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Learning to Fly on the Way Down: Directing and Teaching Gina Gionfriddo's Rapture, Blister, Burn

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Learning to Fly on the Way Down: Directing and Teaching Gina Gionfriddo's *Rapture, Blister, Burn*

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Abstract

Rapture, Blister, Burn is a play best described as if an episode of ABC's *Wife Swap* (in which two families with different lifestyles swap wives/mothers for two weeks) featured debates on feminist theory in the middle of an episode. Gina Gionfriddo's Pulitzer Prize nominee follows two old friends who took wildly different paths—one a successful academic, the other a stay-at-home mom—but find themselves equally unfulfilled. Armed with the thoughts of Betty Friedan, Phyllis Schlafly, and Dr. Phil, the two switch lives in a game-changing experiment with high stakes for both their families. This thesis discusses and critically evaluates my process of directing this play, including my background research and preparation, my journals of the rehearsal process, and finally an analysis of the performances. I will examine how techniques of experienced directors such as Katie Mitchell, Anne Bogart, and Michael Bloom, as well as field-wide conversations on antiracist theater and intimacy choreography, influenced my directing approach, and how that approach changed in response to working with actors. I will then use my understanding of the play and its performance as a jumping off point for theater in education. I will use these as guides to create curricular materials inspired by the play for use in high school classrooms.

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Introduction

Theater is an art form that allows the audience and performers to examine their own lives through the events that transpire onstage. In Gina Gionfriddo's *Rapture, Blister, Burn*, anxieties about death, being alone, and love are brought to life alongside decades worth of feminist theory, drawing a bridge between the two that might not be apparent without the structure of a play to support it. Through dramaturgical research, reflection on production, and lesson plans, this thesis will examine *Rapture, Blister, Burn* and its ability to teach about life and theater.

Work on this thesis began in May of 2021. Across the summer and first half of the fall semester, I completed research on the play, the playwright, and the academic theorists it mentions (most notably Betty Friedan and Phyllis Schlafly). Using techniques from directors such as Michael Bloom and Katie Mitchell, I began script and character analysis to prepare me for auditions and rehearsals, which began on October 18, 2021. Rehearsals continued through the end of the fall semester, across the winter break, and into the beginning of the winter semester. The performance ran in Gannett Theater February 3-7, 2022. After the show closed, I worked on transcribing my process and researching arts education in the United States.

This thesis is divided into three parts: dramaturgy and related research, process and performance, and theater and education. The first section includes all research and analysis conducted throughout the summer and first semester. The second describes my directorial process week by week, including samples of journals I wrote throughout the process. The final third gives a brief overview of arts education in the United States before diving into two lesson plans built around *Rapture, Blister, Burn* to understand how theater can be used for educational benefit.

I: Dramaturgy and Related Research

I.1: Play Structure and Influences

I.1.i. Scene Breakdown

Rapture, Blister, Burn is set in the modern day over the course of a summer. It is a two-act play made up of ten scenes. While they are not given formal names in the script, for my purposes, I named each scene to help tease out its most essential parts.

The format of the two acts differs greatly. In Act One, there are only three scenes. In the first, "Women Always Call Free" (I.1), Catherine, a successful gender and sexuality studies professor living in New York City, has returned to the New England college town where her mother Alice resides. Alice recently suffered a heart attack, and since "both her sisters had heart attacks and died within the year… [Catherine feels] like a clock just started ticking" (Gionfriddo, *Rapture* 10).

Also living in the town are Don and Gwen, Catherine's friends from graduate school whom she has not seen in almost fourteen years. Gwen was Catherine's roommate and Don was Catherine's boyfriend, but the two are now married to each other with two children. Don is a dean at the local college. Catherine drunk-dialed Gwen outside a bar in New York asking for a job at the school so that she could come home and take care of her mother, and Don managed to get her a position.

The reunion is awkward and compounded by the fact that Catherine doesn't remember what she said in the phone call. Don and Gwen argue about what to do with their younger son after their babysitter Avery arrives with a black eye. Gwen eventually decides to send her home, but not without sending Avery out to meet Catherine.

In the next scene, “Ya-Ya Sisterhood” (I.2), Catherine holds the first class of her summer session course, “The Fall of American Civilization.” To her surprise, her two students are Gwen and Avery. The sixteen-page scene is the show’s longest as Catherine, Gwen, Avery, and later Alice discuss Betty Friedan, Phyllis Schlafly, pornography, navigating equality in relationships, and the disastrous marriage of Gwen and Don.

In the act’s closing scene, “Tick” (I.3), Don comes over to “defend [himself]” from Gwen’s claims (Gionfriddo, *Rapture* 34). He and Catherine rehash the end of their relationship and he finally tells her what she said to Gwen on the phone, which was that she had a bad one-night stand. Catherine asks him “if [she] had come back from London when [he] asked, would [they] be married now?” (39). He says no, but that he would do their relationship right if they got together now. He kisses her and, while she initially feebly protests, she gives in, and the act ends.

Act Two is a faster, more furious act with seven scenes. It picks up back at Alice’s house for another class in “Stolen TVs” (II.1). Gwen interrupts Catherine’s lecture on horror movies to berate her for starting up an affair with Don, though Avery and Alice both support Catherine in the ensuing mess.

“The High Dive” (II.2) picks up later that day, with Gwen dragging Don over to Alice’s. Don attempts to end things with Gwen in order to pursue Catherine. Gwen reveals a part of the drunken phone call that Don didn’t know about and Catherine doesn’t remember: the women talked about switching lives. Catherine offers up her empty NYC apartment to Gwen and her elder son Julian while she will move in with Don and their younger son Devon. Gwen is reluctant, but Don pushes her to do it.

In “Love-Drunk” (II.3), Avery learns about this plan when she goes over to Alice’s for class. Gwen and Julian have left for New York and Don is working on moving in with Devon.

Avery lectures Catherine on her mistakes, but Catherine doesn't buy into Avery's "grim philosophy" on love (Gionfriddo, *Rapture* 50). Avery confides to Catherine that Lucas, the boy she's "hooking up exclusively" with and who is in California for the summer, seems to have moved on from her with a Mormon co-worker (19).

We then jump ahead a month to "The Olympics" (II.4). Gwen's miserable in New York and Catherine and Don are discovering that things aren't quite going how they hoped, either. Catherine pushes Don to come with her to a conference in January and to write a book, but he pulls away and leaves to go to his house. Avery reveals that she's won Lucas back by following the advice of Schlafly. Alice encourages Catherine to follow Avery's advice so she can keep Don.

In "Big Slide Kinda People" (II.5), Gwen and Don reunite and decide to give their marriage another shot. Avery finds them and tells Don that he must tell Catherine once she arrives at the house. He does so in "Everything You Said You Wanted" (II.6), fighting back against Catherine's Schlafly-inspired positivity. Catherine doesn't understand, but eventually accepts his decision and leaves.

She goes home to her mother and Avery in "The Final Girl" (II.7). She makes plans to move to New York with Avery. She reassures Catherine that "that guy who comes in and saves the girl in the end [of a horror movie]? He might not be coming. But the girl is still gonna be okay" (Gionfriddo, *Rapture* 67). The three women toast to Schlafly and their new lives in "a silence in which excitement gives way to fear, but not enough to break their resolve" (68).

I.1.ii: External Analysis

Michael Bloom encourages directors to do both an *internal* and *external* analysis of the play. Directors and actors will both analyze the action (internal analysis), paying attention to the play's given circumstances— "all the background and present conditions of a character's world"—as well as the characters' objectives and obstacles (Bloom 36). These objectives help analyze beats, or the changes of action (35). Much of working with actors is about helping them identify, understand, and live in the given circumstances while pursuing their objective(s). Understanding beats helps give actors variety in the ways, called *tactics,* to do this.

Directors alone tend to do the structural (external) analysis (Appendix A). For each scene, there are six components essential for directors to be able to identify: central conflict, function, event, architecture, language, and challenges. It is helpful for the play overall to also examine archetypes and narrative structure. Each of these allows the director to understand each scene both on its own and as a piece of the larger action. This can help guide the internal analysis, as what appears to be a throw away comment in one scene might become essential in a much later one.

Central conflict of a scene is directly linked to the characters' objectives, and in particular their superobjectives. A superobjective is the character's overarching desire that spans the whole play (Bloom 46). In every scene, this superobjective can be broken down into smaller chunks, or objectives, because in every scene, each character is doing something (or somethings) that brings them closer to their superobjective. Conflict arises when objectives meet obstacles, which can include other characters with their own agendas.

Function and event are two different, though somewhat related, pieces of information. Function refers to the scene's role in the overall narrative (Bloom 47). Event, meanwhile,

describes the actual mechanics of what is happening in the scene (49). For example, the function of I.2 is to introduce the central theoretical and philosophical maxims underpinning the play, while also setting up Don and Catherine's affair. The event, however, can be best summed up as "The Eye-Opening Class."

Events are always a noun rather than a verb, but how detailed (or undetailed) that noun is varies. Bloom defines the event of a scene from *The Glass* Menagerie by Tennessee Williams as "realizing the need to secure Laura's future" (49). Actor and director Hugh O'Gorman, on the other hand, is more concise, offering examples such as "a class, a match, a ceremony, a show, a seduction, a confession, a fight, a discovery, and so on" (74). I found it helpful to use a simple noun like O'Gorman, but to add an adjective in front of it. For example, I.2 would be "The Eye-Opening Class."

Architecture refers to the basic tentpoles of plot structure: "rising action, complications, a turning point, a climax, and falling action" (Bloom 51). Beats typically follow the plot structure, with the various plot points corresponding to changes in beats (though beats are often shorter than say all the rising action).

Language is more important when working with older texts, such as Shakespeare, when the language and its structure may not be familiar to actors; this might be referred to as "heightened language" (Bloom 58-59). Typically, this type of writing is reliant on imagery and the connotative qualities of language. While *Rapture, Blister, Burn* is not written in this style, it substitutes poetry for academic language. Academic language is defined as the "formal English rules, structure, and content for academic dialogue and text, and the communicative conventions that allow students to meet the demands of school environments" (Friedberg, Mitchell, and

Brook 2). As this is not typically a form of language used in drama, it requires the actors to become intimately comfortable using weighty jargon in their character's everyday dialogue.

Challenges can include weak scenes, characters necessary but difficult to sympathize with, stage combat, and more. The language and academic theory are a consistent challenge across *Rapture, Blister, Burn*. Five of the scenes involved scripted theatrical intimacy. Apart from I.2 to I.3, II.5 to II.6, and II.6 to II.7, every transition involves a time jump of at least a week, with the transition of II.3 to II.4 lasting a month.

Archetypes are patterns and symbols that appear across history and cultures. In comedy in particular, characters are often built around archetypes that are instantly recognizable. Gunnar Todd Rohrbacher, a Hollywood acting coach, says there are ten comedy archetypes, but we will focus on the ones seen in the characters of *Rapture, Blister, Burn*:

Catherine, as the protagonist, is "The Anchor." Rohrbacher describes this archetype as "intelligent and grounded" but also "codependent." Catherine's need to rekindle her relationship with Don comes from the fact she no longer feels grounded with her mother's looming death. Her uneven footing thus creates conflicts.

Gwen is "The Dreamer." These types of characters think they are "capable and ambitious individuals who are victimized by unfortunate life circumstances," but in reality, they have a "Peter Pan complex." Gwen's struggle is less an inability to grow up as it is an inability to let go of an outdated dream.

Don is "The Neurotic…defined by insecurity, filtered through intelligence." In an interesting subversion, Don's intelligence is filtered through insecurity. Instead of showing off his mind through teaching or publishing books, he is content to remain a dean because it does not put him into competition with others who are more successful than him.

Avery is a healthy mix of "The Rebel" and "The Cynic." Like "The Rebel," her "disdain for life's rules drives [her] to danger and deceit," as demonstrated by the events leading up to her black eye. But like "The Cynic," she thinks she is "cautious and smart enough to know the other shoe is always about to drop." Her philosophy on love follows this maxim to a T, and her use of Schlafly to keep Lucas shows the lengths she will go to prevent that shoe from dropping.

Finally, Alice is "The Innocent…sweet and loveable." Alice's character is an audience surrogate, or someone who can ask the questions the audience has about the play's world. She is also the emotional heart of the play.

Understanding how archetypes are used in the script can help tease out both themes and, more importantly, conflict. Don and Gwen's archetypes are almost immediately at odds with each other since The Dreamer is usually a more optimistic character while The Neurotic is more pessimistic. But at the same time, they are opposite sides of the same coin, making them perfect for each other. This clues into how directors and actors can approach Don and Gwen's relationship. In this way, archetypes lend themselves to helping uncover the play's narrative structure.

I.1.iii: The Playwright

Gionfriddo is a two-time Pulitzer Prize finalist whose work has appeared Off-Broadway and on television. As discussed in her interview with Tim Sanford, she began her theatrical journey in high school as an actor. While attending Barnard College, she interned with Primary

Stages, an Off-Broadway theater dedicated to the development of new work. She transitioned to writing during her time with Primary Stages.

After several years serving as the company's General Manager, Gionfriddo left to pursue playwriting full-time (Sanford and Gionfriddo). She studied under Pulitzer Prize winner Paula Vogel at Brown University's MFA program. Gionfriddo's thesis play, *U.S. Drag*, won the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize in 2002 ("Finalists"). She was then commissioned by the Humana Festival of New American Plays (sponsored by the Actors Theatre of Louisville) to write *Becky Shaw*, which became a finalist for the 2009 Pulitzer Prize for Drama (Sanford and Gionfriddo).

Originally, Gionfriddo set out to write a play about pornography (Gionfriddo, "Gina"). She was particularly fascinated with how access to it had evolved since she was a kid in the early 1980s. This helped lead her down a path to writing less about pornography and more about "generational game changers" ("Gina"). In writing this play, she turned to other plays about academics and generations, such as *Three Tall Women* and *The Heidi Chronicles*. She also took full advantage of the seminar-format to introduce various theories on gender, sexuality, media, and feminism.

I.1.iv: Genre Conventions and Influential Plays

Drama is broken into two genres: tragedy and comedy. In tragedy, characters usually begin with a high stature and the play follows their fall from grace, which for many ends in a form of death. In comedy, the characters are typically much lower stature, contorted in some way to be ugly in either appearance or personality. These characters usually begin at a low point and the action follows them as they achieve harmony with one another and happiness with their lives (Smiley 46). While *Rapture, Blister, Burn* is by no means a farce or slapstick, I think it is still

best classified as a comedy. It has all the hallmarks that Smiley notes a comedy should have: a move from entanglement to harmony, a ridiculous situation (in this case, the wife swap), a "mood of laughter," a "style [that] expresses wit," and an intellectual outlook on life (46). Sure, the last three scenes are sobering and there is a bit of pity and fear for Don and Gwen—even though those are hallmarks of tragedy—but II.7 is a hopeful scene. The characters are sad, but not defeated.

The particulars of tragedy and comedy are discussed in Aristotle's *The Poetics,* one of the most significant pieces of theater criticism ever written. Much of what Aristotle wrote on comedy was lost; however, what he has to say on tragedy has been a guide for most dramatic writers since its rediscovery during the Middle Ages (Habib 86). Through an empirical study of Greek dramatic literature, Aristotle concluded that there are six elements of tragedy that rank in importance: plot chiefly, followed by character, diction, thought, spectacle, and song.

With *Rapture, Blister, Burn,* Gionfriddo constructed a play intrinsically connected to the element of thought. Aristotle defines thought as "the faculty of saying what is possible and pertinent in given circumstances…. [it] is found where is proved to be, or not to be, or a general maxim is enunciated." The play's general maxim concerns what happens *after* you get what you think you want, framed by generations-old debates about feminism.

This emphasis on thought is a cornerstone of Gionfriddo's style. Longtime collaborator Peter DuBois, whom Gionfriddo met at Brown and who directed productions of her plays *U.S. Drag, Becky Shaw,* and *Rapture, Blister, Burn*, describes her as "one of the few writers who can write the way [Tom] Stoppard writes, that can introduce plays of ideas in such a way that makes you incredibly happy to be in that theater and engage in those ideas" (00:18-00:35). Charles

Isherwood, in his *New York Times* review of *Rapture, Blister, Burn*, concurs: "what's exciting about [Gionfriddo's] writing here is the multiplicity of the ideas it engages."

As a style, it can be traced back to her Brown education and, most significantly, the influence of former professor Paula Vogel on her work. Vogel advises aspiring playwrights to stretch their skills by writing the same play but emphasizing one of the different elements introduced in *The Poetics* (Vogel, "2021"). This allows them to become accustomed to the different roles each one plays in constructing a drama, regardless of its genre.

Vogel's influence is also apparent in the connections between Vogel's play *Hot 'N' Throbbing* and *Rapture, Blister, Burn. Hot 'N' Throbbing* is also about pornography, but in a much darker sense. The play's protagonist, Charlene, is a writer of erotic films aimed at women. When her children were younger, she worked at a hospital. After going back to school, she was connected by a professor to writing pornographic movies and she now works as a Story Editor for Gyno Productions. Her estranged husband Clyde, after a night in which he did not have enough money for a prostitute and could not reach orgasm watching porn, comes back to her house in an attempt to hook up with her. Out of pity, Charlene offers to have sex with him. After she makes a blithe comment about having condoms, Clyde becomes jealous and obsessive. He strangles Charlene with his belt and then shoots himself in the head.

The play does not shy away from gore or sexual content: Charlene and Clyde's son, Calvin, experiments with masturbating onstage, and his sister Leslie Ann talks to her friend about her sexual fantasies, which include being injured in some way by her partner. Charlene's death is purposefully staged reminiscent of a porn movie gone wrong. It is a play about the dark sides of pornography. Specifically, it is about the effect pornography has on our understandings

of consent and sexuality, and how easy access to it can lead to obsession and intimate partner violence.

Gionfriddo does not cite *Hot 'N' Throbbing* as inspiration for *Rapture, Blister, Burn,* but the two plays do share some similar threads. While *Hot 'N' Throbbing*'s chief Aristotelian concern is certainly spectacle, it still is a play that manages to connect abstract ideas, viewpoints, and thoughts grounded in real characters. It makes crystal clear the type of learning environment her plays were first shaped in.

Gionfriddo has admitted to taking inspiration from both *The Heidi Chronicles* by Wendy Wasserstein and *Three Tall Women* by Edward Albee ("Gina"). *The Heidi Chronicles* follows Heidi Holland, an art history professor at Columbia, from her high school days in the late 1960s to 1989, when the play premiered. All the main characters of *The Heidi Chronicles* are baby boomers. Rather than focusing on intergenerational conflict like *Rapture, Blister, Burn* does, *The Heidi Chronicles* examines some of the major events in the lives of baby boomers, including the emerging feminist movement, the assassination of John Lennon, the election of Ronald Reagan, and the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Heidi watches the world move around her and continuously struggles, particularly in Act II, to place herself in it. Meanwhile, she has a complicated relationship with playboy and magazine editor Scoop Rosenbaum, who marries another woman yet kisses Heidi at his wedding.

The parallels between *The Heidi Chronicles* and *Rapture, Blister, Burn* run so deep that many see the latter as the former's spiritual successor. In fact, Wasserstein's former assistant even told Gionfriddo that "she wished [Wasserstein] had been able to see [*Rapture, Blister, Burn*]" prior to her death (Lasman). Gionfriddo is adamant that the similarities were subconscious, as she read a lot of plays about academics before beginning her own and

Wasserstein's Pulitzer Prize winner was not one of them ("Heidi"). But at the same time, Gionfriddo acknowledges that:

> "Both plays depict a female academic just over 40 with a successful career as an author. Both women, Wasserstein's Heidi and my Cathy, regard their personal lives as lacking (neither has a romantic partner or children) and find themselves re-examining the feminist movement to sort out how they could have come so far and still wound up unsatisfied. Both women mourn the loss of a relationship they perceive to be a casualty of their ambitions. (It's not just perception, actually; each play contains a scene in which the man in question confirms our heroine's fears.) And both plays force our fortysomething doubters to confront bold, confident women in their early 20s who believe they have figured out how to have it all by observing the older women's mistakes" ("Heidi").

Gionfriddo also confesses that she does not agree with the ending of *The Heidi Chronicles.* After never expressing the desire for children, Heidi ends the play as a single mother cradling her newly adopted daughter in a freshly painted apartment. It was important to Gionfriddo that Catherine's story does not end that way, with a *deus ex machina* type of fulfillment. So, while Wasserstein ends her play with Heidi rocking her daughter and singing her a lullaby, Gionfriddo has her play end with three generations of women in a living room in "a silence in which excitement gives way to fear, but not enough to break their resolve" (Wasserstein 248; Gionfriddo, *Rapture* 68).

This generational conflict may not appear in the pages of *Hot 'N' Throbbing* and *The Heidi Chronicles* the same way it does in *Rapture, Blister, Burn,* but looking at the three plays in concert with each other, the generational divides between the writers become clear. Wasserstein and Vogel are a year apart in age. Their plays tackle feminist issues from their own generational

perspective (baby boomers). For Vogel, her play argues that pornography is making having sex and sex work too mainstream. Charlene almost has to die, because she is a woman doing this work with little external pressure and enjoying it. At least that's what Clyde's reaction seems to imply. The play also treats Leslie Ann's relationship to sex and sex work—in her case, stripping—as a product of her mother's work writing erotica. With her mother and father dead, Leslie Ann goes on to become a college professor teaching the Literature of Obsession; she is "saved."

Conversations about sex go much differently in *Rapture, Blister, Burn.* Gionfriddo draws on her Generation X perspective of casual sex and millennials' pornography usage. When Catherine confesses to asking a man to choke her during their one-night stand, Don shrugs it off as no big deal. Don's pornography usage is judged not necessarily because he watches porn, but because he watches it instead of attempting to improve his sexual relationship with his wife. This carried over into my own approach to the play. In table work, I discussed the sex lives of all five characters much more than I expected to, because it became so intrinsic to the play and understanding the relationship dynamics.

With *The Heidi Chronicles,* examples of generational differences come back to the ending. Attitudes towards parenting—and motherhood in particular—have shifted greatly since 1989. The total fertility rate in the United States, defined as "the average number of children a woman would have in her lifetime based on the childbearing rates of women in a population in a given year," hit a record low in 2020 ("Why Is the U.S. Birth Rate Declining?"). It happened for a variety of reasons, the pandemic only one of them. Women are delaying or not having children in part due to economic reasons, to lifestyle choices (focusing on school, career, etc.), or they simply don't want them (Brown). Gionfriddo made a conscious decision to present Catherine's

journey not from a motherhood standpoint, but from a romantic, more companionship-centered standpoint. It shows how these standards have changed.

But at the same time, it relies on a dichotomy between career and motherhood that is fading, even for Gionfriddo's Generation X. Gwen describes her economic dependence on Don frankly, but somewhat oddly: "I can't teach with just an undergrad degree. I couldn't support my kids if I had to. Or if I…wanted to" (Gionfriddo, *Rapture* 28). She speaks as if the only option for her is to become a teacher, a career that requires nurturing the same way parenthood does. Other than this one line, she doesn't bring up the idea of a job; it is always about getting her master's, presumably so she could teach, but it is the degree itself that seems to mean more than any paycheck she would get with it. It is never mentioned if Alice has ever worked; she, too, is just presented as a mother. Wasserstein's Heidi shows no sign of giving up her career even with her baby, but Gionfriddo, despite being a working mother herself, can't seem to reconcile the two in her play (Gionfriddo, "Heidi").

Edward Albee may be the eldest of the four playwrights, but all the intergenerational conflict about *Three Tall Women* is firmly textual —just in a different way than Wasserstein's or Gionfriddo's. The eponymous women are not actually separate women, but the same women across three different periods of her life: A, ninety-something; B, 52; and C, 26. The first act is rather ambiguous about this fact, but it takes centerstage in the second. After witnessing the senility of A throughout Act I, C announces haughtily that she will not become like B or A when she grows up. They laugh at her. C is appalled by the life that she is destined to grow into—married to a man she doesn't seem to love, cheating on him, hated and abandoned by her son, selling her jewelry for money, and raving madly from her death bed. But the moral of *Three Tall*

Women isn't about avoiding your fate. It's about living in the now, in all its contradictions. Even if it means a life different than the one you imagined as a naïve twenty-something.

