

Collaborative theatre project Student A (SL and HL)

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IB Theatre Collaborative Project

Preparation:

We have been asked to define who we are going into this task and where we think we might like to branch out and forward. Although I have been highly involved in extracurricular theatre at our school, this is my first theatre course. In Y1 we did various devising projects so I have quite a good sense of how I can improve as a participant and my own learning style. I am familiar now with Tectonic theatre's approach to creating original verbatim theatre. I also was part of a large devising project in Y1 outside of the course. Our stimulus was clowns and why people fear them. Over three months I saw scribbles on paper blossom into a full blown production with a great deal of input of all involved. Our director tapped into our strengths and I enjoyed creating an original character called Flirty Clown and I also was heavily involved in writing the script. Simply put, I feel confident about what is ahead and I am excited. Everyone says I am a natural comedian thus I would like to engage in a more serious role in this project to broaden my own range of experiences. If my piece requires a set I would like to help create it. If music is required, I would love to be a part of that. I have been involved in choir for years but know little about vocal projection techniques in theatre thus another area I would like to learn.

Coming Together:

Our teacher has offered us various ways to create ensembles and we too have had a voice in how we might approach this. At first we thought we could simply "talk it out" but it was feeling a bit superficial and friends were gravitating towards friends opposed to really considering skills and goals. We finally agreed upon posting various words and terms that would be the basis for uniting creatively. Also, we had each looked into a professional theatre company that devised and were to use ideas from them to propel us forward.

After not finding enough to support this quest from the physical theater group DV8 (I was intrigued by a video I saw in Y1 called *The Cost of Living*) I found a book in our theatre library from Frantic Assembly. I was also able to find an excellent package online (published by Art Council England) that they had created to guide performers in devising theatre. I also came across a theorist called Toby Wilsher who works primarily with masks. I have never done mask work and thought I might like somewhere, somehow to learn more about it if it might fit with whatever we are going to create.

Frantic Assembly:

Simply put, the image from the opening page of their devising package (on the next page *Guide to Frantic Assembly* pg. 1) made me love them before I even began:

Journal Entry: "...bodies say so much. Connections between people and the way they are placed together with colours, textures and backgrounds are pure art. And I don't even know the stories here. My imagination is on fire."

Frantic Assembly Devising Package:

Many quotes and ideas from the book and package intrigued and inspired me. Here, I share only a few that I hope one can see truly impacted my, and our, own work. All quotes are directly from the source above.

One of the most important and defining features of our artistic process is that the initial ideas come from us. Even if we work with a writer, that writer is often engaged long after the genesis of the idea and is invited to embrace and expand that idea. (Pg. 8)

We want lighting designers to engage with the choreography, designers to engage with the music and all of this to happen as early as possible. (Pg. 8)

Music is a massive inspiration to us. We have it in our heads all the time and we use it in rehearsals at every stage. We cannot understand the type of rehearsal where the music only arrives in the tech week. (Pg. 8)

We use contemporary music because this is what tends to inspire us. We do not use it exclusively but we are massive music fans and find that a lot of our ideas come from music. We have quite eclectic music collections and use whatever excites us at the time. (Pg. 16)

Sometimes there are things we want to try that are outside the text and hopefully complement it. Often it takes a while to get a feel for the rhythms of the text. A good understanding of this dictates when and where and what kind of physicality is required. (Pg. 9)

While this approach encourages a collaborative rehearsal room there is also a very practical reason for this intense, initial involvement of the designer that have ramifications for all of our producing partners and their technical departments. (Pg. 17)

Key Ideas taken from *The Frantic Assembly Book of Devising Theatre*:

- Use video as a means to watch and test our own work
- Look at soundtracks used in movies and then consider how this idea can apply to our own work in theatre and where music might fit or motivate exercises
- Use many kinds of improvisational games and activities (the book is full of suggestions)
- Inspiration is everywhere
- Physical work is vital

Finding Peers With Whom To Work:

