Directing Glengarry Glen Ross

A SENIOR THESIS

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By

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I. Introduction and Origin of the Project

For my senior thesis I produced two versions of the opening scene from David Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross*, one filmed and one performed live. With this project I sought to examine how the characteristics and possibilities specific to film and theatre could be applied to the same piece of text. The original theme of my project focused on how shot selection and editing techniques in film could function in the same way as blocking and movement in theatre. I experimented with how each technique worked to support the arc of the story, compliment the emotional state of the characters and how they worked to communicate my choices as a director to the audience. As the project developed these creative directorial choices took on a secondary level of importance as the preliminary stages of the process, including character development and scene study, began to require more of a focus. This production gave me the opportunity to explore two facets of my education: the training as an actor that I underwent during my time at Emerson College and continued with the Drama and Dance Departments here at Colorado College as well as the training in film, which I discovered at Colorado College. Beyond that, it provided me with a chance to proficiently translate my skills as an actor into prowess as a director by re-examining my training and beginning to understand how one translates an understanding of a story and a character into language that can be used to direct others.

II. Pre-Production and Rehearsing the Film

The opening scene of *Glengarry Glen Ross* follows a conversation between struggling real estate agent, Shelley Levene, and the office manager, Joan Williamson, as Shelley attempts to gain better sale leads in hopes of saving her career. The scene highlights Mamet's talent for dialogue and understanding of the human condition. His characters are complex and relatable with universal objectives that are accessible to audiences and actors. For this reason I was able to make a number of adaptations to the script, while managing to retain the core aspects that drew me to the text in the first place. The first change I made was moving the location of the scene to an office, the English department lounge in Armstrong Hall, instead of a Chinese restaurant. I did this to increase the control I had over the space including shoot availability, pedestrians and lighting. I also wanted to eliminate the action of eating food for the sake of continuity in my shots and to allow the actors to have additional freedom of motion. The second major change that I made was the length of the script. In Mamet's original, the opening scene is thirteen pages long. I had planned to have three versions of the scene done back to back and I wanted to make sure each scene ran no longer than ten minutes. I revised the script and brought it down to six and a half pages. Although I cut the script in half, I used the character of Shelley Levene and the development of her emotional arc as a guide to ensure that I stayed true to the original structure. By showing the progression of her changes in tactic from asking, to begging, to bribing, to threatening and back to begging we see the degree of her desperation and need for survival that represents the theme of the scene and the play as a whole.

The most significant change I made was using an entirely female cast, which meant I had to adapt the power dynamic present in the original production, which was male dominated. I cast two Colorado College students: senior Sarah Stockdale as Shelley Levene and junior Isobelle McBride as Joan Williamson. Mamet's script has an older male character that has been working for the company for years, Levene, plead for the help of the younger office manager, Williamson, who is newer to the company. In order to recreate this relationship I considered elaborating on the presence of Levene's daughter, which is mentioned in the script, by making her a single mother forced to bring her personal life into the office. During our first rehearsal we talked about Mamet's choice of using all male characters and the theme of power and masculinity in the workplace. This led us to talking about what type of women would make it in that industry, what they would have had to endure or sacrifice to become a top agent or manager in the office. We decided that Williamson's character would be a woman completely devoted to her job and therefore in opposition to Levene's decision of choosing to have a family. We also discussed how, being the only other woman in the office, a choice we made to up the stakes, Williamson might see Levene as someone she could pick on or use to assert her power. All of these choices helped define the characters, made the scene and the lines more specific, and became the foundation of our decisions towards character objective, given circumstances, and beat changes.

I created an independent study third block that allowed me to rehearse and shoot the filmed version of the scene. I met with Professor Platt, my thesis advisor, and Professor Haskell from the film department for guidance and support. During this time I kept a journal that I wrote in everyday documenting meetings with my professors, notes

from rehearsal, production plans and research. The goal for my first rehearsal was to do a read through of the script and to create a common vocabulary surrounding character development with a focus on character need, super objective, through line, given circumstances and beat changes. These were the tools and techniques I had learned to use to develop a character in my scene study class at Emerson. I kept multiple journals and notebooks during my two years at Emerson and relied heavily upon them to guide and structure my rehearsal techniques. Our first day I gave my actors a number of handouts: two basic guides to script scoring that I had downloaded from the internet, an example of a scored script from my Emerson notebook and then a list of action verbs from the book *Directing Actors* by Judith Weston. I hoped that the exercises and explanations that had helped inform my work would do the same for my cast.

