

**TOWARDS A CONTEMPLATIVE DRAMATURGY:
THE PEARL, AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC PLAY
ABOUT MEMORY, LOSS, AND MOURNING & THE SPACES IN-BETWEEN**

DANIELLA VINITSKI MOONEY

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT
FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF FINE ARTS
GRADUATE PROGRAM IN THEATRE

YORK UNIVERSITY
TORONTO, ONTARIO
APRIL 2023

© Daniella Vinitiski Mooney

ABSTRACT

The Pearl is a multidisciplinary solo performance, integrating film noir and sci-fi B film aesthetic within the conventions of meta-theatre. The driving story is autoethnographic narrative and speaks to both the mourning process and the reconstitution of self post-trauma. In 2015, Vinitski Mooney discovered a briefcase containing substantial medical and legal records pointing towards severe medical malpractice experienced by her late father on the part of his presiding physicians. This live and filmed performance is a reclamation of her father's narrative and her dramatized existential response. As auteur, Vinitski Mooney embarks on a heightened research-creation methodology, melding the contemplative with the dramaturgical towards a final project integrating original performance, direction, dramaturgy, and writing, as well as intermedial design. To this end, dramaturgical focus included archive-led research and the friction between the live and filmed event. More specifically, Vinitski Mooney is concerned with the function of staged memory from a narrative, spatial, and kinetic lens, and how repetition and the surreal dramaturgically inform a play about mourning, loss, and dementia. *The Pearl* is a play about devastation and redemption, and seeks to be as equally haunting as it is provocative.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS & DEDICATION

For Eric Armstrong: you inspired me to come to York fifteen years ago when I heard you speak at a conference on Shakespeare and thought, this is an artist I wish I knew. It has been a dream working with you. Thank you for your heartfulness & your patience.

For Jamie Robinson, your support and presence has been a keystone to this performance, and I admire and am grateful to get to know you and your artistry over the process. It has been a gift.

JP Marchant: Thank you for taking on this endeavor. You have been the brightest witness and support of the evolution of this project, and specifically the archive, which is its heart. You have been its validation and its launch. Thank you.

For Erika Batdorf: Art queen. Dervish. Genius. Inspiration. I will always think back on these two years and your magic brilliance with gratitude.

For Steve Wangth, for Joanna Rotte, for Mary Overlie, for Merrill Lessley, thank you for believing in me when my world was stilled.

~LOVE~

To the JAMS and the FOXES; you know who you are; I would have died a million deaths without you.

To my husband, the first the last the always. Thank you for your keen dramaturgical mind, your fortitude, your sacrifice, your love, your passion & humor, and your presence in our lives.

For my children: your brilliance knows no bounds and your inspiration is limitless. In honoring your grandfather, I honor you.

For my mother, and all she has given and all she has endured. For being the best grandmother to them in all the world.

For my father: now and always, may your light burn brighter and with greater radiance wherever you are. I love you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements & Dedication.....	iii
Table Of Contents.....	iv
List Of Figures.....	v
Artistic Challenge.....	1
Methodology	11
Conclusion.....	20
Works Cited.....	25
Appendix	
Appendix A: Collaborators & Timeline (Divided by Term).....	26
Appendix A: <i>The Pearl</i>	28
Appendix B: Select Journals.....	47

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1: <i>The Pearl</i> Marketing Poster.....	19
FIGURE 2: Early Storyboard Image	49
FIGURE 3: Early Projection Experiments: Sample “Chapters”.....	50
FIGURE 4: <i>Carnivals & Snowstorms</i> archive still: “Memory”.....	51
FIGURE 5: <i>The Pearl</i> Briefcase Reveal Archive.....	55

Artistic Challenge

The Pearl is a personal narrative chronicling two decades of family trauma specific to medical negligence leading to permanent brain damage of my father, a formerly world-celebrated scientist and Ukrainian-Jewish and Canadian refugee, and his resultant premature death. This play specifically centers on two points in time: his formal diagnosis twenty years ago, and the period of time around his passing, where I gained a deepened understanding of his life narrative and fresh outlook. More descriptively, *The Pearl* is metatheatrical multidisciplinary solo show about navigating my early 20's as an actress in London and New York while dealing with my father's dementia due to medical disability. The piece borrows from film noir and sci-fi B film ambience, and also integrates a metatheatrical approach through an additional character of "the stage manager", who continuously interrupts the action to comment on the show.

Shortly after my father's passing in 2015, I became in possession of extensive medical and court testimony records for a case that never went to trial; my dramaturgical overarching question and obligation since that time as an artist became: *how do I create a work both true to my experimental theatre vision, and tell my father's story with integrity?* Upon asking this question, I realized his story and my signature artistic voice are not at odds, but complement each other in their embrace of the surreal. I furthermore realized that his story is intrinsically linked to mine, and the result was the creation of this performance, whose contents integrate both father and daughter autobiography through the lens of trauma.

My primary challenge became the return to live performance not only through the context of the pandemic, but also a reemergence out of scholarship and teaching in an immersive return to live art. **My artistic challenge is: how do I balance the multiple roles of lead artist (performer, director, playwright, designer and dramaturg)?** This question is further complicated by the high-tech angle I am hoping to use as a multimedia deviser, and my shift to auteur, rather than as historical collaborator.

This project and its challenges are inspired by Bessie award-winning artist David Neumann's *I Understand Everything Better*, a dance-theatre and multimedia production *The New York Times* describes as "a sinuous blurring of fiction and truth that mines and merges topics"—dying and caretaking, death and nature—to address unanswerable questions," and which Neumann created in response to his own parents' passing. This production, as well as the structurally subversive, sometimes colloquial, and holisitically profound work of African-American playwright Brandon Jacob Jenkins also greatly inform my process. At

the same time, my goal is to create work uniquely my own, and to arrive at an artistic signature that reaffirms my place in society and self-identity as an artist. I also take cue from immersive theatre genius director, Michael Counts, who in sharing his own early process stated, “I had to make the shows that I did. The idea of not was more terrifying than anything. I was driven by a need to create ... It was like life and death to me” (19 September 2012).

In this short paper, I will address the challenge of generating and producing a work as Lead Artist through the specific responsibilities of: actor, director, playwright, and dramaturg. My aim is towards a theatre that is intelligent, fresh, and relevant, an ideal which Canadian playwright Jordan Tannahill describes as having “beauty, pathos and virtuosity” within the rigor of conceptual framework (12). In other words, my goal for this project is to create a work that is beautiful, fresh yet haunting, redemptive, and deserving of its subject, my father.

Background

Over the past decade, I have integrated scholarship and performance in the praxis of what I term embodied research. In 2020, I was extremely privileged to give a book talk on my manuscript subject, GALE GATES, an immersive NYC theatre company on a zoom guest lecture for the University of Bristol. At conclusion, professor Dr. Karen Skinazi asked me my views on practitioner-scholarship, to which I emphasized the combined benefits of the theoretical and embodied knowledge it provides. My MFA thesis demands an immersive creation-as-research process which I view as the truest and most exciting litmus of theory put into practice. Despite my multiple cross-overs between scholarship and performance theory, evidenced through peer-reviewed article, chapter, and manuscript publications such as with *Theatre Survey*, *Theatre Journal*, *Theatre History Journal*, Routledge, and Bloomsbury, my relationship to live stage presence and the act of performing became naturally dulled due to underuse. To this end, my largest artistic challenge has been entering the live performance space as an actor-director and to submerge into the unknown and perform, rather than intellectually dictate how I imagine my performance to be, as is the academic impulse. I have been pleasantly surprised by my ease in re-entering and reenergizing the rehearsal hall and performance space, as well as comfort. There is a colloquial sense of returning home. However, the challenge of process is further encumbered by my multi-hyphenated artistic identity and how to envision and execute production elements, including design, with balance, integrity, and finesse.

Early Methodology & Conception

My artistic process is a meld of intuition and revision, led by objective. In other words, over the process, I am aware of where my project is heading in terms of narrative arc, focal points, and content. This anchoring allows me to experiment and take risks in the studio space in a surrender to creative response.

In early stages, this nebulous intuitive arena manifests for me visually and kinesthetically. For example, when entering the rehearsal space, I knew that the aesthetics of the train station, and its imbued suggestion of waiting, wanting, and languor, would feed the world of my play through visual metaphor. For reasons both magnificent and mysterious, even to me, I knew that a rickety vintage spaceship was central to my visual storyline, and would also serve to bring a climactic (albeit enigmatic) meaning. Upon reflection, this rocket image is reminiscent of my quaint childhood, ensconced in my best friend's suburban bedroom, watching vintage science fiction in a time predating her own mother's death and the subsequent rupture of our innocence. The rocket also seems to speak to my experience watching the 2013 remount of monolith director Robert Wilson's *Einstein on the Beach*. The miniature rocket that trailed over the stage in Act Three was rickety, quaint and toy-like, evoking both innocence and a childlike astonishment over the universe. Indeed, the dreamy subconsciously and vision-driven process early in my methodology was in debt to surreal predecessors such as Wilson, where "no one person could definitively say what the pictures 'meant' or tell their 'story,'" but "suggested something personal and profound," (Rockwell 48).

