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## Directing Time Stands Still

Michael Bradley Sheeks  
*Minnesota State University Mankato*

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DIRECTING *TIME STANDS STILL*

by

MICHAEL SHEEKS

A THESIS SUBMITTED  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE DEGREE  
MASTER OF FINE ARTS  
IN  
THEATRE ARTS

MINNESOTA STATE UNIVERSITY, MANKATO  
MANKATO, MINNESOTA

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## ABSTRACT

Sheeks, Michael, M.F.A. Directing *Time Stands Still*. Mankato: Minnesota State University, Mankato, 2011.

This document is a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the Master of Fine Arts degree in theatre. It is a detailed account of author Michael Sheeks's artistic process in directing *Time Stands Still* in the fall of 2015. The thesis chronicles the director's artistic process from pre-production through performance in five chapters: a preproduction analysis, an historical and critical perspective, a process journal, a post-production analysis and a process development analysis. Exhibits and works cited are included.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am probably most thankful for the thousands of students that have propelled me toward this moment in my career. The first of these was a feisty middle-school student who loudly pronounced my very first role-playing activity in a classroom to be “lame.” Since that time I have been inspired and humbled by the talents, dedication and questions of the students, actors, designers, playwrights, technicians, colleagues and friends with whom I have had the pleasure of working. It brings me back to the rehearsal room over and over.

I would also like to thank Heather Hamilton and Paul J. Hustoles for their work at Minnesota State Mankato. It is a pleasure to be able to learn from both of them. There were, of course, many other people along the way that also inspired me to pursue this craft. Among them I would be remiss if I did not name Sam Tanner, Tony Matthes and Jo Holcomb, as well as Marsha Smith, who will be missed.

Finally, I want to thank my kids, Martin and Katie, and my mother and father. All of them have been and continue to be a rich and cherished source of support and inspiration.

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## CHAPTER I

### EARLY PRODUCTION ANALYSIS

This early production analysis is provided for the production of *Time Stands Still* directed by Michael Sheeks and produced at Minnesota State University, Mankato's Department of Theatre and Dance, November 18-21, 2015. The costume and scene design is by Lauren Nelson, lighting design by Chelsea Dively, sound design by Luke Walchuk and technical direction by George Grubb.

*Times Stands Still* is a realistic drama written by Donald Margulies and first produced at the Geffen Playhouse in Los Angeles, California, on February 11, 2009. There are four characters including: Sarah Goodwin, a photojournalist; James Dodd, a freelance journalist; Richard Ehrlich, a photo editor; and Mandy Bloom, an event planner. The play is structured in two acts containing seven scenes. It takes place in a single location within a single year.

*Time Stands Still* is set in the present. Because the play explores journalism in a contemporary context, it benefits from understanding the "present" as the immediate present. To establish the time frame as the immediate present, the production needs to ensure that the topical references in the text remain current. The first production was staged in 2009 and the New York production was staged in 2010. Consequently, this current production is not far removed from the time frame of the original production. At the top of the play, Sarah and James are returning from a war zone that is not identified.

James is working on an article about the refugee situation in Syria and Jordan; however, that topic is just as immediate in 2015 as it was in 2009. On page 60 of the text, Sarah makes reference to leaving for Kabul and Kandahar; however, Margulies has provided a footnote providing permission for these references to be updated as needed. For this production, those destinations can be made current by replacing them with Homs and Damascus in Syria. Other topical references in the text are limited to general references to conflict zones in Africa and the Middle East that remain current. A guide who worked with Sarah and James is named Tarik and is identified as being a Muslim but is not otherwise provided a nationality or geographical identity.

The theme of the play is largely focused on the relationship between journalists and their work. It considers the costs that journalists pay when they immerse themselves in the world of a war zone or other tragic circumstance. It explores how this immersion affects the journalist's perception of their worth and values. It also considers the impact that proximity to chaos and tragedy has on relationships. Finally, it looks at the way that the act of journalism interacts with the journalist's subject to make the journalist complicit in the tragic circumstances of the world in which the journalist is reporting.

To pursue these themes, Margulies presents the story of two journalists, Sarah and James, and contrasts them with the developing relationship between Richard, their editor, and his young girlfriend, Mandy. Through these characters, Margulies develops two significant conflicts. The first is the conflict that Sarah and James face in deciding whether they should return to the conflict zone to pursue their journalistic passions or if they should instead pursue more comfortable careers in the United States. This is made more complex in that their individual choices impact their ability to remain together as a



couple. The second conflict is revealed through comments that Mandy makes about the role of the journalist who witnesses tragic events in the field. In this conflict, the play considers whether the journalist should provide assistance or if it is preferable to simply observe and remain separate. All four characters offer actions and dialogue that reveal a range of nuanced and layered perspectives about these two dramatic conflicts.

The four characters can be best viewed as holding positions on a scale that measures their attitudes about journalism. This scale might be called the Professionalism Scale. Sarah sits on one end of this scale, Mandy occupies the opposite end and the two men orbit around the central axis. Sarah believes that the journalist has a responsibility to function as a dispassionate observer who serves a noble function by seeking and reporting on dangerous worlds. Mandy believes that when faced with suffering, action should be taken to relieve that suffering. She sees the act of reporting, when engaged without an attempt to lessen the suffering, as immoral. James and Richard align more closely with Sarah on this scale; however, there is a second scale that separates their perspective from hers.

This second scale might measure the characters attitudes toward the sacrifice and loss attendant with entering dangerous environments. This scale might be called the Comfort Scale. On this scale there is more separation between the four characters. Again, Sarah, who is very comfortable with the sacrifices she has made as a reporter, occupies one end of this scale. James has been aligned with Sarah in this regard but is moving toward the center as a consequence of his recent experiences in the field. Mandy and Richard occupy the other end of the scale. Richard has some professional appreciation for the sacrifices that Sarah and James have made but has no taste for it

himself. Mandy expresses regard for Sarah and James but does not appear to understand the real nature of their life choices.

The attitudes reflected in these two scales play out in the action of the play. The initial action is incited by acts of violence that cause first James and then Sarah to return to New York from their work as journalists in a conflict zone. James is present at a suicide bomb detonation during which he witnesses horrific suffering. He returns to New York to recover and Susan stays behind to continue her work as a photojournalist. She is then injured by an IED and James goes overseas to bring her back to New York to recover. Although these two incidents are extreme and destabilizing for them individually and for their relationship, it is important to recognize that they have a long history of working and living together in conflict zones. Chaos and uncertainty is a central reality of their lives. It is clear that they have never had an opportunity to be together as a couple in a setting that is peaceful or domestic. In this way, life in chaos has up to the beginning of the play been a circumstance that they have both perceived as normal. The play explores how this shared history influences the relationship between the two characters as well as how they respond to the violence individually.

The entire play takes place over about eight months during which Sarah and James decide to marry and then part. Act One takes place over a few days that begin with the return of Sarah and James to New York. Act Two begins four months later with the wedding of Sarah and James, continues for several days thereafter, and then concludes with a scene that takes place four months after the wedding. Time of year is not indicated; however, the presence of a stocking cap for Sarah in Scene 1 suggests that the play begins during the winter months.

For Sarah, the action of the play is an inconvenient pause in her work in the field. The emotional and physical trauma that she has suffered is important to her mostly in that she needs to recover quickly to return to her work. In Scene 1 and Scene 2 she is presented much like a wounded animal who has retreated to its burrow to lick its wounds. She resists visits by Richard both in Scene 1 where she tells James, “I don’t want to talk to anybody,” and again in Scene 2 where she reacts to his imminent visit by observing, “I wish you could have put him off.” This is not to say that she is withdrawn. There are numerous exchanges in both scenes that function to make Sarah a sympathetic and attractive character. Her recollection of Tarik in the person of the taxi driver, while emotionally loaded for James, has a sense of fondness to it. In addition, there are numerous exchanges between Sarah and each of the other three characters in which she is engaged and responsive to their lives and needs. She also has moments of biting acidity as well. This is most easily seen in some tension with James regarding the pace of her recovery and in that she is rather direct in her disapproval of Mandy. A moment in Scene 2 that exemplifies this is when she observes that she, like Mandy, is also connected to events and goes on to list them as “wars, famines, genocide.” The silence that should follow this statement goes a long way toward building the energy of this charming scene.

Importantly, Scene 2 ends with Sarah’s declaration regarding her role as a journalist. In this short speech, which is emphasized for the audience as the final statement leading into the scene shift from Scene 2 to Scene 3, Sarah clearly places herself on her end of the Professionalism Scale.

I wish I could cry like that. But I can’t; I can’t let it get to me. If I let it get to me . . . How could I do my job? I couldn’t. I’d want to take away

the guns and rescue all the children. But I can't. That's not why I'm there. (Pause.) I'm there to take pictures. (30)

The use of “could” or “can't” five times in this short speech drives home the extent to which her work and her attitudes about her work are an imperative for Sarah. Clearly, Sarah is not able to compromise her work or to allow other elements of her life to gain priority over her work in the field. For Sarah, she knows why she is out there and it is extraordinarily important to her identity. These statements will resonate through the rest of the play and will ultimately drive the resolutions to the established dramatic conflicts.

For Sarah, Scene 3 is encapsulated in a simple pair of lines. Early in the scene, in one honest moment, her attitudes about professionalism and comfort surface and in another, at the very conclusion of the scene, she makes an attempt to sublimate those attitudes. The scene contains a conversation between James and Sarah immediately after the visit of Richard and Mandy. In this conversation James reveals that he is envious of their relationship and would like to be married. This surprises Sarah and she reacts to his statement that “I wished we were getting married” by asking if he is serious (31). She is clearly surprised and when he responds to her question, “Seriously?” with an affirmative nod Margulies indicates “A beat” (31). This is an important beat. It contains a multitude of shifts for Sarah. In this beat she realizes that James is in a new emotional place and that he is shifting away from her on the Comfort Scale. Her response, “Oh, honey,” is remarkably telling (31). This is not a romantic use of the word “honey.” Rather, this is more akin to the parent who, upon discovering that their young teenager is in love with someone who will be forever out of their reach, responds with empathy and sadness. The conversation that follows includes important revelations about Tarik and in the end, after

much discussion, Sarah agrees to marry James. Tellingly, he is concerned that she is not ready and asks her as much. She responds, again in the important final lines of the act, with her reassurance, “No, no. I am. I want to” (36). The stage directions here provide the difficult task of showing her face in their embrace at which point, “her mind is elsewhere” (36).

For Sarah, the remainder of the play is a journey away from James and the comfort of life in the United States. They engage in conflict over the pace of Sarah’s recovery, over their memories of Tarik and his place in their shared memories and, finally, over their continued work as journalists. These conflicts create distance between the two of them and inevitably Sarah leaves James to return to her work overseas. Interestingly, this resolution is achieved with more of a whimper than a bang. James accuses Sarah of being addicted to the intensity of their work and at the end of Act Two, Scene 3, James confronts her with his beliefs, “You need it. The whole fucking mess of it. The chaos, and the drama. You need it. (A beat.) More than you need me” (56). As she has done throughout the play, she denies this and reassures James. “Not more than I need you,” she says as the scene comes to an end (56). Margulies does not expect the audience to believe this statement. The assumption in this moment that Sarah does need her work more than James or anything else in her life is so strong that Margulies does not choose to present the impending and inevitable end of the relationship. Instead, the next and final scene of the play in which Sarah and James have separated and Sarah is leaving to go overseas happens without any reference to or presentation of their split. It is such an inevitable narrative element that its existence is assumed without comment.

There is a strong argument to be made that the play is Sarah's play; the story is Sarah's story. In Sarah, Margulies has drawn a character who is broken at the core but who negotiates the pain and suffering of her damaged psyche by massaging it with her work recording the pain and suffering of the larger world. She functions as a metaphor for the dysfunctional state of the world. In the same way that Sarah records and presents the world in the hope that the world will be better for it, Margulies presents Sarah to his audience as a cautionary figure. What hopes Margulies might have for how the metaphor might be received is unknown but the parallel is striking.

James provides a critical counterpoint to Sarah within the action of the play. While Mandy and Richard firmly represent the comforts of domestic life, James begins the play aligned with Sarah and gradually shifts his attitudes homeward. Whereas Sarah encounters the primary dramatic conflict and chooses not to change, James is the character who makes the largest change over the course of the show. This change begins before the play starts. James's experience witnessing a bombing drives him home and into a process of reflection and psychological counseling. When Sarah is injured this process is interrupted and he puts his energy and focus on Sarah's recovery. Throughout the first two scenes of the play, James is largely a passive presence in the background as the action is focused on Sarah's story; however, there are wheels turning for James that are suggested in several moments. The end of Scene 1 provides the first of these in his response to Sarah's repeated questions about what will be happening next. Sarah wishes to know what will be happening in the future. James's response focuses on a slow recovery and, perhaps more importantly, includes no suggestion that they might return to their work overseas. The final lines of the scene have James suggesting that, "we put you

back together again. (A beat. He kisses her forehead.) Welcome home. (End of scene)”

(9). There is a finality in this last phrase that is grounded in James’s growing satisfaction with being home and with his desire (not yet known or articulated) to stay home.

A sub-plot that runs underneath the larger conflicts of the narrative and is important to understanding James involves the journalistic work that James is trying to finish. James has completed an article on the Syrian refugee crisis for Richard and is waiting for it to be printed. He is working on an article analyzing trends in the horror film genre and, finally, he is working on the text for a joint project with Sarah that presents the results from their most recent time together overseas. Sarah and James have frequent conversations and are sometimes in conflict about his prioritization and completion of these projects. James is reluctant to share his work on their joint project and to the audience, and to Sarah, it appears that he is spending a considerable amount of time watching horror films rather than working on their project. As conflicts develop between Sarah and James about marriage and their return to the field, these writing projects frequently surface as proxies for their more significant relationship issues.

In Act Two, James appears to have gotten what he asked for in that he and Sarah have married and while they are planning at some point to return to the field, that event is in the undefined future. Despite this he is generally presented as being dissatisfied and unpleasant. This begins immediately in Act Two, Scene 1 where the act opens with James “wearily” complaining about a play that he and Sarah had gone to. His frustration with the representations of misery in the play resonate with Mandy’s comments about the need to engage beauty rather than horror and foreshadow James speech at the end of Act Two, Scene 2. In that speech he eschews their plans to return overseas and extolls the

world of Disney and dude ranches. In the intervening passages, James reacts very poorly to Richard's news that his article on the refugee crisis in Syria will not be published. In Scenes 3 and 4, against the backdrop of James's apparent obsession with his horror films, Margulies uncovers the critical conflict that has been percolating beneath the surface from the first pages of the play. Here Sarah discovers that James has chosen not to include Tarik's story in his text for their joint book project. Their argument about this omission allows their opposing perspectives on Tarik, their relationship, their work and their lives in the future to spill all over the stage. As mentioned above, this resolves in Sarah's unconvincing claim that James is more important to her than her work.

The final scene of the play is somewhat bittersweet for James. He has found new love, he is staying in New York and he seems awkwardly content. At the same time, the entire play has been spent demonstrating the complexity and power of his relationship with Sarah. Margulies makes sure that there is strong closure for this shift by having James provide an edit to their joint book project in which he returns Tarik's story to the material. This is an important symbolic gesture as it resolves their conflict both regarding Tarik as a symbol of their relationship conflict as well as his placeholder for what might be important in their work as journalists. There is no doubt that something has been lost but that loss is accepted and the wounds have space to heal.

While Sarah's story comments on the forces that drive a person to seek out and engage with that in the world which is painful and ugly, James's story provides an alternative response. The satisfaction available in the resolution of the conflict is incomplete for both characters. Sarah seems to have lost the peace that comes with accepting the world as it is and James has lost the passion and clarity that comes from



pursuing an idealistic struggle to uncover and change that world. The ambivalence of the ending suggests an ambivalence in Margulies perspective on the primary theme itself. There are no simple answers to the questions that are asked and there are elements of the tragic in the paths of all of the characters involved.

For Mandy and Richard, there is relatively little movement or change throughout the play. They begin where they end, comfortably seeking a comfortable life in the comfort of their love and their work. Both characters carry some ambivalence toward this stasis. Richard clearly sympathizes intellectually with the work that Sarah and James pursue; however, there is nothing to suggest that he wishes to do anything more than utilize the fruits of their labor in his own work. Margulies is not providing a critique of this choice. Richard is a sympathetic character and is provided ample opportunity to make coherent arguments for his actions that are supported by other characters. Still, as he says himself in Act One, Scene 2, “Fuck brilliant. I’ve done brilliant . . . I want something simple for a change” (21). Mandy is clearly that simple thing that Richard wants. She has moments of lucid common sense that is grounded in the realities of living a comfortable, satisfied life. Again in Act One, Scene 2, she explains to Sarah that, “All that matters—to me, anyway—is he takes care of me. He makes me feel safe” (25). Her distress that Sarah and James might choose not to try and assist when confronted with the horrors of the world does not extend to the place where she wishes to go out and fix those things herself. In this way she is a strong representative of the majority of the people in the theatre who have opinions about the world outside their own immediate lives but rarely act in any way to engage that larger world. They are sympathetic characters who have a nobility of their own within the smaller lives with which the audience is familiar.

