

My Year of Rain: A Study in Directing Richard Greenberg's Three Days of Rain

Author: Kristyn Bunce

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Undergraduate Honors Program

Theater

**My Year of Rain: A Study in Directing Richard
Greenberg's Three Days of Rain**

by

Kristyn Bunce

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
the degree of

BA

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My Year of Rain: A Study in Directing Richard Greenberg's Three Days of Rain

Abstract

The work done on this project has combined the knowledge I have accumulated from nearly all of the classes and learning opportunities I have experienced over the course of college. The first semester's work consisted of a long literary analysis of *Three Days of Rain* in comparison to three other plays contemporary with it. This resulted in "Looking Behind Us As We Leap Ahead." In the paper, I compared the use of time in *Three Days of Rain*, *Sideman* by Warren Leight, *Angels in America, Part One: Millennium Approaches* by Tony Kushner, and *Sight Unseen*, by Donald Margulies. All of these plays were written by American playwrights in the last decade of the twentieth century. The initial connection between the four plays was the fluidity of time, an element of dramatic structure that creates abstractions and skewed perception within the play. However, after studying the plays in conjunction with each other, I was struck by just how much the concept of time can affect a play not only in its form, but also in its content. Issues related to history, preservation, and planning for the future ran through all four of the plays, as it became obvious that time was of the utmost importance in the theater of the 1990s. The same proved to be true in the production of theater in 2004. The rest of the thesis was devoted to the production of *Three Days of Rain*, directed by me and produced by the Contemporary Theater in the Bonn Studio in March 2004. I kept journal entries throughout the process of creating this thesis, which aided in the final written part of the thesis, "One Year of Rain: Memoirs of a Director." This section, while more personal in nature than the first academic writing, also deals with issues of time, as it documents the trials and successes of this production, as well as the personal growth of the author and director over the course of the project. The additional information supplied is evidence of dramaturgical research related to the production. Outside sources filled in the information about the world of the play that the text was missing. The combination of the support of this research and the production of the play allowed the ultimate goal of the director to be realized: To bring the play to life, and to bring real life to the play.

Three Days of Rain

*A Study in Directing the Play
by Richard Greenberg*

*Kristyn Bunce
2003-2004*

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Introduction

“ ‘I know you see it, don’t you?’
‘Yes...I know every moment.’ ”

The ending moments of Richard Greenberg’s play, *Three Days of Rain*, have been an inspiration to me from the beginning of the massive undertaking that has become my thesis. The two main characters, newly in love, make the preparations to begin their life together. Ned sketches the first lines of the design for a house that would make him famous, but set into motion a series of events that would later make his children miserable. Greenberg gives away the ending for Ned and Lina in the first act of the play, but when caught in that final scene, the audience can’t help but appreciate a moment of beginning, of starting fresh.

The beginning of any large project is full of ideals, just like the ones that inevitably cloud Ned and Lina’s vision. This project is no different. I dreamed of creating a perfect piece of theater, one that would live on in the memory of all that saw it and would be a landmark moment in my own career. These lofty goals may not have been fully realized, but the purpose of a senior thesis project, as proposed in the first document, was more than served.

Over this year, the work done on this project has combined the knowledge I have accumulated from nearly all of the classes and learning opportunities I have experienced over the course of college. The first semester’s work consisted of a long literary analysis of *Three Days* in comparison to three other plays contemporary with it. This resulted in “Looking Behind Us As We Leap Ahead.” In the paper, I compared the use of time in *Three Days of Rain*, *Sideman* by Warren Leight, *Angels in America, Part One*:

Millennium Approaches by Tony Kushner, and *Sight Unseen*, by Donald Margulies. All of these plays were written by American playwrights in the last decade of the twentieth century. The initial connection between the four plays was the fluidity of time, an element of dramatic structure that creates abstractions and skewed perception within the play. However, after studying the plays in conjunction with each other, I was struck by just how much the concept of time can affect a play not only in its form, but also in its content. Issues related to history, preservation, and planning for the future ran through all four of the plays, as it became obvious that time was of the utmost importance in the theater of the 1990s.

The same proved to be true in the production of theater in 2004. The rest of the thesis was devoted to the production of *Three Days of Rain*, directed by me and produced by the Contemporary Theater in the Bonn Studio in March 2004. I kept journal entries throughout the process of creating this thesis, which aided in the final written part of the thesis, "One Year of Rain: Memoirs of a Director." This section, while more personal in nature than the first academic writing, also deals with issues of time, as it documents the trials and successes of this production, as well as the personal growth of the author and director over the course of the project.

The additional information supplied is evidence of dramaturgical research related to the production. Outside sources filled in the information about the world of the play that the text was missing. The combination of the support of this research and the production of the play allowed the ultimate goal of the director to be realized: To bring the play to life, and to bring real life to the play.

Senior Thesis Proposal

The thesis that I will be completing by the end of the Spring semester, 2004, is a combination of written work and a project. It consists of four parts, all centered around Richard Greenberg's 1997 play, "Three Days of Rain"

The first part of the project consists of a dramaturgical analysis of the play. This will be research related to the times and places of the play, along with references to other things made in the script. It will involve research about New York City in both the 1960s and 1990s. This research will include physical aspects of the city as well as the social, political, and cultural environments of both of these time periods. I will also research the 1960s more extensively, studying the world outside of New York. Architecture, which plays a large part in this play, will also be researched. This will consist of researching NYC architecture, as well as studying the lives and works of some of the great American architects of the 20th century, including but not limited to Frank Lloyd Wright. I will also identify the literary, historical, and philosophical allusions made in the text, in addition to finding justification of their use by the playwright. To complete the dramaturgical understanding necessary for the play, I will also research previous productions of "Three Days of Rain" through newspaper reviews, and published interviews with the playwright and other people involved in various productions (actors, directors, designers, etc.).

The second part of the project entails a literary approach to the play. I will be analyzing "Three Days of Rain" and its dramatic use of past and present settings and the theme of generations. I will also be reading and analyzing three other plays from the same decade as "Three Days of Rain": "Arcadia," by Tom Stoppard, "Angels in America Part 1: Millennium Approaches" by Tony Kushner, and "Sideman" by Warren Leight. I

will evaluate the use of the past intermingled with the present in each of these plays and discuss how this convention relates to the overall message of the play. I will also analyze the relationship between the past and the present as a common theme in dramatic literature of the 1990's, the decade in which all four of these plays were written. This part of the project may also include my work with Stuart Hecht (my advisor) on his production of "Arcadia." The result of these literary analyses will be a paper or series of papers related to the topics mentioned above.

For the third part of the project, I will be directing a production of "Three Days of Rain" in the Bonn Studio Theater over the course of the Spring 2004 semester. I will journal my experience with directing on a near-daily basis, along with keeping careful record of the blocking and design elements of the show. The production should reflect the research I have done about the play and also give some evidence of any conclusions that I have drawn about the play or plays of its type.

For the final part, I will write a conclusive paper, bringing all three of the parts previously mentioned together. I will compile my writings accumulated over both semesters, along with a video of my production, to create my thesis.

Looking Behind Us as We Leap Ahead: The Fluidity of Time in Four American Plays of the 1990's

By Kristyn Bunce

Is Time Catching Up With Us? "The Story of a Moment"¹

By 1997, the year in which Richard Greenberg's play, *Three Days of Rain* was first produced, the nation, and even the world was abuzz regarding the approaching millennium. Never before had the mere passing of time caused so much concern, both reasonable and unfounded. There was the Y2K question: what would happen to computers, the technological advancement that had arguably most changed the way the world worked in the past half-century, when the clocks hit 2000? (Apparently, the geniuses that were so absorbed in the future technological greatness of the world had forgotten to plan ahead.) Would a computer system meltdown be the worst that could happen as we waved goodbye to the twentieth century? Some doubted it, as they feared the apocalypse as predicted by the Bible and Nostradamus. At the very least, mass hysteria causing violence worldwide was to be expected. Never did the advent of one date cause quite so much fear. The future became equitable with the unknown. Americans longed to continue into the next millennium as they had ended the last one: economically sound and politically important. Yet the desire for improvement, growing bigger, getting better, remained strong. How could we make up for the sins of the last several centuries and continue forward with a glowing future? Could an entire nation make a New Year's resolution?

¹ Greenberg, *Three Days of Rain*, pg. 5

In nervously anticipating the future, it becomes natural to look to the past. What could we have changed yesterday to make today and tomorrow work out better? Could computer programmers have just thought to include the next century in a computer's hard drive? Were the previous hysterical reactions to apocalyptic predictions worth anything? Without a time machine, it is impossible for anyone to really know. Looking back at the past seemed to raise more questions than provide answers. Consequently, as it has always gone throughout history, these questions echoed through the art of the time period, including theater. However, in the theater, the playwright is given liberty to build such a time machine and give the audience a venue to seek the answers to these questions by creating theatrical realities in which time is no longer an obstacle. *Three Days of Rain*, as well as *Sight Unseen* by Donald Margulies, *Sideman* by Warren Leight, and *Angels in America: Millennium Approaches* by Tony Kushner are all examples of plays in which time applies in both form and content. Time is fluid and therefore becomes the medium in which the playwright is working, as well as a main topic of the play.

Time in Relation to Formal Aspects of the Plays

*“Why, if you knew Time as well as I do, you’d only have to whisper a hint to him and round goes the clock in a twinkling!”*²

As is previously stated in the above paragraphs, a playwright has the power to create a veritable time machine within his play. The playwright is God to not only the characters and events of his creation, but also to the entire world in which the play exists. Thus, he can make time operate anyway he wants. It can move forward, backwards, not at all, or the play can exist without time altogether. However, regardless of the power that the playwright has over his own play, it must also be remembered that the play itself

² Carroll, Lewis. *Alice in Wonderland*

is subject to the workings of time. While the play is unfolding in different dimensions of time, the audience always remains in the only dimension of time that we have thus far discovered—the ever-moving, never-ceasing present. A play is temporal: time passes while it is being performed. Therefore, while the playwright may use time as a shifting convention within the play, the formalities of the play are always subject to the higher formality of the world: real time. In addition to this fact, it must be remembered that not only is the playwright creating a work of art that must exist in time, but it is a piece that will be saved for posterity, if it is worth any effect. Therefore, they cannot escape the trap of their own lives and times that will inevitably affect the work that they produce. This adds another level of scrutiny to the analysis of time as a formal aspect of the play.

Three Days of Rain deals with generational issues, as it follows the Janeway family through two generations, backwards in time. In the first act, Greenberg shows the audience the present-day (1995) personalities of Walker and Nan, brother and sister, and their father's colleague's son, Pip. These characters are coming together in an apartment formerly shared by their fathers for the reading of Walker and Nan's father, Ned's, will. They discuss their perceptions of their parents, Ned and his wife, Lina, as well as Pip's father, Theo, who we learn had died at a young age. In struggling to come to terms with the unhappiness and tragic circumstances that have consumed their family, Walker and Nan burn their father's journal in an attempt to eradicate the past. In the second act, Greenberg brings this past to life, as we are brought to the same apartment in 1960, just as the illustrious architectural partnership of Ned and Pip's father Theo is beginning, and directly before Ned and Lina fall in love. While the present is dark, the past is "enhanced

with color”³. The first act is full of confusion regarding the past, but the second act shows the past as reality, not as memory. In creating the past as present, Greenberg throws some twists into the plot. We get to know Ned, Lina and Theo in ways that Walker, Nan, and Pip never could. Questions are answered with certainty, rather than speculation. The audience is constantly privy to information that the characters could never know. We know what Walker, Nan, and Pip do not about their parents, and we know what Ned, Lina, and Theo never could have predicted. As an added conceit, Greenberg directs the actors playing Walker, Nan, and Pip, to be the same actors playing Ned, Lina, and Theo. Therefore, time becomes even more of the key because the characters could be the same people, had they not been existing in different times. By removing time as an obstacle to knowledge, Greenberg makes the facts come out in a way that could never truly happen in reality.

Sight Unseen also allows time to reveal qualities of relationships that are alluded to and slowly revealed. Over the course of eight scenes, Margulies chronicles the relationship of Jonathan and Patricia, who are shown at the beginning to be estranged ex-lovers. What exactly happened between them is revealed over the course of the play, as it skips back and forth around the times in their lives. Margulies crafts a reality without one solid “present,” as what we believe to be the present is constantly pushed into the past by the incongruous but somewhat forward moving chronological plot line. The last scene in the play is one that happens earliest in their lives, followed by Scene 4, which is the last scene of Act 1, then Scene 3, then the first scene, which brings us to the “present” time, and continues into several days following it in a non-sequential pattern. This allows Margulies to fill in the facts in small pockets of information, while Greenberg lays one

³ Greenberg, *Three Days of Rain*, pg. 48

perception of truth out on the table and follows it with another reality altogether. We learn about the characters of *Sight Unseen* as the play goes on, but not as time in the world of the play goes on. Therefore, our first impressions of each character are certainly “impressions,” due to what little we know about them, but definitely not “first,” as our views of the character’s development are constantly shifting throughout the play.

The characters of Warren Leight’s *Sideman* are far more consistent, as the narrative moves throughout time in the play. The narrator character, Clifford, effectively acts as the show’s own time machine, as he depicts the story of his own childhood and young adulthood, as well as his parent’s courtship. Clifford’s presence onstage is the factor that keeps the play out of time, as the actor plays both himself at many different ages, from child to adult, but also a more neutral character. At times, he may not even be Clifford at all, as he simply facilitates the play’s movement by handing off props and adjusting the set. The transition from character to crew member enforces the fluidity of time. The play’s setting description calls the time of the play “1985 to 1953”⁴, but the play does not move only backwards from the latest time. It jumps around a little, and ends up in the “present” of 1985 once more. The element of mystery that is so crucial to both *Three Days* and *Sight Unseen* isn’t the operating factor in this time-fluid play. Rather, it is a depicting of a history of a family, but also a history of an era that has been lost to current generations. Time reveals truths about characters and relationships, but it is no longer a total obstacle for understanding for the characters. In this way, Leight uses the fluidity of time in a more straightforward and less complex way. Even so, messages about continuity and history are not lost.

⁴ Leight, *Sideman*

Angels in America is the fourth and final example of a formal examination of time by the playwright. It follows seven main characters whose lives intertwine as they come to terms with their own identities. The main theme revolves around homosexuality and homosexual love, and how it affects the characters, most of whom are gay men. It differs from the previous three plays because it actually does move chronologically forward. In this play, the past comes to the present, in the form of ghosts, hallucinations, ancestors, and angels. Time is also fluid as more than one present occurs in the play, by operating under the convention of a split stage that shows two scenes taking place independently in different places, at the same “time”. This “time” is to be disputed, however, as there are also scenes which operate outside the confines of any time period, such as hallucinations had by Harper, the Mormon Valium addict with a gay husband. The future is of an utmost importance in this play, as it is the one with the most historical significance due to its intrinsic anxiety about the approaching millennium.

The Form (Time) as it Relates to the Content

How does the relevance as time as a formal aspect of the play relate to time as a conceptual aspect of the play? Plays that deal in time as a conceit of the play are *about* time, not just set in time. In order to examine time as it is used in the play, rather than around it, we must first establish the conventional approach to understanding time. Time is usually broken down categorically into three sections: past, present, and future. However, when the regimented rules of time are taken away by the playwright, it is difficult to see time in such a fashion, as it is presented not in that continuous line, but rather, incongruously. As I mentioned in the introduction to the previous section, each scene is “present” to the audience and the actors, but in the world of the play it could be

embodying all three parts of time: past, present, and future. Therefore, time as a conglomeration of these three parts is always present (unintentional pun) and must be examined as such.

The Past

*“It is possible to believe that all the past is but the beginning of a beginning, and that all that is and has been is but the twilight of the dawn. It is possible to believe that all the human mind has ever accomplished is but the dream before the awakening.”*⁵

The past is a time period that always remains somewhat elusive, which is most likely why it is a topic of thought, conversation, and examination in each of these plays. While it is never-endingly mysterious, at times we (the characters, the audience, and people in every-day life) see it as clearly as if it was handed to us in black and white. This applies to both the recorded history of the world as a whole, as in the material that is textbook-worthy, the great events that for this paper’s purpose we will call “history,” and to the pasts that are created within every lifetime, by every person. This second definition of the past may be referred to as “memory,” or even, to make a more broad suggestion, “life.” In all four plays, there are characters for which both memory and history are relevant in their specific lives. Each play has at least one character who could be deemed “historical,” a person with some degree of significance in the life of not only themselves and their family and friends, but also in the scheme of the nation or the world.

History plays a role in the subject matter of each of these plays. In *Three Days of Rain*, history is a weight upon the Janeway family. Due to Ned’s literally monumental success, the family has become a page in the history books of architecture. “I forget sometimes...what he was, the scope of the life he’d made.”⁶ His fame is summed up by

⁵ H. G. Wells

⁶ Greenberg, *Three Days of Rain*, pg. 12

both Walker and Nan as a picture in a magazine; and not just any picture: Ned's greatest work, the Janeway house, was pictured on the cover of Life magazine in 1963. In the existence of this picture, Ned becomes a part of the canon of architects in the history of America and the world. This architectural history influences the two acts of the play in separate ways. In Act Two, 1960, Theo is struggling to design the home that we know will be the famous one of the photograph. Yet, he is stuck in history, in the past of architecture, and has trouble bringing his designs into what will be the future. This becomes evident when Theo brings Ned a possible blueprint.