I also saw the physical act of reaching upwards as a visual and kinetic keystone of the work. In this way, the aesthetics of living sculpture became particularly resonant. Specifically, its suggestion of recurring and trapped time, its dreamy allusion, and its historical avant-garde roots arriving out of "stunning [glam rock] tableaux" (Goldberg 169) collectively referenced my interest in highlighting the aesthetics of the dream, the passage of time, and glorious, vintage visual appeal. More specifically, the character of The Actress, to be detailed later in this paper, has multiple ethereal dances integrating a choreographic strained reaching. In these early visionary stages I also repeatedly saw a character in 1940's garb with their arms thrust in front of their face, blinded by an enigmatically arrived spaceship.¹ In sum, I entered the empty

¹ In my interview with Pig Iron co-founder Quinn Bauriedel on physical dramaturgy, he references the poetry term "synecdoche" which he defines as "the thing that stands for the whole" and which I definitively experience as his description of "a signature movement of [a] play that was abstract yet grounded in something bigger than social gesture" (Vinitski Mooney 171). Part of my artistic challenge also lies in defining the piece's synecdoche without being reductive or over-intellectualizing product over event, which these specific movement gestures speak towards.

playing space, a coinage of the late and greatly renowned director Peter Brook 's book, *The Empty Space*, for its magical potentialities, in the knowledge that whatever I was to generate, these images would become thematically central. Another metaphor may be that of puzzle pieces, where my process was akin to assembling a total structure from these “puzzle” visions. It is this methodological balance between the cerebral, intuitive, and structural, which anchored my process.

Challenges: Acting

Upon the deepened understanding of my father's dementia, its relationship to medical malpractice, and the collective trauma it created, I placed my acting ambition on pause. The autoethnographic narrative of my thesis solo performance, *The Pearl*, speaks to this arc and disintegration as an actor in response to family circumstance. The largest artistic challenge for me became returning to acting in the present, through the context of my significant training at the NYU Tisch School as well as the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London, and conservatory Stella Adler training in Philadelphia. My history in performance and its notable pause loomed big despite the occasional acting with companies over the years both fringe and notable. At the same time, the urgency of this personal story and the rare opportunity to create it over a two-year workshop process through the MFA program inspired me. According to Stella Adler, “it is through the thinking about, and experiencing the magnitude of, the eternal questions of life, to which there are no easy answers... that the modern actor becomes articulate on stage” (Rotte 36). Indeed, this story, its creation and enactment provides such agency.

I took on this challenge in multiple ways. The first was by integrating my history and current role as a reemerging actress into the storyline by creating a meta-role titled “The Actress;” The Actress is thread through the piece and her circumstance mirrors my own challenges of the time. In the performance, she is seen going on multiple auditions in a play “titled *The Actress*, written by The Actress.” The Actress signifies a darling 1940's ingénue, and her performance is intended to be both endearing and ridiculous with a glimmer of the philosophical, reminiscent of myself of that time. In other words, I converted self as lapsed performer and activated it into a character mirroring my own 20's, while giving the aesthetic distance of the film noir ambience. In effect, I created a character allowing my own real-time performer optimal joy, as this

character celebrates the act of performance and allows me to stylistically comment on the passage of time, while allowing for virtuosity.

In further meta-style, I created the role of the Stage Manager, a tongue in cheek reference to my own self as auteur, who randomly interrupts the film noir performance and breaks the 4th wall by speaking to the audience, and reveals she is in effect running the show. The Stage Manager character provides exposition and imaginatively explains where she hopes to take the film noir narrative, ranging from the practical to the utterly profound. My intention with this character is to bring both levity and heartbreak, as the character often blurs the lines between the performance within the performance (the “film noir”) and her own meta-character, thereby fusing anecdotal stories of my own lived experience and that of “The Actress.” In this way, the Stage Manager character allows me, the solo performer, an easy access into the pleasure of acting from a clown perspective as she brings not only explanation, but also comedy and vulnerability. In dramaturgical effect, the nature of this character subverts expectation in a blur of real-time event and the metatheatrical. In creating this character I also take cue from what Tannahill describes as playwright Jacob Jenkins’ “moments of rupture” (131) when the audience is “plunged ... into the world of theatrical illusion” for it to only to be broken and resurrected again “in an elaborate construction meant ... to make us feel something.”² It is in this vacillation between suspension of disbelief and theatricalized autoethnographic event, and the structural interruptions between them, where meaning is made.

The most important facet of my acting challenge however lies in the performance itself. No writing or theorizing can trump the act of performing and existing in the live space—the nuts and bolts of acting. I aided this re-entry through the methodology of rehearsal; that is, the through the repetitive booking of space, the journey to the studio, and the surrender to the fusion of actor impulse and text innate to the art form. During my mid-20’s and at the height of my father’s medical trauma, I also began experiencing intense stage fright and stopped acting for a number of years. It was only after serendipitously running into mentor and Master Grotowski teacher Steve Wangh, author of *Acrobat of the Heart* a decade later in Colorado, that through our conversation I understood that the intensity of the time had naturally called for a pause. Over the years, I have since found myself pleasantly surprised to find a diminishment of stage fright when given

² This act of theatrical subversion Tannahill describes has many historical predecessors, arguably and most notably in Russian visionary and activist Vsevolod Meyerhold. Meyerhold’s advocacy of “the Grotesque” fosters ambivalence among the audience which the artist preserves with “strokes of contrast” taking the spectator from “a plane the strokes spectator has just reached to another which is totally unforeseen” (White 183)."

the occasion to perform, and anticipated nerves have seemed to reverse into dynamic self-possession. Often, I am reminded of Adler again in the context of my own mid-age return to the stage: “‘Shyness is vulgar,’ she would shout when no one jumped up to work. ‘Keats died at 28! What are you waiting for?’” (Rotte 22).

A large factor in the dissipating of stage fright seems to be time, but also preparation. To this end, rehearsal served as the greatest contribution towards overcoming this artist sub-challenge. Only through the physical act of rehearsal and performance, through structured visits and revisits, and the implantation of body, imagination, and play through rehearsal, could my objective—to remedy years of paused performance and a re-emergence into professional grade work—be made. My methodology also included honing my actor’s craft through revisiting old, familiar, and fresh techniques, from Linklater voice work, to Alexander Technique’s focus on dynamic rest, to York University Graduate program director Erika Batdorf’s revolutionary somatic technique, which I visited to the best of my ability over my third term while also performing the lead in a local independent film (in itself a notable return to performance.) In other words, only through the act of full-bodied rehearsal and performance could I truly attend to the major challenge of performance.³

At the same time, I was also led by Adler methodology and the central definition of acting as “truth,” which I sought out first through somatic body-based and choreographic experimentation, before moving into more stylized character-based performance. “For Adler, to act was to do an action truthfully—in a style—in given circumstance” (Rotte 19); however, it was only after discovering the given circumstance and imaginary world of the play through improvisation and performance-led research that I gained enough specificity to understand my characters and this performance approach. Interestingly for Stanislavsky as director, staged truthfulness is represented in a nuanced semiotics; he defines the difference between “artistic and non-artistic truth” for example between a painting and a photograph, describing the latter as reproducing everything” whereas “the former only what is essential” (Jones 35). For me this translates into the creation of an imaginary world over the course of process that can allow for truthful behavior captured in a stylization that is both subtle and artful, suggestive of the world of the play and the

³ I was also in contact with a New York group by the name of the MAMAS towards virtual weekly workshops with a focus on Liz Lerman technique; sadly, this did not pan out, but merits mention for its worthiness and potential for future collaboration and performance.

inner state of the characters, rather than demonstrably naturalistic. This artistic challenge and aim will rest on continued experimentation, rehearsal, streamlining, and embodiment.

Directing, Design, & Writing

My second artistic challenges under the umbrella of Lead Artist are that of serving as director. While I am not formally trained in theatre direction, I have had the great privilege of working with renowned directors and choreographers in professional and academic venues, such as but not limited to 6-Viewpoints founder Mary Overlie, Theatre Communications Group lifetime achievement awardee Daniel Banks, USA National Endowment of the Arts recipient Whit MacLaughlin, and immersive genius and the subject of my Routledge manuscript, director Michael Counts. I have also worked and studied with companies such as Pig Iron Theatre, Colorado Shakespeare Festival, Elevator Repair Service and others who serve to inspire my work.⁴ My evolved methodology as a director is two-pronged with an emphasis in script-analysis, and aesthetic vision.