The spirit of *Three Tall Women* lives and breathes in *Rapture, Blister, Burn*'s I.2, as three different generations of women discuss the roles they've found themselves in. Avery pushes back against the three older women at nearly every turn, filled with the confidence of youth. Come II.4, and she's leading the charge of embracing Schlafly and the gender roles she'd angrily condemned just a few scenes earlier. Both plays end with the three generations together, attempting to reconcile their life lessons learned with their wide-eyed idealism, and the uncertainty for the future such a reconciliation necessitates.

There are also clear parallels between A and B with Gwen and Don. Albee's characters have outgrown their marriage and their love for their husband. But they stay because they see no other option. It is worth noting that *Three Tall Women* is the "middle child" of these three other plays, coming just after *The Heidi Chronicles* and just before *Hot 'N' Throbbing*, all written in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Attitudes toward divorce had changed, but as Gionfriddo shows, that does not necessarily mean anything. Some people just need a "flawed, tired marriage to cushion [their] flaws" (Gionfriddo, *Rapture* 64).

I.2: Understanding the World of the Play

I.2.i: Dramaturgy

I made a dramaturgical presentation that I shared with my cast that included a glossary of terms. I assembled this glossary using any references in the show that I thought were worthy of definition, whether it was a film, an academic theorist, or a term I wasn't sure the cast would be familiar with. I shared it with them during the first week of rehearsals. In addition to making the presentation, I dug deeper into the work of Betty Friedan and Phyllis Schlafly to better understand the play's theoretical underpinnings and aid my cast in unpacking the content.

In 1963, housewife/part-time journalist Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique*, heralded by many as the start of second-wave feminism. In the book, Friedan probes into the "problem that has no name" or the emptiness, depression, and fatigue plaguing middle-class housewives across America (15). She says this problem stems from "the feminine mystique," or the image of a woman as a perfect wife and mother and nothing else. In the post-war era, it was an image to which many women were trying to conform.

Friedan walks through the history of feminism and the efforts to thwart it, stretching all the way back to the Seneca Falls Woman's Rights Convention in 1848 (84). She examines how the fields of psychology, sociology, and education—significantly, all social sciences—that worked in tandem to convince men and women everywhere that the housewife role was best for women. For example, cultural anthropology and sociology took up functionalism, "for to limit one's field of inquiry to the function of an institution in a given social system, with no alternatives considered, provides an infinite number of rationalizations for all the inequalities and inequities of that system" (132). Capitalism, too, she found, played a role in this subjugation of

women, whether it was men taking back the jobs women worked during World War II or answering the question "can your product fill the gap [in women's lives]?" (225).

Gwen's extremely close relationship with her eldest Julian, her alcoholism, and her desire to return to school all slot neatly into the pages of *The Feminine Mystique*. Catherine, too, can be found in the book's pages, but in a different way. She did not conform like Gwen and fears the repercussions, the things that people have been saying since the suffragettes that women won't get if they don't conform. Instead, she fits the profile of some women from Vassar whose growth was measured across their four years at college: "education for women does make them less feminine, less adjusted—but it makes them grow" (Friedan 175). It's not an accident that Gwen retreats into her "flawed, tired marriage" and takes Don with her while Catherine is forced to move on without a man at her side (Gionfriddo, *Rapture* 64). In the words of Gionfriddo via Alice, Catherine (and Avery) is "free" of the "men [who] wouldn't stay with [them]" (67). In the words of Friedan, "the moral…was that if [a career woman] kept her commitment to herself, she did not lose the man, *if he was the right man*" (88; emphasis added).

Rapture, Blister, Burn premiered in 2012, forty-nine years after Friedan's game-changing book. She notes in the book how "the fact is that to women born after 1920, feminism was dead history," and we see this attitude with Avery in the play (Friedan 100). Avery, however, approaches it from a slightly different point of view. She doesn't see first wave feminism as a moot point the way that Friedan wrote about it, but rather its lack of controversiality: "It's like discussing why people thought the Earth was flat. It's not, they were wrong, we've moved on" (Gionfriddo, *Rapture* 21). Much of Avery's arc concerns understanding that her "modern" problems are just rehashes of the same conversations that have been happening since Friedan and the second wave—and perhaps even earlier. This is exactly why Gionfriddo chose to incorporate

Friedan into the play, but also why she chose to incorporate characters from three different generations. Yes, the society around them has changed. But at their core, the issues haven't. This is incredibly evident when reading the work of Phyllis Schlafly.

Feminists in the second wave received a lot of pushback, particularly from conservatives. Schlafly was most interested in the defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). This amendment would ban discrimination based on sex. Schlafly distorted this so that it became an attack on housewives that would force them into things like the military (via the draft, perhaps one of her only factual critiques of the amendment), result in them losing custody of their children in the event of divorce, and simply make life worse for them. She distilled her lobbying into the book *The Power of the Positive Woman.*

The book begins by enumerating what that "positive woman" philosophy entails. While it certainly takes down the major tenants of women's liberation, it is much more philosophical in nature. The second half is where she turns her attention to the ERA. In this latter section, you can see how seeds are planted for the rise of the religious right, the standards and accountability movement ("that diplomas should… [not] be based on academic achievement…there are no standards for graduation from public high schools"), and many other conservative talking points that still exist fifty years later (Schlafly 143-147; 149). In the appendices, Schlafly includes a verbatim NOW platform from 1973 with no notes; she merely presents it so that the reader can see the evils being discussed by the women's libbers. Similarly to Schlafly's arguments, the feminists' talking points are also eerily similar to what is debated today.

If Gwen is enshrined in *The Feminine Mystique,* Catherine's fears are enshrined in *The Power of the Positive Woman*. It's almost word for word the Schlafly that gets quoted in the play, from who should be the decision-maker in the relationship to the full quotation that Avery

cites in I.2: "[The single career woman] will come 'home' to a cold, lonely apartment whose silence is broken only by the occasional visits of men who size her up as one with a liberated view of sex, societal restraints, and the institution of marriage, and therefore an easy mark for sexual favors for which they will neither have to pay nor assume responsibility" (Schlafly 63). This type of fearmongering is rampant throughout the book, so it's no wonder where Catherine's mid-life crisis or her heel-face turn in II.6 comes from.

The contributions made by Friedan and Schlafly to the second wave of feminism are grossly important. With *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), Friedan brought already-changing national conversations around women and women's rights—the first birth control pill was approved for contraceptive purposes in 1960, and Kennedy created the President's Commission on the Status of Women in 1961—into the homes of the white, middle-class women who, up until that point, through choice, design, or both, were isolated from them (Gosse 156, 77). In the wake of *The Feminine Mystique,* the floodgates opened on issues surrounding gender equality in a way not seen since the suffrage movement. But Friedan herself cannot be credited with the entire start of second-wave feminism. Similarly, Schlafly's single-minded opposition to the ERA contributed to its eventual failure to be sufficiently ratified prior to the 1982 deadline. It also helped create the religious right as we know it today by mobilizing women—particularly Southern Evangelical women—across the country against this supposed death of marriage (Williams 1).

With this in mind, highlighting these two women in *Rapture, Blister, Burn* is necessary to understand the "sides" of second-wave feminism from an intellectual standpoint. It allows the characters and the audience to understand Friedan and Schlafly on their own and in relation to each other. But it also simplifies these "sides" down to their very barebones. Most importantly, it

focuses almost exclusively on only one sect of second wave feminism. In the 1960s, two sects of feminists emerged: the so-called "liberal" feminists looking to end discrimination (particularly at work and school) and the so-called "radical" feminists who wanted to fully liberate women from patriarchal society (Gosse 155). In fact, "Women's Liberation" was originally only used to refer to the latter group of feminists, though much of the common conception of the women's movement today focuses more on them—including Schlafly's main criticisms (155).

Rapture, Blister, Burn is a play written by a white woman, centering on white people. (While only Don and Gwen's race is mentioned in the script, a quick Google search for images of the show brings up almost exclusively majority white/white-passing casts.) Its content derives from the theories and philosophies of exclusively white intellectuals, many of which were formulated during or in response to this second-wave of feminism, specifically the sect dominated by white middle class women (the "liberal" feminists). With this Bates production, it is directed by a white woman, with a predominantly white cast, at a predominantly white institution. The play's very selection for performance speaks to the belief that it has something to teach both me and my actors, as well as perhaps the wider campus community, about theater and about life. Both lessons are intrinsically linked to the intellectuals spotlighted in the play. What is Gionfriddo doing by focusing on these bones and these alone?

The answer is twofold. I.2 is dense; including any history or philosophy that didn't immediately bolster Gionfriddo's argument would be a distraction. For example, the feminist sex wars were not just feminists "freaking out about pornography," as Avery puts it (Gionfriddo, *Rapture* 23). The antipornography movement started, in part, as a reaction against lesbian feminism and other radical forms of feminism that dominated the late 1970s (Bronstein 39). But *Rapture, Blister, Burn* is a play centered around heteronormative ideas and expectations.

Gionfriddo's spark of inspiration sprung from questions about pornography. Introducing the sex wars as being about anything other than pornography takes away from that argument. It is the same principle in focusing on Schlafly and Friedan.

But this oversimplification is just as detrimental as it is helpful. Building the play around these two ideologies means just that: the characters and the actions of the play must fit into the framework of white, middle-class feminism that Friedan and Schlafly exemplify. Even *if* Gionfriddo wanted to write an intersectional piece—which I am not convinced she did, considering her own positionality and of course the play overall—the framework prevents it. It treats this white feminism as the sole image of the movement. The only exception is Avery's reference to "hippies" when describing some of the gains of second wave feminism which, even then, makes light of the contributions of queer and BIPOC activists and intersectional feminists of the period (Gionfriddo, *Rapture* 23).

I do not believe, however, that this means the play should not be performed. The questions about feminism it engages, even though they are placed within this framework, are relevant, significant questions. The story it tells about romantic relationships—even if only heterosexual ones—matters. At the end of the day, though, it is a story about not settling. A story about how the right person won't make you compromise yourself. That theme is universal and worth teaching.

I.2.ii: Symbols

Alcohol

Alcohol plays a significant role in *Rapture, Blister, Burn*, from Alice's 5 PM cocktail to Gwen's (questionable) alcoholism to Catherine's blackout phone call. Beer is the most cited drink in the play, followed by martinis.

The history of feminism in the United States oddly coexists alongside the history of alcohol, most notably the temperance and prohibition eras of the twentieth century. The temperance movement sought to curb the consumption of alcohol. It gained traction in the US alongside the first wave of feminism. Both relied on predominantly white, middle-class women protesting, holding rallies, and giving speeches. In fact, the 18th Amendment, banning the production and sale of alcohol, was ratified in 1919 and the 19th Amendment, giving women the vote, was ratified the following year ("Constitution of the United States"). Both also happened concurrently with the abolitionist movement, which Friedan argues is not a coincidence: "it is an undeniable fact that, in organizing, petitioning, and speaking out to free the slaves, American women learned how to free themselves" (92).

Such freedom, however, was stamped out as quickly as possible. Temperance was often derided as a movement led by nagging women trying to steal men's fun. However, a major concern amongst the movement's leaders was alcohol-induced domestic violence, usually committed by men against women and children (Heider 95). Temperance thus, like abolition, became a way of liberation, both in terms of what the overall goal could offer women, or by actively participating in the organizing behind the movement.

In the wake of the 18th Amendment came the prohibition era, where speakeasies, jazz, and flappers ruled the day. Flappers chopped their hair, they smoked and drank, they raised their hemlines. They were the first women with the vote. Some of them grew up with mothers actively lobbying and fighting for temperance, suffrage, abolition, or all three, setting the example that women could have a life outside the home. Flappers became the image of the modern, liberated woman.

While the play does question its validity, Gwen's alcoholism also has some historical context. Friedan claimed that there were "approximately a million known alcoholic housewives in America" in 1963 (250). Women filled their days with housework, much of which did not need to be done at all, much less at the frequency it was performed. When the housework wasn't enough of a motivating factor to get out of bed or when the chronic fatigue set in, alcohol, tranquillizers, and sleeping pills were all used to help either motivate or knock them out until their husbands returned home: "It's as if there's nothing I really have to do…So I keep a bottle of martinis in the refrigerator, and I pour myself some so I'll feel more like doing something. Or just to get through till Don comes home" (qtd. Friedan 252).

Whether or not Gionfriddo wanted to connect alcohol and women's liberation, it is undeniable that she was drawing on social connections and connotations with alcohol. It is quite literally a liberating drug, associated with loose lips and increased sociability. Avery even asks Catherine in the play, "You know how when you get drunk you get nicer?" (Gionfriddo, *Rapture* 50). Alcohol achieves this by lowering inhibitions. This is one of the reasons that, across cultures, alcohol is a significant part of many social rituals. In particular, the purchase of drinks for others can be a way of asserting social competence or economic status. However, "buying drinks is [also] largely associated with the negotiation of intimacy" (TrÆen et al. 69). Finding

both long-term and short-term romantic or sexual partners often involves buying drinks as a pretense for furthering conversation.

In *Rapture, Blister, Burn,* alcohol is used almost exclusively in social contexts, and especially to fuel revelations and romantic relationships. Alice and Catherine have drinks together at 5 PM to bond. Catherine then extends this to Avery and Gwen by offering them drinks during class. Don and Catherine go out drinking to reconnect with one another prior to their affair—and to leave Gwen behind, as she is a recovering alcoholic. Alcohol thus links characters together. And Gwen, who falls into the more antagonistic role out of all the characters, is removed from these social connections by her alcoholism (though she does partake in some of the rituals, just with nonalcoholic beverages).

This repeated use of alcohol to bond characters together helped guide the production process. It was important to me that the actors never play "drunk," as this often leads to caricature. The only scene where any intoxication was even necessary to me was II.4, where actors also had to fight against simply playing "tired."

Alcohol's place in the characters' backstory and interactions was most important during our tablework. While we agreed that Gwen and therefore her actor had to believe she was an alcoholic, whether she actually *is* was a source of debate amongst myself and my actors, as the script raises points both for and against. Catherine acknowledges that in grad school Gwen could "drink more than [Catherine and Don] could" and Don agrees that "functional alcoholism is [Gwen's] cultural inheritance" as a New England WASP (Gionfriddo, *Rapture* 33). Functional alcoholism is when someone who may meet most of the criteria for an alcohol use disorder (alcoholism) does not exhibit "the full range of clinical impairments commonly associated" with

it (Walker). Such comments seem to lend support to the fact that she must be an alcoholic and Don just won't admit it.

But at the same time, is he right? It seems likely that Don would not doubt Gwen if there had been some sort of incident in which Gwen's, Julian's, or Devon's safety was obviously jeopardized due to Gwen being intoxicated, such as a car accident. Such an incident could serve as a motivating factor to quit drinking. It also stands to reason, then, that he did not see Gwen obviously drunk at inappropriate times—at least, not with enough frequency to be concerned.

In our table work, Alex Gilbertson (Gwen) and I agreed that Gwen's drinking made a turn towards "bad" around the time Julian went off to school (though we did not specify if this was preschool or elementary school). We decided Gwen quit drinking around the time she and Don started trying for another baby, so by the time the play starts, it's been about five or six years since she quit. If "bad" equated to true alcoholism was left up to Alex's interpretation.

Personally, I think that Gwen truly is an alcoholic. According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, both binge drinking and heavy drinking increase a person's risk for alcohol use disorder. For women, binge drinking is defined as consuming enough alcohol to raise the blood alcohol concentration (BAC) to 0.08%, which would be about 4 or more drinks in two hours. Heavy drinking, on the other hand, can be defined for women as "consuming more than 3 drinks on any day or more than 7 drinks per week" (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism). Based on the conversation Catherine and Don have about Gwen's former drinking habits and the history of housewife alcoholism as described by Friedan, it did not seem unreasonable to me that she could be an alcoholic without Don knowing.

The most controversial part of my view on Gwen's alcoholism was the fact that I think Don disputes it because they drink similar amounts. While the definitions of binge drinking and

heavy drinking are different for men, Don is not a character who likes being perceived as lesser in any way. I think he loathes Gwen's recovery not just because it means she attends Alcoholics Anonymous meetings in their small college town, but because it forces him to look at his own choices. He acknowledges that he drinks "too much" in I.3, but what he considers "too much," what Gwen considers "too much," and what the definition of alcoholism considers "too much" is left up to our own interpretation (Gionfriddo, *Rapture* 34). In our table work, we wrote down that Don is not as bad as Gwen, but my opinion on the matter still stands.

Aside from the approach to the text and characters, I knew that alcohol was important for the show's overall aesthetic. When discussing poster ideas with designer Adriana Pastor Almiron, I knew that alcohol—specifically the martini—was an important image to have. Martinis have an air of sophistication to them, speaking to the cosmopolitan lifestyle associated with Catherine and New York. But also, through their association with James Bond, I feel like there's a bit of danger in them, too. I liked that marriage of cosmopolitan and danger as the symbol on the poster. Adriana did a wonderful job bringing my vision to life.

When our set designer Chris McDowell brought in the cabinet for the set one day, the idea of that becoming the bar rather than just a collection of a few items on the credenza worked perfectly. Not only would it free up sightlines over the credenza, but it also immediately clues the audience into the drinking habits of these characters. Why would someone have such a fully stocked bar in their living room? Someone who has drinks with their daughter every day at 5 PM, that's who.

New York

There is a plethora of media in this world in which New York City is used as a great center of the fictional universe. Any person with big dreams for their career typically wants to land or is currently in New York. It is a, if not the, cultural, financial, and social capital of the US.

Gionfriddo uses all these connotations to her advantage when constructing the world and backstory of *Rapture, Blister, Burn.* Don, Gwen, and Catherine all attended graduate school there, making it the mythic place of all they used to be. And out of the whole Ivy League, Catherine isn't tucked away in Hanover, New Hampshire (Dartmouth College) or even in the bigger cities of New Haven, Connecticut (Yale University) or Gionfriddo's hometown of Providence, Rhode Island (Brown University). She's in New York City (Columbia University), living the dream.

The play doesn't clarify whether Catherine has been in New York since grad school or not. All it says is that thirteen years ago, when Don and Gwen visited New York for Christmas, she lived there, and that she lived there when her mom had her heart attack. So, did she leave and then come back, trying to find that old person she'd been and reconnect with it? Or did she never leave, and found herself unable to grow into the person she thought she would be? During table work, Paige Magid (Catherine) and I decided on the latter, so she's held teaching jobs in and around the city's universities since graduation. After well over thirteen years, the city's lost its shine.

Though for Gwen (and Julian, but mostly Gwen), New York retains all its sparkle. She takes Julian there once a month and they go to a Broadway show. In the glitz and lights of Midtown Manhattan and Times Square, it's no wonder she has the fantasy she does of moving

back. Living in the city isn't like that all the time. Gwen must know this, having lived there at one point, but now all the memories are filtered through rose-colored glasses. Alex had the challenge, more so than anyone else, of going through a month's worth of character development (perhaps reversion is a better word) entirely offstage—we at least get to see Catherine, Don, and Avery start to spiral in II.4, but Gwen is off to New York and back in the span of three scenes. Uncovering the ugliness of New York was a big part of the conversation when we discussed what happened to her over the course of that month.

I.2.iii: Character Analysis

Facts and Questions

I was first introduced to Katie Mitchell's Facts and Questions technique when I stage managed *The Gap* during my sophomore year. I remember liking the exercise, but when I tried it in my independent study in directing that fall, it didn't quite work the way I remembered it. When I expressed this to my advisor on my independent study, he encouraged me to not let it go entirely.

Once I had Mitchell's book in hand, I realized the flaw in my previous usage. Mitchell introduces facts and questions as a method to guide research and build ideas of both place and character biographies from an objective perspective (11). I'd been using the idea of facts and questions as more of a tool for script analysis—yes, it was to understand character, but I also tried to use it to understand motivation and the sequence of action. That analysis does have its place, but it creates questions that a director cannot answer on their own; it becomes too subjective. Following her approach directly made it go significantly better for me.

According to Mitchell, “facts are the non-negotiable elements of the text…questions are a way of notating the areas of the text that are less clear or that you are simply not sure of” (11). The lists can be used to organize the given circumstances: time, place, and backstory. While facts are non-negotiable, the questions must be answered. This can be done by facts revealed throughout the play, research, or by using your impressions of the text and choosing the simplest answer. Because of how entangled the backstory of Don, Gwen, and Catherine is, this method was extremely useful for organizing all the information on both their history and on that of all the other characters.

I decided to make a “facts” list and a “questions” list (Appendix B). I divided both lists into seven categories: location, trio (Don-Catherine-Gwen) history, Don, Gwen, Catherine, Avery, and Alice. Some things obviously blurred some of the boundaries of those categories, so it went where it seemed most relevant. After making my two lists, I answered as many of the questions as I could. Some I answered through research; others I answered based on my understanding of the text. I bolded questions I wanted to discuss with my actors. Sometimes, it was because I myself was unsure of the answer, but others were because I wanted to make sure we were all on the same page.

Once I’d made these, I used them to sketch out character biographies (Appendix C). I made the decision to not go too in-depth on everyone’s biography, as I did not want to grow attached to information and ideas that the actors did not support. Following Mitchell’s advice, I mixed both the facts and answered questions with other information that came up in my research that was relevant to the character (27).

Characters in Other Media

Another method that was important to me when doing character analysis was finding similar characters in other media that my actors could respond to. I decided to stick with film and television characters for the sake of access. That way, if my actors were inspired by a character I mentioned, they would have a performance to study that would still be distinct from the one they were to build. I chose two parallel characters for each character in *Rapture, Blister, Burn*.

This was a strategy I initiated while working on my independent study. That play was a new work, so there weren't even pictures of performances that my actors could look at. It challenged me in the analysis, but I also hope provided some template for them to go off when constructing their characters.

I decided to re-use that strategy on my thesis for two reasons. Firstly, 80% of the cast was playing characters older than them. While not every character I selected shared the age of the *Rapture, Blister, Burn* character they were matched with, it still offered me and my actors the chance to explore how older actors carried themselves. Secondly, even though they exist, I didn't want my cast to go hunting for clips or bootlegs of older productions of *Rapture, Blister, Burn;* I didn't look at any either (other than my performance as Avery in a cut of II.3 from my freshman year at Bates, which I tried to cast from my mind the second I decided to direct this). I didn't want myself or my actors to get other actors' performances in their heads, though I know at least one of my actors looked them up anyway.

For Catherine, I was thinking about "strong female characters." One of the first who came to mind was Robin Scherbatsky from *How I Met Your Mother*. Robin is introduced in the television series as almost abnormal for being more focused on her career than marriage and a family. Her arc over the course of the nine seasons is about learning how to balance romance and

her ambition. In one particularly heartbreaking moment in Season 5, she decides to turn down a new job in another city so that she can stay with her current boyfriend (ironically also named Don), only for him to be offered the job in her place (Bowman). He takes it without discussing it with her and the two break up. I know with certainty that had Catherine turned down the London fellowship and Don been offered it instead, he would've done it, no questions asked.

The other character that came to mind was Princess Leia from *Star Wars*. I was particularly inspired by a quote from Leia's actress, the late Carrie Fisher, in which she discussed Leia: "There are a lot of people who don't like my character in these movies; they think I'm some kind of space bitch. She has no friends, no family; her planet was blown up in seconds ... so all she has is a cause" (qtd. in Caldwell). Catherine's greatest fear is losing her mother. She seems to have no real ties to New York outside of her job—no mentioned friends, no romantic partner—so her mother is really the last person she has. She's put all her time and energy into her career instead. While the *Star Wars* movies gloss over Leia's trauma from her time on the Death Star and the destruction of her home planet, she does find a family and love in Luke Skywalker and Han Solo. We don't really get to see Catherine deal with her anxieties, but we know that she has Avery, and thus even when she does lose Alice, it will be okay.