In the end, these questions, characters and dramatic actions integrate to offer a contemplation of how the individual should respond to the horrors of a fallen world. The play is, as mentioned above, a realistic drama. Digging more deeply into the style of the play requires some clarification of this term. The text and narrative are essentially realistic; however, there is space within that label to allow for theatrical presentation of the underlying themes. Similarly, the play is a drama but the characters are hopeful and sympathetic providing space for a lighter tone and comedic flavoring. This is not to suggest that the play is a kind of tragicomedy or dramedy (which seems to be the newest label for dark comedic shows). There is no satirical edge to the play and the ironies present in the text are limited to the kind of irony that shed light on the reality of being human and imperfect. The ending is hopeful but given that the driving action of the play is the reclamation of the relationship between Sarah and James it is ultimately tragic. The audience is left to grieve for what Sarah and James have lost while simultaneously celebrating the things that they will now separately gain. The tempo of the play reflects this tension between the comic and the tragic. The text requires periods of intense, driven conflicts that are punctuated by quiet reflection and comedic turns and pauses. It moves along briskly and drives to a climax that is itself somewhat quiet and reflective.

Casting will require an ensemble that connects with each other well and with an eye to how they relate to each other in both temperament and physical type. Clearly, the role of Sarah is critical to the success of the production. Sarah needs to be strong and willful but must also be empathetic and arouse the sympathy of the audience. She will need to be credibly older than Mandy and will need to appear more mature if not necessarily older than James. There should be a world-weariness to her that she wears

comfortably. The actress will need to be able to execute the technical elements of playing Sarah's injury. There are several strong women that are likely to be available for this role.

The most difficult of the casting choices will come for the two supporting roles of Mandy and Richard. The difficulty is finding actors that can credibly play the important age difference between the two characters. Mandy needs to be youthful without being childish. She needs to capture the sexual attraction of a young, "hot" girlfriend. Richard, on the other hand, needs to be mature. The character is somewhere around 50 and his relationship with Mandy will need to be both comic and credible. The actor in the role of Richard will need to communicate the age difference without seeming to be made up for it. The style of the play and the production makes it inappropriate for any aging that might be done to the actor to be at all obvious.

There are also several likely strong choices within the Minnesota State Mankato theatre students to play James. This actor will need to be comfortably empathetic and attractive. He will need to be able to create a character that is strong in his sense of self while bringing a bit of immaturity to the role, particularly as he contrasts with Sarah. The audience will also need to believe that this is a character who would allow himself to settle into a dark living room on the couch and consume horror films for hours on end. We will need to see some of the stereotypes of the sloppy male being worn comfortably by this actor.

For this production, there is space for creative interpretation in the technical designs. Early production meetings will provide space for the design team to explore ways in which the thematic elements of the play might be reflected in the treatment of the

show. Because the play makes direct and implicit reference to panoply of world events, there is an opportunity to bring those images to the performance space. On the most immediate, literal level those images can live on realistic scenic walls in the photography that is directly referenced within the script; however, it could also live in a larger scale that the audience sees outside of the reality of the playing space. The use of selected realism in this way can support the themes of the play that might otherwise be left unregarded.

On a practical level, the action of the play is set in a loft in the Williamsburg neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York. The loft is described in some detail in the preliminary information of the acting edition of the script. That description includes the notion that the space is “raw, unfinished, resourcefully furnished, with nothing slick about it” (5). It makes clear that the loft is an open space with no dividing walls except for those provided to create the bathroom. Stage directions specifically reference a sink and this would facilitate stage business for Act Two, Scene 1. A refrigerator is required for stage business embedded in dialogue in Act One, Scene 1. A bed is referenced in the stage directions for Act Two, Scene 3. All other details of the loft are not enumerated. These practical considerations provide a starting place for the design treatment and the thematic considerations provide the expanding potentiality of those designs. Whatever creative options are explored must attend to the practical needs of a fundamentally realistic story.

Lights and sound have the same considerations to attend to as are found in the discussion above of the scenic treatment. These designs will need to help to establish time and place and will need to connect to the realistic world of the New York apartment.

At the same time, there is room for the lighting to support the mood or the thematic elements that may appear in the set design. Similarly, the sound design may find it appropriate to bring in aural soundscapes connected to the thematic elements described above. Early conversations with Walchuk included the consideration of developing some original music for the show.

Costumes will be helpful for communicating character type and age. This will be particularly important for Richard and Mandy, but comes into play for Sarah and James as well. Mandy's fashion sense and youthful energy should be apparent in her clothing and should stand in strong contrast to the kinds of practical and comfortable clothing that Sarah would wear. Richard's costume should match his personality and this will not be entirely clear until after casting. Richard could be prim and buttoned up, reflecting a neat, mature approach to fashion or he could also be a little comic, attempting to appear youthful in an awkward way. For James, it will be important that his costuming in the second and third scenes of Act II reflect his lack of direction and be a bit sloppy.

This production will face many challenges at a practical, immediate level. The budget is limited and the technical production schedule is rapid. More significantly, the characters that need to be developed are mature, complex people who have experienced much of the world. The acting pool at a university such as Minnesota State Mankato, is filled with the young and the innocent. It will be essential that the rehearsal process provide the ensemble with opportunities to find the depth and complexity of the characters such that the audience is willing to believe the anguish of their individual choices.

Still, the principal challenge facing this production is to present this story in a way that connects it to the daily lives of its audience. Sarah and James are not typical. Their choice of careers and even within their careers their choice of specialty are extraordinary and rare. As such, there is the potential for this to be the story of people who are “other” and thus to be easily distanced from the viewer. This is the genius of the way in which Margulies has embedded this thematic material in the profoundly familiar conflicts of most complex, committed relationships. The audience can connect to the difficulty of having changing attitudes and conflicting values within a relationship. What *Time Stands Still* can offer is the potential for them to also consider their own roles as reporters and fellow humans in a world that is damaged. In their empathy for Sarah and James, an audience has the opportunity to reflect on their own choices and the extent to which they have chosen comfort over ideals.

## CHAPTER II

### HISTORICAL AND CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

*Times Stand Still* was written by Donald Margulies in 2009. It was first staged at the Geffen Playhouse in Los Angeles and was given its New York debut by the Manhattan Theatre Club at the Samuel J. Friedman Theatre in January, 2010. For the New York production, Laura Linney played the role of Sarah Goodman, Brian d'Arcy James played James Dodd, Eric Bogosian played Richard Ehrlich and Alicia Silverstone played Mandy Bloom. The play closed briefly that same year and reopened at the Cort Theatre with Christina Ricci replacing Silverstone in the role of Mandy.

This recent entry into the robust catalog of Margulies's work embodies important themes in his plays from the decades preceding it. Charles Isherwood, in his review of the Cort Theatre production, was clearly affected by the depth of the relationships presented when he described the play as showing "how much pain and trauma are involved in the everyday business of two people creating a life together, one that accommodates the mistakes of the past, the reality of the present and the changes that the future may bring." At the same time, Kerstin Schmidt seems more drawn to the play's intellectual probing when she notes that the play "explores the moral conflicts and ambiguities of journalists/artists working war zones and living off the victims of combat and deprivation" (181). These two perspectives on this play are articulated in a way that does a good job of encapsulating the tension that exists between these two complex

topics. Margulies offers his own opinion about the hierarchy of these perspectives in an interview shortly after the play opened in 2010.

It's tricky to take on current, ongoing events in plays. I don't feel that I've done that in *Time Stands Still*. There are references to things associated with the war in Iraq but it is not "an Iraq play." War is the backdrop for what is essentially a domestic love story—a relationship drama—in which the characters happen to have high stakes professions. As a dramatist I'm always looking for ways to raise the stakes for my characters; in the case of *Time Stands Still* those stakes are particularly high. I'm more interested in exploring behaviour than in answering questions about contemporary foreign policy. (“The Q&A”)

Despite these comments, Margulies’s historical pattern is to tackle themes that are more complex than simple relationship dramas. His earliest work in *Found A Peanut*, *What’s Wrong With This Picture* and *The Loman Family Picnic* focused on the domestic themes found in the relationship between a father and a son and the difficulties of being Jewish in the post-Holocaust world. By mid-career his plays spend considerable time in explorations of intellectual ethical challenges. *Time Stands Still* builds on previous work and interest in a play that merges sophisticated concerns about domestic life as well as complex artistic and professional conflicts.

Margulies’s play *Sight Unseen* sets some of the groundwork for *Time Stands Still* in its exploration of the moral ambiguity of profiting from the results of an artistic impulse. In *Sight Unseen*, Margulies presents a “celebrated media-savvy artist, and his problems balancing fame, celebrity status and rampant artistic consumerism” (Schmidt



172). In *Time Stands Still*, the moral ambiguity of Sarah's use of the results of her photographic talents clearly resonates with the ideas explored in this earlier work. As Richard toils in the background creating a coffee table book from Sarah's photos and James's words, Sarah reflects that "I live off the suffering of strangers. I built a career on the sorrows of people I don't know and will never see again" (Margulies, *Time* 50). The idealized world of the journalist who makes the world a better place fades in the ethical morass of the personal gain available to the journalist who reports the horrors of the world the most ably. Similarly, Margulies's themes in *Collected Stories* also find resonance in the themes of *Time Stands Still*. In that work, Margulies considers the ethics involved in utilizing the world around the artist in the artist's work. When does a story belong to the teller and when does it belong to the world? How does the artist acknowledge and honor the source of the story? These questions are very much alive in *Time Stands Still* as Sarah and James struggle to place themselves in relation to the stories and memory of their interpreter, Tarik.

In *Dinner with Friends*, Margulies returns to his earlier interest in family life in a play that deeply interrogates the complexities of marriage and long-term relationships. Margulies has a subtle and genuine vision of the difficulty of sustaining these relationships in the face of the pressures of modern life. In this vision, there are no villains, "rather, all characters are caught in the sincere attempts of establishing and maintaining relationships, whether friendship or marriage, navigating commitment and stability with passion and love" (Schmidt 178). Similarly, in *Time Stands Still* it is clear that Sarah and James are equally dedicated to the significance of their commitment to one another and the role of that relationship in their lives. The needs of their professional

careers and their own shifting personal values complicate these positive intentions but as in *Dinner With Friends*, “there are no villains in this play” (Margulies, *Dinner* 75). Unlike *Sight Unseen* and *Collected Stories*, *Dinner With Friends* does not seem to have any underlying themes providing commentary on larger societal issues. This is not to say that the work consequently lacks value. In fact, the play won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 2000. Alvin Klein says of the play, “there is every reason to believe that Mr. Margulies's knowing grasp of the intrinsic complexity and contradictions of human beings, and their ceaseless search to clear out the muddle and find coherence, will resonate for a very long time.”

After a return to his personal connections to Brooklyn and Jewish domestic life in *Brooklyn Boy* in 2005 and a comedic diversion with *Shipwrecked!* in 2007, an early version of *Time Stands Still* was presented at the Geffen Playhouse in February, 2009. The critical response to this first staging suggests that Margulies had continued his interest in the domestic world of *Dinner With Friends* and may have been less engaged by the larger ideas implicit in the journalistic world of the play's conflicts. Steven Leigh Morris, in his review in the LA Weekly, was unimpressed with this first production, commenting that, “in *Time Stands Still*, the play's most interesting ideas about image and morality are only loosely and somewhat arbitrarily tethered to the play's core issue.” The revisions that took place during the time leading up to the show's Broadway debut in January, 2010, seem to have addressed some of these issues, but not completely.

[Margulies] also folds into the writing a few trenchant debates about the moral ambiguities of journalists' role in covering atrocities. In the play's premiere production, at the Geffen Playhouse in Los Angeles last year,

these sometimes felt tacked on, but Mr. Sullivan, who also staged that version, and his largely new cast have mostly smoothed out any lumps in the writing. (Isherwood, “What’s Really”)

As powerful as these ethical and professional themes might be, in the end the original Broadway production was fundamentally realistic in style and the play was grounded in the relationships of its characters. Margulies essentializes his analysis to the simple statement that although there may be a range of forces at play, “this is Ms. Linney's play” (Margulies, “The Q&A”).

The possibilities for providing support for the larger thematic forces in the script are of considerable interest to those who produce the play. When Margulies opines that the play belongs to the actress playing Sarah, he appears to mean that Sarah’s relationships with each of the three other characters in the play are the dominant force in the play. Still, it is impossible to ignore the fact that these relationships are the unintended victims of Sarah’s need to fulfill her commitment to the values, expectations and ideals of her professional calling. These professional ideals carry their own independent weight. The text provided in Margulies’s play does much of the needed work in this regard but the question remains as to what additional choices might or should be made to further this effort. A robust presentation of the script must provide the audience with an understanding of the themes and conflicts that underlie Sarah’s relationship struggles. The tenor of the critical reception of various productions of the play reflects this need and suggests that there is merit in moving beyond a utilitarian presentation of the realistic story.

As mentioned above, the initial productions seemed to present the larger themes of the play as an afterthought to the exploration of relationship. Just two years later a production at the Steppenwolf theatre continued the pattern of creating a detailed realistic setting for the show but changes in the direction of the show shifted the impact of the play in important ways. Chris Jones, who reviewed the Steppenwolf production, expressed considerable regard for the impact of the journalistic themes in the play and observed that the original Broadway production created “a highly experienced and skillful playwright's star-friendly vehicle for a debate around those moral questions.” He acknowledged the primacy of Linney’s character in the original production and described the Steppenwolf production as having benefited from a more balanced ensemble performance that played against the stereotypes so skillfully utilized in the original. Despite this shift, the play as presented in Chicago remained a work whose thematic space existed largely within the relationships of the characters.

While Jones praised the egalitarian leveling of characters in the Steppenwolf production, Noah Millman wondered in his review whether there is any way for such a play to provide meaningful commentary on something as large and significant as our response to distant conflict and horror. “We can, in the end,” he says, “only contemplate the unbridgeable chasm of our remove.” The dilemma ultimately is that we cannot find a way to “write about something like the Iraqi experience in a way that is meaningful to us at all.” Perhaps, then, the only meaning available is the more immediate meaning in an exploration of the triviality of romantic relationship.

Later that year the show was produced by TheaterWorks in Hartford at which audiences could view a dramaturgical display related to photojournalism in conflict

zones. Sylviane Gold's review of the play praised Margulies's previous works which dealt with the struggle that people experience in relationship and went on to observe that "this one, expertly directed by TheaterWorks's producing artistic director, Rob Ruggiero, goes beyond the personal to explore the moral ambiguities of journalism, a subject that both producers and consumers of the news media tend to avoid." This additional nod to themes other than relationships had an impact. As Gold put it, the play moved the audience so that the pictures displayed "look very different on one's way out than they do on the way in, before Mr. Margulies has moved us to think hard about the people who take them."

A Washington, D.C. production at Peter's Alley in March of 2014 moved the play even further into the realm of the abstract when it introduced several non-realistic technical elements to underscore specific themes in the play. These elements, described by Amanda Gunther in her review for Theatre Bloom, included an expanded sound design introducing the sounds of war and terror as well as the use of shadows created by lighting sculpture suspended above the set. Gunther found the added elements effective and evocative, describing them as "a unique and brilliant design element that infuses a heavy dose of symbolism into the performance." On the other hand, a production in Olympia, Washington, later that year included projected photography which reviewer Alec Clayton found to be intrusive and "mostly ineffectual, with the exception of two scenes of war when Sarah was describing a particularly horrible event." Interestingly, Clayton describes the play as being "an intense and intimate portrait of a pair of lovers" suggesting that this production highlighted the relationships and then appended the projected imagery. Gunther describes the Peter's Alley production as "a compelling

drama that investigates the purpose and conflicts that arise from living the life of the observer in a world of terror.” Do these disparate summaries of the play reflect the more and less effective underscoring of the themes of war and journalism or do they reflect the natural biases of the reviewers? Would Clayton have been more inclined to describe the play as being about being an observer had he seen the Peter’s Alley production or would he simply have been even more distracted by the soundscape and shadows?

The specific choices that each of these companies made in relation to the potential for a presentational style are a clear reflection of the extent to which the directors desired to move the play beyond themes of domesticity to themes of global intersection. The responses of the reviewers provide one avenue to evaluate these choices; however, it is also worth returning to Margulies’s comment that the play belongs to the actress playing Sarah. In his interview with Ramchandani, Margulies describes the genesis of ideas that led to writing *Time Stands Still*.

I was riding Metro-North into New York from my home in New Haven and wrote "A new play" in my notebook. Then I wrote "A loft." Then I began to ask myself a series of questions:

"Who lives in this loft?" "What if it's a photographer?" "What if it's a woman photographer?" "What if she's a photojournalist?" "What if she covers conflict?" "What if she's been injured covering a war?" and so on.

By the time I got to Grand Central, I had the seed for a new play.

What then, is *Time Stands Still* about? Clearly, it is about a photojournalist. The fact that this photojournalist is damaged as a consequence of her work is the engine that drives the stakes of the play. Reasonably, it is a person’s relationships that suffer the greatest injury

from the ways in which a person is damaged. Thus, in the end, *Time Stands Still* is about the relationships of this damaged woman. The extent to which theatrical treatments of the play are true to this authorial intent is a likely measure of the success of the production.

It seems clear then that authorial intent leans heavily in the direction of the relationships in the play. Margulies seems to write characters rather than plot, a reflection of his interests and abilities. “Playwriting is all about empathy, getting inside the head of someone who is not you, to think like they think without judging them . . . I just write characters as rigorously and as truthfully as I can and hope, no matter their gender, that their humanity comes through” (“Interview”). Given this interest, Margulies has given himself permission to revisit the same ground in many of his plays. In fact, he reflects on that tendency in an interview with Romulus Linney and considers the benefits of doing so.

My feeling is that it comes from something deep in our unconscious past that intersects with something that’s just happened to us in the present . . . They form our worldview . . . One of the fulfilling things about having a body of work and being somewhat prolific is that I find the same themes always interest me. I’m just finding new ways to approach them . . . As I was evolving as a writer, I kept thinking, I have to try something different, go someplace else, but the more I stayed within my own world, the more I was true to myself and to the world that I saw and didn’t try to impose notions on what I should be doing next.