My artistic challenge as a director in this self-produced work is that I had neither a ready-script available to me, nor the vantage of an outside eye. Traditionally, “the play script is assumed to be a blueprint, an architectural rendering of a three-dimensional building that is second place to the actual building, or in the case of dramatic literature, to the performance” (Chirico 2). However, notably the devised process often begins with no script but is organically created over the production process, and resultant text is multidisciplinary. According to Tannahill “the play’s ‘text is more than words– it’s performance, it’s staging, it’s design. A dramatic text is multisensorial. The playwright and their dramaturg will never have all the answers, nor should they try to” (57). Similar to my acting challenge, my methodology was to face the unknown element of the creation process and script head on and fold it into the program. One example of this as cited above was the creation of the Stage Manager character, a director/producer/creator-at-large whose explosive imagination reflects my role as director back to me, and allows me to maneuver this project with joyous deftness. Another means of meeting the artistic challenge of “director” was expanding the notion of “outside eye” and creating a literal viewing atmosphere I could experience and refine in real time. Borrowing from dance and choreographic methodology, I booked mirrored studios which allowed me

⁴ I specifically worked with CSF as actor, assistant director, and dramaturg for two seasons, studied under Pig Iron through multiple workshops and served as a grant team writer for their 2019 Mimi Lien fringe production, and took a workshop with ERS while presenting on GALE GATES at a Theatre Research symposium,.

to watch myself in performance and alternatively experiment with and without self-aware performance modes. This proved invaluable but also taxing; organic response was sometimes dulled in the act of repeated filming and witnessing, as well as difficult for my modest multimedia budget. It proved most helpful from a choreographic lens, consistent with my experience working with dancers. I also recorded my studio workshops in order to refer to them in the future for clarity and revision purposes. This was particularly helpful in the capturing of image and performance in front of an audience and dynamic moments I hope to recreate.

Finally, as a director without a script utilizing the devised theatre process, I allowed my director process to inform my writing; as I experienced and witnessed structural gaps within the performance, I noted those moments that need further massage and clarity for optimal narrative event, and mentally assigned selections for me to write in order to fill those lacunas. As a final directing challenge, I am both a collaborator and auteur, and the balance of DIY (do-it-yourself) aesthetic versus working with a design team as is standard in traditional productions, was difficult. Without designated collaborators, this piece became my vision from a designer stand-point as well, and my process and execution in that regard is still in early stages. Because I am not a designer or visual artist by training, this posed a challenge I later met.

Dramaturgy

My dramaturgical challenge centered on the theoretical idea of memory; the question became, how can I create a piece that is essentially about dementia, mourning, and absence in such a way that its structure imparts meaning? My initial impulse was to center this question in an exploration of the playing space and repetitive movement, which atmospherically called for the surreal.

I became concerned with exploring the semiotics of memory and its relationship both within the performing body, such as in dance, kinesphere, and gesture; and space configurations, such as architecture; and how the layering of stage image can be recreated in the audience's mind so as to create a cumulative feeling of palimpsest, or what I term "ghosting".⁵ In other words, I am interested in how visual

⁵ The notion of "palimpsest" or "writing over writing over writing" (Pearson 136) is often described in site-specific works and the overlay of site history, its contemporary operation, and the meaning created and transcribed over in production, allowing for a multi-layered event. My theoretical use of palimpsest here is the intention of repetitive movement and living sculpture, including sound sculpture, to be re-invoked in the space, and the resultant creation of real-time memory. Palimpsest can also speak to the written narrative itself, and the repetition and reframing of the same story, (in this case memories), of various characters. It can live within text, and also prop.

compositions on the performance stage can create meaning through real-time manifestations, erasure, and absence, and the symbolism of these actions.

Through rehearsal, I realized that the surrealism of the play was best captured in the blurring of real-life events and film noir plot narrative; this act was embodied in the Stage Manager character herself, who mixes exposition between the two storylines. I further realized that the multi-faceted contrasting characters of solo performance innately speaks to the nature of self and memory, and additionally, that repetition and its consequential meanings and impact could be equally explored in text (through fragmentation, repeated and inverted anecdotes) as within the playing space itself. In other words, through rehearsal I began to move away from the *mise-en-scene* as the dramaturgical signpost of memory, and realized that I could comment on the dementia and feelings of loss itself through script.

A core dramaturgical question within the story of self and play was also: “how do I integrate my father’s archival papers in a way that is seamless and evidentiary?” This question led me to create an archive film developed through the York graduate film department. Ideally this archive film serves to dramaturgically merge all storylines: the film noir, the struggles of the Stage Manager character, and most of all myself in bringing my father’s story, and my own struggles, to light. It is my hope that the explicitly concrete object of film (versus the ephemerality of theatre), accentuated in a live theatre space, and the filming of archives specifically, serves to give the clearest testimony to my father: that he lived, and that this was our story. Structurally, the filmed archives in effect become an archive of the live performance itself, and in this way, testimony.

Conclusion

In summary, my driving artistic challenge between first and second year summer was that of embodying the role of lead artist and its multiple complex sub-roles of acting, directing, playwriting, and dramaturgy, and the nuanced balance between them as a solo performer. I was dramaturgically led by the desire to create a story that unpacks my father’s personal narrative as a world-famous scientist who went into premature disability and death due to medical negligence, and its emotional, vocational, ideological, and theological impacts on me. To this end, I knew that I was going to work towards a piece that centered my story as a budding actress as much as my father’s journey through disability, and most of all our relationship. In order to tell his story best, I felt the medium of film and more specifically, the filming of his

medical and court archives, lost to time, played a structural keystone. A significant amount of time was spent not only in the studio and rehearsal hall, but also the filming and refinement of this autoethnography from an archival-focus. Like the metatheatrical solo performance itself, the integration of filmed medium, and specifically filming archives, poses key thematic questions on the subjects of ontology, memory, and the friction between permanence and absence. It also reshapes history, and in the re-telling of my father's story, gives new dignities and framework to his life arc, and honors him in a way that institutional life did not. It is not without irony that his story is told through my multi-faceted performance, as my own journey as a young artist and actress also experienced collateral damage. In reconstituting his story, I am also enacting myself, and connecting the personal past to the now in a way that I hope is urgent and gives fresh agency. It is specifically in the performatively inhabiting of self as young performer, in a paradigm playwright Clare Barron describes as "ghost play" (2) that I hope the loss of self-identity and reconstruction in real time becomes visible. In this way, personal trauma (and subsequent healing) does not need explicit narration but becomes structurally implied.

Moving forward, I would like to continue to focus on the atmospheric balance of the ethereal and the kitsch, which have been described to me as performance strengths. I also wonder how emo-punk aesthetic, a resurging legacy of the 1990's music scene and an artifact of my personal story, will continue to infuse the play. I would like to focus more on object journey, and specifically that of the briefcase/luggage, whose presence seems to encapsulate my own aesthetic and performance tropes: that of the vintage, poetic, and clown. From an acting perspective, I am wondering about the balance between character embodiment and style, and the role of Shakespeare, which I would like to better infuse through the text, and which currently serves to punctuate moments in the play while also allowing myself to skirt through different acting challenges, from the natural to stylistic. My future goals upon completion of the text include: continued rehearsal and embodiment, acting coaching and guidance through the lens of style, finalized design, and ultimately integrating the Erika Batdorf Technique in final performance. My remaining dramaturgical concerns include: technically refining film audio as a non-technician, finding a way to dramaturgically integrate a second more abstract video (completed but not addressed here) in a way that is consistent and makes good sense within the poetic logic of the play world, and finally, a way to motivate the finale briefcase reveal.

Methodology

Trauma-Informed Contemplative Dramaturgy: Intuition and Archive as Process

Over the process of research-creation for my thesis solo performance, *The Pearl*, I cultivated a reflective practice which I term “contemplative dramaturgy.” My early methodology was largely archival-led, and I took inspiration from my lived knowledge of contemplative acting training models and shifted the focus from somatic mediation towards the dramaturgical when studying the archival material. The contemplative-dramaturgy model I arrived at privileged the authentic over product or speed, as well as the sensory, the intuitive, and imagistic over Aristotelian arc. The most notable feature of this contemplative dramaturgy model was permission to rest and allow source material to percolate in the subconscious, thereby giving time for dramaturgical structure to unfold in a slowed but organic way.