I started out by establishing given circumstances and the moment before for each character. I hope that this would serve as a good starting point by helping layout the physical and emotional world of the characters. I referenced my Emerson notebook:

The moment before: what you create to launch yourself into the scene. It is personal and real to you. A reaction to something. What is pulling you onstage for your entrance? Setting yourself up to create a new problem. Load yourself, react to what is there.

In storyboarding the scene and shots for the film I decided that it would open with Sarah's character, Shelley, in the frame waiting for Isobelle's character, Joan to enter. From this I immediately thought to the work I had done regarding the moment before, how helpful it had been for me, and how it would be a perfect place to start with Sarah.

Unfortunately, when she continued to have difficulty relating to her character, a single mother, I in turn had difficulty helping her bridge the gap. I returned to my notebook for guidance, "A substitution, an image to get you going. I have never done this and never will so I substitute to create a reality. Find the emotional equivalent."

I asked her to reflect on a time that would hold the same emotional weight or level of importance as her characters or to a time when she had to confront someone. What were her emotions leading up the interaction? How did that anticipation manifest itself in her? When this failed to help I was at a loss. I had found this method very helpful in terms of preparing myself for a scene and embodying my character. The monologue I had applied this technique to when it was taught to be was about confronting an ex-boyfriend. Emotions and similar situations were readily accessible to my twenty year-old self at the time and I was able to draw directly from personal experience. It simply had not occurred to me that what worked for me would not for others and I soon found myself out of ideas. Throughout the process I would occasionally ask the actors to take a moment before running the scene to review their moment before but they often took no more than a few seconds. Unsure of how to make use of this exercise it soon faded out of our process.

After looking at the moment before we moved on to given circumstances and I again read a passage from my Emerson notebook:

What you see, touch, taste, hear and feel. Time given circumstances: what is the definition of urgency in the scene? Are you up against the clock? What time of day is it? The other (circumstances) are yours that you have translated. You can make them up but they are directly related to the text. They must be censorial. We are communicating

emotion. We cannot trigger emotion intellectually. How do you access the scenes? You do not want to show the emotion but live the emotion beat by beat. Be specific about how you get there

I had established that the scene was to take place at the end of the workday so our next line of business was to decide what the date was. How close to the 30th, the day the leads would be assigned, was it and how would this effect the urgency of the scene? The actresses decided on the 10th, thinking this was a realistic timeframe but also added the right amount of pressure on the character of Levene, giving her twenty days to save her job. I then gave a few examples of non-time related given circumstances. For Sarah, "You are tired because you had to wake up at 5am to take care of your baby, your feet are sore from wearing heels, and you are hungry and have not eaten a real meal in days." For Isobelle, "You are tired because you are always the first and last person at the office and you are anxious to get home because you need to feed your dog that has been alone all day." I had the actors come up with their own list of given circumstances, which they shared at the next rehearsal.

Although these circumstances seemed to logically resonate when we discussed them they seemed to disappear once the scene began. To help with the physical ones I tried to "find the substitute" and draw parallels between the actors and their characters. Although Sarah had never experienced motherhood and actually had had very little experience with children, I searched for a way to make the given circumstance of "being sore from carrying an infant" a reality for her. I knew she had worked on a farm and asked her to remember how sore her back would get from that work instead of trying to imagine what it would be like to carry a child. One circumstance that was regularly

acknowledged throughout the scene when we did the live performance was that there still might be people in the office. I never quite figured out why this one successfully became a part of the scene but the actors used it as a factor that shaped the delivery of their lines: raising their voices, catching themselves, maybe looking over their shoulder and reeling it back in. In theory all of these choices lined up with the character's and their stories but beyond discussing them further or occasionally shouting them out during a run I did not know how to transform them into a living part of the scene.

     With the scene set up I asked my actors to identify their throughline, objective and super objective and to then score their scripts with beat changes and verbs before the next rehearsal. I assumed that if we agreed on a common through line, object and super objective for their characters that the tactics and motivation behind beat changes would line up. I knew exactly how I would approach each character as an actor and therefore had a very clear vision of what I wanted. Not wanting to give line readings, the only way I knew how to explain or teach this to my actors was to do the work myself and then explain to them how I came to the conclusions I arrived at. I felt that I could get my actors to arrive at the same conclusions I had and to deliver the performance I wanted if we shared a common understanding of the character's needs. For Isobelle's character Isobelle we decided that her throughline was to be accepted, her super objective was to be in control and her need or objective was to assert her power. I worked with Isobelle on this because I wanted to ensure that conflict resided outside of herself and the solution within her scene partner. In my notebook I mentioned:

Find out the "need", not any old need but the one that cannot be serviced. You are never solved. It starts in you but is then extended because you need the other person in the scene to do it.

