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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

SANTA CRUZ

**GIVING A VOICE TO THOSE WHO HAVE SILENCED THEIR OWN**

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

In

THEATER ARTS

By

**Sutton Arabe**

June 2013

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## GIVING A VOICE TO THOSE WHO HAVE SILENCED THEIR OWN

By Sutton Arabe

### Abstract

I have chosen to write about the play I directed, *Dog Sees God*, for my thesis because its message strongly resonates with me personally and I wanted to use this story to raise awareness of intolerance in our society. I have always been attracted to theater that combats social injustice and makes people understand another side of an argument by telling the stories of the people who do not have a voice. Although the characters of *Dog Sees God* are fictional, their experiences echo the hardships of any person growing up in an unforgiving society. In my production, I focused predominantly on the issue of bullying in our schools, initially centering on the issue of homophobia, but eventually opening it up to intolerance to all.

*Dog Sees God* is a perfect vehicle to illustrate the dangers and repercussions of bullying without seeming banal and contrived. It takes the familiar children's cartoon, *Peanuts*, and sets the characters in high school. This makes teens and young adults the prime audience for this show, because they are going through the same difficult transitional period in their lives, that is, finding their identity while dealing with the pressures of fitting in. *Dog Sees God* provides the audience with a unique experience to watch their favorite childhood characters grow up and teach them more mature lessons that are now more relevant to their lives. However, this time it's not a bright, happy ending the older cartoons of their youth offered, but rather a reality

check to how unforgiving society can be and the unnecessary cruelty we inflict upon each other.

There were many challenges throughout this process that I was able to overcome. First, the show was originally going to be produced as a full production through the student run theater company, BarnStorm. When my directing proposal was accepted, I was informed by the managing directors that they could only provide enough money for a one night “limited engagement.” I did not want the cast and myself to work hard all quarter to have it all end in one night, especially since I believed that this was a message that needed to be heard by as many people as possible. I went to different performance spaces around the UCSC campus and was able to obtain dates for two of them, Kresge Town Hall and the Porter Dining Hall. These were not traditional theater spaces, which presented challenges. Second Stage and Kresge had an elevated stage with a backstage and wings while Porter was just an empty flat stage in the middle of a huge room. To avoid having to block each individual show around the elements of the space, I had to adapt my blocking so that this show could potentially be performed anywhere.

After these spaces were secure there was still the challenge of putting on a show with virtually no budget. This forced me to come up with practical solutions such as exploring the concepts of minimalist theater. I put this concept into practice for props, sets, and costumes to have a total budget that was less than \$50. However, the rights for the show came to 75 dollars per performance and each performance

space cost \$150 a night. This escalated quickly, and the total cost came out to \$75. To combat this financial problem, I submitted a grant proposal to the Porter Senate, who agreed to pay for the rights for the Porter Dining Hall and the rights to that show. I also appealed to Kresge Town Hall, who decided to charge me for one night instead of two, bringing down the overall total. I received an additional 100 dollars in financial support from the Multicultural Awareness Club, who firmly believed in my cause. This just left me to pay for the remaining rights of the shows out of pocket, but I am proud of how much I was able to lower the cost through fundraising and grants.

Lastly, I wanted to give the audience a chance to be a part of this play by allowing them to donate to three charities for which we were trying to raise money. I believe theater can change people's lives, so instead of being passive and merely watching a fictional production, the audience was encouraged to take real action to combat these issues. My cast and I are proud to say that we were able to inspire people to aid The Trevor Project, Parent Advocacy Coalition for Educational Rights (PACER), and the Siwe Project, to potentially save lives and stamp out bullying from our schools. Thanks to UCSC professor Danny Scheie, I was able to meet more contacts that supported queer theater and convince benefactor Mike Dively to match the amount of money we raised for The Trevor Project: a nonprofit organization aimed to help prevent suicide in the LGBT community.

I plan to write about these challenges and many more in greater detail, along with other opportunities and experiences that presented themselves while I was working on this production, such as trying my hand at composing music and choreography. I believe all of these factors helped shaped the show into something that was so far off from what I had originally imagined, but so much more effective than what I had hoped. I am very proud of the work I created and this project has really opened my eyes to the possibilities and excitement of being on the other side of the stage as a director.



## **Why Dog Sees God?**

In the fall of 2010 there was a string of gay teen suicides happening one after another all around the United States. It seemed like every other day, a new face of teen girl or boy was on the news staring back at me. These kids were so young and full of potential, and it was heartbreaking to hear how they killed themselves in sorrow and isolation to escape from the merciless bullying of a society that hated and rejected them. These suicides hit home for me because when I was 16, I had been struggling with depression and my own sexual orientation. When I thought I was ready to come out, I told my best friend at the time who said he was okay with it, but the next day he stopped talking to me, and before I knew what had happened, we were not friends anymore. I had trusted my best friend, and judging by his reaction, I assumed that nobody was going to love or accept me if I was gay. My worst fears had been realized and I had decided that I did not want to go through life being abandoned by the ones I loved. In the height of my depression, I attempted to commit suicide by overdosing on my anti-depressants. I am grateful now that my attempt had failed, but I will never forget that dark moment in my life when I wanted my life to end.

In the fall of 2012 I stumbled upon *Dog Sees God* when I was borrowing some plays from my friend, Chris. He described it as a play where Charlie Brown and the gang are all grown up and a bunch of misfits in high school. I read the play thinking that it would be a fun and comical story, but it was so much more than that.

When the character, Beethoven, commits suicide at the end of the play because of the fact that he was gay it reawakened the memories of my past struggles. Although this was just a play with fictional characters, it felt so real and personal to me and reawakened the feelings I had during the year 2010, watching those gay teens take their lives and feeling so helpless.

I decided then that I had to do something to stand up against this abomination and try to utilize theater to inspire social change. I knew this play was the instrument I could use to present an anti-bullying statement and help raise awareness of queer youth issues. By directing *Dog Sees God*, I was finally going to give a voice to those gay teens that have been haunting my dreams. But then I realized, while writing my directing proposal, I did not have to make this a singularly queer issue. Although studies show that queer youth are exponentially more at risk of being bullied than their straight counterparts, I did not have to focus on that one minority. Instead, I could open up a larger dialogue and just make the statement that bullying, in general, needs to stop. We have all been bullied or felt society's pressures at one point in our life, whether it was because of our gender, race, sexual orientation, weight, height, or social class.

During our teenage years, we get hyperaware of how society views us and we crave acceptance. Sometimes, in order to feel better about themselves, kids will target other kids who do not fit into their classification of "normal" and will berate them with hurtful words and, in extreme cases, even physically attack them. Usually,

teachers and parents wait until they see signs of physical bullying before taking action, but we must realize that verbal abuse could be just as, if not more, deadly. Verbal bullying is hard to pinpoint unless it is actually witnessed, so people need to start speaking up to fight harassment wherever they see it. With the tools and devices I have learned throughout my theater arts career as well as my personal experiences, I was ready to tackle this challenge of using *Dog Sees God* as a platform for activism.

## ***Influential Figures***

### **Jerzy Grotowski and Minimalism**

I believe people today underestimate the power of their own imagination. One reason I think this production was so successful was because all we needed was to rely on the actors' skill, two acting studio blocks, and occasionally the use of background noise to create a very distinct setting for the audience to imagine. Since there was no money to put into the production, I embraced Grotowski's ideal that with "The acceptance of poverty in theater, stripped of all that is not essential to it, reveal[s] to us not only the backbone of the medium, but also the deep riches which lie in the very nature of the art form." (21, Grotowski). By not distracting the audience with elaborate sets or pace killing scene transitions, we gave our viewers the responsibility to create the world of the play for themselves, rather than having a designer do it for them.

I am very conscious of the environment, so I cringe every time I see a show with a huge and elaborate set that goes through a strike and all of that hard work and material is thrown away. What may have cost thousands of dollars and countless hours create is in the next moment gone, never to be used again. Not only is the minimalist view of having the audience come up with the set design liberating for them, it is also very economically and ecologically practical. I am a firm believer in the fact that “[The theater] cannot exist without the actor-spectator relationship.” (19, Grotowski) A staged reading with passionate actors can be more infinitely more powerful than a brilliantly designed show with mediocre acting. The fact is that theater is a human experience. Museums are for valuing beautiful, inanimate pieces of art, but the theater is *alive* and therefore built on the relationship between two live beings. A touring show was ideal for this production because it did not rely on the set or location of the performance, only the talent of the actors.

I directed and staged the show in such a way that it could technically be performed anywhere that had a well-lit, flat space, potentially on the street, or even in the forest using natural lighting. The point was that lights and set were not going to dictate the number of venues in which we could potentially perform. Therefore, the “set” that I did create consisted of a small wall of bed sheets that acted as a sort of curtain for the actors to stand, sit, wait, and change behind. The white bed sheets had hate words and hurtful slurs spray painted onto them, like graffiti on a defaced high school locker. This helps to paint a picture of what some victims of bullying had to go through each day: not only being humiliated in passing, but having it written out

permanently for all to see. In my sophomore year of high school, I remember walking to my locker only to find the lock smeared with (what I assumed to be human) feces. I remember how everyone passing by would laugh and point and ask whose locker it was. I needed to get my books for next period but I was too ashamed to go anywhere near my locker in fear of people finding out the locker was mine, so I waited until the bell rang and everyone was in class before I managed to open my locker. I remember how disgusted and humiliated I felt when I had to take the lock to wash it off in the bathroom. The fact that somebody did this for the sole purpose of making me feel this way was terrible to think about.

