful repeatable performance as the Stanislavski system, saying “[it’s] about finding a physical structure that supports a renewal every time, even though it’s the same.” Yet she shies away from calling it a method:

“I think people are looking for a method. And what I am doing is not a method. The Viewpoints work is fantastic training, and it makes speaking in rehearsal easier...[but] the idea that the Viewpoints is a technique for directing...that technique does not exist.” (Loewith 13-14)

I quickly embraced Viewpoints as a method for training, rehearsing, and devising, though I’ve altered it to suit the situation. When I directed Andrew Bovell’s *When the Rain Stops Falling*, I

used it to help my actors develop characters' backstories, understand the complex family history in the play, and bond as an ensemble. We never put the Viewpoints work in the show explicitly, but it gave the actors a physical history to draw from. In *Machinal*, the Viewpoints work generated physical gestures which the actors incorporated directly into the performance.

Most of all I've appreciated that Viewpoints gets actors and directors out of their heads. They use their bodies and instincts – not their intellects or emotion memories – to solve problems and tell stories. It's about being physically present, responding to real stimuli, and using physicality – not just psychology – to communicate with other actors and audience members.

Dexter Bullard & Plasticene

In the winter of my second year of grad school, I encountered another reluctant method-maker. I took Directing II/Acting Laboratory with Dexter Bullard. The class gives second-year undergraduate actors and second-year graduate directors the opportunity to try out less traditional approaches to theatre-making. When Bullard teaches the class, he introduces the basic concepts and techniques of his now-defunct Chicago company Plasticene.

Bullard's influences start with Artaud and Copeau, but they go well beyond that. During the 1980's he took advantage of the international theatre festivals that came to Chicago and saw work by groups like Canada's Carbone 14, Poland's Akademia Ruchu, and director Robert Lepage. He studied under Lin Hixson, the director of Goat Island, a small ensemble in Chicago that created abstract performance with limited scenic means and long rehearsal processes. And he made friends with rock musicians: "I was listening to alternative and industrial music. I'd be hanging around people who were in rock bands, and I thought, what's the theatrical equivalent of that?"

So he rounded up actors who were "physically good." He already had some background in ballet, tai chi, and yoga, but he expanded his knowledge by studying corporal mime and contact improvisation. He said, "the idea was that we would train ourselves as actors to create this kind of work, and by creating this work, it would create a different kind of actor." And Plasticene was born.

Bullard has struggled to accurately describe and define Plasticene's work:

"When I say it's 'physical theatre,' that's where I get into trouble, because people think it should be commedia, clown, circus, or LeCoq...and Plasticene wasn't funny. So I usually tell people, in the simplest way, it was just staged dreams or staged nightmares."

The creators of Plasticene never started with a script. Even their finished pieces contained no words. They started with scenic elements and found the play hidden inside of them. They

studied the ballistics of the objects at hand, so they could use them every way imaginable. In their first piece *doorslam*, they discovered the many ways four actors could go into and out of three doors. In *Head Poison*, they built a lot of new muscle by juggling – mostly figuratively – several insanely heavy steel tables. The finished productions looked like a hybrid of a rock concert, a mime routine, and modern dance, but with carefully selected props and a surprising amount of storytelling. It’s like watching curious human beings discover what their bodies can do and how the world around them works, but with some intense musical underscoring and killer lighting. (See Appendix G for links to some video clips of Plasticene’s work.)

Bullard had spent some time working with Second City, so he was used to taking improvisations and fitting them into a performance structure. But he didn’t just steal from Second City. He also sought to mimic the track sequencing of record albums. “Because really we’re creating tracks of action that get put into order, but aren’t necessarily in an Aristotelian order.”

Plasticene shows didn’t tell stories with a traditional Aristotelian structure, though Bullard insists “the forces of narrative were there”:

“We wanted the audience to be able to employ storytelling, even though we weren’t going to be friendly with them and say ‘this is what it means.’ We weren’t going to do that. Without language, that was easy, because the audience had to make assumptions. Or if not assumptions, then associations. So I would call it ‘narrative force.’”

Bullard eschews the term “through-line” for the more physically oriented “pathway.” “The pathway became more important than the through-line. Because if we wanted to do something more visceral and more physical, the body would have to be more at risk than with what’s in a Neil Simon play.” Much like Robert Wilson, he focused on setting up the physical structure of the piece and allowed the actors to supply the rest. He said, “I know the actors in Plasticene definitely used imagery from stories. Whether that was the same story for everyone, whether it all cohered, whether it was pastiche or whatever, they felt like, in their pathway, there was a story through the piece.”

Over time Bullard and his co-creators began teaching workshops on Plasticene’s techniques and came to an agreement on the language they would use. They broke down their work into its most basic elements. They even created a handout to supplement their training (Appendix G). Yet Bullard is reticent to consider it a system like Viewpoints:

“I feel like the Viewpoints really work well for directors, and they apply to choreographic ideas. And actors can train in it, but they can’t really own it. The great thing about Meisner or Stanislavski is the actor actually owns his or her process. Plasticene was trying to be a much more actor-based thing. What can *you* do with *your* body now?”

Over a ten-week quarter, Bullard led the Acting Laboratory class in some of his Plasticene exercises. The preliminary work focused on creating a heightened physical awareness. As an ensemble, the actors composed intertwining phrases of movement. After they had built a phrase, Bullard asked them to rewind these phrases, repeat these phrases, and learn other actors' phrases, all without talking about how to accomplish this. It forced them to be more aware of their own pathways, as well as the pathways of their scene partners (which is a lesson they could apply to realistic text-based work as well).

Bullard introduced the Plastic Stage, his framework for physical improvisation. He set up an empty playing space with clear boundaries, as well as two sidelines for the actors. With his prompting, the actors entered the space and played together. Sometimes he would call for three people to be in the space, sometimes eight, sometimes one. Actors could enter or leave the space when they chose, but there could only be three actors or eight actors or one actor in the space at any given time. After the exercise concluded, the actors talked about what they remembered, and they named the moments or essences they liked. The Plastic Stage helped them create original material and develop a playlist of action.

Then Bullard switched to object work, or what he called ballistics. The actors played with objects as if they were children, discovering all the ways they could use a particular object. They might turn a piece of posterboard into a skateboard sliding across the floor or a musical instrument. Or they could take a standard folding chair and challenge themselves to balance it on one hand or to unfold it and set it up in one quick clean movement. This kind of play got the actors to see everyday items as more than just props. They could be raw material for a devised work, or they could simply have greater significance on stage in an Ibsen or Chekhov play.

I used these methods to create a piece about bullying. I started with a piece of "text" – a Thom Yorke song called "The Eraser" – which became the framework for the piece. We would create a live-action music video for the song. I introduced a few objects into the space – water bottles, T-shirts, and towels – and let the actors play with them. Within minutes the actors had discovered many ways to use the bottles as bullying devices – whacking them against their hands like police batons, squirting out jets of water at their victims, and crumpling them up to create a horrible ear-irritating sound. All we had to do after that was spend some time in the Plastic Stage, create a playlist, and adjust our material to fit with the music. It was surprisingly quick and easy. It made me feel like I could succeed at getting actors to devise theatre with me.

The Plasticene approach blended elements of everything I had learned from the previous artists. Like The Wooster Group's methods, it gave actors tasks to accomplish. Like Robert Wilson's particular way of working, it established a choreographic pathway. Like Anne Bogart's Viewpoints, it stemmed from targeted physical improvisation. And like all these artists, it used movement and physicality – not text – as the primary means of communication. But the

biggest takeaway was that actors generate the best material when they have a safe structured environment in which they can play. Maybe the only good systems of acting are ones that get actors to revert to their childhood, where they are making discoveries every second.

Bullard was openly skeptical of my quest. He doesn't believe there is *one* system to train actors to create the kind of theatre being made by experimental artists and devisers today. True success comes from an ensemble of artists working together over time and developing a language and culture of their own. There is no direct opposite of the Aristotelian standard, so why should there be a standard system to accommodate it? There is no singular definition of what "works," because what "works" differs with each piece and each artist and often depends solely on intuition. "Again and again, companies report that they 'just knew' when an image was appropriate, or when they had hit upon an idea, movement, phrase or sequence that 'felt right.'" (Heddon and Milling 9-10)

In the end Bullard suggests "maybe the only acting technique that could be for the next generation is that which is being minted by different groups working in different ways." When a group of actors and a director gather together to create something, they develop their own language and their own way of working, and it doesn't matter if other people can't understand that language. It only matters that the ensemble members understand each other.

I could see Bullard's point. I was beginning to come to the same conclusion myself. Yet I wasn't satisfied. I still wanted to keep digging. I needed to take some of my newfound knowledge and apply it to the practical task of creating and rehearsing a piece of theatre.

Putting Research into Action: The Hamlet Project

Reading about other directors' methods was enlightening, but I knew I would learn a whole lot more by putting these methods into practice. If I wanted to craft or discover a new "method" of acting, I had to try things out for myself. And that's exactly what I did in the fall quarter of my third year. I directed an ensemble-devised piece called *The Hamlet Project*, where I used a lot of methods I had only read about or dabbled in, and I invented a few methods of my own. Because my advisor Bonnie Metzgar asked me to e-mail her daily reflections and observations throughout rehearsals, I had a record of what we did at every stage of the process. Once I had closed the show, I compiled all these reflections and created a more organized documentation of how we put the show together. By doing so, I hoped to get a better sense of how to (and how not to) work with actors to create the kind of theatre I want to make.

The Goals

I created *The Hamlet Project* because I wanted to make another Directing Theories piece. Working in the style of The Wooster Group during my first year freed me from a lot of self-imposed restrictions, and I knew I could get more out of it on a second attempt.

I also wanted a chance to make the process more collaborative. When I made my Wooster Group-inspired *Angels in America*, I contributed everything. I wrote the script, I brought in the video and sound effects, I told the actors what to do and where to go. While I enjoyed having that kind of artistic control and making decisions based solely on intuition and hunches, I could see the danger in that. I wanted my cast to generate material and become "devisers," so they could take greater ownership of the work. Then maybe the end product wouldn't end up looking like choreography.

Several acting students at The Theatre School had developed a strong and well-publicized aversion to devised work, so I asked them for feedback. Some had a hard time investing in the subject matter of the piece, others craved more structure in the development and rehearsal process, and one or two felt like they got dumped into a devised show because they were "casting leftovers." I was determined to prevent any of my cast members from having a similar devising experience.

I challenged myself to accomplish five major things:

- 1) Create a work based on Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and other seemingly unrelated texts.
- 2) Incorporate elements of The Wooster Group's rehearsal process and performance style.
- 3) Work off of intuition and hunches – not logic.
- 4) Collaborate with a group of actors as co-authors of the work.

5) Make sure the actors don't hate working on it.

The Initial Artistic Impulses

My initial impulse to mash up *Hamlet* with rock videos came from the Enneagram: “a geometric figure that maps out the nine fundamental personality types of human nature and their complex interrelationships.” It has roots in “many different spiritual and religious traditions,” yet it “steps aside from all doctrinal differences” and strives to help people achieve true self-knowledge. (Riso & Hudson 9) I identify as Type Four – The Individualist. Fours are “the romantic, introspective type,” “self-revealing, emotionally honest, and personal, but...[also] moody and self-conscious.” (Riso & Hudson 11) Sounds like the Prince of Denmark to me.

“Fours typically have problems with a negative self-image and chronically low self-esteem. They attempt to compensate for this by cultivating a Fantasy Self – an idealized self-image that is built up primarily in their imaginations.” (Riso & Hudson 181) If Hamlet were truly a Four, maybe he'd try to escape from the world by imagining himself as a rock star living inside his own music videos.

My intuition told me I'd find a connection between *Hamlet* and the subject of clinical depression. So when I started searching for another text to mash up with Shakespeare, I immediately went to the online blog *Hyperbole and a Half*. Created by Allie Brosh, the blog presents a thirty-something girl's observations on childhood, dogs, and random everyday stuff through crudely drawn cartoons. In 2011 Brosh's blog went uncharacteristically silent, because she began to suffer from depression. When she returned, she used her blog to chronicle her struggle, and she did so with insightful humor and honesty. I wanted to see how we could use this blog as part of our piece.

Once I had settled on these as jumping-off points for the devising process, I made a few decisions. I limited myself to eight characters from the play – Hamlet, Ophelia, Claudius, Gertrude, Polonius, Laertes, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern. I removed certain plot elements from consideration – the ghost, the players, and the duel. I changed the way in which Hamlet would die at the end. And I chose the music videos for the piece, as well as the corresponding scene or moment from the play where we could use these videos. We didn't have a script going into rehearsals, but we had these few guideposts. I would task my ensemble with filling in the blanks to get from one post to the next.

Bonnie worried I might overwhelm my cast by giving them all this information. These ideas had swum around in my head for months, but they would be brand new to the actors. It's daunting enough to ask students to tackle one of the greatest works of the Western theatrical canon.

Asking them to add an experimental layer on top of it could lead to a meltdown. So I planned our first meeting and our first week of rehearsals very carefully.

The First Meeting

Starting With Why

I met with my cast in a school seminar room two weeks before rehearsals started. I wanted to give them some time to digest what we would be attempting and, most importantly, why we were attempting it. I think actors get wary of experimental work, because they question its purpose. Often it's just some crazy director trying to make a scene for selfish reasons. I wanted to prevent this possibility from even entering their minds.

I didn't go into great detail about the various texts we'd be mashing together yet. I mentioned how much I love the play and how I had always seen Hamlet as a bit of an emo kid. I also shared with them some of my own personal struggles with depression. I wanted to leave enough open so that they could find their own "way in."

Then I gave them my rallying cry, the 30-second version of why I do theatre. I believe theatre has the ability to activate people's minds, rather than placate them, so they can better solve the problems and challenges the world presents to them. That's why I like putting puzzles on stage and creating work that causes the audience to sit forward. I don't get anything out of pure realism. I don't believe a straightforward linear narrative mimics everyday life as closely as people think it does, so why should we continue to perpetuate that model? By taking a known text like *Hamlet* and smashing it together with elements of contemporary pop culture, we give our audience an entertaining puzzle to decipher, and we make them look at something they thought they knew in a completely different light.

The cast had seen other shows I directed at school, so they had some idea of what they were in for. Jason von Rohn had worked with me on my Directing Theories piece, and Sam Haines was in my final piece for Dexter Bullard's Directing II/Acting Lab, so those actors had more specific expectations of how we'd work. But none of them had ever heard me speak about *why* I wanted to work this way. When I shared my frustration with the current theatergoing model – where we sit in a cushy chair, watch a predictable story unfold, and shut our brains off – and I shared my desire to change all that, I filled in that missing piece. And it definitely struck a chord with some of the cast.

I think the biggest impact came from sharing my own struggles with depression. Though I never demanded that any of the actors share their personal experience with depression or mental illness, some of them volunteered this information later in the process. I don't think they

would have felt comfortable doing that if I hadn't done it first. By starting with "why" and sharing my own personal investment, I created a safe environment for the cast to make a personal investment as well.

Abandoning Meaning; or, The Robert Wilson Exercise

I created the "Robert Wilson exercise" to give the cast a better idea of how we might work. I asked Megan Henricks and Pauline Gilfillan to join me in the hallway, while the rest of the actors stayed in the room. I gave the actresses a few very specific and technical prompts:

- Pauline sat in a chair, and Megan stood about 12 feet away from her.
- Megan walked over to Pauline on a 10 count.
- As soon as Megan reached Pauline, Pauline stood up out of her chair on a 5 count.
- Then Megan and Pauline high-fived on a 1 count and held hands for a 7 count.
- After that count of 7, the actresses broke contact and turned away from each other.

Once Megan and Pauline had practiced the exercise once, I asked the rest of the cast to come watch the performance and take note of what they saw. At first they described the basic blocking, but then, without any prompting on my part, they all began to concoct stories. Some thought Megan was threatening Pauline, one person thought the two girls were in a lesbian relationship and having a fight. So when I asked Megan and Pauline to share my directions with the cast, they were all amazed.

I found an effective way to illustrate to student actors the idea that "meaning" in a work of art is both elusive and subjective. As human beings, we will assign meaning or create stories to explain everything we see, but that doesn't mean only one correct meaning or story exists. I hoped this would relieve the pressure on my ensemble to create an intentionally meaningful work. We didn't have to worry about what it all "means." We could try a lot of different things out and not censor ourselves. When we go to an art museum and look at a Kandinsky painting, we don't identify a single representation or meaning for the painting. We allow there to be a multitude of meanings at once. So why can't we do that in theatre too?

Defining the Physical Action

I showed them video excerpts of work by Wilson and The Wooster Group, so they could have something visual to recall throughout the devising process. (See Appendix A.) In Wilson's *Sonnets*, we saw how Wilson's actors conveyed clear characterization solely through movement and visual elements, yet we were still free to make our own interpretations as spectators. In *To You, the Birdie*, we noticed how actors responded to kooky disjointed sounds, as if their actions were triggered by something else on stage in a non-naturalistic way. Then we watched part of

The Wooster Group's *Hamlet*, where the actors tried to mimic video, and we watched clips from *House/Lights*, where Kate Valk recited lines being fed to her via an earpiece. This allowed me to introduce the concept of performing a task.

When Elizabeth LeCompte gives her actors tasks to accomplish, she gets them to *really* perform an action, not just *represent* an action. The actors don't worry about what the tasks mean, they perform the tasks and let the audience discern meaning from it. Coming up with these tasks would be one way for us to create action, stage the piece, and fill in the blanks between the guideposts I established.

The other way for us to generate material would be through Viewpoints. I didn't spend as much time explaining this, because everyone in the cast had some exposure to Viewpoints, and I planned to spend part of our first rehearsal reviewing the basic ideas. At the time I didn't exactly know how we'd use Viewpoints to generate material, but I had faith it would give us the structure we needed.