If she could fulfil her need without Sarah, she would walk right past her and out the door. With our choices we made it so that she needed Sarah just as much as Sarah needed her. This raised the stakes because it was not only money on the line for Joan but something much greater: her sense of identity. With Sarah's character these choices were more straightforward. We determined that Levene's throughline was safety, for herself and her family. Her objective for the scene was to keep her job and her super objective in life was to support her family. With our decision to highlight her relationship with her daughter these seemed like the most obvious choices, but they required clear understanding and application because they worked as the key to understanding her navigation through the scene and development of her arc. Her needs led her character through the scene as she changed her tactic to tried and get what she wanted from her scene partner, thus causing beat changes.

I gave the actors an example of a scored script that showed where beat changes were marked by diagonal lines. I read from my notebook:

Beat, an adjustment that you make emotionally. A reaction to a punch from a boxer. Must be a reaction. You counter punch emotionally. The tactic changes because the scene partner makes you. Do not change unless you are being forced by a person or a given circumstance.

I then showed them a list of action verbs from *Directing Actors* by Judith Weston for them to assign to the beat changes. I told them, "When you see a change in dynamic, purpose, or emotion that signifies a new beat, you would mark the spot with lines and assign a new verb, for example, "to bribe"." This is where my biggest obstacle as a director began to appear. I assumed that because of Mamet's specificity in word choice and the common foundation we had developed together regarding each character, many of the actors' choices regarding beats and changes in tactic would line up with mine. I certainly did not expect every verb to match my choices but was concerned when the actors noted few changes in tactic throughout the script, creating little to no progression or arc within the scene. Instead of trying to explain my verb choices used in scoring the script, I tried to point out a few major turning points for each character by pointing out shifts in Mamet's writing. I thought this would lead the actors to come to a similar conclusion that I had arrived at. I hoped the result would be organic and easier to apply to their performances.

For Isobelle's character her main shift came when her authority was challenged. In my rehearsal journal I explained:

Today we focused on the most crucial moments in the scene for each character. For Williamson this is when Levene says, "You want to run this office run it". We talked about how that line would hit at her biggest fear, the one that motivates her need to be in power: that she isn't good enough. We talked about how this comment would come out of left field, how she would not expect it coming from someone she sees as an easy target. We then discussed how this would affect the rest of her lines throughout the scene. The more she outwardly expresses her fear in that moment the more she has to work to

re-establish her position of power in the scene. When we got to this part in the script I stood next to the actors and said, "Challenge her" to Levene as she delivered the line. I let Williamson absorb the line, get thrown and then before her next line, where she demands a higher amount of money, I said, "Stab her back". When Williamson agrees to the amount I said, "Twist the knife. Make her pay". She then delivered her line. "And fifty bucks a lead." With the extra push and reminder of intent, the word "And" was more strongly emphasized than it had been in the past. Suddenly the progression in demands began to make sense. Williamson was not attempting to make a fair deal or make money at all, but rather it was just a tool used to regain control. It also gave new meaning to many of the following lines. For example, "I can't do it" and "Wish I could" and "I can't split them". Before, these lines were sometimes delivered with a hint of sarcasm and other times sounded rather sincere. This time around, they were turned into tools. Delivered with a sweet venom that further frustrated her scene partner. Instead of simply saying no they inspired Levene to beg further.

The exercise mentioned in the passage is one that my scene study teacher at Emerson, Professor Scott LaFeber, uses. In order to do this I went through the script and wrote comments next to the important lines of each character. It had a similar effect on Sarah's performance, adding more variation in the tone of delivery of her lines, in pacing and an increased build in her character's desperation. It is no wonder that I commented that, "The progression in demands began to make sense." I was hand feeding the actors the stimuli they needed in order to deliver the results I was looking for. The exercise worked wonderfully in the moment when I was able to provide my actors with specific stimuli. With my comments I had been able to walk the actors through the scene and

provide the subtext that led to the reactions I was looking for. In this way I had been

acting as a third scene partner contributing my personal insight and interpretation of the

scene. When I removed myself from the work the reactions from my scene partners were

lost. This was another example of how I struggled to connect work done in exercises into

the scene itself.