Journal Entry: “ Although I know, based on Y1, that I work really well with Mariam and Yuval, I have to admit that Ronald, Rachel and David seems to be the best fit for where I want to go with this project. David would like to work on set design, Rachel and David are both pulled towards creating rich characters in a more cerebral way whereas I would like to try to do this more through physical experimentation. All three of them were excited when I mentioned my desire to bring masks into it. Ronald would like to work with lighting and has found a group that uses Augusto Boal’s ideas as a means of devising. I am the only one who wants to really keep a video process journal although the others like my idea and appreciate that this could also benefit them. All of us feel strongly that we will not be constricted to a single genre or style and that our creation can be a real potpourri of substance building.....despite what I wrote last week about being confident about this project, the unknown is a massive dark abyss and the fact that it will be evaluated increases the pressure.”

Starting Points –Journal 2

Well, I am a terrible, terrible person. :) When we all agreed to bring in a different stimulus for the project, and then to agree on one (I learned in Y1 that to many cooks spoil the broth when we tried to combine far too many stimuli) and so I found this horrible Egyptian looking vase with a lid that my mother had won (lost?) at a white elephant party and I filled it with ashes from our barbeque. I told a soppy story about how it was a valued treasure: my grandmother. No one said a stimulus needs to be honest. After it was over I told Ronald and David it was a joke but I am waiting until this project is over until I tell Rachel or I am certain she will make me mince meat of me.

“The Starting Point and the Context”—Journal 5

We are currently working on a piece based on what David brought in: a photo of the Titan Arum. We chose it simply because it caused the greatest ruckus amongst us in terms of jokes, ideas and emotions.

Here are some basic facts about the titan arum:

It is called the “Amorphophallus titanium,” or the “Corpse Flower.” It is native to the rainforests of Sumatra in Indonesia.

It uses its rotting, repugnant (to humans) smell to attract pollinators, mainly flies. The female flowers open during the cycle and receptive to pollen. These flowers are vulnerable species and endangered.

(retrieved from Titan Arum FAQs from the Biological Sciences Greenhouse)

Questions:

How is it pollinated?

What pollinates it?

When did it evolve?

Here are some general ideas that it evokes in me:

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder (from an episode of the “Twilight Zone”).

Life exists purely to be alive.

These flowers are based on practicality.

This is a reminder that all life is not meant to be beautiful or gorgeous to humans

We shape things to be more appealing to us, such as apples, dogs etc.

We are trying to create or discover God’s kingdom through our selections, to view only the attractive and appealing and not the ugly or dangerous, but it’s not the case.

This flower is a survivor.

Scattered ideas:

Opening and closing, the cycle

Corpse Flower – symbol of death

Vulnerability of life- a few days of life. Absurdist theatre: Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy.

Specter type of thing.

David and Rachel both were inspired by the life cycles of the flower and its means of pollination.

Ronald thought it would be a good idea to put on “A Little Shop of Horrors,” an idea that is inaccessible because we need to create something new and original, and can’t simply take another show verbatim. Thus, we had to reject this idea.

Rachel brought in some great articles about various real-life couples that inspired us and perhaps gave us more ideas about how to develop the idea of aging and love dramatically, giving us a direction in which perhaps to take the abstract ideas evoked by the original image.

Collective response to the articles brought in about old age and love:

Words that come to mind exercise: (quotes from the group)

It gives me hope.

Sad and beautiful.

Bittersweet.

Touching.

Fate.

Promises.

Is there really somebody for everyone?

Love.

Old people seem gross, but this reminds that they're human too.

Impotence of old age.

Connection with the flower: such a long period of time all comes down to a few moments.

Walking corpses.

Theatrical possibilities of *The Fault in Our Stars*—this is a novel that we all read and thought might somehow connect to our devised piece:

-quote from Shakespeare's play, "Julius Caesar"

-facts of life

-the things dictated by fate or chance

-those things we can't control

-The ugliness of death, our fear of people who are sick or dying.

How to deal with those facts, methods of coping.