“NED: Theo, I'm sorry, but it's the Farnsworth House⁷. (*Beat*)

THEO: I would even grant you that it's something of an...homage—

NED: Well, it's not as if there aren't...c-copies in every architecture textbook in the land.”⁸

Theo's character is so stuck in the restraints of history that he cannot move past it. Yet, in time, his work with Ned will become what a young architect in his position twenty years later may inadvertently copy. They are becoming a part of the canon.

In addition to the quite obvious history of architecture, the play deals with the histories of other artistic worlds and aspects of culture. This becomes most clear through the character of Walker, who essentially operates as a walking, talking encyclopedia, spouting off all sorts of references to literature, philosophy, world history and pop culture. His allusions are all, once again, a part of the self-consciousness of the play. For instance, while burning his father's journal, Walker exclaims “I feel like Hedda

⁷ The Farnsworth House: designed by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, 1951, in Plano, Illinois. Known for its “pavilion of light, transparency, tautness, and weightlessness.” (Glancey)

⁸ Greenberg, *Three Days of Rain*, pgs. 58-59

Gabler⁹”¹⁰ This operates historically on more one level. Firstly, Walker is a making a bow to the canon of dramatic literature that exists in the reality of the world of the play. Secondly, Greenberg himself is making an ironic statement by having a character in one play of the present compare himself to a character in another play in the past. Basically, Greenberg is forcibly comparing his play to a canonical one, and therefore adding himself to the canon, just as Ned and Theo join the canon of architecture.

History is also relevant to the play in the very obvious fact that the era in which the second act takes place *is* history for the first act. Walker, Nan, and Pip all seem to agree on the fact that things may have been very different if their parents hadn't been going through the transitional phase from youth to adult as shown in Act Two in the year 1960. This year symbolizes a transition in the history of America as well, as the nation moved from the post-war innocence and manufactured perfection of the 1950s to the sexually and politically liberated years of flower children in the next decade. Greenberg captures this dynamic in his characters. Lina bursts onto the scene in Act Two in a visible demonstration of what would be “the 60's.” She and Theo are in the middle of an argument regarding Lina's behavior at the Plaza hotel, just the type of establishment of the combined glamour and manners that the 1950's represent. Lina, according to Theo, was “dilating on the wonders of the oral contraceptive”¹¹, a creation that would be vital to newly sexual population in the 1960s, while she bites back at him by calling him “a naive boy from the suburbs”¹², the archetype of everything that was the 1950's. As characters existing in 1995, Walker, Nan, and Pip make assumptions about 1960 that are based on

⁹ Hedda Gabler—Henrik Ibsen's extorted heroine who burns incriminating documents in the play of the same name.

¹⁰ Greenberg, *Three Days of Rain*, pg. 47

¹¹ Greenberg, *Three Days*, pg. 50

¹² Greenberg, *Three Days*, pg. 50

the kind of stereotypes embodied in the second act. For instance, Walker says, regarding Ned and Lina: “They married because by 1960 they had reached a certain age and they were the last ones left in the room.”¹³ Pip also acknowledges the concluding romantic idealism in describing the plays his mother would go to see in 1959 and 1960: “where the girl got caught in the rain and had to put on the man’s bathrobe and they sort of did a little dance around each other and fell in love.”¹⁴ This ironic comment is Greenberg’s nod to the audience’s understanding of the past of 1960, as it is an accurate description of what the second act of the show would turn out to be. What, then, does this mean? Is the depiction of the reality of Ned and Lina’s love proof that the year 1960 was everything the characters in the first act perceived it to be? More likely, it is Greenberg admitting that he, too, is guilty of the same inaccurate assumptions that Walker, Nan, and Pip make about their parents. The plotline of the play that Greenberg set in the time could be based more on a fictional representation of the time, as it is understood in the present day, than it is on reality. With the insertion of this one seemingly flippant statement, Greenberg brings home a major point regarding time in the play: fact can never be taken for granted, as history has secrets that may never come to light, no matter how often it is recreated, not only within the world of the play, but also in the larger, real world.

In *Sideman*, Warren Leight uses similar methods to Greenberg’s to take advantage of the audience’s “knowledge” (which can never be more than dubious without personal experience) of the middle decades in America’s history. These decades are marked in the play with the music. The earliest years depicted, the 1950s, are successful ones for the

¹³ Greenberg, *Three Days of Rain*, pg. 6

¹⁴ Greenberg, *Three Days of Rain*, pg. 23-24

sidemen. From the audience's point of view, this is clear due to the names and places mentioned by Gene and the other sidemen.

“TERRY: Is that you with Frank Sinatra?

GENE: Here, this is me with him at the Copa...”¹⁵

For the average American audience, Sinatra is one with cocktail hours and 1950s romance. Through mentioning him, Leight takes for granted the conventional wisdom of the audience and knows that the setting will be clear. However, he also can assume that the average audience member would associate jazz more with the three decades leading up to 1953 than with that year itself. He sets the play in a time in musical history when the characters are becoming part of their own past, even while they exist in the larger context of the audience's past. He also pushes time forward with musical allusions. Terry knows that her husband's job is bad news after talking to Patsy. “Patsy says these doo-wop groups don't even use horns...She says the big bands are gone for good.”¹⁶ As Terry discovers these facts and starts to relay them to Gene, the audience of the end of the twentieth century knows them to be the case more than any character in the past can. Leight makes sure the audience's knowledge of jazz's doom is solidified by bringing in the one person who nearly single-handedly ended the era:

“TERRY: They're only showing him from the waist up. They're scared shitless.

CLIFFORD: (*to the audience*) This would be the night Elvis first played the Ed Sullivan Show.”¹⁷

Throughout the play, Gene and the other sidemen make references to many recordings and famous jazz players. They are, in a sense, defining their own personal canon as jazz musicians. These are not songs that would necessarily be recognized in the

¹⁵ Leight, *Sideman*, pg. 27

¹⁶ Leight, *Sideman* pg. 35

¹⁷ Leight, *Sideman*, pg. 40

larger context of music, but to a sideman, they are everything. This includes the cassette that they get a hold of in one of the final scenes, a recording of Clifford Brown¹⁸'s last night of playing. The stage directions inform us of the importance of this tape, which has been alluded to throughout the play: "It is one thing to listen to this unbelievable recording. It is another thing entirely to watch three lifelong jazz trumpet players listen to this fabled lost masterpiece for the first time."¹⁹ The tape is of something they never thought could have been recorded, or kept. It is a moment in history that seemed to be lost. Yet, it is not a pure piece of the past come to life. In knowing all that had happened since then, this recording means so much more to the players than it would have been to simply be there at the time. The knowledge that the men have of the present colors the way they see the past. Gene says, "They said the night he died, he played as if he knew he was going to die."²⁰ Of course, they say that now, but would Gene have thought that Clifford Brown was going to die had he been there on that night, not knowing that to be the case?

As the play moves on, Leight reveals yet another misconception about the past, specifically regarding the canon of jazz music that the men hold so dear.

"GENE: This big French jazz critic, Henri Arnaud, reviewed the album. He said that while the band sounded great, the trumpet solos were the best in the last decade.

TERRY: You're kidding. Why didn't you tell me? We should make photostats of the review. Send them to club owners. To managers. Maybe Gene could get someone to...You were lying to me?...

****f

GENE: No one's lying, Terry. They liked my playing. Only problem is, they didn't know it was my playing. The guy screwed the credits up. He saw Bernie's name and everybody over there knows Bernie...."²¹

¹⁸ Clifford Brown—famous trumpet player who died tragically at age 25 in a car accident

¹⁹ Leight, *Sideman*, pg. 67

²⁰ Leight, *Sideman*, pg. 69

²¹ Leight, *Sideman*, pg. 49

In making this discovery, recorded history fails once more simply because of an assumption made by some “guy.” This small mistake in a record changes the way the characters’ lives are lived to such a degree that it may just as well been fact. Gene is a part of the jazz canon, but nobody would ever get to know that he was possibly the best trumpet player of his time. To history, Gene is forgotten.

In *Sight Unseen*, the character of Jonathan is one that the audience has to assume history will not forget. Even while his life is in the present, he is becoming a part of recorded art history, with his life and work subject to the interpretation of the historian. This becomes clear when he and Patricia reunite in the first scene of the play. She tells him that she still “knows” him because her mother has sent her clippings of articles written about him in the New York Times and Vanity Fair. Yet these articles are simply representations of what the journalist wants historicized of Jonathan’s personality and work.

“JONATHAN: They shot me in my studio. That’s how I look when I’m working.

PATRICIA: I know how you look when you are working.”²²

These articles have been dramatizing the reality of Jonathan’s life, and giving it titles such as “Bad Boy or Visionary?” and “Charlatan or Genius?”²³ The recorders of history, in this case, journalists, need to wrap the history up in little packages in order to make it more cohesive. The audience sees the historicizing occurring in the scenes in which Jonathan is being interviewed by Grete, as she pushes him to have some sort of definition for his work. “How do you reconcile the success of your work with its rather

²² Margulies, *Sight Unseen*, pg. 274

²³ Margulies, *Sight Unseen*, pg. 274

bleak subject matter?...Is its popularity purely an American phenomenon?"²⁴ Jonathan struggles with answering these questions because it is impossible to box up everything he's done in a definition. The need for definition becomes pressing to those looking at Jonathan's artwork, especially the piece called *Walpurgisnacht*. "Is the painting about a black man raping a white woman, or is it about a couple screwing in a cemetery?"²⁵

Patricia, like the journalist, cannot accept the fact that the painting is ambiguous.

Jonathan, however, is not bothered by the lack of clarity because he is aware of the constant incongruity of life and art. "I mean, *my* intention is irrelevant; it's all about what you make of it."²⁶ Jonathan wants to create art for art's sake, to put it simply, but the conventions of recorded history cannot help but seek information about the person behind the art. He says that his art deals with "unspeakable things," but this makes it difficult for the historian, as history needs definitions to thrive. He becomes angered with this need for definitions, as he says to Grete, "You're the one who comes up with these fancy labels, people like *you!*"²⁷ History finds its meaning in words, in things that are spoken, or written.

With all of Jonathan's protestations against historicizing himself, history plays quite a meaningful role in his life and his decisions. He is unwilling to create history, but he is completely embroiled in it. This is clear at first when he speaks to Grete about the Holocaust, "the most horrible event of our time."²⁸ He is unable to separate German art from the historical event that caused it, and therefore shows that he, too, has accepted history's definitions to be fact. His inability to forget the history of the Holocaust causes

²⁴ Margulies, *Sight Unseen*, pg. 288

²⁵ Margulies, *Sight Unseen*, pg. 309

²⁶ Margulies, *Sight Unseen*, pg. 309

²⁷ Margulies, *Sight Unseen*, pg. 318

²⁸ Margulies, *Sight Unseen*, pg. 288

him to believe that Grete is leading him into difficult questions because he is Jewish. Regardless of whether or not this is the case, Jonathan cannot see it otherwise as a Jewish man who is aware of the Holocaust. His personal involvement in what seems to be impersonal history is also the case in the last scene, when he first meets Patricia. He tells her that he cannot get involved with her because she is not Jewish. “It’s the Diaspora, it’s the history of the Jewish people! You have no idea, the *weight*.”²⁹

Yet, it seems that Patricia does have some idea of the weight of history. First of all, she moves from America, a country some consider devoid of history, to England, (“Here we have to ask ‘turn of which century?’”³⁰). Secondly, she chooses to take the burden of time on her own shoulders as she becomes an archaeologist and marries another archaeologist. Patricia makes her living by demythologizing history, while at the same time, likely creating new myths about it. Archaeology does not interest itself in the great works done by men; those great works (such as Jonathan’s art) will be recorded in the time in which they are created. It is the job of archaeologists to go back and pick up the pieces of what was not deemed good enough for posterity at the time. Patricia and Nick are more thrilled with their discovery of a garbage dump than they are with the discovery of one of Jonathan’s earliest works in their house. “Do you have any idea what a valuable find that is, medieval rubbish?...Everything you need to know about a culture is in its rubbish, really. What they wore, what they ate. It’s a treasure trove.”³¹ Patricia delights in the treasures of history that was never recorded, and wants to go back and fill in the missing pieces, just as Margulies does with the story of Patricia and Jonathan’s

²⁹ Margulies, *Sight Unseen*, pg. 334

³⁰ *Ibid*, Scene 1

³¹ *Ibid*, Scene 5

relationship. The playwright acts as historian and archaeologist, recording what is happening to them now, and sifting through what happened to them in the past.

Tony Kushner acts in a similar role in creating the fantastical world of *Angels in America*. History, both ancient and recent, resonates throughout the play. It opens with the funeral of a Jewish woman who had emigrated to the States. The issue of the Jewish diaspora, one of the oldest histories we know, carries throughout this play. Louis speaks of feelings of Anti-Semitism in Britain, as he feels that he cannot escape his family's past. "I felt, well, there's no way out of this because both of us are, right now, too much immersed in this history, hope is dissolved in the sheer age of this place, where race is what counts and there's no real hope of change."³²

In addition to the Jewish themes in the play, the histories of other religions are also addressed. Joe and Harper, the two Mormon characters, are far away from Salt Lake City, and therefore far from the place of their religious heritage. However, the history of their religion haunts them wherever go. Harper lives in constant fear of the devil, as she describes her paranoid fears of attackers throughout the day. "The devil everywhere you turn, huh, buddy,"³³ her husband says to her. The Mormon fear and denial of all vices and "sins" becomes apparent when Harper meets Prior in an alternate dream dimension, she says of her Valium addiction, "It's terrible. Mormons are not supposed to be addicted to anything. I'm a Mormon." Her response just a few lines later to Prior admitting his homosexuality is "In my church we don't believe in homosexuals."³⁴ The history of the Mormon church is a burden upon Joe and Harper because it denies what they are. They do not fit in with their own history, so where does that leave them?

³² Kushner, *Angels in America*, pg. 91

³³ Kushner, *Angels in America*, pg. 24

³⁴ Kushner, *Angels in America*, pg. 32

Similar historical confusion exists in Sarah Ironson's funeral scene, as the rabbi preaches, "You do not live in America. No such place exists."³⁵ It is an acknowledgement of the youth of this nation, a theme that had been addressed in *Sight Unseen*, as well. America is a land with little past, but still some history. By the time that this play was produced, the 1980s, the time that the play takes place in, was already historical. Americans place a lot of faith in recent history, because that is all we have. Kushner also makes American history come alive by including as one of his characters Roy Cohn, the man who made it certain that Ethel Rosenberg would be executed. This event in American history is one that makes it obvious that recorded history is not always accurate, and is in fact always changing. Now, we know that the Rosenbergs were not the evil American-hating family that they were portrayed as in the records of the time. By giving the audience Roy, a character who created history, Kushner makes it evident how very mutable history is. It can be recorded, but the records need to constantly change. Words cannot express the truth that we rely on them to at times. This is also evident in the diagnosis of Roy's illness and his sexuality. He tells his doctor, "AIDS is what homosexuals have. I have liver cancer."³⁶ Roy subscribes to the power of words and the way that words can solidify his place in the current world and in history by representing truth.

In discovering the "history" (recorded or assumed), as it has been presented in the previous section involved in a play, the audience can grow to further understand the world of the play and the characters in it. History, in its larger sense, serves to be a weight upon the shoulders of the characters in a play. Each character is a part of history,

³⁵ Kushner, *Angels in America*, pg. 10

³⁶ Kushner, *Angels in America*, pg. 46

a part of the era in which they exist, and is therefore inseparable (with the exception of the supernatural characters in *Angels*) from the continuum of time. The histories of the world, of religions, of arts: each of these serve to create the people that come about. Meanwhile, as each character (or person, as this is the case in life as well as in art) exists within the framework of their historical period, they also come with “baggage” of their own. The personal history of each of the characters is equally a part of the past in each play as is the wider-reaching history. Like recorded history, facts about the past of people’s lives are often assumed and misinterpreted. These plays give the audience the power to see into, and maybe even understand the past in ways that the characters in the play cannot. Therefore, the fluidity of time enables the audience to develop a richer and more complete understanding of the characters as they are presented to us, whereas being stuck in the restraints of time makes that impossible for the characters themselves to do.

This is clear in *Three Days of Rain* as the characters in the first act constantly make assumptions about what happened with their parents in the past that are shown to be incorrect when the audience is allowed to glimpse into the past in the second act. The main culprit of historical fiction writing is Walker, ironically the character most well-versed in history itself. He makes statements regarding his parents marriage that are based in what he had observed in his lifetime, not based on knowledge of what actually happened. He cannot understand why his father was lovable, and he has no memory of his mother being sane. Yet, it is clear to the audience in the second act that Ned was not the cold egomaniac that Walker seems to set him up as; it seems the reason that he was “Chaplinesque”³⁷ was that he was ashamed to speak due to his extreme stutter. Lina, while being slightly manic, was an intelligent woman who was not afraid to speak her

³⁷ Greenberg, *Three Days of Rain*, pg. 6

mind but who also longed for the home that Walker eventually felt so unwelcome in. Rather than both being “the last ones left in the room,” Lina and Ned were two people who found each other, literally, in the storm that was the turbulent changing nation.