This blunt showcase of profanity would constantly force the audience to look at offensive words until they eventually became desensitized to them. Grotowski and I share the same philosophy in the fact that “I wanted to attack [the audience], go beyond them, or rather, confront them with my own experience which is itself determined by the collection of our time.” (22, Grotowski) Of course I couldn’t convey this exact feeling in my “set design,” but it is what inspired me to have the background echo the vandalism of a hateful person. If these words had no effect on the audience and just faded into the background it goes to show how we have become so numb to specific hate words or offensive phrases that we might not even realize when we are bullying someone. For example, the word “gay” is now synonymous with “stupid” or “dumb” in today’s vernacular. Using the phrase, “that’s so gay,” to show displeasure with something may seem harmless, but it is, in fact, training others to internalize homosexuality as something inferior or inherently wrong.

Grotowski was a major influence on my work as a director in the fact that he enlightened me with the lesson that expensive theater is not inherently “good” theater. I believe in theater with a message and theater with a cause, and implementing his concept of “poor theater,” I could combine two ideals that I believe strongly in: taking care of both our humanity and environment.

### **Luis Valdez and Political Theater**

I was motivated to make this a touring production not only because I was only given one night to showcase it but because if I was going to make an activist theater piece, I needed to make it accessible to the public. I was inspired by Luis Valdez’s form of the Acto, a short political theater piece that would be used to rally the public in times of need. My original idea would to use *Dog Sees God* as an Acto, only to show this performance in high schools, because I feel like that is where the most good can come out. This show is perfect for holding the attention of young audience members and I honestly believe that they are at the time of their lives where this message could really have an impact on their lives and let them know how much power their words actually have. The simplicity of the sets, props, and lighting needs makes my production of *Dog Sees God* easy to set up, break down, and mobilize on the go.

I also implemented Valdez’s use of the corrido, or song that breaks up the flow of action to set the atmosphere of the scene. When I started this production I

knew I wanted to write an original song for when Beethoven gets beaten up by Matt. The song I wrote, explained in fuller detail in the next section, did just this. The singer's slow, sorrowful voices filled up the theater creating a somber tone to the already tension filled room while directing relating to the audience. This use of corrido is both an influence of Valdez, yet in some ways also a Brechtian device.

After the shows at UCSC were finished, I was contacted by Santa Cruz High's programs director, Lindsey Behr, who, through a mutual contact, had heard about the show and was interested in us coming to the high school and performing it. This is exactly what I had hoped to do but unfortunately due to everyone's schedules, we could not find a set date. However, in the following spring quarter we were able to perform it for Danny Scheie's Queer Theater class. I am so proud that this production got to be viewed in an academic setting because that had been my hope all along: to not only entertain with a great story, but to educate them through theater. Now that I have a great skeleton for this show, it is my hope that I can direct it again in the future with the intention to tour it to different high schools and inform as many teens as I can.

### **Brecht and His Use of Narration**

*Dog Sees God* is divided into episodic scenes, each having a unique title. It is up to the director to determine whether or not they would like the audience to know the title of the scenes. I decided that I would like to announce the beginnings of each

scene with a narrator. My concept for the narrator was that all the cast was to start the show with stage blacks, or a full “neutral” black ensemble. Whenever a member of the cast was in their stage blacks they represented themselves rather than a character of the play. The point being this could allow the audience to disassociate the actors from the characters they portrayed. Brecht explains, “the actors no longer [throw] themselves completely into their roles but maintained a certain distance from the character performed by them.” (24, Brecht) This gave a redeeming quality to the actors playing antagonistic characters, allowing them to come back in the final scene, “Dear CB,” as themselves, giving words of advice to both CB and the audience.

My original idea for the narrators did not come out completely through for this production, and if I direct this show again I would definitely try to incorporate it fully. My original idea for the narrators of the scene was to have a certain Brechtian quality, in which they would announce the scene and remain on stage to watch the action taking place. My point in this was mainly for the narrators to be able to critique what was happening on stage along with potentially manipulating the action. Instead the narrators for the most part entered at the beginning of each scene, said the title, and then exited with the exception of a couple of scenes where a narrator may have added a quote or given a prop to an actor.

One crucial part of having the narrators in stage blacks was the scene “Mal Di Luna” when Matt beats up Beethoven. I originally wanted the entire cast on stage for this moment; all in their stage blacks save Matt and Beethoven. The reasoning for



this was to create the picture that all of these people were witnessing poor Beethoven without doing anything to stop it. With this device, I hoped to demonstrate the fact that at some point in our lives all of us have witnessed bullying and injustice and have just stood idly by when we could have done something about it. This happened to an extent, where I had Hayley, Abby, Taylor, Ivy, and Atticus walk slowly out in the middle of the scene, but I do not think it was as powerful as it could have been if I had gone with my idea where the narrators were onstage for the whole time especially if I introduced in the play that they had the power to affect the action but none of them chose to do so in this moment.

I did not go with my original idea of having the narrator onstage for the entirety of the scene because I was afraid of pulling focus. Being the first play I had directed I believed it might have been a too radical of choice and that the audience would get distracted or tempted to look at the narrator observing rather than the main characters, even if they were positioned so that they would draw the least amount of focus. I believed just eliminating the potential distraction would be safer choice. In hindsight I think I underestimated the audience's level of comprehension, and I think I could have easily staged my original idea for the narrators.

### **Kirsten Brandt and Transformative Gestures Through Song**

#### *1. The Ants Go Marching One by One*

I knew from the beginning that I wanted to incorporate music somehow into this performance. I have been involved in music since picking up the violin in fourth grade and being competitively involved in wind ensemble and marching band all throughout high school. Along the way I have taken a few music theory classes and have always wanted to try my stab at composing a song. I knew that in casting I was going to be on the lookout for potential singers. If it worked out where I had one or two experienced singers I would try to incorporate a song or two in my production. I had never expected to get a full cast that was so musically inclined and could all sing.

The idea of using the song “The Ants Go Marching One by One” came to me randomly over the winter break before I had started production. I had learned from director Kirsten Brandt of how powerful repetitive gestures or phrases were throughout a show. How something that an audience could recognize to mean one thing could evolve and change over time to mean something entirely different. My idea was to apply this concept to a song that would have a seemingly cheery or happy meaning that could be song at the beginning of the play and then sung again at the end of the play where the words that once seemed happy and hopeful have turned tragic in the context of the whole play in its entirety.

It was important to me to use song that could be recognized by a majority of the audience; a timeless song that wasn’t necessarily associated with a specific era or a well-known pop song. I was originally thinking of the song, “You Are My Sunshine,” which we had used in an acting studio in which Brandt instructed. The

first verse could be mistaken as a happy love melody whereas in the second verse you realize the actual tragedy of the song. The only problem was trying to open the show with the first verse. It seemed awkward to open up the play with the actors assembling on stage to randomly sing this song.

Then one day I found myself humming the tune of the “Ants Go Marching” and it struck me: this tune fit perfectly with my concept. The production would open up on an empty stage where for a few seconds all you could hear were the stomps of the actors marching in unison. They would then come on smiling happily while singing the first verse, with a slight change of lyrics of “the little one stops to suck his thumb” to “the little one stops to load his gun.” This change would create a juxtaposition of all of the cast smiling and singing this cheery tune while saying these very dark words. Because a majority of the audience would know this song very well and because the moment happens so fast, this lyric change would make people do a double take while listening, making them ask themselves, “Wait, what did they just say?” This also is an obvious use of foreshadow, talking about a small child or teen loading a gun to take their life.

While singing this song the cast would be dressed in their stage blacks and all in time with one another; a single unit in complete conformity as if they were a military squadron. This went along beautifully with the theme of “fitting in” and self in society. This device recalled the experience of my high school marching band, especially when the cast moved in formation. The actors would use “faces,” or a

turning commands, to face opposite directions creating the sense of organized chaos which created a diversion for Scott to put on his CB costume without drawing attention. At the last beat of the song all the narrators would turn to face upstage except for Ivy who was center stage and turned downstage to face the audience, drawing all focus to her. She then said the title and the narrators parted ways to reveal a differently costumed CB sitting on one of the blocks. The sense I hoped to achieve was to create the effect of a sudden appearance, as in, "...How did this other character magically appear?"

We end the play the way we started, with the song of "The Ants Go Marching," only this time melody is slower, sad, and ominous. The cast only sings the phrase, "And they all go marching down, to the ground, to get out, of the rain." This line is perfect because it is talking directly about the teenagers who took their own lives, because one after one they took their lives, were buried in the ground, all to get out of the "rain," or in their case to escape the darkest parts of their lives.

### *1. Sticks and Stones*

Another aspect of music was the song "Sticks and Stones" that was sung directly after Matt beats up Beethoven. This song was an original piece in which I wrote and composed. I have always wanted to try my hand at writing music, and was particularly inspired when I was working on *The Mandrake* with director Gina Marie Hayes who utilized beautiful original songs composed by her sister.

Having never written a song before I decided to write the lyrics first and then try to find a melody. I wanted the lyrics to come from a dark place, conveying hopelessness and confusion of someone contemplating suicide. The lyrics I admit are a little juvenile, but I believe the emotional high school poetry aesthetic is appropriate, seeing how that is a potential outlet for many teens struggling with their lives. The lyrics are as follows:

“You said they couldn’t hurt me.

You told me to be strong.

You said that life’s worth living,

but you were wrong.

You said that sticks and stones

may break my bones

but words will never hurt.

Then tell me why I want to die

every time they speak to me.

Sticks and stones may break my bones

but words can kill as well.”

This song is inserted to simply to invalidate the phrase, “sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me.” All teenagers who have resorted to take their own lives in order to escape the constant verbal abuse are proof that the thought that word words can kill.

When composing the melody and harmonies I wanted to create an air of eeriness, sadness, and hopelessness. The song is slow, almost mourning, complimenting the lyrics and creating the sense that the singer pleading to the listener. The singer is casting blame on the listener, by telling them that their “advice” has failed them. I wrote this song from the perspective of the teens who had taken their lives, therefore it possesses this haunting like quality to it. I’m pleased with how this song came out. Although it is very simple, it was something I wrote entirely on my own and conveyed the message that I wanted.