This meditative process is in accord with the Initiative for Contemplative Study and Practice at James Madison University, a leader in this methodology, and who defines contemplative practice on their website as “transformative” in helping to develop “capacities for deep concentration and quieting the mind” and leveraging this state of calm towards exploring “meaning, purpose and values.” My method of contemplative dramaturgy is also in sync with the early but emerging values of trauma-informed theatrical process, which too privileges time, space, as well as boundaries. Finally, in cultivating this process I took inspiration from my interview with Obie-award winning Pig Iron co-founder Quinn Bauriedel, who described a similar methodological shift from material to lived impulse, sharing, “Sometimes.... the idea is to marinate in all this material [music, visual art, the tangential, or books].... And then we put it away and improvise. So the physical dramaturgy becomes, “How do all those ideas and responses emerge on stage?” (Vinitski Mooney *Syndoché* 172)

This dramaturgical process of contemplation and intuitive knowledge also informed my aesthetic and ambient choices for the stage, which were further designated by budget necessity—culminating in DIY (or more commonly known, “do-it-yourself”) punk-originated aesthetics, meshing the edgy, the sublime, and the self-consciously amateur. The result was frequent slow promenades through dollar stores and yard sales where I discovered key props and set material through a quieted meditation with the materials; the

cumulative effect was a gathering of goods that suggested the nostalgic and vintage, appropriate for a performance centering the past.

However, I discovered this contemplative process and DIY aesthetic seemed at odds with my natural directorial tendency towards the spectacle and the large; ultimately, this contemplative dramaturgy led me to an ambitious vision that melded both: the creation of an original archive film to be integrated with the live through intermedial projections, and which was crafted in my home basement through a flurried improvisation centering my father's literal medical and court archives, as well as symbolic vintage goods, and my own confessional self. However, when it came time to embody the script material, I shifted the contemplative dramaturgical process towards the ontological and spiraled back to my original point of inspiration: contemplative acting-training. In this way, I was able to ease myself from meditative yet intellectual inquiry towards the kinetic and the lived through theatrical play. Meditation, Alexander, and other somatic techniques played a key role in calming my nervous system, apropos for a performance impingent upon trauma and its retelling.

The following is broken into four parts: 1) archives as research and a contemplative dramaturgical approach 2) "DIY dreaming" and the relationship of material design arrived out of intuition, and finally 3) the process of embodiment arriving out of contemplative process, and its peripheral relationship to trauma-informed practice, an emerging trend in the field.

Archives as Research through a Contemplative Dramaturgical Approach

At age three, my child once turned to me and stated: "dizziness is a kind of sadness." The amount of paperwork relating to my father's medical neglect and subsequent permanent brain damage, as well as erasure of malpractice through the judicial system through the denial of his expert witness, indeed left myself—for lack of a better word—dizzy. However, over the process of research-creation it became crucial to me to revisit the documents repeatedly and to physically sift through them, not only so as to prepare me for the emotional/psychological load of traumatic content, thereby allowing ownership of my trauma-informed practice, but also giving myself real-time bodily agency. It was my aim to soften into contemplation through repeated exposure to the material, giving permission both for immediate emotional-response as well as absorption.

I revisited the paperwork constantly through its rereading, which proved both emotionally difficult as well as challenging to comprehend in terms of the scope of injustice; however, it was through this act of repetition, distance, and reflection that I was able to distill a singular feeling: outrage. Through contemplation I was then able to translate this outrage to a central content thesis question, that being: how does one resolve injustice? Over time and meditation, the dramaturgical answer revealed itself to be the imaginative dramatization of the trial that had never taken place due to the presiding Judge's denial of my father's expert witness; moreover, it was within this fantastical trial that I realized an opportunity to give myself testimony and speech, thereby bringing light to both my father's and my own repressed narratives.

Revisiting the archives through a contemplative lens proved not only conceptually informative, but also spoke to ultimate performance quality. I noted the physical heaviness of the documents, for example, when holding them, and observed their visually fragmentary nature. Though chronicling a narrative based in sequence and accumulative trauma, the nature, tone, and dates of the documents themselves were inconsistent; at times there would be multiple copies of one document, in another instance there would only be a rare singular testament. I also became aware of documents I had read but had gone missing: the handwritten confession of the doctors themselves in their medical notes, when they ask, years before my father's ineluctable diagnosis of dementia: "could it have been the medicine?" I became aware of the absence of my father's letter of termination from full professor, months before his formal disability assessment, where his chair credits him with "placing the department on the map" and next inelegantly declares his termination. Through the lens of absence, I became aware of my own memoir, *A Language of Time*, written shortly after accumulating these documents, and its ode to my father and its poetic and painful dissection of events.

Perhaps the greatest gap I discovered through a mindful revisiting of the archives was the missing voice of expert witness, Harvard-researcher and controversial anti-pharmaceutical specialist, Dr. Breggin himself. While Dr. Breggin was not permitted to testify by the presiding judge under the notion that his testimony was "unscientific" (a dubious and paralyzing claim), I had multiple records of his compelling expert witness testimony at my disposal. To this end, it became all the more imperative that I speak through an imagined testimony. In paging through these documents again and again, I considered the nature of the unutterable, and those structural moments in performance where silence may reign. Through contemplative and archive-led dramaturgy, the structure of the play was born, and its climax found in my staged testimony.

In another example of imaginative staging arrived out of contemplative and archive-driven dramaturgy, as well as acknowledgement of absent voices, I created a letter derived from my father's own documents. While I could not locate any of my father's testimony at his pretrial, I did have in my possession a letter from my father. With respectful delicacy, I excerpted his letter and added content of my own, which I then integrated into the body of performance in the form of a note that the character the Stage Manager shares with the audience, stating: "Before he died, [the character of] The Father writes a letter, and he composes it to you. Here, I have it," next revealing the letter from her coat pocket and reading it aloud, ending with the question: "Did he [the Father character] really write this? The truth is nebulous. But when you know, *you know*." In this the performance creates the atmosphere of a trial, and one where my father is given retroactive voice.

Over the course of this contemplative dramaturgy I also came to realize the obvious but elusive fact that the archives—the literal documents, their filming, and the integration of archive into the live—served as a means of remembrance, a crucial dramaturgy in the context of a play about fear of forgetting and dementia. I highlighted the import of archives by archiving myself. Borrowing from my interview with Bauriedel where he shares the concept of "syndoché" through a physical dramaturgy lens, and which he defined as "the [poetic gesture] that stands for the whole," (Vinitski Mooney *Syndoché* 171), I sought to find those organically derived dance-gestures within the piece that came to represent the heart of the narrative from an embodied lens. While the character of the Actress later performs these gestures in a cumulative dance, described as "a means of remembering so as not to forget", it is perhaps the climactic testimony reveal which gives greatest meaning to self-archive. In this moment, I perform the improvised monologue/confession derived from my documentary film, thereby resurrecting my deepest sentiments through my live performance.

In sum, through this contemplative-archival research process, I became aware of heaviness, repetition, and absence, which in turn informed the dramaturgical structure of the play. The developing echoes and interruptions intrinsic to its dramaturgy thereby spoke to its larger themes of dementia, remembrance, and mourning. However, another question arose over the process of revisiting the archives through meditation: how can one reveal masses of paperwork onto a stage space in a way that is meaningful and arresting? The answer revealed itself through the lens of film. Film too became a medium of testimony, where the overwhelming nature of the documents could be captured and viewed holistically through

cinematic aesthetics, such as accumulation, snapshots, and materialism, thereby countering the ephemeral nature of both theatre and mortality itself. I discovered that film as testimony was my means of delivering the tangible and creating questions around the culpable. In this way, the film archive became a means by which I dramaturgically suggested performance as trial, through the lens of cinema and the evidentiary.

DIY Dreaming: Vintage Materialism and the Spectacle of Film

I knew that the autoethnographic documentary film I sought to create would take place in my half-furnished basement, whose very location became reflective of the underground nature of my father's narrative and institutional silencing. Through contemplative archive-led research, I also discovered filming concept: I knew I was going to film myself smoking in the basement while reflecting on the story of my father and simultaneously sifting through the archive documents, thereby performing our lived bond while exploiting the semiotics of smoking and the archives themselves. This location choice was also out of necessity; I knew that I needed extensive space to show the accumulation of paperwork. Cigarettes had also earlier entered the semiotic vocabulary of the performance, originally as iconic film noir symbol (one of the main aesthetic threads I strived towards), but also as a reference to my father, whose penchant for life in all its vice and sweetness, from Parisian cakes to coffee shop chats to cigarettes, as well as our autoethnographic history of sharing snuck cigarettes through my adult life. Most importantly, filming the archives delivered gravitas through cinematic witnessing and visibility; at the same time, the sheer volume of paper was impossible to frame in its entirety, and the fragmented and chance documents underlined a story too difficult and too large to tell in entirety. Finally, in filming the medical and court documents, I was also able to include my own work and memoir, *A Language of Time*, which became a visual motif of the piece and whose scattered references (such as to the literal Pearl Theatre in New York City, where I had worked, also a central location in the imaginary play of my thesis) became seeds for the performance itself through retroactive citation.