Further incorrect assumptions were made when Walker began reading Ned’s journal that he started on the first day that he and Lina got together. The dependency that Walker shows on a piece of writing is alarming, and is also evidence that something that is recorded in words cannot be assumed to be a clear interpretation of a thought. When Walker reads the phrase, “Three days of rain,” he sees it as nothing more than a weather report. Little does he know that those three days were the first ones of note in Ned’s life, the first ones he felt happy enough on to write down. They were also the first days in which Walker’s existence was being pondered. Another phrase that is badly misinterpreted by Walker in the journal is, “Everything I’ve taken from him.”³⁸ Walker assumes, based on this journal entry and the fact that Ned left the house to Pip, Theo’s son, that Ned is admitting that he was not the brains behind the design for the house that made him famous. In the second act it is revealed that it was not something nearly as clear-cut as that. Ned took Lina from Theo, that is for certain, but that may not have been what crushed him as much as Ned believed it to have done. After being honest with Theo about the lack of originality of his blueprints, and in being the one to finally design the building, Ned took Theo’s unofficial but clearly defined position in their partnership and therefore rendered serious damage to his pride.

This ties closely in with one of the many unanswered questions of the play for some of the characters. In recounting the story of the day his parents met, Pip mentions that it was raining and Theo was crying on a bench. When Pip asks his mother what he

³⁸ Greenberg, *Three Days of Rain*, pg. 43

had been crying about, she admits that she never knew. The audience, however, gets to know a little bit about what it meant. Theo knows now that he cannot design the house that he needs to do, and he is losing his girlfriend. Because of the transient nature of the play, the audience comes to understand this in a way that it is impossible for Pip to do.

In addition to the issues of personal history, or memory, between the acts of the play, there are also similar themes even within each time-specific act. An example of a misconstrued past is the fact that Pip and Nan had been together at one time, a fact which flies out at a crucial point in a discussion with Walker. Up until the point at which he learns this, Walker had been living in ignorance regarding this very important relationship. It is a part of the personal past of Pip and Nan that Walker had always taken for granted did not exist, when in actuality, it did, changing the dynamic of the three people's relationship altogether. There is also an air of mystery surrounding all three of the characters in the second act, as their pasts are unclear to each other, but not to the audience, since they had already visited the future and learned a little about the characters before they met them.

Sight Unseen operates on a similar level as *Three Days* in regards to the personal history of characters. It is obvious from the beginning that Jonathan and Patricia have a history of their own, but it is unclear what that history is. As the story unravels in the present and the past, it seems that not only do they have a history, they *are* each other's histories. The item that makes this clear is the painting that is at the center of the play. The painting that Jonathan titles "Beginnings" (a title that can never come at the creation of an object, but only after seeing what it comes to represent) is the thing that brought he and Patricia together seventeen years prior to that. Margulies ironically places the scene

that started it all, the scene in which that painting is created, the true “beginning” of the story, at the tail end of the play. Their personal history becomes something that is in the future of the play, not in the past.

Over the course of the play, other memories of life are revealed as well. The relationship of Patricia and Nick has a mysterious nature, not unlike the relationship between Ned and Lina as it is presented in the first act of *Three Days*. They are married, and he is obviously cold towards Jonathan, but little is revealed of their actual relationship until Scene 7, the second to last scene in the play. It is then that it becomes obvious that, while Nick loves Patricia, she does not even sleep with him, nor does she seem to truly be in love with him. This confession by Nick makes other pasts, namely, the one between Jonathan and Patricia, all the more important, as it seems that she has never gotten over him.

Another issue that reaches to the past in *Sight Unseen* is the issue of generations, an issue that applies to all four of these plays. Jonathan is struggling with his own life due to the death of his father. “I’ve lost my way somehow, I don’t know...I’ve been trying to retrace my steps...Ever since my father died...I’m nobody’s son anymore, Patty.”³⁹ Along with being one of the Jews, Jonathan was also a member of his family, an institution that dictated how and what he would do. The greatness of this institution is shown in the display that his father had created on the wall of all of the family pictures. “The Waxman family through the ages. Black-and-white, sepia, Kodachrome. My great-grandparents in the shtetl, my brother’s baby pictures on top of my parents’ courtship, me at my bar mitzvah. Well, it was kind of breathtaking. I mean, the sweep of it, it really

³⁹ Margulies, *Sight Unseen*, pg. 326

was kind of beautiful.”⁴⁰ In the present time of the play, he finds himself without a family, and therefore without a background.

While *Side Man* lacks the misinterpretation regarding the history of Gene, Clifford, and Terry’s family, its retrospectivity serves the play in a different way. The audience learns from nearly the first sentence that the parents whom Clifford is going to visit on this day in the present are separated and that the family is dysfunctional. Therefore, the looks back in the past are not used to solve a mystery of the play, but rather to examine what went wrong. In examining the family’s personal past, the audience cannot help but look for things that could have been changed. The audience is constantly aware of the present when looking back at the past. Clifford’s narration, a casual, almost non-chalant way of looking at things, does not help the audience to feel at ease when seeing how this family has fallen apart. Rather, the mere truth of the situations presented serves to create more poignancy in the show, as the audience gets to know Terry before she was crazy, Gene before he was out of luck, and Clifford before he was born. The audience comes to see that bad situations do not necessarily have bad beginnings. Terry and Gene were once in love, but perhaps they should not have gotten married. The consequences of action and inaction become clear when examining the main characters of this play.

In the same way that Clifford explicates the past of his family, the characters of *Angels in America* also live their lives in a way that is completely supported by the actions that were taken in the past. The audience can see the present, but it only causes them to wonder about the past. Harper was perhaps not always so unstable. In fact, we find out that her imaginary friend, Mr. Lies, who takes her out of her misery, is based on

⁴⁰ Margulies, *Sight Unseen*, pg. 278

a real-life person from Harper and Joe's past: the man who sold them the tickets to New York back in Salt Lake City. In the fact that she calls him "Mr. Lies," it becomes clear that Harper had hopes in the past that flying out of Salt Lake City would make them happier, and she has found that to be true. She feels that her past has betrayed her and turned her into what she has become.

Prior is someone who is certainly suffering the results of his past. His disease (AIDS) is essentially an unspecified mistake in his past that is coming back to haunt him. However, that is not the only thing that is haunting him. Once again, the issue of generations is struck when Prior is visited by the ghosts of his ancestors. All of them have the same name, Prior, which literally refers back to the past, as the name itself means "before." While Prior is a man of the 1980s, he is also the product of hundreds of years of his family, a line which he is terminating, as he has no children. AIDS is time specific, but the idea of a plague is not, as the ancestors reveal to him that other Priors were killed by plagues, as well.

Aside from Prior, both Louis and Joe are also haunted by their family history. Louis admits that he never visited his grandmother when she was ill, even though she was the person that was responsible for bringing the family to America, and therefore for creating the person that Louis became. Louis, as a character, tries hard to get away from his past, but it always catches up to him, just as the history of the world that he speaks about regarding racism always catches up to him. Louis loves Prior, but leaves him in order to escape what is ahead by getting rid of the past. It is at this point that he gets together with Joe, another character who desires to flee his past but does not know how. Joe, a Mormon, sees his sexuality as a sin, and therefore cannot be faithful to himself and

his religion at the same time. He sees problems as originating in the past, in his family. When he tells his mother that he is gay, he prefaces the conversation by asking, “Did Dad love me?” He seeks a reason in his life for the way he is, without understanding that perhaps there isn’t one in this life. He wants to get rid of his past, but cannot help but fear that it will affect his future.

The Present

“I don't think of the past. The only thing that matters is the everlasting present.”⁴¹

It is obvious from the observations above that the present is often completely a product of the past. By allowing the audience to see the past, the playwrights make it easier to understand what is “present” in the play. Just as the past is represented in the present tense in parts of all of the plays, the past in both life and art tends to repeat itself in the present. For instance, in *Sight Unseen*, Patricia and Jonathan come together again, fifteen years after they parted, and she tells him, “You know, even after that last time in Brooklyn, I never actually believed that I’d never see you again.”⁴² She is right, as they do meet again, but how is she to know that they will not repeat the same cycle? Another example of this comes in *Three Days*, when Ned says, “The funny part is, we’re all so vanguard, and when we copy it’s always the most obvious possible thing.”⁴³ Ned speaks for all artists with this statement, as Greenberg makes a self-conscious concession: as an artist, it is impossible to escape what has been done before you.

⁴¹ W. Somerset Maugham, *The Moon and Sixpence*

⁴² Margulies, *Sight Unseen*, pg. 328

⁴³ Greenberg, *Three Days of Rain*, pg 59

The quest for an original idea is ever-elusive, as everything in the present must be based in the past.

Why, then, do people still seek to create when they are in the present? It seems to be a sort of preservation, a desire to stake a claim on your life and your time. When significant eras of time come to a close, people always seem to want to create time capsules with remnants of that time remaining. Examples of this kind of preservation can be found in all four of these plays, as the characters strive to mark the present before moving into the future.

In *Three Days of Rain*, the most obvious examples of preservation are the buildings that Ned creates, and namely the Janeway House. Architecture is a form of art which has to draw heavily on the past, as the ones before Ned taught him what worked and what didn't. However, architecture leads to structures that come to exemplify times. As the architect Mies Van der Rohe said, "Architecture is the will of the age conceived in spatial terms."⁴⁴ The buildings are meant to last into the future, but they are also meant to represent their own creation and their creator. Ned ended up putting his own stamp all over the city and even the world. Walker describes the buildings he designed: "Yes, *all* of the most famous buildings of the last thirty years."⁴⁵ Ned was a silent person, yet he left pieces of himself all over. What was he trying to preserve? How did he change from the shy boy who wouldn't save anything, who tore up all of his drawings, into a man who built landmarks? It seems that the desire for building came to Ned with the desire of remembering. Even with all of the cynicism he has regarding his parents' marriage, Walker still seems to understand this when he confesses that he wants the Janeway

⁴⁴ as quoted in *The Shock of the New* by Robert Hughes, pg. 181

⁴⁵ Greenberg, *Three Days of Rain*, pg. 5

House. “The house is very beautiful. I think it could only have been designed by someone who was happy.”⁴⁶ The house’s beauty preserved the moment that led to its creation, namely, the moment that Ned and Lina decided to take a risk and be together.

Ned also uses another mechanism of preservation, although the intents behind it were slightly less clear. He keeps a journal, which outlives him, and leaves it in the tiny apartment that he also decides to save, for reasons unknown to his children. The journal begins with the entry “April 3rd to April 5th: Three days of rain.”⁴⁷ When Walker stumbles upon this entry, he understands it to mean that “the thing is with people who never talk, the thing is you always suppose they’re harboring some enormous secret. But, just possibly, the secret is, they have *absolutely nothing to say*.”⁴⁸ Little does Walker know that Ned decides to keep the journal to remember the times that he is happy, and this seemingly boring weather report is the first recorded indication of the fact that Ned has fallen in love with Lina. It is also the three days which helped Ned to allow himself to dream and design, an act of preservation that led to all of his following ones.

However, this example of recording is quite curious. Ned seems to be keeping this journal for himself only, as he tells Lina, “I’ll know what it means.”⁴⁹ Yet, if one is keeping something for your own memories, why write it down? And why leave it in a place where you do not live? The journal remains a mysterious reminder of Ned, with the cryptic entries surrounding Theo’s death and Lina’s near-suicide certainly not representing happy times in his life, but times he still wanted to preserve.

⁴⁶ Greenberg, *Three Days of Rain*, pg. 21

⁴⁷ Greenberg, *Three Days of Rain*, pg. 80

⁴⁸ Greenberg, *Three Days of Rain*, pg. 20

⁴⁹ Greenberg, *Three Days of Rain*, pg. 81

In *Sideman*, the methods of preservation range from the very purposeful, to the unintentional, to the theatrical. The first and most obvious example is that of the musical recordings that are mentioned throughout the play. Music is an art form different from architecture, or painting, because it is, by nature, temporal. Music and time are inextricably linked, because once music begins, it can only exist in the present. To skip a beat is to change the nature of a song, because it is changing the rhythm that the music is based on. A funny example of this transformation occurs in the story that Gene tells Clifford about Lester, the conductor who couldn't keep time, and the way that the band all skipped entire beats on him and he couldn't even tell.⁵⁰ Aside from the time that is kept within music, time also defines music due to the fact that a piece of music, especially jazz music which is mainly improvised, can never really be recreated exactly the same more than once. Therefore, when it is performed, it exists only for that time. This is why the recording of music is so crucial; it can take an art form that only exists in the present and bring it forward into the future. In the early years depicted in the play, recording devices were more rare and complex so many songs were lost to time. Due to this, the gift of Clifford Brown's recording is all the more valuable; it has preserved a moment in time that could never be recreated due to the fact that Brown died and the fact that no two performances are alike. More than any other preservation, musical recordings are the true mementos of a time.

In addition to the recordings, Gene and Terry accumulate a symbol of their lives almost without knowing it. The apartment that they live in was furnished in what Gene liked to call "Early American Divorce."⁵¹ They got their furniture from all of Gene's

⁵⁰ Leight, *Sideman*, pg. 57

⁵¹ Leight, *Sideman*, pg. 39

friends in their various divorces. Over the course of the play, the stage representing the apartment gets more and more cluttered with useless furniture and knick-knacks. By the end, it is a veritable museum for the time and place that it represents.

There is also one moment in the play that Leight, as the playwright, chooses to make a point of preserving. The stage directions call for “*a party tableau: Patsy dances with Ziggy. A 1950s conga line starts: Ziggy, Patsy, Gene, Terry, Al—and finally Jonesy—playing bongos at the rear of the line. In the living room, everyone freezes. A flash goes off: A HAPPY TIMES PHOTO. They are captured on film in one final happy moment.*”⁵² Leight, through the character of Clifford, chooses to pinpoint this moment for posterity—a time before everything went wrong, a time before Clifford was born. Yet, this is not necessarily the way things were all the time for the group of friends; merely an indication of one moment. Such is the way most people try to preserve things: save memories of the best times, while ignoring the worst. Even so, these preserved things do remain, and cause people to make incorrect judgments on the past, such as Clifford’s assumption that “EVERYONE WAS HAPPY BEFORE I WAS BORN.”⁵³

In *Sight Unseen*, Jonathan’s art is the representation of what he sees of a time. He says that he’s looking to make good art, but the definition of what good art is can be debated. Jonathan says, “By good art I mean art that effectively tells the truth, effectively *reflects* the truth, and the truth is often rather bleak, so...”⁵⁴ In a sense, Jonathan is admitting that he wants to make art that appeals to its viewers NOW. He references AIDS as an event that has helped to shape the art of the time, because the art is preserving the time in which it is created. This sense of preservation of the present

⁵² Leight, *Sideman*, pg. 40

⁵³ Leight, *Sideman*, pg. 40

⁵⁴ Margulies, *Sight Unseen*, pg. 288

becomes more clear when he goes on to discuss the portrait that he painted of Patricia. “I mean, I look at it and I feel the excitement of and the, the *danger* of that day all over again.”⁵⁵ In his art, Jonathan is not just preserving a time in history, he is preserving a moment in his life, and the portrait of Patricia represents a moment that is more meaningful to him that he can fully let on.

It is interesting, then, that Jonathan is creating the works to be preserved, while Patricia is unearthing things that have been preserved from long ago. The junk that she finds in the dump is the substance of the present, day-to-day lives of those who left it behind. They were making no attempt to preserve, which ironically makes the things that were saved all the more precious and indicative of their lives. Like the photographs in *Sideman*, and the clippings saved by Patricia’s mother of Jonathan’s interviews, things that were meant for posterity often are inaccurate representations of the truth. It is the latrine and the garbage surrounding it that really carry the present forward.

In *Angels in America*, preservation occurs in a different way. People are not really creating things to represent the present, but they are trying to escape time altogether by stepping out of it. An obvious example of this is Harper, who depends on Valium to help her get through each day without facing reality. She longs to get away from her pain, and uses the drugs to do so, until she finally cracks completely, “Mr. Lies...I want to go away.”⁵⁶ She goes to a place that she believes to be Antarctica, where she can live without society, without Joe and his homosexuality. Joe does something similar, when he roams the city at night, walking. Prior’s dreams seem to have the same effect for him. These characters seek to escape reality. By going into alternate universes,

⁵⁵ Margulies, *Sight Unseen*, pg. 291

⁵⁶ Kushner, *Angels in America*, pg. 80

or dream worlds, or even just away from home, they can stop the clock from moving, if only for just a moment. This is their self-preservation and the preservation of the present time.

The Future

*“Life wouldn’t be worth living if I worried over the future as well as the present.”*⁵⁷

Why are the characters in these plays so concerned with preservation and creation? The inevitable answer to this is the fact that they are trying to plan for the future. They take the information and experience they have received in the past, and put it into action in the present in order to have a future that is desirable, or at least controllable. Whatever importance is placed on those two other times in their lives is simply gained for the future. This sentiment seems to be reflecting the common feeling of the 1990s. We looked towards the future again and again, only to have it lead us to questions regarding the past and the present. If we could answer all of those questions, would the path to the future be clearer? The characters try again and again to plan ahead, to think forward, but even their best laid plans cannot be one hundred percent successful.