As I began to exhaust my resources and my actors continued to feel a distance

between themselves and their characters I looked to examples from television and

movies. I had done this research before beginning rehearsals but had steered away from

sharing it with them in fear of having them imitate or mimic. As the date for shooting

came closer I reconsidered. In my journal I recounted:

Yesterday I spoke with my cast a little bit about the smooth talking mentality that

comes with the salesman persona. It has an aggressive and manipulative energy, one that

my actors said they had a hard time relating to. We talked about how it can be a learned

behaviour that people have a difficult time turning off, a persona that becomes part of

their personality, how they look at the world and relate to it. I think it will be great to

develop these personas that can become veneers that crack at different parts of the scene.

We briefly get to see the women underneath their public personas. To help them with

developing this aspect of their characters I suggested clips from *Boiler Room*, *Mad Men,*

Network, Death of a Salesman, and *Salesman*. Watching real life Bible salesmen in

Salesmen try every trick of the trade to make sales gave me a better idea of how to

explain this to Sarah. You say a line, motivated by your objective and in reaction to your

scene partner, that in turn evokes a response from your scene partner. You catch yourself,

realizing it isn't working, maybe you have over stepped a boundary, said something that

offended them or simply isn't convincing them. You then have to dig yourself out of the hole you have put yourself in using a new tactic.

For Isobelle's character I gave examples of female bullies who killed with kindness. The list included Julianne Moore in *An Ideal Husband,* Meryl Streep in *The Devil Wears Prada* and Imelda Staunton in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. These women very rarely lose their cool or even show real investment in their conflicts, appearing above it all. This creates a great opportunity for that facade to break at some point in the scene, to show how invested they really are. When we spoke about why and how people develop these attitudes and defence mechanisms we found parallels with Isobelle's character including protecting herself from her fears by building barriers. We addressed how Isobelle's character could have had a mother who sacrificed her career to have her. We then looked at how this could be linked to her character's actions in the scene. Watching Sarah's character become a mother could bring up guilt or remorse for choosing work over family. She could then rely on bullying to regain a sense of control in her life and reassure herself that she made the right decision.

Once again, this background work and character development worked in theory but failed to influence the scene. I think I was partially responsible for this. When what we discussed did not translate into a run, I would immediately switch my approach or add more details about subtext, character history and motivation. I think this overloaded the actors and inhibited them from concentrating on one specific note that they could work through over the course of running the scene multiple times. Providing the actors with examples from film and television might have served as a useful resource if given more time to apply to the work and approached on a smaller scale.

From here I continued to use the same exercises and tools hoping that some mention of the work we had done would inspire the reaction I was looking for. This continued into the shoot. My attempts at helping my actors turned out to be more harmful than helpful. Similarly to my approach of the film and television example, my tendency to add on more context and new direction instead of taking the time to redefine and iron out what we had already established overwhelmed the actors and resulted in varied performances with arcs that did not match. The shoot lasted eight hours and I was unable to make it through all of the shots on my shot list and got no more than two takes of each shot. My crew and I struggled a great deal with executing the lighting I had planned for certain shots and sometimes made little to no changes to save time. By the end of the shoot only one crewmember remained and my cast was exhausted. I asked for one last shot and we called it a wrap.

I edited a rough cut of the scene over Winter Break but after showing it to Professor Platt and Professor Haskell I scheduled a reshoot for the first weekend of fifth block. I had found it difficult to create an arc with Isobelle's character due to the inconsistent direction I had given her. My goal for the reshoot was to improve lighting, gain coverage of the beginning and closing shots and to capture a clear turning point in Isobelle's emotional state. We paid special attention to her reaction to the line, "You want to run this office run it" and how her character reacted to this challenge of her authority. I point blank told her that there should be a clear distinction between her lines before and after that line. Interestingly enough, this direct request with no mention of character, beat change or subtext was the most successful direction I gave. Isobelle's demeanour took a dramatic shift after the challenge from Sarah. I am unsure as to whether it was driven

from stimuli that would have supported her character in a longer scene but the change in

her tone of voice reflected the vulnerability and pain I was looking for. The shoot lasted

six hours but was well worth the effort.

III. The Post Production Process

The postproduction process gave me the opportunity to begin exploring how shot

selection and editing techniques could be used to influence the audience and support the

emotional arc of the story. During preproduction I used what I had learned in my Basic

Filmmaking class at CC as a guide for creating my storyboard and shot list. Although I

shot full coverage of the scene during every take, through my storyboard I selected the

types of shots I would use at certain moments. With choices like shot type, composition

and the angle of the camera I began to plan how I would direct the eye of my audience. In

Lewis Jacbos' book *The Movies as Medium* actor and director Irving Pichel describes,

"The fixed relationship between spectator and spectacle was broken down [with film.]