Harsh, realistic- naturalistic. Not fantastical.

Love in spite of these physical issues.

Brevity, fragility of life



Image Two: Photo by Ronald. Here we are researching the play and looking for possibilities.

I am in the middle, Rachel is on the left and David is on the right.

Target audience: High school students and older. We want to approach mature themes about love, partnership and want those who can relate.



Image Three: Photo by Ronald. Here you can see David's pictures that he took when he was recently at The Eden Project in the UK of the Titan Arum. Everyone said that I was so convincing when I read my research aloud that I should play the character of some sort of scientist or botanist. Possible!

“Development and application of skills”

I am jumping ahead a few weeks and will then rewind. I would like to focus on some of my more minor contributions and then build up to my real specialist skills. Although not planned, I ended up contributing a great deal to building our project through mask work. Frantic Assembly's approach was that physical work is vital and I found this physical work through masks, primarily tapping into ideas by Wilsher. Rachel really helped us with characterization in the realm of realism as did David. Ronald's games and exercises helped us develop trust in the early stages and many images that I videotaped of these games blended with my mask work. So above all I think my specialization was development through physical mask work and I would like to thank my peers for being so open to me.

Set Design:



Stockholm Bed Exercise Pg. 60 from *The Frantic Assembly Book of Devising Theatre*: The premise of this exercise is to let the ensemble manipulate a couple in bed to show their emotions and ideas. What does it mean when they sleep tightly together? What does it show when they are back to back? As we manipulated the set I directed this exercise first without and later, with masks, as a means of discussing what kind of relationship Rachel and I shared as husband and wife. Then we added our son David in another bed. How did he sleep at night? What his worries or dreams? This filtered into our writing of the actual script: the couple are close but have problems. The son is happy but has trouble reaching out to others. How will our set help us to tell the story?



Image collage
Four

All images taken by Ronald

Our set became a multi purpose one. As we evolved we learned we needed to create specific as well as surreal/symbolic “environments”. Through my mask research work I became intrigued by how only very few actors took on so many roles in ancient Greece. I had been to Ephesus in Turkey with my parents for a holiday when I was young and although I was too young to appreciate it (which became part of my actual character—he only pretend to love archeology to “win the girl”). Earlier, David and I had wanted to create a massive outdoor set in the style of ancient ruins but it wasn’t practical at all nor necessary. The set needed to transition between our home and Ephesus and when we agreed on an intimate space the challenge then became how to do more with less.

In the images above you can see moments of our process. Constructing large blocks/cubes for many purposes and then working with corrugated plastic to create pillars. Our theatre manager needed to be present to ensure that we were safe although all work was our own. We painted the blocks with a textured yellow/beige/brown that could serve as rock and used similar tones to match the pillars. The very basics of set design we found in our class resource text *The Theatre Experience*. Robert Edmond Jones, an American set designer was a big inspiration to me in the section on design simply because he really brought home the idea that sets are not just decoration but are integral to everything. Like Rachel’s costumes, we had to experiment with Ronald’s lighting. Rachel changed two costume pieces because they became too absorbed in the set colours. The following website had very simple instructions on how to make the pillars and was a great guide:

http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CDcQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fd3r7smo9ckww6x.cloudfront.net%2F81021_greek_columns_0.pdf&ei=fmvzUaeSG8KHrAfmn4DwBQ&usg=AFQjCNGbGi-vCW22DBUKdSQPssy2lltuFA&bvm=bv.49784469,d.bmk

Painting was pure experimentation and although David and I were the main designers, Rachel and Ronald came in on the weekend to lend a hand which was highly appreciated. The pillars were too “perfect” at one point and we simply used a scraper to removed bits and pieces. This gave a more dated effect.

Ah’s

Earlier in the process, we thought we might perform in a large space and I became the vocal coach. I looked at various YouTube videos and went through different chapters in different books. To be honest, I didn’t feel qualified to experiment on my peers and my choir leader reminded me that bad practice could cause damage. I found a book called “Alexander Technique and The Voice”.