For Don, I was immediately drawn to Greg Serrano from *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*. In season one, episode 16, "Josh's Sister Is Getting Married!" Greg sings a song called "I Could If I Wanted To." In the episode, he is taking night classes and is convinced that he's the best in the class because, back in the day, he'd gotten into Emory, the "Harvard of the South" (Newman). Then he gets a bad grade on an assignment, and the song follows him as he leaves class.

In "I Could If I Wanted To," which parodies the nihilism of 90s grunge, Greg expresses frustration with the world around him but then shrugs it off: "What's an 'A?' / It's just a letter on

a page meant to distract us from the pain / But it's not like any 'A' can make a difference in the day / Sure, I could get an 'A' if I wanted to get an 'A' / But who cares about an 'A?' / I don't / I don't care / Although I coulda made that grade if I did care / But I don't / But I could if I wanted to" (Fontana 0:13-0:34). To me, this completely summed up Don's attitude towards his academic career.

The second character I chose for Don was Martin from the British television series *Fleabag.* Martin is an ego-centric character who doesn't care who he hurts as long as he gets what he wants. This includes telling his wife that it was her sister who made a move on him when it was actually the other way around (McCormick). While Don is nowhere near as malicious as Martin, I do think they share qualities of being trapped in a relationship but refusing to admit defeat. They like their life as is and will go to greats lengths to hold onto that security.

Gwen was the character I struggled with the most for this piece of analysis. I eventually settled on Lorelei Gilmore from *Gilmore Girls* and Eileen O'Neal from *The Real O'Neals.* Lorelei is whip smart but not in the traditional career one would expect for someone like that—running a hotel. Additionally, her daughter, Rory, is unquestionably her best friend. At times, their relationship can border on inappropriate for a mother and daughter. Julian is not a character who appears onstage in *Rapture, Blister, Burn*, so his relationship with Gwen is underdeveloped in the script, but Gwen calls him her "best buddy" and has trouble accepting him growing up and having a life independent from her (Gionfriddo, *Rapture* 22). Gwen is also incredibly smart, but she's buried that dream ever since dropping out of graduate school.

Eileen is an Irish Catholic woman going through a divorce and raising three children, one of whom comes out as gay in the short-lived comedy's pilot episode (Bacle). Her family receives a lot of doubt and skepticism in their Catholic community because of it. Her arc is about trying to

hold it all together and coming to terms with her son and the end of her marriage. While this isn't quite the arc that Gwen goes on—she rather struggles with her son *not* being gay and deciding to *stay* in her marriage—the image of the matriarch running the ship and focused on appearances is still an important aspect of both Gwen and Eileen.

Characters like Avery proliferate media, but it was important to me to not find girls whose characters boiled down to being sad and edgy, because that's not who Avery is, though there are parts of that personality in her. Maya Hart from *Girl Meets World* is from a more child-oriented television series, so the darkness in her backstory is brushed over somewhat or simplified. This aligned a little more with Avery than some of the other characters out there. One of the reasons I chose both Maya and Beca Mitchell from *Pitch Perfect* is because their arcs are about accepting love and friendship in a beautiful way that I felt really aligns with Avery. Both learn to put themselves above men and form strong bonds with other women.

Alice was the only character where age played a major factor in how I picked the characters I chose to compare her with. The first character I chose for her was Lady Danbury from *Bridgerton.* While Alice doesn't (fully) share Danbury's signature biting wit, she does share her ability to make spaces for women to be themselves—though Alice doesn't exactly run a gambling den for married Regency-era women (Marrs). I was inspired mostly by Lady Danbury's maternal relationship with her godson Simon and how she champions him to be exactly who he is and embrace the things that scare him. Everything Alice does is for Catherine and her happiness, even if she doesn't always agree with it or it goes against what she was taught.

On that note, the other character I chose for Alice is Alba Villanueva from *Jane the Virgin.* The show centers on the three generations of the Villanueva women the same way that

this play centers around generations. Many episodes feature scenes of all three women on the house's porch swing, an image that greatly influenced my production's final scene. Alba is the protagonist Jane's grandmother. She has some more old-fashioned beliefs—one episode, for example, revolves around her spanking Jane's son and an ensuing fight with the child's father over it (Sava). But she puts those aside for her family when she needs to, which Alice does as well, letting go of ideas such as who should be the provider in a relationship for the sake of Catherine getting to be with the man she wants.

To share this information, I included it in the dramaturgy presentation I gave them during the first week of rehearsal. My specific explanation for each character was done orally and significantly shorter, but I included photos of the character in question and the source material I had pulled them from.

I.2.iv: Mood Board

One thing that I found helpful during my independent study was to create what I termed a "mood board." It was a place to collect visuals and lyrics that I associated with the show or characters. Creating the mood board allowed me to finetune my approach to my directorial spine and better understand the play's characters and themes. For my independent study, it consisted mostly of song lyrics that I thought resonated with the characters or the play's story. It also included a scene from *Doctor Who* and a scene from *Fleabag* that inspired me in approaching specific scenes and relationships in the rehearsal room.

To make my *Rapture, Blister, Burn* mood board, I once again started with song lyrics. I am a big Taylor Swift fan, so unsurprisingly a lot of her songs were included. One trio of songs

came from her eighth album *folklore*. The chosen three songs are written as a trilogy about a teenage love triangle, told from the three different perspectives (Huff). One of those songs, "august," I snagged right away. A section of the bridged immediately conjured Catherine and her relationship with Don in my mind:

> "Back when we were still changing for the better / and wanting was enough / For me it was enough / To live for the hope of it all / cancel plans just in case you call / and say, "meet me behind the mall" / So much for summer love / and saying us / 'cause you weren't mine to lose" (Swift, "august" 1:41-2:05).

I realized, though, over the course of rehearsals that the other two songs of the trilogy fit Don and Gwen quite well. "betty," which is told from the perspective of the *folklore* character James, has a chorus that echoes Don in II.5 nearly perfectly:

> "But if I just showed up at your party / would you have me? / Would you want me? / Would you tell me to go fuck myself / or lead me to the garden? / In the garden would you trust me / if I told you it was just a summer thing? / I'm only seventeen; I don't know anything / but I know I miss you" (Swift, "betty" 0:52-1:15).

The final song of the trilogy, "cardigan," told from Betty's point of view, meshes with Gwen in a lot of places, but this one is perhaps my favorite:

> "I knew I'd curse you for the longest time / chasing shadows in the grocery line / I knew you'd miss me once the thrill expired / and you'd be standing in my front porch light / and I knew you'd come back to me" (Swift, "cardigan" 3:01-3:19).

This *Rapture, Blister, Burn* mood board, however, grew to include some other random images that inspired me. My grandmother passed away in the fall of 2020 and my aunt inherited her house in Scarborough, ME, which I've grown up visiting and which has looked the same my

entire life. When I was there over the summer, in the thick of dramaturgy and pre-production work, I realized I'd been picturing this house as Alice's. I had a meeting with Chris McDowell, our set and costume designer, a week or so later. In a surprising burst of courage, I showed her some photos I'd found of the living room. She was immediately struck by the high back chairs and the couches, but also the French doors leading out to the porch. It was this image that inspired us to move the French doors from where they'd lived for *Luck of the Irish* over to Alice's side of the stage. There were some chairs in Vale Street that Chris immediately thought would also be perfect based on the pictures, but we decided they were simply too tall to work with the alley staging.

Another image I put on the board was a still from *Jane the Virgin* of Jane, her mother Xiomara, and Alba sitting on their porch swing. Many episodes feature heart-to-heart conversations between the three women, or a duo of some combination, on the swing. This image inspired my staging of II.7.

A final image that may seem like an odd choice is of a praying man. Over winter break, I worked one-on-one with each actor over Zoom. We did movement work inspired by Rudolf von Laban's eight efforts. I had everyone pick one of the components that they felt best fit their character, then gave them 60-90 seconds to explore the four efforts that aligned with that component. Alex Gilbertson (Gwen) chose the component "bound," which corresponded to "punch," "dab," "press," and "wring" (Espeland). After she explored each effort, we discussed what she'd done (as this was over Zoom and all five actors chose to turn their cameras off), how it made her feel, and if she felt it resonated with any moments in the play.

When exploring press, which Laban says is "direct, sustained, heavy, and bound," she found herself pressing against the ground in what she described as a sort of mourning position

(Espeland). She matched the effort and the position to II.2, when Gwen is backed into a corner and the bound character finds herself freed, only to not know what to do with the freedom she receives. I loved the image and the idea so much that I found the closest thing I could and added it to the board.

II: Process and Production

II.1: Week One

II.1.i: Week Structure

I knew that I wanted to start off rehearsals with a full week of table work. This play has a lot of dense academic language in it, so I wanted to make sure that we had time to go over that and discuss who some of these academic figures and theorists are. At the same time, I wanted us to move into blocking the next week with a firm idea of who the characters are and what their relationships to each other and the world around them are.

We started the week with our design presentation and a read-through. Chris showed off the set model and her costume presentation. Then we moved into first rehearsal conversation and the read-through. For the read-through, I decided that everybody would read their own roles. I have always found read-throughs where everyone reads one line in a circle, trading characters as they go, confusing. I wind up focusing more on what my next line is rather than absorbing the story. I knew that I would struggle too much if the read-through was done in that manner, so I decided to do what I know and prefer best. This also allowed everyone to interact with the academic theory sections they would be responsible for right from the beginning.

We were not able to get through the full script in the read through. This did not surprise me, but it did make me a little sad. We made it to the end of II.4, but the last three scenes are I think where the story shines the most. I asked my actors to finish it for "homework" and to come to the next rehearsal (for some of them it was the next day, and for others not until Wednesday) with at least three questions about their character (or the play) that they wanted to discuss.

Doing the half read-through, though, was still helpful. I noted in my reflection on the day that I.2 dragged a lot during the read. I had anticipated this being the case with I.2 and made a note to myself to make sure my actors got down the theory and language so that when the time came, we could let the scene fly. When we took a break, Dianna Georges (Alice) brought up the white feminism of this play to me for the first time. I had written in my casting call that only Gwen had to be white, as her race was specified in the script. I belatedly realized Don's was also specified, but Dianna's comment made me think: would a Black, Latinx, or Asian Catherine cling to these same ideals in the same way? I couldn't change the script, but I knew that this was something I could not ignore in my dramaturgy, and that it could possibly serve as a way into my educational component.

For the next few rehearsals, I drew heavily on exercises and techniques from Katie Mitchell. Some of them were helpful; others were not. I also brought in my own ideas. For example, I like to start table work with long conversations about the characters and their backgrounds. Most of the questions I used I generated from Mitchell's facts and questions exercise, but others the actors brought in or simply came up organically in conversation. I spent a day with Alex Gilbertson (Gwen), Paige Magid (Catherine), and Brendan Fitzgerald (Don) discussing their characters and their shared backstories. The next day, we did the same with Dianna and Alison Robelen (Avery) and then moved into another character activity.

One of the exercises I brought to the table was a PowerPoint Party. PowerPoint Parties, originally called "Drink Talk Learn," are reported to have been started at the University of Waterloo in 2012 (Broderick). Everyone makes a presentation on anything they are passionate about and shares it. Alcohol is involved. There may or may not be awards. The point is to learn something, drink, and have fun—hence the name. The concept went viral in 2018 after a Twitter

user shared slides of her presentation from one such party, which won "best presentation." During the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, the concept was revived as a way to have a socially distanced get-together.

I had heard of this concept but never participated in one. For my independent study, I had my actors make playlists of songs that they thought fit musically or lyrically with their characters, or maybe was something their characters would listen to. In part I did this because I think it is fun and like to do it on my own for shows, but also because the two characters in my independent study were music students. I thought about bringing back this exercise for *Rapture, Blister, Burn,* but then in a flash of inspiration I was reminded of the PowerPoint Party. Obviously, I couldn't include alcohol, but I thought it would be a fun character-building exercise. It would also allow my actors to become used to speaking with authority on a topic and present that information to a group of people.

To make it work better as an exercise, I tweaked the instructions from a typical party. For starters, they couldn't present on any topic in the world—they had to pick something their character would feel comfortable presenting on. It could be serious or silly, but it had to be in line with who the character was. And, to top it off, they would have to present it in character. That meant both thinking on how their character would literally build a PowerPoint but also how their character would deliver it. While we wouldn't start physical exercises for another week, I wanted them to start thinking about how their character speaks, moves, and thinks. To give them time to work on it, I presented the rules on Monday during the first rehearsal, and they presented on Sunday.

I waited to share the dramaturgy presentation until a few days into the process. I divided the presentation into four sections: a brief biography of Gina Gionfriddo, a quick run-down on

characters and the other characters I associated them with, a couple questions to ponder, and then a glossary of terms. The cast jotted down some notes and asked some questions. I made sure to move the presentation into the shared Google Folder I'd made for my cast, as I had a feeling none of this information would stay in their heads until January, so I wanted them to have easy access.

II.1.ii: Building Biographies

Using the facts and questions work I had already done, I marked questions that I felt were essential that we answer as a group. The questions varied from "why did Gwen drop out of her master's program?" to "how long after Catherine left did Don get together with/marry Gwen?" to "where does Don get his pot?" (that last one because I was genuinely curious, considering that this play was written in Rhode Island in 2012, just as marijuana was being legalized in Colorado and Washington.) Because Gwen, Don, and Catherine's shared history was so significant to the story but also somewhat murky, I decided that I wanted to be able to spend a whole rehearsal just talking with them. The way schedules worked out, I had a full three hours with Alex, two with Brendan, and two with Paige, with the three of them all together for the middle hour. The next day, we did similar conversations with Dianna and Alison present.

In these early conversations, I found it interesting to see what aspects of the characters the actors were responding to. Paige, for example, gravitated to the "girlboss" side of Catherine. Dianna unleashed the most amazing backstory for Alice with just a few guiding questions, building up her entire day-to-day life and marriage to her deceased husband with little to no self-censorship. Alison took some coaxing, but she eventually began to open up, too.

Brendan, on the other hand, came to our second rehearsal and immediately decried that Don made the wrong choice. He was the one member of the cast I had directed before (admittedly over Zoom in a ten-minute play I wrote, but it still counted). One of my few memories from that process was him mentioning to me that he felt the play covered the six stages of grief, so we went through the script as a cast and marked where the shifts were. Brendan and I got into a heated debate about where one such switch was, and even though he was *wrong* (which he did, eventually, admit) he was very adamant that it happened earlier than it did. He came to this *Rapture, Blister, Burn* rehearsal with the exact same attitude. I immediately made a note of his vehemence in my rehearsal reflection. You may not agree with your characters as people; however, you must understand their choices in order to justify them being made. We eventually created a policy were personal opinions on characters' choices had to be left at the door.

In part to counteract some of these feelings, I introduced an exercise of Mitchell's that looked at relationships. In her book, she introduces one version of it for the director to do—which I did not do—and one version of it for the actors. I did not do the director's version because, frankly, I did not realize it was there. But I thought the version for actors might be helpful as they untangled the web of relationships in this play. More importantly, I thought that making the actors think about what their character thinks of themselves would require them to distance themselves a bit from their own opinions on the character.

The exercise is split into two parts. Mitchell seems to know that it does not work for every cast because she explicitly says to only move onto the next part "if the group take to this exercise and see the uses of it" (162). While I assigned my actors the second part, about what each character thinks of the other characters, we wound up abandoning it because of some

absences during the first week of rehearsal. It became too difficult to share out that work without everyone present. Plus, some of those thoughts about other characters came up in our initial conversations anyway.

The part that we did together in rehearsal involved setting the actors fifteen minutes to write down "I am" statements about their characters (Appendix D). The goal was to write down as much as you could and then distill it into a single sentence. Each actor would share it out and then we discussed it and how to narrow it down more. We condensed synonyms where we could and tried to avoid "value judgments," or the types of things someone else might say about you (Mitchell 162).

II.1.iii: Building the World of the Play

As the actors began developing their backstories and relationships, I also wanted them to think about place. For Mitchell, place and time are crucially important given circumstances. She has lots of research techniques and exercises designed to help directors and actors think about place. I was drawn to this approach because we would be in alley staging. When in Alice's living room, the actors would only have one wall; they must build the rest of the world around them. When in Don and Gwen's backyard, what else surrounds them? What about Alice's backyard? It is not about making it visible to the audience; it is about the actors knowing where they are and knowing what they are looking at, as that then creates the world for the audience.

One of the first things this meant for us was deciding where we are. I initially tried to pick a city on my own but found myself coming up short. Gionfriddo offers the setting as a "New England college town." The city of Rocksboro is mentioned as where Avery and Lucas go

to film people, but my research indicated that it was a fictional town. For a moment, I thought of Lewiston itself, but I decided it was not quite the vibe I wanted. Lewiston aligned more with my vision of Rocksboro. Plus, the script offers the feeling that everybody knows everybody in this college town, which speaks to a slightly smaller population than that of Lewiston.

In our design conversations, Chris told me that she'd been picturing somewhere in Vermont. I'd been picturing Alice's house to look like my grandmother's vacation house in Scarborough, which seemed a little too coastal a spot to place the play's action. Gionfriddo herself has lived and worked in Rhode Island for many years, specifically in Providence. I was disinclined to go with Providence since it is such a big city, but I had not ruled out that area of Rhode Island as a possible location. I wanted to talk it out with my actors and see what insights they brought to the table.

While no one seemed as desperate to lock down a location as me, my cast were good sports in helping me talk it out. One detail I hadn't noticed before that someone pointed out—I can't remember who, but I think maybe Alex or Brendan—was the fact that Gwen takes Julian into New York City once a month to see a show. Rhode Island and Vermont both seemed a little too far to justify this as a monthly excursion. Dianna suggested Northampton, Massachusetts, the home of Smith College. Its location within Massachusetts resonated, as did the fact that Friedan and Gloria Steinem, two major figures in second wave feminism, are Smith alumna. We settled on that, creating *Forthampton* (Fake Northampton), home to fourth-rate liberal arts college Mith College, in western Massachusetts.

Once that was set, we started drawing circles of place (Appendix E). Mitchell asks directors to make a list of all the play's locations and then ask questions about them that can be answered with research (21-22). For actors, she suggests having them draw maps of various

places without doing this pre-work. I decided I wanted us to all do this together, since both parts seemed valuable to everyone. I also decided that, instead of making maps of the various cities, it would be most beneficial to work on mapping out the physical areas that we would actually spend time in. Our set designer very kindly printed out a bunch of ground plans for us to use for this purpose.

Alex found us multi-colored chalk so we could differentiate the different circles with various colors on the chalkboard. I started the exercise by having the cast give me the major physical locations of the play from the broadest point of view possible. For most of the places, this meant city names (ex. New York City, Los Angeles), but "Massachusetts" became its own category because of the various towns within it. While we set the play's action in Forthampton, Rocksboro had to be on the board as the site of Avery's black eye. We also decided during table work that Avery grew up nearby, settling on Springfield, so we added that to the board as well.

We then zeroed in, focusing on various environments that characters interacted with, including the Gershwin Theater (where *Wicked* performs), the technical college where Don once worked (in Maine, we decided), the church where Gwen attends Alcoholics Anonymous, and where Catherine lived and studied during her fellowship year in London.

After exhausting these locations, I asked the cast to think about who was important to each circle. While we focused on literal geographic location of the various characters, the actors also started thinking of characters "mentally" in certain places. For example, Don never physically went to London with Catherine, but he sure thought about it a lot, so we added him to the London circle. Similarly, Avery does not go to Los Angeles with Lucas, but she thinks about it a lot, especially since she plans to move there with him.

We then narrowed it down to Alice's house and Don and Gwen's house, discussing the various rooms in each. Once we'd agreed on this, I split the cast up. Dianna couldn't attend the rehearsal, so I divided them into pairs of Alex and Brendan and Alison and Paige. I gave them each a ground plan of the set and asked them to design the rest of the environment, Alex and Brendan drawing Don and Gwen's house and Alison and Paige drawing Alice's. For example, where did the set's doors lead? Once they were done, they shared out with everyone what they had created. Alex told me after this rehearsal that she used the work we'd done to build Don and Gwen's house in the Sims.

When we started blocking the next week, the actors re-shared out the various features of the playing areas they'd created. They cared particularly for where the doors lead and therefore which direction they should enter or exit depending on where they were coming or going from. While they'd all seemed a little slow to get into our conversations and exercises about place, I was glad to see that they did, eventually, pay off.

Place was one of the last activities we did for table work. Before the week was over, we still had two additional important things to do: share the cast's PowerPoints and complete Uta Hagen's Nine Questions.

I truly had no idea what to expect from the cast's PowerPoints. I'd reminded them about them every day and had been asked a question or two about it, but no one had mentioned anything about their topics. I'd given them a Google folder to drop them in and enjoyed seeing the topic names as the files were dropped in the folder, but I didn't open them so that they would be novel when presented. This was the same rehearsal Dianna was unable to attend so she never turned in a PowerPoint, but the other four all did and presented them for the group.

I'd promised them prizes and awards, so I grabbed some fun snacks from Walmart to be a grab-bag of winnings, along with a Den gift card I had lying around. I named each prize after a line (or stage direction) from the show, but they essentially boiled down to best-all around, best diction/language, best visuals, best performance, and an honorable mention of most interesting topic. I don't know how motivating a factor these prizes were, but I thought it might help them get more into it.

Brendan went first ("Why Pornography is Superior to Your Significant Other by Don Harper"), then Paige ("Good for Her: An Alternative Feminist Movie Trope by Catherine Croll"), Alex ("How to Prepare Thanksgiving Dinner by Gwen Harper"), and finally Alison ("3 Things You Can Do to Make Your Life Better by Avery Willard"). After each presentation, I let the other actors ask questions of the presenter. While I did require that the questions be *answered* in character, they did not need to be *asked* in character. Some of them were anyway. For example, after Alex's presentation, Alison raised her hand and asked, in perfect Avery fashion, "Does following the rules perfectly make up for your broken family?" which made me burst out laughing. (Alison went on to win the best performance award, perhaps unsurprisingly.)

I felt that the exercise did everything I wanted it to. Physically, verbally, and "mentally," they'd all done a good job of slipping into their characters. However, since this was a unique exercise, I wanted to hear their feedback. The consensus was that while they had fun making it and enjoyed seeing and hearing everyone else's presentations, they didn't feel that it necessarily helped them *build* their character, since they felt they had to already know the character to pick the topic. Some had struggled with choosing their topic for this reason. They also expressed that improving in character (in the form of answering questions) was hard, which did not surprise me.

Knowing that we would be doing some improvisational exercises in the upcoming days, though, I'm glad that they started in a more "lower stakes" way.

Once presentations were done, we moved onto Hagen's Nine Questions. Hagen was an actor and acting teacher whose technique stresses observation of everyday life. Built upon the Stanislavski System, it is considered a "middle ground between internal (representational) and external (presentational) work" (Ates). Her nine (and later condensed down to six) questions are perhaps one of her best-known exercises. They can be answered as in-depth or as shallowly as needed. They are as follows: who am I? (Name, age, physicality, education, beliefs, etc.), what time is it? (Season, month, etc.), where am I? (Country, town, room, etc.), what surrounds me? (Weather, landscape, people, etc.), what are the given circumstances? (What has happened, what is happening, what will happen?), what are my relationships? (To other characters, to the place, etc.), what do I want? (Superobjective or scene-specific objective), what is in my way? (obstacles), and what do I do to get what I want? (tactics) (Ates).

I love the Nine Questions. I use them when I act, and I've worked with a lot of directors who use them. I think they help ground actors with the most pressing and tangible pieces of their characters. Because they are so useful, I did not want this to be a one and done assignment. I wanted my cast to be able to answer the questions and then have them as reference for the rehearsal process. I found posterboards with sticky backs that they could write on and that we could then put up on the wall (Appendix F). However, with the masking already up in Gannett, there wound up not being anywhere to hang them that were easily visible, so they collected dust in my room instead. Admittedly, I could have made more of an effort to keep them around. However, I am still glad that they completed the exercise.

I brought the posters and some markers for them to use so that they could be more colorful and eye-catching. I put on some music—specifically my *Rapture, Blister, Burn* playlist—and let them chat as they worked. It was one of the first days that I saw them all start to bond with each other, which made me happy. It was interesting to see how they set up their boards and how in-depth they went on each of the questions. While she wasn't there that day, I had Dianna complete hers at one of the next rehearsals. She wasn't looking at the questions the way everyone else was, just working from what the others had written down. I left the rehearsal ready to jump into blocking and feeling good about how the week had gone.