## 2. *Hide and Seek*

Another musical choice I had to determine was a song to play during the ending slideshow. This is a very important moment of my play, some would say the catharsis, and the song choice was critical. I ended up deciding on Imogen Heap’s “Hide and Seek.” Much like “Sticks and Stones,” this is a beautifully sad song, using slow and gorgeous harmonies to convey a certain hopelessness, but to a much greater extent. The lyrics, to an extent, tell the story of someone hiding and nobody coming to find them. This is extremely relevant because the teens that committed suicide must have felt the exact same way as they were committing suicide.

I suppose the main reason for me choosing this song is the fact that when I tried to overdose I listened to this song. There is an awkward period of time when a person overdoses where time and space seems to stop completely, and they are just waiting to die. While waiting, I decided to listen to this song on repeat to take my

mind off what I had just done and focus on the music. Ever since, this song has always had a strong place in my heart, always reminding me of that dark time in my life. I thought it would be appropriate to play this song during the slideshow because I have shared that experience with these teens.

## ***Casting***

### *1. Strategy*

Casting for this show was an interesting process, because there was *The Gynt Project* going on at the same time which had a huge cast of over forty people. *Peer Gynt* was a faculty produced show being funded, produced, and attended by internationally known scholars, famous Bay Area Equity Actors such as Nancy Carlin and Danny Scheie. The production also satisfied a ‘faculty show’ requirement for theater majors, making it far more appealing to the majority of the more seasoned and experienced actors w. As a result, a majority of the theater department got cast in the *Peer Gynt* production while only twenty five students that auditioned for the two BarnStorm productions. This meant that casting between the other BarnStorm director and I would be cut throat, especially since there were only nine male actors out of those twenty five there were only nine male actors. Between the two productions we needed exactly nine male actors, so it was frightening to think that

during the casting meeting, the other director and I would duke it out over the top males we would want to cast in our show. Luckily, I had a secret weapon.

The previous fall quarter I was a teaching assistant for the Introduction to Acting class at UCSC. Knowing ahead of time how *Peer Gynt* was looking for a cast of about forty students in the next winter quarter, I could not rely on casting a lot of veteran actors in the department. I started to scout out promising students in my Introduction to Acting class and was pleasantly impressed by how much potential I found. Throughout the quarter a select group of students demonstrated their versatility and dedication, which was refreshing because a lot of non-theater majors took this class for an easy 'A' or to satisfy a General Education requirement. The final for the class was to do a monologue in an audition type setting at the end of the quarter. The students thought they were just being tested for their final grade, but at the same time I decided to use this opportunity to actually secretly audition them for my play. I gathered a list of actors who I was interested in potentially casting and emailed them over winter break congratulating them that they had received a callback for my show. I made it clear that if they wanted to be considered for the other BarnStorm production, *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*, then they would need to re-audition at the start of winter quarter. I knew the thought of having to audition again would intimidate most of them, and a majority chose to just attend my callbacks, giving me an edge of having a pool of talented actors that the other director could not touch. This was extremely comforting, especially since the BarnStorm managers informed me that *Picasso* would have priority in choosing actors over my show.



In the end, over half of my cast came from students who were in my Introduction to Acting class fall quarter. It was mentioned to me in passing that the director of *Picasso* was upset or thought it was unfair that he was unable to cast any of these actors or that I had “convinced” these actors to not audition for his show. I would whole-heartedly disagree. Did he not have the opportunity to cast these actors over me? Yes, but in knowing that I would essentially going to get last pick out of all the shows that were happening that quarter I took the time and energy in scouting for these students since day one. I spent ten weeks observing and teaching them, knowing which ones responded well to direction, who volunteered and was fearless, and who was willing to put in the time and commitment to the class. I did my research, I put in the work, I took the initiative and emailed them to let them know how talented they were and to encouraged them audition in the first place. I believe that if I had not emailed them with this opportunity, a majority of the students would have gotten their grades and not have given auditioning for an actual production a second thought. I would say that it would be unfair if I encouraged these students I had worked so hard with to audition only to have the other director swoop in and cast them because he had “priority” over my show. Instead of getting the last pick of actors I changed the rules and went in search of actors outside of the department and encouraged them to come to my callbacks. I do not believe I did anything wrong and I never discouraged any student to not audition again for both winter shows. I am very pleased that I was able to avoid getting the short end of the stick and come out with a phenomenal cast.

## 2. *The Actors*

I came into the process believing that I was at a disadvantage and was going to get what was at the bottom of the barrel since I had the last priority when choosing actors. Luckily, I was blown away by the amount of talent in the freshman class. I ended up casting five out of eight actors from my Introduction to Acting class. I felt confident in these individuals because I had watched them closely over ten weeks and knew that each one of them put in so much effort and were passionate about theater. That just left the other three actors to be negotiated between the other director, and me. This was a much more reasonable negotiation, seeing how I knew we both wanted two seasoned actors. I let him have those two actors, who were his first choices, in exchange for Scott Sweet and Ivy Stromaiher, and then managed to bargain Jaime Adame into the deal as well in exchange for one of my top choices to which he obliged. I therefore ended up with the following cast, which blew me away and are all brimming with so much talent and potential.

**Hayley Jackson-** Tricia- Hayley was one of my most promising students in the Intro. To Acting discussion sections I taught. She was always so eager to learn and so respectful. I witnessed just how talented she was when she did an exercise for Professor Greg Fritsch in class which involved her reciting a monologue from Neil Labute's play *Reasons to Be Pretty* over and over again in front of the other one

hundred and twenty students in the class. Hayley was phenomenal when delivering this monologue; there was so much passion and feeling behind it and the fact that she had no problem performing it again and again in front of a huge room full of her peers blew me away. I knew when she showed up to callbacks that I was going to cast her, but I just needed to know which part.

I decided to cast her as Tricia because she read very well for it during callbacks and I felt like she fit into the persona of the “popular girl” well. It was not until about the middle of the process did she reveal to me how much of a challenge it was to play Tricia because their personalities were so opposite and she didn’t seem to have any redeeming values that Hayley could relate with. Hailey was not afraid to ask questions when she was unsure of her performance, but always did so in a respectful manner. When she voiced that she was having trouble connecting with her character, we sat down and talked about how although Tricia seems rude and shallow, she is just part of the machine of society, and she knows that if she doesn’t play her part, it will be her that’s being picked on. We then came up with a backstory for Tricia to give motivation for Hayley to play on, so not all of her intentions came from malice, but also from the desperation to *intimidate* others so they wouldn’t pick on her. I think Hayley overcame her doubts and did an excellent job portraying Tricia. She was delightful to work with and took her work very seriously, which I always respected.

**Taylor Brown-** Marcy- Taylor was also in my Introduction To Acting class, although not my direct student. I first noticed her when Professor Fritsch asked both her and another student, Quest, to perform their partnered scene from *Rabbit Hole* in front of the entire class. I was captivated by both her and Quest's focus and dedication to the scene. During auditions she blew me away with her singing, which resulted me having her audition song stuck in my head for weeks. (At callbacks and I made her sing it for me just so I could hear it once more). She also did some dance improvisation during her audition so I knew she had the makings of a triple threat.

The only challenge I had with Taylor was connecting to her scene partner, Hayley. I wasn't sure if it was a social thing outside of the show and if Taylor just did not feel as comfortable with Hayley as with the others, but during their scenes she kept limited eye contact. I tried the mirror exercise and various other eye contact focus exercises and gave her the note over and over but it still seemed hard to connect them. Overall, Taylor is a very bright young performer.

**Abby Pistoni-** Van's Sister- Again, Abby was in the Intro to Acting class. I did not know Abby too well but she had received a good score on her final monologue for the class which granted her a callback. In the first callback email I sent out she responded first and with so much enthusiasm, I could tell that she wanted it so badly. I asked her if she could send me a recording of her singing and she did promptly. Her singing was absolutely beautiful; she has such a full voice so rich with sound.

I was on the lookout for a strong singer for Van's sister because I wanted to have that actor be featured in different parts of the show such as dance or music since they only had one scene. When she mentioned that she had some circus training and she was a dancer that was another plus I was looking for.

I was torn whether or not to cast Abby or a more seasoned actor. Her extra skillset and enthusiasm in Intro to Acting was enough to convince me to take a chance on her. Abby was probably the actor I had to work the most with. She may not have had as natural acting instincts as some of the other cast members, but she always was willing to learn and practice her scene. I am very proud of her, I feel like she grew the most as an actor during this process.

**Ivy Stromaiher-** CB's Sister- Ivy was one of the three actors that was not in my Intro to acting class. I was very impressed by her audition and callback. Originally, I was going to cast Ivy as Marcy and Taylor as CB's Sister because I was more familiar with Taylor's work. In the end I decided that Ivy realistically looked as if she could be Scott's little sister and took a leap of faith. I am so glad I did because Ivy was so fun to work with and she brought a natural and sassy comedic element to CB's sister that I think Taylor may have struggled with.

Ivy was always ready to work and get up on her feet. She came to me with concerns with her monologue, not understanding the comedic elements of it. Together we were able to come up with a clowning bit while she delivered her monologue, to which I was pleasantly surprised to find out Ivy had terrific comedic

timing. When I saw her first in auditions I remember thinking how great and mature her acting instincts were. Ivy did a phenomenal job and always went above and beyond my expectations.

**Scott Sweet-** CB- I first saw Scott in the previous quarter where he starred as Westley in a production of *The Curse of the Starving Class*. I remember being blown away by his performance and could not believe that he was a freshman. Scott has great acting instincts, good projection, and great expressions. He had a fantastic audition and did very well at callbacks. I suppose I was so impressed because he was always so shy and quiet whenever I spoke with him outside of theater, so his commitment to characters and the fact that he was able to turn up the volume and dive right into a new persona was extraordinary.