It was short, simple, and clear. The basic premise was relaxation and using simple “Ah’s” as building blocks. I honestly noticed growth in my peers over time. They were not straining but

visualized distance and found natural breathing patterns as a means of being heard. Rachel and I devised an exercise where she gave us a map of Ephesus and made us look at videos to make our acting world more believable and I focused on ensuring the voice was used properly in the space. Here are some examples of me leading my peers and also from our work outside.



Image Five: Here I am leading a session on five central ideas from the Alexander Technique vocalization: 1. Commanding the coordination of full breathing 2. Looking at our own bad habits when it comes to breathing at speaking 3. Learning that we breathe naturally and don't need to force projection 4. Learning to control exhalation through the torso, back and ribs. 5. Playing with the "ah" to understand all of the above. (Dimon, *Alexander Technique And The Voice*, pages 13 and 14.)

Images Six and Seven: We are rehearsing lines from our script and applying the principles of the A.T. projection. We are holding up our hands to help each other visualize where the audience may be. Rachel and I both noticed that relaxation was vital to her Stanislavski character work and my vocal work. Ah!

Section from script Rachel and I worked on together:

R in wheelchair. P with walking stick. D is a grown man.
Scene based on observations at a home for the elderly and interviews with couples there.

P: (as if seeing everything he names in various parts of the room)

Acaulescent: stemless

Accumbent: a term referring to seeds in which the embryonic root is wrapped around and lies along the edges of the two cotyledons

Acerose: needle-shaped

R: Will you get me some more tea angel?

D: You still have tea, mom.

R: I do!

P: Achene: a small, dry, one-seeded, indehiscent fruit deriving from a one-chambered ovary, typical of the *Asteraceae*

Acicular: needle-shaped, as applied to some kinds of foliage

D: Dad seems happy.

R: He does!

D: Shall I get him his medicine?

R: Oh those pills don't help him. Just make him sleepy.

D exits and returns

P: Actinomorphic: radially symmetrical

Aculeate: pointed or prickly

D: Time for some candy dad.

P: Busy son. Busy trying to understand why plants are like people.

D pretends to eat the pills and acts as if they are delicious.

R finds this incredibly funny and can't stop laughing.

Laughing until she cries.

(Terms from:

<http://www.calflora.net/botanicalnames/botanicalterms.html>)





Images 8-10: Rachel had taken us through a long visualization, asked us to watch videos of Ephesus and outside we discussed what was where so we could transfer this real imagery to our scenes in the small theatre. I thought it was excellent because in our actual play I could see the diverse terrain that surrounded us in the two scenes. Rachel had us play with an idea called Circles of Acting which helped us expand from very realistic personal space, to a greater realm that I felt stretched miles beyond our audience. During rehearsals Ronald adapted her idea and did this very intriguing lighting exercise that literally allowed us to “see” as far as was realistic for a scene. I took Frantic Assembly’s idea of using a soundtrack and played different kinds of music while we were outside. Here, we are allowing our son David to go off and play. In the “happy” take I used light classical, playful music which we took into our bodies. In the “tragic” replay of the scene I used ominous music from the soundtrack from “The Hunger”. Crazy but true: it made our hearts beat faster!



How did my soundtrack work actually come into the performance?

Well, big ol’ TOK kind of ethical discussion emerged on how to apply music to our devised play. Can we use the music of others? Do we need to apply for the rights even though we aren’t trying to make any profit from it? Do we have time to write our own music? In the end I found an incredible piece of music. What was strange/bizarre/coincidental/fate was that I was looking up videos of our stimulus and was watching this one entitled Life cycle of Titan Arum (corpse flower) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QYqS8UEzT58>. The effect is eerie as it is in fast motion so you keep seeing the plant live, die, live, die and it was almost human. Fit so well with our themes about cycles, love, what ifs and following your own heart and truth. I was simultaneously looking for music and when I played the song with the video I got chills. Our theatre teacher often used this as his radar if work was stunning or not. He said there’s no theory behind it but the mind, heart and soul simply know. Well, bingo. The song I found was at a site called Jamendo where you could get royalty free music and, actually, this project aside it was a great find! Why Change by StrangeZero from their album entitled *Future Is A Choice You Make*. It can be found at:

<http://www.jamendo.com/en/list/a83070/future-is-a-choice-you-make-ep>

I will discuss the impact of the music later in my analysis of the clips I have chosen to analyze from our final presentation.