As part of my contemplative-material dramaturgy, the concept of serendipity, borrowed from my interview with immersive theatre directing icon Michael Counts, also came into play. In our published interview, Counts shared the relationship of chance material encounter to the formation of his works:

There are a few books that came into my life; I've often described it as I felt like they jumped off the shelf into my arms. I'm walking through The Strand [bookstore], there are a million books, and there it is. And that book changed my life. I can't describe it. It's happened a few times. And one of those books was *World's Great Letters*. There were various accounts. Dostoyevsky writing to his brother after he was almost assassinated, to letters of obscurity. It was a portrait of human history through correspondence. And that book changed my life. I would build pieces around some of the ideas and letters and relationships and the stories that were revealed. There was another book similar to that, "Eyewitness to History." Which was the burning of Rome and which was the birth of [major company work] *Field of Mars* and a whole universe of symbols.

(Vinitski Mooney *Immersive*)

In preparation of the filming event, with this conversation with Counts in mind, I visited a large local corner thrift with a conglomeration of odds and ends from décor to bedding to clothes and toys. On that day and since, I frequented the store with both openness and agency, which allowed for inspiration. On that particular day, intuition led me to a bag of rose-shaped candles; in seeing them I experienced an immediate visceral certainty that they would become essential semiotics to my film. Indeed, over the sequence of filmed improvisation the candles became multifold in symbolism; they became memorial and beatific, whose smoky glow visually expressed my belief in the eternal radiance of the human spirit.

I leaned into this contemplative-materialism over the course of my process through the DIY lens of low budget enterprise, repeatedly visiting, the same store and allowing for objects to reveal their purpose through what I can only describe as an intuitive magnetism. Through this methodology of promenade thrifting and sensitivity, I populated my set with other kitsch but significant antique items: large Parisian-inspired clocks, a vintage suitcase, a gingham briefcase, and boxing gloves that became symbolic of my father's nature and the "fighter" he self-describes in both his original and dramatized letters. In effect, this softening of expectation or rigid vision and a deep dive into introspection as dramaturgy collectively cued the dreamy film-noir aesthetic I sought.

Contemplation into Ontology and the Embodied Dream

Perhaps the most essential part of my methodology was moving from the cerebral and dreamy to a place of embodied performance. As a highly trained performer who had taken an extended leave from the stage in response to this trauma, I was able to lean into my foundational training in an attempt to regain performance from an authentic place. I centered somatic methodology such as Alexander Technique for the physical realm, Linklater voice work, yoga and meditation. It was my aim for these methodologies to help me transfer focus from the academic and intellectual to a place of lived imagination.

It was vital to me that I perform with integrity, as in many respects the performance is my own personal narrative of trauma and identity displacement as much as it is my father's. As the Actress character herself says, she was compelled to testify and did so with the gifts she has been given: "For she is after all, the Actress." As part of my trauma-informed methodology I had to not only reacquaint myself with parental trauma in its relation to story, but also my own personal mourning process as a former actor who had circumvented both her dream of the stage and her core performer identity. For many years I stopped performing as well as auditioning due to a prolonged nervous system response to this trauma, and my steps in regaining this identity were fraught, often denied, sometimes feeling impossible. In sum, my contemplative dramaturgical process was also the foundation that informed my return back to the stage and towards the hope of a performance that is dynamic, relaxed, truthful, and refined. Moreover, it is in this very act of triumphant and self-possessed performance where reclamation can take place.

Interestingly, the contemplative methodology I followed seems in alignment with emerging thought on trauma-informed artistic practice. Dr. Bessel van der Kolk, a researcher and psychiatrist focusing on post-traumatic stress, defines trauma as "an event that overwhelms the nervous system and alters the way one processes and recalls memories" (Hurtado-Pierson and Nyberg 13). In their essay for *Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of Americas* 20th Review, scholar-artists Christina Hurtado-Pierson and Anais Nyberg share a case study trauma-informed approach to post-COVID theatre, writing trauma-informed theatre practices "takes into account the existence of trauma in the participants ...[and] a trauma-informed rehearsal process is one that acknowledges the potential for trauma to surface in the theatrical journey and [anticipates supports]" (14).

As my own inner caretaker navigating the many traumas embedded in the story I sought to dramatize, I cultivated supports in real time, such as: defining emotional and physical boundaries, embracing lived knowledge that contemplative meditation and somatic processes were essential and helpful towards the calming of my deeply traumatized nervous system, thereby launching inspiration from a centered, calm place. I also gave myself permission—to express said emotion in the rehearsal as well as permission to not relieve the trauma but rather privilege story and arc. Finally, I also gave myself the gift of time and space in the creation of this dramaturgy, whose carefully wrought organic process I hope will support and lift me in my thesis performance and future incarnations to come.



THE PEARL

A Sci-Fi B-Film Film Noir Event About Disability Justice
By DANIELLA VINITSKI MOONEY
YORK UNIVERSITY
4700 KEELE ST. TORONTO, ONT

Friday April 14, 2023

~Time: 9:00-10:00 pm

~Room Location & Number: Centre for Theatre and Film | Room# 139 (CFT 139)

Saturday April 15, 2023

~Time: 9:00-10:00 pm

~Room Location & Number: Centre for Theatre and Film | Room# 139 (CFT 139)

Sunday April 16, 2023

~Time: 3:00-4:00 pm

~Room Location & Number: Centre for Theatre and Film | Room# 139 (CFT 139)

Fig. 1. *The Pearl* Marketing Poster

Conclusion

An Autoethnographic Film Noir SciFi B Film About Disability Justice

What is a conclusion but a farewell and a re-imagining; an idyllic vision of the future, in this case revisions and remounts, and in some cases, a rumination on regret.

It is a hard thing to balance the public and the mystical. I came home after one of the final performances and had the revelatory thought, “I need to reintegrate Hermione’s divinity.”

To explain; there is a moment near the end of *The Pearl* when the Actress character gives testimony on the innocence of her father and condemns the court in a heightened personal speech; in the final line she abruptly stands and performs a key moment from *The Winter’s Tale*, a Shakesperean play arguably about karma, the perseverance of love, and deceit. More specifically, the Actress performs a famous speech given by queen Hermione on the subject of innocence. In my play, the Actress reaches a moment of peak irony which she can only address through such ultra-heightened poetic language. Specifically, she says: “The plaintiffs ask if the father is responsible for his own suffering. I take it as a moral question. I say ‘innocence shall make false accusation blush, and tyranny tremble at patience.’” The implication being of course that those truly guilty i.e. those holding false court will ultimately be accountable. It is a provocative moment, and one that is both inexpressibly difficult and enjoyable to unravel in real time performance on the stage.

However, in coming home after feeling the distress of audience members who were personally affected by the performance, I had a profound desire to give comfort. In the recognition that desire, I turned to language. I wondered about the potency of speech, and specifically what I have anecdotally been taught as the power of “speech acts,” or the notion that language itself can halt time and provide action. It came to me that reinserting the word of “divinity” original to the Shakesperean text has the potential to suggest the possibility of a spiritual witnessing and karmic knowledge larger than ourselves. In my revision, the Actress’s eruption now reads: “The plaintiffs ask if the father is responsible for his own suffering. I take it as a moral question. I say, ‘But if powers divine behold our human action, as they do, I doubt not then but innocence shall make false accusation blush and tyranny tremble at patience.’”

I thought about other edits and changes and experiments. It occurred to me that the stage manager's naturalistic tone in interrupting the film noir action to say: "I forget what happens next. It is so hard, the forgetting," might either disarm the audience until the pleasure of realizing that the act of forgetting is itself a performance within the play, or, if too convincing, might alienate them. Borrowing from an earlier intention of repetition and use of the palimpsest, on my final evening I experimented with echoing that phrase in identical posture and emotional life later in the performance, thus underlying both blackout as well as repetitive structure, further informing the poetry and content of the play in a charged and unexpected way.