II.2: Week 2

II.2.i: Week Structure

The goal for this week was to start making first passes of Act I. Since the scenes in Act I are much longer, and because the actors' schedules were rather busy, I made the decision to spend our truncated four days just looking at I.1 and I.2. For I.1, this wound up feeling a little unnecessary, but for I.2, it was vitally important.

In addition, we also continued to do some character-building work. I led the actors through Chekhov's Imaginary Body Work to help them start to tap into physical aspects, specifically playing older characters. Alex, Brendan, and Paige also did an improvisation exercise in which they improvised what happened the night of Catherine's phone call.

II.2.ii: Doubts

Throughout the rehearsal process, I wrote up "rehearsal plans." Adapted from lesson plan templates I have used in my education classes, these plans allowed me to keep track of attendance, material, goals for the rehearsal, and "homework" assigned. I also included a notes section, with reminders for myself or things to share with the cast, and a reflection section, where I could jot down a brief summary of the rehearsal, how I felt, things I observed, describe any break throughs or challenges, and ideas for what I wanted to do in the future.

The following is my reflection section for my Monday, October 25 rehearsal, our first blocking rehearsal:

- *Today was SHIT*

- *I don't know how to talk to actors about acting or how to approach working a scene or how to block*
- *I feel like every sentence that leaves my mouth makes no sense and doesn't answer their questions*
- *I don't know how to help them find objectives/beats/tactics or anything that is actually helpful*
- *I don't think the improv was as helpful as it could've/should've been*
- *Brendan's physicality is going to bite him in the ass age wise and I should've just done some sort of physical character body warm up today even though I just had the three of them*
- *Paige meanwhile is sitting straight and upright and not moving at all and I can't tell why, like if that's a choice, if she feels stiff, if she isn't even aware she's doing it, or what*
    - *Please please please don't be *** Part 2*[1]
- *Alex is doing a lot of work and I'm excited*
- *I have no idea what we are going to do tomorrow; we need to spend the first hour not blocking I think and just doing like warm ups/exercises*

The thoughts and doubts expressed in the first four bullet points were my friends for the entire rehearsal process (and even the production itself, really). Some days were better than others, but they always lingered in the back of my mind. I am not sure how aware my actors were of my lack of confidence (at least, prior to December—more on that to come). In these early days, we were not yet an ensemble—I can't even remember if we had done a post-rehearsal

[1] While working on a previous production, I directed an actor who did not take direction related to blocking right away, as they wanted to work it out on their own and then come into rehearsal the next day having tried it out. I found this rather frustrating. Their name has been removed for privacy.

cast dinner yet—so we certainly were not discussing amongst ourselves how well a rehearsal went or their thoughts on my directing.

But here is my reflection from Tuesday, October 26:

- *Today went SO MUCH BETTER [I am SO MUCH BETTER than before[2] ;)]*
- *The music I played during the exercise got into the 30-minute mark; we skipped I think one, maybe two songs? I filled the first hour basically so I'm kind of a god is what I'm saying, and I filled it with something helpful too so like maybe everyone should worship me*
- *I'm not sure if I came in more prepared today (didn't feel it), had a better mindset, was riding the high of having a stage manager (a lil bit), was too distracted based on the time to worry about being bad (also a lil bit), a combination, or none of the above*
- *I don't love that Paige is sitting in the same spot for this whole scene but I'm not sure when to get her up nor where she would go, and I think Paige is kind of in the same mindset so *shrugs**

This abrupt change from day one to day two taught me the importance of being fully prepared for a rehearsal, not just partially (as I had been for Monday). It also reminded me of the importance of a good, thorough warm-up that is aligned with your goals for the day.

II.2.iii: Character Building and Improvs

Improvisations allow the actors to form memories of events that happen before or during the events shown in the play. It also gives them a space to explore their character without the

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[2] O'Keefe, Laurence, and Nell Benjamin. "So Much Better." *Legally Blonde: The Musical (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*, performed Laura Bell Bundy and Legally Blonde Ensemble, Sh-K-Boom Records, 2007.

stress of lines—but it does add the stress of *improv,* a word which can be quite scary for actors. I purposefully selected an improv-based warm-up game to help loosen the actors up prior to starting an improvisation.

I decided that it was important to improv the events surrounding Catherine's initial phone call. Looking back, I'm not sure this was the best choice for Paige--after all, the point is that Catherine *does not remember it*. However, I felt it vital for Alex, and there was no route I could fathom that would allow Alex to fully experience it and Paige not.

Watching the improv and then discussing it afterwards with the actors, it was clear to me that it was not as helpful as I had intended it to be. I have two theories as to what happened. The first was I picked a bad moment. However, I stand by my decision to do this scene as it is what helps set the play in motion. Gwen's entire Act I arc centers around this very phone call. In a way so does Catherine's, as she spends about half of I.1 and a whole section of I.3 trying to figure it out.

My second, more supported theory is that I was underprepared and thus did not give them the tools that they needed to make the improv successful. Mitchell writes out detailed descriptions of what has happened prior to the start of the improv *and* the characters' intentions (objectives) within it (73). She gives all that information to the actors and while she doesn't give them time to prepare lines, she does give them time to prepare a space and understand where they are. In the future, I resolved to do this.

In addition to this improvisational work, I introduced an exercise called "Imaginary Body." The exercise comes out of the work of Michael Chekhov, whose approach to acting I was studying with Professor Dugan in Advanced Acting at the time. To lead this activity, I wrote my own script using what I remembered from class and what I thought would be most helpful

(Appendix G). That way I could adapt it to suit the needs of my actors, who were just discovering who these characters were. The goal of this exercise is to merge the actor's body with an image of the character, so that "the imaginary body becomes an intermediary" that is not quite the actor and closer to this imaginary character (Rushe 207).

I did this exercise with the actors twice this week, in part because Brendan was not present when we did it the first time. While I have not had lots of success with it, I thought it would be helpful for the actors playing older than themselves to have to truly study an image of an older body and then move within that body. (I also knew that it was an exercise Alex enjoyed and found useful.) We spent a little under half an hour with it both times, though I think the second one went a little shorter. After completing the exercise, the actors and I briefly chatted about it, and I let them write down any discoveries they had that they thought were worth keeping.

Another key piece of physical work I wanted to do right from the beginning involved having rehearsal shoes for them. This was a big thing for my high school theater director, so I got into the habit—both for class presentations and for productions—of wearing the shoes I would be performing in as early as possible. The shoes you are wearing change how your feet connect with the floor and how you hold yourself. I am particularly glad that we started this early since Paige wound up in heels. When heels are not your everyday shoe, putting them on can be a dramatic shift (and more taxing on your feet), so I am glad she had weeks to break them in and become used to them.

While I do not know the exact origin of why my director chose this route, it seems to be inspired by or drawn from Hagen's work on specificity and authenticity (Ates). By working with authentic props, costumes, and set pieces from the very beginning, Hagen believed actors

became more immersed into the exact world of their characters. They become accustomed to the weight of items in their hand, the confines of a corset, the comfort a chair does or does not provide. I wanted my actors, particularly those playing different ages, to have the opportunity to feel the world through their character's feet right away. Our costume designer very kindly brought in some rehearsal shoe options for us during this week, and everyone was outfitted by the end of it. Some of them even wound up wearing those specific shoes in the actual production, even if only for a scene or two.

II.2.iv: First Passes and Blocking

When I read a play, I tend to see the scenes play out in my head. Not always crystal clearly, but enough to guide me in what I think the scene should look like. I don't think directors should come into rehearsals knowing the exact blocking they want and exactly where it happens. However, with the alley staging, I knew that I needed to come into rehearsals with an idea as to how the actors would be moving through the space and how to "equalize" their visibility over the course of the show.

Using extra copies of the ground plan and my notebook, I went unit by unit and pictured each scene in my head. If anything movement-wise jumped out at me, I wrote it down. For I.1, I knew that I wanted everyone at the table at the top. I also knew that Alex and Brendan needed to have easy access to the door, since they both enter and exit the scene multiple times. It was through this process that I came up with the idea of Don and Gwen speaking to each other from the steps, which I loved. That particular blocking stayed in every iteration of I.1.

Before getting up on our feet, the actors read the scene (or the section of the scene) that we would be working on. We discussed any questions they had about the scene, whether it was pronunciation of words, allusions, or about the general nature of their character in the scene. After that, I asked them all to give me what they thought their objective for the scene was. Specifically, I asked them to frame their objective as "I want _____ so that _____." These objectives were malleable. Ideally, they would carry through the full scene, but we immediately ran into a roadblock in that regard with Catherine in I.1. The conversation she has with Avery is incredibly different in tone, topic, and atmosphere than the conversations she had been having with Don and Gwen. We kept the same root as "I want to impress," but the direct object and the "so that" changed with Avery's entrance.

As the week came to a close, I was still feeling a little unsure of my own skills. But we made good progress, ending the week with completed first passes of I.1 and I.2.

II.3: Week 3

II.3.i: Week Structure

Like Week 2, Week 3 was about making first passes of scenes. After two weeks, we were finally able to move into Gannett for the first time, which was very exciting. I was hoping we would, but we did not have time to re-look at I.1 and I.2 during this week. Instead, we picked up where we left off with I.3. We then moved onto Act II.

With the way the cast's schedules worked out, we were not able to look at Act II in order; II.3, which we looked at during this week, also had to be done out of order, knitting Don and Alice later in the evening into the overarching Catherine-Avery conversation. This did not *officially* become a problem until later, but I was acutely aware of the looming threat as I sketched out the week and as we started making passes at scenes. After all, having to rehearse out of order was not something I had anticipated.

It was perhaps the biggest problem with the mid-semester start for a show. When you start at the beginning of the semester, actors' schedules are not yet fully finalized. Thus, you can (mostly) set your own schedule and their individual schedules will adapt around yours. With the mid-semester start, classes, clubs, work, and other commitments were pretty much set in stone, so the rehearsal schedule had to be squeezed in around it.

This also manifested in rehearsal length. Most of our rehearsals were only two hours this week; we were able to have one two-and-a-half-hour rehearsal. Since the scenes in Act II are so much shorter, this was not necessarily a problem, but it meant that we couldn't spend as much time warming up and having long conversations about the scene before getting on our feet.

I also became acutely aware this week of how "off" things started to feel. I attributed it to the fact that we were working Act II out of order. No one seemed fully certain what to do with themselves, including me.

II.3.ii: Continued Explorations

As we made first passes, we also continued to work on character building. I wanted to make sure that we did an improv about Catherine, Don, and London before starting our pass of I.3. Having learned my lesson from last week, I filled out an example template that Mitchell provides for planning an improv (Appendix H) (73). I prepared two options and gave Brendan and Paige the option to do one or both. They picked the juicier—and frankly more important—option: Don calling Catherine (after having slept with Gwen) and asking her to come home.

I set them up in opposite sections of the Schaeffer stage and let them begin. I remember sitting there watching them unable to take my eyes off them—which my lack of notes on the subject seems to support. They didn't look at each other as they did it, either, as if they really were separated by an ocean. I have this vivid memory of Brendan saying something and Paige wringing her hands and pacing as she listened to it. It was a much more helpful exploration than last week's.

II.3.iii: Movement for Movement's Sake

I admittedly put too much focus on blocking during this period, rather than digging into the intentions, objectives, and obstacles of each scene. While we briefly discussed these things,

usually towards the top of the rehearsal, we sort of bypassed them as the nights wore on. I continued to prep for rehearsals by reading scenes and sketching out an idea for the physical shape of the scene. This was never a technique I've used before when directing. I'm not entirely sure where I got the idea from. The only thing I can think of is that it came out of my final project for my directing class back in 2020. We were supposed to direct a scene for our final, but with the outbreak of COVID-19 and everyone being sent home, that didn't happen. Instead, we turned in prep work for the scene we would have done. This included a sketch with blocking ideas. I'd found it useful then, so I think I decided to pull it out again for this.

However, what wound up happening in the rehearsal room was that the passes lacked something. The movements seemed divorced from what I pictured happening behind them. It all became "Olivia told me to do this so I'm going to," a sort of visual clutter. Since I felt so pressed for time, I didn't investigate this in the moment as much as I should have. Instead, I tended to simply make a note of it in my reflection and move onto the next day.

One thing, however, that we did begin to have discussions about this week was subtext. Just like people, characters don't always say what they mean. Actors must know both what they say, what they mean, and why they don't just say what they mean. This week, we looked at two spots where I felt that subtext was being employed: the opening of II.3, and the "final girl" section of II.7. Both moments involved Paige and Alison and I got the idea after we'd already worked II.3, so we did it on the day we worked II.7.

To work this, I used an exercise I stole from Ali Greene '20; where she got it from, I could not tell you. I had each actor read their line as written. After, they had to say what they thought the character was really trying to say. Then they would go to the next line. The actors' first try at this was a little shaky. I found with all the actors—as this exercise would come back in

later weeks—that when we were working with subtext, sometimes they would want to simply reframe the line in a different way, such as using synonyms or switching the order of information around. That's not digging underneath the words. This was especially apparent in II.3. The section of II.3 we looked at for this exercise is as follows:

"CATHERINE. Hi. Sorry. I'm late. Did Mom let you in?

AVERY. Yeah. Do we still have a class?

CATHERINE. Yes. Gwen won't be back, but we'll keep going.

AVERY. So it's like an independent study now?

CATHERINE. Yeah, is that all right?

AVERY. It's great. Are you…Did you just have sex?

CATHERINE. What? No! I just…I rushed. From upstairs" (Gionfriddo, *Rapture* 47).

In this section, the characters *are* (mostly) saying what they mean. However, even as Avery is asking questions she cares about the answer to, she is mentally cataloguing everything that Catherine is providing her: sex hair, misbuttoned clothes, et cetera. I wanted to make sure that Alison was aware of this, and that Paige was able to focus on *deflect, deflect, deflect*. They both walked away from the exercise understanding why we did it, but not really finding it helpful.

The "final girl" section of II.7, though, went much better. Avery uses Carol Clover's final girl theory to boost Catherine's morale in the wake of her and Don's break-up. An interesting discovery that happened for me while they did this exercise was where Paige felt that Catherine understood Avery's point. I'd always felt it came *after* Avery's whole speech, in the beat before Catherine says, "want to go to Italy with me in January?" (Gionfriddo, "Rapture" 67). Paige placed it a few lines earlier, when Catherine says, "Clover thinks slasher films are actually pro-

feminist because the woman is finally allowed to fight her own battle and win" (67). This difference of opinion offered a chance to chat about what is happening in this section and what the two characters need from each other in this moment.

After using this exercise on both scenes, I checked in with Paige and Alison and asked them their thoughts. I really appreciated that they weren't afraid to tell me when something didn't work for them. It made me feel like we had established a room where people felt that they could voice discomfort or displeasure without anyone's feelings getting hurt.

II.3.iv: Cast Bonding

One of my most important goals for this show was building and creating a safe space for my actors. To me, this includes my actors being comfortable with each other. We tried to have cast dinners after rehearsal whenever we could. During Week 3, we hung out together on Friday night. It was the first time I'd spent significant time with most of them outside of class or rehearsal. It was great to see everyone become friendly and grow more comfortable with each other. As I wrote in my 11/7 journal: "And my cast is bonding <3 they're becoming friiiieeennddds <3."

II.4: Week 4

II.4.i: Week Structure

Week 4 was dedicated to wrapping up first passes and introducing intimacy work. Monday and Tuesday were devoted to first passes of II.4-II.6. Artemis Preeshl ’84 Zoomed in to work with us on Wednesday and Friday as we choreographed all the various moments of intimacy in the script. Sunday, we put some of the pieces of Act II together and prepped for our Act I Stumble Through that we were planning for the next week.

II.4.ii: Finalizing First Passes

II.4, II.5, and II.6 we were able to work linearly. After working on II.4, we had the time to run directly from II.3 into II.4, which I think helped both scenes and allowed everyone get a bit of a feel for how the scenes work together. Working II.4 was a little complicated without Artemis there, since the majority of the show’s intimacy moments occur in that scene, but we made do. By the end of the rehearsal, I felt like we’d done all we could for the moment.

Working II.5 and II.6 didn’t go quite as well. Monday (II.4) had been a very silly day and we rode some of that energy into Tuesday. I didn’t feel prepped enough and as a result found us going off on a lot of tangents. But we buckled down and I left the rehearsal feeling like, in my own words, a “real director.”

II.5 is a hard scene. We talked a lot more about objectives and tactics than we had with prior scenes. I gave Alex and Brendan the same subtext exercise I’d given to Paige and Alison. We went through most of the first page. I noticed that Brendan tended to frame his subtext in

more objective-tactics form, i.e. *I want ____, I am trying to _____*. To me, that's not what subtext is. I think of subtext as what you want to say but don't, while a tactic is why you say what you said instead. There might occasionally be an overlap, but even if the subtext is, say, "I want you to do this for me," you want that in service of something else, and so the tactic isn't *to want*. I tried to talk about this with him in the moment, but I didn't feel like my answer was sufficient and that I'd only confused him more.

My big victory in the "real director" sense, though, was a blocking decision. The script calls for Don and Gwen to be seated "looking at [Devon's birthday] cake" at the top of the scene. (Gionfriddo, *Rapture* 60). When lights come up, the actors would thus be discovered at the table, much as they are discovered at the top of Act I. This didn't seem to be working and kept them locked down for the whole scene. I asked them to try entering into II.5. It made a world of difference, so we switched to that instead.

II.4.iii: Intimacy Work

Intimacy choreography and coordination is an emerging field in theater (in theater, "intimacy choreography" is the preferred term), television, and film. The three fields have long been synonymous with sexual exploitation—the Shubert brothers, who practically built Broadway, were once described by dancer Agnes de Mille as "[running] a brothel" (Zimmer). Basically, if you were a woman and you wanted a part in this up-and-coming theatrical space, you better sleep with a Shubert. As Hollywood began to take off in the 1920s, the casting couch mentality moved west (Zimmer). The physical couch eventually faded out, but the exploitation did not.

The 2017 allegations against Harvey Weinstein blew the doors off Hollywood's and entertainment's practices surrounding gender parity and sexual harassment and assault. In its wake emerged the #MeToo movement and Time's Up, the latter explicitly founded by women in entertainment (Nicolaou and Smith). Media and entertainment juggernauts like Kevin Spacey, Bill O'Reilly, and Matt Lauer, as well as many others in various fields, had their careers torpedoed—and for good reason. But removing individuals does not change a toxic culture. What could?

One such change for entertainment was the development of intimacy choreography and coordination as a field. Back in 2015, actress Lori Myers woke up the Chicago theater community to its #MeToo problems with the call "not in our house." Local theatre artists and administrators created the Chicago Theatre Standards as "a voluntary tool of self-governance that seeks to nurture communication, safety, respect, and accountability of participants at all levels of theatrical production" ("Not in our House" 4). In it, it lays out ways to improve local theaters to be harassment-free, nurturing environments with support from peers and common understanding. It addresses concerns around consent and the staging of sexual scenes. One of these proposed changes was for "intimacy designers" to be hired and sit on the production team of shows requiring sexual content or nudity ("Not in our House" 22). It further advocated for "actors, directors, and choreographers [to] have equal status in devising SC/N scenes" (22). This was one of the first discussions about standardizing intimacy choreography in theater.

In 2017, Chelsea Pace and Laura Rikard founded Theatrical Intimacy Education (TIE). They are a consulting firm training theaters and practitioners in TIE Best Practices with the goal of making theatrical intimacy more consensual and "less weird" (Pace and Rikard v). Pace published a book discussing these practices entitled *Staging Sex: Best Practices, Tools, and*

Techniques for Theatrical Intimacy in 2020. The two were honored by the Kennedy Center in 2021 for their contributions to the field, a recognition that shows just how vital intimacy choreography has become in such a short amount of time ("Chelsea Pace").

The Netflix drama *Bridgerton* brought intimacy coordination into pop culture, even getting a *Saturday Night Live* sketch out of it. The series exploded upon its release, becoming Netflix's most-watched series (at the time) upon its premiere (Clark). Its sex scenes received particular attention. When asked about the scenes in interviews, the stars and creators all sang intimacy coordinator Lizzy Talbot's praises. Series star Jonathan Bailey said, "I can't believe there was ever a time when [intimacy coordinators] weren't in place…it was all incredibly safe, and it became really fun" (Seddon and Robinson).

This increased spotlight on the role and power of intimacy coordinators and choreographers suggests that they won't be going away any time soon. Thus, bringing it into the rehearsal process for *Rapture, Blister, Burn* seemed like a no-brainer.

I had been first exposed to intimacy choreography in 2019. Artemis came to Bates to lead a workshop on the topic and to choreograph scenes for the fall productions of *Love/Sick* and *Elevator Girl*. I was both in *Love/Sick* and attended the workshop (and even wrote an article for *The Bates Student* about it and intimacy choreography overall). Additionally, I was able to attend a workshop with Pace and Rikard at the 2021 Kennedy Center American College Theater Region 1 Festival.

Artemis came on board in October. She worked remotely with the actors to teach them the basics of the technique and choreograph the various moments called for in the play. Her work was built from Pace and Rikard's Best Practices, which we continued to consult even after she

left. My actors laughed when I first pulled out my copy of *Staging Sex* in the middle of a rehearsal, but it became a trusty guide for us as we worked scenes.

There are several key components to the technique. The first is boundary tools, which includes "button," fences, and gates (Pace and Rikard 17). Theater is often built around the "yes, and…" idea essential to improv. By agreeing, you are more likely to keep an improvised scene going. Saying "no" can be seen as counterproductive, or even being difficult. These connotations migrate to theater as whole. "Button" is a way to say no without truly saying no, which for some might be easier. It is essentially a hold word. It is not meant to replace "hold" or "stop" or any other words already a part of the theatrical lexicon, as these all have their place. Instead, its goal is to remove the negative connotations that those words can hold when called by an actor rather than a stage manager or director. The button word does not have to be "button," but should be something not used in the script or in the show's world (Pace and Rikard 18). "Eggplant" became the cast's chosen word at Artemis's suggestion. (I have a feeling she might be unaware of that word's sexual connotations amongst younger generations, as I found such a choice somewhat counterproductive to the ideas of "button" and its role in intimacy choreography.)

Fences and gates are physical boundaries. As this play has no nudity or sexual scenes, every actor was given a fence around their "bathing suit areas." Additionally, actors had the option to put fences around areas they did not want touched, whether that be the top of their feet, their nose, their left wrist, or anywhere else. Consent is conditional and revocable, so actors can put up fences whenever they need to—say they hurt something later in the process—or to "open the gates" and remove a fence in a particular move, say maybe a hug where two actors' pelvises would touch (Pace and Rikard 23).

The actors practiced this by working with partners. Dianna had a conflict with the beginning of rehearsal, so Paige and Brendan paired off and Alex and Alison paired off. Each actor ran their hands over everywhere on their body they were comfortable with their partner touching. Their partner had to orally tell them everywhere they noticed a fence and ask any clarifying questions. Then, the first actor had to take their partner's hand and run it over those areas. While or after doing so, the first actor had the option make any modifications.

After practicing both, we began the actual choreography. We started with Alex and Brendan's kiss in II.5 so that Alex would be able to leave (as we did a closed rehearsal). We then moved onto Dianna, Alison, and Paige's contact on the couch in II.7, specifically Dianna holding Paige's hand. Once those were done, we worked through Paige and Brendan's moments from start to finish, wrapping it up on Friday.

The choreography is derived from several different ingredients. The first is timing. All moves have set times attached to them that are recorded by the stage manager and confirmed with the actors. The second is level of touch. Pace describes these levels as "powder, paint, and clay" or "skin, muscle, and bone" (43-44). Each one has a different intensity and thus can be used to display different things. Powder or skin is the lightest, followed by paint/muscle and clay/bone.