This tendency to stay in the same place to dig more deeply into domestic life places Margulies within a realistic tradition that was ubiquitous in the twentieth century. There is nothing in the form and structure of his plays that offer experimentation or new ground in the American theatre. Although he is a bit more playful in *The Loman Family Picnic* and *Shipwrecked! An Entertainment*, his most successful and critically acclaimed works “are written in a realistic mode [while] some follow more naturalistic tendencies” (Schmidt 182). Margulies was heavily influenced by Arthur Miller’s early work, particularly *Death of a Salesman* (1949). He seems to consider this unusual, remarking that, “for theater to simply delve into the dark places of domestic life, strangely enough, is now an unusual thing” (“Donald”). Perhaps it is, but there is clearly room for continued work within the world of realism. However much modern theatrical works might upend tradition to deconstruct theatrical form and structure, there seems to be plenty of audience need to have it put back together for them from time to time.

### **The World of the Photojournalist**

Regardless of Margulies’s intent or the history of the realistic drama, by focusing his story on a female photojournalist returning from a modern conflict zone, Margulies brings a diverse and complex set of contexts into his story. It is a set of contexts that requires an understanding of how to tell the stories of war; how technology has transformed the practice of telling those stories; how gender impacts the experience and practice of storytelling; how society chooses to receive and process the stories of war; and, finally, how to understand the cost of storytelling to the storyteller. This last item has become particularly important as the line between combatant and non-combatant



becomes increasingly unclear in modern warfare. For the character of Sarah, the important context of the play lies within the complex job of the photojournalist working in a conflict zone and how that job has changed in a world where the way war is waged has changed.

The relationship of the photojournalist to war is as old as the camera. Of course, creating a visual record of conflict and warriors predates the camera considerably. Visual imagery from war goes back beyond modern conflicts where access to conflict zones is immediate and swift. It goes back through the great wars of the twentieth century where photographic technology expanded into ubiquity. It goes back through several millennia of handcrafted visual artwork capturing images of war. It even goes back to and beyond romanticized imagery captured on pottery such as the artwork on the Terracotta Amphora of Greece in the sixth century B.C. Despite that long tradition, the experience of the photojournalist in war today bears little resemblance to how it was most likely experienced in previous centuries. As technological developments removed the obstacles of space and time between the photographer and their subject, the need for and ability of the photographer to be present in the moment of conflict became absolute. Robert Capa became the twentieth century icon of this transformation but his successors are legion in the conflict zones of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

This transformation is the transformation of how we tell the story of war. As artists, photojournalists often speak to the need to capture and communicate truth. In war, truth is a difficult and elusive target; however, the drive to capture that truth is significant. The editors of Images of War, a tribute to the great photojournalist Robert Capa, described his pursuit of his craft in these terms.

His love of people, his quick understanding and sympathy for the suffering of the individual, made it impossible for him to ignore the political events which were affecting the lives of everyone he saw. Capa began then to record political emotions and the emergence of unalterably opposed political faiths. In the center of the conflict stood Capa's real protagonist: the little man whose future was at stake in a world he could not change.

(Capa 9)

Capa stands as the iconic ideal inspiring contemporary photojournalists to excel in their work. In the introduction to Requiem, a tribute to photojournalists killed in Vietnam and Indochina, David Halberstam speaks to the nature of modern warfare and the ways in which Capa recognized that the "remarkable humanity of those who fought there had been produced by the equally remarkable inhumanity of those who had planned the war" (Faas 10). A smaller conflict like Vietnam, Capa argued, rather than being less significant than the global conflicts of World War I and World War II was, in fact, "big enough, and it was real, and intensely human. It was, he said, fierce and dangerous, and it had a genuine face" (Faas 10). Continuing this theme, Michael Kamber spoke of the way in which the war in Iraq is "a constantly shifting battle of ever-mutating enemies" and, echoing Capa, believed that "it was the intimacy of the violence in Iraq that was uniquely horrifying, and so challenging to record" (Kamber ix).

Perhaps one of the more remarkable sources of background research was a book by photojournalist Lynsey Addario . The book, It's What I Do, documents Addario's experiences working as a photojournalist in a wide range of conflict zones across the globe. Most significantly, Addario's life progresses in a manner that is strikingly similar

to that of the character of Sarah and does so after *Time Stands Still* was produced. Had her book been published earlier it would be hard to imagine her not to be Margulies's source for the character. Addario's book is a wealth of insights into Sarah's character and the life that a photojournalist leads while working in the field.

It's What I Do opens with a chapter describing her first experience being captured while working in Libya in 2011. In some ways, Addario's life story fulfills the promise that Sarah's story contains as she heads back into the field at the end of the play. Addario makes the sacrifices that Sarah makes and then, when she is a little older, finds a place of balance that allows her to experience both a domesticity and a career in the field. It required a partner willing to accept the risks and sacrifices inherent in the profession. As for the period of her life that most closely aligned with Sarah's circumstances in the play, Addario had a range of interesting things to say. Like Sarah, she questions her choices but finds within them significant purpose.

This is insane. What am I doing? But there were other days when I felt that familiar exhilaration, when I thought, I am actually watching an uprising unfold. I am watching these people fighting to the death for their freedom. I am documenting the fate of a society that has been oppressed for decades. (7)

About the work itself Addario had a comment that echoes Sarah's comments in her conversation with Mandy in Scene 2 in very interesting ways.

When the stimulation got overwhelming, I hid inside my viewfinder, outside of my body. Images were everywhere, and my eyes got tired. But

I could endure anything for the prospect of beautiful negatives. I spent all my money on film. (52)

Addario's book is filled with stories that resonate; however, her final paragraph in her introduction is worth capturing in its entirety for the remarkable character sketch that it provides for Sarah. In the end, Lynsey Addario might very well be the very person for whom this play was written.

Under it all, however, are the things that sustain us and bring us together: the privilege of witnessing things that others do not; an idealistic belief that a photograph might affect people's souls; the thrill of creating art and contributing to the world's database of knowledge. When I return home and rationally consider the risks, the choices are difficult. But when I am doing my work, I am alive and I am me. It's what I do. I am sure there are other versions of happiness, but this one is mine. (22)

## CHAPTER III

### JOURNAL

#### **September 11, 2015**

The first production meeting went well. Although we have lots of time prior to auditions and gaining access to the stage, once we do move into that phase of production there is relatively little time before the show opens and closes. Production meetings will need to be efficient and our preparations need to be thorough. Toward that end, we spent a fair amount of time at this first meeting reviewing the overall schedule of the show with particular attention to the specific design deadlines for each production meeting. After discussing various logistical concerns I presented the team with some images from iconic photojournalism from the last fifty years (See Appendix A). The team had a chance to do a quick writing activity to help them respond to the images. I think it will be important to keep our conversations focused on the themes related to journalism as we work through the design phase of the production process. The relationship narrative in the show is likely to grow more central of its own weight and it is the job of the artistic staff to help support the underlying themes. I discussed the notion that the center of the production should be realistic and that the edges of the world of the play are more abstract and chaotic. Paul J. Hustoles, the performance advisor of the production, suggested that this is best represented as falling within the realm of Selective Realism. This is a useful clarification and very much represents where the show will need to go.

**September 16, 2015**

Today was the first meeting between Hustoles and myself to review progress on the production. I had been struggling with writing my Chapter I. It seemed like I was moving too slowly and laboring over the first draft. Hustoles confirmed that I could let go of my need to write too closely the first time through and encouraged me to write more freely with the expectation that significant edits might be appropriate. This was helpful and I did find that my work with Chapter I later in the day was more productive. We had a useful conversation in which he shared his experience seeing the show at The Guthrie Theater and my experience seeing it in New York. Interestingly, we both felt that these productions had missed opportunities to support the larger themes of the play by providing a staging in which the world of the play was too realistic. I am really looking forward to examining the context of the show in Chapter II and to digging deeply into the text of this show in Chapter I.

**September 18, 2015**

Today's production meeting was focused on sharing research. Lauren Nelson, the costume and scenic designer, shared information about a photojournalist named Lindsey Addario. I was struck by the fact that my research has been focused on journalism in the abstract. It had not occurred to me to seek out female photojournalists similar to Sarah. This is clearly a research path I will need to pursue. The meeting went well. We had a nice conversation about the style of the play and I am more confident that the design team has a shared vision of our objective. There were good specific conversations about how the design might bring a more abstract expression of the themes of the play into the

realistic requirements of the text. We were also able to spend some time articulating the difficulties of staging a shallow stage space and to consider options for keeping the playing space as deep as possible. The design is likely to include a lot of windows and there was good discussion about how to arrange this to ensure that lighting positions would be available. Lighting Designer Chelsey Dively discussed her interest in identifying spaces in the stage that would be colder to represent Sarah's world and other spaces that might be warmer to represent James's world. I'm a little concerned about how this might play out as in the past I have found that this kind of approach in the Andreas can be clunky. A lot will depend on the scenic design and staging requirements. Sound Designer Luke Walchuk offered some encouraging ideas about how he might support the thematic elements of the play with the music selections. Up to this point we have not had a technical director (TD) assigned to the show; however, George Grubb, the faculty member who coordinates technical directors for the Studio shows, emailed with the news that he would be serving as TD.

### **September 20, 2015**

With the auditions for *A Christmas Story* taking place this coming Monday, I was thinking about the auditions for *Time Stands Still*. The auditions will be for three shows, *Antigone*, *Rumors* and *Time Stands Still*. I am concerned about the wisdom of having the participants prepare three separate monologues. Clearly, they will need to have a unique monologue for the *Antigone* audition. It is possible that I could use whatever audition material Melissa Rosenberger is considering for *Rumors* but it is likely that would not be suitable. I am wondering if it might be advisable to have the students do readings of

sides for the *Time Stands Still* audition. The process could require that they sign up for auditions in pairs and that they have the sides in advance so they could prepare with their partner. In this way I could see five paired scenes in each block rather than ten individual monologues. It would take the same amount of time and would allow me to see the students working with an acting partner, which would be helpful. Students who do not have a pre-arranged partner could be paired randomly at the time that they signed up. I think this would be more useful than monologues.

### **September 23, 2015**

During our weekly advising meeting, Hustoles had a positive response to my ideas for auditions so I am quite excited about preparing for auditions. I have selected three cuttings that should be sufficiently long to give me a good sense of the abilities of the actor in the audition while still being fairly efficient. There is a side for a scene between Sarah and James, one for a scene between Sarah and Mandy and one for a scene between Richard and James. Although I would have preferred to have seen Richard interact with a Mandy character the script does not offer any direct dialogue between the two characters. All of their dialogue is interspersed inextricably with material from either Sarah or James. Not surprisingly there is a lot of great material for Sarah and James and Mandy has a strong scene with Sarah in the first Act. I made PDF versions of the sides and forwarded these to Production Stage Manager Henry Anderson along with an audition information sheet that included character descriptions. Hustoles also offered some feedback on the first production meeting. One of his comments related to the conversation that I initiated regarding color choices for the show. Because I am



colorblind, I will typically initiate an early conversation about the color palette so that designers can be aware that there is an increased need for them to negotiate this element between them rather than expect clear direction from above. Hustoles observed that my statement that I was colorblind may have surprised and possibly concerned the designers more than I intended. I forget that when I say that I am colorblind sometimes people will assume that this means I see no color, which is not the case. I am simply not reliable at identifying and organizing colors in traditionally aesthetic ways. I will need to continue to develop my communication strategy on this topic.

### **September 24, 2015**

Today I met with Chuck Lewis, a faculty member in the Mass Media Department. It was interesting to explain both the specific production process for *Times Stands Still* as well as the overall process that is required for the Theatre Department's MFA thesis project. Naturally, the requirements for various departments differ and it is easy to forget how idiosyncratic the discipline of theatre can be. I laid out the various issues related to journalism that I find interesting in the script and we discussed ways in which Lewis might be helpful in the process. Officially he is responsible for seeing the show and responding to the paper; however, I would be very interested in getting his input during the rehearsal and design process. He is open to this and gave me a DVD of a documentary on war correspondents that I am looking forward to viewing. He also is going to consider what other resources might be of use to me.

**September 25, 2015**

During our third production meeting Nelson presented a number of fairly detailed sketches for costumes. We discussed each costume in some detail and this process uncovered a number of topics worth further consideration. As discussed in Chapter I, I have some questions about how we might play the character of Richard. These various approaches are very important in regard to costumes. As a result, my direction to Nelson was somewhat vague in regard to Richard's costumes. I also think we are still looking for just the right approach for Mandy's costumes. Both of these character's needs will be clearer after the specific actors are cast into the roles. The discussion of the scenic design brought us closer to a shared vision of the setting. We are continuing to look for ways to bring in the thematic elements of our concept without becoming heavy-handed. At the same time, the meeting provided an opportunity to continue to clarify some of the specific concrete problems we have related to the depth of the playing space and the need for appropriate positions for lighting instruments. Walchuk offered some thoughts about ideas he was having for including environmental soundscapes from war and war coverage. Again, the discussion focused on ways for these elements to be present but not overwhelming. The team seems to be on the same page with the style of the show and I am comfortable that we will end up with a well unified technical treatment of the show.

**September 28, 2015**

The audition notice was posted today. I made copies of the sides and put them on my office door. I am also working at the moment on the historical and thematic context of the show. I am considering doing a formal dramaturgical package for the show that

might then be available to present at the Kennedy Center American Theater Festival for Region V. In conjunction with this it might be interesting to see if anyone in the Mass Media Department were interested in doing some kind of related project on war correspondents. I will send a note to Lewis to see if he has any thoughts on this.

### **October 2, 2015**

At today's production meeting Nelson presented a preliminary floor plan for the set. The major issues for the set design relate to the logistics of the crossover, the depth and nature of the upstage boundaries and the position and nature of the photographic thematic treatment. Nelson and I had taken some time the previous week to walk through the space together and discuss how the set might be best situated given the realities of the current seating arrangement. Dively and Steve Smith, the production faculty advisor, again expressed concern that the photographs and windows be placed in a way that allows good access for lighting. It is clear that this element will end up being a compromise between the needs of the light design and the needs of the scenic design. Ideally, the pictures and windows would wrap closely around the playing space; however, in order to ensure good lighting opportunities there will need to be some space provided to the right and left of the stage and immediately behind the left and right windows. We discussed the need to keep the bedroom platform small as it is only used briefly. Nelson presented updated costume sketches and reiterated that costume choices for Mandy and Richard will depend in part on the actor who is cast. We also discussed the budget and set a preliminary budget. I asked Anderson to prepare a formal properties list so we can ensure that the properties budget is adequate.

I also had an email exchange with Lewis regarding a possible dramaturgical display. He suggested a faculty member who might have an interest and subsequently sent me the contact information for Heather McIntosh. I expressed an interest in finding a student who might be interested as well. This is a bit of a long shot but it would be a valuable collaboration if it can work out.

### **October 7, 2015**

At my weekly meeting with Hustoles today we discussed auditions and the rehearsal schedule. I have prepared two versions of the rehearsal schedule. The first assumes that I am casting at least one actor from the current cast of *The Miracle Worker* and the second assumes that none of my cast is from that play. Including a cast member from *The Miracle Worker* means that I lose four days of rehearsals. My expectation is that a number of preferred actors will end up coming from *The Miracle Worker* and that we will use the shorter schedule. When I directed *Gabriel* in 2014, it was in this same production time slot and I also used actors from the conflicting production thus requiring the slightly shorter rehearsal period. We had more than enough time to stage and work the show and I would expect the requirements for *Time Stands Still* to be similar. I have printed a copy of the schedule and will bring it to my meeting with Hustoles on October 14 (See Appendix B).

### **October 9, 2015**

The fifth production meeting focused on the white model for the set and a discussion of sets and lights. Nelson's model provided a good visual for clarifying the

various concerns that were discussed in previous meetings. We discussed the arrangement of windows and the photographs at some length. Grubb suggested that the upstage boundary of the platform needed to be spaced a bit further down from the crossover blacks. After some clarification, we came to a consensus that the set as presented would work for all concerned. I am pleased with the floor plan as it should provide good opportunities for staging and picturization. Grubb confirmed that we should be able to build the designed set within the budget provided. Anderson presented the properties list and we discussed strategies for obtaining some of the trickier items. Although Anderson clearly felt that the properties list is long, it does not seem to present any particularly overwhelming challenges.

### **October 14, 2015**

We discussed the rehearsal schedule in the weekly meeting with Hustoles today. The schedule that assumes a cast member from *The Miracle Worker* seems the more likely eventuality. The schedule needed a few adjustments in regard to clarity of times and days but otherwise seems to be appropriate to the needs of the production. It will be a quick process but there is ample time to get the show staged. Hustoles observed that the three days that are scheduled for a reading of the script and table discussions of the text are more than would routinely be scheduled here at Minnesota State Mankato. It is clearly appropriate to be attentive to the culture of the department, which is one in which the emphasis is on getting a show up and running early and then making adjustments in the context of act runs as well as complete show runs. At the same time, my own experience inclines me to value a slower pace at the start that includes character work and

textual analysis prior to blocking. My plan is to find a comfortable compromise that allows some of the development work that I prefer but also keeping the pace steady and appropriate to the needs of the schedule and the department. I need to lay out a more specific plan in regard to how those first days would be used.