Scott is a very talented actor, but I noticed very quickly while working with him that he seems to have attention/focus problems. I would constantly catch him zoning off while giving him direction or talking to the entire group. I would give him a note and run through that section to see how it read with the new changes and he would totally disregard it because he hadn't heard a word I said. When Scott would realize that I was talking to him after he was zoning out, he would just nod his head and say, "Okay," even if he did not hear a word I said. This was extremely frustrating and at first I thought I was just not explaining what I wanted clearly, but I soon realized Scott just had a hard time retaining information and paying attention unless I was stern and called him out on it. I had to pick and choose my battles with what I

really wanted from him, and usually had to make him repeat it four or five times to make sure it actually stuck.

Another challenge that I faced with Scott was hand acting. He was a very big culprit of using some gesture to almost every word or sentence he said. I'm not sure how I did not pick up on it during auditions and callbacks but the louder and more passionate he got, the bigger the gestures. No matter how much time I tried to spend with him to control it, I could not undo what he already learned, which in turn made me feel like a bad director. Instead I had to block certain scenes, such as his beginning monologue, with his hands in his pockets to restrict the amount of instinctual hand movements he might have.

Overall, I am very pleased with Scott's work; I honestly think he is a very talented actor. Like I said earlier, he has a very natural grace of slipping in and out of character and possesses great acting instincts when it comes to inflections and executing intentions. I think he did an awesome job playing CB.

**Quest Zeidler- Beethoven-** When I first noticed Quest in Introduction to Acting with Taylor I could not help but notice the amount of emotion and passion he put into his performance. I knew he would make a great Beethoven because I knew he could relate emotionally to the part. Plus, it didn't hurt that he had the skinny, nerdy look down perfectly.

Quest took direction very well and was always open and eager to receive critique very well. I usually only had to give him a note once before he fixed it. The

only challenge that we faced was throughout the process, he had a hard time “cheating out,” or facing out to the audience, in a naturalistic style. I was worried that his Beethoven/CB scenes were too closed off from the audience where it just seemed like a constant ‘show down’ between the two, only giving the audience a view of the characters’ profiles and therefore only half of their acting. In the first month of rehearsals when I would ask him to take some parts of his monologue out toward the audience, but he had a hard time grasping the concept of speaking out *towards* the audience but not *to* the audience. This was understandable since we broke the fourth wall multiple times during the show where actors literally talked to the audience. We worked on the concept, finding realistic excuses for him to not be making direct eye contact with CB, such as: ‘this is too painful for you to talk about,’ ‘you’re so frustrated you can’t even look at him,’ or even ‘what you’re saying is a lie so you can’t bring yourself to make eye contact.’ All these factors helped immensely and created beautiful beat changes. By the end of the rehearsal process, Quest was a professional at cheating out, helping the audience to better see and hear his remarkable acting. I was so lucky to have the honor of having him in my cast and I am so proud of the growth that he has made.

**Atticus Woodbury- Van-** In Fall quarter I did not know much about Atticus since he wasn’t my direct student in Introduction to Acting. I did however notice how much commitment he gave to all of the exercises we did in class and how willing he was to put himself out there with no regrets. I remember observing the whole classroom when we were doing an exercise involving the students to pair up, one having their



eyes closed while the other led them on their own “adventure,” describing everything they saw in detail and letting the other imagine the details on their own. I noticed Atticus out of the crowd when he was being led by his partner, who had decided that he was a military drill sergeant and was barking orders at Atticus, who had his eyes closed. What caught my attention was the moment the exercise started, Atticus snapped to attention in a salute, and quickly followed the orders he was given immediately and without question, including dropping to the ground and crawling on the floor. This was an immediate contrast to the rest of the room, where timid students were second guessing themselves, moving around the space with their eyes closed, perhaps self-conscious about how silly they looked to others. Atticus’s fearlessness was definitely noteworthy, setting him apart from anyone else in the class.

I definitely underestimated his skill as an actor in callbacks. I did not realize until we were already cast and starting the rehearsal process how much of a gifted actor he was. In hindsight, he would have been a phenomenal CB, but his comedic timing for Van was so spot on, I could not think of anyone else who auditioned who could have played the part as well as he did. Atticus has the unique talent of making the text his own, working with it rather than against it, a very rare trait for a young, aspiring actor. He is incredibly humble and respectful, always asking for critique or ways he could improve but I rarely had any for him because his instincts were spot on. I was so blown away by the energy and commitment Atticus brought to the stage. I truly believe having him as comedic relief brought the play to the next level.

**Jaime Adame- Matt-** Jaime is the last of the three who were not in my acting class. His audition process was actually quite interesting, given the fact that he walked out in the middle of it. He was so nervous he had to start his monologue over three times and after that he still couldn't finish it. I told him if he wanted to he could move on to his song which, after the first phrase, he could not remember as well. Feeling sufficiently embarrassed, Jaime apologized for wasting our time and exited.

I thought both his song and monologue sounded good until he stopped, and the truth of the matter was there were such a limited amount of boys and Jaime was one of the few that had the masculinity to pull off Matt. I wrote him an email encouraging him to attend callbacks which he did. He did well in callbacks and I was able to determine that it was just the nerves of auditioning that was holding Jaime back. He demonstrated his ability to command the room, a trait vital to the character of Matt.

As an actor Jaime seemed to second guess himself a lot and on rare occasion get defensive when I would give him direction. It took him a while in the beginning to warm up to the cast and rehearsal process in general, and I always felt him holding back. I realized after the first performance that he is the type of actor that comes alive when put in front of an audience, which is a plus but also has its dangers. For one, he connected a lot better with the intentions and actions he was playing on stage, however, sometimes he would tend to upstage others or over-exaggerate certain words or phrases to fish for laughs. This was a very common habit for young actors

and definitely not the worst one to have. Jaime is a very talented actor who just needs to trust in his instincts and free himself on stage. I believe over the next couple of years he will flush out his nervousness and become a force to be reckoned with.

### *3. The Dynamic*

The entirety of the cast was made up of freshman. Many would consider this to be a disadvantage, but I honestly think this element was what made our show so dynamic. For most of the cast this was their first college production, and lacked the experience of more seasoned actors. This meant I had to spend a good part of the rehearsal process teaching them acting principles and ironing out bad habits from high school that a director would not typically have to do with more seasoned actors. But the fact that all of them were first years eliminated any sort of hierarchy in the cast, giving them all an equal playing field to relate to each other. For the most part, all of them were strangers to one another so they grew together rather than splitting off in groups or cliques that tend to happen in certain casts.

The fact that I had an all-freshman cast, a majority of which I had already taught in the previous quarter, helped me calm my nervousness as a new director. I explained at the beginning of the process that we were all going to learn together and from each other, which was exactly what we did. Grotowski describes this process as, "...not instruction of [a] pupil but an utter opening to another person. In which the phenomenon of "shared or double birth" becomes possible. The actor is reborn- not only as an actor but as a man- and with him, I am reborn." (24, Grotowski) This

is exactly how I felt my process went with my cast. Throughout the quarter I would give the actors notes on what I thought needed to be fixed but also gave them a chance to let me know if they had any questions about my direction or if the staging felt awkward at any time. If they did, we would sit down and discuss it, and a majority of the time I agreed with what they had to say and would merge both of our ideas to make the process collaborative. They were all so ready and eager to learn that they took direction and criticism so well that I was in no position to not return the favor.

None of the actors had a chance to develop egos. Out of all eight actors not one was a “diva” or thought that they were better than another. Instead, all of them thought of each other as an equal. I cannot stress how much this attitude affected the whole dynamic of our show. I remember at the end of our first read through of the play, the members of the cast decided to go to the dining hall together to get to know each other, and I knew from there that this cast was going to be a close knit group. Throughout ten weeks the cast grew together and learned to trust each other and I believe full heartedly that it was reflected in the performance. Their cooperation and faith in me gave me confidence in my ideas and pushed me to be bolder and more daring in my staging; where as having a more experienced actor constantly critiquing the choices I make would have been detrimental to the process and create a schism of trust between the actor/director relationship. As cliché as it sounds, I believe that the equality of power and the willingness to learn permitted my cast and I to inspire one another, allowing us to create a powerful piece of theater.

## *Scene Analysis*

### **Dear Pen Pal, Warsaw War Song, Taephaphobia, etc**

Throughout the play there are transitions (*A Segue I Suppose, Warsaw War Song, Taphephobia, etc*) where CB addresses the audience as if is talking to his pen pal. These interludes provide little breaks from the action and break up the linearity of the story, making CB a narrator telling us what it is that has already happened and how it affects him.

These scenes were very straight forward to block because most of the time it just involve CB coming center stage to interact directly to the audience. The first in these series of monologues is *Dear Pen Pal*, where CB sadly recounts the tragic story of his dog, Snoopy, contracting rabies, killing an innocent bird (Woodstock), and getting put to sleep.

The other interludes feature CB writing to pen pal about various facts about the composer Chopin. Every interlude seems to get less and less serious and more and more fun and interesting, that is until Taphephobia, the interlude right after Beethoven gets beaten up. After something horrible happens and CB goes on stage in

a matter of fact manner creating this dynamic juxtaposition where we do not know if CB knows what has happened to Beethoven until he says, “Beethoven didn’t leave a note. So I don’t know if he had any last requests.” These monologues help break up the flow of the plot and allow CB to speak directly to the audience, reminding them that they need to be engaged and are as much a part of this story as the characters in it.