When choreographing each moment, Artemis and the actors first discussed timing and level of touch, as well as where exactly on the body contact would be made. I let them take the lead on this, chiming in if I felt something wasn't working or needed further clarification. Most of the moments were chosen to be at the paint level, with a few powder exceptions. The exact timing of each of the moves changed a bit from initial impressions to trying it out. For example, the gap between Brendan and Alex's two kisses was lengthened a bit to make sure that the

movement was not rushed, since it involves a lot of internal momentum for the actors. Much to Artemis's chagrin, the amount of time that Dianna and Paige held hands for kept fluctuating, since they'd attached the move to a line. We eventually got it to mostly match with a count of about 11-12 seconds.

On Thursday between the two rehearsals, I checked in with Alex, Brendan, and Paige individually about how they felt about their intimacy moments, specifically the kisses. I offered all of them that if there was anything they wanted changed, I would bring it up to Artemis as something I'd thought about. They all assured me they were feeling good about it.

II.4.iv: Putting the Puzzle Together

After Artemis choreographed everything with us, we were able to integrate the moments into the passes we'd done. We put some scenes together that we hadn't had the chance to knit yet to help make sure everyone understood the shape of Act II. We then returned our focus to Act I in preparation for our Act I stumble through the next week.

One thing that I thought was important for us to start this week was looking at the "monologues." There aren't any big, long monologues in this show (apart from Brendan's phone call), but both Alex and Alison had chunks of text that could be knit together into a monologue. I decided to use Karen Kohlhaas's monologue technique to work this.

Kohlhaas's technique was designed for monologue auditions. For these auditions, actors must be able to work the monologue and direct themselves. Chunks, descriptions, and sizes and speeds are designed to give actors those tools (15-23). I found the technique useful for thinking about monologues when I worked on my own, so I wanted to bring the option to my actors. I

specifically gravitated to sizes and speeds. All these monologues are presented as parts of wider scenes and broken up by dialogue, so while we *could* assign descriptions, I worried that the pieces would be too small, and the descriptions would be too synonymous with one another. However, that would not necessarily be the case for sizes and speeds, so this was the part I chose to focus on.

Since Alex's monologues happen first and the first of hers is the only one in Act I, we started with her. This was another factor in my choice to mostly just focus on size and speed. Alex and I were taught the technique together. I knew that she had done exercises like the one where we had tried out each size and speed combination physically and attached it to certain descriptions, emotions, and feelings. I did not feel the need to repeat this exploration since it was so fresh in both of our minds.

Instead, to start I read her the monologue aloud. I asked her to clap whenever she felt there was a shift in tone or topic. This is what Kohlhaas calls making a "chunk" (15). A chunk basically functions the same as a beat. Chunks, however, can also be used to create rhythm and highlight important pieces of information. Alex, for example, isolated "He didn't even try!" even though you could argue that it would've been perfectly fine to include it in the former chunk ("The plan was for Don to work hard and get a better job—somewhere with decent schools") (29). However, the exclamation point on the sentence, combined with the next chunk, implies that this sentence is a bit of an outburst. Thus, isolating it allowed this emphasis to shine through.

I then had her read the chunked monologue aloud to me, not worrying about sizes and speeds but still clapping at the chunk switches. This allowed us to get a feel for the shape of the monologue when we stripped away everyone else's dialogue. I then had her assign each chunk a size (big or small) and a speed (fast or slow) (25). Of the four combinations, two back-to-back

chunks could not share the same one--the size *or* speed could stay the same, but they *both* couldn't remain. Once she'd done it, she then read the monologue overexaggerating the size and speed. We discussed if any of the chunks needed to combine, or the size and speed need to change. I gave her the note that I feel like Gwen's tactic here is basically to vomit. She must get all these words off her chest, and once she starts, she can't stop. It makes even her "slow" have a bit of a speed and urgency to it.

Once she felt comfortable with the sizes and speeds, we added blocking. In the run of I.2 we'd done earlier, I'd been bored. Getting Alex on her feet for the monologue would help her physicalize size and speed while also break up the monotony of her sitting for the whole scene. I gave her the whole room to play with and she took it. The monologue came to life for the first time. It was a great note to end the week on.

II.5: Week 5

II.5.i: Week Structure

This week was short due to Thanksgiving Break. We started with an Act I Stumble-Through. This was the first time we had put Act I together. I think it was also the first time we had done all of I.1 in Gannett, since it had been first blocked in Schaeffer. For our last two rehearsals, we worked each individual scene.

All the actors were asked to be off-book for Act I starting this week. They were in varying states of success. Paige, with the most academic language and philosophy to deal with, unsurprisingly had the hardest time. I.2 suffered for the same reason.

II.5.ii: Stumble-Through

Chris McDowell and Kati Vecsey both attended our Act I Stumble Through on Monday. This was the first time the actors did all of Act I together and in order. It offered a chance to put things together and give me an idea of where we needed to work the next few days. It was also the first time that people other than me and Mingzheng were watching rehearsals, so we could all start to gauge where audience reactions came in—and where they didn't, but perhaps should.

Starting with this stumble, I began taking aggressive notes during runs. Most of them I shared with the actors in some capacity. For example, I wrote down lines that sounded flat in some way. I would ask the actor why they said that line or what they were hoping to accomplish. They verbally answered me and then took it into consideration for next time. Some notes I chose

not to share directly, because they either seemed minor and nitpicky, or they were something that would come up by slowing down and running the scene later in the week.

The biggest thing that caught my attention in the stumble through was I.2. Because lines weren't fully off-book, my attention was mostly drawn to blocking. People were getting up and down. I couldn't tell what was "oh wait I forgot we changed this, so I'll just fix it now" and what was the actual blocking. I resolved to look at it later in the week.

I also noticed that I.3 was falling flat. We would need to spend some time on its character moments and the emotional aspect of it. I.1 also had some moments to look at, but of the three, I felt it was in the best shape.

II.5.iii: Working Scenes

We started with Brendan and Paige, working I.3 and their solo parts of I.1. While working I.1, we got into a conversation about when Don decides he wants to make a move on Catherine. About two weeks pass between I.1 and I.2/I.3 (which happen on the same day). All we know is that Don and Catherine have been hanging out frequently enough that Alice feels the need to comment on it at the top of I.2. Brendan believed Don decides to shoot his shot in the car on the way over to Alice's. But that raised the question for me: why then would he go over in the first place? Why *would* he care what she thinks of him if he wasn't interested in something more?

I had the actors try something that I thought might be useful, or at the very least interesting. We'd had some success unlocking earlier scenes by improving into them, specifically II.2 and II.6. It gave the actors a sense of where they were coming from and how they got to the

scene's starting point. They would let the improv go on for as long as they needed or wanted and then the person with the first line would start the scene, connecting the two seamlessly.

For this exercise, I asked Brendan and Paige to improv *out* of I.1. I pulled two chairs off to the side and designated them as the car. I then put two more chairs on the Alice side of the bench and designated it as the bar. I told them to start from Don's final entrance in I.1. Instead of running off into the house, they would go to the car, and then the bar. I challenged them to figure out the sorts of things are Catherine and Don talking about; just what does "catching up" entail?

Watching them felt like watching two people fall back into a rhythm. They made up stories about people from grad school. Don ordered Catherine's drink. They talked a little bit about Don and Gwen's kids. They struggled a bit, especially transitioning from the locales, but they did their best to stay in it. Once I felt like they had a bit of a grasp of the dynamic, I stopped them and had them jump to the top of I.3 and do the scene. I.3 was totally lifted. It helped unlock something for all of us. For me, it was a good reminder that sometimes the best thing you can do is ditch the script and simply let the actors play.

II.6: Week 6

II.6.i: Week Structure

Coming back after Thanksgiving Break, this was our last week of rehearsals for the semester. The actors were asked to be off-book for Act II. From there, the week's structure was similar to what we did with Act I: a stumble-through on Monday, followed by working scenes on Tuesday and Wednesday. The only difference was we did a full stumble-through on Friday. We doubled this as a designer run so that the designers could see where the show was prior to leaving on break.

II.6.ii: Run and Work

The Act II stumble went about as I expected. Lines weren't as in place as I was hoping they would be, considering everyone had the whole break to prep. I came away knowing that I wanted to look at blocking in II.3 and II.4, and that the stakes in II.2 and II.6 needed addressing. We ended with enough time to look at Alex's II.1 monologue. I'd asked her to come in with some size and speed ideas, so we worked that before calling it a day.

It became immediately clear that II.4 wasn't doing what it needed to do. I took two stabs at fixing this. First was working Brendan's phone call monologue. He'd initially wanted to treat it like a monologue, but we'd both concluded prior to this rehearsal that even though Gwen's half wasn't written in the script, we needed to treat the exchange as a dialogue. While we worked the earlier parts of II.4, I asked Alex to read that section and then write her half of the phone call. Once we reached that moment, she read her half off to the side while Brendan did his half and

the blocking we'd been working on. This gave him someone to bounce off, but also helped him figure out the timing of the pauses, which he'd been rushing through. I could tell it helped, but it still needed to lift more. Don must leave that phone call, and II.4 overall, ready to go back to Gwen. I wasn't getting that from the runs we were doing.

The second stab was working with Alison, Dianna, and Paige on their final chunk of the scene. In this section, Avery and Alice needed to steamroll Catherine. I decided I wanted to do a status exercise to help Paige understand how she needed to let herself be—frankly—bullied a bit. I gave them a chair and introduced it as "the chair of status." Whoever has status in that moment has the right to sit in the chair. If you don't have status, you are trying to get that chair. But they were all too nice with each other as they started going through the scene. So, I stood them up and cleared some space. I pulled off one of my shoes and gave it to them as "the shoe of status." Their job was to win this shoe. If you had the shoe, you had to do everything in your power to keep it; if you didn't, you had to do everything in your power to get it.

The Schaeffer stage turned into basically a boxing ring as Alison, Dianna, and Paige chased each other around. Alison and Dianna teamed up by the end to keep the shoe away from Paige, just as Alice and Avery team up against Catherine. Once they'd done the whole scene fighting over the shoe, I had them do the scene normally but with that same energy. The entire chunk lifted astronomically, not just for Paige but also Dianna and Alison.

Since it worked so well for them, I had Paige, Alex, and Brendan do the same thing for II.2. Brendan maybe took it a bit too seriously, but it had similar effects on their scene. Once again, it was a good reminder that sometimes, actors just need to *play*.

I tried to carry this energy into working on the remaining scenes of Act II but had significantly less success. I challenged Paige to try all of II.6 (or at least the opening) smiling

like crazy, playing into Schlafly's "positive woman" image. I challenged Brendan to enter II.3 whistling. We did more subtext work and tried improving II.5 to help unlock it, but those didn't go so well. We did have an important breakthrough about that scene, though: II.5, II.6, and II.7, which had all been feeling off, will only work if Don (and the audience) leaves II.4 with the realization of what he must do. This is obvious in hindsight. It had to start with Don on the phone with Gwen. This creates a challenge since a) it's been a month in between II.3 and II.4, so we miss what got everyone to this point and b) Gwen isn't on stage for that moment. This knowledge I think helped make II.6 go smoother than it had in a while, but it still felt off.

After rehearsal on Wednesday, I didn't feel great about where things were. We'd had some breakthroughs and made some progress over the course of the week, but lines, in particular, stuck out to me as not quite where they needed to be.

II.6.iii: Breaking Point

I was nervous for how the designer run—our first full stumble through--on Friday (our next rehearsal) was going to go. Perhaps we shouldn't have done a designer run for our stumble through, but we needed to do it prior to break, so there was no other day to make it work.

Almost immediately, things got off the rails. Only Kati Vecsey, Chris McDowell, and Michael Reidy, our lighting designer, were able to be there. Dianna was late, which she'd warned me about, but it was even later than I expected. So late that we wound up doing Act I out of order, doing I.2 last. But all of that was truly the least of our concerns.

We had not looked at Act I since before break. And it showed, especially in I.1 and even worse in I.2. Every joke, even ones that deserve an under-your-breath chuckle, fell flat. I.2

dragged so much from people calling for line that I eventually interrupted and asked if they wanted their scripts. When I did, Kati immediately agreed that they needed them. She said nothing had improved from the last stumble she'd seen almost three weeks ago. She and Chris both said they were bored. The actors picked up their scripts and we carried on with the scene.

When we took a break for intermission, Kati pulled me out into the hallway. I no longer remember exactly what she said to me, but it was something to the effect of me being too nice and needing to be harder on my actors. We went back in and started Act II. It went a little better. II.3 got some laughs. II.5 seemed tighter than it had on Wednesday. But when we got to the end and Michael thanked us and said this was great, Kati said, "Don't lie. No, it wasn't."

Chris came over to talk to me and ask about props. Why was there no liquid in the glasses? (I forgot and hadn't been clear enough with my stage managers for them to take the initiative on their own.) Were we tracking props? (We'd started, but actors weren't consistently remembering.) I don't remember all of what she said to me because while she spoke to me, Kati had gone over to my actors. When Chris was done with me, she joined her.

I'll be completely honest: I can only remember broad strokes of the conversation. I was listening, but it felt like background noise to me as I tried not to cry in front of my professors or my actors. I more remember my reaction to what I'd heard than what I'd actually heard. But Kati and Chris told the cast something to the effect of the show was bad and their performance was letting me and Alex down on our theses. At its core, it wasn't that dissimilar from what Kati had said to me in the hall. However, I felt that she basically gave me the highlights and put the focus on my actors instead when I knew it wasn't 100% their fault. Even when it came to knowing their lines—were we giving them line notes? Admittedly, no. And in that moment, I realized only Alex really had training—this was Dianna and Alison's first show at Bates, and while Paige

and Brendan had done things with the Robinson Players and Brendan had taken Beginning Acting (via Zoom), it wasn't quite the same. There was so much more I could and should've been doing, basic building blocks of acting and standards for rehearsal, that I hadn't been doing.

Brendan pushed back somewhat on what Kati said, asking for some clarification. When the faculty left, he got upset, but calmed down quickly. I let the cast go with hugs and insistence on having fun at the theater party happening later, which I couldn't attend since I was contact traced at the time. Or at least, that's what I told them as they left.

I completely broke down they second their voices disappeared from the hallway. I was supposed to go see *The One-Act Play That Goes Wrong* that night, but I didn't. I didn't eat dinner. I spent at least two hours in Gannett, crying on and off. They had voiced every single insecurity I have ever had about my directing. It was imposter syndrome brought to life. In my black-and-white, spiraling mental state, all that I could see and think was that the department had finally found out I was a fraud but didn't even seem to realize they'd done so. I couldn't help but wonder, *does that make me a bigger fraud*?

When I wasn't crying, I came up with a plan for the next week. This was supposed to have been our last rehearsal since finals were coming up, but I didn't want to send the actors off to break like this. And when planning just made me cry more, I thought about editing the reflection discussing the process so far that I was about to turn in. I wrote the following, addressed to my advisor, for that reflection, but my roommate said I couldn't turn it in, so I didn't. However, I think it is important to share, to show just exactly where I was during that day:

I am writing this after our stumble-through attended by Kati, Chris, and Michael. The former two rightfully called out this show for not being in good shape. They put most

of the blame on my actors and lectured them on their roles and responsibilities, but every single thing they said to them (with the exception maybe of not knowing lines) are things that they 100% should've said to me. (Chris, admittedly, did say most of it to me, but Kati gave me the Sparknotes compared to what she laid into my cast.)

I don't know if Tim mentioned it to you at all when [you took his place as my advisor] (in fact I wouldn't be surprised if it influenced his decision to hand me over), but I am not a confident director and I am an incredibly harsh self-critic, to the point where the pretty low evaluation I turned in on my 360 was actually the edited version, which Tim seemed to struggle to grasp when I said so.

I often wonder if I picked the wrong track and there have been many times this semester (including right now, writing this) where I have wanted to email you and the department and ask them to cancel this show (I even looked at the refund policy of Dramatists [Play Service, licensing company], and I wish I was joking on that). I am good at research and dramaturgy and seeing how scenes and characters work together, but I am not good at sharing that information. I am not good at using language that my actors can translate into performances that honor the work of the playwright. I get too wrapped up in blocking and images and words over what the actors actually need to do to make those parts work together. I don't know how to do it in my own acting, and I don't know how to do it as a director. It shows deeply in my work. I try to hide behind good plays and good actors and that only takes you so far.

I know that the ball has gone too far to cancel this show or change this thesis. My actors have put in too much work, my stage manager has put in too much work, my designers and the shop crew have put in too much work, and you [Cliff] have put in too

much work advising me and assembling my honors panel. I am so deeply sorry for not speaking up sooner and for almost certainly wasting that time and effort and energy. I am working on putting together a plan to help address some of the flaws that Kati and Chris rightly identified and called out. It will almost certainly involve a lot more rehearsals than I planned on over break.

Please know that I am going to try my absolute hardest, but I don't know if it is going to work. If we can't create a passable product in six weeks of rehearsing five times a week, I don't know what we are going to do with three and a half, which is really all we have left with break and everything. I want you to know this and I want the other faculty to know this so that they don't take it out on my cast or my stage managers when the time comes. I truly don't think they are to blame.

II.7: Break Rehearsals (Week 6.5)

II.7.i: Rationale

Between December 6 and January 11, technically we were not supposed to rehearse due to finals and winter break. I knew that we couldn't follow that. Everyone would forget their lines and the work we'd done, and we didn't have enough time to deal with that when we came back in January. Prior to December 3, I had already planned on meeting over break and the cast had agreed. After the events of that rehearsal and my subsequent meeting with my advisor, I asked my cast if they would be willing to meet on the reading day of finals, which they all jumped at.

I decided to devote these rehearsals mostly to character work. That had been the biggest piece of feedback Kati provided, so it seemed like a good place to start (and easy to do over Zoom). Due to winter holidays and people's travel plans, I didn't see a way for us to meet as a full group more than twice. I told the cast to expect possibly being called for one-on-ones and for group work. I also encouraged them to meet on their own time to run lines together and to reach out to me if they had specific questions or things they wanted to work.

II.7.ii: Re-Grouping and Re-Examining Act I

During my Gannett session, I went digging for resources to help my actors with character. We hadn't spent time talking about it as a group in a while, so I thought maybe digging back into who these people are and how they move would help unlock things. I planned that for December 6, we would mostly talk about what happened on Friday and then do some character work.

Paige and Brendan requested privately that we go over the Act II intimacy, since they didn't feel like they knew when and where all of it was. Additionally, my advisor was able to join us for this rehearsal, which our schedules hadn't fully aligned to do during the previous weeks. I had Paige and Brendan come early and we looked at those moments. After our full-cast discussion, we decided to pivot and run Act I. Outside of the stumble, we hadn't been able to look at it since before break, plus it would allow my advisor to see some of the actual show and not just us talking about character.

In this run, I tried to let my blocking worries fade into the background and instead focus more on lines that fell flat. I took notes to share with the cast. I spoke with my advisor afterwards and his biggest note was that the actors were doing the blocking, but they didn't seem to know *why* they were doing it.

II.7.iii: Character and Movement Work

As I prepared for our first Zoom rehearsal, I knew that working scenes was lower on my priority list. I decided I wanted to lead a physicality exercise different from those we had done before. There was a dance improvisational score I had been introduced to in my sophomore year that I thought might be interesting to bring in called Barely Alive. However, I worried about asking them to do it at home, as they would not have as much space as they would in a theater or dance studio. Instead, I went searching for ideas. I found a video from the National Theatre in London in which movement director Vanessa Ewan, through coaching an actor preparing to play Nora in Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House,* demonstrated various studies and exercises for helping physically develop a character. This video immediately excited me. I was only familiar with one

of the exercises—exploring an animal—but thought they all offered interesting ways into a character.

Of the five introduced in the video, I decided to bring two of them to my actors: animal studies and Rudolf Laban's Eight Efforts. Laban was a dancer who categorized human movement into four components—direction, weight, speed, and flow—each of which has one of two elements—direct/indirect, heavy/light, quick/sustained, or bound/free, respectively (Espeland). These components and elements come together in the Eight Efforts: wring, press, flick, dab, glide, float, punch, and slash (Espeland).

In the video, Ewan worked on the "light" efforts with the actress. After first exploring them in a more abstract, physical sense, Ewan had the actress try it in a more everyday activity. The actress had gravitated to the idea of flick and the chosen activity was writing. It allowed the actress to unlock a sort of "tick" for the character of Nora (Ewan 3:02). This approach excited me for two reasons. Firstly, it combined a more abstract exploration with a more focalized one, which I thought might be helpful. Secondly, while it would not perhaps radically change the actors' physical approaches, it could perhaps help unlock an idiosyncrasy of some sort that might separate actor and character.

In addition to this physical work, I also decided that it was worth having a conversation about what is happening for each character in the II.3 to II.4 time jump (Appendix I). I had thought about possibly doing improv for some of this but decided that this would only take us so far. Instead, we started our first break Zoom rehearsal going character by character and week by week of the jump. I prompted them as needed but tried to let them have the discussion amongst themselves about how their character was feeling and what they were doing during this time. We

wound up spending so much time on this discussion that we ran out of time to do both Barely Alive and the animal studies, as I had planned, so we just focused on the animals.

I regret not having the actors come into the rehearsal with animal ideas or taking more time to talk about them prior to setting the exercise on them. I had them play around with the animal and the character at 25%, 50%, 75%, and 100% increments. They had the option to turn their cameras off, which they all chose to do. They appreciated doing so because they felt they would have censored themselves more had we all been together in Gannett. We discussed the exercise afterwards, which we would've done anyway, but I was particularly curious to hear what they'd thought since this was something almost entirely new for me. They gave it a C grade. They found the middle phases too long and started second-guessing their animal choices as it went along (Paige: octopus, Brendan: blobfish, Alex: elephant, Dianna: bird, and Alison: lion). But from hearing them speak about their individual experiences, it sounded like Alison, at least, was able to unlock something.

Our one-on-ones were significantly more fruitful in almost every sense. I started each session with a check-in as to how they were feeling about the process. From there, I introduced Laban and the efforts. They each got to pick the element we worked with so that each of them explored four efforts. I split the exercise into two parts, but none of them chose to go onto part two, which would be the more realistic integration of the effort. However, I think doing just the first part was still valuable and we had some interesting discussions when playing with the different ideas. After the Laban work, I gave them the opportunity to ask any questions or talk about any areas they felt they were having trouble with.

I met with Paige first. She gravitated to the idea of flow but didn't pick between bound or free. Instead, she chose two free efforts (slash, flick) and two bound efforts (press, wring). I gave

her about two minutes to explore each effort with her camera off, and then we chatted about what she did, how it felt, and if it conjured any moments, scenes, or traits to mind for her. She felt that the slash worked well for II.6, but other than that, I could tell that she did not fully jive with the technique. Upon reflection, this may have been because she was the first I did it with *and* because we were not more specific with the element, but regardless, I chose not to push.

It was our conversations before and after the Laban work that were the more effective. Paige had expressed hesitation about the role of Catherine, as she seemed more "normal" than roles Paige had played before. I came away with the impression that this lack of confidence combined with her worries about lines resulted in her not being able to buy into the character the way she needed to. We discussed pieces of I.2, II.1, and II.4, such as Catherine's teacher persona, when she can no longer ignore that Gwen's horror movie analysis is about her, and when and where she switches strategies to keep Don.

I met with Brendan next. He bought into to the Laban significantly more. He gravitated to the idea of weight and heavy, so we explored punch, slash, press, and wring. Punch reminded him of II.4, specifically the line "Cathy, I'm not gonna beat one out of [Gwen] when she's crying" (Gionfriddo, *Rapture* 55). He felt that press also resonated with II.4, but more in the sense of Don feeling pressed, rather than doing it to anyone.

As we discussed the idea of wring, I noticed how he started talking about it in a way that reminded me more of Michael Chekhov's work with psychological gesture. The two are undeniably similar, centering on archetypal gestures and even using some of the same actions (including wring). The idea behind psychological gesture is "to summarize the intricate psychology of a character in an easily surveyable form" (Chekhov qtd. Rushe 260). It is meant to help activate the actor's body as they transform into a character by unlocking their need. I find

this different from Laban's work as it is about propelling the body into action rather than constructing movement to further action, as I feel the latter is meant to do.