Ned Janeway, by occupation, is a planner. Architects are planning buildings, and planning for the future. Yet, even his most successful work was not solely based in plans.

“NAN: According to the monograph writers, when you look at them, they’re very fine but they somehow don’t imply the house itself. Apparently that’s how it is sometimes with great buildings⁵⁸—

WALKER: There’s an intuition held in reserve, a secret the architect keeps until the building is built. It may only be that the plans actually work.”⁵⁹

⁵⁷ W. Somerset Maugham, *Of Human Bondage*

⁵⁸ Apparently this was often the case with great architect of the mid-20th century, Mies van der Rohe.

⁵⁹ Greenberg, *Three Days of Rain*, pg. 17

The ability to plan for a building that comes out even better than it is planned is truly a gift. Yet it also shows a weakness, an inability to predict even the things that are in your own hands. Ned is a planner by nature, as well as in his career, and together he and Lina discuss the future often, but never with certainty. Lina tells him, after they first make love, that she knows exactly what she wants. “You right now in this bed forever. I want that. And children.”⁶⁰ She says this with such certainty, but little does she know that she may get what she wishes for. She does get Ned, forever, or at least until they get divorced, and she does have children. However, it is impossible for her to have what she literally wants. She wants him “right now” and “forever.” She longs to have the present extend into the future, but she cannot see that things could change. Ned voices a similar desire in the discussion that somehow leads to Walker. He speaks about being a “flaneur,” a person “who idles through the streets without a purpose...except to idle through the streets. And linger when it...pleases him.” When Lina asks if he would like to do that, he replies, “I haven’t got the strength of character. But it’s what I would wish...for someone better than I am. I think it would be the best thing! To be this...vagabond prince. Do you know? A wanderer through the city. A walker”⁶¹ Walker lives up to the name that his father chose for him, but this kind of life does not end up making him happy. Perhaps Ned saw his son as “someone better” than him, but in creating a flaneur, he created an unhappy man. It is ironic that Ned builds homes, but creates a son without a home, a person who cannot be contained in any of his buildings. The last line in the play, “The beginning of error,” is more indicative than either Lina or Ned realize regarding their lives. The house he would build with those daring plans was

⁶⁰ Greenberg, *Three Days of Rain*, pg. 78

⁶¹ Greenberg, *Three Days of Rain*, pg. 73

a smashing success, but the family they created was less than successful. Yet, they planned on, knowing the error that could lie ahead, and going bravely into the future anyways.

Sideman is another example of family planning, albeit in a much different way. Gene is constantly planning ahead for Clifford, without considering what Clifford may want. A key example of this is when Clifford is up for a job in advertising, and his father automatically assumes he will quit after doing the minimal work, and then will continue to collect unemployment checks. Gene constantly makes assumptions about what the members of his family will want, and cannot see when his planning is all for himself and not for the people he loves. He makes Terry millions of promises about the future, but all of them end up being empty. In this play, the poorly planned future can come to fruition immediately, right before the audience's eyes. For example:

“GENE: I promise you. I'm going to take care of us, (*kisses her*) you won't ever have to work at all
TERRY stands
TERRY: (*yelling to a kitchen's short-order window*) BLT please, whiskey down.
From the other side of the stage now, PATSY, in a waitress uniform, meets TERRY downstage, hands her an apron.”⁶²

The fluidity of the time in the play allow Leight to compact present and future, and make it clear that, if anything, the future is predictable in that the family can be assured that promises made by Gene will not be kept. It is no coincidence that jazz is an improvised art; Gene tries to plan the future but he is unable to understand the structure of a plan, and therefore cannot help to ensure the future at all.

In *Sight Unseen*, an interesting representation of the future is brought forth in the sales of Jonathan's art. When asked by Nick about buying his art, Jonathan replies that

⁶² Leight, *Sideman*, pg. 37

not only are all of his pieces sold already, but there is a waiting list for new pieces that he needs to fulfill. This does not sound so absurd until Nick's response: "You mean there are people on Park Avenue or in Tokyo, who have walls in their living rooms especially reserved for the latest Waxman, Number 238?"⁶³ This is where the title of the play comes from, the fact that people have invested so much money and hope into something, a piece of art, a relationship, "sight unseen". How are they to know that this piece of art will be worth their while? What if it doesn't go with their furniture? What if it never gets painted at all? The future is completely unpredictable, but Jonathan and his clients seem to feel comfortable with the idea of a well-planned future.

Ironically, Jonathan was right about something when he predicted the future. In the last scene, the night that Jonathan and Patricia first meet, he tells her that is not a good idea to get involved with him. She seduces him by telling him to not worry about the future. "We're talking about a *kiss*, Jonathan, a kiss, some coffee, and maybe spending the night together... We are not talking about the future of the human race."⁶⁴ His response? "This is how it starts, though, Patricia, a kiss."⁶⁵ Her attitude towards his fear of being involved with a non-Jewish girl seems to be in the right. What could be the harm in fooling around a little bit? However, this scene is well-timed because it is placed at the very end of the play. The audience knows that Jonathan is right; the kiss is how "it" starts, "it" being a turbulent relationship that hurts her irreparably and causes him to always feel a little "incomplete"⁶⁶. We find him turning her away, only to give in to her, directly after they talk for what Patricia deems to be the last time. She does not plan to be

⁶³ Margulies, *Sight Unseen*, pg. 307

⁶⁴ Margulies, *Sight Unseen*, pg. 334

⁶⁵ Margulies, *Sight Unseen*, pg. 334

⁶⁶ Margulies, *Sight Unseen*, pg. 281

hurt in the way that she is, and he does not want to hurt her, but their plans are disregarded in the grand scheme of the future.

The idea of the future is a heavy one in *Angels in America*. The approaching millennium is the ever-looming burden, one that is rarely addressed but always present in this play whose time setting is absolutely intrinsic to its message. In the face of what could be impending doom, the characters make plans for the future regardless. For some, like Joe, these plans are not entirely illogical. He wants to move to Washington to advance his career. However, others, such as Roy, make plans in spite of the fact that they may not have control over what happens to them in the rest of their lives, which may be short, indeed. Roy refuses to come to terms with the fact that he has AIDS, as is obvious in the scene in which he is getting very ill and the ghost of Ethel Rosenberg comes to visit him.

“ROY: I’m immortal. Ethel. (*He forces himself to stand*)

I have *forced* my way into history. I ain’t never gonna die.

ETHEL: (*A little laugh, then*) History is about to crack wide open. Millennium approaches.”⁶⁷

Ethel is trying to tell Roy what is becoming clear from this play and the three others: As much as learning about the past can inform the present, there is really no way to predict the future based solely on the past. Yet, this is what we have been taught to believe. The religious themes in this play especially drive this point home. Before Louis brings Joe home with him, he says, “I never made it with one of the damned before.”⁶⁸ Mormonism, like many other religions (but not Judaism, which the play has strong roots in) believes in an afterlife, a reward or punishment based on the acts committed during lifetime. However, if history really will be cracking open, the rules that were formerly

⁶⁷ Kushner, *Angels in America*, pg. 112

⁶⁸ Kushner, *Angels in America*, pg. 117

obeyed for the afterlife no longer apply. It will take something more mysterious and magical, but still very religious to understand the future as the millennium approaches. Something like a prophet, which is the idea that this play ends with. Prior, the closest of all of them to having absolutely no future on this earth whatsoever, is called upon to be the Prophet by the Angel in the last moment of the play. With her arrival, she declares “The Great Work begins: The Messenger has arrived.”⁶⁹ With that, Kushner ends the play, leaving the questions regarding the future unanswered, despite the detailed plotwork he has done to set up the play.

Thus, it becomes clear that even the best-laid plans can go awry, as the future is a mysterious and absolutely unpredictable place. What is to come is impossible to determine within the play, and it continues to be problematic outside the world of the play, after the conclusion. The end of *Angels* is the most obvious example, and mainly because the end of the play is inconclusive, and leads to the sequel. The futures of *Three Days of Rain* and *Sight Unseen* are interesting in that the latest scene chronologically does not occur last in the play. Therefore, after Walker and Nan burn their father’s journal with the desire for a clean slate, their future remains ambiguous, although the play goes on. After Patricia and Jonathan part for what is believed to be the last time, the audience sees them together once again, albeit seventeen years earlier. Therefore, there are always unanswered questions for not only the characters, but also the audience. The audience must wonder what will happen with Clifford, Terry and Gene in the future, after Gene plays his last riff of the show, because the future is barely alluded to. Will Clifford really be able to leave his dysfunctional parents behind? He never was able to before, and there be little to indicate that this time would be any different. The audience must

⁶⁹ Kushner, *Angels in America*, pg. 119

leave the theater in all four cases wondering about what the future holds, thinking about how it can be changed or understood.

So within a couple of hours on the stage, the audience has before them the past, the present and the future. These times are juxtaposed and interchanged in ways that they never can be in reality, yet they are still realistic representations of life as we know it, or at least as we perceive it. The time is fluid, but it is still as present and vital to each of the plays as it is to life itself. It does not cease, but conquers all. Why would this appeal so much to audiences of the 1990s? Is it comforting to be assured that we were being hurdled towards an unknown fate, without the power to stop? Perhaps the future of 2000 did hold fearful qualities. However, we now know that it was not the apocalypse that was once imagined. Even so, nobody imagined the terror of September 11 and the losses that would be suffered in years to follow. Yet we have survived, and we remain hurtling towards that ever so unknown fate. What can we take from these plays, when the future and the past are known? I prefer a philosophy quoted from Richard Greenberg himself: “It’s a decision you make—to somehow keep going no matter what darkness lies ahead. So you go to the theater.”⁷⁰

⁷⁰ “People Are Talking About: Theater” *Vogue*, November, 2003 pg. 361

Kristyn Bunce
Contemporary Theatre Directing
Proposal

Three Days of Rain
By Richard Greenberg

Approach

This play takes place in two vastly different time periods, in the same apartment. In the present, the apartment is abandoned, barren and dark. In the past, it was a place of light, color and passion. In the opening scene, upon being brought to this apartment, the audience must wonder, “How did it get this way?” Turns out, this is the same thing as the characters are wondering, in a way. I would like the second act to be the answer to the first, as it is written. Questions are asked and answered by the characters of Nan, Walker and Pip, and then we see the people that the questions regard. We even find that the conclusions drawn by the characters in the present are incorrect. Walker paints his father as an arrogant thief of ideas and his mother as a romanticized loon. When the audience meets the real Ned and Lina, the characters must be working against the preconceptions set up against them. We find that Ned *is* creative, and suffers from a stuttering problem. Lina is not crazy; she’s hurt by Theo and finds a sort of comfort in Ned that the audience must see that she’s never felt before. This presents a particular challenge to the director. Although there are only six characters onstage, there are in essence nine characters created by the dialogue, and the audience must distinguish who is real and who is not.

There is ghost imagery in this script that I would like to play with. It is ironic that the first scene, set in the present, depicts characters that are actually living and young, yet they are the ones that seem to be the ghosts. The mood is darker and dismal in the first act, while the second act, showing people that are either old or dead, is the part of the play full of life, of action. Walker and Nan’s final act is one of destruction, while Ned and Lina are creating something. Must every act of creation give way to one of

destruction? I would like to approach the play from a more positive approach, as I think Greenberg would want it. I believe that the reason that the second act is after the first is to show that, even when an action ends in sadness, there was some motivation for its beginning. Even though we know Lina and Ned eventually divorced and led less than perfect lives, we are happy to see that, at the root of it, there was love and ambition. This is the message I would like to leave the audience with.

In order to convey this point, I believe that the first act should be drawing the blueprints (pun intended, with all of the architecture stuff in the play) for the second act, rather than vice versa. Where the characters are indecisive and rooted in the first act, they should be free, bold of movement and full of fire in the second act. This is a challenge because, as indicated in the script, the three actors in the first act are the same as the ones in the second act. I think that this double casting will help to enforce the ghost imagery. As the director, I will have to do extensive actor coaching, especially in movement exercises, to help the actors to distinguish the characters while holding on to a family resemblance to each other.

Why do I want to direct this play?

First of all, I was drawn to this play because it is *so* well-written. Greenberg is incredibly intelligent, and has very high expectations of the people who choose to work with the script and to view the play. However, I do not think that the play is too “smart” for the Boston College audience. Most of the literary references are covered in a typical philosophy class here, and I like that the allusions will make the audience think. It would be a gift to get to work with a script that is finely tuned and complex.

I also love the use of time in the play and the way that it works to further the story. Even though the play is, essentially, “backwards,” there is a forward motion to the script, and I love that the mysteries of the past are solved within the play. This use of time allows for subtleties in the script that the director must work at to bring out and make clear to the audiences. I want to really work hard to show the audience: “Yes, this IS the answer!”

I think that this show would be an excellent opportunity for the actors in this department. While the cast is small, the roles are amazing. All three of the actors will have the enormous challenge of tackling not one but two intricately complex roles. This requires incredibly versatile and talented dramatic actors, and I would love to work with people of this caliber. The material is difficult, and that is what I love about it. These actors have to learn to love and understand both of their characters, even though they may be in opposition to each other. All of the characters have some amazing monologues, and the emotions that each actor must represent truly run the gamut. The actor playing the roles of Walker/Ned has a particularly large challenge. I think that our actors are ready for roles like this, and few plays afford them such opportunity. I look forward to developing and distinguishing the characters with the actors, as it will be just as difficult for the director as it will be for the actor to make sure that this achievement is possible.

Problems

The largest problem of the play is the one that I addressed directly above, in discussing the difficulty of the roles. This truly is a challenge, and I think it will be difficult but possible to find actors that can really take it on. Actor coaching would be vital in the rehearsal process of this production. I would like to have individual sessions

with each actor, which would be possible because of the small size of the cast. Character development must begin from the very first rehearsal, so that by the time the show goes up, the actors are very comfortable in each character and are able to internally distinguish between the two for themselves.

Another problem with the play is making the transition between 1995 (the first act) and 1960 (the second act). The time period needs to be evident before the actors even say a word. This is the responsibility of the designers, for the most part. Costumes and set will do wonders in defining the era. However, as the director, I will do a lot of research about the sixties and incorporate it into my actor coaching and blocking.

The only other problem I can think of for this play is the literary and philosophical references that I mentioned previously. Some are obscure, but I think that, as long as sufficient research is done about *every single one of them* and the research is relayed to the actors, it will be the actors' responsibility to get the meaning across to the audience. I believe that if the actors know what they are talking about, the audience will get the jist of it.

Budget:

Rights: from Dramatists Publishing Service = **\$180**

Scripts: 5 @ \$6 each = **\$30**

Publicity: = **\$50**

Set: One interior of a NY loft, with a small area of the stage to be designated as "outside." A mattress and drafting table, as well as other supplementary furniture in Act 2. Most of the furniture can be pulled from stock. The set itself can be (and preferably would be) suggestive, not completely realistic = **\$250**

Costumes: 1 each for Walker, Nan and Pip = 3
2 each for Ned, Lina, and Theo = 6
(period of 1960s)
9 total

= **\$200**

Props: umbrella, journal (not much needed) = **\$20**

Sound: = **\$20**

Grand Total = **\$750**

One Year of Rain

Memoirs of a Director

When we began rehearsals for our production of *Three Days of Rain*, Richard, my stage manager, joked that the show should be called “Three Months of Bunce,” since everyone involved would be working with me for the months of January, February and March. I laughed mainly because that seemed like such a long time to him, whereas this play has consumed me for nearly a year. Over this time, the project’s ups and downs have made this work process perhaps the most significant learning experience thus far. I have been given opportunities to stand on my own, and to rely heavily on others. Through studying and directing the play, I’ve learned about history, about literature, about theater, and most of all, about myself. As a result, this section of the project is an intensely personal record of one year in my life; my year of *Rain*.

PART ONE: What's the forecast?

Finding My Niche and Finding My Play

As an underclassman in the BC Theater Department, I wasn't quite sure what it was I wanted to do with myself. I knew that I loved plays; but I didn't really know how much I loved them or why until much later. I knew that I loved acting in and seeing theater, but over time, I discovered that it was really the entire process of producing a show that appealed to me. As I began to understand the art of theater more, I grew more vocal in my opinions about the way plays and productions should be run, both artistically and logistically. I began to grow jealous of those people in charge—I longed to have the creative license to make something mine. This is what first pulled me to directing—a borderline unhealthy possessive urge. However, after studying the craft over the course of my junior year, directing became fun to me for many more reasons than that. I had always loved reading, and scripts were no exception to that. As a director, I could take that love of reading much further; I could bring the words from the page to real life. I had never been much of a visual person before; I enjoyed art, but couldn't really understand it. The dialogue and character development of film had always been what drew me rather than the camera techniques. After learning about directing, all of that changed. I began to have a greater interest in all things visual, and in all things theatrical. Learning to direct enriched my love of theater more than any other experience has. I had my first taste of this love outside of the classroom in the spring of junior year, as I directed a student written one-act play in a tiny space with a minimal set. This only left me wanting more. So, obviously, when the opportunity to apply to direct a full-length

production in the Bonn Studio Theater with designers and a real live production team arose, I went for it.