Setting the Parameters

I wanted to establish some sort of structure from the very beginning. I thought that devising without any boundaries would overwhelm everyone or lead to total anarchy, so I imposed two rules on our process. The first rule – we would not be allowed to write any of our own material. Any words added to the piece had to be someone else's. If we felt like a scene or section needed some language, we could pull scenes from Shakespeare's text, transcribe YouTube clips, or use copy from a commercial, but we couldn't write a scene ourselves. I believed that setting this restriction would contribute to the mash-up aesthetic of the piece and ultimately lead to more creative results.

The second rule is the same rule I used when creating my *Directing Theories* piece – everyone who is on stage must be performing a task at all times. I told the actors that if they found themselves standing around on stage with nothing to do, that was a problem. We either had to find tasks for them or get them off stage. Sam enjoyed this rule, because it helped distract him from his overactive brain and get him more focused on action.

I thought the work might still seem foreign to my cast, so I offered a metaphor of what it should feel like for audience members to experience the show. Imagine someone surfing the internet with multiple tabs open in his browser. He bounces back and forth between the sites on each tab with no rhyme or reason, yet he finds the character of Hamlet on every single one of them. Hamlet's on each site, even if the sites do not directly concern him. This gave us a framework for the idea of shifting from one world to the next at rapid speed.

To close the meeting, I introduced the most exciting aspect of the piece. I told them we'd be staging live music videos, and I showed them the three videos I had chosen. In the same way The Wooster Group mimics pre-recorded video live in the space, we'd learn the choreography from these videos and perform it while the actual video plays. The actors were so enthusiastic about recreating music videos they couldn't pay attention to anything I said after that.

Setting these parameters early on gave most of the actors a clearer sense of how we'd create the piece, as well as the confidence that we'd be able to do it. Laura Harrison told me, "I had just tried to devise something for my workshop piece...and it was really difficult until I got the structure. So that's why I was relieved when you were like, 'This is going to be a very structured thing.'" Stephanie Barron felt like we were leaving a lot open, but she was okay with that: "It was very vague, which I think was kind of nice. Because then since I didn't know what to expect, I just had to approach things from a bunch of different angles in order to be ready for whatever it was that we were going to be doing, because I had no idea what it was going to be."

Dispatching the Troops

Before I let the cast go, I gave them an important assignment. They had to read the unedited version of the play – at least twice – and answer some very specific questions from the perspective of their characters. The responses would serve as the basis for our work in the first week of rehearsals:

- What are your three favorite lines/passages your character speaks in the play?
- What two actions does your character perform on Hamlet most often during the play?
- What one action that your character performs in the play is your most defining action?
- Which scene reveals the most about your character?
- FOR HAMLET: What one action do you perform most often on EACH of the other characters?

The First Week – “Tabling”

In a more conventional process, the first week means tabling. In this process we didn't have a finished script to table. We didn't have *any* script, other than the unedited Arden edition of *Hamlet*. I worried that spending too much time talking about the play itself would make my actors feel they had to play “accepted” versions of these iconic roles. And I didn't want to take a cerebral approach, where we are all “in our heads” worrying about the minutiae. So our “tabling” consisted of (1) discussing “big picture” ideas introduced by the play (and by me); (2) discovering our personal responses or riffs on the play and its characters; and (3) physicalizing our discoveries through Viewpoints and other work.

Tabling Day 1: Giant Sheets of Easel Paper

Rather than break the play down into smaller units of action, I used some of the tactics I learned from Lisa Portes' spring Directing II class. I asked everyone questions about the whole play and encouraged them to just shout out the first things that came to mind. What is this play *about* (in just one or two words)? What adjectives would you use to describe the world of the play? How does the play appeal to your senses? (i.e. If *Hamlet* were a tangible entity, what would it smell like? What would it sound like?) No answer was incorrect. I jotted down every answer on a large sheet of easel paper, so we could see if there was a pattern to our responses. (See Appendix B.)

I also gave the actors their own sheets of easel paper, so they could write down their responses to the assignment, as well as any other notes or ideas that came up during the rehearsals.

Based on our communal sheets of paper, we believed *Hamlet* is a play about people who maintain a shiny surface to cover up some ugly truth underneath. We also noticed a lot of our images dealt with the idea of surveillance. So on that first day of rehearsal, after having done a brief Viewpoints refresher, we did an open Viewpoints session on the idea of surveillance. I stressed that surveillance was merely a prompt. They shouldn't enact it. They shouldn't plan or make decisions. They should meditate on it for a moment and let their bodies respond to what's happening in the room.

After the open Viewpoints session – and after *every* exercise we did throughout the process – we took stock of what we saw and remembered, whether we participated in the exercise or observed it. Sometimes it was a gesture, sometimes it was a floor pattern, sometimes it was an unexpected emotional connection. We jotted down things we liked, so we could reference these exercises later. I wanted them to feel comfortable giving each other feedback, so they could help reinforce things that worked and own their roles as co-authors of the piece.

Tabling Day 2: Riffing on Shakespeare's Characters

The next day we shifted our focus to the characters. I stole a Composition exercise from *The Viewpoints Book* – Bogart's equivalent of the "hot seat" exercise. (See Appendix F.) I paid strict attention to Bogart's call for "exquisite pressure" – giving the actors limited time to complete the exercise – because I didn't want the actors to think too much about their responses.

I added another element to the exercise. I wanted to clarify the relationships between these characters quickly, so I stole an idea from Katie Mitchell's *The Director's Craft*. In addition to giving the actors Bogart's prompts, I asked the actors how their characters felt about everyone

else in the play. They had to write down three adjectives which their characters would use to describe each of the other characters, and at least one adjective had to be a positive one.

Once the actors had finished, they served their time on the “hot seat,” reading their responses out loud and performing their physical gestures and floor patterns. Then I asked them to stay in the seat and hear what the other characters thought of them. I gave everyone the option of withholding an adjective or two if they wanted. Some actors got especially bold and wrote their adjectives on paper, so they could share their adjectives with the rest of the cast but *not* with the person in the seat. I believe this unconventional approach to tabling helped us discover characters more quickly and viscerally. We were doing all the interpretive work without sitting around a table.

This exercise proved memorable and helpful for the actors. Laura thought it was “the most interesting part of table work”: “People were writing things and being secretive about it, and that was something that I don’t think I would’ve come to having just scripted it. That’s something that usually takes me a long time to come to.” Sam claimed that doing an exercise like this one made him feel “weeks ahead of schedule for the personal work.”

Then I copied something from my *Machinal* rehearsals. Throughout our tabling of *Machinal*, we identified a vivid physical metaphor for each episode. One episode felt like a conveyor belt, another felt like liquid spiraling down a funnel. At the end of that tabling, I gave the cast a composition assignment – to use these metaphors to tell the story of the play in nine distinct episodes. I put the responsibility on the ensemble to do the storytelling, and I got them to start physicalizing the things we had discussed all week. The end result was fantastic. They proved they understood the journey of the play, as well as the forces they exerted on the main character. I wish I had done more composition work throughout that rehearsal process.

So I gave my cast a similar composition assignment with a thirty-minute time limit and a list of specific ingredients. This time I added a thematic element – they had to tell the story of *Hamlet* while exploring the idea of surveillance. They could incorporate some of the material they had discovered earlier into a more structured exercise. (See Appendix C.) It wasn’t quite as successful as it had been on *Machinal*, but it still helped distribute the authorship of the piece. At the end of that rehearsal, Stephanie told me it was the first time she felt completely confident that we could put this whole show together.

We kept up our open Viewpoints sessions, but I got more selective about which groups of characters worked together, so we could continue establishing clear and distinct relationships between them. Often I side-coached these sessions, so I could draw the actors’ attention to the Viewpoints that yielded the greatest results. Topography (or Floor Pattern) helped the actors

discover their characters' gaits and posture. Gesture – both behavioral and expressive – helped them identify their characters' habits and inner desires.

This Viewpoints work was especially helpful for Awate Serequeberhan. He found a BMOC (“Big Man on Campus”) and jock-like energy for the character. This informed his understanding of Laertes as Hamlet’s rival, Ophelia’s protective older brother, and Polonius’ younger clone. Soon he started playing with a guido accent and donning a switchblade comb. He almost discarded these ideas, but during one of our feedback sessions, the cast gave him such positive reinforcement that he had no choice but to keep it.

Tabling Days 3 and 4: Incorporating Disparate “Texts”

By day 3, it was time to add the other ingredients. In order to do that, we talked a lot more about forms and how we could imitate them. Technically we had already begun imitating forms – we were learning and practicing precise choreography from the music videos to incorporate into the piece. We were also identifying the properties of that choreography. What were the properties of the choreography of a Justin Timberlake number, and how do they differ from those of a My Chemical Romance video? Is the movement fluid or jerky? Does it feel like seduction or confrontation? We took this approach and started applying it to other forms.

I asked everyone to look at a few different sites about depression – excluding Wikipedia – and bring in a few facts about depression that surprised them. I also asked them to pay close attention to the way those sites presented information – language, page layout, color choices, photographs and other images. We noticed most sites seemed very clinical and “safe.” Stephanie had learned from her psychology classes that there are legal reasons for this. Creators of these sites must choose their wording carefully, so that patients and families who view these sites can’t sue them later.

We watched a few different antidepressant commercials and made note of the patterns we saw between them. Most of the commercials made a clear distinction between the “before” and “after,” usually through the use of lighting and underscoring. People in the “before” section appeared alone, while in the “after” section, they gathered in groups. And ALL of the commercials displayed bright and cheerful images while the voiceover rattled off a comically long list of side effects. So then I divided them up into two groups to create their own antidepressant commercials using our findings.

We did the same thing with Allie Brosh’s online blog. We talked about her choice of “form” and how her information delivery differs from that of depression websites and antidepressant commercials. We identified the qualities of the cartoon format – bright colors, ridiculous facial expressions, humorous comments. We all agreed that Brosh’s approach and her frank

commentary more accurately and eloquently captured the true feeling of depression and all that it stirs up. Again I divided them into two groups, and this time I asked them to bring an entry from the cartoon blog to life.

When I started the process, I didn't know how we'd use these seemingly disparate texts in the show. I had a hunch they belonged together. By breaking down the specific properties of each text, I made it easier for us to turn them into something performative. And by giving the actors the composition assignments, I gave them the opportunity to create and define the language we would all use to construct the whole piece.

The Script

By the end of that week, we had generated A LOT of material, and I had to figure out a way to merge my fixed ideas with all the new stuff. I made the decision to write the preliminary script myself, incorporating all the things that made the greatest impression on me and the ensemble:

- During the “hot seat” exercise, Megan intuited that Guildenstern believes – in her head – she is the star of her own talk show. This gave me a framework for the whole piece, setting up Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as daytime television personalities in the style of Wendy Williams or of Kathie Lee and Hoda on the Today Show. They served as good PSA-style mouthpieces for the text we pulled from depression websites and articles.
- During open Viewpoints, Rejinal Simon discovered a powerful gesture for Claudius. He charged at Sam (Hamlet) as if he were going to attack him, but when he reached Sam, he embraced him in an amorous yet aggressive way. We couldn't quite describe what we saw in our feedback, but we all felt like Rejinal had captured Claudius' inner conflict. This gave me the idea that Claudius could lip-synch how he felt about Hamlet in moments of suspended time. I even found text from *Hyperbole and a Half* to fit these.
- The work the cast did on the antidepressant commercials and the online blog did a lot of my work for me. I pretty much stole their compositions and inserted them at key moments in the show. I learned from these compositions that Laura (Gertrude) was the right person to provide the antidepressant side effects voiceover, which inspired us to turn the character into a bit of a pill popper. I even took the video game theme music from *Banjo Kazooie* that Sam used in his group's dramatization of the online blog.

Not everything made it into the script, but a lot of the actors' discoveries from tabling made their way into the staging. Sam latched onto the idea of Hamlet as a rock star, drawing some inspiration from the Green Day video we used. Jason found the perfect archetype for Polonius, which led to the development of a number of very idiosyncratic behaviors for his character.

Of course I also had to choose which sections from the original Shakespeare to include in the script. Here I drew from each actor's answers to the initial questions about their favorite lines and sections, and I tried to include excerpts from each of these in the script somewhere. The rest of the text I pulled from YouTube clips of Kathie Lee and Hoda, Cymbalta commercials, Hyperbole and a Half, depression websites, and the compositions the ensemble made during the first week. I stuck to the rule of always using someone else's words, not our own. Though I started referring to the script as a "score" and told the cast we could definitely make edits as we proceeded. (See Appendix D for complete "score.")

The Rehearsals

Since we were working on a Shakespeare play, we started by doing the text work Catherine Weidner and Sigrid Sutter taught in the classical acting class. Though I never planned to make text the primary element of the show, I wanted actors to know what they were saying and communicate effectively. I had text sessions with Sam and Awate, because they were just starting classical acting. I asked the others to use their training and do their own text work.

The rehearsal process involved a lot of trial and error and very little discussion. The only way to truly fill in the blanks and connect all the seemingly disparate texts was to add a physical track to our score. We were writing the "performance text" in rehearsals. We would still use Stanislavski's "what if" question, but rather than restrict ourselves to action verbs and subtle psychology, we proposed physical solutions. What kind of tasks could we accomplish on stage? What floor pattern should a character use to travel from one area to another? What gestures from our table work could we bring back and incorporate? The physical actions they performed had as much significance as the words they spoke.

We spent the bulk of our time choosing and trying out tasks. Some of these tasks involved imitating other things. Pauline and Megan (Rosencrantz and Guildenstern) studied the mannerisms of Kathie Lee Gifford and Hoda Kotb from YouTube clips and used them while performing the text from these clips. Laura mimicked the tone and language of antidepressant commercial voiceovers for our own commercial.

But we didn't limit ourselves to imitation. When we staged Ophelia's mad scene, we needed a task for Claudius, Gertrude, and Laertes to complete while Ophelia was singing and delivering letters. Since Ophelia's arrival definitely disturbed those three people, we thought maybe they should move around the space like pinballs. We physicalized the metaphor. The actors each held one of Ophelia's letters and walked in a straight line until they hit an obstacle – a strip of fabric, a piece of furniture, another actor. Once they hit that obstacle, they would change direction and repeat the process. Each actor also decided on a different tempo for his or her movement. The task didn't necessarily make narrative sense, but that didn't matter.

Sometimes choosing tasks led to us incorporating new texts, as in the “Pill-Popping Gertrude” scene. We felt like we needed something physical *and* textual for Hamlet and Gertrude to do after Hamlet had confronted his mother and knocked the pills out of her hand. Sam, Laura, and I came up with a complicated series of tasks to perform. Laura had to find and pick up all the pills from the ground, and Sam had to stay within one foot of Laura as she did this, but this didn’t feel like enough. Sam suggested that we incorporate the children’s book “I Love You Forever.” Now Laura would recite text from the book – “I’ll love you forever/I’ll love you for always/As long as I’m living/My baby you’ll be” – as she picked up the pills, and Sam would use sign language to tell Laura “I love you, Mom” over and over again.

Finding tasks didn’t always work. Ophelia’s scenes with Hamlet, as well as her cartoon blog confessions, didn’t lend themselves to task-based performance. I still don’t know whether this was because I couldn’t get Stephanie to embrace the method or because we didn’t find the right tasks for her. So we took a more realistic approach. I asked Stephanie to define her action in William Ball terms. I suggested that she deliver the text as if she were speaking to a support group – an honest and straightforward confessional. As a result, it felt like we were trying to represent human behavior in a naturalistic way in these scenes, rather than use a more abstract vocabulary. Ultimately I was okay with this, because I got the most exciting and truthful performance out of Stephanie this way.

As we built the piece, we tried our best not to ask why. If we had a new idea for a particular moment, we didn’t debate whether that idea would work or question what it would mean – we just tried it out. If it didn’t work right away, we put on our problem-solving hats to see if we could make it work. And if it didn’t work, we simply stopped and moved on to something else.

The ensemble cohered so well that it became easy to tell whether something belonged in the piece, even if we couldn’t articulate why. Much like Dexter suggested, we reached a point where we just knew. As director I paid attention to the visual and aural composition of the whole thing, but ultimately if it satisfied us on an intuitive level, we went with it. We made the rehearsal room a place where everyone could offer up, accept, and reject ideas, which made it the most low-stress rehearsal process I’ve ever experienced.

Bonnie only sat in on a first-week rehearsal. She never saw any of our working rehearsals, so she didn’t offer any suggestions for rehearsal or devising methods. She read my regular e-mails, and she sat outside the piece and made big-picture observations. She noticed that Stephanie’s performance seemed a bit incongruous with the rest of the piece. She pointed out pacing and composition issues that I couldn’t see. At the time I didn’t know how to respond to her notes, because we were still building the piece, and we didn’t have a clear sense of what the finished product would be.

We did encounter one significant setback. Megan suffered a concussion, and the faculty replaced her with Ashlyn Lozano as Guildenstern. While the production missed Megan's energy – the talk show segment was her idea, after all – it taught me a valuable lesson about devising. Because of the approach we used to create the piece – figuring out tasks in the room first and supplying the personal investment later – we could bring a new actor into the fold pretty easily. We had created such a well-defined world that Ashlyn only had to learn Megan's "pathway" of tasks. She could negotiate the rest on her own without disturbing the show.

The Technical Rehearsals

We started incorporating sound a week before technical rehearsals began. In true Wooster Group fashion, sound cues often triggered the actors' actions – not another character's lines or behavior – and the cast needed to start practicing this. The trickiest to incorporate was the "channel changing" sound we used to move from one segment of the piece to the next. This sound usually signified a sudden change in character or setting. The more practice the actors had, and the more they associated the sound with a change in physical gesture, the easier they navigated the shifts.

We used lighting and sound to establish several distinct worlds, each with its own set of rules:

- **THE COURT, or THE ASYLUM:** When Gertrude, Claudius, and Polonius were present, we mimicked the sterile lighting and elevator music (all by Beethoven) of a hospital.
- **THE TALK SHOW:** When Rosencrantz and Guildenstern took on their talk show personas, we copied the bright front light and catchy incidental music of a television program.
- **THE CARTOON:** When Ophelia addressed the audience and spoke in text from *Hyperbole and a Half*, we used bright multi-colored lighting and music from the video game *Banjo Kazooie*.
- **THE MUSIC VIDEOS:** Whenever we lived inside a music video, we did our best to replicate the feeling of a rock concert.