### **Canis Exiquiae**

In this scene CB and his sister bury their dog, Snoopy, in the backyard. To represent this I had both of the actors come to the very lip of center stage and look down at the space below them for the duration of the scene to signify looking at the grave. All the while, various ambient noises such as birds and crickets chirping signify we are now outside.

In this scene, I wanted to set up a motif that would be echoed later on in “Brothers and Sisters,” that is the two clashing forces butting heads against each other where in the later scene they come to understand each other and reach out to one another for support. In this scene it is very much a typical brother and sister relationship while going through puberty, where both think the other is unbearable and it seems like if they are together for too long they will rip their heads off. That gave us a lot to work with and was very relatable to Ivy and Scott growing up with their own siblings.

The scene starts with CB far stage left and CB's sister entering and coming downstage right. Whenever both CB and CB's sister are onstage at the same time it always echoes this staging to show a divide in the siblings. They look to each other, obviously not pleased to see the other but come together anyway for the common unifier, their dog's funeral. I had both actors spend most of the scene delivering their dialogue out to the audience rather than to each other to show so that it seemed as though the characters were so annoyed and disconnected with each other that they couldn't even bear to look at each other, that is until they start berating each other towards the end of the scene.

Both of their intentions in the beginning of this scene is to *undermine* one another, contradicting the things they say until it builds up to a screaming match where they both are trying to *destroy* or *eviscerate* each other. The scene ends with CB's sister yielding; however it is important that she *brushes him off* as if she didn't even care about what they were just fighting about in the first place, so that it's not so much "giving up," but more of throwing the argument back into his face. This is the first time we encounter CB's sister, and since she can never seem to have a "consistent" identity, it was important to track what persona she had in each scene and how we would distinguish them from one another. This scene was her gothic/Wiccan persona, so she wore a black dress with spiked accessories and spoke in a very sultry, almost menacing voice.

Both Ivy and Scott did a great job playing off each other's energy in this scene. One challenging part of both this scene and the next was whether or not to use herbal cigarettes, seeing how both call for smoking. I decided during tech that having two smoking scenes back to back was sort of obnoxious, and did not really add to anything to the performance, other than fill the space with smoke that would potentially irritate the audience members or distract them by watching the clouds glide slowly towards them. The scene looked just as good with the actors just *acting* to smoke their cigarettes/joints, and I trusted that the audience would be able to suspend their disbelief.

### **Nirvana**

In this scene we have CB talking to his best friend, Van, about life after death. Van, a huge stoner, informs CB of the Buddhist's concept of Nirvana. The script calls for this scene being on the remnants of "the brick wall," but because we did not have or need this set piece, I decided that this scene was vague enough that it could be anywhere, all we need to get from it was that CB and Van were hanging out.

The actors were positioned with Van sitting on the stage left block with CB leaning against it facing the opposite way. Again the motif of disconnect with CB and his friends is achieved, instead this time it's just friendly banter where they are so comfortable with each other (or in Van's case high) that they don't need to be facing one another to talk.



Throughout the scene CB's intention is to *question* or to *search* Van about life after death, still depressed about Snoopy's passing. Van therefore *reassures* or *cheers up* CB with his knowledge of Nirvana, which is comical because of how obviously high he is trying to explain philosophy. Despite the comedic relief Van brings, he has some pretty poetic lines that I really wanted to bring out, for example,

“My point is, Chuck B, is that life-it does go on. Even without the things that have been there since the beginning. The things we think define us, don't mean shit in the grand scheme of things. Us defines us. Not things or other people or pets.”

I wanted to highlight this quote because it really sums up the core thought of being an individual. The existential choices that we make are what define us. You don't need approval from anyone else but yourself in order to know who you are. I decided to bring out this line by having Van break away from the play and talk directly with the audience. This would jolt the audience into stop paying attention to passively watching a play but to actually listen and receive what this actor was telling them directly. I had CB stay listening in the position he had been in, making sure not to follow Van while he was talk to the audience. This gave the effect as if Van was speaking directly to him. At the end of this line Van would resume the previous position he had when talking to CB and the play would continue as usual. This was the first of the “magic moment” series where the actors would break away from the action to speak a line directly to the audience.

## Where Swine Live

We are thrown into the high school by the sound of a passing period bell and the noise of a busy school hallway. Here we are introduced to Matt, arrogantly striding in to greet CB. Matt's humorous introduction, with his ridiculous behavior and sexual jokes, fools the audience to believe that he is a likeable character. Again CB poses the question of life after death, to which Matt replies by taking center stage delivering a monologue out to an imaginary audience. This speech is filled with insincerity and sexual innuendos, making Matt's objectives *to butter up, amuse, entertain* when he is first joking around with CB. Once Beethoven walks into the room, his demeanor completely changes, as do his verbs, going from a joking conduct to *intimidate, shove, humiliate*. Beethoven, who is just trying to simply walk to class, is the clear trigger for this hostile and unforgiving transformation in Matt, shattering the audience's first impression of Matt as another loveable and comedic character.

After Beethoven scuttles away, CB's sister rushes to his rescue, now dressed in her street "gang member" ensemble: sagging pants, big shirt, and a beanie. This outfit totally strips her of her gender, as her voice is still low and aggressive as she tries to both physically and verbally shove Matt aside. At the same time Matt is amused more than he is threatened, and in turn tries to *undermine, mock, aggravate* CB's sister. The staging is set up so that it is CB upstage center with his sister downstage right and Matt downstage left pitted against each other. This image sets

up a choice that CB has to make, to side with his sister or with his friend. In the end he joins Matt downstage right, making it two against one.

In the end, CB's sister starts to storm off stage right, but stops and cheats out to the audience to allude to Matt's name, "Pigpen," (referencing the name of the scene) which he absolutely hates. The effect I wanted to create was that it appears that Matt has succeeded in undermining CB's sister but when she is able to flip the situation and wipe that smug smile off his face all by asking a simple question and not even having to make eye contact, she was really the one getting the last laugh.

### **The Pianist and the Platypus**

Both Beethoven and CB's sister previously exit stage right, go around the curtain, and emerge stage left right when Matt and CB exit from the previous scene, having almost no transition between the two scenes besides the narration. The effect of running full circle and entering the same direction as the previous scene is to make it seem like this is just a continuation of passing period, and CB's sister is literally running to catch up with Beethoven.

In this scene we see the relationship between Beethoven and CB's sister, where CB's sister appears to be smitten by Beethoven (much like in the comic strips) who seems to want nothing to do with her. This scene was great for setting up opposing objectives for the actors: Ivy's to *corner*, *smother*, and *charm* while Quest

tried to *escape, brush off, and deflect*. This was displayed in the staging by the two inching across the stage with CB's sister asking questions and Beethoven answering in curt one word responses. For each response he said, Beethoven would try to take another step away to end the conversation only to be pulled back in by yet another inquiry his persistent admirer. There came a time where, without looking, CB's sister literally *reeled in* Beethoven by grabbing his backpack and pulling him back into the conversation. From just this action the audience understands the nature of these characters, CB's sister recognizing what she wants and going for it despite what others think while the passive Beethoven is too quiet and polite to stand up for himself. Luckily during a short monologue describing her one woman show, Beethoven manages to escape stage right, pursued by CB's sister after realizing his absence.

### **Spork**

#### *1. Staging Frida. The Missed Opportunity.*

In this scene we are introduced to the characters Tricia and Marcy, best friends and “the popular girls” at school. This scene was a challenge because it was probably the most prop heavy scene in the show. The setting is in the school cafeteria, although onstage is still only just the two blocks. The mood is created by the sounds of a busy lunchroom which lets the audience know instantly that since we have noisy chatter of school, and the girls are sitting down with food in their hands, this is obviously lunch period.

This scene was a challenge for me because I had an original idea for it that I had to let go of because I felt as though I was overthinking and the audience would lose a certain essence of the scene. The opening of the scene the girls start out trash talking their professors and their classmate “fat ass Frida.” There is a full page of dialogue dedicated to tearing down Frida’s weight, her eating disorder, and her overall “disgusting” appearance. Despite the harshness of these words, this dialogue is written very humorously with its amusing analogies and funny adjectives. There is no avoiding that the audience will laugh when watching this scene, but the fact is that these are real issues and Marcie and Tricia are bullies, and even though the words they are saying might be funny for the audience, they are definitely not funny for Frida.

My initial idea was for Marcy and Tricia to go through the first half of the exchange making fun of Frida’s weight and have the audience laugh and respond naturally. Then halfway through their trash talking I wanted to Abby to appear onstage, most likely downstage stage right, representing Frida in a separate time and space. Although Frida is not physically present in the cafeteria she is being affected by the words Tricia and Marcy who are literally talking “behind her back,” showing how she would hear all of these comments through the grapevine. There would then be a shift where the sound would change to a deep and ominous noise and Tricia and Marcy would get up from the blocks and would seem to enter Frida’s mind. With eyes locked on her, they would begin to circle Frida slowly like a sharks waiting to tear apart their prey, Frida all the while slowly sinking, being burdened by these

inescapable insults. This sets up a beautiful stage picture of these two girls having all the power to crush this poor victim, not by force, but by just using their words.

The point of this staging would hopefully be to make the audience realize what it is they find funny. The first part of the scene the audience would presumably laugh at the things Tricia and Marcy were saying, however, until they put a face to the name and realize the ramifications that these words have, the laughing would hopefully stop. This would create the intended effect of the audience realizing that they were laughing at another person's expense, prompting them to ask themselves "What did I just laugh at and why did I find it funny?" I think this is an extremely relevant issue that people need to realize, especially teens and young adults. It's easy to start rumors and make fun of somebody when they are not there, and although it might be harmless, it's easy to overlook the damage that it causes.