My first (and greatest) problem arose in selecting a play. I loved theater, but I was still not as well-read as I would have liked to be. I still couldn't pin-point what it was that made some plays enjoyable to me and others not. I wasn't sure if I could handle a script that was very abstract, as I had very little experience in that area, so I was steering towards realism. I didn't want anything that was over-produced, or something that absolutely nobody had heard of. I knew that I liked characters, quirky, strange ones that were well-developed by the playwright. I didn't like anything too serious or anything too funny. In short, I liked almost everything a little bit, but there was nothing that I absolutely loved. I wanted to find a play that spoke to me, personally, one that I would feel comfortable crawling inside of. For my first round of proposals, I selected *Sideman* by Warren Leight, which would later become one of the time-fluid plays that I focused on for the first semester part of the thesis. In the end, I'm glad that I was not chosen to direct this play. There were too many flaws in the selection: it was really more of "boy" play, and I've never been too good with uber-masculinity. Its structure appealed to me, and I felt that I could give it a creative staging, but in the end, it left me slightly unfulfilled. So, I went back to the drawing board for my next round of directing proposals. I began to ask all of my professors that were outside of the theater department for suggestions of plays they had read, seen, or heard of, that appealed to them. One professor, Chris Constas of the Honors Program, had quite a few suggestions; turns out his wife is well-connected with the Speakeasy Stage Company, a small professional theater that produces Boston premieres of generally small-scale shows. In other words,

shows that would be suitable for production in BC's own black box theater. Professor Conostas suggested several shows to me, including Neil Labute's *The Shape of Things*, which I immediately rejected, as it was being made into a film that year, and *Three Days of Rain*, by Richard Greenberg. I had heard of the show vaguely; I had even checked the script out of the library but returned it once I realized it only had three actors. (I had thought I wanted a cast of at least four.) I couldn't remember much about it, and I knew very little of Greenberg, although I had seen the production of his one-act play, *Life Under Water*, in the fall of 2002. Based solely on the recommendation of Professor Conostas, I checked the play out of the library again and read it with a more careful eye. I wouldn't return that copy of *Three Days of Rain* to O'Neill Library until several months later, when I finally purchased my own copy.

So many things about this play touched me. A lover of literature and proudly self-proclaimed nerd, this script struck me with its "smartness". Not only was there the incessant cultural name-dropping among the very intelligent characters, but also the conceit of the play itself was quite thought provoking. I loved the fact that, each time I read it I discovered something new. I liked it because it was not a "girl" or "boy" play—I by no means wanted to direct something with an all-female cast, or with some sort of feminist uplifting message, but my feelings about *Sideman* taught me that I needed to be careful to keep it relatable to myself, as a twenty-one year old woman. This idea was nicely compromised by the second act, which is a sweet little romantic comedy in disguise, just the type of play that was made fun of in the first act. The concept was clever and heart-warming and a whole lot more. Even with the lovey-dovey part included, I was nervous about proposing such an intelligently challenging play. Would

other people love it in the same way that I did? Would people think I was arrogant for throwing this kind of “talky” theater at them? Would I be able to find actors that were smart and academic enough to talk like that, but still sensitive enough to crack into the inner life of these characters? With those problems in mind, I set out to propose the show anyway. I did not write a full directors’ approach for the play (although I should have), due to the fact that the two student groups I was submitting the play to requested short proposals. I put together a neat little six-page document (infinitely shorter than everything else I’ve ever written) and submitted it to the Contemporary Theater and the Dramatics Society.

In the middle of a night a couple of weeks later, I received a long-awaited phone call notifying me that my proposal had been accepted by the Contemporary Theater. I was going to be a director!!!

Developing a Project

In the spring of junior year, at around the same time that I was deciding which play to submit for my directing proposal, I was also deciding what I would take on as a project to fulfill my thesis requirement for the Arts and Sciences Honors Program. I knew without a doubt that I wanted to direct a play, and I was sure that this would be a good jumping off point for my thesis. After all, directing encompasses so many parts of the theater education that I have so enjoyed getting in college, so putting together a production seemed to be a good project that represented what I had learned here. I liked the idea of doing something for my thesis, rather than just writing about something. When I told Dr. Hecht, the chairperson of the department and my directing professor, about my desire to direct as a portion of my thesis, he offered himself up as my advisor. I

was flattered and pleased with this arrangement, and my one concern was that, since he advises many students on senior directing projects, he may not have a lot of time to devote to my particular project. However, he assured me that this would not be the case, and encourage me to take control concerning the project. This forced me to see the project as something belonging to me, not to anyone else. It made me see that my thesis should be done as I want it to be, not following a guideline set out by someone else. In the English department (my other major), each thesis advisor advises only one student per year, in order to ensure lots of personal attention. While this is very nice, I am glad that my situation did not allow for so much coddling; after all, I am learning to be a director, and that means taking initiative and exercising a great amount of independence.

The first time I sat down with Dr. Hecht to discuss the project, I wasn't quite sure what to expect. How much of this was I supposed to come up with on my own? At the beginning, I couldn't even put my finger on what exactly interested me about directing this particular play, at least not formally. I knew that I loved the play and its characters, but I wasn't sure if there was one issue addressed in it that spoke to me particularly, or if the structure or the language was appealing to me. How would I create a project from just "liking" the play? Dr. Hecht helped me to narrow down my thoughts and organize them into what my thesis would become. I wanted to do something that brought in my skills at analyzing texts, because this relates to both of my majors and is something that I think I am good at. Working with this idea, Dr. Hecht and I put together the concept for the paper I would write during the first semester, wherein I compared four plays that were all written in the same decade as *Three Days of Rain*, all of which had time-fluidity as a part of their structure, and all of which were created by American playwrights.

In addition to this literary aspect, it was obvious to me that part of the thesis would require me to do some research so that I was dramaturgically prepared to direct the play. I needed to know about architects and architecture, and about the 1960s and New York. In the end, my research really centered more around the first part of this, around the architecture that was springing up around the time that Ned and Theo were working.

This research opened ideas to me that I was not anticipating. At the beginning of the project, I was a complete architectural neophyte—I knew little more than which buildings I thought were pretty and which I didn't. The buildings of the 1960s surprised me, because at first glance I did not find them aesthetically appealing. They were so boxy and plain; I felt ignorant because I could not see their beauty. However, the more I studied them, the more I realized how connected architecture could be to the play and the characters in it. *The Shock of the New*, by Robert Hughes, had an excellent chapter on twentieth century architecture that cleared a lot of things up for me. The Utopian style of architecture had instincts and desires that were so tied to the character of an architect and a father themselves. The Utopians wanted to plan everything for the future, to ensure some sort of perfect society. Ned was an unusual product of this time, because he was aware of the imperfection of planning; he says, "Everything is so much better before it begins." I gained a lot of insight into his character and Theo's character, in particular, from doing research that I had expected to be purely factual. All of the information I had on architecture was also pulled together when I went to see the documentary, *My Architect*, by Nathaniel Kahn, in February. The story was strikingly similar to the plot of the play; Nathaniel is the illegitimate son of architect Louis Kahn, who passed away several years ago. The film documented Nathaniel's journey around the world in search

of information about his father, who was elusive in many of the same ways that Ned apparently had been. The movie was incredibly reminiscent of Act 1 of *Three Days of Rain*, but it also incorporated the architecture itself into the plot, as Kahn went to visit most of his father's biggest projects. The movie helped me to realize something that books never could: the appeal of the work Kahn and other men of his time were doing. What was most striking about the architecture was its beauty on the inside of the buildings. Each work was so much more than what initially met the eye, which is what proved to be true about Ned, and Walker, too, I suppose. I consider this film one of my most valuable pieces of research, even though it came very late in the game.

I wanted to become an expert on everything in the world of the play, but some things did slip by me. I had wanted to make a glossary for all of the references in the play, but I ended up just looking them up as we went along in rehearsal. I didn't know too much about the specific year (1960), but I did get a good feeling for the age in general. Dr. Hecht suggested that, historically speaking, decades truly run from the middle of one to the middle of another, which would place 1960 in that odd spot right in the middle of 1955 to 1965. The more I thought about that, the more it made sense to me in relation to the characters in the play. Lina, in particular, is someone who is stuck between using her traditional feminine wiles to get what she wants, and needing to break free of that mold and express herself for the intelligent and independent woman that she is. So, while I didn't do very much obvious research on the era, I felt that I had thought about it sufficiently to relay the feeling of the times to the actors. If I could do it again, I would have spread my research out a little bit more and maybe read some literature of the

time, to immerse myself in that world more, so I could make it more of a concrete reality to me.

PART TWO: Precipitation Condenses

Assembling a Crack Team

Never one to leave things unplanned, I began worrying about putting together a production team pretty early in the game. My goal was to have all of my designers settled before Christmas break, which seemed very possible. Of course, seemed was the operative word here. In thinking back, I see this part of the process as the first time when CT started stepping into its role as producer. Until then, I saw the group basically as just a backer for my project, but as they began taking a more active part in finding designers and talking about the play, I realized it was much more than that. These seven people were here to help me! This was a strange feeling—I've always been the type of girl who would rather do all of the work herself than bother other people with it. Some may call this type of person a control freak. I prefer to believe that I am self-reliant.

Anyway, the first very subtle indication of the support system behind me came with the duty of finding a stage manager. I had given the matter a lot of thought—after all, this would be a person I would be spending most of my time with next semester. I decided that I definitely wanted someone with experience, since I was not familiar with the ins and outs of student-produced theater. I didn't think I wanted a girl, because I had worked with a female stage manager the year before and didn't really enjoy the experience. I decided that one person I could definitely see working on the show would be Richard Lawson—he's smart and likes plays like this one, and had experience; plus, he's fun! On the very day that I decided he was my number one choice, Rich approached me and asked if I would be interested in working with him. I was flattered and incredibly excited—it was like being asked to the prom by my crush! I realized later that a big part

of Richard stage managing the show had to do with his role on the CT Board. That had a bad experience the semester before with an unknown stage manager and a rushed assembly of a production team, and didn't want to repeat those mistakes with this show. By having Richard as a constant liason between the board and the production, they hoped any miscommunications and problems could be avoided or smoothed out easily. As it turned out, this also put an enormous amount of pressure on Rich to do multiple duties when some people weren't stepping up to their jobs.

With the stage manager situation under control, designers were the next concern. I had already snagged Meghan Clinton earlier in the semester after seeing her hard work costume designing "The Foreigner." Both of my other designers, Brenna Casey and Silja James, had been studying abroad in the first semester, so it was all a matter of calling dibs on them immediately upon their arrival back to BC. I saw them both as great prospects due to their extensive design experience. I had written an email to Brenna about the job much earlier in the semester, but we didn't really line her up until the next semester, with help from Sarah Ryndak. Sarah also helped a lot in contacting Silja, whom I had not even known was only studying abroad for the first semester.

The CT Board took care of all of the rest of the production team assignments for me, although more lackadaisically than I would have liked. For awhile, I appeared to have two production managers as Emily, who would eventually fill the role, was studying abroad. The technical directing position was also confusing. My technical director (Dan O'Brien) had never done that before, and Sarah Ryndak, as CT's senior technical director, was supposed to help him, but it was unclear about exactly who would be doing what. Which is why I'm not too surprised that things turned out the way they did...

Do We Have a Meeting Today?

As is typically the case with college students, especially ones as extracurricularly involved as theater majors tend to be, it was very difficult to find a weekly time for scheduled production meetings. We settled on Mondays at 5:30 or 5:45—even the time was never concrete. Even though I know that at least myself and Richard saw this as a regularly scheduled meeting, I don't believe we ever had more than one or two meetings that were fully attended by all three designers, Dan, Emily, Rich, and myself. The meetings were so up in the air that I found myself asking, "Do we have a meeting today?" to the random assortment of people that would turn up in the Green Room on Monday afternoons.

Whose fault was this lack of organization? I suppose that Emily, as the production manager, should have managed a little bit more, maybe sent out a few more emails or displayed some sort of authority. However, the fact of the matter is, we were all too overextended. This is a major difference between student theater and professional theater. It was even more the case because the production was in the second semester, when everyone had already committed to things and when there were more productions rehearsing and running. Over the course of the production period, Emily and Richard were both involved in staged readings of plays they had written; Meghan was cast as the dance captain of the large-scale department musical; Silja was on the fencing team; Dan had a lead role in a time-consuming and emotionally demanding production early in the semester; and I was working two jobs and had a very precisely scheduled day to day calendar. In short, even though the show was a priority for everyone, nobody had the luxury of making it their only priority. It would have been nice to have a group of people

to whom this play meant as much as it did to me, but that would have been an unrealistic expectation. I simply had to feel lucky that everyone was helping in the best way that they could.

As a whole, the production meetings were not very productive—oftentimes things were left up in the air that should have been decided right away. However, somehow, at the end, everything got done. I'm not sure what I personally could have done to increase the efficiency of the production, but being at the meetings made me realize that I wanted to do *something*—the production process was interesting and fun to me, and it made me wish that I had been a part of it years before now, because I would have known more and it would have been exciting to find something that I enjoy so much earlier on.

Richard Lawson, SM Extraordinaire

The role of stage manager is incredibly important to any production, to an extent that I hadn't even truly realized until later years of my college career. This is why I was so thrilled when Richard volunteered for the job. I needed someone to support me and reign me in, someone who understood the play for its artistic value but who also knew how to get all the other “stuff” done.

The stage manager is a constant messenger between all of the aspects of the production; he needs to be able to have a foot in every door in order to make all of the parts of the show come together. Richard did an excellent job at being the glue of this production. One thing that he is very good at is relaying information in the most professional and effective way possible. He has a great manner that he can put on whenever he has to deliver news that is not good, or make people pay attention in order to solidify schedules or plans. He is a great boss because he can maintain just the right level

of personal disinterest and kindness, something I've never been able to do. I loved when Rich would voice a frustration that both of us were feeling, because he was so good at doing so without making it personal, whereas I would have trouble controlling the emotional level in such an interaction. An example of this is the third day that the actors were supposed to be off-book, and they still were not. I was upset, and Rich was so frustrated that he wanted to cancel rehearsal. While I didn't want to go to such extremes, I didn't really know what to say to our three actors. I started off, and just when I felt I had gotten the point across, Rich stepped in and reinforced me. I loved that he knew when to share the burden of authority that we both had, and I think that his comments were always weighted heavily in the actors' minds. The same goes for the production team—they trusted Rich because he knew what he was talking about on both ends, because he knew about the managerial aspects of theater, as well as how this particular show was going. I found Rich to be an excellent and articulate business partner, one whose opinion counted for a lot for me.

Of course, nobody is perfect. If I could do it all again, I'm not sure I would choose Richard for my stage manager, not because of him as a person, but because of all of his other responsibilities. I wouldn't have wanted to work with anyone else, but there was no way I could really lighten his load. When we auditioned the show, Rich was in the middle of a production weekend for *Extremities*, another show he was stage managing. We only had a week and a half or so in between auditions and the beginning of rehearsal, so he got virtually no break at all, and also very little time to switch gears. As a result, I think he didn't necessarily enjoy the process as much as he could have had he not been jumping from one project to another. Several times, he asked for nights off

from rehearsal, which I gave him. I wasn't necessarily bothered by his not being there, but more by the fact that there were nights when he didn't want to be there. In the end, I think that it was best that he not come, though, if he didn't want to, because his tiredness and impatience would have made me rush rehearsals that really didn't need to be rushed. In addition to that, as the production period went on, he began to take on duties that were not necessarily his. He ran the production meetings, because he knew the most about what was going on, and Emily didn't really stop him. He spent a lot of time discussing technical issues with the designers, especially Brenna, because nobody else was. He told me that he felt like he was production managing, technical directing, and stage managing the show, and obviously that is just too much. By production week, he was exhausted and his already nervous personality was at its peak.

In saying I may have chosen a different person, I spoke too quickly, but I do wish that I could have found a way to make Rich less stressed out. He was always great at making me feel like things were under control, and at helping me to actually get things under control. He dealt with the cast effectively and at times more strictly than I did, which was a good thing. His dry wit and never-ending funny imitations and comments eased tense moments and made me look forward to coming to rehearsal. Over the course of the production, I found a new friend in Richard, and I will always be grateful for the way that he enriched this experience for me.

Making the show look good from the outside, in

One area of directing that I will certainly have to work on for next time is my relationship to the designers. As someone who doesn't know a whole lot about design, I found myself often afraid to broach concerns with them, figuring that they knew best. As

a result, I think I got very different products from some of my designers than I would have gotten had I been a little more vocal. I was generally satisfied with their work, but I did feel that they could have spent a little more time making the show look even more special than it did.