We kept tight control over what objects entered the space, and we used scenery, props, and costumes sparingly. I had a feeling that having too much "stuff" would push us over into the land of realism. So we maintained a black/white/gray color palette, keeping Hamlet in black (of course) and the other characters in white. We used modular furniture – silver table, silver chairs, black stool, black cart – as suggestive structures, rather than realistic indicators. I hung strips of white fabric from the grid to create faux walls and set the boundaries of the space. And I laid a pattern on the floor with white gaff tape to break up the blackness of the space, which ended up looking like the design of a computer chip.

The Finished Product

So what did we end up creating? We created a pop culture-infused riff on Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and the modern-day issue of clinical depression by blending verse text with YouTube clips, online blogs, commercials, and music videos. Though I sought to mimic the attention-deficit experience of surfing the web, I think the end product more closely resembled channel surfing on television (because of the channel-changing sound effect and the two large television screens we used for video).

Audiences had radically different interpretations of what was going on. We conducted talkbacks after each performance and asked the audience to share specific information: what images they'll remember, which character they were tracking, which moments kicked them out of the performance. Some felt like the whole piece took place in an asylum, while others thought the whole thing played out inside Hamlet's mind. No one felt overwhelmed by the pace and the amount of "stuff" happening on stage – they all found something they could follow. A surprising number of people got very emotional about the show – we had several audience members in tears at the end.

I noticed that the performance didn't really start to coalesce for our audiences until the first music video, specifically the moment the audience realized Sam/Hamlet was imitating all of Justin Timberlake's moves on the screen. I don't know what it was, but even our older audience members, who may not have recognized or been a fan of the music, started to get sucked in at this point.

I also noticed that Ophelia emerged as the protagonist for some people. I attributed this to the more realistic approach we took with her scenes. Because there was so much crazy task-based activity and Viewpoints-inspired movement going on around her, Ophelia looked like the one who was most in need of help, while all the people around her chose to ignore her.

The Feedback

Since I want to continue devising, and I'm still considering remounting the show, I sat down with several cast members a week or so after the show closed to ask them a few questions.

What would we keep?

The biggest takeaway for me was that devising thrives on structure, and our process had plenty of that. Setting parameters gives everyone a problem to solve, and these problems require more creative solutions. I think putting ourselves inside the structure of the online blog and the antidepressant commercials proved useful as well. By giving the actors a task to accomplish in

the rehearsals, I figured out how to use these texts in the piece itself. Of course we never nailed the choreography of the music videos perfectly, but the attempt to imitate them yielded something that was interesting to watch. We even gave the audience a task – watch these videos and see how our performance synchs up.

Everyone felt the Viewpoints work in the first week was a keeper. Laura remembered “[discovering] something early and unexpected with Gertrude – her isolation – and that came out of the Viewpoints.” The structured exploration enabled her to make a discovery like this faster than usual. Awate offered a particularly glowing testimonial:

“All the Viewpoints physical work we did beforehand was essential in me trusting the process. If we had started trying to get really heady about it, it would’ve cancelled everything out. The physical work was useful in finding a skeleton for who I thought Laertes was.”

I’ve always customized my table work to suit the needs of each show I directed, but using it on this process cemented my belief in its value. In this case our table work generated actual material for the finished piece, not just dramaturgical or emotional insight into the characters. Laura said,

“I’m glad we had the task of creating the expressive and behavioral gestures of the character. Because then later in the process, when I was stuck, I realized I had all these things I created before, and I could go back to that work.”

Even the most focused and efficiently run tabling rehearsals – where a director steers the conversation towards actions or beats or given circumstances – end up too intellectual or heady for me. There’s a danger that the rehearsal process will become all about achieving what was decided on in tabling. Giving the actors specific tasks to accomplish and questions to answer, and then using their responses as inspiration for physical exploration, kept the creativity going and prevented us from asking whether anything made sense or whether we were doing something “correctly.” Pauline agreed with me:

“The lack of traditional table work was really helpful. Sometimes when you sit down and you talk to your partner about what they’re fighting for, you realize you don’t want to hear that. Because then it gets you in your head.”

The greatest success, however, was the task-oriented trial-and-error rehearsal process. I think my actors said it best:

SAM: “If we had been working a scene all day, and I said, ‘I really don’t want to do any more of this,’ that was okay. We’d move on and do something else. The ‘it’s okay’ thing made coming to rehearsal never a bad thing.”

PAULINE: “As myself, I do things and I don’t think about it. When I’m in a show that’s scripted, I’m asking myself, ‘Would I do this?’ And in this process, it was more like, ‘Who cares? Just do it.’ I’m not thinking about what the character would do, I just respond.”

LAURA: “There’s potential in everything. That was freeing for me. We talk about opposites and about character having several things they could do in order to be more human, more real, so relieving the pressure of choosing which action is *right* for the character was great.”

JASON: “This process really gave me the freedom to try making weird noises, try doing weird walks. It gave me the comfort of knowing that I can fail, and that if something doesn’t work, we’ll just toss it out and try something else. It was true freedom within a structured setting.”

What would we change?

Everyone agreed that working with the technical elements sooner would have helped. In a piece where lighting and sound defined which world we inhabited, and where actors had to respond to lighting and sound as if it were another character in the piece, the tech has more significance, and having it earlier leads to more discoveries. Sam didn’t really learn how he could use the hanging strips of white fabric – elements of architecture – until we had them in the space. Then he discovered a key moment where he could walk through them and push them out of his way.

The same could be said for our channel-changing sound cue. It wasn’t until tech rehearsals started that Bonnie had the idea to clip the talk show segments at different spots than we had originally planned. The channel-changing sound was such an established piece of our production’s vocabulary that she wanted us to use it more variedly. She even suggested having the stage manager pick a new spot to clip the segment at each performance, so the actors wouldn’t expect it. The actors would be closer to performing tasks than to performing a script. Sam echoed her idea:

“So many of the tasks...you kind of knew how they were going to go. I think some more spontaneity or unpredictability in the tasks would’ve been good, where we actually had to solve problems during the performance.”

If we were developing the work further, I would try to create the sense of unexpected interruption throughout the entire piece. What if the music that played underneath Polonius' funny walk played for a different duration every time? What if we interrupted the music videos before the number has finished? What if we altered the length of the channel-changing sound, so the actors never know how long it will be before it ends?

What did we learn about an actor's approach to this kind of work?

During my interviews with the actors, I asked them how they rationalized my asking them to discard all their expensive Theatre School training to create experimental work. Surprisingly they didn't feel like they had to forget about it. We still asked Stanislavski's "magic if" question in our rehearsal process. The actors still had to perform activities and respond to what happened in the space in a very Meisner way. They weren't dancers in a choreographed piece. They were just playing themselves under a very strange set of given circumstances.

But a more physical approach definitely helped. Sam said, "there was something about the physical exhaustion of the show. When I wasn't being physically active, I felt really out of it. Maybe that's just something that helped me turn off my brain." He used a lot of Laban techniques in his performance. Laura used Michael Chekhov's psychological gestures from movement class. Finding a physical solution prevented everyone from pre-planning and trying to conjure up something emotional and psychological on the spot.

Jason is someone who excels at this kind of work. He played a jockstrap-clad hybrid of Mr. Lies from *Angels in America* and Bob from *Twin Peaks* in my first-year Wooster piece. He played a suspicious father caught in an endless and seemingly random time loop in my production of Caryl Churchill's *Blue Heart*. And I was prepared to fight to have him in the cast of *The Hamlet Project*. I believe he gives more truthful and entertaining performances in experimental work. He said,

"In this work you don't have time for emotional prep. I think it's more about physicality and voice for me. That one motion I did while I was Polonius would be the trigger for my mind, so I didn't have to think about it. That movement launched me into another character. So the rehearsal process was about discovering what movement serves as the catalyst that gets me into the next moment."

When I studied The Wooster Group in *Directing Theories*, I found that their work felt like "kinetic painting." LeCompte uses the stage as her canvas and the actors as her paint, and she asks her audience to consider her work the same way they'd consider a painting hanging on the wall of a museum. I don't think I ever used the phrase "kinetic painting" during the process, yet Sam made a similar observation about the experience:

“I feel like the show was this thing that got painted throughout the rehearsal process, and once the show was open, it was my job to control my part of it. God, it doesn’t sound like ‘acting’ at all, what this school wants it to be anyway, but it felt like most of the time, my job was ‘do this with your body now, and the rest will happen.’ Sometimes it really is just that task.”

When I first met with the cast, I told them we would make something experimental and non-realistic. We would try to reject through-lines or straightforward narratives. I think we accomplished some of this, but ultimately we told a story with an inciting incident, a rising action, a turning point, and a climax. As Awate put it, “we fell into our own little trap of making meaning out of the meaningless.”

I’ve thought a lot about *how* we could remedy this, but I still struggle to figure out *why* it happened. Sam wondered if it was “out of fear or habit...because it seems like even when we did throw something in there that was completely out of nowhere, a week later it made sense somehow.” I wondered if it was simply because we *tried* to connect the dots and make a through-line. As Pauline said, “Being humans we’re going to find through-lines in anything.”

And that’s okay. If I want to create work that allows for multiple interpretations, I have to accept that some of those interpretations might involve through-lines. The only way *The Hamlet Project* could have failed is if everyone in the audience left with the same interpretation. I know for a fact that that did not happen.

Working on *The Hamlet Project* brought me back to what Dexter Bullard had said, specifically his belief that my quest for a definitive acting system was futile. I incorporated ideas and mixed methods from many sources to put the show together. It all depended on the actor or the scene or even the mood in the rehearsal room. So maybe I needed to let myself off the hook. I should abandon my quest to find *one* system and instead find as many systems as possible.

It also reminded me of something Sam said during rehearsals (and again during our interview):

“During Meisner class I was telling [my teacher] Trudie Kessler, ‘This doesn’t work for me. Going out into the hall and doing something to prep for the Meisner exercise, that doesn’t work for me.’ And she asked, ‘Well, what *would* work for you?’ I said, ‘Sometimes literally just jumping up and down in circles. That’s worked well.’ And she said, ‘Then why does it matter how you do it if you’re doing it?’ And that just made me really stop being hard on myself about it. If the end product is still good to watch, do I really care?”

Defining the Work

I could finally articulate *why* I make theatre, and I had a better sense of *how* to collaborate with actors to make the kind of work I like, but I still couldn't describe *what* that work is. I couldn't use words like "experimental" or "fringe," because those words mean different things to different people. I found it easier to describe what the work is *not* – it's not Aristotelian, it's not realistic – but I wanted to find more positive terms.

For a while I tried using the term "postmodern":

"Postmodern theory has contributed vitally to contemporary writers: notions of reality as construction, rather than the real; the awareness that all texts are battlefields of contradictions and that each work, when examined, implodes; that meaning is constructed not only by the writer, but by the reader as well." (Vogel 94)

That made sense to me. Vogel's denotation encapsulated and articulated everything I enjoy about contemporary work, from the fragmented out-of-sequence narratives of David Foster Wallace's novels to the lack of expository details in Caryl Churchill's plays to the kinetic paintings of The Wooster Group. All of these artists have paid attention to the construction of their work and the inclusion/omission of information. They've required their audiences to put narrative pieces or symbolic elements together, so audiences can determine what they think the work means. Still I wasn't satisfied with the term "postmodern." It sounded too literary.

Hans-Thies Lehmann, author of *Postdramatic Theatre*, agreed with me:

"When the progression of a story with its internal logic no longer forms the center, when composition is no longer experienced as an organizing quality but as an artificially imposed 'manufacture', as a mere sham of a logic of action that only serves clichés..., then theatre is confronted with the question of possibilities beyond drama, not necessarily beyond modernity." (26)

So I read Lehmann's book and decided to try out the term "postdramatic" instead.

Dramatic Theatre

I had read and discussed Aristotle's *Poetics* many times in my educational and professional career, but I thought it would help to refresh myself on the elements of dramatic theatre. In fact Lehmann actually spends the first part of his book doing the same thing.

Dramatic theatre made me think of Aristotle's definition of tragedy. There's the imitation of an action, so we see something we recognize on stage – human behavior. There's also an attempt

to use pity and fear to bring an audience to a point of catharsis. We follow a protagonist through exposition, rising action, turning point, and climax. As Lehmann points out, “as old-fashioned as it may sound, these [elements] are what people expect of an entertaining story in film and theatre.” (34) We lose ourselves in the protagonist’s struggle, we get wrapped up in the suspense, and we enjoy the release when we find out whether the protagonist will succeed. We take comfort in riding this emotional arc.

The action on stage mimics reality, but the action is also fictitious. “[Dramatic theatre] wanted to construct a *fictive cosmos* and let all the stage represent – be – a world...abstracted but intended for the imagination and empathy of the spectator to follow and complete the *illusion*.” (Lehmann 22) It helped for me to think of the world on stage as a hermetically sealed illusion with its own history, its own laws, and its own set of given circumstances. I am a spectator at dramatic theatre – I am separate from the onstage world.

Dramatic theatre is a theatre of synthesis. That means it has a lot of parts, but all of those parts come together to make a complex whole. I won’t find any extra puzzle pieces on stage. I won’t see anything out of place (assuming that the playwright and the creative team have done their work correctly). “Wholeness, illusion and world representation are inherent in the model ‘drama.’” (Lehmann 22)

Finally dramatic theatre is “subordinated to the primacy of the text.” (Lehmann 21) Words come first. The characters communicate with each other, and the actors communicate with the audience, through language. They may decide to use their bodies or voices in a specific way, but these decisions must always support the words they say.

These elements don’t all have to be present in order for theatre to qualify as dramatic. Actors can break the fourth wall and acknowledge the audience, but they could still be acting in a work of dramatic theatre. Some theatre features movement or nonverbal communication prominently, but it could still be dramatic if it tells a story with a beginning, middle, and end.

When I looked at all these elements together, it made perfect sense why dramatic theatre is so approachable for actors. Actors are human. They have a relatively good understanding of human behavior, and they can easily imitate it. They can wrap their brains around a singular concept, idea, or meaning, so they can help contribute to that synthesis. And they start their process with something real and tangible – a script they can read and interpret.

Dramatic theatre is also approachable for an audience. It entertains and satisfies them. They know they’ll see something with a beginning, middle, and end. And because the world on stage has been properly synthesized, they’ll leave the theater without any major unanswered questions. Dramatic theatre provides an audience with answers.

Herein lies my biggest problem with dramatic theatre. It contradicts the rallying cry I gave my *Hamlet Project* cast. I believe theatre should activate people's minds by giving them puzzles to solve. It shouldn't placate them. They should leave the theater with questions. How could I define *this* kind of theatre? What's the *opposite* of dramatic theatre?

Postdramatic Theatre

Lehmann suggests the Theatre of the Absurd was postdramatic theatre's most immediate predecessor:

"Reviewing the Theatre of the Absurd in [Martin] Esslin's description, one might initially feel transported into the postdramatic theatre of the 1980s. There is 'no story or plot to speak of' here; the plays 'are often without recognizable characters', but instead have 'almost mechanical puppets'; they 'often have neither a beginning nor an end', and instead of being a mirror of reality seem to be 'reflections of dreams and nightmares' consisting of 'incoherent babblings' instead of 'witty repartee and pointed dialogue.'" (Lehmann 54)

Postdramatic theatre rejects the need for mimesis. We don't see human behavior on stage anymore. "The play is to adhere solely to the law of its internal composition." (Lehmann 64) Instead we see postdramatic theatre artists playing with other forms and structures to create action and behavior. Robert Wilson demands that his performers adhere to strict choreography. Liz LeCompte asks actors to mimic actions from pre-recorded video.

This theatre also abandons the Aristotelian arc. It "deliberately negates, or at least relegates to the background, the possibility of developing a narrative – a possibility that is after all peculiar to it as a time-based art." Instead we watch "a theatre of states and of scenically dynamic formations." (Lehmann 68) We no longer track a conflict-plagued protagonist to the point of catharsis. We may not track a protagonist at all, but rather an idea, a location, a motif, or something else entirely. Postdramatic theatre wants to create "a space of association in the mind of the spectator," not a clear through-line. (Lehmann 148)

Postdramatic theatre dispenses with the need for illusion or creates "a partial suspension... between the fictive cosmos of a 'drama' and the reality of the performance." (Lehmann 67) We're no longer watching a hermetically sealed world with a fictional time and place. We're in the same time and the same room as what happens on stage. We are experiencing "a theatre of the present." (Lehmann 143)

Sometimes the line between performer and audience member gets blurred. When I saw Pig Iron's *Pay Up*, the rest of the audience and I joined the cast for choreographed dance numbers

interspersed throughout the piece. In Gob Squad's *Kitchen*, the initial performers "recruited" audience members to help them re-enact an Andy Warhol film, before eventually abandoning their roles and letting the audience recruits perform the piece.

In postdramatic theatre, the audience *completes* the performance, because they determine the meaning of the work they see. "Synthesis is cancelled. It is explicitly combated. Enclosed within [it] is...the demand for an open and fragmenting perception in place of a unifying and closed perception." (Lehmann 82) We aren't meant to pick up one meaning. Instead we experience a tension between several conflicting ideas, "the dialectics of human experience." (Lehmann 69) This sounded a lot more like my kind of theatre.