The action could be brought closer or moved away, or stated conversely, the spectator

could have every sensation of moving closer except that of motility" (114). I had a

variety of shot types to choose from, each with their own artistic and emotional

expressions. The first major choice that I made was to use dirty singles during the

beginning of the scene to give the subtle feeling of a connection between the two

characters. "We can be made to feel detachment or an emotional involvement through the

manipulation of space with the lens of the camera" (Katz, 124). To draw the audience's

attention to Isobelle's detachment that occurred after her position of power was

challenged I switched to clean singles. Although both actors were still in the scene, they

began to appear alone in the frame. The transition added emphasis to the moment and mirrored Isobelle's closed off emotional state.

In his book *Film Directing: Shot by Shot* Stephen Katz explains, "The close-up can bring us into a more intimate relationship with the subjects on the screen than would normally have with anyone but our closest friends and family. Sometimes this capacity for inspection can be overdone" (123). If I introduced the shot too early it would lose meaning and its usefulness as a directorial tool. For this reason I reserved close-ups for the emotional peaks of each character. These shots allowed the audience to see every detail of the character's reaction and signalled the importance of the moment. For Sarah, this came when she realized her leads had kicked out and again when she brought up her daughter.

The composition and camera angle of each shot was another opportunity for me to impact the audience and create tone in specific shots. "Conventions in Western art favour portraits that position the human face slightly off-centre to avoid disturbing symmetrical compositions" (Katz, 124). With this in mind I opened the scene with a shot of Sarah seated in the centre of the frame. This along with multiple close-ups and quick cuts, reflected her inner anxiety and set the tone of the scene long before she delivered her first line. I also considered the rule of thirds, where you imagine that the frame is divided into nine equal squares by two vertical and two horizontal lines. To form a pleasing composition you place your main subject in the intersection of the lines and leave negative space on the side where the subject is looking.

Additionally, camera angle was one of the ways that I enforced Sarah's helplessness and Isobelle's position of power at the end of scene. I ended the scene with a plonge shot looking down on Sarah. This extreme bird's eye view emphasized her defeat and made her look small in the frame. Camera angle can also be used to connect the audience to the subject. "Occasionally, however, the camera steps out of its role as casual observer and becomes a participant in the story. In so doing, it assumes the point of view of one of the characters. Thus, the camera actually becomes his "eye", and when this is the case we say that the camera is *subjective*…The audience is allowed to see part of the action as it appears to one of the characters, and it will subconsciously experience the same reactions as he does" (Jacobs, 62). For this reason I brought the camera down to the ground and shot an extreme low angle reaction shot of Isobelle. I wanted the audience to directly feel Sarah's sense of doom as if they were on the ground with her helping her look for her wallet.

Although I planned out these aspects of the shots during the preproduction stages, issues with sound quality and performance often dictated my decisions in the editing lab. The lab was where I had the ability to dictate the pacing of the scene. Karen and Rosenblum explain how dividing a scene into more than one shot, "Meant that the tedium of a long scene could be broken and the tempo heightened by fresh cuts and new angles" (38). To further accentuate the feeling of anxiety in the opening scene I began with an establishing shot but then cut to a short montage of quick extreme close-ups to accentuate her anxiety. Changing the perspective from a long shot, which I held for an almost awkward amount of time, to close-ups gave a jarring effect. I chose to use a short montage to mimic the pacing of a pounding heartbeat and heighten the level of anxiety.

"[The juxtaposition of] two images in such a way as to evoke an idea or a feeling that went beyond the sum of its parts" (Karen and Rosenblum, 48). In the scene cutting from a close-up of Sarah's face to her wringing her hands, then back to her face and then to her straightening her skirt was more emotionally effective than simply showing a long shot of the same action. This portion of the scene presented another opportunity to use juxtaposition.

I chose to play a calming track of elevator music that was in direct conflict with Sarah's state. I abruptly cut the music as Isobelle entered the scene to catch the audience off guard and create in them the same reaction Sarah had to the entrance of her scene partner. I developed a method for pacing during the dialogue that would emphasize and draw the audience's attention to specific moments in the script. I went through and circled three main moments: "Either way you're out", "You want to run this office. Run it" and "I'm asking you as a favor to me. Joan. Joan: my daughter". I then went back and made the cuts leading up to these lines tighter and faster creating a gradual build up. To push this even further I overlapped the audio so that it appeared that the actors were interrupting each other. When the critical lines came I slowed the editing and allowed the audience to clearly see the beat changes and feel the impact of these moments.