Brendan was unfamiliar with Chekhov's work, so I gave him a brief crash course. I later sent him a summary of psychological gesture and some helpful objective verbs if he wanted to explore this in his own time. He chose not to, but did, however, latch onto the idea of Don as a character controlled by his brain. We realized that in every scene he's covering up an insecurity. This helped us unlock how and why he can be an asshole about never reading Catherine's books. It also got us thinking about how he approaches his arguments with Gwen. We came up with the idea that Don's "you wanna teach him battered women should be punished?" isn't about him really fighting with Gwen; it's slashing up her argument because he's back in teacher mode, showing off for Catherine (Gionfriddo, *Rapture* 11). Brendan tends to escalate quickly, so this change allowed him to still have somewhere to go by the time he reached "let him have his fucking magic years" (11).

Similarly to Paige, Dianna chose to play with direction without getting more specific and chose four efforts somewhat at random (press, glide—both direct—, slash, and float—both indirect). This cemented for me that Alex and Alison would need to be more specific for the exercise to work as I wanted it to. Dianna was perhaps the only one to even approach the more realistic integration of Laban, as she didn't have the physical space to explore as much as the first round really called for. She felt that the slash reminded her of spots of I.2 and the float of parts of II.7, but she didn't quite appreciate the exercise, either.

In our conversation, she asked a great question about Alice's final lines. Specifically, did Alice already know about the freedom that Catherine and Avery achieve? We decided that no, Alice also must go on the journey with everyone else. Her arc is about getting Catherine what

she needs, even if it's Don and even though she doesn't exactly like Don. After Gwen's outburst in I.2, Alice sort of starts to "audition" Don for Catherine. At the top of II.1, she covers for them. She must reach the end and realize that Don wasn't what Catherine needed and that by being on her own, Catherine will finally get what she *does* need.

Alex's Laban work was fascinating to watch (or, well, hear about—all five actors chose to turn off their cameras while doing the physical explorations). She initially was interested in exploring direction, but she couldn't choose between direct and indirect. In the end, we settled on bound, which corresponds to punch, dab, press, and wring. Of these four, only one, wring, is indirect, and Alex didn't feel like she got much from that one once we did it. For me, this answered the unspoken question: Gwen's direction is direct, not indirect.

The direct-bound efforts produced some interesting images and conversations. I mentioned when describing my mood board the image that press brought to mind for her as she pressed down on the floor of her room. She matched this up to II.2, where Don and Catherine press down on her. We also had an interesting conversation about dab, which we discussed as having an almost maternal quality to it. When I heard her talk about it, I almost immediately conjured images of small children's faces being dabbed by their mothers to clean them of tears, snot, and food. I was hoping she would want to move onto the second half of the exercise and explore dab and press, but she chose not to.

Finally, I met with Alison who, like Paige, needed a little bit more coaxing to have the conversation. We almost immediately agreed that she would explore the direct efforts of punch, dab, press, and glide. She found some sort of scene or moment to connect each effort to. For punch, it was (perhaps obviously) when Avery gets punched at the Rocksboro lottery line. For dab, she felt it fit with II.7. The only difference between these two efforts is their weight: punch

is heavy while dab is light, which we noted for Avery might mean the difference between aggression and compassion (Espeland). Press she associated with II.4. Glide, the only flow she explored that was free instead of bound, she associated with Avery's post-show life in New York. Unsurprisingly, though, she chose not to go on into the second round. Our conversation was also much shorter since she didn't feel like she had much she wanted to talk about.

After having all these meetings, I felt a bit better about where all the actors were and how I was doing as a director. I was glad to take this time to slow down a bit and check in with everyone. It resulted in interesting discoveries and explorations that we would not have otherwise had the time for. I also think doing it alone helped as each actor was able to get individual attention, especially with the Laban—while all of them explored the effort of "press," I don't think there was a component or element that would've been helpful for all five of them to explore as a group.

II.7.iv: Omicron

As all this happened, international news became dominated by the Omicron variant running rampant. Chris McDowell emailed me about my thoughts on masking. Alison rescheduled her one-on-one since she'd gotten her booster and felt horrible. Bates announced they would be requiring boosters for the winter semester. My father and stepbrother tested positive for COVID-19. And on December 29th, Joshua McIntosh announced a slate of new public health policies for the winter semester, including that the first few days of classes would happen remotely.

In the fall, actors had been allowed to unmask while performing. We expected this to be the case for us. Despite the winter semester changes, athletes would still be allowed to unmask while competing, but would we be given the same exception? The script called for drinking and kissing to happen onstage. Our set was not designed to accommodate social distancing. If classes were expected to be remote the first week, did that apply to us? Would we be able to open January 27 with only a week of in-person rehearsals prior to tech? Could we push opening back a week?

As arrival loomed closer, we got answers where we could. Expect to be masked. Yes, the first week (at least) would be remote. We began discussions about moving opening back a week, but that required conversations with the other shows going up this semester, so we wouldn't get that one answered before the end of break. We had to approach our final break rehearsal assuming that anything and everything not only could but would go wrong, and that might include opening January 27 without much in-person rehearsal time.

II.7.v: Digging Deeper

With all of this, I did not feel ready for our last break rehearsal on January 5. I decided to do a combination of a line through and a work session. We looked at I.2, II.1, and II.7. Since they couldn't do their blocking, it forced me to focus on only giving them notes on other things. I wound up writing down mostly questions to spark conversation. While I was nervous about this, I think it worked well. For example, this run was the first time I realized that we might be playing Avery's "nice" wrong in I.2 (Gionfriddo, *Rapture* 29). The line happens just after Gwen admitted to stealing Don, and Gwen's response to Avery's interruption is to say, "I know" (29).

Up to this point, Alison had been playing it as in “nice job,” but that’s not something that Gwen would agree with. I asked Alison if it instead should be more of a “that was nice of you” kind of vibe. All of us immediately went “OHHHH!”

I felt a little better after this. However, I was terrified about what the next few weeks would bring.

II.8: Week 7

II.8.i: Structure

Since we were dealing with Zoom once again, I stuck to a plan similar to our final rehearsal of break. We ran Act I on Wednesday and Act II on Thursday. The show officially got pushed back a week, which made these rehearsals a little less stressful than they would have been.

During Thursday's rehearsal, I had yet another break down about the state of the show. This was entirely focused on my own directing. To quote my journal:

> "I know what I want from them but I don't know how to get it and I don't think this method of questions and answers is working for any of us and I'm not doing a good job of explaining things and I had this realization about midway through and so I legitimately have like nothing to say about Act II because I didn't know what to do with it and I have no idea what we are going to do tomorrow and I feel like everything is falling apart and this extra week is just going to be more excruciating and I don't know what to do."

To pivot from this, I decided to spend Friday on only specific scenes that either I or my actors identified. We combed through each scene and really dissected what people wanted and what was in their way.

II.8.ii: Piece by Piece

We looked at six scenes with this fine-toothed comb approach: I.1, II.1, II.2, II.5, II.6, and II.7. With the earlier scenes, we spent significantly more time and by the end were rushing

through a bit. I think going back to basics like this was eye-opening for all of us. For example, Alex and I had talked ages ago about how Gwen is trying to get Don and Catherine to go out in alone in I.1. But once we started breaking the scene down like this, that motive broke down. Firing Avery doesn't accomplish anything other than all three of them not going out and staying home. It's not part of some master plan to get Catherine and Don back together.

Honestly, I probably needed this dumbed-down rehearsal, for lack of a better word, more than any of the actors. This week might not have seemed that productive on paper, but in the grand scheme of the show, I think it was exactly what we needed: a time to slow down, a time to step away from blocking and staging, and dig back into the text.

II.9: Week 8

II.9.i: Structure

We finally returned to Gannett Theater after a long absence this week. Thanks to Martin Luther King Jr. Day, the week was shorter once again. We planned Run-and-Work days for the week so that we could do full runs, or we could stop and start as needed. Brendan had to go out of town for work on Friday, so that was planned as a day to focus on making sure props tracking was correct and to look at key moments that didn't involve him.

II.9.ii: Breakthrough (COVID)

We started with a full run on Tuesday. I left it with two and a half pages of notes, many of which I highlighted to remind myself to work them. We only got through II.5, but I didn't exactly leave feeling great about it. Lines were still way behind, but the cast was doing a good job at helping each other out when cues were dropped. While obviously I wanted them off-book, at this point, I cared more about the show being semi-coherent than word perfect.

When my advisor and I met afterwards to discuss the rehearsal, we started talking about energy. Most of the cast had brought theirs up a lot, but Paige appeared to be struggling. As we talked, I wondered aloud if it was less Paige was lower energy and more that she was having Catherine absorb everything and be more internal, which meant that anything sent to Catherine (which is a lot) appeared to drop.

The next day, Paige and I wound up meeting one on one to talk about some spots she wasn't feeling good about. We discussed this energy thing and I told her to let loose, let

Catherine lose it! She cries in front of her students! Let her have passion, let her get excited about her work.

We also discussed the "I'm an asshole" moment in I.3 (Gionfriddo, *Rapture* 35). In this moment, Don has just confessed to Catherine that he never read her books. The stage direction prior to that line reads "he puts a hand or two on her. He's a flirt and he's good at it" (35). While we had blocked an arm touch with our intimacy choreographer, the move had been bothering me for weeks now. It read as too false, not romantic enough, and didn't fully allow Brendan to tap into the assholery of it all.

As Paige and I talked, this image popped into my head of Brendan coming up behind her and wrapping his arms around her waist. She graciously let me try it out on her. I was worried it was too melodramatic, but Paige instantly loved it and called me a genius. When we had rehearsal later that night, we tried it out with Brendan. We struggled, though, with how exactly the move needed to happen. I wanted Brendan to be able to rest his chin on Paige's shoulder, so her back would need to be pressed to his chest. Paige currently was walking away from him in the lead up to the lines. We tried it so that she stopped with her back to him and said, "You didn't read it, did you? Wow" while looking at him through the sliding door (Gionfriddo, *Rapture* 35). However, I didn't feel that this provided enough motivation for either the "wow" (meant to come after a beat of silence) nor for Brendan to cross to her. It also broke the set boundaries a bit, as the door wasn't meant to be part of this particular location.

Next, I had them try it where Paige starts walking, but when she comes to the realization that Don hasn't read her books, she turns around to look at him. With this blocking, "wow" becomes a need to move away from him and hide her emotions. Don, sensing this, then crosses to her and wraps his arms around her waist. Once we tried that, the moment locked into place.

I rode that high into Thursday morning. As I walked to Post and Print, I heard someone shout my name. I turned and saw Dianna standing under the library arcade. She shouted to me, "Check your phone!" When I pulled my phone out, my stomach dropped: she'd texted our group chat to say she tested positive for COVID-19 that morning and would be in isolation until at least Tuesday.

Of all the actors to get COVID, I'm frankly thankful it was her—as horrible as that is to say. Alice is in the least number of scenes and Dianna was in a good spot; I didn't feel too worried about her losing time. Our lovely stage managers subbed in for her so that we could still do run-throughs while she was out. It certainly made our Friday rehearsal odd, with no Dianna or Brendan, but it allowed us to work some of I.2 and some individual moments with Alex, Paige, and Alison.

Alex and I looked at blocking of her I.2 monologue during this time. We came up with the idea to have her get her own Shirley Temple from the credenza, as this motivated her to stand up and allowed her to use up more of the space. We also played around with the very end of her monologue. I'd noticed that Alex tended to pull herself in at the end, zapping all her energy. Her line reads as "Phew! That felt good," which can't be inward (Gionfriddo, *Rapture* 30). She'd expressed trouble before with the "phew," so I gave her permission to treat the line more like an exhale, which helped but didn't solve much. I tried challenging her to make it *sound* like it felt good, but that didn't seem to be working, either.

This time, I made her try the "that felt good" part with three different tactics: celebrate, brag, and confide/confess. She immediately took a dislike to the idea of brag, but graciously tried it anyway. Her variations for celebrate and brag were basically the same, but confide was

different, so I pushed her to go further that. We were able to reach a point where I felt like the line had life in it for perhaps the first time.

Despite Dianna's absence, the Thursday run was the best I'd seen yet. Brendan was still anticipating a lot of things and Paige's energy was still a little low, but something clicked. It was the first time I thought hey…we might just be okay.

II.10: Weeks 9-10

II.10.i: Structure

Our bonus week, so to speak, was dedicated to runs and preparing for tech. We had our last solely-work day on Monday, in part because Dianna was still out. We did some brief work and then runs on Wednesday and Friday, but otherwise it was just runs. Our designers came in and out all week to ensure we were ready for tech. Mingzheng worked with our light and sound designers to basically have all the cues written by the end of Friday, setting us up nicely for tech on Saturday. So nicely, in fact, that we were done with cue-to-cue by 2:45, in a rehearsal scheduled to go until 6 PM. We used the time to squeeze in an additional run. They kept getting better and better.

II.10.ii: We Have a Show

I was terrified of losing the momentum from the previous week, but every day this week things looked better and better. Kati came back for the first time since December on Tuesday, and I rode the high that she liked what she saw for the rest of the week.

With sound and props mostly set, we finally choreographed the II.4 transition. I regret leaving it for so late, and it was awkward to start, but Paige and Brendan were great sports about it.

Dianna came back on Thursday, and while she'd missed some things, she slotted right into place. Vocally she wasn't quite where she had been, but I am so appreciative of the fact that

she dove right back in regardless. I was also very impressed that she immediately met everyone where they were despite it being a very different place than when she left.

My journals this week were short. But for the first time in maybe the whole process, they went like this:

Monday, January 24: "Other than me being incoherent for half the rehearsal I think it went well."

Tuesday, January 25: "Kati liked it which is all that matters."

Wednesday, January 26: "There are some moments in here that I think look really good."

Thursday, January 27: "We a rolling now."

Friday, January 28: "We have a show and I think it might be good (or at least passable)."

Saturday, January 29: "We had a really good run (they keep getting better)."

Sunday, January 30: "I think things are going really well."

Monday, January 31: "This is like going to be a thing."

I wrote my final rehearsal plan for Tuesday, February 1, but there's no reflection on it. I can't remember feeling paralyzed about anything (other than my friends and family seeing it, and COVID, but that was all out of my control). I'd feared the extra week wouldn't help us, but instead, it allowed us to tap into something amazing. I've believed for a long time that shows fall apart before they come back together, better than before. In my previous experience, that usually happened just before or during tech, as new elements appeared, and stress arose. Ours just

happened a little earlier. By the time tech rolled around, we were set and ready for it, and we only improved at each tech rehearsal. Moving into open dress and opening night, I felt…ready.

II.11: Show Time

In my thesis meeting the day before open dress, I asked my advisor, "Where should I be during the show?" I was too scared to sit in the audience. The very thing that excited me about alley staging—being able to see the other audience members reacting—now terrified me because it meant *I* would be able to see everyone reacting.

Yet, if we included open dress, I watched five out of six shows—I couldn't watch when my best friends were there and instead hid backstage, where I could still hear but couldn't see. I even did the thing that most terrified me: sitting on the opposite side from my dad, which meant I could watch him whenever I wanted.

I don't know if I can write about the differences between each performance in my actors. I don't know if I even clocked it. Once the show was out in the open, I became much more worried about audience reaction. Were people laughing? Were people invested? Did my friends like it? Did my Honors defense panelists like it? Did my Kennedy Center respondent like it? Had I done what I set out to do?

Based on conversations I had in the aftermath and the review in *The Bates Student*, the answer to this last, most important question was yes. Our KCACTF respondent said we avoided the trap of the characters simply being vessels for the philosophy. Three of my bosses from the Admissions Office came, and two of them had a whole conversation about the theory and themes on their drive back to Portland. My friends told me it was the best performance they'd seen from Alex (as she's the only one we'd all seen on stage before). On Thursday night, the much-agonized-over "I'm an asshole" move drew audible gasps from the audience (Gionfriddo, *Rapture* 35). Every night, the tension as Don and Catherine kissed was palpable—nobody moved

when the lights first came up for intermission. My idea for pre-show and post-show music—feminist anthems through the ages—was much lauded.

When I met my friends in the lobby on Friday night after the show, my roommate, shedding a few tears, exclaimed, “I’m so proud of you!” She made me tear up as well. One of my friends practically knocked me over with the force of his hug. We held on for a long time.

III: Theater & Education

III.1: Introduction

One of the things that attracted me to *Rapture, Blister, Burn* was its rich wealth of knowledge for me to learn and to explore. I am an education minor at Bates, and while I knew that I would complete a capstone as part of my minor, I also knew that I would get little choice in what that project would be. With this in mind, I approached the theater department about introducing a theater-in-education component to my thesis, and they allowed me to do so. Below, I will give a brief overview of the current climate of arts education (specifically theater) in the United States, followed by my curriculum project.

III.2: The State of Arts Education in the United States

When discussing the role the arts play in education, very rarely is the focus on the art forms themselves; rather, it tends to focus on how the arts (music, visual art, dance, theater, and media arts) can improve learning in other subjects and transfer skills. Elliot Eisner lays out different "visions and versions of arts education" in his seminal text *The Arts and the Creation of Mind*:

- Discipline-based art education, which encourages students to develop the skills and imagination of a specific discipline, learn how to discuss formal and expressive qualities of art, understand relationships between art and historical and cultural context, and engage students in a philosophical conversation about the value of art

- "Visual culture," where art functions as an interpretable text to be discovered
- Creative problem-solving
- Creative self-expression, or art as human development
- Preparation for working world via development of initiative, creativity, imagination, teamwork, and planning skills
- Cognitive development
- As an aid to boost academic performance in other subjects
- Integrated across the curriculum to encourage connections (25-45)

These various frameworks often exist in conjunction with each other. There is no true consensus amongst educators or researchers which model is best, either. Considering these competing interests, it is not a surprise that since the 1970s, there has been a decrease in and fragmentation of arts education in the United States. The arts are not always considered a core content area—though they are included in No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation—so their inclusion in curriculum can be heavily dependent on district budgets and time constraints (Bodily 10).

NCLB and the wider standards and accountability movement have had a significant impact on the arts' inclusion in school curricula. For the 1999-2000 school year (the most recent national arts survey at the time of the cited article's publication in 2008), it was found that 94% of elementary schools offered music programs, 87% offered visual art programs, and less than 20% offered dance or theater (16). At the secondary level, while 90% of schools offered music and 93% visual art, 57% and 62%, respectively, offered fewer than four classes in either discipline. Additionally, 48% of secondary schools offered theater and 14% offered dance. As schools have shifted to reading and mathematics in accordance with NCLB and its successor

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the arts have been eroded. In five years, California saw a 50% decline in the number of students taking music classes (17).

Due to this marginalization in schools, arts education has expanded to non-school providers, which include community-based providers, cultural organizations such as museums and theaters, and after-school programming. Sometimes, these programs come into schools, but other times, they are separate.

However, the arts are still a privileged piece of society and culture. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has four objectives for education that can be met by the arts: "to protect, promote and transmit heritage; to empower learners to be creative and responsible global citizens; to foster creativity and the diversity of cultural expression; and to promote freedom of expression" (qtd. Wright and Leong 25). Thus, access to the arts should be critical—and yet it is not.

Theater in particular experiences a unique type of marginalization. Plays, particularly those by Shakespeare, are ubiquitous in the curricula of literature courses. But introducing actual theater courses can be seen as a threat to established music and visual art programs, fighting for limited resources (Pascoe and Yau 57). There are types of theater that exist to be instructive, such as theater for social change, theater of the oppressed, and the work of Bertolt Brecht. With these types of performances, learning is not meant to be isolated to a classroom and standards, but rather to educate a community in an applied manner. But at the same time, theater can also be used as a pedagogical tool across disciplines, such as through Readers' Theater, a practice particularly useful for English Language Learners (ELLs) because it involves listening as well as speaking, both key in language development (qtd. Rieg and Paquette 149). Theater in education can thus be seen as a web of contradictions and confusion, carried out by classroom teachers,

teaching artists (artists who are not state-certified to teach but are brought in as guests to schools), and educational wings of theater companies.

III.3: Connecting this to Rapture, Blister, Burn

My original plan for this piece of my thesis project was to design an interdisciplinary curriculum where *Rapture, Blister, Burn* could be taught in an English classroom alongside studying the women's movement in social studies. I also considered making a show guide similar to what theater companies make for some shows, designed to be offered alongside performances that students would see to spark discussion around plot and theme[3].

However, the more rehearsals we had, the more I knew that *Rapture, Blister, Burn* would likely never be taught in a classroom, even with high school seniors. (The Motion Picture Association guidelines say that PG-13 movies are only allowed one use of "one of the harsher sexually-derived [swear] words," so anything more earns an automatic R/18+ rating, and seniors are typically 17-18 years old) ("Classification and Rating Rules" 7). If *Rapture, Blister, Burn* was a movie, it would get an R-rating on language alone—not to mention all the frank discussion about drinking, pot, and pornography. Additionally, the women's movement is typically part of a larger unit in social studies, so it would be harder to tie in one play to a slice of a whole unit. So, I could still develop a full curriculum or a show guide, but how practical would they be, especially for students who hadn't seen the show?

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[3] An example of one made by the Huntington Theater Company for *Rapture, Blister, Burn* can be seen here

Instead, I have written two lesson plans—one for English/language arts (ELA) and one for theater—aimed at high school students that uses *Rapture, Blister, Burn* as an example text. While educators could choose to leave the play as is depending on the age group they are working with (all lessons are aimed at high school students), they could also substitute a different text and have similar, if not identical, discussions. Alongside each lesson, I provided a rationale statement explaining how I designed the lesson. I additionally have created materials that educators could use for the various lessons, such as presentations and note sheets, which will be included as appendices.

III.3.i: Lesson #1: How to Read a Play

Discipline: ELA

Target Age Group: 9th-12th Grades

Unit Topic/Theme: Studying a play (example text: *Rapture, Blister, Burn* by Gina Gionfriddo)

Lesson Length: Approximately 80 minutes

Essential Questions:

- Why do we read plays?
- How are plays structured?
- How do playwrights reveal information?

Learning Objectives:

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to…

- Articulate differences between reading and watching plays
- Define important terminology such as act, scene, dramatis personae, dialogue, stage direction, and beat
- Identify character names, dialogue, and stage directions on the page
- Understand how playwrights use punctuation to enhance dialogue and performances
- Identify triggers and heaps according to David Ball's method of plot analysis
- Understand how playwrights reveal information

Applicable Common Core State Standards:

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.5 / CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5
    - Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise. / Analyze how an author's choices

concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3:
    - "Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed)."

Materials:

- Presentation
- Copies of Act I, Scene 1 of *Rapture, Blister, Burn*
- Cloze notes (Appendix J)

Entry-Point Question/Activity (approx. 5 minutes):

Teacher should facilitate a discussion with students asking, "Why do we *read* plays, rather than merely watch them?". This may not be something students have given much thought to, so you may have to prompt them. Some conclusions they may come to include:

- Watching a play = pleasure, engagement, entertainment, moral education, social change, fixed
- Reading a play = analyzing, teasing out information, preparing for production, potential

Lesson Breakdown:

1. After the entry activity, teacher should introduce common play terminology, such as acts, scenes, dramatis personae, stage directions, and beats via a presentation with accompanying Cloze notes (see below). If working with a playwright who uses

punctuation in a specific way (such as Gionfriddo), this should also be introduced. (approx. 10 minutes)

2. Introduce action as defined by David Ball, which states that an action is built up of two "happenings," a trigger happening and a heap happening (as in a heap of bodies after a trigger has been pulled on a gun) (Ball 9). Plays are built on a series of actions building on top of one another. Students will follow along with the Cloze notes. (approx. 5 minutes)
3. Pass out copies of and read aloud the first scene of *Rapture, Blister, Burn.* Four students can read for the four characters, or students can each read one line going around in a circle until the scene is finished. (approx. 15 minutes)
4. Facilitate a discussion of the scene with the students. (approx. 10-15 minutes)
    a. Who are the characters (seen and unseen)? What do we learn about them?
    b. Where are we? What do we learn about that?
5. Split the class into eight groups and give them each a section of the scene. Some units are longer than others, so they might warrant more students working on them. As groups finish their section, they can migrate to help other groups. Split students across the following sections:
    a. Group 1: Top of scene (pg. 7, "GWEN. I knew this wouldn't be weird.") to Gwen's first exit (pg. 8, "DON. Yeah.")
    b. Group 2: pg. 8, "DON. She sorta gave up drinking and took up talking." to pg. 9, "CATHERINE. She's recovering."

c. Group 3: Gwen's reentrance (pg. 9, "GWEN. So we have a problem with our babysitter.") to Don's first exit (pg. 9, "GWEN. Pay her and send her home." second time)
d. Group 4: pg. 9, "GWEN. Did Don have you sign our books?" to pg. 10, "CATHERINE. That was generous of me."
e. Group 5: Don's first reentrance (pg. 10, "GWEN. Is she gone?") to Gwen's final exit (pg. 11, "OK, I'll talk to him.)
f. Group 6: pg. 11, "DON. We could make a run for it." to pg. 13, "DON. I'll see what I can do."
g. Group 7: Avery's entrance (pg. 13, "DON. Avery, my friend.") to Don's exit (pg. 13, "AVERY. It's okay.")
h. Group 8: pg. 13, "AVERY. What are your books about?" to the end of the scene (pg. 15, "CATHERINE. I'm in.")