But the idea which gave me the best understanding of postdramatic theatre, as a director and future deviser, is the way it uses text. "In postdramatic forms of theatre, staged text (*if* text is staged) is merely a component with equal rights in a gestic, musical, visual, etc., total composition." (Lehmann 46) And when everything going into a production does not serve the text and the text alone, it opens up the possibility for multiple interpretations:

"[All] means are employed with equal weighting: play, object and language point simultaneously in different directions of meaning and thus encourage a contemplation that is at once relaxed and rapid. The consequence is a changed attitude on the part of the spectator. In psychoanalytical hermeneutics the term 'evenly hovering attention' is used. [...] Here everything depends on not understanding immediately. Rather one's perception has to remain open for connections, correspondence and clues at completely unexpected moments, perhaps casting what was said earlier in a completely new light. Thus, meaning remains in principle postponed." (Lehmann 87)

The term postdramatic covers a vast array of work. Two works of postdramatic theatre can look and sound very different depending on the artists who made them and the methods they employed. Perhaps the simplest way to put it is in what Lehmann calls "the essential opposition of dramatic and postdramatic theatre: appearance instead of plot action, performance instead of representation." (58)

After I had processed all that information, I pared it down to a checklist. It represents a broad, but certainly not comprehensive, outline of some potential attributes of postdramatic theatre:

- It resists the need for a cohesive narrative with a logical sequence of events. A clearly outlined plot is hard to find.
- It presents a fragmented or deconstructed reality. It more closely resembles a panorama or collage of isolated or overlapping tableaux or snapshots.

- It gives movement, objects, and all other visual and auditory elements as much weight as language and spoken word.
- It allows the individual performative elements to serve distinct purposes, rather than strive for synthesis. If it were a puzzle, there would be extra or missing pieces.
- It acknowledges and includes the audience in the experience. It doesn't pretend the audience isn't there.
- It takes place in the present moment and the present space, not behind some invisible plate glass in a fictional time and place.
- It asks actors to perform tasks or choreography, rather than try to imitate everyday human behavior.
- It adheres to its own set of rules and principles, which may or may not mimic conventional reality.
- It encourages the audience to determine the meaning of the work. It doesn't shove one meaning down the audience's throat.

My Theatre

Now I had a clear checklist, but I was hesitant to use the term "postdramatic" on a grant application or in everyday conversation. (I tried. Once or twice. Unsuccessfully.) Also I wasn't sure I wanted to create work that is wholly postdramatic. *The Hamlet Project* certainly wasn't.

When I held *The Hamlet Project* up to my checklist, I saw many postdramatic elements. We gave movement and gesture as much significance as language. When Laertes instructed Ophelia on how she should behave, he treated her like a sculpture, positioning her limbs in the place he deemed appropriate. We gave ourselves tasks to perform on stage – Hamlet imitated Ophelia's sculptural positions as they happened, and Gertrude had to pick up ALL the pills Hamlet knocked out of her hand. We created a panorama effect, abruptly switching tone and genre with each scene, mimicking the effect of changing television channels. And we definitely left a lot open to interpretation. But in the end, we told a story with a narrative. We tracked one character's journey from beginning to climactic end. And I didn't mind that.

So I took some of Lehmann's language and added some of my own to better describe what *my* theatre is. I make theatre for the attention-deficit culture of the 21st century. I riff on classic stories using sound bytes, found text, mixed media, and contemporary pop culture. I resist the straightforward narrative, because that's not the way we process information today. I refuse to create work that limits itself to one meaning, because I want the audience to exercise their brains and fill in some blanks. They should leave the theater wrestling with questions and determined to find solutions. Yet despite all the problem solving and experimentation, I still want to tell stories with a beginning, a middle, and an end, and a human heart at their core.

Blending the Ordinary and the Extraordinary

In April and May, just a month before my graduation, I traveled to Philadelphia to do an internship and reconnect with some of my former colleagues. I also spent some time with Quinn Bauriedel and Dito van Reigersberg of Pig Iron Theatre Company. I'd seen a couple of their shows – *Hell Meets Henry Halfway* and *Pay Up* – and I'd always been impressed by the way they combine theatrical experimentation with human storytelling. They create postdramatic work with a heart. So I thought they might be my best source of information as I completed my quest.

Bauriedel and van Reigersberg (along with Dan Rothenberg) founded Pig Iron in 1995 as an interdisciplinary theatre ensemble “dedicated to the creation of new and exuberant performance works that defy easy categorization.” Bauriedel elaborated on this:

“We call ourselves a dance-clown-theatre ensemble. What we mean by that is there are these different languages that each of those genres of performance speak. In theatre we're kind of obsessed with story and character. In dance we're obsessed with movement and gesture and space. And in clown we're obsessed with the audience and with some kind of artistic authenticity that really wants to be shared with an audience. All of those things are really important, and for us they kind of balance each other out.”

Van Reigersberg said a lot of their material comes from an exercise called “Open Canvas,” which he called “Pig Iron's version of Viewpoints.” “It's an improvisational game where you're basically given a theme, and then the whole stage is like an Etch-a-Sketch where people can come in and out and compose things. It's a neverending generation tool.” This sounded a lot like Plasticene's Plastic Stage to me.

The company recently established the Pig Iron School for Advanced Performance Training, a two-year certificate program for performers and creators that focuses on physical and ensemble-based approaches to making original work. They essentially created a school that trains actors to do exactly what I want them to do. Their curriculum mirrors the two-year curriculum of the École de Théâtre Jacques LeCoq, where both Bauriedel and Rothenberg studied. Actors study improvisation and movement side by side, learning to generate their own work and hone their physical instrument.

“We have all agreed that there's one answer to the question ‘what is an actor's purpose?’ For a long time the actor's purpose has been to convey a realistic depiction of a character in a realistic space. [At the Pig Iron School] we open up that assumption and say there's a thousand other ways we can answer that question.” (Bauriedel)

Two of the main features of the curriculum are what Bauriedel calls “artistic treatments” and “dares.” In an “artistic treatment,” he gives the actors very specific constraints and asks them to create something within those constraints. For example, he may ask five actors to play eleven different characters who are all on stage at the same time. Or he’ll ask actors to create something epic within a 4’ x 4’ stage space. In a “dare,” he dares the second-year actors to be artistic leaders. He assigns each actor a title – one at a time – and each one must create a fifteen-minute piece using his or her fellow classmates. Bauriedel uses these exercises to set up the students for what they’ll be doing after they graduate. They’ll work in different spaces, they’ll have limited resources, and they’ll have to take a leadership role:

“The hope and the planning is that having a lot of structure when everything else is up for grabs is really helpful. At times the parameters we launch for them are really strict. Within that narrow band they find their creative freedom.”

Van Reigersberg offered me some parting advice on how to keep actors involved in the process and audience engaged in the performance, even as the work strays from something realistic and recognizable:

“One of the main things we talk about is the Ordinary and the Extraordinary. I’ve seen Wooster Group shows I’ve loved and Wooster Group shows I’ve felt totally alienated by. And I sometimes feel like it might have to do with the amount of Ordinary in it. If every image is Extraordinary – not entirely of this world – if everything feels theatrical, it doesn’t let me in. And then on the other side of the spectrum, if everything is Ordinary like a kitchen-sink drama, it doesn’t ever rise above a circumstantial telling of the story, and television would probably do it better.”

It turns out the guys at Pig Iron had the answers I needed the whole time. Their methods encompass everything I’ve discovered on my quest to find a new system of acting. Creating the kind of nonrealistic or postdramatic work I want to make – and getting actors on board as true collaborators in the process – can happen more easily when certain conditions exist in rehearsals and performance:

- **STRUCTURE** – This could mean using a previously established “system” or “method” – like Viewpoints – to rehearse the piece. Or it could mean establishing very strict parameters or rules – as in Plastic Stage or Open Canvas – to generate material. Either way structure promotes creativity and prevents the process from devolving into chaos.
- **ATTENTION TO PHYSICALITY AND/OR MOVEMENT** – All of the artists I encountered put emphasis on the physical life of the characters. (Even Stanislavski in his later years tried to find ways to work this into his methods.) An intellectual interpretation can only do so

much. The approaches of Laban, Michael Chekhov, or Le Coq can contribute a lot.

- AWARENESS OF THE AUDIENCE – Without an audience, there is no theatre. So regardless of how I want to affect the audience, I don't want to shut them out of the work. The artists at Pig Iron use clowning to remind themselves that a living breathing audience is in the room. This keeps the human heart beating at the center of the work.
- ADAPTATION OF THE STANISLAVSKI SYSTEM – No matter how postdramatic my work gets, I can make it easier for my actors if they can use their Stanislavski and Meisner training to get inside of it. They still perform actions in response to what happens in the room. That's what my actors on *The Hamlet Project* learned. I shouldn't abandon my early training so readily. This will also help keep some Ordinary elements in my work, so the Extraordinary moments have more impact.

Ultimately I learned there *isn't* one definitive system actors can train in to create this work – there are hundreds, maybe even thousands. Each cast, ensemble, or team has to develop its own language and approach. As long as I try to keep the four above conditions alive and present in the room, I will succeed at creating the theatre I want to make. The only “right” way to get it done is the way that works for me and my collaborators.

I already have plans to create something the “right” way. I've recruited some of my former collaborators on *The Hamlet Project* – along with a few newbies – to create a mashup of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, the writings of L. Ron Hubbard, and *RuPaul's Drag Race*. And I've decided on the title of my next devised work after that – *Julia Child and Stephen Hawking Perform the Works of Henrik Ibsen* – which stems from my love of baking and my anger over the global environmental crisis. I have no idea what either of these will look or sound like, and I'm excited by that. Because now I'm confident that I know how to create them.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A – *The Hamlet Project*: Dramaturgical Links

The following are links to the videos I showed the cast at our first meeting to give them visual examples of the work of Robert Wilson and The Wooster Group and to show them the music videos we'd be using:

Robert Wilson – Sonnets

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PYDZj8kZq_A

The Wooster Group – *To You, the Birdie*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2lcRblv-t80>

The Wooster Group – *Brace Up!*

<http://thewoostergroup.org/blog/2011/02/10/from-the-archives-brace-up-2003-that-was-paul-lazar-as-kulygin/>

The Wooster Group – *House/Lights*

<http://thewoostergroup.org/blog/2013/08/05/from-the-archives-houselights-1998-2/>
<http://thewoostergroup.org/blog/2012/09/28/from-the-archives-houselights-1998/>

The Wooster Group – *Hamlet*

http://youtu.be/_10u984AvzE?t=40s

The Wooster Group – Interview with Ari Fliakos of *Vieux Carré*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=257qO9UgrD8>

Justin Timberlake – “Pusher Love Girl”

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=282oUXSdkUA>

Green Day – “Holiday”

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A1OqtlqzScI>

My Chemical Romance – “Helena (So Long and Goodnight)”

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KSNKCfxcYvE>

“The Way You Look Tonight”

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CPx-bR5iXnk>

APPENDIX B – *The Hamlet Project*: Easel Papers from “Tabling” Rehearsals

During the week of “tabling” rehearsals, we used giant sheets of easel paper – in place of a blackboard – to keep a record of our responses to various prompts. These are photographs of the papers generated during that week.

Hamlet is ...

Vengeful
windy
inactive
mischievous
dark
depressing
expansive
loony

morbid
Contemplative
Misinterpretes*
Mistrust
moody
witty*
tragic
twisted

Crazed
visceral
disruptive
Vengeful
long
Conniving
gurgling
a facade

regretful
deceitful
gilded
moody
loyal*
destructive
hidden
plotting

Crazy
envious
Cunning
Self-involved
Secretive
covered

subliminal

Surface
formality

Sweeping under the rug
Surveillance

SEE

ragged/disheveled
bird's view of ant colony
disheveled
hiding holes in dark playset
Spider web
maelstrom
Crumbling/decrepit castle
vines + weeds
country club from the outside

HEAR

teenager on Red H Wires
faraway violin string
harsh
theme songs
Yeezus
parking garage
eerie
whispers
ear ringing

FEEL

moist
cold metal
familiar
pond mud
cold Long Island sand
dead grass
Claustrophobic
Splinters

SMELL

Musty
faint sulfur
old book
red wine
Nordstrom's
Mt. Everest
Sickly sweet
poison ^{skunk}

TASTE

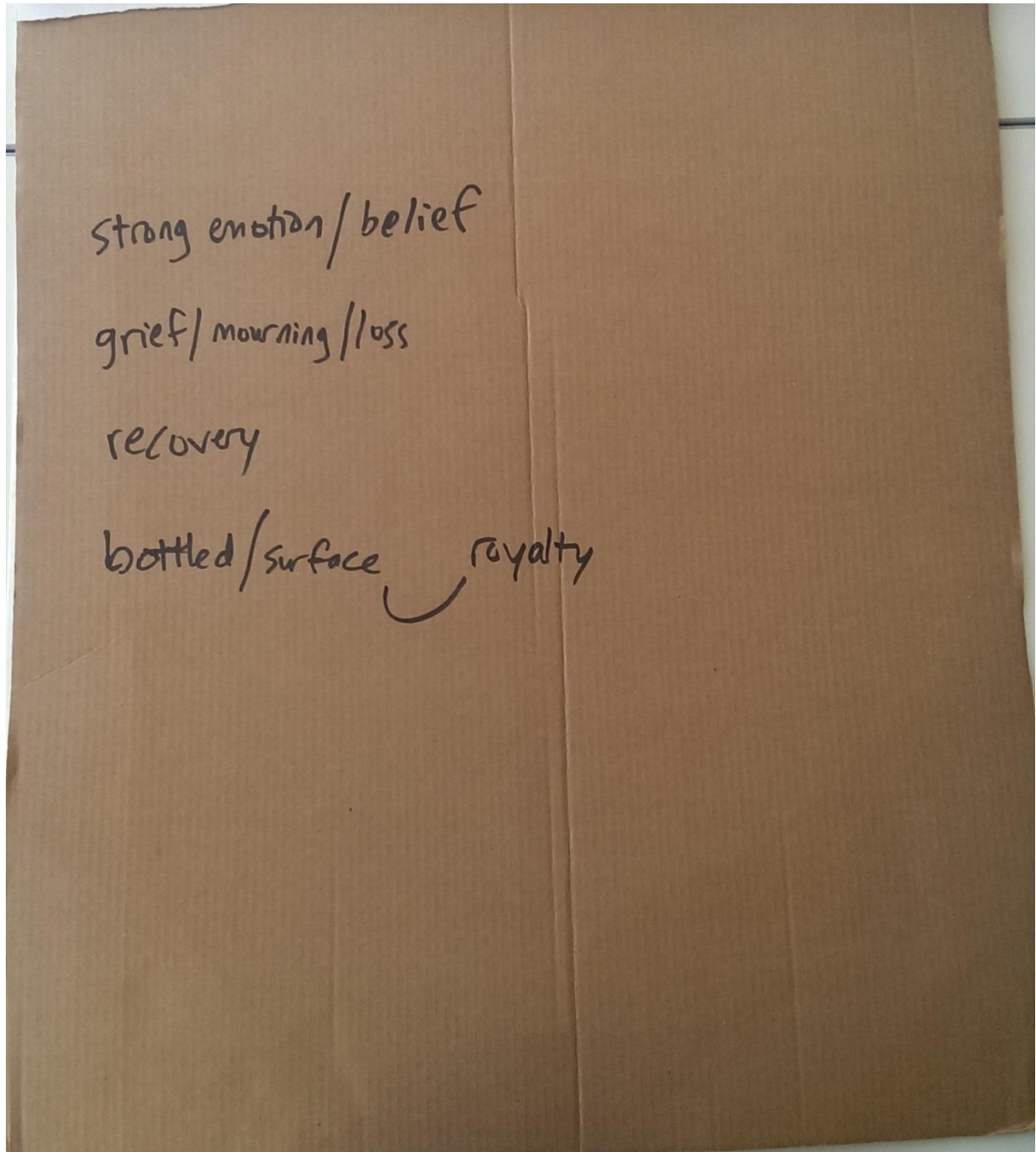
salt
safely sexy/cinnamon
too many Skittles → raw meat

Steak
honeymoon melon
blood/iron
wine

Adjectives and sensory associations that came to mind for the cast when they thought of *Hamlet*

revenge	justice	Seeks revenge
obsession	loneliness	takes the advice of a ghost
whether life is worth it		thinks too much x2
love	idle time	manipulates
ecstasy	purpose	jokes
greed	reaction	loses himself in a desire
boundaries	Solving the puzzle	uses people
impulse	action	obsesses
power	Scheming	can't get outside of himself
control	plotting	can't move on
hunger	winning the game	is self-destructive
deceit	death	loses hope
Slipping away	fixing old mistakes	tries to mold stone
blurred lines		-feels alone
Sweet bells jangled out of tune → harsh		rebels / calls B.S.
doubt		

Themes and actions that came to mind for the cast when they thought of *Hamlet*



Summary of recurring ideas and themes in our tabling responses

- My name is Hamlet.
- I am nineteen years old.
- I am from Denmark.
- My profession is student/Prince.

- Five facts I know about myself from the text are...

- My father is dead.
- I was in school with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.
- I have greatly professed love to Ophelia.
- I have some skill with a sword.
- My uncle and mother are now married.

- Five things I intuit about myself are...

- I'm well liked by friends and the public.
- I can hold my own in conversation with others.
- I enjoy playing theatre.
- I've traveled a fair amount.
- I spend a lot of time pondering on death.

- A telling action I perform in the play is... to toy.

- A telling line I speak is... "Use every man after his desert, and who shall scape whipping?"

- My greatest fear is Hell.

- My greatest longing is revenge.

- Odd habits I have are... talking to myself, singing to myself, facial + hand ticks, smelling things.

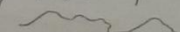
- My likes include... music, duels, school, night time, eating outside

- My dislikes include... stupid people, boring people, liars, promiscuity in others.

Actions that express character

Action w/ tempo → sharpening a knife

Action w/ duration → singing silently + playing air piano

Floor pattern → la la la 

3 behavioural gestures → wake up stretch, spit, hand kiss

2 expressive gestures → Knife, crawl backward
(essence, propelling force, conflict within)

My name is Guildenstern.
 I am 20 years old.
 I am from Denmark.
 My profession is being a lady.

A telling action I perform in the play is
 - to serve -

A telling line I speak is
 - we will ourselves provide.
 Most holy & religious fear it is
 to keep those many bodies safe
 that live & feed upon your majesty.