### **October 16, 2015**

We began today's production meeting by reviewing the final ground plan. Nelson had prepared a design that incorporates the various comments from previous discussions. It was apparent that the crossover and upstage spacing of the set is still too tight and needs to be adjusted. The various set pieces as represented on the plan seemed large to me and I suggested that every effort be made to find furniture that is relatively diminutive. Hustoles suggested that the table in the kitchen area seemed large as well. The plan showed six chairs rather than the stools that had been discussed previously and we really only need four of these. The photographic treatment that surrounds the playing space seemed to follow a rather flat line across the upstage border and we discussed arcing this treatment around either end of the playing space. Smith suggested that we split the difference between the angle of the free standing windows and the upstage curtain. However it is balanced, I suggested that Nelson stay in communication with Dively regarding their exact placement. Hustoles expressed concern about the impact of the low platform that was designed for the living room section of the set on patron access, particularly for wheelchairs. The platforms in this area had been intended to provide some levels but in the end they were determined to serve no particularly critical functional or aesthetic purpose. After some discussion it was decided that the entire

living space excepting the lofted sleeping area be on a single level. This should work well.

Walchuk played three musical selections that he was considering for the show. They would be used primarily in the transitions between scenes. Of the three, there was a strong consensus that one of them had the right mood for the show. Walchuk reiterated his interest in finding some subtle environmental elements that he would blend into the musical selection.

We reviewed the properties list briefly and also discussed some of the elements of the lighting design. Everyone confirmed that they were comfortable that the design can be executed within the allotted budget. We concluded with a discussion of the exact nature of the photographic treatment. It is important that this element be large enough so that the photographs are able to be seen by the audience. Nelson is going to mock up one of these panels for the production meeting on October 23.

### **October 19, 2015**

Auditions were held tonight. I saw forty-eight students. Most also auditioned for *Antigone* as well as *Rumors* so it was a slow process. Several of our groupings had only a couple of pairs of readers so that in the end we had a block of time of about forty-five minutes where we simply read pairs as they became available. In a few instances this afforded some time to have specific students read for a different role but largely we saw each student read once. When we were done I had a pretty clear idea of who would fit well into various roles and there were strong options for most of the roles. In some

instances it seemed like a callback would have been helpful but I suspected that the negotiating process with the other two directors would likely serve to clarify things.

Several women were clearly a good fit for Sarah. My four preferred women in that role were (in order of preference) Alex Blesi, Rachel Howard, Alyssa Johnson and Jaclyn Britz. Blesi had played the role for me previously in a cutting that I had staged in the Spring as a part of the Advanced Directing class. Although I really liked her audition and her previous performance, I wanted to make sure that I remained open to other options and wasn't inappropriately biased in her favor. Howard, Johnson and Britz all had very strong auditions and were clearly able to play the role but there was nothing in their auditions that convinced me that they were stronger choices than Blesi.

For James, I liked Jordan Wolfe, Charley Libra and Logan Sulentic. All three of these would deliver very credible and also very different performances in this role. Of the three, I was most interested in Wolfe because of the way that he aligned with my casting preferences for the role. His tendency to embody a kind of contemporary "Everyman" quality would work well as someone who had pursued an ideal for a time but was ready to give it all up.

For Richard the list included Doni Marinos, Jake Sullivan, Jake Jessup and Riley Lindell. Of these, I was most interested in Marinos as he demonstrated the most relaxed credibility in his audition. Sullivan has a strong presence but I was not convinced he would have the needed lightness. Jessup has the same issue. Lindell has a wonderful and quirky presence but I was concerned about how he would fit with the ensemble as a whole.



My list for Mandy was the most problematic. It included Colee Ludtke, Zoe Harrigan, Delaney Reitveld and Maureen O'Malley. Of these, Ludtke was the closest match to the type I had identified. Harrigan and Reitveld had the right energy but are very inexperienced. O'Malley is a wonderful actress but it seemed to me initially that she was not the type I was looking for. My first list leaned toward going with type and had Ludtke at the top; however, as I waited for the other auditions to complete I began to be more intrigued with the idea of using O'Malley in this role. Although she does not match the type I had envisioned at all, she is a formidable actress and I began to think that she would bring an unexpected and possibly brilliant reading to the part. On the other hand, I did not really expect to have access to her as she seemed a likely casting choice for the role of Antigone.

At this point the other two directors, Matthew Caron and Melissa Rosenberger, completed their auditions. Hustoles joined us in the conference room and Caron and Rosenberger began their casting conversation. As that conversation progressed a number of the actors on my list became unavailable. Marinos and Sullivan were principal among these. In the end, I realized that Sulentic would be able to play age in the role of Richard and had a better overall alignment with the requirements of the role. Unexpectedly, O'Malley was available to me and so I went with her as Mandy. Blesi and Wolfe were also available and I felt that they would be a very strong pairing as Sarah and James respectively. Of these four cast members, only Blesi was in *The Miracle Worker* and I briefly considered passing her by in order to gain a few extra days of rehearsal; however, I remained convinced that she would be the best available actress for that role.

I am very excited about this cast. Blesi, Wolfe, Sulentic and O'Malley are all very experienced and capable actors with whom I anticipate being able to construct a web of credible and complex relationships. Their understanding of the text in the auditions was very nuanced and I expect them all to be highly responsive to coaching and collaboration. I also realized that I had not included Tuesday, October 20, on my draft rehearsal schedule because I had mistakenly thought that *The Miracle Worker* had some kind of corporate performance on that date. Consequently, I scheduled a first meeting for October 20. Since the cast would have only had a day with the script it seemed that a conversation and reading of the full play would be of value. I also created a Facebook group for the show. I find that these groups are very efficient ways to communicate with casts as they send notices directly to their phones when messages are posted to the group. This seems to be a faster method of distributing information than email though I will, of course, use both.

### **October 20, 2015**

Tonight we had our first meeting and reading of the script. As I normally do we started by sharing our initial connections to the project and our hopes and fears. My training in staff development and adult learning included considerable work around ways to build a collaborative and connected team. I have found that many of those techniques translate well into the rehearsal process. The use of the specific language “hopes” and “fears” speak to the kinds of anxieties that people bring to a new project as a consequence of their desire to be successful and to be accepted. Articulating these thoughts in a first meeting can be useful even if they are somewhat mechanical or self-consciously

constructed. As expected, the cast was mostly focused on the hope that the project would be received well by the audience and their peers and their fears that they would not be adequate to the task. The conversation related to our various connections to the play was very interesting. Wolfe shared that he had been in the show previously, which I had known at one time but had forgotten. He had played Richard and he had also seen the Broadway production. As mentioned above, Blesi had played Sarah for me in a cutting and was excited to be tackling the full script. Sulentic and O'Malley are completely new to the script and O'Malley in particular had not anticipated being cast in the Mandy role.

We proceeded to read the play and it was clear that some fun things were going to happen in rehearsal. The energy between Wolfe and Blesi was at times quite palpable and promises to work well. O'Malley's reading of Mandy is completely delightful and fresh. Her Mandy is more intelligent and probing than expected and yet she captures the innocence and naivety that is required for the role. It seems that her Mandy will likely manage to be narcissistic in a way that is endearing and also emblematic of American mainstream culture. Sulentic's natural reserve should make Richard's age apparent while he also brings some charm and sophistication to the character.

As the reading progressed I was reminded that I had intended to create a dramaturgical package for the show. Since our next meeting is not until this coming Sunday I plan to use that time to put one together. There are many references in the script to cultural and historical elements that are unfamiliar to these young actors. This also helped me clarify the details of the initial rehearsals. We will use this coming Sunday and Monday to work through the entire script in a combination of conversations and preliminary staging. On one of these days I would like to have Nelson come in to

present the scenic and costume designs. Then we can use Tuesday through Thursday to block the show allowing us to do a complete run of the show at the end of the first week.

I was also able to move ahead in my thinking about the scene shifts during this read of the play. Even though the scene changes do not change location, they do require some substantial rearranging of the set dressing and properties on the stage. I have asked Smith to arrange for an extra stagehand on crew so that this can be arranged in a way that is visually interesting and efficient. I very much dislike blackouts for scene shifts unless they serve some storytelling purpose. For this show, I intend to have scene shifts in an altered light but visible. The stagehands will execute the movement of the properties and the actors will focus on their costume changes. All of this will happen in view and will help tell the story of the passage of time. The actors can help with the shift to the extent that their action is consistent with the character's action within the world of the play. I have seen this done elsewhere recently and find that it works very well as an alternative to placing the audience in darkness.

### **October 23, 2015**

Today we had our first production meeting since the auditions. Nelson presented the final ground plan as well as a mock-up of the photographic treatment. The images in the mock-up were smaller than they needed to be and Grubb offered to have them printed on his large format printer. We discussed the appropriate mounting material and associated costs. The major concern is that they be light enough to be mounted with fishing line but also not end up drifting around in the air currents in the Andreas. Nelson plans to work with Grubb to get these done at the beginning of next week so that they can

be in place ahead of the other work on the set and the lights. After the meeting I connected with Grubb and Nelson in the Andreas to look at a revised mockup that they generated with Grubb's equipment. It read well from the house and was apparently easy to create making it more likely we will meet our deadline with this element.

We spent some time in the meeting reviewing the final ground plan and also looking at the elevation of the photographic treatment. The upstage doors that represent the passage to the hall and to the bathroom are going to be interesting in that they stand without accompanying walls. I am hopeful that they integrate with the photographic treatment in a way that is both logical and pleasing. Anderson is going to make sure that we have the needed props for rehearsal by the end of the coming week. The cast will have scripts in hand through Friday so these items won't be critical until Sunday, November 1, but it will be good to have them in the space so we know what we'll be working with.

After the meeting I got most of the work done on a dramaturgical website for the cast and designers to use to access some background research I have done for the show (Appendix C). I had invited the designers to take a look at the site, as it contained elements of research that are relevant for our current discussions. I need to continue working on this element through this first week as we encounter new questions that need clarification. I did a fair amount of reading related to journalistic ethics last summer but that material seems less relevant now. The life of the journalist, on the other hand, seems pertinent. The script has a fair number of references to cultural and historical events and terms that we need to make sure the cast has in hand (Appendix D).

**October 25, 2015**

Today's rehearsal was relatively short given that Blesi had performed earlier in the day. We spent the first half hour in a general discussion of the themes of the play and I had the cast participate in a writing activity. This activity required them to respond to some imagery and then to each other's responses. It was interesting how quickly the two men moved into rational analysis of the activity and how the two women were more inclined to focus on their emotional responses. Even when I specifically prompted the four actors to reflect on how the activity made them feel, Wolfe and Sulentic tended to focus on explaining rather than on a direct expression of their emotional state. We talked about how this aligned with the way that their characters tended to process the conflicts in the play and also how these responses allowed the characters to either confront or avoid the obstacles that they encounter.

We proceeded to read and discuss the play from the beginning forward. I was surprised to discover that although Blesi's reading of Sarah is very empathetic and audiences are clearly going to connect with her well, much of Sarah's early dialogue comes from a place of anger and bitterness. Sarah is angry with the world and frustrated with James. Despite flashes of humor and sensitivity, her presence is very dark. The scenes as a whole have a much lighter feel and this is largely because the other three characters drive much of the dialogue. Sarah becomes a presence against which the energy of the other characters cast shadows. There is some serendipitous alignment between this fact and the overall technical design of the show. As with the first read through last week, the cast had very strong readings of the script and are largely finding the proper characterizations intuitively.

**October 26, 2015**

For our second rehearsal last night we continued our reading and discussion of the play through to the end. Wolfe needs to make sure that he is sufficiently articulate and takes the needed time with the material so that the story is told clearly. He has a very nice feel for the emotional life of the story and had some very strong interpretations of some of the moments of conflict with both Sarah and Richard. We discussed the anger that Blesi needs to bring to Sarah and I encouraged Blesi to let Sarah's frustration and bitterness be evident and powerful. I can see that Blesi wants to make sure Sarah is likeable. That is certainly something to monitor but there is much room here. In fact, when we worked on the final scene I directed Wolfe to pull back his anger some to ensure that we don't end up making Sarah appear too much as the heroic martyr. There is an important ambiguity in the ending of the play that could be lost if the audience disapproves of James' decision to pursue a more domestic lifestyle.

We also discussed Sulentic's work with the age of the character of Richard. I encouraged him to let his natural formal vocal pattern suffice for this purpose. Although he will want to make sure his movements reflect a slower, less youthful pace, there is no need for him to play age too strongly. The habitual vocal and physical patterns of this ensemble align pretty well with the relative ages of the characters and should read appropriately in terms of their relative ages. A little greying of the hair and a bow tie should establish Richard's maturity and should contrast nicely with O'Malley's energy and the youthful costumes that Nelson has for Mandy.

Charles Lewis's office contacted me today about an event on Wednesday evening that the Mass Media department is sponsoring. It involves a speaker who is doing a short

presentation entitled War, Literature & The Arts (Appendix E). Although he is not specifically a journalist there is enough alignment that I think we will sneak out of our Wednesday rehearsal to view the presentation. It should make a useful catalyst for ongoing discussion of the larger context of life in a conflict zone.

### **October 27, 2015**

Our first blocking rehearsal went very well. We got the four s that include just James and Sarah finished. Two problems surfaced, one of which was expected and the other probably should have been. As expected, the wide, flat playing space provides some challenges in terms of picturization and composition. This is particularly problematic when working with just two characters. Tonight we'll be doing the blocking for the long four-person scene in Act I and I anticipate that will provide considerably greater opportunities for making pictures. What I hadn't really thought about is that due to her injuries Sarah is not particularly mobile during Act I. Obviously I knew this but it was more of a conundrum than I thought it would be. For Scene 2, this will be less problematic since there are three characters moving in the space around her; however, in Scenes 1 and 3 of Act I, James provides most of the variety to be had. I am not a big fan of talking heads scenes but, of course, movement needs to be motivated. Fortunately, both Scene 1 and Scene 3 provide James with some essential stage business that helps to move him in orbit around Sarah. The challenge will be to make this both natural and dynamic. I feel like the groundwork for this was established last night and when we come back to work the scenes we will be able to fine-tune the blocking accordingly.



Anderson did a great job of preparing the space for the rehearsal. Many needed props are available to us already and the space was taped out and ready to go. We need to determine the table and chairs that we'll end up using for the kitchen area since that space will have some blocking alleys with limited clearance. It is also clear that having the props early will be important because there is a lot of stage business in these scenes that will drive the blocking patterns.

### **October 28, 2015**

We began today's rehearsal with a presentation of the set by Nelson. As we were already in the space and the floor is taped out it was not hard for the cast to visualize the completed set. I am excited to see the photographic treatment come into place and hope that this happens soon. We have a variety of rehearsal furniture that is meeting our needs though having the actual kitchen table and chairs will be useful.

We had to keep Nelson's presentation fairly short as we attended the presentation by J. A. Moad, a writer and veteran of the U.S. Air Force, that was hosted by the Department of Mass Media. Moad's remarks were very useful and relevant to the character work that we are doing. He discussed the difficulties resulting from participating in wars while the larger society experiences relatively little cost, discomfort or even awareness that the conflict is ongoing. His remarks consisted of a blend of factual lecture material along with the reading of some poetry and prose. It was very affecting for all four actors. Blesi and Wolfe in particular seemed quite struck by how little they really understood about the consequence of experiencing the kinds of trauma

that their characters, Sarah and James, have experienced. It seems clear that some follow up that is connected to that issue would be useful.

We were back in rehearsal by about 8:15 PM and proceeded to block Act I, Scene 2. I was struck by how much humor is embedded in this scene and how it is placed at the beginning of the play in a way that effectively establishes a playful and positive tone. There is much about the other scenes that we worked with just James and Sarah on Tuesday that are heavy and touched with despair. Because we are beginning with those darker scenes separated from this lighter scene it really highlighted the difference in tone. While the audience will, of course, only experience them in proper chronological sequence it is useful for me to consider them separately. While Scene 2 is lighter, it is only because the energy that Mandy and Richard bring into the space is preeminent. The wounds that Sarah and James carry are still there. We didn't quite finish Scene 2 but will have no problem finishing it Thursday evening as well as completing the Act II blocking. The entire play will then be blocked and we'll run it on Friday.

### **October 29, 2015**

Tonight's rehearsal went well and we blocked the remainder of the show. The doorframes were screwed to the floor and they had been placed about 18" downstage from where Anderson had taped the upstage playing space boundary. After some discussion and concern we discovered that the upstage masking curtains had been hung so as to allow a five foot crossover rather than the three foot crossover indicated in the ground plan. This compressed the stage considerably and we will discuss this issue in the production meeting tomorrow morning. I am assuming that the curtains will be moved.

Regardless, we did need to remove the end table right of the couch to make the upstage blocking aisle from the door to the kitchen more comfortable. Anderson continues to do a good job on his work with rehearsal props and furniture so that the cast has been able to consider and solve logistical problems early on in their process. Mac Meza, our assistant stage manager, joined us for rehearsal tonight.

I had secured a copy of Photojournalists on War, by Michel Kamber, which includes the stories and photos of a large number of photojournalists who worked in the conflict in Iraq. Blesi read the section on Lynsey Addario and was struck by how many things Addario says that could easily have been said by Sarah. The cast chatted informally about last night's presentation by J. A. Moad. This is a very reflective and thoughtful group of actors and I am impressed with their intellectual curiosity.

Blocking went well and when we were done, Anderson and I conferred on items that need to be addressed at Friday's production meeting. These were largely related to clarifying properties. The platform for the bedroom has been built and is sitting just offstage waiting to be installed. I continue to look forward to seeing the photographic treatment start to go up.

### **October 30, 2015**

At today's rehearsal we ran the show in sequence. We started and stopped in order to adjust a variety of blocking to better connect movement to text. I was quite pleased that we were able to work through the entire show in this single rehearsal. There will need to be more work on the details of blocking and general dynamics at the next rehearsals; however, the foundation on which we are working is pretty solid. The cast

continues to play with specific line readings and has a good understanding of character and text.