My greatest query was about emotional arc and tension; while as the performer I was encouraged to allow for grief and release, after closing I realized what served this piece best, I feel, and subject to change – is dignifying the narrative. And so ultimately those moments that I played with upping sentimentality and sorrow ultimately felt indulgent and a detraction from the story at large.⁶ Moreover, I never allowed myself to fully indulge the emotion because no moment felt adequate for such a pause of feeling. In some regards structurally this performance is about survivorship and the act of "keeping on to keep on," deliberately manifested in the many essential tasks of the stage manager character for example. As much as the characters yearn for "stopped time" (a key moment within the play) circumstance, i.e. the driving desire to locate, perform, and cultivate disability justice, pushes them forward, as does the desire to testify. In other words, time too becomes a symbol of the privilege, and a concept I hope to unpack further in future incarnations. It occurred to me too however that catharsis is earned, and in each performance I experimented with the ideal moment. I realized later that if the opportunity to cry sits anywhere, it is within the final testimony itself, where I ask, "am I supposed to be crying here?" At the same time this is play about versatility and perseverance, and perhaps here tears have no place. It is a play about strength,

I think a lot about potentialities. I think a lot about dance-gesture and the multiplicity of meaning both movement and intermediality have the potential to make. I think about breaking budgets, big grants, and grandiose collaborators. Most of all I want to work with a choreographer: while I can inhabit movement I cannot make it (not to the standards I can perform and would want to showcase); I think about the elusion

⁶ There is a good deal to potentially share about Brechtian theory here and his notion of "not this but that" as well as the obscure and fascinating stylistic choice wherein actors are encouraged to perform as if quoting the character rather than emote, which a deeper dive may serve future incarnations but ultimately lives outside the scope of this study as presented here.

to the chandelier, a real artifact (many in fact) from the original Pearl Theatre that the play so fully immerses itself in; I think about the spaceship, I think about the textual references to “better worlds” and “otherworldly underground dance clubs” and how to potentialize them viscerally in the space (I think the preshow —had the music been working at its dynamic best—touched upon this atmosphere); I think about the immersive and staging spectacle-driven climaxes. I would love the ability to recreate the spaceship moment in particular so that it is spectacular and profound. I want it to be resonant. I would have loved and look forward to the possibility of working with prop masters and designers who can craft a “briefcase reveal” that both references the childlike quality of a daughter sorting through the remnants of what her father has left behind in a hearkening to the DIY aesthetic I so often reference in my methodology, while also crafting something of beauty and style, that is sophisticated and haunting. I would love the opportunity to work with New York lighting and stage designers with the affluence of time and grants that can in turn afford us to dream big and cultivate sensorial new worlds.

I think about the future: European tours and famous East Village venue PS-122 and the backspace at Theatre Passe Muraille and FringeArts on the waterfront in dusky and gorgeous Old City Philadelphia. I think about booking a performance at the newly formed Medical Humanities program at my father’s old institution and inviting his old doctors (I wouldn’t; probably.) I think about other opportunities for intermediality and how to push (or push against?) the notion of film noir.

As an artist, sometimes I drop into a sort of hypnotic inspiration I cannot break; there’s a physical pain to stopping. When the pandemic hit, I felt obliged – on a physical, somatic, magnetic level – to write a memoir about my dad. I do not know if it was my own sense of impending mortality within a Covid world, the isolation, or the prolonged mourning process. It was a means to resolution. I named the memoir *The Language of Time*, submitted it to two idealized places, and when it was rejected allowed it to gather dust until ultimately it was given new life in the showing through the autoethnographic film.

So much of the foundational story to my performance is this memoir, and its exchange with and testimony of the past. If memory, as the Actress character describes, is a means of “not forgetting,” then by its very ontology it is a homage. So much of the artistic process is about cutting, sculpting, and streamlining. Perhaps the most heart of my memoir is the part that was first cut in the writing process. Perhaps it cut too deep. I hold onto it still, and it is my small and meaningful tribute. The memoir itself is the bedrock of my performance, and a seed for future incarnations. In conclusion, in respect to a process that is about erasure

and loss and the palimpsest, I'd like to share an excerpt, which (to quote the stage manager) I deem my own "lost testimony" here:

At night now I like to run through the plush Philadelphia suburbs known as Merion Station; I run there because the parking is easy. There are large flowers everywhere and easy lolling streets and mansions so large that they eviscerate home envy. It's a strange formula. I just want, and I feel this brutally in my heart, my childhood home and the sound of my own children passing their hard feet against its stairs, to look outside the dignified upstairs windows. I run past a stop sign that is hung upside down. I am running through a nightmare, I would tell my doctor, if I had one. I think back to my first year as a freshman at NYU, triggered by sleep paralysis, nightmares where my mind was awake by my body could not move. Some sort of malfunction in the nervous system. This was the first time I try to see a therapist. "When I'm asleep my brain wake up before my body does," I tell her. "It's terrifying". "Hold that thought," she says, "I'm going to write you a prescription." I do not return.

My father was the first person you would call after a really bad day. He was the kind of person who sits on your ripped up black futon while you nurse and tells you not to worry, tells you about the time he gave away his car to his student, the mom, and could my advisor do that for me? He was dimpled, shy, embarrassed by too much attention, countered by a penchant for performance, something of the charming professor in the lecture hall still in him, as well as the grand pianist. He was a jester and an idealist, a Renaissance man who spoke with a velvety accent, a romantic, he could quote almost any episode in history or philosopher without pause. My father had a flair for impassioned speeches, a knack for melodramatic silence, and a puzzling delight in British wit that I only learned to appreciate late in life. He knew all the cool things. He was encyclopedic in his passion for and knowledge of all music, he was gentle, he was kind, he advocated for forgiveness even in the worst of humankind. He called it "the mama bear impulse." He was also reserved, and traumatized by his disability, the knowledge that the scientific community kept spinning in a constellation he could no longer join in. I remember him once opening his flip cell phone and pushing his glasses down to his nose as he tried to acquaint himself with its technologies.

I like to run through the plush Philadelphia suburbs known as Merion Station; I run there because the parking is easy. There are large flowers everywhere and easy lolling streets and mansions so large that they eviscerate home envy. It's a strange formula. I just want, and I feel this brutally in my heart, my childhood home and the sound of my own children passing their hard feet against its looping stairs, gazing outside the dignified upstairs windows. I run past a stop sign that is hung upside down. I think about writing my father's old doctors. It begins, "I'm compelled to write you on a language that I don't know how to write. I'm compelled to reach out to you but there is nothing about you that I seek to touch. I am compelled to remind you that you wrote that you knew my father better than himself. I feel compelled to give you an opportunity for remorse. I am compelled to tell you that he died prematurely. But that he tried not to. Because he said, he had obligations. To me." I do not so much run as waltz, hip heavy, swerving, to old New York beats, my heart bursting. I run and I think about watching my daughter's perfect cherubic face when she sleeps. The pouty cheeks and the cupid mouth; the smile that she made in the delivery room when she was born, the smile that she gave my father at just two months old. The rare smile he returned.

Works Cited

- Brook, Peter. *The Empty Space*. New York: Atheneum, 1968.
- Chiciro, Miriam and Younger, Kelly. *How To Teach a Play*. Bloomsbury: New York. 2020.
- Einstein on the Beach*. Dir. Robert Wilson. Perf. Helga Davis, Kate Moran. Brooklyn Academy of Music. New York City. 16 Sept. 2012.
- Goldberg, RoseLee. *Performance Art: From Futurism to Present*. New York: Thames & Hudson/World of Art, 2001.
- Hurtado-Pierson, Christina; Gonzales Nyberg, Anais. "Trauma-Informed Approaches to Dramaturgy and Rehearsal: An Exploration in the Time of COVID-19." *LMDA Review*. Vol 26.1. 2020.
- James Madison University Initiative for Contemplative Practice and Study. Contemplative Practices. <https://www.jmu.edu/mindful/index.shtml>. Accessed 1 April 2023.
- Jones, Richard David. *Great Directors at Work*. University of California Press: Los Angeles. 1986.
- Kourlas, Gia. Review: In 'I Understand Everything Better,' Ruthless Elemental Forces. *The New York Times*. Dance Review. 2015.
- Now I Understand Everything Better*. David Neumann/Advanced Beginner Group. Bryn Mawr, 2017.
- Pearson, Mike and Michael Shanks. *Theatre/Archaeology*. London: Routledge, 2001.
- Rockwell, John. "Staging Painterly Visions". *From Within*. Ed. Margery Arent Safir. The Arts Arena: New York. 2011. 45-60.
- Rotte, Joanna. *Acting with Adler*. Limelight Editions: New York. 2020.
- Tannahill, Jordan. *Theatre of the Unimpressed*. Coach House Books. Canada: 2015.
- Vinitski Mooney, Daniella. "So Long Ago I Can't Remember: GALE GATES et al. and the 1990's Immersive Theatre." *Theatre History Studies*. Special edition: Site-Based Theatre. Volume 38. 2020.
- Bowditch, Rachel; Casazza, Jeff; and Thornton, Annette, eds. *Physical Dramaturgy: Perspectives from the Field*. "The Search for Synecdoche." Vinitski Mooney, Daniella. New York: Routledge, 2018.
- Vinitski Mooney, Daniella. *The Immersive Theatre of GALE GATES*. Monograph. Routledge. 2022.
- White, Martin. *Renaissance Drama in Action*. Routledge: London. 1998.