5 FACTS I KNOW ABOUT MYSELF FROM THE TEXT ARE:

- I went to school with Hamlet
- Claudius & Gertrude summoned me here
- I am always with Rosencrantz
- I go where I am told
- I get filled because I follow orders
- 5 things I intuit about myself are:
- I wish I could have Hamlet's life/opportunities
- I pass a lot of silent judgement on people
- I have a lot of dirt on people
- Rosencrantz & I gossip a lot

~~detour~~

Rosencrantz & I are dreamers
 & not asleep when it comes

My likes include:

fancy things, cats, anything red or purple

My dislikes include:

listening to people talk for super long amounts of time

My greatest fear is to be forgotten if people need me

My greatest longing is to be so important that people would be lost without me

Odd habits I have are:

writing speeches in my head (pretending I'm on a talk show)

essence
 & repelling force,
 conflict

Megan Henricks' "Hot Seat" responses for Guildenstern

My name is
 Claudius. I am 42 years
 old. I am from Elsinore.
 My profession is ~~King~~ ^{king} leading the
 people. Five facts I know about
 myself from the text are I killed
 my brother. I married his wife and
 inherited the throne. I am a
 step father. ~~Also~~ I am friends
 with ~~the~~ Polonius. I live in Elsinore.
~~I'm ret.~~ I believe in God. Five things
 I know about myself are
 I enjoy power. I am not easily
 trusting. I keep a close circle
 I can only trust myself. I will
 always persevere no matter what. I
 loved my brother. A telling action
 I perform in the play is having
 people spy for me. A telling line
 I speak is "A powerful gone mad
 is dangerous. My greatest fear is that the
 world will turn their back on me. My
 greatest longing is to turn back time."
 Odd habits I have are ~~an~~ overthinking
 things ~~to~~ looking so deeply into subjects. My
 likes include theater, being adored, chess,
 winning at chess, sports. ~~My~~ My dislikes are
~~people~~ People who talk so much
 people who talk in circles, people
 who don't think before they talk

Rejinal Simon's "Hot Seat" responses for Claudius

- My name is ~~laertes~~ laertes
 - I am 23 years old
 - I am from Dane
 My profession is in ~~politic~~ undecided.
 w/in politics

5 facts I know about myself from the text are

- I kill hamlet
- I reveal king claudius's part in the Scheming
- I have a sister ophelia whom I love dearly
- I return to france after the coronation
- I bury my sister

5 things I know about myself

- I like displays of competition (tournaments, fighting, archery)
- ~~I have. I'm not very good at politics.~~
- Used to getting what I want
- normally a calm, cool, collected figure
- ~~the love between~~ ^{I feel}

Awate Serequeberhan's "Hot Seat" responses for Laertes

My name is Ophelia.

I am ¹⁸ 18 years old

I am from Denmark. (Major France)

A telling action I perform in the play is to confide in
A telling line I speak is "And I, of ladies most deject + wretched."

My greatest fear is rejection. → being alone

My greatest longing is to escape.

Odd habits I have are to laugh at inappropriate times
humming without realizing it's out loud.

My likes include flowers, music, ~~books~~ nature.

My dislikes include lying, red meat, ^{drawing} being cold.

My profession is being Polonius' daughter

For your character an action where ^{flipping through book} tempo expressed duration ^{Character}

5 facts I know about myself from the text are: I am Polonius' daughter, I am Laertes' sister. I have been romantically approached by Hamlet. I am well versed.
- am

2 expressive gestures
Conflict within propelling force
- Scream

3 behavioral gestures
floor pattern
- praying
- picking flowers
- viding

5 things I intuit about myself are,
I don't die a virgin, I lost my virginity to Hamlet, I feel babied, I have never left Denmark. I lost my mother at a young age and never knew her

Stephanie Barron's "Hot Seat" responses for Ophelia

19/10/13

My name is

Rosencrantz

I am 19 yrs old

I am from Denmark

My profession is student

Five facts I know about myself from the text are:

1. I'm Hamlet's friend

2. The King/Queen ordered me to come to the castle.

3. I ~~was supposed to~~ get killed.

4. I know the players

5. Not a fact - I do not know Claudius killed the king.

5 things I intuit about myself are:

1. I don't love Hamlet as fully as I say I do
2. I believe in capital punishment.
3. I have a utilitarian perspective.
4. Guildenstern annoys me.
5. I'm attracted to the King - Claudius.

A telling action I perform in the play is agreeing to bring Hamlet to England / death.
 A telling line I speak is "Act III Scene III"
 My greatest fear is public shame.

My greatest longing is professional success to the fullest.

Odd habits I have are

- sleeping I love you too early

My likes include - reading, history, drinking gin, children

Dislikes - not talking, moaning, disrespect, indignities

My name is Gertrude.

I am 42 years old.

I am from Copenhagen.

My profession is the Queen of Denmark.

Five facts I know about myself from the text are

- ① I am Prince Hamlet's mother
- ② I married Claudius, my previous husband's brother.
- ③ I care for my son and want him to be happy.
- ④ I obey my King.
- ⑤ My heart is broken by Hamlet

Five things I intuit about myself are

- ① I'm not as happy now as I once was.
- ② I am incapable of decisive action/efficiency for whatever reason
- ③ I long for a daughter
- ④ I like consistency in everything
- ⑤ I might ~~play well~~ ^{play along} ~~with others~~.

A telling ^{well liked} action I perform in the play is to discipline.

A telling line I speak is "One woe doth tread upon another's heels, so fast they follow..."

My greatest fear is being an unsuccessful woman.

My greatest longing is to be a stable person to those who need me.

Odd habits I have are obsessive reapplication of lipstick and wiping off of

My likes include coarse chocolate, getting up sunrises early

My dislikes include thunderstorms, snakes

Laura Harrison's "Hot Seat" responses for Gertrude

- 1) My name is Mudd.
- 2) I am 57 years old.
- 3) I am from Lancaster.
- 4) My profession is writer.
- 5) 5 facts I know about myself from the text are;
 - I am father to Hamlet & Ophelia.
 - I was an actor.
 - I went to university.
 - I know the 'players'.
 - I create the scheme to determine Hamlet's problem.
- 6) 5 things I intuit about myself are,
 - I know what Hamlet's problems are.
 - I was a great actor at the university.
 - I get along well with most everybody.
 - I am very protective of my daughter.
 - I am going senile.
- 7) A telling actor I perform in the play is, when I convince the King to hide & overhear Hamlet's convo w/ Ophelia
- 8) A telling line I speak is, Madam I swear I use no art at all. That he is mad, tis true, tis true tis pity. And pity tis tis true, A foolish figure.
- 9) My greatest fear is ~~that I will be~~ ~~emotionally~~ ~~play with~~ ~~and~~ ~~scare~~ ~~my~~ ~~daughter~~ ~~Claudius~~ ~~will~~ ~~run~~ ~~out~~ ~~of~~ ~~use~~ ~~for~~ ~~me.~~
 ~~of the state~~
- 10) My greatest longing is to be well ~~the~~ loved and respected for my knowledge and worldlyness.
- 11) odd habits I have are, talking to myself, writing a biography about myself. I tap the wicker basin 3 times before & after I wash my face. Birds rally
- 12) My likes include, feeding birds, writing books.
- 13) My dislikes are, coffee cakes, polo, ~~the~~ The French.
 - action or tempo expresses character
 - " " Duration
 - floor pattern
 - 3 behavioural gestures
 - 2 expressive gestures express essence, propelling force, conflict
 - looking at my hand,
 - finger stake ewlike

Jason Rohn's "Hot Seat" responses for Polonius

Hamlet

3 favorite lines/passages:

- Act II Scene II - "Why, then 'tis none to you, for there is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so."
&
"God's bodkin, man, much better. Use every man after his desert, and who shall scape whipping?"
- Act III Scene I - "To be or not to be..."
- Act I Scene V - "That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain."

1 defining action: Toy

To manipulate - or "handle" someone in any way, really, even if for "good reasons," it takes a very particular way of thinking regarding a human's value. → Actor as object.

1 revealing scene: Act II Scene II

The things I say, man...

Ophelia: Reprimand

Claudius: Appease (fool)

Gertrude: Scold/Shame

Polonius: Toy

Laertes: Challenge

Guildenstern: ^{Polonius's} Belittle
Cassianus

Horatio: Praise/Bolster

Sam Haines' responses to initial tabling assignment

Polonius

- This business is well ended. My liege, and Madam, to expostulate what majesty should be, what duty is, why day is day, night is night, and time is time. Were nothing but to waste night, day, and time. Therefore, since brevity is the soul of wit, And tediousness the limbs and outwash floor-steps, I will be brief. Your noble son is mad. Mad I call it; for, to define true madness, what is't but to be nothing else but mad? But let that go.

- I use Ophelia to gain an insight into Hamlet's madness - (foisting Ophelia on him)
- I engage Hamlet in a discussion of theatre & acting
- I test Hamlet / care to his thoughts

Def Act - I am certain of what ails Hamlet.

- Madam, I swear I use no art at all.
That he is not mad, tis true: tis true tis pity.
And pity tis to see him so. I shall do well, But yet I do believe the origin and commencement of his great sorrow from neglected love.
- ~~That~~ That did I, my lord, and was accounted a good actor.

Jason Rohn's responses to initial tabling assignment

Laertes

"The devil take thy soul!"
(A 5, Sc 1, ln 252)

"That drop of blood that ^{calm} proclaims me bastard;..."
(A 4, Sc 5, ln 119-122) ^{translet thou art slain;}
"no medicine in the world can do thee good..."
(A 5, Sc 2, ln 319-326)

"Too much of water hast thou, poor ophelia,
and therefore I forbid my tears; o..."
(A 4, Sc 7, ln 184-187)

Revealing scene - ophelia's burial

Action done to / done by - to kill - to get even with

Action through play - Warn / threaten

Claudius

III - III
my up, my thoughts remains below
words without thoughts never do heaven go

- O, what form of prayer can serve my turn?
- May one be pardoned and rebuked in this world?

In the corrupted currents of this world,
Offence's gilded hand may shove by justice,
And oft 'tis seen the wicked prize itself
Boys out the law.

- Help Angels! make assay.
Bow, stubborn knees; and heart with strings of steel,
Be soft as sinews of the new-born babe.

And all shall end well.

III. I >>

O' tis too true... a heavy burden

IV. VII

Or are you like the painting of a sorrow,
a face without a heart

I Father/Baby Hamlet
I challenge Hamlet

I often twist people's actions
'Damage control'

Resrain Floor patterns

Revealing

III. III
IV. VII

Rejinal Simon's responses to initial tabling assignment

Gertrude

3 Favorite Lines / Passages:

III. iv ln 158 O Hamlet, thou hast cleft my heart in twain.

IV. v. ln 16 To my sick soul, as sin's true nature is,
each toy seems prologue to some great amiss.
So full of artless jealousy is guilt,
it spills itself in fearing ^{his} ~~the~~ break

IV. vii ln 112 ~~the~~ hoary leaves in the glassy stream.
then with fantastic garlands did she make of crow-flowers, nettles,
daisies, and long purples, that liberal shepherds give a
grosser name, but our cold maids do dead man's fingers call them.

ETC
But long it could not be till that her garments, heavy with
their drink, pull'd the poor wretch from her melodious lay
to muddy death.

2 Actions on Hamlet: Soothe, Plead

1 Action - Character defining: teach/discipline

1 Scene: III. iv - Bed chamber / Polonius Death

but a noble ambition of son
but a shadow's shadow

Ophelia

DEFINING SCENE

ACT I. iii Rooms + garden before

FAVORITE LINES

"but good my brother,
Do not as some ungracious pastors do,
Show me the steep and thorny way to heaven,
Whiles like a puff'd and reckless libertine
Himself the primrose path of dalliance treads
And recks not his own rede." ACT I. iii (p. 20)
"for to the noble mind
Rich gifts wax poor when givers prove unkind." ACT I. iii (p. 20)

ACTION I PERFORM

I seek for guidance

ACTIONS I PERFORM ON HAMLET

'to awaken' to the world 'to soothe'

And I, of ladies most deject and wretched,
That suck'd the honey of his music vows,
Now see that noble and most sovereign reason
Like sweet bells jangled out of tune and harsh
That unmatched form and feature of blown youth
Blasted with ecstasy. O woe is me
T'have seen what I have seen, see what I see." ACT II. i (p. 35)
"Alas and fie for shame,
Young men will do't if they come to't -
By cock, they are to blame.
Quoth she, "Before you tumbled me,
You promis'd me to wed." He answers
So would I a done, by yonder son.
And thou hadst not come to my bed." ACT II. i (p. 35)

Stephanie Barron's responses to initial tabling assignment

Guildenstern

• Happy in that we are not over-happy: on Fortune's cap we are not the very bottom...

> Act 2. Sc. 2

• Faith, her privates we

• O my lord, if my duty be to Bold, my love is too unmannerly.

↳ Act 3 Sc. 2

• We will ourselves provide
to keep those many bodies safe
that live and feed upon your majesty

} Act 3 Sc. 3

defining actions
• to serve

revealing scene:
ACT 3 SC. 3 [p. 307]

2 Hamlet actions

↳ to wake, to accompany

Rosencrantz

"The single and peculiar life is bound with all the ~~strength~~ strength and armour of the mind to keep itself from noyance; but much more that spirit upon whose weal depends and rests the lives of many." - Act III Scene III

"Truly, and I hold ambition of so airy and light a quality that it is but a shadow's shadow." - Act II Scene II

"Good my lord, what is your cause of distemper? You do surely bar the door upon your own liberty if you deny your grieves to your friend." - Act III Scene II

APPENDIX C – *The Hamlet Project*: Rehearsal Videos

Cast Composition – September 9, 2013

<https://vimeo.com/92474783>

At the end of the first week of rehearsals, the ensemble created a composition around the idea of surveillance and its relevance to the world of *Hamlet*. They had 30 minutes to complete the composition – without the assistance of me or the assistant director – and they had to include a specific list of elements/ingredients.

Rehearsal Excerpt

<https://vimeo.com/75733915>

Password: mosinski

Originally put together for a fellowship application, this video contains rehearsal excerpts of various moments and scenes. The video was recorded by Andrew Peters midway through the rehearsal process.

APPENDIX D – *The Hamlet Project*: Scene Breakdown & Performance Score

Following are the scene breakdown and final performance score for *The Hamlet Project*.

HAMLET PROJECT – Scene Breakdown

TITLE	PGS (v2)	STARTS WITH	ENDS WITH	CHARACTERS
1 - Preshow	1			Hamlet
2 – Psych Session	1	Michael’s entrance	Michael’s exit	Hamlet, Michael
3a – Kathie Lee and Hoda, Pt. 1	1-3	R&G’s entrance	R&G’s look at Hamlet	Hamlet, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern
3b – PSA	3-4	R’s lines	Claudius’ lines	Hamlet, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, Claudius, Gertrude, Polonius
4 – Claudius Poltergeist	4-6	Claudius’ lines	Polonius’ whistle	Hamlet, Claudius, Gertrude, Polonius (R&G onstage)
5 – Pusher Love Girl	6-8	Ophelia’s entrance	End of song	ALL
6a – PSA	8-9	Grabbing Hamlet	Hamlet breaking away	ALL
6b – Wendy Williams	9	Hamlet breaking away	End of G’s lines	ALL
7a – Ophelia Sculpture	9-10	Laertes’ lines	Shift into cartoon	Hamlet, Ophelia, Laertes, Polonius (R&G onstage)
7b – Cartoon: Facial Expressions	10-12	Shift into cartoon	Shift out of cartoon	Hamlet, Ophelia, Laertes, Polonius (R&G onstage)
7c – Polonius’ Advice	12-13	Shift out of cartoon	Shift into cartoon	Hamlet, Ophelia, Laertes, Polonius (R&G onstage)
7d – Cartoon: Toys	13-15	Shift into cartoon	Hamlet’s entrance	Hamlet, Ophelia
8 – Sex Scene	15-16	Hamlet’s entrance	Dropping of letter	Hamlet, Ophelia, Polonius (R&G onstage)
9a – News Magazine	16-17	Dropping of letter	Shift to Kathie Lee and Hoda	Rosencrantz, Laertes (Hamlet, Ophelia, Polonius, Guildenstern onstage)
9b – Kathie Lee and Hoda, Pt. 2	17	Shift to Kathie Lee and Hoda	End of segment	Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, Hamlet
10a – Polonius’ Counsel	17-18	Polonius’ entrance	Ophelia’s entrance	Hamlet, Polonius, Claudius, Gertrude
10b – Hamlet’s Letter	18-19	Ophelia’s entrance	End of letter	Hamlet, Ophelia, Polonius, Claudius, Gertrude
10c – Cartoon Villains	19-20	End of letter	R&G’s entrance	Hamlet, Polonius, Claudius, Gertrude
11 – The Talk Show	20-21	R&G’s entrance	Commercial start	Hamlet, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern

TITLE	PGS (v2)	STARTS WITH	ENDS WITH	CHARACTERS
12 – Cymbalta Commercial	21-22	Commercial start	Hamlet’s last line	ALL
13 – Ophelia’s Redelivery	22-23	Polonius pushing Ophelia onstage	Ophelia’s exit	Hamlet, Ophelia, Polonius, Claudius
14 – Cartoon: Skittle Time	23-24	Ophelia’s exit	Start of music video	Hamlet, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern
15 – Holiday	24-25	Start of music video	Polonius’ death	ALL
16 – Pill-Popping Gertrude	26	Polonius falls to ground	R&G’s entrance	Hamlet, Gertrude (Polonius dead)
17a – PSA	27	R&G’s entrance	Meet up w/Claudius	Hamlet, Gertrude, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, Claudius (Polonius dead)
17b – Duty to the King	27	Meet up w/Claudius	End of meeting	Hamlet, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, Claudius (Polonius dead, Gertrude asleep)
17c – Cartoon: Dead Fish	27-28	Start of cartoon	R&G’s death	Hamlet, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, Claudius (Polonius dead, Gertrude asleep)
18 – Laertes’ Return	28-29	Laertes’ entrance	Ophelia’s entrance	Claudius, Laertes (P&R&G dead, Gertrude asleep, Hamlet playing dead)
19a – Mad Scene 1	29	Ophelia’s entrance	Shift into cartoon	Ophelia, Claudius, Laertes, Gertrude (P&R&G dead, Hamlet playing dead)
19b – Cartoon: Suicide	29-31	Shift into cartoon	Shift out of cartoon	Ophelia, Claudius, Laertes, Gertrude (P&R&G dead, Hamlet playing dead)
19c – Mad Scene 2	31-32	Shift out of cartoon	Ophelia holding her breath	Ophelia, Claudius, Laertes, Gertrude (P&R&G dead, Hamlet playing dead)
20 – Helena	32-33	Start of video	End of video	ALL
21 – To Be or Not To Be	33-35	Hamlet’s 1 st line	Gunshot	Hamlet, Michael
22 – The Way You Look Tonight	35-36	Start of video	End of show	Hamlet, Ophelia

THE HAMLET PROJECT - Draft 2 (9/19/2013)

PRESHOW:

HAMLET, dressed in black, is already sitting at a table, eating a bowl of Life cereal and listening to Green Day's "Basket Case" on his iPod through small battery-operated speakers. Each time the song ends, he immediately restarts it.