### **November 1, 2015**

Tonight we were able to move through the scenes that only include James and Sarah. This was useful since isolating these four scenes clearly highlights the progress and then disintegration of their relationship. It is interesting how much of this story is left to the imagination of the audience. Margulies rarely presents the explicit articulation of the key decisions in this relationship. Marriage is considered and the next scene finds them married. The critical conflict explodes and in the next scene they have moved on to separate lives. There is a brilliance in realizing that it is the emotional tectonic shifts that drive the plot and not the reverse.

During rehearsal tonight I was struck by James's lines in Act II about needing some time to process what he had seen before he could write about it. The protection of distance and time allows him to in some measure hide from his experiences in war in a way that is not possible for Sarah. This put me in mind of a comment that I had read in the introduction to Requiem. David Halberstam observes that the photographer has no option except to be present in the moment of war.

We who were print people and who dealt only in words and not in images always knew that the photographers were the brave ones, and in that war . . . they held a special place in our esteem. We deferred to them, reporter to photographer, in that venue as we did in few others. They were real because they had to be real; they could not, as we print people could,

arrive a little late for the action, be briefed, and then, through the skilled use of interviews and journalism, re-create a scene with stunning accuracy, writing a marvelous you-are-there story that reeked of intimacy even though, in truth, we had missed it all. We could miss the fighting and still do our jobs. They could not. (9)

Both Wolfe and Blesi are making good progress toward being off book. The expectation is that they will be off book this week; however, we are continuing to adjust blocking and it is helpful for them to have scripts in hand to reference blocking notes and to stay on track with the text. We will do the sometimes painful work of rehearsing with line calls and no script in hand on Wednesday and Thursday so that we should be in pretty good shape for the Friday run.

### **November 2, 2015**

The Introduction to Theatre course needed to use the Andreas Theatre tonight so we set up for rehearsal in room 102. Since this is a classroom, it is appropriate for text work but not particularly convenient for approximating the actual playing space. Conveniently, I had decided to do some work with Rasa exercises this week so the two hours that we are not able to be in the rehearsal space provided a good time to do line readings in those exercises. These exercises are useful at helping a cast to move past stereotyped expressions of anger and conflict. Given the centrality of such moments in the script this is important for this production.

The Rasa system approaches the work of the actor from the perspective of the emotional life of the action of the play (Appendix F). In some ways this is an alternative

to thinking exclusively about objectives and tactics. It is a way to experiment with fully engaging specific emotional states in the expectation that those emotional states will have a specific and desired effect on the audience. In modern Western systems of acting technique we tend to avoid working in terms of emotions as they are sometimes dismissed as inciting actors to “play at” the emotions rather than arriving at them through technique (whether that technique is from the outside in or the reverse). Rasa allows the actors and the director to have a conversation about emotional expression and to consider how those emotions might serve the task of telling the story of the play. My own experience with the Rasa system of exercises is that they can elicit unexpected line readings that free the actor from initial interpretive assumptions and patterns of expression.

The introductory exercise takes about ninety minutes and it went very well. I introduced music to a portion of the exercise where I had not done so in the past and I think it helped to allow the actors to focus on the exercise more intently. The introductory exercise involves some physical work in connection with the nine basic Rasas: love, joy, fear, disgust, compassion, courage, wonder, rage and peace. The physical work incorporates both gesture and mask work. We were able to get back into the theatre later in the evening and worked through Act II, Scene 2. As we had the previous day we cleaned up the blocking and adjusted some tempos and builds. The cast was working in turns with and without their scripts. It seems clear that we'll be free of the scripts by Wednesday and Thursday but it will probably be Friday before there is a comfort with the text.

**November 3, 2015**

Rehearsal tonight was in turns both frustrating and satisfying. The cast was working to free themselves from the script. Although there are advantages in having a cast as small as four, one disadvantage is that each actor carries a relatively substantial workload in line memorization. It can take time for them to achieve full memorization and some of that work is felt in rehearsal. So it was that tonight there were a lot of line calls and false starts as they stumbled through this process. It is neither unexpected nor inappropriate but can sometimes never-the-less be painful to watch.

On the other hand, we did some good work tonight with finding new and varied ways of moving through the large conflict in Act II, Scene 1. All four cast members, to varying degrees, were working within a single note in their attack on their characters. Wolfe tended to blustering anger, Sulentic pontificated in a clipped stridency, Blesi snipped and O'Malley had a kind of bright harping. These attacks were not inappropriate but quickly grew tiresome, particularly for Wolfe and Sulentic since they carry much of the dialogue in the conflict of this particular scene. After working the scene for a bit to smooth out the lines and establish the builds, we pulled out the Rasa grid and I had them work the climactic moments of the scene in the grid. As an exercise, I eliminated the emotion of rage from the grid, thus forcing them to work within other less obvious approaches. This left them eight emotional states from which to work. The first pass through the text was interesting in that the actors, particularly Wolfe, struggled to release rage and anger from their delivery and instead layered it into a second emotion. We repeated the exercise and I encouraged them to find the pure and singular emotion of the

grid for their line readings. Happily, this succeeded in disrupting some of the patterns that had developed in their attack.

We then returned to the stage and worked the scene some more. The cast continued to explore new attacks on their character's tactics as inspired by the work in the Rasa grid. While these were sometimes not successful choices, the experimentation was beneficial. After rehearsal, we discussed the ways in which these unexpected choices could be naturalized and made more organic to the character's narrative and emotional arcs. I also talked some about the need for the actors to let go of their expectation that they show the conflict and emotional intensity of the story. The script will do this for them and if they work too hard at it the results will be less credible. My own expectation is that much of the work that we'll be doing over the next week will be focused on finding ways to ensure that the choices that are made on the stage are then executed in ways that are natural and credible. This is a group of very smart people who could easily find themselves working at the story rather than relaxing into it.

#### **November 4, 2015**

Tonight we worked through Act I. The first time through we stopped and started to adjust blocking and accommodate memorization issues. The energy was uneven and the acting choices were overwhelmed by the actor's struggle to find the correct words. Since Scene 3 only includes James and Sarah we stopped after Scene 2 and went back to do more detailed work with Scenes 1 and 2. We made some good adjustments with the tone when James and Sarah are discussing the horror film article in Scene 1. Wolfe has a tendency to laugh nervously as both a character choice and as an actor habitual. We



discussed eliminating that choice and choosing to reserve a comic response for specific moments. Interestingly, this resulted in a better overall character attack and also caused Wolfe to reduce the habitual considerably. For Scene 2, we worked on Richard's reaction to Sarah's plan to return overseas as well as Mandy's reaction to the horrifying photo. Both of these conflicts arise out of the general awkwardness of the social dynamic introduced by the new presence of Mandy in their relationships. These reactions need to be heightened but also credible. As we focused on the dynamics in these sequences the actors became more comfortable with the text and by the end of the rehearsal we had nice performances happening without scripts in hand.

We released Sulentic and O'Malley at about 9:00 PM and worked on Scene 3. I had them run the lines without blocking first to get the words more firmly in their heads. This is not a difficult scene and it went reasonably well. There is some physical intimacy at the end of the scene and this presented some minor challenges for Wolfe and Blesi that they overcame easily. While the romantic connection between Sarah and James remains less evident than the conflict, I am hopeful that we will be able to build that connection as we move forward. The show works better if we really see the extent to which these two people have depended on and been in love with each other.

### **November 5, 2015**

During the work through of Act II today the primary focus was on getting dynamics adjusted appropriately. It went very much like the rehearsal of Act I the night before with some struggles with lines but some progress with the builds in the conflicts and other dynamics. I worked with Sulentic on his portrayal of Richard quite a bit

tonight. Sulentic has a strong handle on being piercing both physically and vocally. We will want to find ways to soften this and toward that end we played with bringing his vocal work into a less strident and almost throaty resonance. This seems to be effective but will take some time for him to establish as a consistent character choice.

Amanda Dyslin, who does publicity for the department, sent me a list of questions for a newspaper article on the show (Appendix G). Grubb got three of the photographs hung and installed the steps and railings for the platform. We will need to make sure we are introducing props as quickly as possible so that we have time to work with the considerable stage business in the show.

### **November 6, 2015**

The day began with our final production meeting. I had a variety of small questions related to properties and the set that Anderson had collected in rehearsal this week. At this juncture, I am not anticipating that there are any elements of the show that should present themselves as overly difficult. We'll need to be proactive with the scene changes and the many little elements of stage business involving computers, books, drinking and eating; however, these should be easily managed. Amber Kuennen is now on board doing properties, so Anderson and Nelson have some useful support with this area.

The biggest challenge with the show at this point is not in the technical area but in the emotional load of the show. We have put considerable effort into building the conflicts and making these credible. As a result, it was clear during the full run on Friday night that this element is indeed working. What is not working is the development of the

empathetic connection between the audience and the characters. Across the board the characters are neither intimate nor sympathetic. It is important for the audience to care about what happens to these four people. Consequently, our focus for the next few rehearsals will be on fixing this issue. For Sarah and James, we need to work to make the intimacy of their relationship more apparent. Sarah, in particular, needs to be more joyful and loving. O'Malley needs to be perky enough to really communicate the freshness that attracts Richard to her. Sulentic has made some good progress at making Richard less strident and we need to find ways to infuse that into more of his work throughout the show. After the run, I met with Hustoles and he also felt that these were our immediate priorities. He provided some good specific suggestions for working with the cast in these areas. Despite these concerns, I am pleased that the show is in good shape. The cast has a handle on their lines and the fundamental staging seems to be working well. There is ample time and the cast is sufficiently skilled so that we should be able to move it to where it needs to go.

I received a book in the mail today that was written by Lynsey Addario, a photojournalist who had worked in conflict zones during the last twenty years. The book was written several years after *Time Stands Still* was produced but Addario's story could easily have been the exact model for the character of Sarah. Addario's story is detailed in Chapter II; however, it is worth noting that receiving this book at this juncture in the process is quite appropriate. Addario really articulates the vulnerability and compassion that is an important part of her work as a photojournalist and that we will want to incorporate into Blesi's work as Sarah. I hope to finish it quickly so that Blesi can read it

as well. There is so much in this material that resonates with questions we are currently asking about how Sarah might feel about the things others are saying.

### **November 8, 2015**

We started work tonight by recalibrating the emotional load of Scene 1. To do this I had Wolfe and Blesi run the lines in the Rasa grid with the rage and the disgust squares blocked. Blesi spent a lot of time in the comic square and Wolfe tended to land in the love square. There were also some interesting readings coming out of the surprise and fear squares. After they finished we discussed which pieces worked best and also how these new readings fit into our previous conversations about the anger and fear that run underneath the scene. It seems clear that we had allowed ourselves to preview the conflicts that are coming later in the show and that is not appropriate. The tensions are there but need to be left for later. We identified one specific moment when Sarah can snap at James but we will want that to come from exhaustion rather than genuine anger. We then ran the scene with blocking and it went quite well. I also gave some notes to both actors about projecting. While they adjusted accordingly we will likely need to continue to work on this issue.

Before beginning Scene 2, we reinforced Friday's notes regarding Mandy's character and the physical adjustments that Sulentic needs to make with Richard. We also discussed ways in which we can take the humor that Sarah experiences in meeting Mandy, which we had previously seen in the three-person scene when Mandy is in the bathroom, and bringing that to the rest of the scene. As we worked through the scene, we also put some energy into having Richard and James work a little harder to be filling the

spaces between the lines. There is an awkwardness to this scene that is caused by Mandy's presence and this can be best communicated with the work that happens between the lines rather than during them.

Not surprisingly, O'Malley committed fully to her simpler version of Mandy and it played very well. As a result, the other three actors played their reactions to Mandy's innocence quite well giving the scene the comic energy that is clearly a part of the writing. This was very fun to rehearse but we will need to make sure that in our enthusiasm we don't allow it to become stereotyped.

On the other hand, there are some very emotionally charged moments in this Act that need to be played effectively as well. The first, which is in Scene 2, involves Mandy. This moment begins with Mandy's discovery of a particularly horrifying picture in Sarah's slideshow of photographs and leads to a complete emotional breakdown on her part. O'Malley struggled with allowing herself to plunge immediately into this emotional space; preferring to find the logical build that might take place over a longer period of time. I challenged her to allow Mandy to be the kind of emotional person who could become distressed immediately and passionately by a photo of this kind. We worked this scene for quite a while and made considerable progress.

The second emotionally charged moment in Act I comes at the conclusion of Scene 3 when James becomes enraged that Sarah had fallen in love with Tariq. This scene requires that Sarah and James move into an intense conflict and then move beyond that conflict and become physically intimate. We are working hard to develop the intimacy between Sarah and James; however, this is a piece of the show that is going to need to build slowly and will most likely not be completely credible for a few rehearsals

yet. We made good progress tonight with the build to and set up of the end of the act. On Monday we will spend the first hour of rehearsal working with the details of this moment and then look at some of the moments of intimacy in Act II.

### **November 9, 2015**

Tonight we started with the intimate moments between Sarah and James at the end of Act I and in Scene 2 and 3 in Act II. Our focus was on layering the conflicts in these moments and on slowing down the moments of intimacy. Shifting the tempo was particularly important for the physical intimacy after Sarah falls down during their argument about Tariq. We found a few moments earlier in the scene to establish the physical connection between the two characters and then inserted some slower beat changes in the passages leading up to the moment that the characters begin to make love. It felt like we made good progress with this. The actors have some tension with this work that we should be able to resolve through continued work of this type.

O'Malley and Sulentic joined us at 7:30 PM and we continued to work the rest of Act II. Both of these actors are making good adjustments as regard the notes they received on Sunday evening. Wolfe and Blesi are also making good progress. All four characters are finding more nuanced and balanced readings of their lines. We are also finding a lighter and warmer tone for many segments of these scenes. Wolfe in particular had a very nice moment when he is imagining a life of Disneyland and Club Med during which I kept him on the couch rather than crossing into a more intrusive space beside Blesi. It gave a greater sense of melancholy and reflection rather than frustration and

angst. We finished with O'Malley and Sulentic by 9:00 PM and spent the remaining thirty minutes continuing to adjust the moments that pair Sarah and James.

Dively was in the rehearsal tonight working with the lighting design. She has a good handle on the overall design and I am pleased with the way she plans to use the windows to provide strong light sources. Communications were a challenge today as Dively was looking for more input from me during the rehearsal than I had the opportunity to provide. At this juncture I anticipate the designers playing with their own concepts rather than looking for extensive feedback from me. Of course, I did provide some input; however, it was a challenge to be responsive to her questions. I had a quick conversation with Smith about this today and am hopeful that he will make sure that Dively understands that I am more than satisfied with her work on the show.

### **November 10, 2015**

The next several days will need to be all about tempo. The emotional load of the play is in all the right places and as the cast gets more comfortable with the text, movement and stage business they will settle into the show nicely; however, at this stage there are a number of places that drag.

Tonight's rehearsal started with a promotional photo call. We took advantage of this moment to see the costumes in an informal costume parade. Nelson's design looks good and fits the characters and the contexts well. The costume change in the scene shift out of the wedding and into Act II, Scene 2, will be a challenge. The stage has a fairly substantial shift in dressing and properties so there will be some business happening to fill the space during which the costume change is occurring. The challenge will be in

making this change swift and graceful. The run of the show after the parade was uneventful. I gave Wolfe a fair number of notes related to volume. Wolfe is also working harder than is necessary to be interesting when James is telling stories. We will work to get him to let the text do more of the work while still being energized and projecting.

### **November 11, 2015**

Before rehearsal began today we spent about thirty minutes sharing pizza and cookies with Jim Johnson, a Minnesota State Mankato graduate student who is a combat veteran. Johnson experiences symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as a consequence of his three tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan. He shared some of his experiences living with PTSD and his thoughts about how we tell stories of war. Regarding war stories, Johnson was very struck by the reality of the opening sequence of the film, Private Ryan, and how combat vets tend to be very affected by that film clip. He shared that the film very much captures the essence of being in a conflict event. We were, of course, very interested in his experiences with flashbacks and symptoms of PTSD. Johnson was very open about his work to manage these challenges. He described two specific events that tended to emerge and also the types of circumstances that tended to trigger his flashbacks.

For Johnson, being in crowded situations frequently creates a trigger. Interestingly, he shared that the crowded streets of New York were not a problem but that a crowded movie theatre could be quite challenging. Blesi was curious about this as it related to her work as Sarah so Johnson elaborated. He described that images tended to



surface from either an experience where he confronted a young Iraqi who was the age of his own child or from an event where he directed an air strike that killed three Iraqis who were planting a roadside bomb. In both instances, Johnson described experiencing a loss of connection to the people around him and to a disassociative state in which he was not aware of the space between present and past. Coincidentally, today was Veteran's Day, so it was an emotionally charged conversation from a variety of perspectives. The cast was pretty quiet but also very attentive and it was a good opportunity to put a complex and personal face on the reality of PTSD.

While this was going on, Erin Horst, a graduate student who produces promotional videos for the department, was setting up for interviews in the theatre space. Before Johnson arrived, Blesi and I went up to the theatre and did a quick interview for the video (Appendix H). When the rehearsal began, Horst shot video footage for the first half hour or so. It was interesting to watch the cast adjust to the presence of the photographer. The actors tended to be more aware of their behaviors and they struggled to relax into the reality of the dramatic action. This was particularly true for Wolfe as he is struggling with finding the right energy for his character in the first place. Blesi seemed more at ease with the presence of the photographer.