And Onto My *Most Significant Contribution*:

The Trestle Theatre company's Toby Wilsher and his ideas about applying masks to create physical theatre was by far my biggest contribution to our devised piece. I think Wilsher's exercises are transforming. Ironically, when I first read through several of them I thought them simple but in actuality it was the contrary. I made the mistake of imagining outcomes before they even happened. Here are screen shots I took from the ongoing video journal I made during our rehearsals (with a thank you to Ronald, Rachel and David for helping record me in action):



Early in the process of developing our character physicality through masks I tapped into Jacques LeCoq's states of tension. I had encountered these briefly before at an ISTA workshop lead by Jo Scott but she had her own way of sharing them. Pages 52-58 in Wilsher's *The Mask Handbook* explore these states. Later, I also worked with scenes written by Rachel and I asked all actors which states were most applicable for the scenes. I share the screen shot on the left because it served a very valuable point to my entire group earlier on. Here, Ronald "thinks" he is in a neutral state but as we discussed it his left hand is curved, his head is slightly forward. Reminding me of our Peter Brook discussion in Y1, when you are onstage your body is always saying something.



"Crossing the Room"—exercise from Wilsher's book mentioned above

Students cross from room facing the audience. The turn at some point along the way, and need to not turn their backs to the audience.

Hold mask up, pull the face of the mask onto their own face. How does it make them feel? Find a walk to suits the face, finding a speed and rhythm of movement that creates a simple sense of character. Repeat the first exercise. Instead of turns, give a simple action halfway that contradicts the character. Grumpy mask finds a 50 euro note. Needs to show elation physically without changing the face. Mask and countermask.

This affects our blocking for the final presentation.



In the scene that Rachel wrote based on many games and improvisations her character and mine are discussing why we couldn't keep the child she is pregnant with. Love relationships was a major idea from our stimuli and research thereafter. We read several articles about people in love who died often minutes apart even if they were miles apart (this really did come from that big plant!). Rachel told me she was feeling the emotions in her heart and mind but didn't think it was translating to her body. Mask work to the rescue! And one can see this physicality come alive in our final performance.



Wilsher refers to the need for inner monologues in several sections of his book. I would like to clarify that there is a great deal of information on masks and ample exercises to be found in books and on the Internet. But as I found actual Trestle masks in our theatre supply room and the book was so beautifully laid out /explained (and I barely touched the surface; I could have lead mask workshops for months) this text became my lifeline. I found there was a great parallel to mask work exercise revealing inner monologues and Rachel's work we did with objectives and subtext. In this screen shot both Rachel and I are coaching David while Ronald moved the blocks around to define the space to work with his lighting. This is David expressing how his character as a young man felt about ever meeting the right person to share his life with also in the script. I supplemented the exercise with "Getting Interviewed" from *Mask Characterization An Acting Process* pages 74-75 by Libby Appel. Once again, reminded me of character exercises lead by Rachel. Probe.



Early in the process I had the actors choose masks that they thought best represented their emotions at various points in the script and asked them to study them intensively. I then asked them to play with them while performing while the rest of us sat on the floor, stood up, or looked on from various angles. The faces of the masked changed drastically. I thought this was vital to reaching our target audience as we had to use our bodies to ensure the mask was saying what we wanted it to say.

My screen shot; Ronald operating camera.



Here, a mask that was quite angry looking when David first explored and reacted to it, actually looks quite hopeful or forlorn when David changes its angle.