When the house closes, MICHAEL enters, holding a white clipboard and a pen. He sits down next to HAMLET. Nothing. After a moment, he stops HAMLET's music. HAMLET restarts it. MICHAEL definitively stops it. Eventually HAMLET speaks.

HAMLET

Alexander died, Alexander was buried, Alexander returneth to dust, the dust is earth, of earth we make loam, and why of that loam whereto he was converted might they not stop a beer-barrel? Imperious Caesar, dead and turn'd to clay,
Might stop a hole to keep the wind away.
O that that earth which kept the world in awe
Should patch a wall t'expel the winter's flaw.
We defy augury. There is special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come. The readiness is all. Since no man, of aught he leaves, knows aught, what is't to leave betimes? Let be.

HAMLET resumes eating. MICHAEL takes a final note. As MICHAEL gets up, the opening theme music from the 4th hour of the Today Show plays, and ROSENCRANTZ (Hoda) and GUILDENSTERN (Kathie Lee) make their entrance. They move and take over HAMLET's table.

GUILDENSTERN

Hey everybody. It's dreary and a little drizzly around here. But Rosey and I have a song in our heart.

ROSENCRANTZ

We are full of sunshine.

GUILDENSTERN

Yes.

ROSENCRANTZ

Exactly.

GUILDENSTERN

How are you? You doing well?

ROSENCRANTZ

I'm good, but you've been very—your cards match your dress. Oh my God!

GUILDENSTERN

It's a tad off.

ROSENCRANTZ

It's almost a perfect—

GUILDENSTERN

A tad off.

ROSENCRANTZ

If you guys have ever been to an Abercrombie and Fitch, I don't know if you've noticed this, but if you look through the racks of clothing, you might find out that there is not a bigger size than a 10.

GUILDENSTERN

Which is not considered big. I think the average size for a woman in America is 14.

ROSENCRANTZ

So if you're bigger than that—

GUILDENSTERN

I don't think I could fit in that.

ROSENCRANTZ

I know I couldn't.

GUILDENSTERN

I don't think I wear a 10. I know I don't wear a 10. But those don't look like...I don't know.

ROSENCRANTZ

Well, they're trying to keep the...it sounds like they don't want the business of the bigger folks...

GUILDENSTERN

Or they're trying to make it elite, and most of their buyers are kids, right? Teenagers?

ROSENCRANTZ

Teenagers.

GUILDENSTERN

The beef that I've had with Abercrombie and Fitch all these years is their...is their sexploitation, to me, of young people in their ads. So that's why I never went in there. I'm not gonna spend money at a place that does that to young children.

ROSENCRANTZ

Well they carry the smaller sizes for women - the 10's and lower - and they carry the double XL's for men, because-

GUILDENSTERN

They want the athletes.

ROSENCRANTZ

They want the athletes to come in.

GUILDENSTERN

We'd love to know what you all think about that. We reached out to them for a...um, a comment, and they did not return our calls.

ROSENCRANTZ

But in 2006 the company CEO-

GUILDENSTERN

Mike Jeffreys.

ROSENCRANTZ

--was heard as saying, they hire good-looking people in the store to attract good-looking people. He says that companies try to target all sizes, they end up in trouble, and when you don't alienate anyone, you don't excite anyone.

*An abrupt change to the PSA style. Channel changing sound?
CLAUDIUS and GERTRUDE use their floor patterns to enter the space, move HAMLET's table upstage, summon POLONIUS to strike the props, and then return to HAMLET.*

ROSENCRANTZ

Depression is a disorder of mood, so mysteriously painful and elusive in the way it becomes known to the self...as to verge close to being beyond description. It thus remains nearly incomprehensible to those who have not experienced it in its extreme mode...

GUILDENSTERN

Although the gloom, 'the blues' which people go through occasionally and associate with the general hassle of everyday

CLAUDIUS

and think of us

As a father...

No response. Then HAMLET gives his cereal bowl to POLONIUS. CLAUDIUS and GERTRUDE retreat and conference with POLONIUS.

HAMLET

O that this too too sullied flesh would melt,
Thaw and resolve itself into a dew,
Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter.

POLONIUS whistles for OPHELIA. She appears. They push her down towards HAMLET, and the world changes. The opening intro of "Pusher Love Girl" by Justin Timberlake plays and stops. What's wrong? HAMLET isn't ready. After an uncomfortable silence, ROSENCRANTZ claps her hands.

As OPHELIA stands by awkwardly, MICHAEL hands off clothing to CLAUDIUS, POLONIUS, and GERTRUDE to dress HAMLET. ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN take care of hair and makeup. MICHAEL strikes the chairs and sets the microphone and mic stand.

When everything is ready, MICHAEL gives the signal, ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN roll the TVs into position, and OPHELIA moves upstage. The music video starts, and the lights change dramatically. ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN stay by the TVs, OPHELIA stays upstage, but the others slink away.

HAMLET mimics JT's moves in the video exactly and lip-synchs with the song.

HAMLET

Hey little mama
Ain't gotta ask me if I want to
Just tell me, can I get a light?
Roll you up and let it run through
My veins
'Cause I can always see the farthest stars when I'm on you
And I don't wanna ever come down off this cloud of lovin' you
Say
Now you got me hopped up on that

(Pusher love) So high I'm on the ceiling baby
(You're my drug) So g'on and be my dealer baby
(Roll me up) 'Cause all I want is you, baby

One more time

(Pusher love) So high I'm on the ceiling baby

(Be my drug) G'on and be my dealer baby

(Hook me up) All I want is you, baby

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah

ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN start to part the TV screens. They then join GERTRUDE, CLAUDIUS, OPHELIA, and POLONIUS, who enter in step and mimic the dance moves of JT's back-up dancers in the video. LAERTES enters but joins in later in the song.

You're my little pusher love girl

Ain't you?

Mmm-hmm

Just my little pusher love girl

Uh

Now hey little mama

I love this high we're on to

And I know that your supply

Won't run out any time soon

Yeah...break it down

You gave me a taste, now I know that there's no getting off you

And I don't wanna ever come down off this cloud of lovin' you

Say

Now you got me hopped up on that

(Pusher love) So high I'm on the ceiling baby

(You're my drug) So g'on and be my dealer baby

(Roll me up) All I want is you, baby

One more time

(Pusher love) So high I'm on the ceiling baby

(Be my drug) So g'on and be my dealer baby

(Hook me up) All I want is you, baby

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah

My little pusher love girl

Ain't you?

Yes you are

Just my little pusher love girl

Uh

Since you came around

I've been living a different life

I don't wanna come down

From this love I got on high, yeah

And people call me a user

But I want you

To go on and use me, too

Nothing else will do
Hey
All I want is you, baby
Ahhh-nah

HAMLET motions for OPHELIA to join the audience as one of his adoring fans.

Uh
Said baby
You know who you are
Yeah
Hey
Come on, say, now you got me hopped up on that

(Pusher love) So high I'm on the ceiling baby
(You're my drug) So g'on and be my dealer baby
(Roll me up) 'Cause all I want is you, baby
One more time
(Pusher love) So high I'm on the ceiling baby
(Be my drug) So g'on and be my dealer baby
(Hook me up) All I want is you, baby
One more time
(Pusher love) So high I'm on the ceiling baby
(You're my drug) So g'on and be my dealer baby
(Roll me up) All I want, yeah, all I want, yeah,
All I want is you, babe
(Pusher love) So high I'm on the ceiling baby
(Be my drug) So g'on and be my dealer baby
(Hook me up) All I want is you
Yeah hey hey hey hey hey hey

You're my little pusher love girl
So sweet
Yes you are
Just my little pusher love girl
Ain't you?
She's my little pusher love girl

*MICHAEL hands off flowers to HAMLET, who gives them to OPHELIA.
CLAUDIUS, LAERTES, and POLONIUS start sneaking up behind HAMLET.*

I don't want nobody else, yeah
You're all I need, yeah
Just you and me
My little pusher love girl

Video cuts out completely. CLAUDIUS, LAERTES, and POLONIUS restrain and grab HAMLET and drag him upstage to tickle him, while GERTRUDE tends to OPHELIA, and ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN deliver their message.

GUILDENSTERN

Men typically experience depression differently from women and use different means to cope.

ROSENCRANTZ

For example, while women may feel hopeless,

GUILDENSTERN

men may feel irritable.

ROSENCRANTZ

Women may crave a listening ear,

GUILDENSTERN

while men may become socially withdrawn or become violent or abusive.

HAMLET violently breaks away from the tickling and starts stripping off his JT clothing. MICHAEL strikes each article of clothing and brings HAMLET his iPod, some paper, and a pen. HAMLET's breaking away is what kicks us right into the theme music from the Wendy Williams Show. GUILDENSTERN takes her place, ROSENCRANTZ takes a seat, and OPHELIA and LAERTES engage in some "child-play" upstage.

GUILDENSTERN

You know, I have a broken pinky toe. NO! Laugh now, peep the prognosis later. No, no, look, so yesterday I was telling you that, um, last week I told you that my pinky toe got caught on a wall as I was leaving. So I'm walking in my flip-flops, and I'm saying "good night" to, you know, everybody over at the washing machine, they wash our clothes right afterwards, our underpinnings? And my foot wasn't paying attention, and...it...clipped my pinky toe on the wall, and then there were, like, three children there, so I couldn't fully curse and carry on? There were three kids who came in to say hello? So I had to grimace and hold it and talk to them nice, when really all I wanted to do was curse?

Suddenly we're with LAERTES and OPHELIA. LAERTES treats OPHELIA like a sculpture that only he can shape.

LAERTES

My necessaries are embark'd. Farewell.
And sister, as the winds give benefit
And convoy is assistant, do not sleep,
But let me hear from you.

OPHELIA

Do you doubt that?

LAERTES

For Hamlet, and the trifling of his favor,
Hold it a fashion and a toy in blood,
A violet in the youth of primy nature,
Forward, not permanent, sweet, not lasting,
The perfume and suppliance of a minute,
No more.

OPHELIA

No more but so?

LAERTES

Think it no more.
Fear it, Ophelia, fear it, my dear sister,
And keep you in the rear of your affection
Out of the shot and danger of desire.

OPHELIA starts to break out of the rigid sculptural pose.

OPHELIA

I shall th'effect of this good lesson keep
As watchman to my heart. But good my brother,
Do not as some ungracious pastors do,
Show me the steep and thorny way to heaven,
Whiles like a puff'd and reckless libertine
Himself the primrose path of dalliance treads,
And recks not his own rede.

POLONIUS makes a grand entrance with theme music.

POLONIUS

Yet here, Laertes? Aboard, aboard for shame.
The wind sits in the shoulder of your sail,
And you are stay'd for. There, my blessing with thee.
And these few precepts in thy memory
Look thou character.

There is a change. POLONIUS' speech continues, but while he delivers it, OPHELIA steps out, and we stage another section from "Hyperbole and a Half" with music from Banjo Kazooie playing underneath.

POLONIUS (*sotto voce*, under OPHELIA's lines)

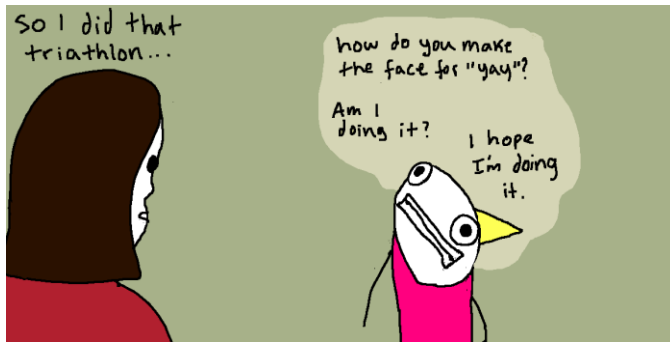
Give thy thoughts no tongue,
Nor any unproportion'd thought his act.
Be thou familiar, but by no means vulgar;
Those friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,
Grapple them unto thy soul with hoops of steel,
But do not dull thy palm with entertainment
Of each new-hatch'd, unfledg'd courage. Beware
Of entrance to a quarrel, but being in,
Bear't that th'opposed may beware of thee.
Give every man thy ear, but few thy voice;
Take each man's censure, but reserve thy judgment.
Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy,
But not express'd in fancy; rich, not gaudy;
For the apparel oft proclaims the man,
And they in France of the best rank and station
Are of a most select and generous chief in that.
Neither a borrower nor a lender be,
For loan oft loses both itself and friend,
And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry.
This above all: to thine own self be true,
And it must follow as the night the day
Thou canst not then be false to any man.
Farewell, my blessing season this in thee.

OPHELIA

I gradually came to accept that maybe enjoyment was not a thing I got to feel anymore. I didn't want anyone to know, though. I was still sort of uncomfortable about how bored and detached I felt around other people, and I was still holding out hope that the whole thing would spontaneously work itself out. As long as I could manage to not alienate anyone, everything might be okay!

However, I could no longer rely on genuine emotion to generate facial expressions, and when you have to spend every social interaction consciously manipulating your face into shapes that are only approximately the right ones, alienating people is inevitable.

On the video screens:



LAERTES: So I did that triathlon...

OPHELIA: (pre-recorded, while she makes the faces) How do you make the face for "yay"? Am I doing it? I hope I'm doing it.

On the video screens:



LAERTES: Yeah, some guy had a heart attack and drowned!

OPHELIA: (pre-recorded) Uh oh...SAD FACE SAD FACE.

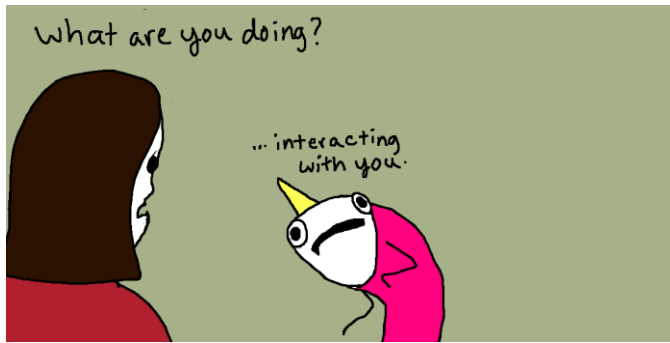
On the video screens:



LAERTES: Can you believe that?

OPHELIA: (pre-recorded) I'm doing the wrong face, I'm sure of it. Oh well...

On the video screens:



LAERTES: What are you doing?

OPHELIA: ...interacting with you.

We return to "normal." POLONIUS breaks from his speech, even if he hasn't finished it.

POLONIUS

For Lord Hamlet,
Believe so much in him that he is young,

LAERTES

Young.

POLONIUS

And with a larger tether

LAERTES

Tether.

POLONIUS

may he walk
Than may be given you.
I would not, in plain terms,

LAERTES

In plain terms.

POLONIUS

from this time forth
Have you so slander

LAERTES

Slander.

POLONIUS

any moment leisure

LAERTES
Leisure.

POLONIUS
As to give words or talk with the Lord Hamlet.

LAERTES
Hamlet.

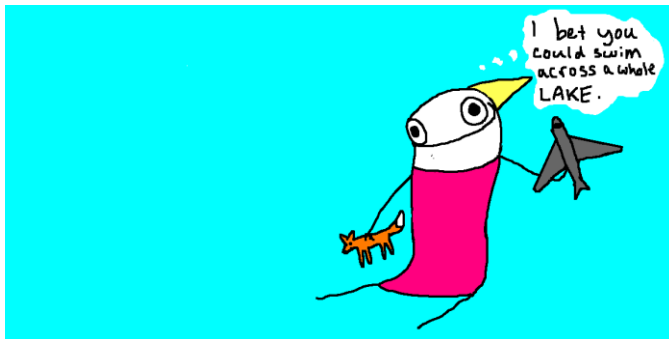
POLONIUS
Look to't.

POLONIUS & LAERTES
I charge you.

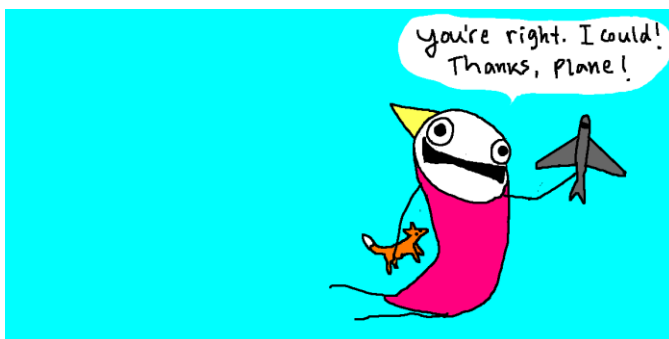
POLONIUS exits, and LAERTES copies his father's walk. We go back to the cartoon mode.

OPHELIA
I remember being endlessly entertained by the adventures of my toys. Some days they died repeated, violent deaths, other days they traveled to space or discussed my swim lessons and how I absolutely should be allowed in the deep end of the pool, especially since I was such a talented doggy-paddler.