During the rehearsal itself we focused entirely on the two scenes that include all four characters. These strike me as the most problematic for tempo and the work we did tonight was clearly beneficial. We worked the opening sequence of Act I, Scene 2, where Sarah and James are discussing his horror film article several times. I directed Blesi and Wolfe to move the scene along more quickly and to energize their readings. Wolfe has a passage here where he describes his article. He has a tendency to slip into a higher

tessitura that has a pleading whine to it and that delivery is less empathetic and more grating. We worked at finding a stronger delivery that sounded less defensive. While working the wedding scene section where he describes the play that he had seen with Sarah, I realized that he also has a tendency to frequently phrase his lines as questions. I encouraged him to find more lines to read as affirmative statements in this passage rather than as questions. When we wrapped up the night we discussed how this seemed to have helped to keep Wolfe grounded in the character. Wolfe connects with this character very personally; however, his own personality habituals are not necessarily the best ones for the character and this work has been useful at getting Wolfe to find a more clearly defined character.

We returned to the work we had begun earlier in the week on Mandy's reaction to the burn victim photo. This segment is getting closer to having the emotional load it needs; however, the first two lines of the baby elephant story are still not landing in a way that works for the scene or the character. We discussed some options for this moment and O'Malley tried a more vulnerable reading; however, this is still in need of a better reading. Sulentic and Blesi are continuing to work on the character notes they were given on Tuesday and are both making good progress. I am particularly pleased that we are starting to see more of the humor and joy that is clearly a part of Sarah's character. Blesi is bringing more of those characteristics into her lines that comment on her father and on James to good effect.

A significant obstacle at this juncture is a tendency to paraphrase lines. Wolfe is the most likely to do this though he is not alone. In some segments of the show, this is so prevalent that Anderson and Meza are not able to capture the line notes due to the

frequency of errors. I discussed this with the cast after the rehearsal and admonished them to do the work necessary to correct this. This is extraordinarily frustrating and is clearly having an impact on our work.

### **November 12, 2015**

I met with Anderson, Meza and Stage Crew member Ana-Brit Asplen today to review the scene shifts. It is important that these happen in a way that engages the audience's attention and sustains the tone of the scenes surrounding them. For instance, for the first transition Blesi will exit to the bathroom to do her costume change while Wolfe changes his shirt on stage. The crew will execute a variety of small adjustments to the properties but the focus should remain on Wolfe's movements as he disengages from the scene in which he arrived at home and shifts to a scene where he is relaxing in his living room. His movements should represent this passage of time and the choreography of the shift should draw our attention to him so that we are engaged by his actions until Blesi returns from the bathroom to sit in the chair. It should feel as if the scene shift has ended quite organically as the action of the play resumes. My goal is to create moments like this in each of the scene shifts.

The first of the two windows went up today. The stage left window unit, which definitely appeared large in the model and the drawings, appears enormous in its execution. It will be interesting to see how this piece shifts its appearance as the photographic backdrop is finished and the set is painted. It definitely redefines the scope of this loft apartment. It may give the photographic treatment a sense of being bigger-than-life. We don't have the doors yet but should have those tomorrow. The bed

dominates the space we provided in the lofted bedroom but it probably reflects the reality of living in a New York loft.

At rehearsal tonight we introduced lights and sound. Both of these elements were functionally appropriate but are not yet representative of what we should have by next Tuesday. Lighting provides the needed face light and transitions but Dively has work to do to take advantage of the setting and to help tell the stories in the transitions. Tonight I specifically asked her to do this in the way that she brings the light up at the top of Act II; however, this will need to happen throughout. Walchuk had decided not to include the environmental sounds related to conflict that we had discussed in the production meetings. He feels that these would be too intrusive and not contribute appropriately to the tone of the show. I had mixed feelings about this. I understand his concerns in this area but realized that I was genuinely disappointed that we have gone this direction. I sought Walchuk out Friday morning to discuss this again and he is going to introduce these elements in one of the scene shifts to see how they work. He may be right that they will be confusing but I need to hear them in context to make this choice. In either case, he is planning to include some environmental city noises at the top to help place the show in an urban setting.

We continued to have line paraphrasing issues tonight. I picked up the script at various points and found that while Wolfe is the larger offender in this regard, Blesi and O'Malley are at times less precise with their language as well. At notes I admonished the cast again to correct this. I explained that when they use their own words rather than the words of the character they are undermining the work that we do to establish a well-defined and consistent character. Their words align with their personal habitual

behaviors and characteristics whereas Margulies's words align with the characters behaviors. Some of the challenges we are having with communicating credible and compelling characters are coming from this issue. It will need to improve. Toward that end Wolfe met with me for about ninety minutes Friday morning to work on his lines. This was surprisingly effective. We are going to meet again with O'Malley, Blesi and Sulentic at 5:30 PM before Friday's rehearsal. As frustrating as this has been it is not surprising given the brevity of the process. I have every expectation that we will be on point with the script by Saturday night.

### **November 13, 2015**

For tonight's run of the show, I had freshman Cameron Pederson attend rehearsal and follow the show with a script and a highlighter. He highlighted any deviation from the exact text in the script. After the rehearsal, I scanned the marked up script and emailed it to all four actors. This process is likely to reveal changes the actors have made of which they are not aware as well as remind them of moments where they know they are deviating from the text. This will need to be the last effort in this regard. With the show opening in just a few days the actors need to dedicate more of their focus and energy to the pursuit of character goals and emotional dynamics than on text memorization. While there are plenty of corrections to be made it looks like we may have succeeded in getting back to the playwright's words.

Meza and Asplen worked hard to get the scene shifts in place. Up to this point they have been largely focused on the movement of the hand props and costume pieces that we were able to anticipate shifting between scenes. Their list includes simple things

like getting James's computer from the living room to the bedroom so that Sarah can discover it when she is in the bed in Act II, Scene 3. Tonight, however, we are starting to introduce a range of set dressing elements that also should change between scenes. The set dressing in the first scene needs to communicate the sense that the loft was left somewhat disheveled when James left quickly to go to Sarah when she was injured. The corresponding detritus would have remained in place. That dressing needs to disappear in the shift to Scene 2 to help indicate that four days have passed during which James would have tidied the apartment and created a space in which Sarah could recover. Similarly, in Act II there is the significant task of eliminating the wedding paraphernalia from Scene 1. Finally, the shift to Act II, Scene 4 should help tell the story of James's exit from the loft to live with Richard. These elements will greatly complicate Meza's work coordinating the scene shifts.

Because we had the doors in place for this rehearsal we were able to more effectively approximate some of the movements in and out of scene shifts. We stopped and worked some of this movement tonight but largely ran without stopping. Dively is adjusting the lights well. Walchuk added the environmental sounds to one of his sound cues and the effect was dramatic. It very clearly made the connection between the instrumental selection and the narrative of the play itself more immediate. There is no doubt that this aspect of the sound design is essential to the show. Aside from its value in helping to connect and unify the realistic and thematic elements of the set, the sound itself is compelling and rich. Walchuk will work over the next few days to craft the added sounds so that they help support the shifting moods of the transitions.

**November 14, 2015**

Tonight was the first official technical rehearsal; however, there were not significant differences between Friday's rehearsal and this one. Lights, sound, properties, and scene shifts are all in a state of suspension that will resolve itself when costumes arrive and the set is finished. For the actors it was a good rehearsal during which they gained some confidence that came from having really worked hard on text and from becoming more comfortable with the various properties that are now in place. Sunday will tell a much fuller story about the show's readiness to open.

**November 15, 2015**

It was so helpful to have the costumes tonight. Blesi arrived early to work with Nelson on her makeup. The facial wounds look good close up but Nelson will need to make this much more dramatic for them to read appropriately from the audience. It also took a very long time to get them done. Otherwise, the costumes themselves look great. We did not have hair and makeup beyond Blesi's wounds so it remains to be seen if Mandy looks youthful enough and if Richard appears middle-aged but the costumes work in both cases.

Line work and character work appeared to be in very good shape for this rehearsal. Wolfe has managed to settle in and capture both the grounded confidence that is essential for James as well as the pain that he experiences in the loss of his relationship with Sarah. He still needs to work on the horror film article conversation as well as the passage where he is complaining about the play he and Sarah attended. In both of these sections he has a tendency to be slightly defensive or plaintive in his delivery. I have

given him some specific notes regarding this and expect it to continue to improve. Sulentic is maintaining Richard's age very well. He still goes to a slightly strident delivery in the passage where he is defending his relationship with Mandy to James and Sarah; however, he has found a very nice range of tactics for this passage and it is growing well. O'Malley finds new ways to be silly and fun with Mandy every night. What is particularly fun about this is that when she suddenly comes to Richard's defense at the end of the wedding scene she is able to bring the power and intelligence that is so readily accessible for her to those lines giving them a powerful emphasis. Blesi also finds more places to laugh and reveal the joyful Sarah with whom both Richard and James are in love. The emotional load of the show is very satisfying.

The scene shifts came into focus for me with this rehearsal. They proceed along two parallel tracks that intertwine to tell a story as they also advance the logistical needs of the play. One of these tracks involves the movement of Meza and Asplen into the space for the adjustment of the scenic elements. The other track involves the characters who must make the shift in position and costume to reflect the new reality of the successive scenes. In my notes to the cast from this rehearsal I made adjustments to the sequencing of these two tracks so that as to help direct the audience's attention during the shifts. Ideally, the movement of Meza and Asplen and available actors will cover moments when the actors need to have disappeared for required costume changes. I have always felt that this element should be a part of the storytelling of the play. The shift from Act I, Scene 1 to Scene 2 tells the story of settling in to the loft over four days. Scene 2 to Scene 3 simply establishes a small gap in time after Mandy and Richard have finished their visit. In Act II, the shift from Scene 1 to Scene 2 carries the audience



forward several days from the wedding to Sarah's first photo assignment. Scene 2 to Scene 3 covers just a few hours but needs to set up Sarah's important discovery on James's laptop in the bedroom. The final shift from Scene 3 to Scene 4 covers months and takes the audience to the new living arrangements for James and Sarah. While these stories should not include new details that would exceed Margulies's script there is no reason not to use the shift to sustain and develop the emotional load established in one scene and carried into the next.

### **November 16, 2015**

Tonight was the final dress rehearsal before we have an audience for preview. I took pictures of the show during the run. Although I will be able to continue to give notes through the performance weekend at this point my feedback to the cast is limited to some fine-tuning. I gave each of the actors specifics related to some of the work we have been doing. The final moment of Act I is still moving too quickly and I gave Wolfe notes related to taking the time to make the decision not to leave the apartment. There is much that needs to be communicated in this moment between the spare lines of dialogue.

### **November 17, 2015**

Tonight was the first run of the show with an audience. There were about twenty-five students and a handful of general public patrons in the house. They were very responsive and this helped the cast to enjoy and invest in the lighter moments when all four characters are on stage. The silence in the more serious, reflective moments was very satisfying to observe. The scene shifts have tightened up as much as they can and I

really enjoyed the way we seem to be telling the stories of these transitions. In a conversation with graduate student Matt Gilbertson after the show he quipped that the crew were like “time ninjas” helping to move the time frame of the scenes forward while the actors stayed in character and “lived” the passage of time between the scenes.

### **November 18, 2015**

For our first official performance we had about fifty patrons. They were engaged and attentive but not as overtly responsive as the preview audience. It was clear that the cast was affected by the more measured response as it really felt like they were working harder to sell the show to the audience more than was needed. There was a tension in their delivery and an awareness of pace and timing that hindered the show overall. In conversation with them after the performance they were very aware of this phenomenon and we discussed the need to stay in the center of the pacing regardless of the response. It was a good learning experience for this talented group of young actors.

I set up a lobby display with some images, quotes and biographical information about significant photojournalists (Appendix I). Hopefully it provides the audience with a little context to prime them for the larger themes of the show. It’s really quite a superficial assortment of elements but on the other hand a more detailed or in-depth display would be overwhelming and probably less effective. The program has my director’s notes, which I had forgotten having written. I always enjoy writing the notes for these shows for the way that they make me reflect on what I think we might be up to (Appendix J).

**November 19, 2015**

Tonight's performance seemed to go very well. The cast was relaxed and the audience responsive. Fortunately, it was the performance that I captured for the reference video. This will be useful in doing my post-production analysis. I am looking forward to doing some thinking about what has worked and what could have been better. I am suspicious of the ways in which we are taking advantage of stereotypes to make Mandy humorous. Of course, there is truth in stereotype and it certainly provides a shortcut in communicating character. As I have mentioned before, I need to do some thinking about how we built the conflict sequences. After the performance we had the production photo call. As we worked through the scenes I was struck by how limited the variety in picturization is for this show. This is largely a function of the shallow playing space but it is still a little frustrating. It would have been nice to have had more levels or to have been able to use the bedroom more.

**November 21, 2015**

The final performances and strike went well. I have little to add to my reflections on the show here except to look forward to working on Chapter IV. This has been a very satisfying process. I was fortunate to have a wonderful cast and design team who met the challenges of the show with creativity and dedication.

## CHAPTER IV

### POST-PRODUCTION ANALYSIS

Although the absence of an objective critical review of the production and the brevity of the performance schedule limits the opportunity to fully and objectively evaluate the success of the production, many of the goals of the production were met and the performances were viewed by attentive and appreciative audiences who had much to say that was positive. The overall scenic design was very well received and the strong reactions that audiences had to the characters and narrative were equally satisfying. To analyze the production effectively requires a review of its adherence to the original concept, the creation and control of the empathetic response of the audience, the effectiveness of the rehearsal process, and an evaluation of the acting, design and staging.

The Early-Production Analysis observes that the theme of the play is focused on the consequences of the journalist's professional lives for their relationships and personal lives. Much of the research and analysis for the show focused on the role and circumstances of the journalist who works in a dangerous conflict zone. The use of such a photojournalist as the protagonist suggested large existential themes to the director. There is an irresistible draw to the intensity and scope of such a story. The staging of the show as described in the journals of Chapter III articulates how these life and death circumstances informed and influenced the production choices. This preoccupation with

the themes of the show was appropriate; however, it would appear that in the end the play seen by our audiences is very much a love story.

Audience reactions to the show were very interesting. James establishes the foundation for this love story and it is worth noting that patrons who saw the show were very sympathetic to this character. Surprisingly, there was a corollary response to Sarah that was strongly negative. Audience members reported that they disliked her and resented the way that she treated James. While viewing the final performance, the director's daughter, Katie Sheeks, commented at intermission that she "hated Sarah." In her post-production interview, actress Alex Blesi also reported that audience members found her character to be unsympathetic. This was surprising given the fact that so much analysis and preparation was founded on the assumption that the play tells Sarah's story and that her primary characteristic is her passionate commitment to her work as a photojournalist.

Regardless of the audience response to the relationship narrative, the concept for the show as it developed in production meetings and other conversations with the team had a strong focus on the larger themes of war and journalism. Director Michael Sheeks articulated this concept in terms of how the world of the play is essentially realistic at its center but that at the edges there was room for it to be more chaotic and abstract. For the actors this was articulated in terms of how the story being told on stage takes place within a relatively safe and peaceful space that is contained and encompassed by a chaotic and disintegrating world. The goal of the concept was to create a world that presented and emphasized the larger context of war and violence without being heavy-handed and without intruding on the important stories of the relationships of the characters. Scenic

Designer Lauren Nelson attacked this goal by creating a design that created a highly realistic Brooklyn apartment in which the characters played out the action of the play (Appendix K). The realistic elements of the apartment were set within a montage of photographs from twentieth century conflicts presented on large format prints that were suspended across the stage as the background for the set. Sound Designer Luke Walchuk integrated sounds of urban warfare and news reports from contemporary conflicts into the musical selections that were used in transitions and at the opening and close of the play. Sheeks created a dramaturgical display highlighting the lives of significant photojournalists that was presented in the lobby. These elements combined to create a strikingly beautiful design that effectively supported the themes of war and chaos that the team had identified as being important to the production.

While these elements seemed to be effective at providing a specific context for the narrative of the text, the audience did not appear to be overwhelmed by or distracted from the relationship stories. In fact, as mentioned above, rather than experiencing a story that extolled the virtues of the photojournalist and glorified their sacrifices in the cause of reporting the horrors of war to the safe and insulated domestic world, audiences preferred to sympathize with the characters who chose to eschew that work in preference for domestic tranquility. It would suggest that the work that was done to make James charming and sympathetic was unexpectedly effective and resulted in a strong affinity in the audience to empathize with James. By no means is this to suggest that Blesi's work with the character was unsuccessful but rather that the heroic elements of Sarah's journey are ultimately subordinate to the exploration of relationship that Margulies himself sees as central to his work.

This connection of the audience to the relationship story of the play is relevant to a concern expressed in the Early-Production Analysis that predicted that the greatest challenge of the production will be to make the play relevant and immediate for its audience. The play focuses on an individual who is experiencing extraordinary circumstances that are not common to the typical patron of theatre in Mankato, Minnesota. At the same time it is interesting that news reports in the weeks following this production were filled with reporting on domestic episodes of violence and terror. Current news reports make observation of a perceived mood of anxiety and fear in the American public that is directly related to how and what is presented in the media through the work of journalists like Sarah and James. Perhaps, then, the realities of the lives of Sarah and James are not so far removed from the lives of the audience. What Chapter I did not address was the possibility that the show might turn out to be a tempest in a teapot, full of sound and fury but signifying nothing. Both of these issues were important in the process of staging this production. The first was addressed in much of the preparation and planning while the second was more apparent and relevant in the rehearsal process. Both reflect the process of crafting the emotional load of the play and creating an empathetic response from the audience, which was the central problem of the production. Much of this work focused on the dynamics of the moments of conflict in the show.