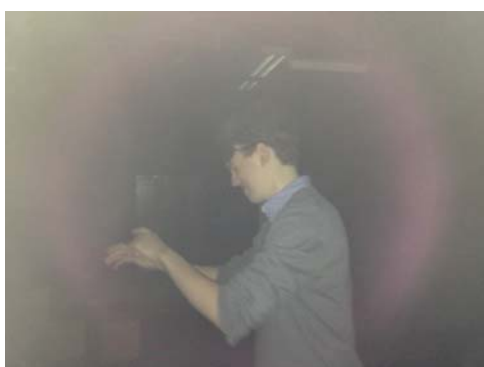
My screen shot.



During some Boal games lead by Ronald I had an epiphany that the masks he was using are still... masks. There was a great discussion about how this could become our opening scene as originally I thought that the mask work was only going to help us with our physicality but the others said it was too precious not to include and Rachel and I had both wanted a performance that was not only realistic but also symbolic. We used these masks under the Trestle masks at the beginning to show that even under our own masks of who we are there are other layers. Rachel felt this fit with her subtext work. We are hopelessly trying to connect here but do a much better job some two weeks later. (My screen shot)



The story develops....My character (left) is a very cerebral botanist who is often more caught up in his study of plants than anything else. He has more than one passion; more than one love. Underneath these masks are the blindfolds. Earlier I mentioned the exercise called Crossing The Room from Wilsher's *The Mask Handbook* pg. 47 and here you see us in action trying to express our ideas but on the horizontal plane. My screen shot; Rachel at the camera.



Our blocking for the first and final scene are near finalized on the left. David and Rachel have both adapted the neutral position beautifully as my character comes to life. We are still working on synchronicity which actually became easier with the music/soundtrack that I found. David is in the centre to show he is the son. We are trying costumes Rachel found to show our status and place. I am considering many questions that arose during discussions about who we are as characters. The book is a symbolic prop. Rachel made me carry it around school for an entire day saying I would feel more attached to it. Found it more of a nuisance until I left it in the caf at lunch and had a mild panic attack looking for it. Point taken! (My screen shot from video)

On the left—photo by Ronald—is the origins of the scene when Ronald lead us through a Boal game called The Vampire of Strasbourg. Was to develop trust but I look terrified!

“Exploration, collaboration and the development of the piece”

Reflections based on reviewing video footage:

My workshop was extremely successful and provided several insights into the use of masks. I learned that even when masks present a certain emotion, that emotion can be either amplified or contradicted by the performer’s physicality and actions. The contradictory physicality was especially effective after a physicality was presented that aligned with the mask’s appearance. I did grow to grasp that even when a performer’s physicality was directed towards a certain emotion or expression, the mask will still distort the performance. For example, Ronald experimented with a happy mask and at one point completely changed into a sad physical stance: the juxtaposition between the mask and this physicality wasn’t jarring, but instead was somewhat unnerving. Masks themselves are not necessarily dramatically constricting and could thus be used to create layers in performances and contradictory and confusing emotions for audience members. The physical performances were most effective when the entire body was being used to convey the expressions.

In order to test further the extremely positive results of the workshop, I decided to re-run it in front of other theatre students, on stage while they watched from the audience. Although the performances were almost exactly the same, the perception from the audience was extremely different for some members, due to the wide effect that a change in angle or perspective can have on a mask. David’s mask for example, which had almost a leering quality, was extremely effective when glaring at audience members but had relatively little impact when in profile.

The performers also expressed concerns about the comfort of wearing the mask, and Ronald especially was concerned with breathing. Certain masks themselves were more comfortable than others, but it is important that ensuring masks are the correct sizes and shapes for each performer, as the mask and the performer need to merge in a same, to become one and the same. My major concern is that performers are less audible while wearing masks, a problem compounded by the fact that their mouths are not visible. Characters in masks seem more

enigmatic, and indeed, the voice can be used in an additional juxtaposition to the mask and the body to enforce the outward appearance of the character or to juxtapose against it.