On the video screens:



OPHELIA: (recorded) I bet you could swim across a whole LAKE.



OPHELIA: (recorded) You're right. I could! Thanks, Plane!

OPHELIA

I didn't understand why it was fun for me, it just was.

On the video screens:

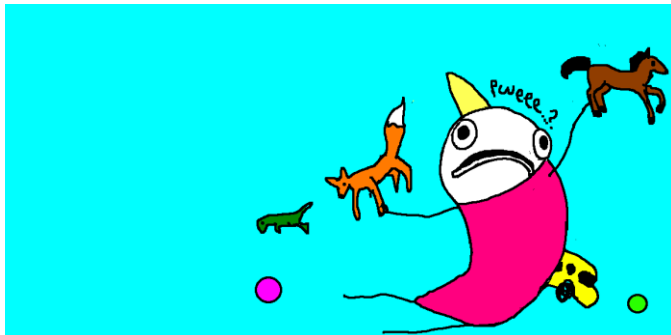


OPHELIA: (recorded) Pweeeeeeeeeeeeeeee...

OPHELIA

But as I grew older, it became harder and harder to access that expansive imaginary space that made my toys fun. I remember looking at them and feeling sort of frustrated and confused that things weren't the same.

On the video screens:

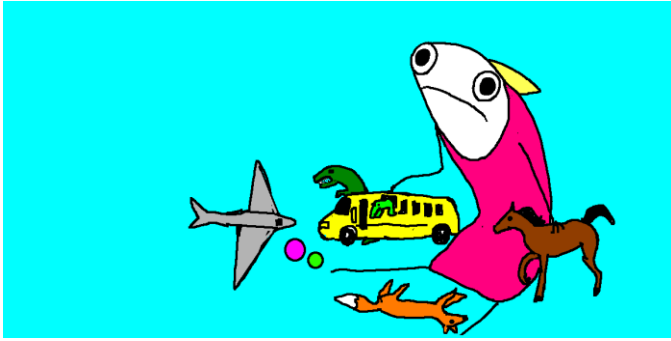


OPHELIA: (recorded) Pweee...?

OPHELIA

I played out all the same story lines that had been fun before, but the meaning had disappeared. Horse's Big Space Adventure transformed into holding a plastic horse in the air, hoping it would somehow be enjoyable for me. Prehistoric Crazy-Bus Death Ride was just smashing a toy bus full of dinosaurs into the wall while feeling sort of bored and unfulfilled. I could no longer connect to my toys in a way that allowed me to participate in the experience.

On the video screens:



OPHELIA

Depression feels almost exactly like that, except about everything.

HAMLET happens upon OPHELIA. They then interpret and enact OPHELIA's description of what happened in her chamber, while the words she uses to describe it are pre-recorded and played. Some sort of low-key JT music plays as well. POLONIUS watches the whole thing from underneath the table.

OPHELIA (pre-recorded)

Lord Hamlet, with his doublet all unbrac'd,
No hat upon his head, his stockings foul'd,
Ungarter'd and down-gyved to his ankle,
Pale as his shirt, his knees knocking each other,
And with a look so piteous in purport
As if he had been loosed out of hell
To speak of horrors, he comes before me.

He took me by the wrist and held me hard.
Then goes he to the length of all his arm,
And with his other hand thus o'er his brow
He falls to such perusal of my face
As a would draw it. Long stay'd he so.
At last, a little shaking of mine arm,
And thrice his head thus waving up and down,
He rais'd a sigh so piteous and profound
As it did seem to shatter all his bulk
And end his being. That done, he lets me go,
And with his head over his shoulder turn'd
He seem'd to find his way without his eyes,
For out o'doors he went without their helps,
And to the last bended their light on me.

HAMLET drops a letter before exiting. POLONIUS and OPHELIA fight for the letter, POLONIUS wins, and he sneaks off. While

this happens, ROSENCRANTZ addresses us in the style of a scandalous news magazine...with appropriate music, of course.

ROSENCRANTZ

In 2004, Andy Thomson met Paul Andrews, an evolutionary psychologist at Virginia Commonwealth University, who had long been interested in the depression paradox - why a disorder that's so costly is also so common. They struck up an extended conversation on the evolutionary roots of depression. They began by focusing on the thought process that defines the disorder, which is known as rumination. The verb is derived from the Latin word for "chewed over," which describes the act of digestion in cattle, in which they swallow, regurgitate and then rechew their food. Research has reinforced the view that rumination is a useless kind of pessimism, a perfect waste of mental energy. That, at least, was the scientific consensus when Andrews and Thomson began exploring the depression paradox. Their evolutionary perspective, however, led them to wonder if rumination had a purpose.

HAMLET restores his table to its original location while LAERTES gives his interview.

LAERTES (as Andrews)

I started thinking about how, even if you are depressed for a few months, the depression might be worth it if it helps you understand social relationships. Maybe you realize you need to be less rigid or more loving. Those are insights that can come out of depression, and they can be very valuable.

Abrupt change in talk-show style. Back to Kathie Lee and Hoda. ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN reset their table and knock HAMLET off the table.

GUILDENSTERN

By the way, Rosey, we have our Powerball tickets. Yes yes yes. If you win this, 360 million dollars, I guess it'll be more than that by the time they draw, right?

ROSENCRANTZ

Yeah, it's gonna be building
and if no one wins

GUILDENSTERN

Cause people are gonna go
crazy...

GUILDENSTERN

I bet it's gonna go over 400 after that.

ROSENCRANTZ
You think so?

GUILDENSTERN
Well, if it's 360 now.

ROSENCRANTZ
We did the Quick Picks, which I kinda like. Some people pick the same numbers over and over, but the Quick Picks have numbers that people don't normally pick, like numbers in the 50's and the 40's, because they're not on the calendar year? So people don't usually pick 'em, because they don't remind them of a date?

GUILDENSTERN
Oh.

ROSENCRANTZ
So we have unique numbers, which means we could win.

GUILDENSTERN
What about the 50's, if you're in your 50's, it would remind you every single day?

An abrupt shift. ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN back their way out, as POLONIUS makes his entrance (with CLAUDIUS and GERTRUDE following behind), and HAMLET moves his table stage left. Eventually CLAUDIUS has had enough, and he makes POLONIUS quit it. GERTRUDE performs a nervous gesture with her nails. HAMLET is visible to everyone on stage, yet the others talk about him as if he weren't even in the room.

POLONIUS
My liege and madam, to expostulate
What majesty should be, what duty is,
Why day is day, night night, and time is time,
Were nothing but to waste night, day, and time.

CLAUDIUS LIP-SYNCH (to HAMLET)
Do you need to go outside? Is it more fun to make that stupid face out there?

POLONIUS
Therefore, since brevity is the soul of wit,
And tediousness the limbs and outward flourishes,
I will be brief. Your noble son is mad.

CLAUDIUS LIP-SYNCH

Do you want to play a game? The game is called Stand in a Corner and Look Stupid. Ready? YOU WIN.

POLONIUS

Mad call I it, for to define true madness,
What is't but to be nothing else but mad?
But let that go.

GERTRUDE

More matter with less art.

POLONIUS

That he is mad 'tis true; 'tis true 'tis pity;
And pity 'tis 'tis true. A foolish figure—

CLAUDIUS LIP-SYNCH

Are you going into the kitchen? Cool. Go fuck yourself.

POLONIUS

But farewell it, for I will use no art.
I have a daughter—have while she is mine—
Who in her duty and obedience, mark,
Hath given me this. Now gather and surmise.

OPHELIA makes a cross, with flowers in hand, during the letter reading.

HAMLET (*with some sort of underscoring*)

To the celestial and my soul's idol, the most and beautified
Ophelia...

Doubt thou the stars are fire,
Doubt that the sun doth move,
Doubt truth to be a liar,
But never doubt I love.

O dear Ophelia, I am ill at these numbers. I have not art to
reckon my groans. But that I love thee best, O most best,
believe it. Adieu.

Thine evermore, most dear lady, whilst this machine is to him,
Hamlet.

CLAUDIUS, GERTRUDE, and POLONIUS gradually turn into cartoon villains.

CLAUDIUS

Do you think 'tis this?

GERTRUDE

It may be; very like.

POLONIUS

Hath there been such a time—I would fain know that—
That I have positively said, "'Tis so,"
When it prov'd otherwise?

CLAUDIUS

Not that I know.

POLONIUS

Take this from this if this be otherwise.
If circumstances lead me, I will find
Where truth is hid, though it were hid indeed
Within the center.

CLAUDIUS

How may we try it further?

POLONIUS

You know sometimes he walks four hours together
Here in the lobby.

GERTRUDE

So he does indeed.

POLONIUS

At such a time I'll loose my daughter to him.
Be you and I behind an arras then,
Mark the encounter. If he love her not,
And be not from his reason fall'n thereon,
Let me be no assistant for a state,
But keep a farm and carters.

CLAUDIUS

We will try it.

ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN enter with some sort of talk show theme music to underscore. They bring on their furniture, and they get rid of the three cartoon villains. This next scene is treated as if it were a talk show, and HAMLET is the guest, but he's a guest like Tom Cruise on The Today Show.

GUILDENSTERN

My honored lord.

ROSENCRANTZ

My most dear lord.

HAMLET

My excellent good friends. How dost thou, Guildenstern? Ah, Rosencrantz. How do you both?

ROSENCRANTZ

As the indifferent children of the earth.

GUILDENSTERN

Happy in that we are not over-happy: on Fortune's cap we are not the very button.

HAMLET

Nor the soles of her shoe?

ROSENCRANTZ

Neither, my lord.

HAMLET

Then you live about her waist, or in the middle of her favors?

GUILDENSTERN

Faith, her privates we.

HAMLET

In the secret parts of Fortune? O most true, she is a strumpet. What news?

ROSENCRANTZ

None, my lord, but the world's grown honest.

HAMLET

Why, then 'tis none to you; for there is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so.

Something here. Laughter? A studio audience laugh track as well? Do ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN try to pretend like what HAMLET is saying is the funniest thing they've ever heard? Guests on talk shows are supposed to be amusing, right?

HAMLET

I have of late, but wherefore I know not, lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of exercises; and indeed it goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame the earth seems to

me a sterile promontory, this most excellent canopy the air, look you, this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire, why, it appeareth nothing to me but a foul and pestilent congregation of vapors. What piece of work is a man, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in form and moving how express and admirable, in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god: the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals—and yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust? Man delights not me—nor woman neither, though by your smiling you seem to say so.

Something here. How's that laughter working out? Maybe not so good anymore, huh?

HAMLET

God's bodkin, man, much better. Use every man after his desert, and who shall scape whipping?

ROSENCRANTZ (*trying to fix the situation*)

Good my lord, what is your cause of distemper? You do surely bar the door upon your own liberty if you deny your griefs to your friend.

The talk show freezes, and we transition to a live-action Cymbalta commercial. The only thing that might appear on the screens is the Cymbalta logo.

GERTRUDE

When you're depressed
Where do you wanna go?
Nowhere.
Who do you feel like seeing?
No one.
Depression hurts in so many ways.
Sadness.
Loss of interest.
Anxiety.
Cymbalta can help.

Cymbalta is a prescription medication that treats many symptoms of depression. Tell your doctor right away if your depression worsens, you have unusual changes in behavior, or thoughts of suicide. Antidepressants can increase these in children, teens, and young adults. Cymbalta is not approved for children under 18. People taking MAOIs or thyridazine or with uncontrolled glaucoma should not take Cymbalta. Taking it with NSAID pain relievers, aspirin, or blood thinners may increase bleeding

risk. Severe liver problems, some fatal, were reported. Signs include abdominal pain and yellowing of the skin or eyes. Talk with your doctor about your medicines, including those for migraine, or if you have high fever, confusion, and stiff muscles, to address a possible life-threatening condition. Tell your doctor about alcohol use, liver disease, and before you reduce or stop taking Cymbalta. Dizziness or fainting may occur upon standing. Side effects include nausea, dry mouth, and constipation.

Ask your doctor about Cymbalta.
Depression hurts. Cymbalta can help.

The commercial ends, and HAMLET addresses the audience.

HAMLET

O what a rogue and peasant slave am I!

POLONIUS shoves OPHELIA onto the stage. As soon as she hits the ground, ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN tiptoe off with their furniture. POLONIUS tiptoes in the opposite direction upstage and strikes the table. He and CLAUDIUS then eavesdrop behind opposite sides of the curtain.

OPHELIA

How does your honor for this many a day?

HAMLET

I humbly thank you, well.

OPHELIA

My lord, I have remembrances of yours
That I have longed long to redeliver.
I pray you now receive them.

HAMLET

No, not I.

I never gave you aught.

OPHELIA

My honor'd lord, you know right well you did,
And with them words of so sweet breath compos'd
As made the things more rich. Their perfume lost,
Take these again; for to the noble mind
Rich gifts wax poor when givers prove unkind.

HAMLET

You should not have believed me; for virtue cannot so inoculate our old stock but we shall relish of it. I loved you not.

We briefly relive a moment from the sex scene with musical underscoring. It cuts out.

HAMLET

Get thee to a nunnery.

Go thy ways to a nunnery.

I have heard of your paintings well enough. God hath given you one face and you make yourselves another. You jig and amble, and you lisp, you nickname God's creatures, and make your wantonness your ignorance. Go to, I'll no more on't, it hath made me mad.

We relive another moment. It cuts out after HAMLET's sigh.

HAMLET

To a nunnery, go.

OPHELIA storms out, and we're back to cartoon world. The sound of a high-power generator starting. But now it's HAMLET saying the words, so the theme music is different. ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN enter downstage by the TV screens, each carrying an open bag of Skittles. (We have to work the Skittles in earlier in the show.) **Do we put cartoon panels on the screen?**

HAMLET

I've always wanted to not give a fuck. While crying helplessly into my pillow for no good reason, I would often fantasize that maybe someday I could be one of those stoic badasses whose emotions are mostly comprised of rock music and not being afraid of things. And finally - *finally* - after a lifetime of feelings and anxiety and more feelings, I didn't have any feelings left. I had spent my last feeling being disappointed that I couldn't rent *Jumanji*.

I felt invincible.

Judge me all you want, stupid face - I don't have feelings anymore.

I can do anything.

ROSENCRANTZ stands by HAMLET's side in a Charlie's Angels pose.

HAMLET

Maybe I'll rent a horror movie.

GUILDENSTERN does the same on HAMLET's other side.

HAMLET

Maybe I'll rent six horror movies.

HAMLET grabs the Skittles out of their hands and unleashes the contents of the bags in the audience's direction.

HAMLET

I would like to rent all of these movies and also purchase all of these Skittles.

And we're into the "Holiday" video. MICHAEL bursts through the upstage fabric with the cart, which will represent the car from the first part of the video. HAMLET lip-synchs, and all three mimic the actions of the video.

HAMLET

Hear the sound of the falling rain
Coming down like an Armageddon flame (HEY!)
The shame
The ones who died without a name

Hear the dogs howling out of key
To a hymn called "Faith and Misery" (HEY!)
And bleed, the company lost the war today

I beg to dream and differ from the hollow lies
This is the dawning of the rest of our lives
On holiday

We move on to the second section of the video. HAMLET plays director, assigns roles, and sets everything up to look just like the video. We don't have to worry about mimicking everything perfectly until we get to the last part, where the camera pans from left to right. THAT'S when everyone becomes professional and snaps into their roles.

HAMLET (*still lip-synching whenever he can*)

Hear the drum pounding out of time
Another protester has crossed the line (HEY!)
To find, the money's on the other side

Can I get another Amen? (AMEN!)

There's a flag wrapped around a score of men (HEY!)
A gag, a plastic bag on a monument

I beg to dream and differ from the hollow lies
This is the dawning of the rest of our lives
On holiday

*After the perfectly mimicked scene, we break into slut dance.
HAMLET picks up the microphone from the ground.*

HAMLET

Sieg Heil to the president Gasman
Bombs away is your punishment
Pulverize the Eiffel Towers
Who criticize your government
Bang bang goes the broken glass and
Kill all the fags that don't agree
Trials by fire, setting fire
Is not a way that's meant for me
Just cause...just cause, because we're outlaws yeah!

*We are still trying to embody the spirit of the last part of the
music video. It feels like we descend into chaos, but we still
want some storytelling. It should build to quite a fury.*

I beg to dream and differ from the hollow lies
This is the dawning of the rest of our lives
I beg to dream and differ from the hollow lies
This is the dawning of the rest of our lives

This is our lives on holiday

*In fact, it builds to such a fury that HAMLET grabs his gun
(which MICHAEL set in place) and fires it. But he's not really
firing it - we're using a sound effect. His bullet just happens
to catch POLONIUS, who is standing behind one of the fabric
curtains. He "dies." No blood.*

*The shot causes everyone to freeze. When he hits the ground,
everyone but GERTRUDE and HAMLET scamper away. GERTRUDE starts
popping pills.*

GERTRUDE

O what a rash and bloody deed is this!
Thou turn'st my eyes into my very soul,
And there I see such black and grained spots
As will not leave their tinct.

When GERTRUDE shifts into the cartoon voice, HAMLET appears to shake violently.

GERTRUDE AS A VOICE OF POSITIVITY FROM THE CARTOON

You should do yoga while watching the sunrise. It's literally impossible to feel negative and sad while appreciating the wonder of the universe.

HAMLET stares off into nothingness.

GERTRUDE (*popping pills at every punctuation mark*)

Alas, how is't with you,
That you do bend your eye on vacancy,
And with th'incorporal air do hold discourse?
Forth at your eyes your spirits wildly peep,
And, as the sleeping soldiers in th'alarm,
Your bedded hair, like life in excrements,
Start up and stand an end. O gentle son,
Upon the heat and flame of thy distemper
Sprinkle cool patience. Whereon do you look?

GERTRUDE AS A VOICE OF POSITIVITY FROM THE CARTOON

Positivity! Hope! And joy! Yay!!! Beauty and LOVE!