The filming process of this project taught me about working with actors but also about my aesthetic as a director and editor. After my final presentation faculty members from the Drama and Dance departments critiqued my work and presented a number of questions regarding my process and creative choices. During the critique I was asked why I took such a literal approach to the work, steering away from all of the experimental possibilities that film could lend itself to. This question caught me off guard because until

that moment I had never even considered that option. I chose Mamet's text because of its

clear foundation in reality with objectives based in the core of human nature- survival. I

have a tendency in life and in art to see things very cut and dry. Having little to no

experience in directing or filmmaking I clung very tightly to the familiar, further

accentuating this all or nothing approach. I followed the exercises, tool, handouts and

experiences I had from Emerson and the two film classes I had taken very strictly,

sometimes to my own disadvantage. For instance, I used an example shot list from class

as my guide, adding in only one or two shots of my own. I got full coverage of the scene

with long shots, clean singles, dirty singles and close-ups, but the lack of variety created a

very stagnant and sometimes difficult to watch scene. Although I had hoped to create

such an effect, it was a fine balance between making the audience uncomfortable and

having them check out. I knew my limitations as a camera director going into the shoot

and because I did not think I could achieve perfection with a dolly I decided against it

altogether. I instead stuck to traditional conventions of shot reverse shot throughout the

scene. Beyond the result this had in my final product, by limiting my exploration of

options regarding camera movement I neglected to examine part of my thesis- the

possibilities unique to film.

Having a clear vision and aesthetic is important but I could have benefitted a great

deal from the insight of others. If I could go back I would seek outside help for my

directing process, allowing me to allocate time towards my direct goal of exploring the

unique characteristics within each medium. With outside help I might have found more

efficient ways of communicating what I was looking for and opened up a great deal of

time towards preparing for the shoot. I would also add a wider variety of shots to the list,

have time to experiment with the equipment and get more than one or two takes. Overall, I cannot confidently say that I accomplished all of the goals I had for this portion of the project but I did gain an invaluable lesson concerning working with actors, finding multiple ways of addressing and expressing your vision and the preparation necessary for a successful film shoot. These are integral areas of filmmaking that I need to explore further if I want to pursue my interest in the industry.

IV. Rehearsing the Play

For the theatrical version of the scene I sought to investigate how movement, blocking and staging could direct the focus of the audience and support my interpretation of the text in the same way I had used shot selection and editing techniques in the film. For this reason I planned to keep the same interpretation of the text and direction of my actors, allowing the audience to focus on the change in medium. I anticipated that the actors would need time to re-familiarize themselves with their lines but having the scene and character development already laid out, I planned to have plenty of time to focus on movement exercises in rehearsals.

I began to worry that I was not taking full advantage of what the theatre had to offer and did not want to repeat my mistake in leaving out an important characteristic of the medium like I had with camera operation. I spoke to Professor Platt about my concern with my lack of knowledge surrounding lighting, set design and sound. I was looking for tools in theatre that would be the equivalent of those I had used in film: shot selection, camera angle and a number of various editing techniques. He suggested that the simple

fact that a camera was no longer directing the eye of the audience was one of the characteristics unique to live theatre. This also meant that the audience would no longer have the same level of access to the detailed expressions of the actors' faces. Oscar G. Brockett directly addresses this fact and states, "Theatre is psychologically the most immediate of the arts" (13). In theatre the engagement between the audience and the actor never breaks with a cut to a different shot. The cast are three-dimensional beings interacting and existing together in the same space. With the entire stage visible I sought to convey these same emotions through the body and voice, which would operate on a larger and more readable scale.

At Emerson my movement classes incorporated the Alexander Technique and then moved into Kristen Linklater work for voice and text, which aim to help identify habits developed over time in response to various stresses. Although I was more familiar with these techniques than any others, I refrained from calling on them for my rehearsals due to the amount of time until the performance and a lack of confidence in my ability to teach them. That being said, I wanted to create a movement routine that we could utilize at the beginning of every rehearsal and used *Moves: A Sourcebook of Ideas for Body Awareness and Creative Movement* by Katya Bloom and Rosa Shreeves as my guide. I went through the book and picked out a number of exercises that I thought successfully outlined what I hoped to achieve and create in rehearsal. My goal was for the actors to become aware of their own bodies including: gestures, posture, habits and places of tension. We would then work on finding a neutral state of relaxation that they could then build upon as they took on the physicality of their characters. At the very least I hoped the actors would develop a level of awareness that would allow any movement to

function as a natural reaction to stimuli and not a choreographed piece of blocking. In exercises I looked for a progression along the lines of: empty and calm the mind, relax the body and release tension, bring focus inwards and move with awareness. Using those as a foundation I then found other exercises that focused on partnering that I planned to bring in at different points in the rehearsal process.