As the set designer, I felt that Brenna Casey had the biggest amount of responsibility. She was happy to take it on, as she enjoys designing and is obviously comfortable with taking initiative regarding her designs. She almost single-handedly solved the problem of burning the book onstage by rigging up a garbage can with a light in it that worked pretty well. Also, I was amazed at the amount of time she spent working on the physical set in the last week of production; she was in the theater past 2 AM two nights in a row, and I could not have asked for any harder worker. I wish, however, that I had been more clear with my ideas about the color palette, because I would have liked the show to have a little more color than it did. Also, I wish she had made the spacing of the set a little larger and less awkward, and maybe done something more visually interesting with the neutral area. The Bonn is such a wonderful space to work with due to its endless possibilities, and I don't feel like she exhausted all of them. Perhaps I should have communicated more with Brenna; we met once to talk about the show, once when I picked out a design from three that she had made (and I do think I made the right choice), and once to discuss the actual floor plan. There were parts of the set that I was still unclear about until the last week before tech week, and more communication could have fixed that.

I was initially worried about communication issues with my costume designer, Meghan Clinton, as well. She was flighty about coming to production meetings, and

hadn't read the play as thoroughly as I would have liked. Also, she had a rehearsal schedule of her own to follow, so she didn't get to come to a run of the show until very late in the game—the last dress rehearsal. In the future, I would definitely require more commitment from a designer, because changes had to be made at the last minute that could have completely changed the way the actors felt. This made me uneasy and worried about how the costumes would turn out, but I was most happy with the results of the costumes out of all of the design elements. They served for excellent character definition, and her color palettes made sense.

Silja James was my lighting designer, which is an element of production I know the least about. She was the only designer that actually came to parts of the run of the show before tech week, which was good and bad at the same time. Because she did appreciate the emotional tones of the show so much, she was really set on making the moods for the show clear, with the first act dimmer and cooler than the second. However, I do fear that this mood lighting sacrificed some of the illumination that we needed on the actors' faces, and even though I had her raise the levels and even re-hang some lights, there was no way we could get all of the desired effects with the number of instruments we had. However, Silja gave me the most control in some aspects of her design than any of the other designers, as I got to tell her when I wanted certain things to happen, and she didn't argue with me. She also didn't have a whole lot of ideas for specific light cues, and I wish that she had dared to be a little more creative.

Sound design was one area that I most definitely should have treated differently. From the beginning, I just kept saying that I would take care of picking out the music for the show, not thinking it would be a big deal. It turned out to be much more time-

consuming and difficult than I had anticipated, and I wish I had lined someone up to do it for me. Richard and Chris did most of the work, since I don't have a very large music collection, but I did have the final approval on all things. Matt O'Hare was a huge help, since he made the all-too-necessary rain sound effect for us, along with some nice background city noises for the first act. Without those three men, the show would have been absolutely silent. In the end, I was very happy with how the sound design turned out, but it was absolutely an unnecessary stress.

The design section of production has my longest wish-list of things I would have changed, and I have learned a lot about the type of director I will be regarding design from this experience. Of course, a larger budget could have helped me get some things—like a bigger set, or a backdrop for behind the windows to light, or extravagant props, but those are all things that were impossible. In the realm of possibility, this experience has mainly taught me that I need to not be afraid to ask for things that I want, because people will never be able to read my mind.

PART THREE: Storm clouds ahead!

Show me what you've got

By the end of the first semester, I was sick of thinking about the play—I wanted to *do* something. Auditions came the first weekend of the semester and I was thrilled and terrified. The first task, making the information sheet for auditions, would be a preview of what would become my least favorite question: “So, what’s the play about?” Sometimes I would want to answer, “Oh, I don’t know,” but I think that would have people seriously questioning my directorial aptitude. I tried many times to make a clear and thorough summary, but eventually I realized I would have to settle for clear and concise, rather than thorough, because the plot is difficult to describe in just a few sentences, and I trusted the actors who were really interested to read the play on their own time. I posted the audition information and the sign-up sheets early in the week, but I was never quite satisfied with the number of people who had signed up. In the end, I was happy with the cast I had, but I do wonder why more people didn’t turn out for auditions. It’s hard not to take something like that personally, but I grew to see that many actors were either intimidated by the competition for such a small cast, or had their hearts set on other productions for the semester. I felt that, had more people read the play, more would have showed up upon realizing what an amazing acting opportunity it is.

I had been through the audition process once before, when casting for the one-act play I directed last spring, so I felt like I had some idea about what I was doing. However, despite my experience and preparation regarding the play, I still felt unprepared. If there is one thing I have learned about myself from this experience, it is that I never feel like I have prepared enough for anything; I guess I can blame it on a

director's version of stage fright. Having Richard around was helpful, because he had gone through the process only a couple of months before, whereas my last time behind the table was nearly a year before. He suggested a nice organizational system for the audition sheets into three folders for yes, no, or maybe, and before I knew it, I had some pages of people to put into those folders!

As an underclassman, I definitely hated the system of pre-casting that seems to dominate a department as small as this one. However, now, I have realized that it is nothing short of irresponsible to have absolutely no idea who could play a certain role. On the other hand, you can't depend on being able to cast someone who may get snatched up by other shows or may decide not to audition or may just not be good enough. Before auditions and after extensive talks with Richard, I had come up with a few options. I pretty much knew that it was going to come down to either Chris Barnard or Matt O'Hare for the Walker/Ned role; I simply couldn't see anyone else who would be able to do it, and it was far too large a responsibility for a complete unknown. The other two parts were much more up in the air. I was never really concerned about Nan/Lina—there are so many talented women in the department, and while the part isn't easy, it's neutral enough that it could be played many ways. For Pip/Theo, I had one man in mind who would fit the part perfectly, but who would be a terror to work with. I was hoping I would not have to resort to casting him, and I was willing to see who came up with things in the audition room.

For the initial audition process, I asked that the actors prepare a 2-3 minute contemporary monologue and present it in two entirely different characters. Right off the bat, this was not adhered to by many people, which was to be expected. Honestly, I

would rather they turn out only half-prepared than not at all. There were a few people who presented the monologue in two strikingly different ways, and I don't think I called back any of them. Being in this position made me realize more than ever how small a part of casting has to do with how talented an actor someone is. There were plenty of good people that I saw who just didn't fit the parts. I really needed intelligent, sophisticated actors who could easily play people in their thirties and could utilize the very wordy humor that Greenberg is so good at. These are difficult traits for some college actors to embody, and it was hard for me to put some very good auditions in the "no" pile, but it had to be done.

After two days of auditions, I had called back eleven people—6 men and 5 women. I would have liked to call back more, but there just weren't any others that deserved it. Even some of the ones we called back hadn't stood out in my mind; we called back two men who just didn't look the parts, and the one woman who was beautiful to look at but not much of an actress. Among the other four men were the one who I didn't want to cast, Chris, Matt, and one unknown freshman named Zack Conroy. When Zack had walked in for his audition, I was pleased to see a very attractive young man with a bit of talent. If he could deliver at the callback, he could solve my Pip/Theo problem—a huge relief! It was a good thing he showed up, too, because the man I didn't want to cast pulled out of the callback at the last minute due to a conflict he hadn't indicated at the auditions. It was a good thing he did, too—I can't imagine how horrible it would have been if I had cast him and he pulled out later in the game. So my hopes were set on Zack to pull through in the callback.

Being rather overzealous in preparing for the callback, I copied nearly every page of the script for the actors to read. After all, they each had to read for two parts, and I didn't want to run out of material, or get too bored with seeing the same scene over and over again. Also, I went through each of the thirteen scenes I had copied and wrote down everything the actors would need to know to play the scene. I made a list of the things I was looking for from each person (this is included in my project papers). There were some people who I could really see as one part and not as another, or who were great on their own but possibly lacked that special chemistry with others. I was determined to make callbacks as productive as they could possibly be.

As it turns out, due to a couple of people dropping out, and the rush of being able to let people go to their other callbacks, all of that organization was not entirely useful. I certainly didn't use all of the scenes I had copied, and I definitely didn't have time to go through extensive plot summaries before sending the actors off to read together. Once all of the actors were in the room, I found myself lacking words. I just wanted to get started so I could see as much of them as possible.

In all honesty, the callback could probably have lasted about fifteen minutes and we would have gotten the same results as we eventually did, but I needed to test out every second and third choice so I wouldn't be kicking myself if it turns out that everyone I wanted to cast was unavailable. The real decision to be made was between Chris and Matt, and that was a choice that seemed like it would be made for me, since Dr. Houchin, the director of *Anything Goes* was casting at the same time as me and had priority and was reading the two men for the same part. I assumed that he would take one and I would take the other, so I had to see which woman would have good chemistry with one

or the other or both. My second choice for Pip/Theo was quickly eliminated, and Zack stood as the only option. Slowly but surely, I got information regarding the status of the women and who would be cast in other shows. Eventually, I was left with the Sarah and Zack, and still a decision to be made between Matt and Chris. Sarah read the last scene, a romantic one between Ned and Lina, with both of them, and she and Chris clearly sizzled—I actually got goosebumps—while the tension with Matt was kind of awkward. I didn't want to leave any stone unturned, so I had Matt read for Pip/Theo as well (by his request, interestingly enough). A big problem I had with this was the fact that Pip is supposedly always in a good mood, and I just couldn't see this actor as happy-go lucky, although he was a much better actor than Zack. I was faced with a difficult decision—go with the better actor, or the person who most fits the part? I decided to go with Zack because, no matter how well Matt was acting, I don't think he could be Pip. Also, I still had him as a possibility for Walker/Ned, in case Chris was cast in the musical.

Finally, the time came for the power meeting of the directors and the stage managers. I had been looking forward to this for some time—I love being privy to confidential information, and I've always wanted to see what the process of calling dibs on actors was like. This particular casting session was surprisingly not dramatic. As it turns out, Dr. Houchin didn't want Chris or Matt, which was shocking to me. I had my pick, but I had avoided making a solid choice until that moment. I went with Chris, who had clearly been better at the callback, even though I had originally thought Matt would be the one. I have never been happier with a decision. The one regret I do have about the callbacks was not having one actress read more. We had been told that she would be cast as a dancer in the musical, so I dismissed her fairly early, and she barely made it into the

chorus. However, I was happy to be working with the cast that I got. It was so strange, to see their names in writing, to finally be able to associate faces with the lines I had grown to know so well. I couldn't wait to see them fill their roles.

Meet the cast

I was anxious to begin rehearsals right away, but Richard and Sarah, who were just coming off of a weekend of the intense production of *Extremities*, definitely needed the break. So, one and a half weeks later, I met with my cast (and Richard) for the first time to read through the play. I was excited and didn't really know what would be expected of me on this, the first, day. The readthrough went well, but I realized a couple of things right away. First of all, the show is long and very wordy, even when it is brought to life. Second of all, lines were going to be delivered in ways that I wasn't expecting, not necessarily always the way I had heard them in my head when reading through them. This was an adjustment for me. As a rule, I don't like giving line readings as a director—if I force someone to say something in a way that is unnatural to them, it will sound unnatural. I prefer to talk about the meaning of the words, and then the right idea or feeling will come across; but it may not come across in the way I was expecting, and I needed to deal with the fact that this was okay. After the readthrough, we talked about the play a little. I was terrified that they wouldn't like it, but as it turns out, they all did, even on that first day. Like me, their affection towards the play grew as we delved into it more, but even then, they brought so many great thoughts and questions to the table. Zack even said something along the lines of, "I hope the audience is thinking about this as much as we are, now." He would be full of gems like those throughout the rehearsal period!

Although I was a little anxious about the readthrough, I was most nervous about what would come next, after it. I had such a nice long production period, and I wasn't quite sure how to fill the time. I've never been one to initiate a whole lot of improv because it has always made me uncomfortable as an actor, but I recognize its necessity. However, I felt like I needed to warm myself up by doing some other character work first, so for the second "rehearsal," I scheduled some individual meetings with the actors to discuss their characters. I made a list of questions to get some thought flowing for each of the characters, and we discussed our impressions of the script. This is something that worked really well for my cast, although I can see that it wouldn't for many others. Making sure that they understood the script and their characters before putting them into action was important for me, although I of course realized that discoveries would be constantly made as rehearsals went on.

My meeting with Chris was excellent. He had read the play several times and thought a lot about it. This would always be the case with him, although the one problem was that he was sometimes afraid to show how much he had thought about things right off the bat, like he was shy about his devotion to the play. Eventually, though, I think he saw that we appreciated all of his work and insight, and he began sharing them more with the whole cast, not just those it directly involved. Sarah's meeting was also interesting because she, while not having read the script as many times as Chris, had so many ideas about her characters that I hadn't thought about. Sarah was also very good at expressing to me right away what would help her to develop these characters. For example, she liked comparing them to characters in films or books. The meeting with Zack was funny and certainly different from the other two. For one thing, he is not a student of theater,

and so his reading skills are not as fine-tuned as everyone else's. This was to be expected. The surprise that came was that he really is remarkably similar to his two characters in their very typically masculine ways. He didn't read into things as much as I had been regarding his characters; this even caused him to have opinions that differed from mine, initially. However, I wasn't upset when I couldn't get him to see things my way, because his approach was so Pip-like; what you see is what you get. I like that he didn't try to overcomplicate the character, because Pip is not a complicated man.

Right away, all three of the actors related more to one character than to the other. Chris liked Walker and Zack liked Pip, while Sarah felt connected to Lina. It became a goal of mine to get them to know and love both of their characters equally. We worked on the contrasts between the characters at the third rehearsal, where I had them make image card collages for each character. I loved what they did with it—there were very subtle visual connections between the two characters, but the collages as a whole looked very different. They really enjoyed this exercise as well; I would definitely use it again even when directing a show where actors only play one part. The collages helped me to see what it was they were feeling about the characters, and get a feel for the texture of what the show would be now that there were three human beings attached to the names in the script. After the collages, we did some physical stuff, including walking around the room and walking into each character. They loved this exercise, as well, and we continued to use it throughout the rehearsal and production process. Lastly, we did some improv, which I had been dreading, but really enjoyed. There is so much history between these characters, so we filled it in a little bit with the improv. We did two scenes, one with the characters from the first act, and one from the second. The first one went very

well, as they acted out the dynamic of the relationship between them when Pip and Nan were together and Walker didn't know about it. The second one wasn't as good, I think because it was less based in reality and they didn't quite have a handle on those characters yet. I learned that I enjoy improv so much more than I gave myself credit for, especially when I just give the idea and set them on their feet. The first glimmers of the characters developed on that day, and I'm glad that I pushed myself to do it, even though I was initially uncomfortable with the idea.

You stand...um...there!

One thing I constantly surprised myself with was the amount of freedom I gave the actors throughout this process. I like to be in charge of things, but from the very beginning I really trusted their instincts more than I had ever trusted anyone else's that I worked with. This first appeared at the very first blocking rehearsal, in which we blocked the entire first section of the first act, the scenes involving Walker and Nan. Both Chris and Sarah like to do their own thing before being told what to do, and that actually worked well for these scenes and the ones to follow. It never ceased to amaze me, though, that even these experienced actors constantly put their backs to the audience! Despite that, the first blocking rehearsal went so well that it only made me more excited for the rest. At the first rehearsal, I came up with an idea that I thought was a little strange, but worked for the show, of Nan pouring two glasses of water when describing the night that her mother threw herself out the glass facade of her building. This was the first time I had ever really dealt with more "symbolic" blocking, but the glass imagery spoke so clearly to me that I had to try it. It also served as a really nice segue into the

next scene...this was a bit of blocking I was particularly proud of, because it proved to me that I can be somewhat creative at times, a fact that I'm never too sure about.

As a whole, the blocking process went smoothly. This was a fun chunk of time because there was absolutely no pressure, as far as deadlines went. When we were blocking the play, the actual show felt years away, and we had the luxury of going slowly, or of not pushing too much work in one night. However, I think that this lack of pressure served as a disadvantage at times, as well, because it made me approach rehearsal more casually than perhaps I should have. It became more and more apparent over the course of the blocking rehearsals that Zack didn't really know what he had gotten himself into, and I wasn't sure how to get that point across. He was sick nearly every day that we had to block his sections, and it turns out that he is the type of person who just can't work through sickness. Therefore, I didn't really feel good about any of his big sections after blocking them, since on one particular occasion he couldn't even speak at all.

The time we spent blocking the show was really the time when all of the little mannerisms of the actors became apparent to me, as well as the things that would need to be fixed. I already mentioned the tendency of Sarah and Chris to turn their backs on the audience. Part of this may have also been the fact that we were working in a small room in Gasson, and it was hard, even with all the spike tape in the world, for us to clearly define the space and where the audience would be. It amazed me when they would be confused by this, but then I thought back to some of the rehearsals that I was in as an actor with nothing but spike tape to show the way, and how foggy my mental picture of the set was, and I could completely understand. I also saw echoes of Sarah's last show in

her physical work; she tended to stride, like her character in *Extremities*, so I really had to tame her gait. Also, *Extremities* had been staged with the audience on two opposite sides, so Sarah tended to play moments to two sides naturally, looking over her shoulder to include...nobody! Chris' acting was extremely in the moment, which was good at times, but also made him tend to change blocking or the dynamic of a scene from run to run. Zack was very stiff, which made me wonder if he would ever loosen up. Also, I noticed over the course of the rehearsals how uncomfortable he seemed to be with Sarah. Onstage, he always gravitates towards Chris, to the point where Theo and Ned seemed to be too close. This was something I tried hard to fix, but it never really went away. To the last day of the show, Zack and Sarah's kiss in the second act was painfully awkward, at least in my opinion. As well as he could fill some aspects of the show, he was still very young in some ways, and his "flirty" act showed it.