HAMLET AS A RESPONSE TO THE VOICE OF POSITIVITY

Are you taunting me? Is this some weird game where you name all the things I can't do?

HAMLET knocks GERTRUDE's pill bottle out of her hand and forces the pills out of her mouth.

GERTRUDE

O Hamlet, thou hast cleft my heart in twain.

GERTRUDE crawls around on the ground to collect her pills.

ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN enter in PSA mode and use GERTRUDE as an example of what they are describing.

ROSENCRANTZ

Psychological theories have traditionally explained depression as "anger turned inward against the self." If you fail to live up to some internal standard of who or what you are supposed to be, some internal watchdog notes your failure and begins to let you know that you haven't been all that you could be - depression.

CLAUDIUS enters and performs his floor pattern.

GUILDENSTERN

People often talk about being angry with themselves because they have not accomplished or achieved or done what they think they should have. This explanation accounts for the diminished self-esteem people often report.

GUILDENSTERN (*to CLAUDIUS*)

We will ourselves provide.
Most holy and religious fear it is
To keep those many many bodies safe
That live and feed upon your Majesty.

ROSENCRANTZ

The single and peculiar life is bound
With all the strength and armor of the mind
To keep itself from noyance; but much more
That spirit upon whose weal depends and rests
The lives of many.

CLAUDIUS

Arm you, I pray you, to this speedy voyage,
For we will fetters put about this fear
Which now goes too free-footed.

*CLAUDIUS moves out of the way, and ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN pick HAMLET off the ground. They fake walk. **Do we put cartoon panels on the screens?***

ROSENCRANTZ

What's wrong?

HAMLET

My fish are dead.

GUILDENSTERN

Don't worry! I'll help you find them! Are there any clues where they went?

HAMLET

I know where they are...the problem is they aren't alive anymore.

ROSENCRANTZ

Let's keep looking! I'm sure they'll turn up somewhere!

HAMLET

No, see, that solution is for a different problem than the one I have.

GUILDENSTERN

Fish are always deadest before the dawn.

ROSENCRANTZ (*starting to overlap*)

Have you tried feeding them?

GUILDENSTERN

You used to have so many fish...what happened?

ROSENCRANTZ

We should get together this weekend and make fun little finger puppets out of them.

GUILDENSTERN

Why not just make them be alive again?

ROSENCRANTZ

What about bees? Do you like bees?

HAMLET shoots and kills both of them. Again they aren't real gunshots. Just sound effects.

HAMLET

WHY CAN'T ANYONE SEE HOW DEAD THESE ARE?

LAERTES bursts in with a sound effect. HAMLET slides the gun along the ground to the upstage wall, before he drops to the ground and plays dead with the other corpses.

LAERTES

Where is my father?

How came he dead? I'll not be juggled with.

We are in CLAUDIUS's head.

CLAUDIUS

O, my offence is rank, it smells to heaven;
It hath the primal eldest curse upon't—
A brother's murder. Pray can I not,
Though inclination be as sharp as will,
My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent,
And, like a man to double business bound,
I stand in pause where I shall first begin,
And both neglect. What if this cursed hand
Were thicker than itself with brother's blood,
Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens
To wash it white as snow? Whereto serves mercy

But to confront the visage of offence?
My words fly up, my thoughts remain below.
Words without thoughts never to heaven go.

We snap out of it.

LAERTES

To hell, allegiance! Vows to the blackest devil!
Conscience and grace, to the profoundest pit!
I dare damnation. To this point I stand,
That both the worlds I give to negligence,
Let come what comes, only I'll be reveng'd
Most thoroughly for my father.

OPHELIA enters with a basket of crumpled up notes. She will distribute them throughout.

OPHELIA

How should I your true love know
From another one?
By his cockle hat and staff
And his sandal shoon.

GERTRUDE

Alas, sweet lady, what imports this song?

OPHELIA (*to GERTRUDE*)

Say you? Nay, pray you mark.
He is dead and gone, lady,
He is dead and gone,
At his head a grass-green turf,
At his heels a stone.

OPHELIA (*snapping into cartoon mode **with video?***)

I discovered that there's no tactful or comfortable way to
inform other people that you might be suicidal. And there's
definitely no way to ask for help casually.

(to audience) Knock-knock joke?

(to GERTRUDE) Knock-knock.

GERTRUDE

Who's there?

OPHELIA

Suicide.

GERTRUDE
Suicide who?

OPHELIA
I want to be dead. Actually this isn't a knock-knock joke, but I have something to tell you...Surprise!

(to audience) Yell, run away? (to CLAUDIUS, as she runs away)
Hey...I might do something bad to myself.

(to audience) Write on face, wait for someone to notice? Maybe, but face probably not big enough.

I didn't want it to be a big deal. However, it's an alarming subject. Trying to be nonchalant about it just makes it weird for everyone.

(to LAERTES) Hey...guess what.

On the video screens:



OPHELIA: No, see, I don't necessarily want to KILL myself...I just want to become dead somehow.

On the video screens:



OPHELIA: Sssshhhhhh...it's okay. Life is meaningless anyway.

On the video screens:



OPHELIA: I'm really sorry. Can I get you some juice or something?

OPHELIA (*out of cartoon mode*)
Fare you well, my dove.

LAERTES
Hadst thou thy wits and didst persuade revenge,
It could not move thus.

OPHELIA begins to distribute letters to people. When each receives a letter, he or she opens it and reads it, while walking a circle on the stage.

OPHELIA
You must sing *A-down a-down*, and you *Call him a-down-a*. O, how the wheel becomes it! It is the false steward that stole his master's daughter.

LAERTES
This nothing's more than matter.

OPHELIA
There's rosemary, that's for remembrance—pray you, love, remember. And there is pansies, that's for thoughts.

LAERTES
A document in madness: thoughts and remembrance fitted.
Thoughts and affliction, passion, hell itself
She turns to favor and to prettiness.

OPHELIA (*who will jam a letter in her dead father's mouth*)
And will a not come again?
And will a not come again?
No, no, he is dead,
Go to thy death-bed,
He never will come again.

His beard was as white as snow,
All flaxen was his poll.
He is gone, he is gone,
And we cast away moan.
God a mercy on his soul.

*OPHELIA holds her breath as long as she possibly can.
Everything freezes. When she can't breathe anymore, she takes
her place "in the coffin." And we are at "Helena."*

MICHAEL

Long ago
Just like the hearse, you die to get in again
We are so far from you

Burning on just like a match you slide to incinerate
The lives of everyone you know
And what's the worst to take
From every heart you break
And like the blade you stain
Well, I've been holding on tonight

What's the worst thing I can say?
Things are better if I stay
So long and goodnight
So long not goodnight

Came a time
When every star fall brought you to tears again
We are the very hurt you sold
And what's the worst to take
From every heart you break
And like the blade you stain
Well, I've been holding on tonight

What's the worst thing I can say?
Things are better if I stay
So long and goodnight
So long not goodnight
And if you carry on this way
Things are better if I stay
So long and goodnight
So long not goodnight

Can you hear me?
Are you near me?
Can we pretend

To leave? And then
We'll meet again
When both our cars collide

What's the worst thing I can say?
Things are better if I stay
So long and goodnight
So long not goodnight
And if you carry on this way
Things are better if I stay
So long and goodnight
So long not goodnight

We're doing something with video here, but I don't know which cartoon panels we'll use, nor do I know where they fall.

HAMLET

To be, or not to be, that is the question:

MICHAEL

One crucial fact needs to be emphasized.

OPHELIA'S RECORDED VOICE (with super happy swelling music)
At some point during this phase, I was crying on the kitchen floor for no reason. Then, through the film of tears and nothingness, I spotted a tiny, shriveled piece of corn under the refrigerator.

HAMLET

Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles
And by opposing end them.

MICHAEL

There is a particular risk of suicide when the depressed individual is just beginning to recover.

OPHELIA'S VOICE

I don't claim to know why this happened, but when I saw the piece of corn, something snapped...and it produced the most confusing bout of uncontrollable, debilitating laughter that I have ever experienced.

HAMLET

To die—to sleep,
No more; and by a sleep to say we end

The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to: 'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wish'd.

OPHELIA'S VOICE

That piece of corn is the funniest thing I have ever seen, and I cannot explain to anyone why it's funny.

MICHAEL

As they recover, some sufferers - who were too depressed to elaborate a suicide plan and carry it out - become a little more energetic and better able to act.

HAMLET

To die, to sleep;
To sleep, perchance to dream-ay, there's the rub:

OPHELIA'S VOICE

If someone ever asks me "what was the exact moment where things started to feel slightly less shitty?", I'm going to have to tell them about the piece of corn.

MICHAEL

Some depressed individuals even feign improvement in order to carry out a suicide plan undetected. Such individuals find themselves able to proceed with their intention just at the very time that relatives are beginning to feel more hopeful.

HAMLET

For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause-there's the respect
That makes calamity of so long life.

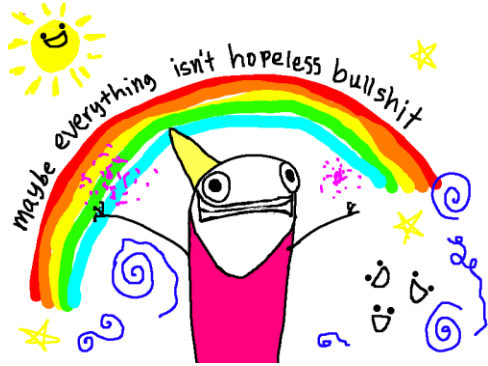
While OPHELIA's voice plays, MICHAEL presents HAMLET with two options - the fake gun he's been using and a real gun. HAMLET chooses the real gun and makes his preparations.

OPHELIA'S VOICE

Anyway, I wanted to end this on a hopeful, positive note, but, seeing as how my sense of hope and positivity is still shrouded in a thick layer of feeling like hope and positivity are bullshit, I'll just say this: Nobody can guarantee that it's going to be okay, but - and I don't know if this will be comforting to anyone else - the possibility exists that there's a piece of corn on a floor somewhere that will make you just as confused about why you are laughing as you have ever been about

why you are depressed. And even if everything still seems like hopeless bullshit, maybe it's just *pointless* bullshit or *weird* bullshit or possibly not even bullshit.

On the video screens:



Maybe HAMLET laughs a bit, but then he ACTUALLY FIRES THE GUN at his head.

The video of Fred Astaire singing "The Way You Look Tonight" to Ginger Rodgers starts playing. We sort of mimic the movements? HAMLET ACTUALLY sings along.

HAMLET

Someday when I'm awfully low,
And the world is cold,
I will feel a glow just thinking of you
And the way you look tonight.

Oh, but you're lovely
With your smile so warm
And your cheeks so soft.
There is nothing for me but to love you
Just the way you look tonight.

Whenever Ginger Rodgers enters the room, OPHELIA appears in a spotlight in a wedding dress, unbeknownst to HAMLET.

HAMLET

With each word your tenderness grows,
Tearing my fear apart.
And that laugh that wrinkles your nose
Touches my foolish heart.

Lovely, never never change,
Keep that breathless charm.
Won't you please arrange it

'Cause I love you?
Just the way you look tonight.
Just the way you look tonight.

When it gets to the part where Fred turns around to look at Ginger, the video freezes. HAMLET and OPHELIA revisit movement from the sex scene. HAMLET lifts OPHELIA's veil to reveal that she is DEATHLY WHITE. It catches him off guard. This is not how he wanted all this to go. OPHELIA realizes it. She pulls him closer.

OPHELIA
Good night, sweet prince,
And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest.

OPHELIA leans in to kiss HAMLET, and just as their lips touch, we go to black.

APPENDIX E – *The Hamlet Project*: Performance and Production Photos

The closing performance of *The Hamlet Project* was recorded, and it can be accessed at the link below. Unfortunately, the camera did not capture the television screens positioned at the downstage corners of the playing area.

<https://vimeo.com/77449337>

Password: koosh

The following production photos were taken by Andrew Peters.



Psych Session: John Gryl (Stage Mansger), Michael Osinski (Director), Sam Haines (Hamlet), Gracie Raymond (Assistant Stage Manager)



Claudius Lip-Synch: Sam Haines (Hamlet), Rejinal Simon (Claudius)



Pusher Love Girl: Entire Company



Cartoon (Facial Expressions): Awate Serequeberhan (Laertes), Stephanie Barron (Ophelia),
Sam Haines (Hamlet), Jason Rohn (Polonius)



Cartoon (Toys): Stephanie Barron (Ophelia)



Sex Scene: Stephanie Barron (Ophelia), Sam Haines (Hamlet)



The Talk Show: Pauline Critch-Gilfillan (Rosencrantz), Ashlyn Lozano (Guildenstern),
Sam Haines (Hamlet)



Cymbalta Commercial: Laura Harrison (Gertrude) and Entire Company



Holiday: Sam Haines (Hamlet) and Entire Company



Cartoon (Dead Fish): Pauline Critch-Gilfillan (Rosencrantz), Sam Haines (Hamlet), Ashlyn Lozano (Guildenstern)



Helena: Sam Haines (Hamlet), Stephanie Barron (Ophelia)



The Way You Look Tonight: Sam Haines (Hamlet)

APPENDIX F – The “Hot Seat” Exercise – from *The Viewpoints Book*

The following is taken from *The Viewpoints Book*. We used this exercise in the first week of rehearsals.

Part I: Writing

Gather the group together in a circle, each with pad and pencil. Ask them to complete a series of personal statements about their character (simple statements and responses are below). They should write down the entire sentence as you state it, then fill in the blanks; when they read their answers back later, they must answer with the full statement exactly as it was posed to them. Give them a tiny bit less time for each question than you think they need to answer it thoughtfully; create *Exquisite Pressure* by reducing time and increasing spontaneity.

As your character, fill in these statements:

My name is _____.

I am _____ years old.

I am from _____.

My profession is _____.

Five facts I know from the text are: _____.

Five things I intuit (but which are not stated in the text) are: _____.

A telling action I perform in the play is _____.

A telling line I speak is _____.

My greatest fear is _____.

My greatest longing is _____.

Odd habits I have are _____.

My likes include _____.

My dislikes include _____.

Part II: Moving

After you've finished with the questions from above, and before you read them aloud, get the company to work on their feet. State out loud to them the following list of movements, which they need to generate on their own, and give them five to ten minutes to prepare:

- An action with Tempo that expresses character
- An action with Duration that expresses character
- A floor pattern that expresses character
- Three Behavioral Gestures that are particular to the character's personality, culture, time or place
- Two Expressive Gestures that express the essence of character, a propelling force or a conflict within
- A walk across the room with bold choices regarding Tempo, Shape and Topography.

Gather the group back together and sit as an audience. Ask one individual at a time to get up into the *hot seat* and share her/his statements and movement, in exactly the way you ordered it, with the exact wording. For instance, the individual should say, "My name is Blanche DuBois," then go on to state her age, etc., ending with (as a completed example), "My dislikes include naked light bulbs, etc." When each participant performs her/his movement, s/he should state the name; for instance, s/he should announce, "Tempo," then perform the action, then "Duration," etc., making sure there is a clear start and finish to each action, returning to neutral in between.

APPENDIX G – Plasticene Handout – from Dexter Bullard

The following is the handout Dexter Bullard gives students in the winter Acting Laboratory/Directing II class at The Theatre School. It outlines the basic principles and elements of his work with Plasticene.

Plasticenics

Plasticenics* empowers performers to take expressive control by generating action from circumstances beyond the traditional text-based interpretive theatrical process. Plasticenics sees the actor's physical connection to the actual and fictive worlds as the inspirations of honest and creative expression — and therefore, honest and creative theater. Plasticenics imagines a full awareness of present detail from the Six Spaces of Self that inspires the creation of Actions in those Spaces as informed by the Twelve Tools. The actor enters a reciprocal flow of attention and action in full physical engagement.

The Six Spaces of Self

Interior — the systems of our body, the forces, impulses, and change noticed.

Skin — our contact with beyond the interior, sensation, and attention.

Identity — our personal, habitual, and cultural physical “habitat.”

Effect — our effect on the world of objects.

Social — our engagement to the world of the other.

Universal — our awareness of beyond to infinity.

Bone
Muscles
Blood
Nerve
Endocrine
Digestion
Respiration

The Twelve Tools

Breath

Impulse

Pathway – Bodily, Spatial

Grounding – Gravitational, Electrical, Radiant

Extension – Internal, External, Other

Focus – Direct, Soft, Peripheral, 360

Flexion – Rate, Range, Tension

Physical Listening

Essence

Material Action/Object Encounter

Causality

Contact

Touch... is massage, posture, and sculpture
Smell... is aroma and emotion
Taste ... is eros and family
Hearing... is music, balance, and alarm
Sight... is art, position, and space

Five Actions

Hard (or Yang)

Soft (or Yin)

Mutual (or Parallel)

Responding (or Complementary)

Controlling

LINKS TO PLASTICENE WORK

<http://vimeo.com/28859915>

<http://vimeo.com/29745037>

The Collaborative Process

Resource — something from which to improvise/play. An object, event, place, text, image, moment.

Exploration — improvisation with the resource to generate a field of possibility and develop interrelationships.

Scoring — placing possibilities in an order/flow of time and energy - incorporating light and sound.

Performance — inviting witness to respond by experiencing the flow.

Exchange — teaching what we have discovered to others and evaluating ourselves to start the process anew.

The Theatrical Flow

Convocation — the player and witness come together.

Evocation — the player and witness enter dream together.

Invocation — the player and witness experience change together.

Provocation — the player and witness experience change apart.

Convocation — the player and witness come together again.

*Developed by Dexter Bullard and Plasticene company members Brian Shaw, Sharon Göpfert, and others since 1994. Inspired partially by Etienne Decroux, Jacques Copeau, Steve Paxton, Contact Improvisation, Authentic Movement, Viola Spolin, Goat Island, Yoga, Augusto Boal, Eugenio Barba, Ruth Zaporah, Robert LePage, Carbone 14, Richard Schectner, Antonin Artaud, hundreds of students, and lots and lots of rehearsal time together.

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