6. Have each group work backwards through their chunk to connect the triggers and the heaps, writing them down on a sheet of paper or online document to turn in. Not every single line is an event, so students should use their best judgement as to how many lines have the same purpose. The first two or three can be done together (it doesn't matter which unit is used as long as the exercise starts from the end of the unit). Go around to group to track their progress and answer questions as they arise. Remind them that events can also happen off-stage that spur on-stage events (this will be especially important for students in groups 1, 3, 5, 7, and 8). Here is an example from the end of unit 6 that could be done as a group: (approx. 20 minutes)
    a. She asks about the phone call → He deflects

b. He deflects → She pushes

c. She pushes → He doesn't respond

d. He doesn't respond → She asks about summer school

e. She asks about summer school → He offers to find her something

7. Regroup the class and have them try and connect each of the chunks together using what each group came up with for their final/first triggers and heaps. How does knowing how the action flows affect your understanding of the scene (or moments in the scene)? What do you expect to happen next? Which events feel unresolved? (approx. 10-15 minutes)

Ideas for Assessment:

Formative via turned in trigger and heap breakdown. Cloze notes can either be collected and graded for participation or kept by the students. An exit ticket could also be used at the end of class to check for understanding of play terminology and/or structure.

Accommodations:

The lesson is designed to offer opportunities for full-class and small group discussion to benefit students who thrive in both environments. Reading the scene aloud can be structured by the teacher's best judgement for students who may suffer from anxiety about reading aloud for any reason; however, for the best experience of capturing the play, it is recommended that the scene be read aloud by some group of students rather than everyone come into class having read it in advance. Materials can be provided in print or online. The presentation is designed to have a high color contrast (black text on white backgrounds) to support students with visual impairments. It also includes instructions that will remain on the board while students work in small groups to aid with remembering directions.

Next Lesson:

Building off this lesson, students will continue to explore how playwrights reveal information and structure plays through continued study of the text.

III.3.ii: Lesson #1 Rationale

This lesson best falls under Eisner's vision of integrated arts, though it could also fall under a more visual culture lens. It uses discipline-specific theatrical techniques to help students analyze a text in an English class, providing connections across the two disciplines. It is a lesson that could be taught by an English teacher without the need of a teaching artist or someone with significant theater-specific knowledge.

When I first read *Backwards and Forwards* for my First-Year Seminar, it completely revolutionized how I read and understood plays. It has been a key text throughout my college years. It made me realize that even though I took a lot of classes in high school where I read plays, we never really discussed what made them *plays*. We didn't usually read more than a scene or two aloud as a class, even though this is how plays are performed. We usually watched film adaptations, which allowed us to see the story come to life, but they were adaptations, not filmed plays—*Glengarry Glen Ross* comes to mind, where Alec Baldwin's character was created just for the film and thus the story was altered to accommodate it (Parker).

I do not think students need to read *Backwards and Forwards* in its entirety to understand how action works in a play, nor do they need to only study plays in performance. However, I knew that I wanted to create a lesson for students that involved using Ball's trigger and heap description of action and required reading a play aloud.

While sitting in my Introduction to Design class earlier this semester, we were discussing an upcoming assignment in which we would be watching clips from several different filmed versions of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night,* but first we would read one of the scenes together in class. A classmate asked my professor something to the effect of, "Why do we read plays if we can watch them?" Immediately, my brain said *That's it, that's the starting point of this lesson I*

want to write! My professor didn't turn the question over to the class, but as an entry point activity, I knew it would make the most sense if it was a full-class discussion. I used some of my professor's answer, some things I've heard from other professors over the years, and brainstormed more on my own to give a bit of a guide for teachers—after all, if this was a question getting asked in a college-level class, how much opportunity have high schoolers had to ponder the question?

Once I had my entry point and my overarching idea for the lesson, I began breaking it down—trigger-and-heap-ing it, if you will. I knew that I wanted students to test out the trigger-and-heap for themselves. It thus would make the most sense to use the first scene, even though there are other scenes that I think would be more interesting to play with—II.4, for example, tracking just how the events of the scene result in Don's II.5 request to come home. I had some trouble figuring out just how to get to this part of the lesson, though. To test the theory out, students had to know what it was. But what *else* did they need to know?

The answer came to me via the desire to read the scene aloud before they could trigger-and-heap. To do that, they would have to know what to read, what *not* to read, and how to read it. This meant introducing various ways playwrights use punctuation—such as ellipses and dashes—but also what are stage directions, what is a beat, et cetera. Plays read differently on the page than a novel, so students would need to be aware of and understand those differences.

Once I knew that the lesson would involve teaching vocabulary, I decided to make a presentation and accompanying Cloze notes. Cloze notes are also known as fill-in-the-blank notes. Not only are they easy for teachers to make from presentations, but they are also helpful for students. Students can listen and record information without missing major swatches of information. This is especially beneficial to ELLs because "it is often difficult for [ELLs] to

attend to a teacher's lecture and take notes simultaneously because of the high levels of language such an act entail[s]" (Rubinstein-Ávila and Leckie 31).

For selecting the presentation's content, I stuck to the most relevant information for the activity. I structured it so that it could follow the whole lesson, not just the vocabulary session, in order to be a better blueprint for the Cloze notes and to offer the opportunity to keep directions on the board. Finally, I made sure that all the text in the presentation was black and on a white background. Students with visual impairments of any time benefit from this high contrast on printouts, whiteboards, and screens (Cox and Dykes 72).

III.3.iii: Lesson #2: Kohlhaas Technique—Sizes and Speeds

Discipline: Theater

Target Age Group: High school

Unit Topic/Theme: Monologues

Class Period Length: 60 minutes/1 hour

Essential Questions:

- How do actors work through characters' emotions and objectives?
- How can physical action translate to vocal qualities?
- What impacts choices actors make in performance?

Learning Objectives:

- Gain experience matching physical feelings to abstract concepts, such as emotions or desires
- Learn a "from the field" theatrical technique
- Understand the components of the Kohlhaas monologue technique, specifically sizes and speeds (big slow, big fast, small fast, and small slow) and how they can lead to more interesting choices

Applicable National Core Arts Standards (Theater):

- TH:Cr1.1.II.c. (High School Accomplished):
    - "Use personal experiences and knowledge to develop a character that is believable and authentic in a drama/theatre work."
- TH:Cr3.1.I.b (High School Proficient):

    - "Explore physical, vocal and physiological choices to develop a performance that is believable, authentic, and relevant to a drama/theatre work."
- TH:Pr4.1.III.b (High School Advanced):
    - "Apply a variety of researched acting techniques as an approach to character choices in a drama/theatre work."

Materials:

- Gwen's I.2 monologue from *Rapture, Blister, Burn* (projected for class or copies given to students)
- Pre-made directors' chart(s) (projected for class and filled out by teacher, handed out as printouts for students, or an editable online template for students to access)
- Optional: Presentation

Entry-Point Question/Activity:

Lead students through a check-in activity entitled Rose, Bud, Thorn. Have each student share their rose (good part of their day/week/weekend), bud (thing they are looking forward to in the future), and thorn (bad part of their day/week/weekend). Depending on the size of the class, breaking students into smaller groups might be useful, as this activity usually takes about one minute per person.

Lesson Breakdown:

1. After either setting up the projection or passing out copies, ask for a volunteer to read Gwen's monologue aloud. Provide any necessary context for anyone unfamiliar with the monologue; if students would all be familiar with the monologue, have one (or more) of

them explain the context. With this context, ask students what they think Gwen wants from the people she is telling this to. What is her objective? (This can be unpacked also as *why does she share it? What reaction is she trying to get and/or how does she want the other characters (Catherine, Avery, and Alice) to feel?*)

2. Introduce components of the Kohlhaas Monologue Technique, an audition tool designed to help actors prepare monologues with strong choices and interesting variety. This can be done via a presentation. Students can take notes or sit and listen.
3. Facilitate a physical exploration of sizes and speeds. Have students move about the room moving in such a way that corresponds to each of the sizes and speeds for approximately 2-5 minutes each; the exploration should start and end with a "medium" option to provide a contrast amongst Big Slow, Big Fast, Small Fast, and Small Slow. Music might be helpful. Encourage students to use their full bodies and to play with levels.
4. After the physical exploration, facilitate a discussion on what each of the size and speed combinations felt like. Students should start to match adjectives/feelings/emotions to each size and speed
    a. Example questions: what did each feel like in your body, if you saw someone moving big and slow what would you think, etc.
5. Return to the monologue and show students a sample director's chart for the monologue (seen in presentation). It is recommended that the monologue be chunked out in advance, but with extra time this step could be done together. After deciding on an objective together, have students pick sizes and speeds for each chunk of the monologue. Look for consensus and have them explain their reasoning.

6. Ask a volunteer (or volunteers) to read the monologue aloud, changing size and speed as indicated in the chart. Encourage them to really exaggerate each size and speed.
7. Afterwards, facilitate a discussion with the class. Let the other class members and the performer provide feedback on how it felt hearing and acting each size and speed. Could you get a sense of what Gwen wants and needs?

Ideas for Assessment

Graded for participation.

Accommodations

Students with mobility challenges can adapt in one of two ways: they can explore vocally, or they can observe their peers; the former is recommended as it is less alienating. Having a singular volunteer read is recommended rather than randomly selecting a student(s). Materials can be passed out or made available on screens.

Next Lesson

Ideally, the next lesson would move onto the students preparing their own monologues and spending more time on the "description" section of the Kohlhaas technique.

III.3.iv: Lesson #2 Rationale

For this lesson, I chose to zero in on theater as a discipline, so it requires more discipline-specific knowledge than the previous lesson. This lesson could be taught by a teaching artist or theater teacher in a classroom setting; however, it could also be taught by a theater professional or teaching artist in a more informal setting, such as an after-school program or a workshop hosted by a theater company's education department. As such, it is shorter than the previous lesson, which was designed to fill a typical block period length.

The true inspiration for this lesson came from research into the arts and social-emotional learning (SEL). SEL is a growing sector in education that "at its core… reflects an increased interest among educators, administrators, parents, and other stakeholders in students' development of individual and interpersonal skills beyond the realm of academic achievement" in schools (Farrington et. al 4). It can be integrated into core content or into more advisory-type curriculum. Its focus is rooted in developing skills such as emotional regulation and awareness of other's emotions.

The arts are greatly intertwined with SEL, as seen in Eisner's visions for arts education. For example, theater offers students opportunities to improve their skills in "self-management and self-discipline, interpersonal and relationship skills, and self-expression and identity," which manifests as "understanding and being aware of emotions" and "recognizing the effects of emotion on behavior" (Farrington et. al 29). The latter two were taken into consideration for this lesson.

While looking for inspiration, I read an article by Cassie Angley in which she discussed using a "character walk" exercise in her work as a reading specialist. The activity comes out of the work of acting teacher Viola Spolin (Angley 60). By getting into the character's body,

Angley helps students unlock the character's emotional journey and with it the narrative arc of the stories they are studying. While reading this, I was reminded of the physical exploration of Kohlhaas's sizes and speeds that we did in Advanced Acting. I realized that this work had us connecting emotions with what we did in our body, and thus was a good example of how these soft skills appear in theater and arts education.

While building the exercise, I chose to not focus on the "descriptions" component of the technique, much as I did with Alex when working her monologues in the show. Firstly, "descriptions" is very similar to the idea of "tactics," which students would likely already be familiar with, so not as much time needs to be spent on teaching them. Secondly, the goal of the lesson was to explore how emotions can be expressed, which worked best with sizes and speeds.

Like in my other lesson, I wanted to provide materials that could be either printed out or projected to ensure that all students had the best visibility for their needs. I decided to keep this lesson mostly centered on full-class discussion as the class asks students to do activity that might put them a bit outside their comfort zone. If everyone must do it, I thought that would be beneficial than specific students being put on the spot.

Members of my education seminar were guinea pigs for this idea. We discussed how the arts can further SEL, and then I lead them through the lesson. They found it interesting to connect these physical aspects to emotions and needs and thought that it would be a good way to work on emotions and being aware of other's emotions with students. With that as a success, I turned to writing this down as an actual lesson plan aimed more at high school students.

Trying out the lesson on my education class offered me the perfect opportunity to think about accommodating this work. We met over Zoom, and the morning of my lesson I sent everyone a reminder email and made sure to note that there would be movement in the lesson. As

I wrote it, I suddenly remembered that a member of my group had a broken leg. I had to pivot quickly to figure out how to adapt the exercise for them, as well as other students who did not have space to move around. I asked them to do the more theoretical thinking, which did not work as well as I hoped. I wish I'd come up with the vocal idea for them to test out.

It was also helpful to try out this very theater-heavy lesson on students who had a mix of theater backgrounds. I knew at least two members of the group had been involved in theater at Bates in some capacity and a third was a dancer, but the other two had less experience. This convinced me to root this lesson firmly in theater to ensure that students have a strong foundation technically to fully make the SEL connections that are necessary for the lesson.

Conclusion

I knew two things when I arrived at Bates in the fall of 2018: 1) I was going to major in English with a concentration in creative writing 2) when I was a senior, I would be the Executive Director of the Robinson Players. Only one of those things happened, but I am thankful every single day that it was the latter—even when I sat in Gannett and cried for two hours after that December 3rd rehearsal. No part of me wondered I'd made a mistake in picking this path.

Theater has been a mainstay of my life since I was five years old. But when the gangly, awkward teenage years came around, theater and I had a falling out. I became gripped by paralyzing anxiety about my own talent and ability. In my sophomore year of high school, I refused to audition for any shows because I couldn't handle the constant feelings of rejection anymore. Fast-forward to senior year of high school, and I took Honors Theater, acted in two productions, stage managed a third, and directed for the first time in a fourth. I knew I loved theater and wanted it to be a part of my life in college and beyond, but I didn't know how just yet.

When theater and I had our falling out, I turned to writing. I've spent most days since I was eleven years old on my laptop, falling into stories of my own invention. And though that didn't stop when I came to Bates—I wrote a short story and two chapters of a novel in Advanced Fiction, a full-length play for Advanced Playwriting, and bits and pieces of many other personal side projects over the course of working on this thesis—English course descriptions didn't invigorate me the same way the theater ones did (apologies to Jess Anthony, my beloved fiction professor, and Sylvia Federico, who brought my love for King Arthur to new heights).

I'd always thought of these two parts of myself as separate. Linked perhaps, but still separate. My four years at Bates, particularly these last two, have been an eye-opening

examination into the fact that no, they're not so different after all. I've realized I want to tell stories, *my* stories—which, even when "original," tend to be riffs on classics anyway. I want to explore stories of change, personal growth, female friendship, imperfect relationships, anxiety, love, and death. I want to build them from the ground up, whether that means penning them on the page or breathing life into them as a director.

When I submitted my application to speak at this year's Mount David Summit, I didn't have a title yet for this thesis. I get a lot of my inspiration for titles from song lyrics (just like Gionfriddo!), so I stole a lyric from a song on the *Rapture, Blister, Burn* playlist I'd made myself. However, at the end of this process, I think the lyric—the song itself, really—perfectly encapsulates this four-year journey. From August 2018 when shy Olivia moved into Bates with all the wrong goals, to September 2019 Olivia hesitantly declaring her directing major, to February 2020 Olivia who was in her darkest place, October 2020 Olivia directing with no clue what she was doing, May 2021 Olivia who began work on this project by bingeing Hulu's *Mrs. America* miniseries (highly recommend), December 2021 Olivia who wrestled her demons, January 2022 Olivia who got back on the horse, and now March 2022 Olivia who did more than she ever expected to—and is leaving feeling good about it:

> "The road's been long and lonely, and you feel like giving up / There's more to this than just the breath you're breathing / So keep on climbing though the ground might shake / Just keep on reaching though the limb might break / We've come this far; don't you be scared now / Because you can learn to fly / On the way down" (Maddie & Tae 1:29-2:09).

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Appendices and Supplementary Materials

I: Appendices

Appendix A: External Analysis of I.2

Central Conflict → Catherine's want for a partner (specifically Don) vs Gwen's (miserable) marriage

Function → Introduce play's theoretical underpinnings, reveal Don's true character, introduce Alice

Event → The Eye-Opening Class

Architecture → Longest scene (16 pages) in 10 units, starting and ending with Catherine and Alice, begins with conversations on theory before transitioning to that theory's real-world consequences for the characters

Language → Academic, filled with theory

Challenges → Length, making theory interesting, disguising Alice's audience surrogacy without diminishing its importance

Appendix B: Facts and Questions for Don Harper

Don Facts	**Don Questions**

• Don is a disciplinary dean at a college
  o He hasn't taught in several years
• Don (with Gwen's help/urging) got Catherine a gig at his school
• Don had a beard in grad school
• Don smokes pot and drinks
  o He smoked a little in college
• Don watches porn that you can find for free online
  o The stuff you could've rented at a video store in the 80s
  o He was watching it the night Catherine called
• Don has not read Catherine's books
• Don was an adjunct at Hamden out of grad school
• He then began teaching at a technical college
  o He was promoted to dean there
• Don has a soft spot for Emily Dickinson
• He wanted to teach American Lit when he left school
• Catherine told him 15 years ago to write an "anti-theory" manifesto
• Don is white
• Don hires his students to help Gwen around the house
• Don does not like that Gwen goes to AA
• Don has never cheated before
• Don likes beer
  o Gwen threw beers out before Devon was born and he took them out of the trash
• Don drinks coffee
	• When did Don start smoking pot? **Where does he get it?** Is it legal where they live?
	  o Don started smoking in high school, but he did not start smoking it regularly until later (at some point between Julian and Devon being born)
	  o In 2013, pot was not legal in Rhode Island
	  o Don is very concerned with appearances so I feel like he might not have a med card—maybe he buys it from people?
	  ▪ But I doubt he buys it from students because that's a fireable offense (especially because he's the disciplinary dean)
	  ▪ But if he does buy it from someone, he probably buys it from someone who also sells to students
	• **Is his drinking on par with Gwen's or is she blinded by her own relation to alcohol?**
	  o Don seems to think Gwen doesn't have a problem which makes me think their habits are similar
	  o But also, Gwen doesn't push Don to go to AA which she *definitely* would, so she's *definitely* a bigger offender but unsure by how much
	• Has Don written and/or published a book? Was it his dissertation?
	  o I think Don has published a book just based on how Gwen (and I think also Catherine) discuss it
	  o It was probably his dissertation or something that came out of it because he's lost his drive in recent years, so it was probably published either before or shortly after Julian was born
	• When did Don get into porn? **How frequently do he and Gwen have sex?**

	○ In high school ○ He and Gwen have not had sex in over a year • What type of college was Hamden? What did Don teach? What made him leave for a technical college? Why was he promoted to dean? What made him leave that position? ○ Hamden was probably a fine liberal arts college (à la Gettysburg or Allegheny) ○ I'm assuming American Lit ○ The fact that he was making $15k a year and had to support Gwen and then Julian ○ He probably became a dean of faculty or something though I'm not sure how that lead to him becoming a dean of students at his current school • Did he know his new gig would be where Alice currently lives? ○ Yes ▪ ~~It was part of the appeal~~ • What type of dean is Don? What is Dean Keller the dean of? How much money do they make? How much is Julian's tuition? ○ Gwen describes Don as a "disciplinary dean," so he holds a position basically equivalent to Carl Stiedel (Associate Dean of Students). This would make Dean Keller more equivalent to someone like Josh McIntosh (VP of Campus Life and Dean of Students) ○ The average yearly salary for an associate dean of students is $83,000. For a dean of students, the next level above, it's about $109,000 in Rhode Island ▪ A family of four in RI needs to have a pre-tax income of $70,153 according to MIT's living wage calculator ▪ In RI the average private school tuition is $15,760, or approximately 19% of Don's salary

Appendix C: Catherine Croll's Character Biography

1970	Catherine born in Providence
1972	*Phyllis Schlafly founds the Eagle Forum and begins opposing the ERA*
1977	*Women Against Violence in Pornography and Media founded*
June 1982	*The ERA fails to be ratified, which most consider the "end" of second-wave feminism*
Spring 1992	Catherine graduates undergrad
Fall 1992	Don, Gwen, and Catherine begin their masters' program in NY
1995-1996	Catherine does a year-long fellowship in London
1995	Don asks Catherine to come home and she sees no Alice tells Catherine she made the right decision in saying no
~1998	*Women Always Call Free* published
Winter 1999	Gwen and Don bring Julian to New York to meet Catherine
Sept. 2001	*9/11*
Winter 2003	*Real Time with Bill Maher starts airing*
2004	*Abu Ghraib prison offenses come to light*
2005	Catherine's father dies
2006	Catherine is commissioned to write her second book
2008	*Cruel Appetites* published
Fall 2009	Catherine starts teaching at Columbia
Spring 2010	Catherine appears on Bill Maher
Summer 2011	*Hurricane Irene makes landfall in the Southeast, with evacuation orders for North Carolina*

Catherine attends a conference in Virginia

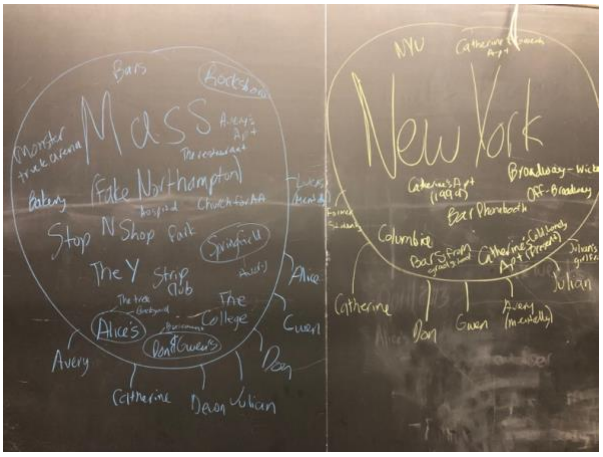
2012 Alice sends Catherine *Love Smart* by Dr. Phil