We finished blocking the show in about two weeks, and then we had three days until spring break. After spring break the actors were supposed to be off-book, but the in-between days were difficult to deal with. It's hard to rework things when the actors still have their heads in the script, but work had to be done to keep all of our heads in the game. Even though I dreaded those rehearsals, fearing that they would not be productive at all, they actually ended up helping more than expected. We were able to work through scenes with Zack when he was actually healthy and could speak on the first day of reworking. This was also an opportunity for me to try to find little places to add in "echoes" of blocking that would make certain moments in one act connect to moments in the other act, a technique that Dr. Hecht had suggested to bridge these two very different acts together, to make it a full-length play rather than two one-acts with the same actors

in them. On the second day, Chris was really sick and Richard was really stressed, so we just had brief character meetings again. I felt at first like this was just a time-filler, but it turned out to actually be productive. After discussing things with Dr. Hecht, I suggested that each of them bring something physical to the next rehearsal to help them differentiate between their characters. I also talked with Zack about his comfort level with Sarah onstage, and discovered something that was kind of complimentary to her—he was afraid of Lina onstage, but not Nan. That is a real credit to the difference in Sarah’s performance of the two roles.

The day before spring break, we ran the entire show on book. It was good! It went quickly—if only we could have kept up that pace for the real show. There were some sections that needed more touching up than others, obviously, but it looked like a play, a real one. I had been dubious about the merit of running a show on book, but it was a great way to tie everything we had been doing in rehearsals before break. I couldn’t wait to get back and see what they could do without their scripts in hand.

The week I wished Spring Break didn’t exist

As it happens, I didn’t really get to see what they could do without their scripts for several days. The week returning from spring break was disastrous, even more so than I had thought it would be. The first day wasn’t so bad, because Sarah and Chris really did take to heart some things that we discussed in our meetings the week before break. Sarah brought some pearls and some heels and for the first time, I really saw Nan. However, they just weren’t off-book. That problem continued the next day, with Zack. I scheduled a linethrough for Wednesday, and it was just disastrous. Our productivity was quickly slipping, and there was really nothing I could do about it. We had been in such a

great place before the break, and now I didn't know how to get back there. Retrospectively, that week really set us back more than it should have. I still think that if they had been off-book, the show could have been a little more polished. I'm not sure what I could have done to help it, but on Wednesday, Richard and I gave all three of them a talking to when they were still not off-book. There was just so little we could do when they were holding the scripts. At one point, Chris said to us, "I feel like you just don't want to work on it anymore because you're sick of watching us with our scripts." To some extent, that was true—selfishly, I wanted to work on new things, and having scripts in hand was not new. Thinking back, he really was right about that—we still could have been more productive with them on-book, but we shouldn't have had to be. They scheduled their own linethrough for Thursday before rehearsal, and I prayed that this would work.

Thursday was a completely different show. They were generally off-book, and even better than that, they were focused! Richard was absent from rehearsal on that night because he had to go to the auditions for his staged reading, but it was our first night with our ASM, Ian Stoker-Long, who continually brought a wonderful sunny attitude to rehearsal. He actually enjoyed the show, which shocked me, because it was still so rough. That rehearsal, when we ran the first act off book, was a great one. I remember that Zack said to me at the end of it, "I was kinda worried that the show would be boring, but now I don't think so anymore." I hated to admit it, but I had the same fear until that night...not that the thought didn't ever come back, but it was soothed all the same on that night.

We had one more week before tech week, and it had to be a productive one. We got to work in the Kresge room, which was very helpful. I find myself wanting to be more productive when I am in an environment that is typically used for theater, rather than a random, cold classroom. Monday was a high-pressure day because Dr. Hecht was coming to watch the rehearsal. They did fairly well at that rehearsal, and the notes from Dr. Hecht were helpful in many ways. I found that I really liked getting a different, educated perspective on the play. By that point, it was already becoming too familiar to me, so it was nice to have a night when I could step away from it and let someone else do the judging. His character notes were specific and detailed, and got at the material in a different way than I had been doing so. He tends to deliver his notes in more of a lecture style, which is very different from the conversational manner that I would usually give notes in. Poor Zack had no idea what this would be like, since I usually let him argue a little or agree a little, figuring it can't hurt. He was surprised when Dr. Hecht didn't really let him talk during the process, and I think it was good because it put him in his place. My notes from Dr. Hecht were pretty much what I was expecting. I could see that the show was visually kind of flat, which was partially because of the very shallow acting space. I still wish I had asked for more space! He gave me some nice suggestions to give the blocking more visual depth, and while I didn't take all of his advice, I did manage to sprinkle it throughout the show.

Our best rehearsal by far took place in that last week in the Kresge. It was St. Patrick's Day, and rather than partying, my devoted little cast stayed in rehearsal until almost 12:30 AM. We picked through the show, and I stopped them when we needed to stop. We fixed any and all blocking issues, and ran and reran scenes until they satisfied

me. I can pinpoint that night in my memory because it was a great one for cast bonding. Everyone was having a good time and working hard, and we felt like we were all alone in the theater, which was nice. We even had a good laugh when some punk freshman kids threw snowballs at us because I wouldn't let them cut through the Kresge. That night, with its combination of productivity and fun, was one of my favorites that I have ever spent in the theater, and it reminded me of why I love doing this so much—opportunities to work on things in a positive way while fostering friendships.

PART FOUR: The first drops of rain...Tech Week

Missing Platforms, Disassembled Beds and More...The Build That Was Three Days Too Long...

On the morning of March 21, I sprang out of bed at 8 o'clock (ungodly early for a college student) and dashed to Dunkin Donuts, ready for a wonderful day of building the set for my show. When I got to the theater, I was psyched; I couldn't believe that all of these people (meaning, the CT Board, my designers, and crew) were assembled so early in the morning to help me! Of course, then I realized that it was a good thing they were there, because I had absolutely no idea what to do. I don't know the first thing about building *anything*, despite my limited experience in Elements for Theater Production I. The morning opened with bad news. My technical director had put in a request for Work Order to bring us two platforms that were in storage at the BC warehouse. They belonged to Dramatics Society, and they had been nice enough to let us use them. Unfortunately, the swift men at Work Order hadn't gotten on top of this job on Friday as they were supposed to, and on Saturday, the warehouse was closed. Thinking that they could help us out anyway, they brought us a whole bunch of risers...the same exact risers that are always available in the Bonn, the ones we use for directing scenes and rehearsals. I guess they figured we just needed something to stand on! Since the warehouse was closed, we couldn't get the platforms that we needed until Monday. The other two platforms that we were using were part of the set for the show, *How I Learned to Drive*, which was currently going on in the Bonn. Therefore, we had no platforms to paint or do whatever it is you do to platforms with. Not a huge problem for Saturday—we would just have to cut into some of our tech time on Sunday to paint the platforms that would be

available after the play closed, and we would get the others on Monday. So the “build” on Saturday didn’t entail building very much at all; the most difficult task we completed was taking apart my bed in my dorm room to bring down to the theater and use as a set piece. This is probably illegal at Boston College, but I was willing to sacrifice a scolding from Residential Life and a few nights good sleep for the show. Giving up my bed was just one of those things that I wouldn’t expect anyone else to do for the show, and it made me happy to do it. I tried not to worry too much about the platforms and to concentrate on the good things happening that weekend. The problem would get solved eventually. In the meantime, Kathy Peter was nice enough to let us use department platforms on Sunday to focus the lights with. Fine. Everything would be fine on Monday.

Well, this is not exactly what happened. On Monday, as I made my way to the theater early in the afternoon, I was informed that the platforms had not been delivered by Work Order. Ok...we’ll do it on Tuesday. Unfortunately, that wasn’t the end of it. Work Order had by some stroke of genius decided to not only *not* deliver the platforms that we requested, but also to take away the platforms that we had already painted. So, on Monday, which was supposed to be a dress rehearsal, we had essentially no set.

I could have been very angry. Part of me was, but the other part knew that there was nothing we could do about it at the time, so it mainly struck me as funny. However, in retrospect, this whole situation annoys me because it could have been avoided by some people (namely, the technical director) calling Work Order more persistently in the days leading up to tech weekend. We muddled through it, but I was still unhappy about the fact that in the first two dress rehearsals, dealing with the platform situation became a priority over dealing with the play itself.

The Play's the Thing...Right?

In planning to direct a show, never did I truly realize what the phrase “tech week,” really means. At the end of our last week in the Kresge Room, I still felt like I had my work cut out for me as far as the show itself went. I had no idea how much the “tech” in tech week made the week seem so much shorter. The platform fiasco was only part of the delay, albeit a big one. I grew very frustrated when the demands made on the actors and myself began to center more on us as physical bodies to paint, build and clean things, and less on the roles we were supposed to play in the show. Because there was still so much work to do on the set, the actors had to paint when they came for call, and immediately following the run of the show. On top of that, the set was always being worked on in the time that we weren't physically on it, so we didn't get to rerun any problem sections. I began to freak out when I figured out that we would only run the show on a completed set one time before the actual show. Richard kept saying, “That's student-run theater for you,” but I couldn't help but wish for a different way. Space is such an issue in the theater, which is not news for me, but I began to truly despise the “out by midnight” rule. I felt like I had waited so long to get in the Bonn, and now that we were finally there, the play itself least concern. On both Monday and Tuesday, I really wanted to run parts of Act 1 after rehearsal, but that was impossible. Richard even got mad at me for giving notes on Monday, but for me this was a non-negotiable. Maybe it was selfish of me, but my concerns with the play were artistic before they were technical. If I didn't give the actors notes after rehearsal, I would have to cut into time that I wanted before rehearsal the next day. Besides that, we had a crew who came in specifically to do the dirty work, and when I was helping, I often felt like there were too

many cooks in the kitchen. So, I stood up to the techies to be a self-absorbed director, but it still didn't help the fact that things just weren't done when they should have been. Lights were still being hung and refocused into Tuesday, and even after that happened, cues had to be readjusted. Richard was also very nervous about calling the show for some reason. Part of it may have been his sudden case of laryngitis; part of it was definitely the never-ending scene change in which Chris had to be doused with water. I was bothered by things like that, too, but I didn't want them to distract me from the task at hand, which was to make the acting and staging of the show as good as possible. And that fact was, that task was not going well. For some reason—probably related to the distracting technical processes that they had to be a part of—the actors just weren't completely on in the first two dress rehearsals. On Monday, the first act was alright, and the second act was not as good as it once had been. Tuesday night, the first act was something I couldn't bear to watch. That night, all I did was scribble furious notes; I couldn't find the right words to fix it. I was on the brink of a temper tantrum when I noticed that Patricia Riggin, acting teacher and director in the department, was taking notes—and thank God! She is a talented actor coach and she is also not afraid to give her opinion. She pointed out the main problem to me—in Act 1, the actors really weren't listening to each other. To some degree, that's part of the problem of the act—the characters are disconnected and postmodern and selfish—but the actors were playing the parts a little too indulgently, concentrating only on themselves, taking attention away from others onstage at inappropriate moments, wasting time on unimportant things. Patricia suggested that Sarah and Chris have dinner together and speak through the first act, to make it less crazy and more personal. This was excellent advice—Sarah and Chris

continued to just talk through the act throughout the run and I do think it helped a lot. I was shocked when Patricia said that she felt that Zack was more “in the moment”—he had always seemed so mechanical to me. I knew there was a reason I cast him, but up until this point, I had honestly expected him to be a weak point of the production. Patricia’s comment made me reevaluate his role, as well as the biases I was watching the show with. Patricia also had some helpful hints for a couple of technical things—use a basket to speed the dinner scene up, fix the wobbly table, etc. that we were also grateful for. She also helped me with some blocking on a section that I would change the next day.

Once Chris and Sarah learned that Patricia was watching, their focus really changed—in a good way. The second act was very solid and I felt a lot better. They didn’t even lose their focus after Patricia had to leave halfway through the act.

By the end of Tuesday night, I had mixed feelings about the show. Monday’s first act had been more solid, while Tuesday had a stellar second act; but would they ever be able to do two great acts in a row? I was excited and nervous for Wednesday’s rehearsal, our last. I couldn’t wait to run the show with every technical aspect in place. I felt that finally, with those distractions gone, I would be able to focus on my actors and directing—basically, what I came there to do.

Wednesday’s dress rehearsal was just as I thought all of the rehearsals should have been. The previous two dresses hadn’t been as “show-like” as I would have preferred, (although they did start at eight, as planned, a fact that made me happy), so I was pumped when everything was going smoothly pre-show. I relayed the blocking

change that Patricia suggested to the actors, but we didn't have time to do it before the show, so I told them to wing it. All of a sudden, I had the greatest confidence in them.

I don't remember much about rehearsal that night, except that it went freakishly well. I still think that this particular rehearsal was probably the best performance the actors had. Too bad there wasn't a larger audience! We did have a few spectators, thankfully, all of whom genuinely seemed to like the show. Chris had so much energy—probably because it was his birthday! I, too, felt energized and very excited to put the show up for a new crowd. The new blocking went well, and we ran through it one more time before calling it a night. I felt ready.

PART FIVE: March 25 through March 27, Three days of rain

The Moment of Truth

Excitement was rushing through me all day on Thursday, March 25th. This was the day that I had been awaiting for nearly a year. After riser put-in (which went smoothly despite my increasing awareness of my own physical incompetence), we ran the new blocking that we had solidified the night before. Zack seemed unsure, nervous that he would forget his lines if he wasn't standing in the same place as he had been. This gave me a difficult choice. Should I go with blocking that really worked and place a lot of faith in my actors, or ease their nerves and do without the blocking? In the end, I decided that Zack had been coddled enough, and I made the self-righteous (or selfish) directorial choice to keep it in. A little bit of nerves couldn't hurt him, I figured.

Before the show, back in the green room, I didn't really know what to do with myself. Warm-ups for us had always been rather minimal, a fact that I was always uneasy with. Warming up is not a personal strength of mine as an actor or as a director; I'm not good at thinking of things that will truly help them, things that aren't just a waste of time, and I always benefited more from some quiet time to focus than jumping around a whole lot. I found that this was what usually worked for my small cast, also. It made me think—was this just because they adjusted to what my comfort levels are? How much do my theatrical likes and dislikes affect them? Even considering that, the cast was so small that unifying exercises were almost unnecessary, and their favorite thing to do was walk silently around in character, getting into their two different characters' bodies. My favorite thing to do before the show was to play Big Booty, my all-time theater game of clapping and dancing. I'm not sure if it helped, but I forced them to play every night

of the run. I know Chris enjoyed it, and we even incorporated some crew members to make it bigger and more fun. I think it did bring some energy and relaxing to the pre-show time, and it helped ease my jitters. (As if the strain of opening night wasn't enough, I was also being filmed for candid sections of the theater majors senior goodbye video, which was making me even more uncomfortable.) After this rousing game, the actors went to do their focusing things, and for the first time, I felt sort of useless. I was as nervous (if not more so) as the actors, and I felt like I wanted to cling to them, but I didn't want to distract them. So I went about keeping myself busy. I made the sign for the slapboard that actors traditionally hit on the way to the stage. I made place cards for my reserved seats and spend an inordinate amount of time deciding who would sit where. Finally, when there was really nothing left to do, I kissed the actors "break a leg", went up and wished Richard luck, and settled myself in the third row to wait.

This was absolutely agonizing—if I ever direct again, I will not sit with people I know at opening night or maybe ever. Actually, I won't sit with audience members at all—I found it to be both nerve-wracking and distracting. To top it off, the reporter from *The Heights*, BC's newspaper that I am not a huge fan of, was sitting directly across the aisle from me. I was both relieved and terrified to see that they sent Emily Berg, who is a reviewer who actually knows some things about the Entertainment section she edits, unlike many members of the staff who review the plays at BC. I was glad to know that our show was getting attention, but her lack of incompetence made me more nervous to read the review.

As the lights went down, I nearly had a heart attack. The show was going—right there in front of me—and I absolutely could not jump up and yell “Stop!” even if I wanted to. This was terrifying.

The show on Thursday was different, a little strange. The humor in the first act that we had worked so hard to pinpoint and highlight wasn’t there as much as it had been the night before. Part of this was because the audience seemed dead. It was an audience full of “non-theater people,” members of the BC community who came to see the show because they knew someone in it or affiliated with it, or because they had to for class. I got the impression that they were not regular theater-goers, nor were they ready for such an intimate environment. Part of what tipped me off to this was the fact that my roommate overheard the guys sitting behind her say, “Yo, when Zack comes out, let’s scream for him.” Definitely people more accustomed to the sporting world.

I didn’t know what to make of the show, really. Chris was rushing in a way he had never done before. I knew he was nervous before the show, but I had no idea that it would actually come across in his acting, and it did. Walker was a little crazier but also a little dead inside, like he was afraid to let it all out. Zack’s performance seemed rather insincere to me. Every line had me questioning why I hadn’t pushed him more, to a deeper emotional place. Sarah seemed stable and solid to me; consistent and supportive, just as Nan should be. This was up for debate amongst several people, but more on that later.