I also had the preliminary idea of staging Frida to actually vomit onstage. I figured she came on with a large bowl that she would hug against her body while being bombarded with insults about her weight until she couldn't take it anymore and would force herself to throw up. We never experimented with the technicalities of how it would have actually been done but I originally thought Abby could come onstage with a little of the "vomit" mixture, (most likely juice of some kind) and would then initially hurl that into the bowl. Inside the bowl there could be a small covered cup with a straw, so while her head is down in the bowl covered by her hair, she could refill and then wretch again, making it clear to the audience that she hadn't

just been holding a mouthful of juice the whole time but that she was actually producing it.

Having read Artaud's *Theater of Cruelty*, I wanted the audience to literally feel physically sick and uncomfortable watching this poor girl vomit to "fit in" with society's idea of beauty. I am sure if I did stage this moment it would have been a very controversial part of the performance, and I am sure many audience members would have hated it. Whether they loved it or hated it the point is they would remember this moment and it made them feel something. As a director I am interested in staging action that happens offstage, or as Artaud puts it, "We shall stage, without regard to text," and in doing so having theatrical moments to show the audience an event suspended in no linear construct of time and space. Since events mentioned in the text may have already taken place, I believe it is up to the director's interpretation to illustrate that moment in time, if they choose to do so. Since I viewed the audience of my production as a representation of "society," I wanted to force them to see what this girl was doing to herself just so that she could fit in.

My biggest regret in the staging process is not doing this initial idea. I eventually turned it down because I assumed that the audience would get the overall point that Tricia and Marcy were the "mean girls" at school without me having to spell it out for them. Another factor was that this was my first time directing and I was second guessing myself in staging a radical version of the scene based on my concept; I was not sure if it was going to read clearly to the audience and decided to

play it safe. And lastly, this dark twist in my version seemed to clash with the overall arc of the play, starting off fast pace, funny and then towards the end suddenly slamming into this tragic and serious world. Following this arc was important to me because it represents a very real image of life and growing up. I believed that if I had added this staging of Frida so far into the beginning of the play it would disrupt this concept and scare the audience to thinking that they weren't allowed to laugh at anything in fear of being reprimanded.

## 2. *The Actual Staging*

I decided to stage *Spork* the way it was originally written in the text. This consisted of Marcy and Tricia sitting on stage right and left blocks, respectively, as if they were sitting down to eat lunch in the cafeteria. During the beginning trash talking scene their intentions were pretty straight forward: *to shut down, mock, crush, ridicule*. The challenging part of this scene, as mentioned before, was the props. Both girls walk in with lunch baskets and sporks and when they sit down they pull out milk cartons and a fifth of vodka. Throughout the first part of the scene Tricia had to pour the vodka into the cartons Marcy was holding and after both had to take swigs from the cartons so that they would get progressively “drunk” throughout the scene. This was another challenge in itself because Hayley and Taylor both had trouble mapping out how drunk they would get at certain parts of the scene. It seemed as though they were just drinking non-alcoholic drinks and when the boys would enter



they would magically get drunk. We had to set markers on certain phrases throughout the scene to indicate certain behaviors, such as slurring of words, so the audience knew that this was in fact a progression and not just a random surge of drunkenness. This helped the actors, but there would still be times where it seemed as though the intoxication would come out of nowhere. I attribute this to the fact that they had to do so much with the props: putting them down, pouring, shaking, and drinking, all while trying to convey their intentions to the audience. I am partially to blame for this since we didn't start practicing this scene with actual props until technical rehearsal, but overall I did not think it was that much of a distraction to the scene.

A unique element that I added to the scene was during Marcy's "spork speech." During this speech Marcy talks about the history of the spork and how it was created after World War II as a less threatening utensil substitute because the U.S. were scared that the occupied Japanese would "rise up, revolt and retake their country with forks in hand." During rehearsal one day I was watching this scene when I thought in my head, "they both have been sitting down for a long time." Instead of having an entire scene, and a long one at that, with all of the actors sitting down, it struck me that during this speech we could have another "magic moment" where Tricia would continue to look in the place where Marcy was sitting, but Marcy would stand up and speak directly to the audience, suspended by time in space. This short little speech about the spork evoked great imagery, so I wanted to incorporate a little clowning bit, where Taylor could show off her physicality. This bit was inspired

by Patty Gallagher, who taught me about “the economy of movement,” how every gesture means something specific so short, precise movements are more elaborate and clearer than a long drawn out detail of the action. Throughout her bit, Marcy would talk about World War II, embodying the soldiers, the oppressed Japanese, and the revolts, all while utilizing articulated movements and levels. I believe this gave the audience something interesting and dynamic to look at, breaking up the scene so that it was not just a passive table drama. I think the only other addition I could have made was to add a little sound collage of warfare and the national anthem for comedic effect, but this addition would be entirely superfluous.

When the boys came in, each split a block with the girls, CB and Marcy stage right and Tricia and Matt stage left. Yet again CB asks about life after death and whether or not his dog went to heaven and yet again he receives an insincere response as the girls crack a joke about dogs being gross, motivating CB to exit. In this scene we see Matt’s germaphobia in a higher context as Tricia touches his food. Again, props were an issue, seeing how I wanted Jaime to throw down his chip bag and get out his hand sanitizer but we encountered the same problem with the girls of juggling props and intentions. I noticed this was especially hard for Jaime, who seemed to relish his props, taking his time and making a show out of using his hand sanitizer, upstaging the other action happening onstage when it was supposed to be just a regular gesture for Matt, such as scratching his nose. When I gave him a note about it he quickly fixed it in rehearsal, but during performances he would always revert back,

knowing that it would get laughs which was a little frustrating but I learned to pick and choose my battles with Jaime.

The ending of this scene was really hard for me to stage convincingly. The scene ends with Marcy and Tricia drunkenly raising their sporks in the air and “revolting” while Van observes them confused. I realized that this scene was written for a black out to end it, but since I was trying to avoid blackouts for transitions, I just staged it so the girls would drunkenly march off. No matter how we played with the timing, there was always a moment of awkward dead space. In the end, we practiced it to minimalize this dead air to about one or two seconds, which I eventually accepted.

### **The Viper’s Nest**

This is my favorite scene in the play. It shows the first true interaction between CB and Beethoven in the music room while Beethoven is practicing the piano. This of course presents a big obstacle which many people who were familiar with the play asked me, “Are you going to have a piano on stage?” UCSC has a surprising number of pianos that could have been used for this production, so that was not an issue, but since the beginning of this process I knew I didn’t want a piano at all on stage. When I told people this, they seemed skeptical, but the way I viewed it was the minute I put a piano on that stage, that stage would be labeled as the music room unless I blocked around it. There was of course the option of wheeling it on and off stage but that would take a painful amount of time that would be both distracting for

the audience and the actors. And lastly, the actor I cast to play Beethoven did not play piano, so why would I need an actual piano onstage if he was just going to pretend to play it?

I therefore decided to embrace the minimalism and have Beethoven face upstage on the stage left block and mime playing a piano. So far the audience has only looked at bare stage with two blocks and have imagined the surroundings of the scenes for themselves, so to me it was not outrageous at all to ask the audience to suspend their disbelief that Beethoven was playing a piano that was not there. Grotowski explained that, “By controlled use of gesture the actor transforms the floor into the sea, a table into the confessional, a piece of iron into an animate partner,” (21, Grotowski) so it was not a problem for Quest to use gesture to create the effect that he was playing the piano. Quest and I took time to practice playing on a real piano to know the feeling and height of the keys. As he practiced he eventually got that repetitive gesture into his body so his playing looked as realistic as possible. I was extremely happy with the way this image turned out, and from the audiences’ responses, I do not think it was distracting or unbelievable that there was a piano on stage.

This of course presented the challenge of cueing up the sound to Quest’s movements. The illusion was immediately shattered and distracting when the sound cue for the piano would start to play before Quest had his arms up. Therefore, we had to make sure all cues came off of Quest instead of the stage manager, the reason

being they could see him clearly. After a few repetitions we managed to get the sound cues perfectly, so this illusion of the piano was a very simple and cheap solution.

Staging and directing this particular scene was extremely exciting because of all the beat shifts. We start off with Beethoven seated playing the piano while a morose CB delivers a monologue stage right. The monologue is directed to nobody in particular, but rather a way for CB to articulate his thoughts out loud. Talking with Scott we both agreed that this was a sort of confession for CB that he has wanted to share with his friends but never felt comfortable because all of them could not take him seriously. We related how sometimes it is easier for a person to talk to a stranger rather than someone whom they are close with because there is that sense that they will get it off their chest but not necessarily have to see that person as often as they would someone close to them. Scott and I therefore came up with intentions to do more so onto himself rather than Beethoven such as *to search, strip down, unearth, expose*.

This slow paced monologue is interrupted by an angry Beethoven, who starts to criticize CB in his fragile state, asking why he should care about him and his problems when he's been bullying and tormenting him for years. A heated argument ensues between the two where Beethoven attempts to *cut down, sting, shove off* CB, listing all the times he has terrorized him while CB is trying to *deflect* his accusations, playing it off that he was just "joking." To avoid a complete yelling match I decided

to pull Quest back during the section where he states, “I haven’t eaten lunch in the cafeteria for two and a half years in fear of going home with it smeared across my shirt!” I assume from the exclamation points that Bert V. Royal wrote this section to be screamed, since it shortly follows the line “Fuck you, CB!” but I thought it would be a lot more powerful to reveal Beethoven’s more vulnerable side, and actually show how the bullying has been affecting him in a very real and personal way. In doing this the audience can feel sympathy for Beethoven and all he has had to deal with rather than continuing to watch a yelling match where they could be potentially turned off or tune out to what it is Beethoven is saying.