Appendix A: Collaborators & Timeline (Divided by Term)

Production Team & Collaborators

Daniella Vinitzki Mooney: writer, perform, filmmaker, director

Zita Nyarady: dramaturg, assistant director

Nava Waxman: film editor, visual artist

Kai Osborne: work study & projection tech specialist

Beau Morrish: lighting designer

Millie Cameron-Burelle: production manager, stage manager

Fall 2021

- enter program with vision: multimedia performance about my father's medical negligence
- revisit archives; revisit personal memoir
- percolate/experiment with forms
- apply for grants (provincial art & internal and external funding)

Winter 2022

- begin embodiment: record and document improvisation
- define and decide on characters and begin writing script
- create film installation ("little people")
- begin performing without explanation, let the gaps gape
- formulate dramaturgical structure
- visit the studio; experiment with performance, characters, dances
- experiential focus

Summer 2022

- create autoethnographic archive film
- finalize dramaturgical/narrative structure
- complete draft 1 of complete play
- begin contemplating sound + movement

- begin reaching out to collaborators
- continue embodied research in the studio

Fall 2022

- present draft 1 in full with archive with focus on dramaturgical structure
- focus on developing characters further: language, dialogue, movement
- hyperfocus on physical dramaturgical elements: clown, design, key objective question, etc
- continue to cast net for collaborators & funding
- embodied commitment to rehearsal hall; borrowing from dance choreographic technique

Winter 2023

- finalize script/begin memorization
- discover & find collaborators & production team
- rehearsal with focus on character body and vocal/physical gesture
- self-produce, market and present thesis

Appendix B: *The Pearl*

The Pearl

daniella vinitski mooney

Characters:

The Detective: simmering, somber, vitriolic; touched by the beyond; a chain-smoker for sure

The Actress: 20's, mildly ridiculously, a bit of inner fuck you. She can only speak through archival poetry, fragmented Shakespeare, or dance-gesture. Not so good with being direct. A bit of a romantic,

The SM: the thread that keeps the world together. Maybe a little bit of a magician? or just a very hard worker.

The Father: not so much a character but a presence; a beloved suggestion whose being is traced through citation; the memory of his presence evoked through props and old letters. Poisoned. He is also referred to as *The Professor* and *The Amnesiac*.

The Spaceship (potentially never seen; suggested through light and sound)

Set: Film noir Sci Fi B Film atmosphere. Glints of gold, DIY aesthetic meets otherworldly. Visually pleasing. Suggestions of shadows, mystery.

Downstage right is a suggestion of *The Detective's* office; there is a little wooden table with a phone, perhaps an astronomy book on its side. Some kind of warm light. Next to it is a reclining chaise, velvet or similar. Maybe a work desk. Sturdy; it will be stepped and danced on repeatedly. There is a suitcase or briefcase with a bowler cap near by. Inside or already placed on the table is a large folder containing *The Father/ The Professor's* secret archives. There is another chair nearby to be used later as a semblance for the court.

Downstage left or so is an open suitcase with splayed artifacts: a fake fur coat, a large clockface, candles, a train, peaches and fake roses. Maybe a glittering red Canadian baseball hat. Souvenirs from Paris. A vintage toy train. Kitsch yet evocative.

It would be nice to have a chandelier, but it is not essential.

Note: Over the course of the production, things become littered so that a sense of organized chaos, almost like the playful explosion of a little girl's bedroom, is seen taking place. Maybe.

Note 2: This piece calls for projections.

MUSIC PRESHOW 1 Tom Yorke, litanies of "fucked up fucked up" electronica Black Swan sound score. More Radiohead and similar. Galactic, moody projections.

Music dims

Projections end

Lights dim, rise. The ACTRESS takes her place front

Opening:

I. *The Actress under a spotlight. She steps forward.*

The Actress: Hello.

My name is The Actress.

Today I will be perform the role of *The Actress, the Professor's Daughter*, written by The Actress.

May I begin?

MUSIC 2 LINK [here](#).

She performs a slow dance-gesture: The Train Dance. It is perhaps reminiscent of Butoh. It ends and she stands forward. Attitude.

Thank you.

*There is the sound of A **BOXING BELL** signaling all the transitions to follow. It melds into a train sound visceral and rumbling, hopefully pervading the theater from all sides, again, as The Actress walks behind the table, transforming into THE DETECTIVE.*

II. The Detective

The Detective takes his time. He is smoking imaginary cigarettes. He exhales and flicks it away. Stomps it out dramatically.

I am The Detective.

I am the purveyor of guilt and redemption, the persistent knock at the door. I am courage.

I am the voice of the not to be forgotten, the lost, the misbegotten, those flung far and wide across the universe.

I am The Detective.

It was a dark dim rainy night and I was having a smoke when he appeared: *The Professor*.
Was he a ghost? No, but he was haunted.

I learned that he was once a famous scientist, but now slept alone in a bedroom in a corner of the earth, where he dreamed of old concerts and inventions, the creak of classical piano interwoven with the purr of the white cat that one day just showed up at his door. The Professor dreams about stars and physics still, he tells me, asleep surrounded by overflowing briefcases, his heart ransacked like vintage luggage, valuable to the world no more.

The Professor is the waft of fading cologne, the rumble of the last train. He is forgiveness and work ties and the scent of cedar forests. He is the secret that goes unsaid. He is also **The Father**.

“They tried to take my life,” The Professor tells me. The Professor mouths this, as he can no longer speak. Professor, who has done this to you? I ask,

(places hat down on the briefcase)

but The Professor has disappeared, leaving only his hat and briefcase in his place.

Boxing bell and Light change:

III. The Stage Manager

Awkward silence.

I forget what happens next...

It’s hard; the forgetting.

(It’s a very real moment.)

(long beat)

Well, welcome to the Pearl Theatre. You’ll know it’s The Pearl by the chandeliers.

(A gesture to the imaginary chandeliers)

And I am the Stage Manager.

Welcome to the story of the once brilliant Professor, and his daughter, the Actress.

Her dramaturgy is that she’s starring in her own film noir which is eternal and sentimental and terrible yet sweet. She’s a little angelic, a little poetic, a little bit of inner fuck you. Sometimes a glimmer of her father, The Professor. The Actress has been studying Shakespeare in New York and she writes existential poetry and takes night walks and gets lost in the soho rain. (beat) And she works at the Pearl. This very theatre.

Eventually, the Actress gets an agent from the Morris Agency who meets her over coffee and the agent says, “I hate flowers because they always die,” and the Actress thinks, “but I, but I’m in full bloom.” And the agent sends her on sexy calls and the Actress hates it, because she’s a rebel and an escapist, but also yearns to be pure. Meanwhile the Actress’s father is diagnosed with amnesia, and in her poetry The Actress writes it is as if the moon is pulling him away. She writes, it is as if he does not notice. And at night, the Actress has been running away to dance – to the clubs, to the speak EZs,– she dances till sunrise and then has nowhere to go home -- because these clubs, they are otherworldly. And she needs a better world. But even more so, she needs her father.

Shortly before he is struck with amnesia, the Professor has been working on a magnificent, mysterious invention to benefit all of humankind, before his doctors, we never see them we just read about them, it’s very Hamlet and Claudius and the King, because these doctors poison The Professor and give him amnesia and he dies. In their medical notes the drs even write, “Oh murder most foul and unnatural”. They do. They fucking do. They confess their guilt in their own fucking handwriting.

And what the poison does is it turns his brain to water, and his body to glass, and when the world becomes too cold, he breaks. And because it is a film noir, there is also a gun.

(PROJECTIONS: it begins with a picture of the father as a young boy. **An edited silent version of the archive video link [here.](#))**

But before he dies, the Professor writes a letter, and he addresses it to you.

Here, I have it: *(starting center then possible eventually moving to another chair in the space which later becomes a testimony chair)*

Dear Fellow Researchers:

Farewell. I did what I could and it was sufficient, I longed for what I could not redeem, and it broke me. After all, pain is the quickest teacher.

I was born in a harbor town full of piano concerts, the full moon, and secret police. I was born in fight or flight in a tortured country. When I was a boy, my father was arrested and wrongly condemned. I remember the atmosphere of growing up after his arrest. It is burned in my mind for forever.

My father had wanted me to become a pianist; but I fell in love with science instead. I asked my father for his blessing to allow me to become a physicist. I asked him from his jail cell. And because I worshipped him, I continued to play the piano as well, and I graduated top in my conservatory, I graduated 3rd in all the world.

After my father died of a stroke in jail, I joined the underground. I was detained, interrogated, and some of us went to prison. Eventually, I was stripped of my citizenship and sent to another country. It was a lottery, and I had won.

My whole life I strived for a world where actualization was in reach, for an idyllic harmonious country, for the creation of universal utopic childhoods, where the alignment of the stars and the yearning for something larger than oneself was allowed.