During our first rehearsal on February 3rd I shared production notes with the actors and my vision behind the movement work. I read aloud from *Directing a Play* by James Roose-Evans, "Gesture is more than speech. It is not what we say that persuades, but the manner of saying it. Speech is inferior to gesture because it corresponds to the phenomena of the mind. Gesture is the agent of the heart. It is the spirit of which speech is merely the letter… The most powerful of all gestures is that which affects the spectator without his knowing it…" (29).

We did a read through of the script to get the words back in the actors' bodies. I asked them how they were feeling about the material and each of them expressed a level of uncertainty with the performance they had given during the film. Sarah said that she was no longer comfortable with the approach she had used, feeling like she victimized her character. Isobelle felt similarly and that what we had established before no longer felt natural. I was a bit worried about this because of the amount of time we had spent working on character development and the difficulty we had run into. I was afraid of abandoning that foundation and starting again from scratch. In the end, I knew that if the material felt stale or forced we had to address it. Leaving it the same for convenience's sake would only lead to a contrived performance and a hollow experience for both actors and audience. I appreciated their honesty about the material and wanted to make sure that

they got what they needed out of each rehearsal. This time around I sought to make sure

that my actors played a more active role in the process, hoping this would increase

efficiency and open my mind up to new ideas.

Instead of moving into the movement work I had planned we began discussing

new ideas in terms of character and overall approach. We tried multiple scenarios ranging

from practical to the extreme to see what new moments arose. At one point I had Isobelle

keep the motivation of belittling Sarah but took it to a new level by having her act like a

preschool teacher reprimanding a small child with her hand caught in the cookie jar. This

infuriating behavior of being treated like an infant pushed Sarah to the limits of her

patience, which created moments where she lost her cool, overstepped boundaries and

then had to scramble to stay on Isobelle's good side. When Isobelle delivered her lines

there was no malice behind them but instead a genuine feeling that Sarah was

incompetent and required looking after. Although this only made sense for the first

portion of the script, it brought to light a few new moments unseen in the film. We tried

multiple interpretations and in the end decided that the two would be friendly

acquaintances in the office. We focused a great deal on walking the line between friends

and coworkers and the moments when the etiquette of professional behavior was broken

down. To decrease Sarah's feeling of helplessness in the scene I suggested she view

Isobelle as both an ally and an easy target. I pushed her to manipulate the friendly nature

of their relationship in order to fulfill her objective of protecting her job and family. This

in turn put Isobelle between a rock and a hard place: however much she wanted to help

Sarah it would mean putting her own job in jeopardy. In this version of the scene the

audience got to actively watch as Isobelle grappled with her inner conflict. Blocking and

gesture became a vehicle for both actors to express their frustration and build the arc of the scene.

I gave my actors a number of homework assignments that I hoped would help support our new approach and develop their choices. I asked them to keep a journal of their own habits and mannerisms: how they sat in class, if they had any nervous tendencies like shaking their legs or tapping their pencils and the way they used their hands when they spoke. Along with this, I asked them to observe others and take similar notes. I read from *Directing a Play*, "Little by little I found accidentally the sources of many of the elements of the inner and outer image. For instance, in Berlin, I met a learned man whom I had often met before… and recognized that I had taken from him the gesture of Stockman's index and middle fingers. Meeting a famous music critic I recognized in him my manner of stamping in one place which I used in my performance of a role" (Roose-Evans, 28). I hoped that an awareness of where these gestures or movements came from would help the actors take note of when and where in their performances they appeared. Even if the type of gesture changed, identifying specific moments where they continually occurred was key to developing blocking. For Sarah many of these moments came when she became defensive- for example, when Isobelle brought up two leads that Sarah conveniently avoided mentioning. At this point I would often yell out, "You've been caught. "In reaction Sarah would physically move away from Isobelle and avert her gaze. Before, the status of Isobelle's claim had been unclear as to whether or not Sarah was hiding something. These small movements helped make the situation clear to the audience and justified the defensive nature of her following lines.

I had originally wanted to avoid using props to go along with my minimalist set design but it became clear that their introduction would open up a number of options for Isobelle's character. Roose-Evans explains, "The actual blocking of a scene will often grow out of the actor's relationship with the physical objects around him" (68). With an almost empty stage I toyed with the idea of using filing cabinets instead of the crates I had planned to use. In the end, I decided against this because of the awkward and amateur appearance it created and instead gave Isobelle a folder to work with. Sarah already needed to have a purse to look through so I thought one more prop would not be too distracting. The folder helped establish Isobelle in the beginning of the scene by providing her with an action. I did not want its sole purpose to be an easy way out of an awkward opening. Luckily, we found a key moment in rehearsal where Isobelle slammed the folder down on one of the crates in a moment of frustration. In this way the folder became a vehicle for her subtext, expressing the words she could not say.