When the lights came up for intermission, it seemed that every face in the room was turned to me. Of course, this was not the case—it was really just my friends and some teachers, and most of them were smiling and complimentary, but all I wanted to do

was dash back to the green room and hide with the people who really understood the show. It wasn't that I thought the show wasn't going well; I guess it just wasn't the same show I had seen for the past couple of nights. Plus, I found that the attention I had craved earlier wasn't what I wanted at all! I longed for anonymity, to distance myself from the production. I didn't know if I could handle any comments on the show, be they good or bad. I began to realize that the show was just too much a part of me, something that I wasn't ready to have evaluated. But time was up, and I was going to have to face what the whole world thought. I tried to behave gracefully even as I was sweating through my brand-new directorial outfit. When I got back to the green room, I just didn't know what to tell them. I wasn't disappointed in the least, but I was afraid that disappointment was what was coming through to them. I was just emotionally confused—this whole process seemed to be coming to an anti-climax in that dead, humid house. I tried to boost their energy and my own, and before I knew it, intermission was over.

I just love the beginning of the second act, where Theo and Lina enter through the audience, fighting. It's so high-energy and fun and different from the first act. My roommate said that her thought on their entrance was, "This is bold!" That was just what I wanted to hear. It was partially due to Meghan's choice of a bright pink suit for Lina, partly due to Sarah and Zack's energy (I have a feeling they played the "fuck you" game backstage) and the fact that Chris looked like a great nerdy Ned onstage and the fact that the music worked. My spirits rose at the beginning of the act. However, all of my energy turned to fidgeting over the course of the act. I wanted them to hurry up! This would continue to be the case throughout the run of the show—I just wanted so badly for the "good parts" to come, because I knew the audience would enjoy the love story. I

wish that I had conveyed that impulse more clearly to the actors—this could have kept the show from dragging in the way that it did.

I was satisfied with the run of the second act, but, again, a feeling of anticlimax came when the audience didn't know whether or not to clap at the end of the show—they didn't know it was THE END. Part of the problem was that they hadn't been clapping in between the scenes throughout the show. I'm still not sure if it was because they hated it, or they were just unsure of theater etiquette. Then again, one interesting thing about this particular play, something that may be noted as a flaw, is that the endings of all of the scenes are slightly awkward; by no means are they definitive. In either case, the applause was not as bountiful as I would have liked, but I wasn't devastated. I was proud of my actors, my crew and of myself for getting through this stressful evening of confusing tension.

Friday Night: A Crowd to Impress

All day on Friday, I hoped that I wouldn't be as emotionally...weird...as I had been on Thursday. I was beginning to think that I could handle the pressure, but not the release of it. I'm such a control freak that I think I would have rather stayed in stressful rehearsals forever rather than enjoy the fruit of my labor.

Well, with the arrival of my mother and aunt on Friday, it became apparent that maybe I couldn't handle the pressure, either. As soon as my mom got to Boston, she started asking me questions non-stop, about our plans, directions around town, everything. I had been looking forward to her visit so much, but she was driving me crazy! I realized that all I wanted was to be cared for, to stop being the director in one aspect of my life, but she expected me to take charge as usual. I love control and

responsibility, but often a long week of being in charge, I just wanted to relinquish that role, if only for a few hours. I became incredibly emotionally high-strung and sensitive. Like I had felt at intermission of the show the previous night, I just wanted to be with my cast (and Richard). I felt like people outside the production couldn't really understand anything—I felt myself being consumed by the play and I wanted to give in. I think part of this was also nerves about my professors and theater peers coming on that night. I longed for the show that we had had on Wednesday night, and hoped everyone's nerves were settled to avoid the strangeness that was Thursday.

As it turns out, the show *was* better on Friday. The audience was much more expressive, but the theater was also much more humid, which made the show seem even longer. At the end of the show, I was satisfied, but not completely fulfilled. I just couldn't handle dealing with the public opinion of the play, and I was afraid that what other people thought was going to matter to me more than how I thought the play had turned out. It made me question: Which is more important? Theater is a form of entertainment, meant to be seen. But, inevitably, not every person that sees the same piece of theater will enjoy it, or even see it in the same way. I don't ever want to be a director that goes for cheap laughs or sappy sentimentalism, but sometimes that is what sells. The script for *Three Days* is so complex; sometimes I think the best thing I can do is leave the audience thoughtful, rather than leaping out of their seats with applause. Yet, even these comforting (and perhaps delusional) thoughts didn't keep me from wanting to enjoy my own work more.

We're Experiencing Technical Difficulties

The solution to my problem would come to me without any effort on my part, simply as an incident of circumstance on Saturday night, the last night of the show. I remembered that I had forgotten to videotape the show. I borrowed a video camera and frantically set it up in the last row of the center section. (We hadn't sold out a night yet, and this would be no exception.) This being settled, I went back to the Green Room for the emotional ordeal of cast gifts. I didn't know exactly how I was going to react emotionally, since all of my feelings had seemed so strange up to this point. It wasn't as bad as I was expecting. The actors had gotten me a journal, which was very relevant to the play but also ironic because I had bought each of them a journal as well. I used the very journal that they gave me to record my thoughts and feelings upon reflection after the show. The gift was sweet, and the things Chris said were sweeter, so of course I cried. After the fits, I gathered my cast around me to focus together one last time. I found myself at a loss for words. Everything coming out of my mouth seemed trite and insincere compared to what I was feeling at the end of this amazing experience. The only semi-decent thing I could come up with was to remind them to enjoy spending time with the characters they created; by the end of the first act they would already have to say goodbye to one of them, each.

As I settled into my seat in the last row, it felt surreal. I realized that this was the very last time that this piece of theater would exist. I was a little upset that I was sitting so far away from it, that I would be watching it through the lens of a camera, but there was nothing to be done about that. So, I slipped off my high heels, made myself comfortable and enjoyed finally being "alone" with the show. As the first act got rolling,

I realized several things. First off, I should never ever man a video camera again—I'm awful at it! After I figured that out and decided to just let the camera catch what it could on it's own, I sat back and watched the audience watching the play. And they were enjoying it! They were leaning in, exclaiming and laughing—it was a wonderful feeling. I even found myself enjoying the play without panicking. I was watching the play as if I were seeing it for—well, not the first time, but not the twentieth time either! The show was full of life on Saturday night, despite (or maybe because of) some glaring errors. Here is a short list of the “technical difficulties” my actors dealt beautifully with: A car alarm went off not once but twice during the show; a sound cue went on in the middle of a scene; Chris spilled water all over the floor as Walker; Zack dropped about a page and a half of lines; Chris lost his Ned glasses and had to wear these absurd eighties things; the cigarettes that Ned and Lina have to smoke fell into the lining of his coat; and the speakers went on the fritz so that the sound was moving and varying in volume. Even with all of this, I was grinning from ear to ear by the end of the show. They had never done better, and I finally felt ready to celebrate!

PART SIX: The lull after the storm

So, what'd you think?

Immediately after the show, my first concern was to see what other people thought about it. I hoped desperately that they thought *something* about it! The first question from the typical audience member was, “How did they get wet in between the scenes like that?” Of course, this isn't the most thought-provoking point of the play, but it did make me laugh that this was cause for so much curiosity. (The answer? Zack and Sarah got into the showers in the dressing rooms with their clothes on, while Chris was doused with water from a watering can backstage.)

After the initial stream of questions such as that one, the audience members that were near and dear to me kept coming back with more questions and speculations about the characters. One friend, a person who had even read the script prior to seeing the show, even woke me up with a phone call about his thoughts on the show. It meant a lot to me that questions continued to be raised about small plot points; I had worried so much that the audience members would miss the subtle connections between the characters in the first act and the characters in the second act after seeing the show only one time. I realized after speaking with some audience members that not only did they understand the connections without catching all of the in-jokes, but that they were truly interested in learning more. Everyone I talked to, from my twelve-year old babysitting charge to my seventy-year old former professor, cared about all of the characters and their world, and that was a true measure of success to me.

The review in *The Heights*, as well as a post-show meeting with Dr. Hecht, gave me some more ways to touch base with the public reaction to the play. The review was

fair and honest, and more well-written than some others that the publication has turned out. I appreciated the praise for the actors, which is something that was unquestionably deserved. Sarah was the actor that the points of view varied on most greatly. The review stated that she was the weakest of the three, but came alive in the second act. Dr. Hecht was in general agreement with that. However, one audience member came up to me and told me that Sarah was absolutely radiant, that she couldn't keep her eyes off of her. I tend to praise Sarah before I can criticize her. The role of Nan may have been the most difficult and subtle of all of the parts in the show, even if it was not the most demanding as far as line memorization went. Nan was onstage for the entire first act, and had to be someone that was a neutral force, not necessarily someone who blew the audience away. I do agree with Dr. Hecht's opinion that Sarah was not enough a "typical" mother; she just couldn't help but add bits of her own personality to the character. I felt that those bits made Nan more interesting, and richer, and kept her from becoming a stereotype, but I do see that some of the vital identifying factors of Nan's suburban motherhood got lost in the shuffle.

The review stated that the staging seemed at times unmotivated, a criticism that I could also agree with. However, with a play with so many words, I simply could not have the actors standing around the whole time. The play was much less stagnant than it had been before we fine-tuned the blocking, and I think that it gave it more life. However, perhaps there was still not enough energy. Where *The Heights*, Dr. Hecht and I all agree is on the pacing of the show. There is no way to evaluate the show without noting that it did drag. I wished that I could have shortened it by a half hour or so, but by

the end, it was what it was, a play that the review called, “a valuable piece of theater.”

That should be good enough for me.

But more importantly, what did *I* think?

Was the “value” of this show good enough for me? Nothing is perfect, but unfortunately I’ve never given up hope on a perfect experience. Directly following the run, I think I felt some regret that the show was not more perfect. However, in the weeks following the production, I’ve realized that I’ve learned so much more from the imperfections; or from recognizing the imperfections—because it’s obvious that, even if I had thought the show was perfect, inevitably someone would have disagreed. Thinking back, I can see a lot of things that I wish had gone differently. However, it’s useless to dwell on things like missing platforms and busted speakers. It’s far more productive for me to reflect on things that I had control over; things that *I* as a director could have done differently.

Such as?

I wish I had asked for more acting space in the set design. I wish I had gone for illumination over mood with the lighting. I wish I had pushed my actors to pick up the pace a little more. These were three of the big ones, and they all come down to the same thing—I have recognized that I am not as assertive as I should be in this authority role, and this lack of asserting myself generally stems from a fear of infringing upon other people’s artistic license. I have always had a problem with expecting a lot from people, but not being clear enough in communicating those expectations, resulting in me being disappointed with what people end up giving me. After meeting with Dr. Hecht, I discovered that, while it is good that I am considerate, it became a problem because I let

everyone, including myself, focus too much on the process, and didn't interfere when it was time for the product to come into place. Dr. Hecht and I discussed this with regard to picking up the pace of the production, and his advice regarding fixing a problem like this was perhaps the most valuable information he has given me throughout this process. I generally tend to concentrate too much on the fact that this project was a process, and not enough on the fact that there was a product to be made at the end. Even in my reflecting, I have concentrated more on the lessons I learned and experience I gained from working on the show as I went along, rather than focusing on the end result. I'm torn with my feelings about this. On one hand, this is part of my thesis, which is supposed to be the application of something I have learned about that I have a special interest in. The nature of a thesis tends to be very process-heavy. On the other hand, had I forced myself to be more product-minded, I wouldn't have been so afraid about stepping on toes in order to get the best show possible. This is something I will certainly remember for the future; I should not let anything keep me from the end of the road, even the artistic freedom of the people I am working with. I wish I had asked someone just how much right I had to question the designers and change the actors' approaches. I think that, had I asked, anyone would have told me that I could do whatever I wanted—after all, when all's said and done, it's my show. I guess my ego is still not quite large enough to handle that!

Even considering my wavering ego, there are some things I would like to pat myself on the back about. I felt that the casting was strong, especially due to the limited pool I was presented with. Zack's attitude did get to me at times, but in the end, I know that he wanted to do well, and he delivered. Sarah was the most consistent during the performances (and not as consistent during rehearsals). She could always tell when I was

stressed and would know just how to calm me down without directly addressing the issue. I was the happiest overall with choosing Chris. He loved the play and always thought about the script and his character outside of rehearsal, and he always brought interesting and *good* things to the stage. On a personal note, working with Chris on our last production at BC was supremely fitting. We managed to rekindle a friendship that had been built in the theater three years ago, when working on *Oklahoma!* and this friendship proved to be infinitely valuable to me in all aspects of the production, in addition to my (at the time miniscule) life outside of the play. Chris kept me sane and focused, and I'm not sure if I could have been as good of a director as I was without his help and friendship.

Over the course of this year, a lot of things have gotten narrowed down and become clearer in my mind. Directing the show has helped me to pinpoint the things that I love, and the things that I am good at in theater, as well as those that are my weaker points. Obviously I still have some work to do on delegating authority, but I do love the management end of things because it allows me to have a say in everything, and I've learned that I certainly had opinions about everything. Doing the research and literary analysis for the play have also shown me where the course work that I have always loved and demonstrated an aptitude for can be useful in the creation of theater. This year of *Rain* has opened many different doors for the future, and given me the courage and experience necessary to make a leap into the world of theater.

The beginning...

“ ‘What we want...what we get. Guilt. It’s an arch.’

‘What you want...what you will get. Genius! It’s a flight path, an ascent!’ ”⁷¹

I was drawn to this play because of Greenberg’s clever use of the juxtaposition of two radically different time periods. The 1960s were a time for change, a time when people dragged themselves out of their comfort zones to live life the way they wanted to, rather than the way they were told to live. By the time we see Ned and Lina make those first fatal steps into error, we don’t even mind much that they may be making a mistake. Isn’t it more of a mistake for them to stand still, to keep themselves from following their hearts and their ambitions? It’s an inspirational ending, but also an uncomfortable one. Time is something that is out of their control, and the audience knows that it will catch up with them and their dreams eventually, but at least they have this moment.

In addressing the issue of time in four different plays, this thesis truly deals with the central issue of not only the theater, but also of life. I wondered why so many of these American plays, written at the end of a millennium played around with the concept of time. In some respects, it gave the writer the ability to play God like never before. Doing a play with the end at the beginning is interesting, but it’s also safe; the playwright and his audience knows how the play will end. Beginnings such as Ned’s and Lina’s are interesting, but endings are frightening. In an ending, man is pitted against time, for only time can tell what will happen to him.

The same is true in the theater. The theater is dependent on time; a play never comes together without a schedule, a division of time that must be adhered to. Throughout the production of *Three Days of Rain*, I often felt like I was in a battle with time. In creating the series of reflections that made up the final section of this thesis, I

⁷¹ *Three Days of Rain*, Act 2

smiled to myself when recalling all of the nights when I wanted time to slow down or speed up or just leave us alone for once!

Time was always an issue, both from the inside of the play, and outside of it as well. Walker describes a sound that he hears as “The Story of a Moment.” That’s truly what theater is, the story of several moments strung together. It captures the most tender moments of beauty, pain, and love in the life of humans. It gives us “life with the boring bits cut out.” However, like life, it is subject to the wrath of time, as well. Once a piece of theater is performed, it will never live in exactly the same form again, because it is dependent on humans, who cannot escape the clock or the calendar. As humans, we can put something down on a page or record it in photographs, but things that are real; living, breathing pieces of theater such as the one we created, can only live on in our memories as something dear to us that has passed on.

In a lecture on contemporary American plays, Professor Scott T. Cummings discussed the recent (in the past forty or so years) trend towards writing plays with inevitable endings. American playwrights, it seems, have lost their sense of “event” in recent years. The suspense is gone as the playwright beats Time to the punchline by using conventions similar to the ones that Greenberg, Kushner, Leight and Margulies used in their plays. The chronology of the play is confused, but the end is always looming, regardless of at which point it comes in the play. My class discussed the apocalyptic feeling of American plays in recent years, which is apparent most obviously out of the plays addressed here in *Angels in America*, but is also the case in *Three Days*. We discussed the connection between the end of America and the end of the world, how these two ideas haven’t truly been separated in the drama of recent years. Fear that time

is running out on America's golden years coincides with the fear that time is running out altogether.

The idea initially seems preposterous and ethnocentric, but the sentiment makes more and more sense as the days in this semester tick away. Time weighs more in April of senior year of college, and each day seems to fly away more easily than the last. It begins to seem all too possible that the end of an era could be the end of life as we know it, and the future has become a blurry and frightening realm of the unknown.

In these moments of fear, it is best to return to the beginning, to the final picture of Ned and Lina sitting at a drafting table, with the future spread before them, as blank as the paper that Ned has made those first tentative marks on. This project was once a page so blank, and while the end result may not have been the soaring "ascent" that Lina predicted for Ned, it has by no means been the catastrophe that Ned fears. *Three Days of Rain* was my last contribution to the public forum of Boston College as a student here, but it will not be my last contribution to the world of theater. Things may be "so much better before they begin," but time pushes past those beginnings and into the future, "error" and all.

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