A very believable moment occurred when the characters of David and Ronald interacted. The two contradictory characters had a non-verbal exchange that felt surprisingly natural. Part of this moment was likely due to the fact that both performers had masks, and so it seemed that both were part of the same world: there wasn't a clash between real and unreal that emerged later when one performer was masked and one was not.

I also enjoyed the workshops held by David and by Rachel on other sides of our performance. David worked on improvisation techniques, which involved Rachel and I acting through several unplanned scenes making up objectives. The major problem with this was the danger of the choices we had made as part of the improvisation coming into conflict, such as when she decided we would be siblings and I decided that I wanted a honeymoon. As such, David agreed that such exercises would be better with a script.

Meanwhile, Rachel worked on developing subtext. As part of her workshop, she gave each of us specific goals to keep in mind while we interacted in a particular setting. Not only did we have to make obvious our goals, but we also needed to elucidate the setting as well. As such, I found this a rather challenging task but nonetheless a rewarding one. Once again, Rachel agreed that scripting would make our scenes far more fleshed out and coherent.

We have also been working on constructing the set. In line with other naturalistic plays such as "Master Harold... and the boys", we have settled on a minimalistic set that uses the motifs of the Ephesus throughout. This is not only for dramatic effect but due to the small number of performers and the limitations of time for set changes. For the same reasons, the costumes were also chosen to be minimalist, with only subtle costume changes showing the passage of time and changes of scene.

Performance for our teacher and peers:

All in all, I was pleased with how the performance went. We only had a few slight errors, mostly in lighting because of the difficulty in coordinating lights and music. For example, in one scene the lights were supposed to come back up on David as he went to give me a letter, but instead the lights went down and he had to stumble around the dark. However, the audience didn't notice these small glitches and they hardly detracted from the work as a whole. A bigger concern I had was that the fact that each scene was presented a second time as an alternate possibility would be lost on the audience, and I feel that perhaps this would be more clear if there was more consistency in our choices. For example, in the first scene between Rachel and myself as lovers, she goes into a neutral pose at the end to indicate that change and she walks offstage. Later on, the change between the scenes with us as elderly people and the corresponding alternate reality where we are no longer alive is marked by a blackout. Based on feedback, I feel like a consistency of decisions in this regard would have been clearer for the audience in general. One major discovery was that you can put hours and hours of work into a single minute on stage and should not expect that work to be appreciated. The audience sees and evaluates the product. I am grateful to David and Rachel as I had great feedback on my character acting. The hardest part was that our play is 26 minutes long. We felt sick about this but better we learn this now than later. Truth be told we hadn't timed it previously but thought (ha ha) that it was more like ten. Ronald has volunteered to edit our script and that was a massive relief. Rachel and I feeling too close to it right now and as he has worked more behind the scenes he will be the most objective.

Analysis of Our Final Performance:

Old Age 10:20-11:20

Although a short piece, I felt I was able to show a range of emotions throughout. Earlier I am very romantic, later a caring father or uncaring father (we use a cyclical motif based on fate or what if?) Perhaps most intriguing to me was the scene in which I had to play an elderly man which is the one I have chosen to share a minute of here. I wanted to convey both the joy and sadness that accompanies aging. I thus chose to portray the character as amusingly eccentric in a mad-scientist kind of way. Whereas before I had been using Rachel's Stanislavsky technique of maintaining some kind of subtext for the character, this part of the play for me departed from

that, as this was a character that was at this point in a way wholly innocent, or ignorant perhaps. This old man barely knows what's going on around him and is perhaps happier for it – a kind of ignorance is bliss scenario. As such, the comedy is bittersweet, because there's an inherent sadness in how little he understands about his life now, how powerless he is in a way to control things. However, the ultimate feeling is one of happiness because of how David and Rachel's characters respond to mine, with laughter and fondness. Ronald made sure David read the line about getting me pills in a particular way that would not suggest frustration and instead suggest an easy complacency with the situation – an overriding acceptance. Because my character was such a tabula rasa, devoid of any real subtext or ulterior motives, the responses of the other characters was that much more important. Concern over my condition would have dramatically shaped the perception of my character. Although old, I feel little or any state of tension.