The three black crates on set also influenced and dictated the movements of the actors. The desk became Isobelle's place of power and comfort that she could return to, which added to the level of discomfort created when Sarah encroached on this space. The crates also provided the actors with a place to rest after periods of building tension, quick pacing and constant movement. At the end of the scene we talked about why Isobelle agreed to go ahead with the deal. We decided that if we could create enough of a build to the point where each of the characters reached their breaking points, we could then slow things down, give them a place to reflect on their behavior and feel remorse for their actions. Having a place where both characters could lean up against or even sit down increased the feeling of exhaustion at the end of the scene. This moment would not have

been possible without the appropriate build up and I used a similar technique to that I had used in editing.

I circled the last line of the argument and then back tracked a number of lines. I used the moment that Isobelle slammed the folder down as a beginning point and asked my actors to increase the speed at which they delivered their lines. The urgency that the pacing created allowed for the moment of silence that followed to hold more weight. "It is here that, when blocking a play, a director may find the use of an interrupted action useful, in order to bring an added emphasis to a particular line or movement" (Roose-Evans, 15). We found a similar moment when Sarah discovered her leads had kicked out. We decided that everyone in the office knew except for Sarah and to treat it as an elephant in the room for Isobelle. I told her not to say the line until Sarah aggravated her to the point where it spilled out in spite of itself. In a fury Isobelle let the line slip and Sarah fell still, letting her arms drop to her side as she absorbed the news. This moment of stillness accentuated the gravity of the situation.

In an attempt to avoid the confusion I had created during the film I had my actors run the scene before our presentation but gave no notes or final thoughts. I watched the performance from the back where I ran the projector and saw a scene quite different than ever before. The thrill of performing in front of an audience, no matter what size, always adds a new dynamic to the delivery of a performance. It was exciting to watch as this energy helped push Sarah to new levels, allowing herself to lose control and find real anger. In that moment the scene became their own.

In the end I felt similarly to my experience with the film. I continued to struggle with my limitations as a director and the lack of time spent on exploring movement, which became less of a priority after deciding to change our approach. I am, however, glad that we took the time to address the issue and believe that sticking with the same direction I had used for the film would have resulted in a manufactured and uncomfortable performance. That being said, if I could go back I would schedule the performance to be closer to the time I wrapped the film, decreasing the amount of time away from the material. I believe that a consistent interpretation of the story would have led to a better opportunity to compare the differences in medium and have better served the original goal of my thesis.

From the beginning, this project evolved in many unforeseen ways. ~~at the beginning of the process.~~ My original intent of exploring the unique characteristics inherent in both film and theatre and how they could be used to reinforce my directorial vision took on a secondary level of importance. When I had difficulty expressing my vision and applying exercises from rehearsal to the execution of the performance, I shifted my focus away from shot selection, editing techniques and movement work. Instead, I dedicated my time to directing and figuring out new ways to explain character development, subtext, objective, through line and beat changes in a way that my actors could successfully incorporate into the scene. As I reallocated my time and focus, I learned to let go of certain expectations and had to adapt to both logistical and artistic challenges. The new concentration on directing provided me with an unpredicted opportunity to reevaluate my training as an actor. My preconceived notions surrounding

the relationship between acting and directing, along with my ability to connect knowledge from one skill set to another was greatly challenged.

Upon reflecting on the choices I made as a director including: a realistic interpretation of the text, a minimalist approach to set design and the use of conventional shot reverse shot editing techniques, I have gained better understanding of my aesthetic as an actor, director and audience member. By examining my creative choices I began to realize my perfectionist tendencies. Through the logistic and creative roadblocks I encountered, I observed my aptness to eliminate any idea or technique that I could not execute flawlessly. At times, my black and white outlook limited my creative choices and kept me from taking risks. For example, when I opted out of using a dolly because of my lack of experience, I missed an opportunity to incorporate movement and blocking into the scene. On the other hand, I also learned the benefits of being a perfectionist, which included having a clear vision, a relentless work ethic and a knack for detail. By experiencing the pros and cons of this straightforward approach I will be able to recognize what positive aspects I can hold onto and which should be left behind. Whether my passion for storytelling leads to a future in film, theatre or something unforeseen, the level of self-awareness I have gained through this process will be an invaluable and worthwhile tool to my future endeavors.

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