Soon after Beethoven is back on the offense, but instead of directing the frustration at CB, I decided to insert another “magic moment.” This again broke up the flow and beats where CB is onstage reacting as if Beethoven were talking to him when in fact he is downstage talking directly to the audience. While downstage Beethoven *destroys* the audience as he says, “And what really kills me is that everybody wonders why kids bring guns to school and shoot you fuckers down. Maybe you’re not the bully, but you stand idly by and watch. In my eyes that makes you even worse.” These are some powerful words and I wanted to make sure that the audience felt personally attacked by them. Reason being is that it was more of a warning rather than Beethoven actually threatening to shoot the audience.

Kids who get bullied might reach a breaking point where they take it out on themselves, but there is the other alternative where someone reaches a breaking point

that they might seek revenge on others. I made sure that Quest really picked out individuals to attack, walking along the lip of the stage calling out the entire audience. The overall intention for this moment was to *snap* the audience and forcing them to feel this uncomfortable sensation that their lives were in danger; that at any moment Beethoven might break and turn a gun on them. This effect was even more powerful since only a few weeks before the Sandy Hook elementary incident occurred and school shootings were a very sensitive subject at the time. Whenever I watched this moment I got so uncomfortable that I thought it might be too controversial and was tempted to cut it, but then my inner Artaud reminded me that this was the exact feeling that I wanted to evoke from the audience. If I made any of the audience experience any anxiety, hopefully they would be able to recognize that emotion and understand that something like a school shooting could be as easily avoided as reaching out to someone or simply by treating others with respect and kindness.

Towards the end of the scene, CB apologizes for what he has done and the two sit down on the blocks and have an honest conversation. During this time CB asks Beethoven whether he thinks there is a heaven and finally receives an honest response. This moment is a complete opposite of the outbursts we saw just moments earlier, and I wanted to make sure that both characters were trying *reassure* and *build up* one another. In a moment CB asks Beethoven if he believes dogs go to heaven in which I had the narrator, Abby, respond with the biblical quote Beethoven was originally supposed to say. I did this because this is the answer for both characters,

CB with his dog and Beethoven with his dad, and with the narrator reading this passage she could provide an answer to the audience as well.

The scene ends with the two playing one of the simplest duets, “Heart and Soul,” on the piano and CB suddenly kissing Beethoven and running out of the room. So to review the beats of the scene that I laid out starts with: a confession from CB, a yelling match between the two, a confession from Beethoven, blaming the audience, a heart to heart with both, a playful duet of heart and soul, and finally an unexpected kiss. Scott and Quest were able to play all of these different beats and intentions beautifully and it was really a joy to watch this scene grow and evolve. The scene ends with a confused Beethoven stunned on the piano bench until he is jolted awake by the school bell.

## **Drama**

### *1. The Dance*

Drama was by far the most fun scene to direct and choreograph. Originally this scene comprises of CB’s sister delivering a monologue from her one woman show. However when reading this scene I got so many visualizations I knew it would be extremely comedic to turn it into a dance. I did not want to take away from Ivy’s moment so I made sure to choreograph around her, making sure she had most of the focus during the entire scene. I decided to make this an ensemble piece using Atticus, Abby, Hayley, Taylor, and Quest as dancers.



My original inspiration for this dance was the scene from the movie, “She’s All That” where there is a featured avante garde play where a dancer was spurring out nonsensical words and phrases while others did an interpretive dance around him. This notion is supported by the playwright, as he wrote in his stage directions, “The following can only be described as BAD.” By adding an ensemble of interpretive dancers to CB’s sister’s ridiculous monologue, a great piece of comedy ensued.

The dancers wore their stage blacks, but in order to conceal their identity they wore a pair of panty hose over their head. Not only did this hide their facial features but it also looked like they had random tails or extensions protruding from their heads, making their appearance look even more ridiculous. Throughout the scene I choreographed certain movements that related to certain words in Ivy’s monologue. Then something completely unexpected happened. One day during rehearsal, Atticus started walking on his hands, which Abby then replied that she could do it as well. Before I knew it Atticus and Abby were showing off their acro-yoga tricks all over the rehearsal space and I knew I had to work it into the dance. In the end I had them both balancing on the blocks CB’s sister was standing on, as they represented the wings of a butterfly getting mercilessly ripped off.

This piece also involved a good deal of clowning. Ivy came up to me after one rehearsal saying that she wasn’t confident with this scene and she didn’t know how she was supposed to play it. I set up some one on one time for us to work alone and clarified that this scene was not intended to be taken seriously. We then

choreographed a clown piece, involving her trying to *captivate* the audience but always seeming to get ahead of herself. For instance, for dramatic effect she would spin around in circles while screaming “evolution!” and when she tried to stop she would lose her balance and stumble. When she tried to jump onto the two blocks she would trip and land sprawled on top of them. This then involved a slow, horrified out take to the audience as her other foot searched in vain for the other block to regain her balance, all the while the dancers are shaking their heads at her in embarrassment.

There is even a moment in the monologue where she says that she will become a platypus and both the music and dancers stop because of the ridiculousness of it and she must prompt them all to continue. Once I explained to her that the more serious she takes this monologue the funnier it is going to be to the audience. Ivy did an amazing job and with the right direction she was a natural clown!

I knew that once I decided to make this scene a dance, I wanted CB’s sister to be cocooned and carried off at the end. Throughout her monologue she refers to herself as a “teenage caterpillar” and “spinning a web” making it perfect to incorporate white sheets into the dance. The scene ends with the masked dancers wrapping sheets around CB’s sister, effectively cocooning her so all that remains is her head. She then trust falls into them and they carry her off as she delivers her final words upside down.

2. *Missed transformative meanings. The masked men and the sheet.*

Another missed opportunity that I decided not to stage was Beethoven's death during the scene *Peer Counseling*. I had an original idea of transformative gestures which like "The Ants Go Marching," would make a fun and exciting introduction and then reappear later on in a darker, serious tone. Both of these concepts, the "masked men" and the "white sheet" are both introduced in *Drama*, which is such a high energy and fun scene.

The idea would be that both of these things represent ridiculous things in *Drama* but in *Peer Counseling* transform to represent death. The masked men are introduced as bizarre interpretive dancers with the extra fabric hanging from their head looking like long ears or tentacles on their heads. They seem to move in absurd and humorous motions and even are human like as they react in disbelief at the ridiculousness of the show they are performing in.

During *Peer Counseling*, I had originally wanted to stage Beethoven's death onstage. Most of the characters are on the stage at the time but Beethoven's death would only be seen by CB, so it would appear like he was imagining what it actually looked like. I wanted these masked men to appear among the audience, no longer having their fabric extensions, but a fitted cap giving them an appearance of a black skull. They would creep across the stage in a slow controlled movement, opposite of their quirky interpretive dance moves we saw earlier. This would give the effect that what were once silly interpretive dancers have now transformed into grim reaper-like characters walking to collect Beethoven's corpse. Once surrounding Beethoven they

would produce the white sheet and lay it over his body. Instead of cocooning Beethoven the sheet has now transformed into a white sheet that would cover a dead body in the morgue. The masked men would then slowly carry Beethoven off in the same fashion they carried CB's sister off, only this time the action has transformed into a funeral march.

The reason I did not stage this version of the scene was the same reason I did not stage the "Frida scene." I loved this concept but I was afraid it was going to be too much happening on the stage at once. Seeing how it was my first time directing I decided to play it straight, but if I were to direct this show again I would love to try to do this staging and see how it reads.

### **You're Invited**

You're invited is a short little scene in which Marcy breaks the fourth wall and invites the audience to a party through a clever poem. In my staging Marcy literally steps offstage, which goes dark, to interact directly with the audience, with houselights. She has fliers that she hands out (or denies) to the audience as she cordially invites them to her party. Taylor did a great job moving across the audience while staying in character. I wanted to have her hand out physical invitations because at the end of the performance each invitation is worth \$1 towards the charity of their choice. The scene transitions when Marcy is center front of the audience and throws the remainder of her invitations over the audience.

Next there is an ingenious musical cue that I had decided to come up with, executed with the help of my sound designer, Kyle Sanger. It starts off by playing the original *Peanuts* theme song as the gang assembles, dancing like they did in the comic strips. The theme dies down as do the lights, in the blackout the actors go to pre-planned spots to collect their red party cups and assume their previous position. When the lights come back up they are grinding to a dub-step remix of the same Peanut's theme, modernizing a classic piano piece into an electronic party song.

The real drama of the scene begins when Beethoven walks in the front door and the music cuts out as everyone shouts, "what the FUCK are YOU doing here?" The staging basically sets up the picture of the gang vs. CB and Beethoven. After they kiss they run out stage left while everyone else drunkenly stumble off stage right.

### **Nocturne**

With this scene I am basically echoing the same effect I intended to have during *The Pianist and the Platypus*. The characters exit one side of the curtain and emerge on the other side signifying that they just traveled and are now in a different location, in this case outside the house, most likely down the street a ways. Again we see the same thing that happened earlier, where Beethoven is pursued by a smitten admirer, only we have substituted CB's sister with CB. CB is trying to *charm, uplift, reassure* Beethoven who is trying to *deflect and escape* him. The difference between the two scenes is in the end, Beethoven admits to himself that he wants to be with

CB. The scene ends with a sudden and unexpected kiss and, for the first time, I break and indulge in a full black out to get the precise comedic timing. This also sets up for Marcy, Tricia, and Matt to enter in the dark.

### **Fire is Bad**

This is one of the longest scenes of the play. For the first time we are introduced to Van's sister, who is locked up in a mental correctional facility. Abby and I decided that you can't take anything Van's sister says at face value. She is dripping with sarcasm or double meanings. The whole first part we have Van's sister sitting on the stage right block and CB sitting on the stage left. Van's sister, whether it's an act or not, tries to *convince* CB that she loves it in the facility. Her beats evolve from *diffusing* CB's protests, *interrogating* his sexual escapades with Beethoven, *repelling* CB's attempts to try to get a straight answer out of her about why she burned the red headed girl's hair, and finally *confessing* the actual reason she did it.