I was concerned about the fact that I was supposed to use the same walking stick as a prop that I was seen with earlier when Rachel and I meet as young adults at Ephesus and would be used later as an elderly man and that it would appear silly, but Ronald eventually convinced me that it would be part of the continuing motif and would better establish the setting. In the final performance, it did just that. I used a lot of my own mask techniques to define him physically and create an inner monologue or landscape of what is going on in his head. Rachel also guided me with observations she took while interviewing individuals at the senior citizen's home next to our school. She chose simple costume pieces to show time and age. We had very fast changes usually in pitch darkness that required a great deal of rehearsal and trust and earlier games led by all of us helped us feel safe with one another. The arrangement of the set here represents our family home. Our child is now the parent in a sense who takes care of us.

Although Rachel was our main writer and Ronald the main script editor, I did help Rachel write this scene and it familiarized me with the kind of language my character, a botanist, would know. It also made memorization easier. I include an excerpt from this on page 7 of my portfolio.

Final Scene—Back to The Beginning 11:23-14:23

The final scene between Rachel, David and I was very important to me. I felt that the masked scene depended more on clever direction and staging than acting due to its abstract nature and our general deadpan, and that it required symbolic movement.

In this clip, the scene has just ended where our son, David, looks at the empty wheel chair, chair and room that was his family home. He sees his parents are no longer there; we have passed as is the cycle of life that has been a theme in our devising. The neutral walk (from my states of tension workshop) he uses as he leaves was a motif we used to inform the audience that a transition is about to occur. Ronald's lighting fills the room here; he employs a full wash to show "the home" in previous scenes as well. You can see how the blocks and pillars of Ephesus are rearranged in a family home. Rachel put together frames and pictures of the titan arum. Early in our piece, when Rachel and I meet, we have a discussion about the plant at Ephesus. My character is a botanist who has been studying it and is impressed that Rachel knows so much about it as well. Much of my/our previous brainstorming and facts uncovered about the plant are placed in the dialogue so that the audience is cognizant of the role it plays and why the pictures are there; they serve as a reminder.

The mask and movement work that follows represents the family and the plant as well as the life cycle. But this time when the masks are removed there are no blindfolds underneath: death has no subtext; it is a reality. I wanted the movement here to represent the video I saw that showed the plant die and resurrect in fast time. I don't expect our intended audience to get this but I do expect them to understand that the fall, and rise again, is about life and death. David, our son, tries to hold on to his parents but cannot. By this point we hope the audience feels an attachment to the characters because of our other scenes spanning their first meeting until now; I strive to create a feeling of nostalgia one might say. Although the sad story of a plant that only lives for a few days and is reborn every few years and articles about people who love each other and die so soon after each other may seem morbid, on the contrary, we were touched that love can be so meaningful. Perhaps not well caught by the camera is that we are smiling and looking at each other lovingly as the lights fade for the last time.

The music I chose has a haunting feeling and the powerful words of the Indian spiritual teacher Jiddu Krishnamurti and part of this song. He challenges the audience to consider what is really important in life, and, for us, it was love as cliché as it may sound. The music and movement in relation to the flashing lights show that we each have moments when we “shine” and “fade” in real life. Trestle masks are used and the action is mainly centered and focused towards our intimate audience in an intimate space. From plays I have seen myself I found the closer I was to the stage the more I felt connected to the performers and I have actually preferred plays that were not in huge mainstream theatres. As the final words are heard of “You really don’t care” we actually want the audience to think to themselves, “No, I DO care.”

The prop that I use, the book, is a signature prop my character’s obsession with his work. At the end he lets it fall showing the people in his life are more important. All of the character work that David and Rachel did with me is in my mind here and I feel I am able to bring forth truthful emotions through my mask work and their challenge to me to explore myself and my character reflectively.



After the final performance during audience Q and A. The happy family. :)

Photo by Ronald