There are three important conflicts in Act I and two in Act II. In Act I these include Richard's conflict with Sarah and James over their planned return overseas, Mandy's conflict with Sarah over Sarah's failure to provide the object of her photography with assistance and James's conflict with Sarah over Sarah's relationship with Tarik. In

Act II the conflicts include James's conflict with Richard over the publication of James's article and Sarah's conflict with James over the nature of their lifestyle. Early analysis in Chapter II describes and analyzed the character elements that created these conflicts.

What is interesting from this post-production perspective is the final disposition of the dramatic dynamics surrounding and supporting these moments of conflict. Much of the analysis and work described in early chapters relate to how these dynamics were developed. The question to ask, then, is did they work?

Fortunately, a good recording of the show was made at the performance on Thursday, November 19. This recording provides the evidence needed to review and evaluate the realized performance of the play. Two tendencies surface in a review of this recording. The first relates to the tone with which Blesi expresses the strong emotions of Sarah and the second has to do with the range and nature of the dynamic expression in the moments of conflict. These two elements are related in important ways.

Generally speaking, the more subtle and understated the expression of a strong emotion the more credible it is likely to be. In many cases people will restrain themselves and filter their comments. At the same time, these filters fall away the closer and stronger the relationship is between the participants. In *Time Stands Still*, the relationship between Sarah and James has been forged in the unique foundry of life at war. Similarly, Sarah and Richard had worked together closely for over twenty years and had spent some portion of that time as lovers. These two circumstances provided the actors with some freedom to allow the characters to engage each other vigorously. In addition, Sarah is a person deep in the throes of an emotional grieving process. She is grieving her own loss of physical capacity along with the loss of her intense relationship



with her lover, Tariq. The sum of these circumstances led to the decision to allow some very strong emotions to find expression.

In regard to the character of Sarah, this choice was supported by an analysis of the text. In Scene 2, while Sarah is in the bathroom, Richard's comment that she, "certainly sounds like herself" is clearly meant by Margulies to be ironic and suggested that Sarah's "what" and "yes" needed to have a distinct edge. Blesi played the "what" with the energy of a hostile expletive and backed off only a little with "yes" (13). Actor Jordan Wolfe's reaction to these lines got laughs every night and Richard's comment got a large laugh as well. Sheeks considered directing Blesi to temper these lines; however, they supported the text well and were clearly in line with the idea that Sarah is distressed. She and the other characters in the play are part of a cultural context that is more direct and expressive than that of our regular audience here in the Midwest. The East Coast of the United States is permeated with cultural traditions that use fewer filters in their conversation. The text supported this in the way that all four characters are quite willing to lay their opinions on the table. Although audiences were struck by Sarah's distance from James and her cool reception of Mandy, the circumstances of the character and the analysis of the text seemed to support this choice. In the end, Sarah must choose to leave James behind and return to her work overseas. Although she may do this with some tenderness and affection, there is nothing in the text to suggest that this character is experiencing a strong emotional attachment to the other characters in the play. Her journey must be traveled alone and with some degree of calculation. Whatever emotional load Sarah carries is largely reserved for her memories of Tariq and her passion for her

work. Still, there is room to consider how the play might have played differently had Sarah been drawn as a warmer and more emotionally available character.

The context and text also suggested a wide dynamic range in the conflicts. Perhaps the most striking example of this is Mandy's willingness to challenge Sarah's choice not to help the young boy in the photograph in Scene 2. In this passage, in addition to having Mandy go so far as to accuse Sarah of playing God, Mandy becomes so upset that the stage directions indicate that she collapses into Richard, crying. This happens within just an hour or so of meeting each other. Even allowing for the natural compression of life that happens in theatre, this is an astonishing conflict for two relative strangers. There are clues in the text that support the continuation of these dynamics. Mandy reacts openly to the vigor of Richard's line, "are you out of your fucking minds" (23) and this specific conflict needed to have enough of a crescendo and climax to justify the beat and contrast contained in Mandy's line, "Ooh, you know what I would love?" (24). This same dynamic happens again when James becomes angry with Richard in Act II with Sarah interjecting in the face of James's energetic attack. The question that the cast and director came back to repeatedly, then, had to do with how these strong emotional dynamics should be expressed. There was considerable effort put into varying the tactics utilized so that the characters were not just yelling at each other. Although this work had a positive impact on the final results, there was probably room to find more variety and subtlety in this regard.

Achieving these results required good use of the rehearsal process. It is always a challenge to stage a production efficiently and quickly. At Minnesota State Mankato the theatrical productions are staged with alacrity. The ambitious production calendar

provided this show with twenty-two rehearsals of three hours each. The small cast for the show makes this short process more viable. Even larger shows like *Antigone* and *Rumours* have rehearsal schedules of only twenty-five and twenty-nine days respectively. When developing the rehearsal schedule, Sheeks evaluated the needs of individual rehearsal times by working backwards from the preview performance on November 17. The introduction of technical elements require full run-throughs of the show beginning with the introduction of sound and light and continuing through the final dress rehearsal. The first of these was scheduled for November 12. Prior to that date there was more flexibility with how rehearsals are utilized. The first rehearsal that saw the entire show rehearsed was scheduled on Friday, October 30; however, this was a rehearsal during which the action was allowed to start and stop for feedback and work. The first run-through without an interruption was scheduled for Friday, November 6. In the larger picture, there were twelve rehearsals leading up to the first run-through and nine rehearsals afterwards. Overall, 36% of the rehearsals were dedicated to full runs of the show. This structure is pretty typical of non-musicals. For comparison, *Antigone* has 36% of its rehearsals as full runs and *Rumors* is scheduled for twelve out of twenty-nine, which is 41%.

How those early rehearsals are utilized varies with the nature of the production. For *Time Stands Still*, it was important to attend to the dynamics of the relationships and the conflicts between the characters. Toward that end, the first three rehearsals were dedicated to table work during which discrete segments of the text were read and examined to discuss pace and mood. This also provided an opportunity to discuss relationships and character attacks. These rehearsals provided a good foundation for later

work when the show began to get “on its feet.” In post-production interviews, cast members reported similar responses to having an opportunity to gain an understanding of how other members of the ensemble perceived the relationships that they shared in the play. Blesi particularly enjoyed the creative activity that was paired with the read-through on the first day and actress Maureen O’Malley found the table work most beneficial. Blesi did express some impatience with the pace of work during the two days of table work. This is not surprising since much of this work was focused on other characters. In many cases Sarah acts as a catalyst to the strong reactions of others and so the fine-tuning required often focused on how James, Sarah and Richard expressed and controlled their passions. Several cast members expressed a desire for more table work and analysis prior to blocking but acknowledged the requirements of such a short rehearsal process.

Another activity that was important to the early work in rehearsal was the use of the Rasa exercises that are described in Chapter III and Appendix F. The actors suggested that these exercises were useful, with Wolfe observing that it was interesting when “the emotion of rage was eliminated as an option.” Blesi liked that it provided “different ways of motivating a line” and O’Malley found the activity to be a good bonding activity and “freeing”.

In addition to the Rasa work, the cast had two opportunities to meet with individuals familiar with conflict and PTSD. After seeing J. A. Moad’s presentation on October 28, Blesi commented on how her perspective on Sarah’s experiences had been significantly altered and the cast discussed similar insights. The presentation brought into stark relief the isolation and emotional anguish that is typical of individuals who

return to domestic society after having experienced long exposures to war and chaos. Sheeks posted a dramaturgical website with some additional background information and the material found in Lynsey Addario's book, It's What I Do, was particularly useful in conversations between Sheeks and Blesi about Sarah's backstory.

All of these experiences were effective at developing a strong connection between the actors that could then translate to stronger relationship chemistry in the characters. In general, the early work of the rehearsal process seemed to be largely successful at helping the actors place their characters in the world of the play. This could be seen in the way in which the relationships of the characters were communicated to and perceived by audiences.

This production featured a strong ensemble who worked well together and who fit their roles well. Blesi had a very natural empathy with the character of Sarah and came to the rehearsal process extremely well prepared. Her physical and emotional presence communicated a maturity and gravitas that worked well considering her youth relative to the actual age of the character. She did appropriate research to capture the details of the impact of her injuries and her physical work in this regard was very credible. In early rehearsals Blesi had a tendency to stay in an emotionally hostile space; however, she responded well to direction to lighten the character. The humor and lightness with which she delivered several lines in her interactions with Richard in Act I, Scene 2, provided a good starting place for this work. By capitalizing on her willingness to find Richard's relationship with Mandy as humorous rather than censorious, Blesi had a place from which to grow. Sheeks and Blesi discussed the extent to which Sarah would naturally find humor in the world around her and Sheeks encouraged Blesi to explore those aspects

of Sarah's personality as much as possible. Although Sarah's experiences overseas and her recent loss of Tariq certainly function to darken her outlook, it was important that the personality hidden behind those experiences have strong elements of joy in them.

Similarly, Blesi had a natural inclination to connect sympathetically with O'Malley's reading of Mandy in the one scene in which the two characters are alone on stage in Act I. There is a tenderness in Blesi's delivery of the line, "Mandy, you really don't have to . . .", which comes in response to Mandy's defense of her love for Richard which spoke to Sarah's sensitivity to Mandy's insecurities. Over time, Blesi's reading of the role found more of those moments so that, despite audience tendencies to judge Sarah, her performance captured a very credible balance between bitterness and sensitivity.

Blesi and Wolfe did express some discomfort with the intimate sequence at the end of Act I. In an effort to ameliorate this and because it was a delicate moment that required some subtlety, this sequence was built in a series of increasingly intensifying layers. Blesi commented during and after the production that the physical intimacy never did ring true for her; however, it was rendered in a way that served the play. This passage in the script is inherently difficult. It requires significant emotional swings for both characters and the transition from intense conflict to physical intimacy is a difficult challenge for actors who are as young as Blesi and Wolfe. Sheeks provided incremental direction during each of the rehearsals of this passage to help Wolfe find new moments of discovery to help communicate the shift that takes place in those moments. By taking a longer pause at the door, another when he hangs his coat, another at the end of the couch and then by highlighting James's caution in the text and physicality on the couch, Wolfe was able to move much closer to the needed performance. Similarly, Sheeks worked

with Blesi and Wolfe to determine precisely where the control and inclination to initiate touch and intimacy passes back and forth between the characters.

Wolfe was a very strong James for this production. Audiences connected to the character in very strong ways and a number of people remarked how they felt sorry for James and didn't understand how Sarah could just leave him as she did. In truth, this response was a bit puzzling. As mentioned above, the textual analysis and casting intentions made the assumption that James was a bit lost and adrift. Sheeks worked from the assumption that James's lack of determination and direction would incline audience members to see him as something of a loser who was giving up his dreams. Instead, Wolfe's reading of the role was likeable to the degree that he somehow played as more heroic than the heroic protagonist. Of course, that is in large part due to the brilliance of the script itself. There is no clear winner here and in some ways there is also no clear loser. Sheeks worked with Wolfe with several specific physical and vocal elements of his performance to give the reading of the character needed clarity and consistency. Two discoveries drove much of the direction that Sheeks gave to Wolfe. The first had to do with a tendency that Wolfe had to end his phrases with a rising tone so that the impact of the line was weakened. Wolfe worked hard to eliminate this pattern and this was much to the character's benefit. Sheeks also noted that when Wolfe was less certain of the specific wording in a given line of text he had a collection of physical and vocal habitual behaviors that intruded on the characterization. This observation drove the work that was done in rehearsals with line memorization and was helpful not only for Wolfe but for the cast as a whole. Wolfe also worked to find a wider range of tactics to express his anger when in conflict with the other characters in the play and this was also effective.

A somewhat amusing divergence from the early analysis work comes in the way that Mandy's character develops over the course of the play. In early work on the show, Mandy was perceived as an essentially static character who represents the innocence and simplicity of comfortable domestic life. As mentioned in the casting journal, this analysis had initially indicated a specific type of actress for the role. Casting O'Malley in the role was the first step in a journey of unexpected delights in this regard. In rehearsals, Maureen O'Malley brought to the character of Mandy a very sophisticated and layered reading that was initially too reserved and intellectual. Rehearsal work to make the character lighter and more humorously innocent was very effective and audiences responded rather enthusiastically to the comic aspects of her lines and the moments related to her relationship with Richard. O'Malley altered both the tonal range of the character as well as the syntax of her speech to achieve this youthful tone. She made particularly good use of a few strategically placed squeals of enthusiasm that went a long way toward endearing her to the audience.

Fortunately, because of the strong work that O'Malley brought to creating the character she was also able to bring very credible and impassioned readings to Mandy's conflict with James in Act II. When she intervenes defending Richard's work at the newspaper, O'Malley draws on her own innate intelligence and strength to give Mandy the opportunity to speak with passion and persuasion. As a consequence, O'Malley sets up the final scene of the play in a way that imbues Mandy with a clear trajectory of growth over the course of the play. While the audience laughs at her naivety in Act I and enjoys the comic juxtaposition of her provincial innocence with Sarah's worldly experience, that empathy deepens significantly in Act II and there is much to like in the



growth of this character. O'Malley is a very smart and gifted actress who was a delight to have in the ensemble.

Last in the ensemble but certainly not least was the work of Logan Sulentic as Richard. This was initially identified as one of the roles that would be a challenge to fill. The requirement that Richard be credibly older than Mandy in an environment where the actors were likely to be within just a couple of years of each other in age was daunting. Sulentic filled this role admirably. He, like Blesi, brings a certain maturity to his characterizations quite naturally; however, he also worked very carefully and specifically with his vocal qualities and physicality to communicate the characteristic of a man in his fifties. Because Sheeks happens to be 54, Sulentic was able to make use of this model and it was an element of some humor in rehearsals when Sheeks would be asked to demonstrate the difficulties with which an older man gets out of a chair or climbs the stairs. Sulentic adopted these and other patterns so that his rendering of the age of the character was almost invisible and quite effective. He also adopted a lower vocal range for the character along with a more measured delivery that helped to make Richard very likeable and authentic.

The technical elements of this production were designed and executed with some considerable success. In particular, Nelson's scenic and costume designs were very well received. Audiences frequently described the setting as "beautiful." The placement of the large photographs above and around the realistic details of the apartment was very striking. The photographs included images that were both beautiful as well as disturbing. It was interesting that although there were some very provocative and violent images included, the manner in which they were distributed across the set and their relative scale

made the individual images present enough to have an effect without being overwhelming. In retrospect, those photographs might have included more contemporary images in addition to the mid-twentieth century imagery that was utilized. The apartment itself was carefully appointed and furnished while at the same time Nelson's design was not slavishly tied to a realistic presentation of the setting. The apartment walls were completely absent, allowing the apartment to almost float in a sea of black fabric and pictures. The rich colors of the apartment treatment, particularly the wood floors and wood furniture, combined with the largely black background to allow the black and white photographs to hover over the set as if in another time and place. Nelson and Sheeks worked together to ensure that the details that were chosen to be included in the design were very realistically rendered. The sink provided running water, the coffee maker brewed coffee, the light in the refrigerator was functional, the television was functional and played appropriate content. The set created a very distinct sense of place while also providing a strong foundation for the themes and concept being pursued.

Functionally, the design worked very well. Sheeks had concerns about the fact that this seating configuration creates a wide, shallow playing space, making picturization and composition challenging. The placement of the bedroom upright effectively pushed the kitchen downstage and provided a nice balance to the more open living space located stage left. The exits to the hallway and bathroom up left center created useful blocking patterns. Although the bedroom and the extreme ends of the playing space were not heavily utilized, the overall floor plan provided the needed room for interesting blocking patterns. Locating the television down center helped with this a great deal.

There was relatively little about the scenic design and execution that might have been improved. The bed was a bit wide for the space in which it sat; however, it would have been odd for it to be smaller and the very limited use of the bedroom made this a minor issue. The doors that were installed upstage were of a very lightweight design and consequently did not make a very satisfying or accurate sound when closed. Technical Director George Grubb discussed this with Sheeks and it was determined that rather than assume the expense of more substantive doors the cast would make an effort to close the doors in a way that minimized this effect. The original design indicated a difference in floor treatment between the kitchen area and the living room; however, the actual treatment was uniform across both spaces. This is less a weakness than it was a design choice. The space was sufficiently small that two treatments seemed a bit illogical, particularly in light of the fact that the room is a converted loft and the floor would have been of a single construction. The railings for the bedroom were steel pipes that had been used in a show earlier this season. Although they looked better when they were painted black, their industrial quality did not quite fit with the other appointments to the apartment. In summary, the team was very happy with the overall scenic treatment.

The costume design was equally successful. Great care was taken to ensure that the details of the costumes helped to establish characteristics of age and personality for the individual characters. The costuming for Mandy was very helpful in allowing O'Malley to find the youthful energy of her character. Similarly, the costumes for Sarah communicated her seriousness and practicality very nicely without losing an important feminine aspect. Production Stage Manager Henry Anderson obtained a wonderful leg brace for Sarah that helped communicate her injuries and that was available early for

rehearsals so that she could spend considerable time with the physical work needed. Richard's costumes were very successful at imparting an air of maturity while making it clear that the character wants to look good. Finally, James generally appeared casual without being slovenly.

Nelson's costume design did include substantial costume changes for both James and Sarah for which no offstage time is provided in the script. This was an appropriate and necessary design choice; however, it did present some distinct staging challenges. To overcome those challenges the scene changes were intentionally structured in a way that captured the audience's attention and provided time for the actors to make the change. This element is discussed later in this chapter in more detail and in many ways became a very fun part of the staging.