Throughout this whole scene Van's sister is supposed to be handcuffed and at the end when CB asks if she is serious she takes off her handcuffs, signifying that they're toys and she lied about them being real, therefore she might have lied about her confession. We searched high and low for cheap handcuffs that looked semi-realistic but ended up not being able to find any. I decided to cut the handcuffs and instead during this moment Van's sister just reveals that during her confession she

had her fingers crossed the whole time, signifying the same effect that CB can't trust anything that she says.

It was really nice watching Abby grow and get more comfortable with this character. She had been struggling trying to figure out Van's sister since it is such a complicated character. Using viewpoints to find the character's physicality seemed to help Abby understand Van's sister a little more. Finding out how a character walks and how they would want other characters to view them based solely on physicality forces the actor to think like the character and therefore get into the mindset of the character. This seemed to help Abby a lot and once she unlocked Van's sister, she was a lot more confident in her ability in this scene.

### **Our Sister of Mercy**

This scene basically echoes the blocking of *Nirvana*, where we have Van sitting on the stage left block and CB's sister leaning against it. The comical moment of this scene was relating the action of smoking from a pipe to giving a blowjob. Therefore, when Van shows CB's sister how to smoke, it is staged so he is holding the pipe right over his pelvis insinuating that when CB's sister is "sucking" the pipe it shows the immediate foreshadowing of what is about to happen.

### **Mal Di Luna**

Originally in the script, Matt is supposed to smash Beethoven's fingers using the lid of the piano. Since there is no physical piano to use, I had to instead

choreograph a fight. During the fight all the other actors are on stage as themselves watching the violence ensue but doing nothing to stop it. Matt pins Beethoven on the floor and breaks his fingers behind his back, the sound cue of cracking bones playing in the background. As Matt flees the music room the actors gather around the broken Beethoven as a sound cue plays of whispering hate slurs that reflect the writing on the curtain. The sound cue crescendos until the whispers become screams, bearing into the audience's ears, all the while the sub-woofer is emitting a very loud but low resonating frequency that creates a very ominous and unsettling effect.

This is the culmination of Beethoven's angst, as his ability to play piano is snatched away as he lies broken on the floor, his head filled with the hate words of his peers. He screams, cutting off the sound cue. The actors on stage look at the audience and begin to sing "Sticks and Stones," while Beethoven limps offstage for the last time. The actors split offstage leaving Abby to sing her solo and introduce the next scene.

### **Peer Counseling**

As I mentioned before, I decided to stage *Peer Counseling* how it was intended. A semi-circle of chairs in blocks represent the students gathered around to talk about their feelings. An empty chair in the center marks the "counselor," whose voice is represented by the "Woh Woh's" of a trombone. One by one the students explain how they feel while a sullen CB skulks facing upstage right. When asked how he feels, CB explodes at them all, *annihilating* the teacher, Beethoven, and his



peers. It's obvious that CB is going through the first stages of grief where he cannot accept the truth and is consumed by rage.

Scott did a beautiful job conveying this, illustrating how CB is trying to cover up how hurt he is with his fury. He is positioned in the middle of the semi-circle, center stage when he screams, "DID HE SAY GOODBYE TO ME?!" Scott had a beautiful instinct to choke back right after he said that line, revealing a glimpse of CB's actual vulnerability as he chokes back tears and regains his composure. This rejection of Beethoven is heartbreaking, but it is clear to the audience that this is just a defense mechanism for CB as he storms off the stage.

### **Changing Evolution**

CB's sister takes center stage, continuing her monologue about evolving into a platypus, only this time the words are true and from the heart. She *disarms* the audience with her pleading of how she "evolved" too much, and never wanted to grow up and learn the pains and disappointments of life. As she confesses this to the audience she assumes her position of stage right as CB comes downstage left to address the audience of his true feelings. This sets up the image of the first scene with the two siblings, except they have come full circle.

### **Brothers and Sisters**

The stage directions do not specify where this scene takes place. It just has the dialogue between the two siblings. I decided to set this scene in a cemetery, specifically at Beethoven's gravestone, so the staging for this scene echoes the scene where we first see CB and his sister together, beginning and ending the play with a funeral. By repeating the same blocking of the two siblings coming together downstage center, we see how much their relationship has evolved. Instead of harsh and provoking tones they speak soft and delicately, trying not to step on each other's toes.

At the top of this scene I have the narrators and CB and CB's sister flowers. The two kneel down and place their flowers at the lip of the stage as if they are setting it down in front of a tombstone, clarifying that the two are at the cemetery. As the two *open up* to each other, they become closer than we have ever seen them before, as CB's sister leans her head on her brother. For once in the play we see this brother and sister in what appears to be an actual loving relationship. They sit in silence like this for a moment, until CB's sister produces a letter response from CB's long lost pen pal.

### **Dear CB**

All actors in stage blacks enter the stage and strike a tableau. Atticus and Ivy are standing on top of stage right and left blocks, Taylor and Hayley are sitting on the same respective blocks, while Abby and Jaime come downstage right and left. CB

sits center stage reading the letter. All take a breath cue off Abby as they all say in unison, "Dear CB." Throughout this scene the actors feed off each other's energy, and talk as if they are one unit. The point being that they are all reading the letter as if they are the pen pal writing back to CB. Each actor has a designated chunk that they take downstage center and *reassure/ inspire* not only CB, but also the entire audience of the beauty of life and the power of love. After they say their part, they all kneel around CB making a tight semi-circle, placing a hand on him as if to give him strength to go on and keep on living. At the end CB gets up and walks downstage write to read the remaining letter to the audience. Lights dim and the actors split off into the wings.

### **Staging the Ending: Dog Sees God or God Sees Dog?**

Bert V. Royal most likely had the device of the palindrome, *Dog Sees God*, when structuring this play. It is apparent in his writing that Royal ended his play with many of the same scenarios which he began it with: A letter to/from a pen pal, the death of a loved one, a monologue about changing evolution etc. In each beginning scene the premise of the conflict seems to either be silly or juvenile when compared to the echoing of it at the end. CB mopes around the loss of his dog while at the end he must face the loss of his friend and romantic partner. Likewise, his sister starts the play off spouting words of how she wants to 'evolve' and change from being trapped in a girl's body, yet towards the end of the play she gets a taste of maturing from a

child into an adult, and is forced to realize the pain and suffering of growing up in an unforgiving world.

As I explained above in my scene analysis, my intent to follow Royal's theme of repetition and cycles echo in my staging of the beginning and ending scenes. I chose to block certain scenes exactly the same so that the audience could make the parallels of the circular structure of the play. Since the blocking is not new, this encourages the audience to focus more on what the characters are saying versus what they are doing, taking into account how the characters and writing have transformed since the start of the play. However, I inserted my own concept for how I wanted the play to end in a way that disrupted this structure of recurrence.

Before I started staging this production I knew that at the end I wanted to acknowledge those who weren't able to stand up for themselves, and decided to take their own lives. I decided to assign each actor a teen to represent at the end of the show, creating an almost candlelight vigil for these teens who have committed suicide due to bullying. My reasoning for doing this is to allow the audience to put a face to these poor victims. It is one thing to hear about a young teen taking their own life, but it is quite another to actually see them staring back at you. I wanted to force people to realize how young and bright these kids' futures were, but because of the intolerance and blind hatred, they decided it wasn't worth it to live in a world that rejected them.

Originally in the play, the letter addressed to CB is signed C.S., presumably meaning Charles Schultz, the creator of the *Peanuts*. For me, this ending seemed anti-climactic, as not everyone knows the name, let alone the initials of the creator. I was originally going to have the actors say their own name, allowing them to connect as themselves to the audience. I then had the idea to take it further and have the actors say the name of their teen. I like to believe that this would create the sense that we were giving these teens a voice and that they had time to reflect on what they have done and regret it. By having this ending message of hope come from the teens that originally had none, it creates the sense that they have banded together to persuade CB to keep on living his life and not make the same mistake they made of dwelling in the darkness.

I wanted this to create the opposite result of Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt*, or distancing effect, so it is perfectly clear to the audience that this isn't a problem of the past or far off land that we need to think critically about because it is a happening right now. There is no point in beating around the bush with the issue because there is no valid argument in support of unprovoked bullying. Instead this ending aims to make it clear that this a very relevant, yet preventable problem happening in our current society. By showing the audience the images of the dead teens that did not have to die I hope to evoke some humanity into the hearts of the audience.

Antonin Artaud would applaud this alternate ending while Brecht would reject it, but I believe that Bert V. Royal would agree that it as an acceptable way to end his

piece. Replacing the letters C.S., who a majority of the audience most likely will not recognize, with actual human lives and experiences create a feeling of connection much more stronger than text could ever do. Artaud believed in the power of human emotion and I would agree that in the case of *Dog Sees God* we need to be reminded that we are all human beings who *feel*. I did not matter whether the audience felt confused, sad, or infuriated when seeing these teens, but the fact that they responded to the images presented in front of them and felt a human connection is so much more valuable than just the letters “C.S.” If Bert V. Royal saw a performance of my production, I do not believe that I had ruined his work by omitting these two letters, but rather applaud the fact that his story was able to resonate with mine, and together we hopefully created a piece of theater that affected all of those who experienced it.

### **Final Thoughts**

This process turned out better than I ever hoped. I am so thankful that I got this opportunity to show what I could do as a director. I have found a new passion for directing and in doing so I feel as if I have learned so much more as an actor, now knowing how directors think and what they want out of their performers. I feel as though I have finally been able to do my part to give a voice to the teens that felt that they were alone. I was determined to make sure that they did not die in vain, for this entire process is dedicated to them. They have changed my life and I aspire to make sure their deaths were not in vain by changing other people’s lives with their stories.

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