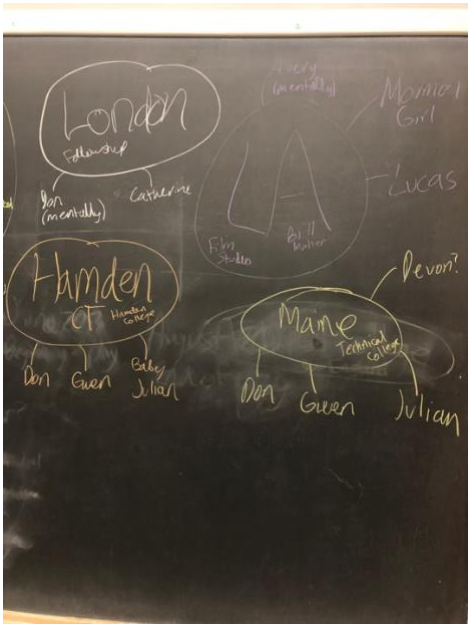
Spring 2013 Alice has a heart attack

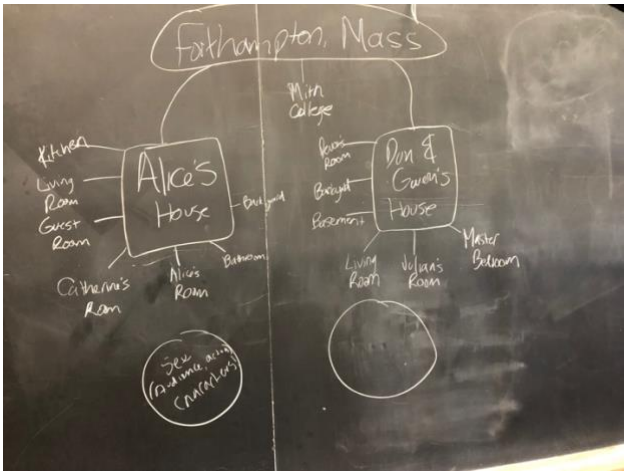
Appendix D: "I am" Statements

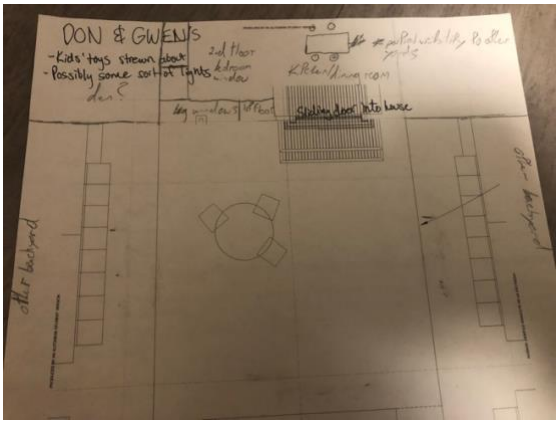
- Paige (Catherine): I am too intelligent to be held back by a man and I wish I wasn't because I am drained from taking care of other people and my isolation is overwhelming and I know that I am hot and accomplished and I wouldn't take that back, but I am still jealous of Gwen's life
    - Distilled: I am lost, accomplished, too intelligent to be held back by a man, and drained
- Brendan (Don): I am content, complacent, immature, trying my best, conflicted, and regretful
    - Distilled: I am aggressively average, immature, and complacent
- Alex (Gwen): I am a smart, hard-working woman, a protective mom, and a patient wife
    - Distilled: I am smart, unfulfilled, a patient wife, and a protective mom
- Alison (Avery): I'm not tied to anything, to leave myself options in life and not let myself have any regrets; however, I am going to move onto bigger and better things and will make a difference in the world someday
    - Distilled: I am driven, lonely, and scared of having regrets
- Dianna (Alice): I know the rules of womanhood and my perceived worth comes from doing it well, but it resulted in an unhappy marriage -- I don't feel free now from those rules but at least my time is my own
    - Distilled: I am savvy, willfully ignorant, a good mom, and content with the rules

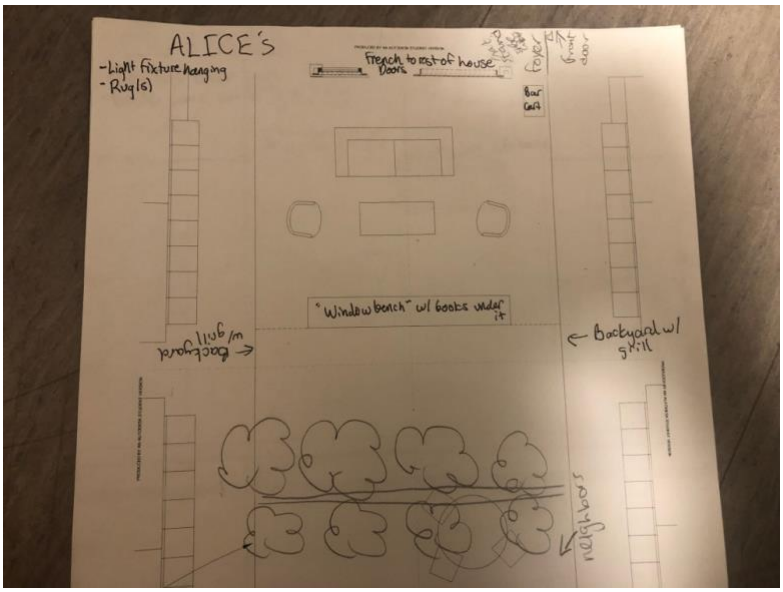
Appendix E: Circles of Place



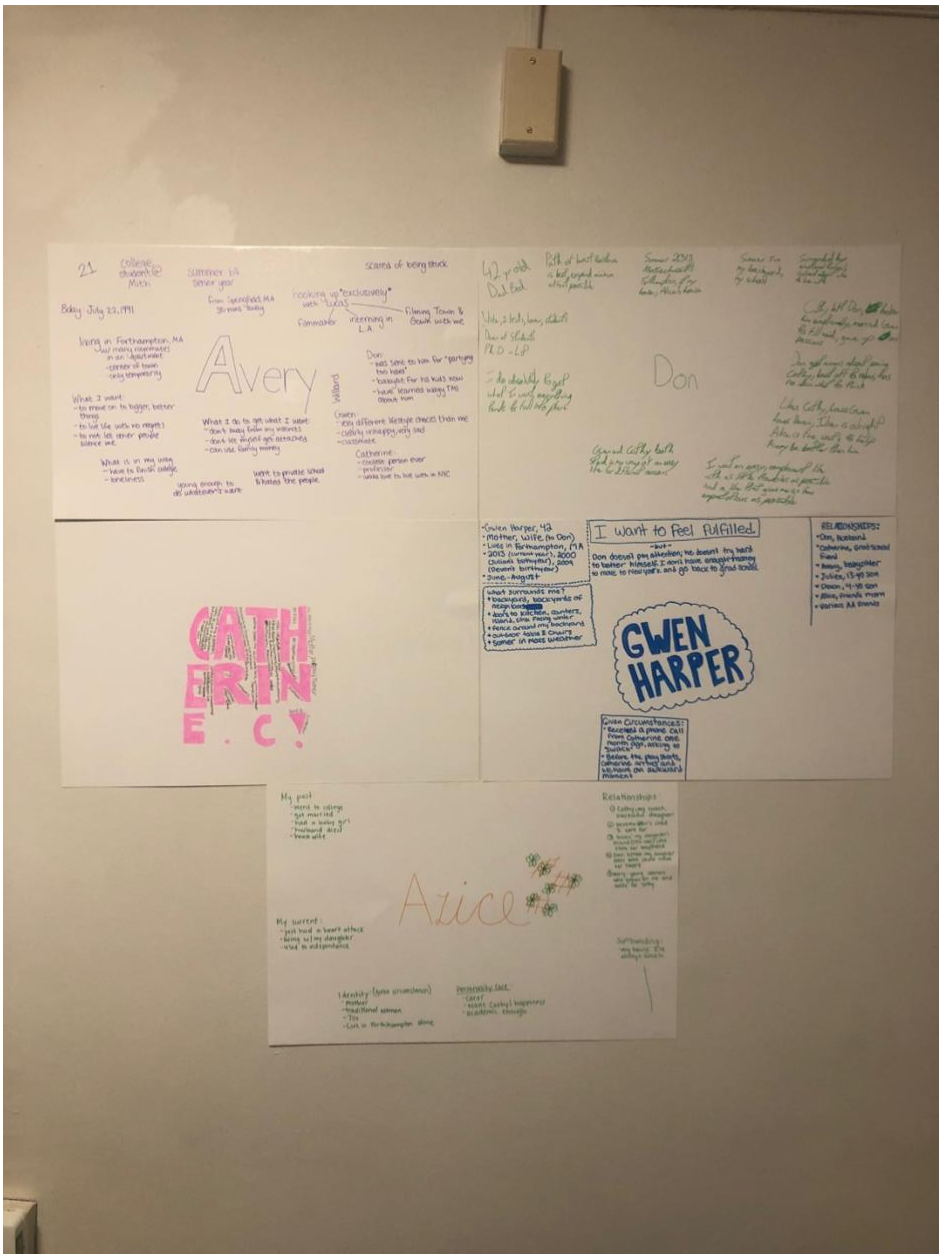







ALICE's
- Light Fixture Hanging
- Rug (6)
French to rest of house Doors
foyer
front door
Bar Cart
"Window bench" w/ books under it
Backyard w/ grill
neighbors

Appendix F: 9 Questions Posters



Appendix G: "Imaginary Body" Script

- Spread out
- Lay down on the floor and close your eyes
- Start to imagine your character in front of you. What do you notice? Don't try to construct the character in your mind; rather, let this picture of them come to you organically. It's okay if they don't look exactly like you--in fact, embrace the difference
- What color hair do they have? Eyes?
- What other features do they have? Scars? Freckles? Wrinkles? Where?
- How tall are they?
- How do they hold themselves physically? Do they slouch? Are their backs and shoulders straight? Where does their weight appear to be held?
- What are they wearing? What colors? What types of shoes? Do they wear any jewelry? Are their nails painted?
- Look at them from different angles. If you were looking at them from the front, what changes if you move to the side? The back?
- Get a full, 360º look at them, as if they were a wax model at a museum. And when you think you've seen all you're going to see, stand up.
- Reframe the image if you have to. Take it all in. What little details haven't you noticed before? Is it a scar on a finger? A wrinkle in their clothes?
- On the count of three, you are going to open your eyes and place this character in the room. They can be anywhere but keep them standing and keep them in your line of sight.
- One. Two. Three.

- If your character is far away, what can you see from the distance? If they're close by, what can you see from up close? Go up to them, back away. Walk around them. What are you finding?
- Come to a stop behind your character, so that your front is facing their back. And when you are ready, you are going to take a deep breath in, and on the exhale, you are going to take a step forward and become them.
- Walk about the space. What does it feel like to move as this character? How is their posture? Where do they hold their weight? What is their gait like? What leads when they walk? Where do they keep their gaze? Let this be their basic walk, their everyday walk.
- What happens if you speed up? Slow down?
- What if you sat down? What if you picked something up? What if you took a drink of water? How does this character move through the world?
- What if you greeted one of these other people? Don't worry about your actual relationships to each other for right now. Just find a greeting, a way of speaking. Is your character inviting? Is your character closed off?
- But now what if you are seeing these other characters? How does Avery greet Catherine? How does Catherine greet Gwen? How does Gwen greet Avery?
- Whenever you're ready, find a place to come back to rest. Take a deep breath in, and on the exhale, step out of your character.

Appendix H: London improv template

- Immediate circumstances: Don woke up at what used to be Catherine and Gwen's apartment in Gwen's bed. He was angry and missing Catherine and ran into Gwen at their usual bar the night before. They hadn't seen each other since he ended things with Catherine. They got to talking and laughing and drinking and Gwen took him home. Catherine just got home from the class she is in as part of her fellowship. She is researching European cinema, particularly horror conventions. She is doing her best not to think about Don, whom she has not spoken to since leaving, and is planning to call her mother later in the evening.
- Don's first intention: To show Catherine he still loves her
- Catherine's first intention: To figure out if Don is okay
- The event: Don asks Catherine to come home
- Don's second intention: To convince Catherine it's the right decision
- Catherine's second intention: To make Don give her time to think about it

Appendix I: II.3 to II.4 Time Jump

WEEK ONE:
Catherine—Trying to do work and prep for class (15 mins a day, can't really focus), lots of sex with Don, kinky!—look how cool and sexually exciting I am!, still lots of attention to diet and exercise—standards aren't relaxed yet, doesn't interact with Devon (Duolingo for kids), cancels class to drink and have sex with Don
Don—"first year living out of your parents house", sex all the time, drinking beer and eating like a disgusting college freshman, LOVING IT, no responsibility, no nagging, Devon's been shirked to Alice, smokes in front of Cathy but she doesn't partake
Gwen—Packs and plans logistics, drive? park in the city?, class starts by the end of the week, likes Catherine's apartment (fancy AirBnB!), by the end it feels unhomey…?, Julian is super excited!, researched getting tickets to shows, going to the lottery lines for all the shows
Avery—Moping still about Lucas and trying to stay engaged with Catherine's life, by the end of week one she makes up the fake car crisis, still going to class/interacting with Catherine, not a very deep class
Alice—Chilling and watching things happen, Don hasn't "moved in" but is spending a lot of time there, lots of chatting, thinks he's kinda an idiot but nice to have a man around (putting him to work), seeing Cathy have a good time and having her do other stuff with Don gives her free time, spending time with Devon!

WEEK TWO:
Catherine—More work, novelty is wearing off, tried to smoke with Don and neither one of them liked it (panicky high), starting to think more about Don's potential and what their future could look like, sex life is getting less exciting, lots unreciporicated oral sex
Gwen—Didn't like class, oldest person in class is immediately frustrating, Julian loves it!, getting to be in the city and live in this nice place is still really nice, Julian is spending less and less time with her, trying to keep herself busy
Don— "I'll deal with this next week," no power to change it?, feel burn and weight of his sins, smoking and drinking more, starting to suggest things to do (i.e. movie night)
Avery—Lucas calls back!, gives advice about the car, Avery gets hope back, BoySmart TM, not calling as often as she wants to, 2 phone calls between them (including the call back), Avery decides to focus on what's not going well in her life, has something to grasp at, Instastalking Lucas and found Mormon girl publishing #MormonLifestyle photos tagging him
Alice—Settling into nice routine, feeling fully recovered from heart attack, notices all of the bad habits and "hmphs" to herself but doesn't nag them about it because Cathy is happy, Devon's great!, move-in more official, an hour or so together every day

WEEK THREE
Catherine—Drinking more but not to Don's extent, doing more work when Don is away, hasn't found the book review yet, not bored with Don but bored with lifestyle (used to fast-paced NYC environment—less work, not going to the gym, etc.), watches porn with him and it was obvious it didn't go well and awkwardly avoided each other, starting to blame herself for what might happen if this goes sour, boring, starting to feel a little guilty about her mom and the real reason she came back
Don— Starts having the thought of "maybe I should go back," only fully sober when taking care of Devon/feels guilty about leaving Devon with Alice constantly, starts spending some more time at his house for space, even the sex is not a draw anymore, once or twice contacted Gwen (about Julian mostly), sees Gwen on weekend (Don stays at Catherine's)
Gwen—Coming up on the weekend with Julian, still hating class (meets pretty infrequently), feels old and Julian isn't spending any time with her, exploring city alone and sad, not fun, part of her thought she would meet the perfect man and doesn't have means to find one and is disappointed
Avery—3 phone calls with Lucas, not fully leaning into what's bad, "playing the game," trying to get him to remember why he used to like talking to her, complimenting him, class that isn't very eventful/canceled
Alice—Don and Devon spending more time at the house, Catherine still having drinks with mom but a quick one, mess becoming more frequent but not saying anything, strict no smoking in the house policy

WEEK FOUR:
Catherine—Found book review and thought about Don, kinkiest week because she felt Don slipping away, Italy two or three days ago, 10 hours of TV (~5 movies, started at 8) + 1 60-minute sex break (anything can be Netflix and chill if you're horny enough), ordered pizza and ate it, started drinking at dinner, haven't left the house for at least 24 hours, Catherine did some work and read
Don—Bergman festival, Don thinks the sex is mediocre at best and is just trying to watch the movies (doesn't like the kinky shit, very vanilla), starting to look for an out, looking for any possible excuse for even longer periods of time, Italy is the first nail in the coffin of responsibility, using Devon as an excuse to get out of the house, Gwen told him about Julian's girlfriend in week 3/early week 4
Gwen—1 or so phone calls with Don, kind of nice/catching up, missing each other…, went to class and feeling unhappy (ruins the day), thinking seriously about maybe going home but wants to hear from Don, wants to stick it out for Julian
Avery—Lucas is seeming further away/becoming more distant, Avery dials it up and goes the pity route, calls him just to vent, desperate, seems to be working but something shifts—longer response times, overthinking, Catherine asks her to come watch Devon and she jumps at it Trying to convince herself it'll work!
Alice—Seeing things going downhill, things in the house are getting ridiculous, a passive agressive comment about being neater, Catherine pulling away, vibing solo or with Devon, did a puzzle for an hour with Devon

Appendix J: Cloze Notes for Lesson #1

1. Why do we read plays, rather than simply watch them?

2. Play Terminology and Playwright Quirks

Scene	• Theatrical _____ • Typically, but not always _____ to one _____ or _____
Act	• A collection of _____
Dramatis Personae *Latin:* _____	• _____ list • May or may not list _____ who originated the _____
Stage Direction	• Provides _____ related to the _____, _____, _____, and _____ that should be seen, but not read aloud

Beat (Definition 1)	• A section of a _____ notated by an _____ and/or _____ that shares similar _____
Beat (Definition 2)	• A short _____, which may indicate the end of a beat (definition 1) • Used as a _____
Ellipses _____	• _____ • _____ off
Dash _____	• _____ off

3. How do plays work?

a. Action

i. "Action occurs when something _____ that _____ or _____ something _____ to happen."

ii. _____ (first happening) and _____ (second happening)

b. _____ Effect

i. One action's _____ becomes the _____ of the next action

ii. One heap can trigger _____ resulting actions, *including things that happen* _____

iii. It is easiest to tell what led to what by working _____

II: Supplementary Materials

Presentations

Mood board
Dramaturgy Presentation
PowerPoint Party
Lesson # 1 Presentation
Lesson #2 Presentation

Script and Character Analysis

Facts and Questions/Character Biographies
Internal Analysis of II.5
Dramaturgy Presentation

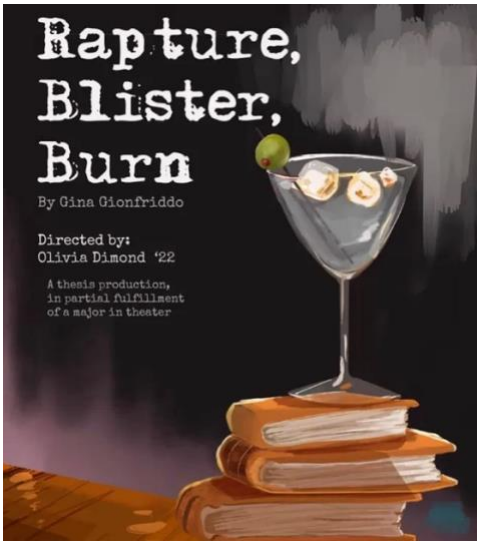
Cited Rehearsal Documents

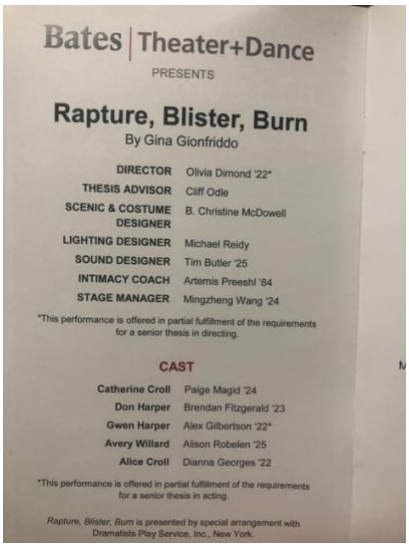
RP 10/18
RP 10/19
Table Work
RP 10/25
RP 10/26
Rehearsals Week 3
RP 11/7
RP 12/3
RP 1/13
Rehearsals Week 9
Rehearsals Week 10 (Tech)
All Rehearsal Plans and Reflections

Production Photos (by Anna Gouveia and Michelle Desjarlais)

More available here: oliviadimond.com

Poster and Program





Bates | Theater+Dance

PRESENTS

Rapture, Blister, Burn

By Gina Gionfriddo

DIRECTOR	Olivia Dimond '22*
THESIS ADVISOR	Cliff Odle
SCENIC & COSTUME DESIGNER	B. Christine McDowell
LIGHTING DESIGNER	Michael Reidy
SOUND DESIGNER	Tim Butler '25
INTIMACY COACH	Artemis Preeshl '84
STAGE MANAGER	Mingzheng Wang '24

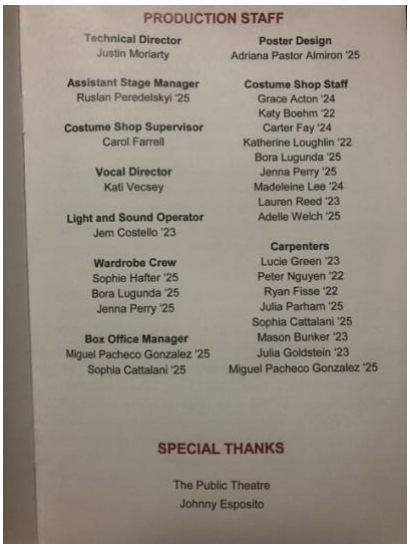
*This performance is offered in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a senior thesis in directing.

CAST

Catherine Croll	Paige Magid '24
Don Harper	Brendan Fitzgerald '23
Gwen Harper	Alex Gilbertson '22*
Avery Willard	Alison Robelen '25
Alice Croll	Dianna Georges '22

*This performance is offered in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a senior thesis in acting.

Rapture, Blister, Burn is presented by special arrangement with Dramatists Play Service, Inc., New York.



PRODUCTION STAFF

Technical Director
Justin Moriarty

Assistant Stage Manager
Ruslan Peredelskyi '25

Costume Shop Supervisor
Carol Farrell

Vocal Director
Kati Vecsey

Light and Sound Operator
Jem Costello '23

Wardrobe Crew
Sophie Hafter '25
Bora Lugunda '25
Jenna Perry '25

Box Office Manager
Miguel Pacheco Gonzalez '25
Sophia Cattalani '25

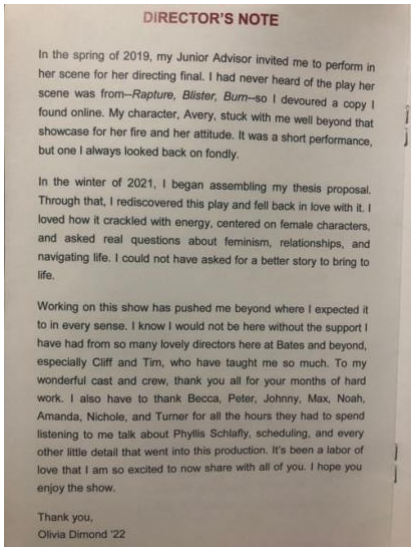
Poster Design
Adriana Pastor Almiron '25

Costume Shop Staff
Grace Acton '24
Katy Boehm '22
Carter Fay '24
Katherine Loughlin '22
Bora Lugunda '25
Jenna Perry '25
Madeleine Lee '24
Lauren Reed '23
Adelle Welch '25

Carpenters
Lucie Green '23
Peter Nguyen '22
Ryan Fisse '22
Julia Parham '25
Sophia Cattalani '25
Mason Bunker '23
Julia Goldstein '23
Miguel Pacheco Gonzalez '25

SPECIAL THANKS

The Public Theatre
Johnny Esposito



DIRECTOR'S NOTE

In the spring of 2019, my Junior Advisor invited me to perform in her scene for her directing final. I had never heard of the play her scene was from--*Rapture, Blister, Burn*--so I devoured a copy I found online. My character, Avery, stuck with me well beyond that showcase for her fire and her attitude. It was a short performance, but one I always looked back on fondly.

In the winter of 2021, I began assembling my thesis proposal. Through that, I rediscovered this play and fell back in love with it. I loved how it crackled with energy, centered on female characters, and asked real questions about feminism, relationships, and navigating life. I could not have asked for a better story to bring to life.

Working on this show has pushed me beyond where I expected it to in every sense. I know I would not be here without the support I have had from so many lovely directors here at Bates and beyond, especially Cliff and Tim, who have taught me so much. To my wonderful cast and crew, thank you all for your months of hard work. I also have to thank Becca, Peter, Johnny, Max, Noah, Amanda, Nichole, and Turner for all the hours they had to spend listening to me talk about Phyllis Schlafly, scheduling, and every other little detail that went into this production. It's been a labor of love that I am so excited to now share with all of you. I hope you enjoy the show.

Thank you,
Olivia Dimond '22