Working in very close collaboration with Nelson, Properties Manager Amber Kuennen contributed to the sense of place by ensuring that the set was dressed with a wide range of appropriate properties. As mentioned in Chapter III, Sheeks, Kuennen and Nelson had a number of negotiations around the extent of the clutter at the top of the show. Nelson was reluctant to have the apartment appear unkempt and it was only with some reluctance that Kuennen and Nelson moved in that direction. In the end, the opening scene included appropriate clutter to suggest that James had been living there without Sarah's influence and had left in a hurry to retrieve her. Scene 2 saw the clutter removed and in Act II the detritus of the wedding went a long way toward establishing the given circumstance. The functional properties were generally very accurate and helped the actors to do their work. The balloons for Scene 2 were available fairly early on and helped the cast key in to the humor in that scene. Unfortunately, the camera that

was obtained for the show was not of the quality or complexity that would have been appropriate for a photojournalist of Sarah's caliber; however, on our limited budget this was a difficult challenge to overcome. On the other hand, one of the cherished properties was the photographic coffee table book in the final scene. For this prop, Kuennen printed a new full color cover that included images that Sarah might have taken along with her name as author.

When Sheeks first spoke with Luke Walchuk about the sound design they considered doing original music for the show. Eventually this option was abandoned and Walchuk found an instrumental musical track that did a nice job of matching the tone and context of the story. To this track he added environmental sounds that were layered into the design during introductory, transitional and concluding moments. Walchuk placed speakers around the set so that the sounds of cell phones ringing and the television were very realistic located in proximity to their presumed source. Given the intimate nature of the playing space this was very beneficial. An amusing highlight of the sound design was a moment in Scene 2 when James sends an email to Sarah. This action is accompanied by the iconic Macintosh sound effects of these actions.

Chelsea Dively's lighting design was both subtle and effective. In the design phase Dively was very taken by the possibilities that were offered by the placement of the large windows at either end of the playing space. She determined to add to those two natural lighting sources a third window located in the fourth wall and indicated through the use of gobos. Sheeks worked with Dively to increase the extent to which her design utilized gradual changes in lighting treatments to provide a greater sense of the passage of

time over the course of the play. The final execution of the design was well connected to the reality of the space while supporting the features of the scenic design very nicely.

Another element of a production that can greatly impact the process is the extent to which technical elements are in place as they become needed for actors to utilize them in rehearsal. For this production, the lighting and sound designs were very important to the finished production but did not have a significant impact on the work of the actors. Consequently, both Walchuk and Dively were free to adjust and adapt their designs right up to the opening of the show without worrying about interfering with the rehearsal process. This flexibility was important in allowing the designers and director to work together to calibrate the scene shifts. There was some confusion on the part of Anderson in this regard as the addition and movement of cues did impact his work; however, the relatively small number of these made it manageable for him.

Properties for the show, on the other hand, grew more complex in the final weeks of the rehearsals on an almost daily basis. There were good discussions of this element early on in production meetings and Sheeks had indicated from the beginning that the production would need a solid crew to fully implement the scene shifts and properties management. Anderson took strong leadership with managing the properties and Kuennen and Nelson worked together well to ensure that the properties that were essential to the action were integrated well with the set dressing and overall aesthetic design. Properties that were utilized in the action of the play were generally available in a very timely manner. There was some confusion regarding Kuennen's role in the process and her commitments to other department productions complicated this issue; however, her contributions were very important. Sheeks was very pleased with the final

arrangement and functioning of these elements. Nelson and Grubb communicated well and this led to a fairly smooth execution of Nelson's design.

This production was fortunate to have a very capable stage manager in Anderson. Although young, Anderson brought a quiet maturity to his work as well as a wry sense of humor that endeared him to the cast and design team. He was very thorough at capturing and communicating the details of the production and was also quite capable at managing his assistant stage manager and crew. Rehearsals and performances all proceeded smoothly. Anderson was not completely comfortable calling cues in the booth and it took him a bit to recognize that there is an art rather than a science to calling a show. Once he had that understanding, he did a very nice job of sensing the rhythms of the show and called the sound and light cues accordingly.

Staging this particular play in this particular seating arrangement had the potential to be difficult. The need for a realistic apartment designed across a wide shallow space runs in contrast to the need for layers of staging both in terms of stage depth as well as elevation. As discussed above, Nelson's design ultimately assisted Sheeks in creating reasonable blocking patterns. Several questions were recurrent in creating these patterns: When could the action move to the kitchen table? How much of the play could happen while seated in the couch and upholstered chair? How much could or should the injured Sarah move about the room? What opportunities are available to use the level offered by the raised platform of the bedroom? What anchors might pull the characters into interesting and meaningful stage pictures? Some of these considerations are discussed below.

The first question that seemed to present itself in rehearsal was related to the importance of the upholstered chair stage left that was used exclusively by Sarah. Because of her injury, Sarah lands in this chair early in the play and stays there throughout Act I. This meant that all other action had to be staged in relation to this single position in the living room. Because the chair had been identified as “hers,” Sarah was initially blocked to go directly to it at the top of Scene 1; however, adjustments were later made to have Sarah sit on the couch for that first scene. This provided some needed variety and was logical given that the couch was proximate to the entrance door. The business of settling in and checking for food provided James plenty of natural motivation to move about the space during this first scene. Although short, this scene established a familiar blocking pattern that was at time a challenge to disrupt.

Scene 2 opens with James and Sarah sitting in their anchor positions; James at the right side of the couch and Sarah in her chair left. One of the discoveries of rehearsals was that Wolfe was more comfortable and credible when seated. As a result, the final blocking scheme had him returning to this anchor position at several key moments in the play. When Mandy and Richard enter in this scene they move first to the kitchen table. This establishes them initially as guests and pulls the action into a new focal area. Initially, James takes their coats and placed them on the bed, pulling him into the lofted area and creating a pleasing stage picture. Unfortunately, this position was also problematic as it forced O’Malley and Sulentic to upstage themselves as the conversation continued. The blocking was changed incrementally to bring Wolfe back to the kitchen at ever earlier moments until eventually a coat tree was added at the foot of the stairs and



the entire sequence stayed in the kitchen. Sheeks resisted this movement as it resulted in the bedroom being generally unused until Scene 3 of Act II.

By the time Blesi enters from the bathroom to continue Act II, Scene 2, and all four characters are on stage, the fundamental blocking patterns of the show were established. The primary pattern involved Blesi in her chair at left with other characters moving naturally between the kitchen and the up left doors or liquor cabinet unless seated beside her. Sheeks had concerns that this would become too repetitive or static but these concerns were ultimately unfounded. The natural flow of the action provided suitable variation from this primary pattern. Disruptions to this pattern keyed the audience to be prepared for changes in the dramatic flow of the scenes in unexpected ways. It also served the play well to have Blesi and Wolfe return to their anchor positions at moments that had heightened emotional content. For instance, at the end of Scene 2 in Act II James and Sarah have a rather significant conflict over Sarah's work. By bringing James into his seat on the couch rather than in a stronger position in conflict with Sarah the moment achieved a greater sense of domesticity that made the conflict less stark and more nuanced.

The scene shifts were a relatively complex element of the staging for this show. From the beginning of the process, Sheeks was interested in having the scene shifts be moments of transparency in which the mechanics of the theatrical were apparent but which also served to further the action of the play. The actors were directed to remain in character for these shifts and the stage crew worked to be present and efficient without being intrusive. For instance, in the shift from Scene 1 to Scene 2 in Act I, both Blesi and Wolfe had costume changes. Blesi exited to the bathroom to effect her change as she

naturally would in the course of normal life. The stage crew appeared on stage to set Wolfe's new sweater on the back of the couch, which he then changed into as if he had placed it there himself. As the audience watched Wolfe change they could also watch as the stage crew tidied up the apartment. The crew placed James's briefcase beside Wolfe on the couch and then Wolfe removed his laptop from the bag and opened it to begin work. Wolfe had placed the clothing he had removed on the back of the couch and the crew removed those items in much the same way as the character might have in the course of time. As the crew exited the stage Blesi returned to her chair where she opened the laptop that had been set there by the crew. This kind of integrated movement was a feature of the Act II scene changes as well. Audiences seemed to be relatively unaware of the fact that these changes were longer than would be typically appropriate had they been sitting in the dark waiting. A fellow graduate student commented that it was like the crew were little "time ninjas" who effected the changes in environment that might otherwise happen over a longer period to happen in an instant.

In the end, much of this production was executed in a manner consistent with the original vision articulated in early production meetings and table work. Sheeks's approach to the production was one in which a balance was sought between adherence to his vision of the play and the complementary visions that were brought to the process by the cast, crew and design team. It was a process that created an environment in which participants were encouraged to express their opinions and to make divergent choices but also in which everyone's choices were guided toward a unified vision of the play. In the end, the play seemed to have been served well.

## CHAPTER V

### PROCESS DEVELOPMENT

Prior to arriving at Minnesota State Mankato, Michael Sheeks directed plays within secondary high school and community theatre settings. Within those contexts he directed over thirty full-length productions and numerous one acts. At that time, Sheeks had not had any specific training in theatre beyond some limited undergraduate course work in theatre during his first several years at the University of Minnesota in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Most of his craft had been developed through working as a technician and stage manager in community theatres in the 1980s. The most significant of these experiences were at Theatre in the Round where Sheeks stage managed several productions and was able to observe a number of skilled directors in the casting and rehearsal process. These experiences were sufficient to provide Sheeks with a rudimentary understanding of the objectives and tasks of a director as he began directing for Roseville Area High School in January of 2002.

While directing for the schools and community theatre, Sheeks developed an artistic style and some elements of craft. Artistically, Sheeks established an appreciation for the collaborative aspects of theatre and a desire to create art that expresses the complexities and ambiguities of human experience. In terms of craft, Sheeks brought a strong sense of the administrative needs of a project from his work in the business world and over the course of his work in the decade prior to coming to Minnesota State

Mankato he learned some essential aspects of acting coaching and creating stage pictures. Working in a secondary setting with young actors, Sheeks has significant experience with helping developing performers to master fundamental acting techniques in order to begin to credibly express the objectives of their characters.

When Sheeks began work at Minnesota State Mankato his goals for his craft were significant. Much of his prior work had been guided by instinct and learning by the “seat of the pants.” While this process had been engaging and exciting, Sheeks was interested in gaining knowledge as to the professional standards and expectations for the craft of directing. In what ways do professional directors approach the myriad tasks of the director with skills and knowledge that Sheeks had yet to learn? What are those skills? What knowledge? He was acutely aware that there was much to learn about the craft of acting that he needed in order to effectively communicate with actors but also wondered what it was that he didn’t know that he didn’t know. Regarding his artistic goals Sheeks was less clear in his expectations. In response to the question, “what kinds of shows do you want to direct,” Sheeks was not sure that there was a clear answer or that there should be. There are so many different ways that theatre can come to life and offer up a new thought or an old proverb. Is there a kind of art that Sheeks should or might focus upon or is it best to develop a more eclectic outlook? These are the starting points that Sheeks had as he arrived in Mankato.

In the first five terms at Minnesota State Mankato, Sheeks has had coursework in many useful elements of craft. Courses in performance craft have allowed Sheeks to be more articulate in communicating with actors. In the Fall of 2014, Sheeks took Acting Techniques from Paul J. Hustoles and the vocabulary from that class related to gestures,

character motivations, vocal work and physical attack were of immediate use in his subsequent productions. In that class and also in Intermediate Acting and voice lessons, Sheeks has had opportunities to perform scenes and projects. These courses, along with the experience of playing Maurice in *Disney's Beauty and the Beast*, have given Sheeks the physical experience of performance in a setting where he was able to think more explicitly about that process. These experiences provide a much deeper understanding of the process of the actor as they prepare for and experience rehearsals and performance. Sheeks is better able to talk with actors about their objectives and tactics. Examples of these new understandings are numerous but one that is interesting to note has to do with the notion of an actor being “grounded.” This term is one that Sheeks had heard and even used in the past but had only understood intuitively given the descriptive nature of the term. After having taught Acting for Everyone and worked on his own physical presence and attack in class and in production, the concept of being “grounded” is remarkably clarified for Sheeks and is now a concept that can provide a greater foundation for conversations about physical attack. Although he is fortunate that the caliber of performer in Minnesota State Mankato productions is such that actors often need little or no help with becoming grounded, it is useful to have that expanded understanding as a part of his larger understanding of performance. There are many other examples like this that include more subtle and sophisticated elements of the craft of performance that are relevant for the craft of directing. During his work in 2014 on *Gabriel*, Sheeks had interesting conversations with actress Kendra Verhage about the psychological center of the character of Jeanne, a concept that came from their shared experience in Acting Techniques. In his work with the actors in *Time Stands Still* this conversation continued

and was expanded in the physical work required for that production. His work with actor Logan Sulentic to find subtle ways to communicate the age of a character utilized learning from his Acting Techniques class as well as from the various courses on vocal production. While the convenience of working with actors who share a specific understanding of terminology is advantageous, these ideas will be useful even when performers are not as well versed in the concepts.

Sheeks has also increased his understanding of the craft of the director in regard to the director's knowledge and focus within the rehearsal process. In Hamilton's Advanced Directing course Sheeks gained an increased appreciation for the ways that a director needs to have a clear understanding of the purpose of each element of production. Sheeks has increased his attention to identifying and supporting the specific purpose in every line, beat and scene within a production. This was very useful in both *Gabriel* and *Time Stands Still*. *Gabriel* had a very complex plot and the objectives and tactics of the characters were essential to telling that story effectively. Although this piece of craft was present in Sheeks' work previously, he was much more cognizant of the importance of asking the question, "Why is this happening at this time and in this place and in this way" throughout the rehearsal process. There is considerable room for continued improvement in Sheeks' understanding of the craft of directing. Sheeks has also benefited from the research work that took place in Hamilton's Theatre Research and Dramaturgy course as well as the research done for the productions of *Gabriel* and *Time Stands Still*. These research experiences have increased his interest in more fully understanding the context within which a play is written as well as demonstrated that the understanding of a play changes from the beginning to the end of the process.

In the period between *Gabriel* and *Time Stands Still*, Sheeks audited the Acting Styles course as well as completed coursework in dialects and directing. A number of specific insights from these experiences informed his work in *Time Stands Still*. Sheeks found that he was better able to discuss specific vocal qualities that his actors manipulated in order to better find appropriate characterizations. He was also more intentional in considering the subtleties of picturization and composition in this most recent production as a consequence of work done in Hustoles's Advanced Directing course. While working with the scenic designer for *Time Stands Still*, Sheeks was able to consider how the placement of scenic elements would provide useful anchors for blocking patterns. While previous productions had been approached with an eye to this issue, Sheeks has now moved to a place where he connects the designer's ground plan to his own vision of staging in a more intentional and proactive manner. In regard to dialects, his recent work with his scene for the Region V Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival provided an opportunity to apply new knowledge of International Phonetic Alphabet substitutions for establishing an appropriate dialect for the characters.

Sheeks's coursework in technical theatre has also been useful in improving his ability to communicate with designers, particularly for lighting and sound design. Lighting concepts related to face light and down light came into play frequently in *Gabriel* and sound concepts related to sources of sound were also useful in that play. For *Time Stands Still*, Sheeks was able to work with his designers in similar ways. At this time his goals for the development of craft remain as they were when he arrived in

Mankato and the work that will take place in the remaining courses and projects will likely support those goals.

Artistically Sheeks has enjoyed very strong ensembles in all three of his project productions. For *Trust*, the design team was particularly effective at collaborating and developing an artistic vision of the production. For *Gabriel*, it was the acting ensemble that was able to do this. *Time Stands Still* benefited from both an ensemble as well as a design team who worked together well. These experiences provide some interesting material for considering the collaborative process. The design team in *Trust* were able to take the open nature of the development process that Sheeks prefers and while it pushed them to challenge their own thinking and was at times difficult it fostered strong communications and collaborative problem creative work. That same process was less effective for *Gabriel*. In the end the designers for *Gabriel* presented an acceptable product; however, they did so in a way that was less collaborative. *Time Stands Still*, on the other hand, had a design team that again worked together well and benefited from considerable freedom in their creative process. Set and Costume designer Lauren Nelson particularly seemed to thrive in this context. From these experiences, Sheeks continues to consider how best to manage a design team. Artistically, he continues to believe that the ultimate artistic expression is enhanced when it allows the designers to bring their individual intuition and creativity to the process. He also recognizes that when individual designers need more structure and guidance that it is important that the director be prepared to provide that guidance at the earliest appropriate moment.



Sheeks is also developing his ability to articulate an artistic vision for a project. He is consistently reluctant to be directive in this regard. In a dramaturgy project in 2014 he encountered this quote from Tom Stoppard,

I write plays because writing dialogue is the only respectable way of contradicting yourself. I'm the kind of person who embarks on an endless leapfrog down the great moral issues. I put a position, rebut it, refute the rebuttal, and rebut the refutation. Forever. Endlessly. (Gussow 3)

There is an essential ambiguity in this outlook that is attractive to Sheeks artistically. Of course, the task of the director is not the same as the task of the playwright. Ultimately, the director must make a choice and take a stand . . . perhaps. Sheeks continues to seek a better understanding of how collaboration is a part of the artistic in theatre and also he is interested in developing an ability to ask better questions in pursuit of an artistic vision.

When Sheeks talked to friends, family and colleagues about leaving public education to focus on directing, one explanation that he gave was that he had spent a decade trying to be both an effective secondary educator and an effective director. While it is certainly possible to do both of these things the task of learning to do them well is considerable in both cases. Over time it became clear that to do either of them with a satisfying level of mastery required a choice. The choice to leave secondary education behind was a choice to develop mastery in the art and craft of directing. Implicit in that choice is a desire and commitment to approach directing with integrity and discipline. One measure of success in this regard will be how effectively Sheeks is able to come to the directing process with increased knowledge of the present text and a larger toolbox

with which to analyze that knowledge and communicate it to a team of actors, designers and technicians.