I do not know: was it ambitions or my nightmares that broke me? Or was it something else? My story is not from the rose garden, but the rose garden is what I seek. I was crushed by dreams. I now forget what I write as I compose it. I feel my language shrink. I have even forgotten music. They call it inorganic dementia. They claim the cause is a mystery.

The courts asked: is the plaintiff responsible for his suffering? I took it as a moral question. My work was difficult, perhaps more difficult than I ever conceived. But the truth is I was naïve, and I did not have the luxury to question anyone. These medicines are for life, the doctors told me. I believed them, because I believed their ethics were my own. But: now I know those doctors were not honorable men.

If you must remember only one thing, please know it and sketch it in your records deeply, that even through the duress and the most tremendous of hardships, even in these last moments, I have made substantial achievements — for Science. I fought and fought, until the day I could not.

I was born too sensitive for this world.

Yours very truly,

Confession of an Idiot

The Actress's Father

(The SM, Continuing)

Did he write this? The truth is nebulous. *But when you know, you know.*

(The projections have ended. SM starts taking galactic images from the desk meant to signify the Professor's briefcase interior and shows them to audience before placing downstage left as she speaks the following. Ideally they are large vintage astronomy images)

So, the last thing we have seen is, The Professor has just visited the Detective and has mysteriously vanished, *(dance gesture for vanished)* and has left his hat and briefcase instead. Meanwhile, while the Actress has missed her train and has gotten characteristically lost in the rain on her way to an audition, the Detective has gone through the briefcase, and he has questions. I call this next part, "The Interrogation."

IV. The Interrogation (Boxing bell)

The Detective:

Where were you the night of the night of the Disappearance, Actress?

Did you hold his hand, bring him cake, light his cigarettes?

Did you bring him hot tea and lean into the smell of his aging musk?

Did the world not make him feel remediated, remedial, sequestered, "made", shorn, obliterated and did you try to piece him back together after he was torn?

Where were you, Actress?

Where were you?

And did he not still try to live, with the elegant dignities of a man humbled, days passing like rain, common and beautiful?

Or, was he a snail without a shell and if so, how could he have hidden this from you? How could you not know?

Did you call him back from exile?

Did you give him proper respite?

Where were you?

Did you try to break bread and make new rituals, did you defy laws and Gds of the here now and in-between and give him credit where credit is due? Do you honor him? Do you honor him still?

Where were you, Actress?

Answer the Question.

Or: was it just too painful? And were you lost, tired, and heartbroken, and did you find cool waters elsewhere, where the trees still carry his scent.

And do they infuse you still, the nebulous signs between the worlds, incandescent and changing, and are you guided by them still?

(gently)

I am speaking of hope.

CUE HUGE MUSIC LIGHT SHIFT: THE SPACESHIP IS COMING. MUSIC LINK 3 HERE:

music (note: it would be good to get this shortened: I have a version but it needs work on the end)

SIREN RED LIGHT DRONE SPACESHIP DANCE: Ideally in slow motion against a backdrop of sirens, helicopter blades, red strobe lights and an alien drone, with music, The Detective takes out his magnifying lens and circles to the table and Detective Gesture Mystery Dance. He is thrust in light; the Detective is beamed up. If production allows, there might be a toy saucer spaceship, rickety and antique, shakily visible from the rafters in this moment, that then disappears.

BOXING BELL

V. *The Actress Goes on An Audition*

ACTRESS (*standing on table or bench; a little bit of inner fuck you*):

Hello, my name is The Actress. Today I will be performing a piece from *The Actress*, by the Actress.

May I begin?

(she begins)

i work at the pearl theatre
there are mirrors behind me and infront of me
as if I could see myself in entirety
if only I could move quickly enough

at work a young man's head is caught in the light and suddenly he is beautiful
and suddenly i ache
as we all ache for the unknowable

but what's the use
what's the use for desire, a banksafe filled only with feathers
-useless

one night at work i broke a wine glass
and he took my hand in his to check for blood.
i said, i only want for someone to let me love them.

because sometimes it is too much, these delicacies
these impermanences and abandonments, these evasive city roads, this sagging earth and sunk stars,
the fading light of my father's eyes,
the theatre that fills with people each night and then releases again.

(The Actress has finished her monologue in a dramatic reclined pose)

BOXING BELL

CUE LIGHT: SOFT AND SURREAL: A DREAM

MUSIC: [here](#)

VI. “The Vanishing”

A figure of The Father dances in recline in watery, gentle gestures, both fetal and otherworldly; he is pulled to standing (“as if by the moon”), and takes The Father’s briefcase and hat and walks slowly with back turned upstage. Upon reaching the audience, the The Father turns and lifts up a hand, signaling a light, lilely a train; the performer, now clearly The Father, walks through the audience. The light must be profound. There is a train sound rumbling again around the theatre and behind the audience. Silence. There is no bell, only stillness and silence on stage, the reverberation of what just took place. Then

BOXING BELL

VII. The Trial

The SM returns to the stage with the father’s hat and briefcase; she might be wearing a glittering red hat dollar store hat, preferably with a Canadian flag. She might have a briefcase with CRAYOLA written on the front, and a Canadian water bottle. She might not. Her hat should be identical to the hat by the open vintage suitcase, if she wears one. More likely, she takes it from the suitcase and puts it on. The set and character are fluid in this way.

Stage Manager:

Ok so, we’ve just seen the Father crossing over, and clearly we can’t see what’s there. So what we could do is stop time. So this, this is stopped time.

The SM stops time. She goes back and forth between arranging the playing space (tasks such as opening the curtain to show the mirror, move the chair more center, play with documents including taking a copy of the Breggin testimony, and take a phone off the hook if there is a phone to do so, running back and forth between these activities and stopping time, eventually

BOXING BELL

(She reads the Breggin testimony:)

“Overall, this is a tragic story of a brilliant scientist who suffered severe emotional and cognitive deterioration, resulting in dementia. The deterioration was caused by a toxic combination of medications persistently prescribed by his doctors for years. In defiance of common sense, multiple medications were added, and at no time did the doctors reduce or discontinue these medications, nor did they ever give him a drug free trial, even at the patient’s own behests. At times, they responded to his adverse effects by increasing the number and dosages.”

This is lost testimony from the Father’s expert witness during the Frye hearing, who the Judge does not allow to speak.

The Father’s expert witness is from Harvard. He is also the golden goose; a rebel, his name on the streets is the “the anti-psychiatrist psychiatrist.” He is in fact so controversial that the mob breaks into the courthouse and puts a gun to the Judge’s head and tells her, he can not testify. Or was it the judge? I think it was the Judge who points the gun at the Father. Because when she denies his expert testimony, the trial is dead.

It's a lot.

Hence the spaceship.

(She points to where the chandelier was suggested to be earlier.)

I don’t know, maybe we have a gobes for that?

(An actual stage manager in back might call out: no, no we don't. It would be nice however if the room itself somehow flickers.)

Imagine, however, that in this world, the Actress has found her way to The Pearl, to this very theatre, where there is not an audition taking place, but the trial of her father. And that finally, she is allowed to speak. You'll know it's the Pearl by the way because of the mirrors. But perhaps instead of speaking, she makes a dance, a collection of archived gestures, as a means of remembering so as not to forget:

Beatific lighting, perhaps a spotlight

MUSIC LINK [here](#):

The Actress dances a collection of gestures accumulated over the performance including archived gestures created over the process that do not make their way but whose ghostly imprint is still felt in the space; perhaps she dances over the enormous scope of vintage galaxy posters left on the floor. The dance ends.

LIGHTS UP

Stage Manager:

This dance of course only confuses the Judge, who is likely vampiric and heartless, and who demands the Actress does not even try to speak. To which, in an act of great defiance, the Actress takes the stand, and she does so with the gifts she has been given. For she is after all, the Actress.

(The Actress takes the stand. Perhaps she swears on an astronomy book in lieu of a bible:)

The Actress:

My name is the Actress. May I begin?

The last time I saw my father he was getting on the train. He was searching for his cat, Kitty Good Boy, KGB for short, a white Russian that had just one day showed up at his door. The same cat that used to lay on his chest when the pain was particularly unbearable.

My father went looking for him. I imagine that he had put on his work clothes for the first time in years; his hat, his tie and briefcase. I did not see him before he ascended the train. He did not see me. I never saw my father again.

My father was born too sensitive for this world. He was a Professor who changed the pathway of the stars.

The Judge says order in the court. I say, what court?

The plaintiffs ask if the Father is responsible for his suffering. I take it as an ethical question.

(she boldly stands)

I say: "If Powers Divine behold our human action, I doubt not then but innocence shall make false accusation blush and tyranny tremble at patience."

(The SM again)

Maybe she would say that. Probably. Or maybe, if given the opportunity to take the stand, she would have said:

(The SM takes a black binder, like what one sees at a staged reading. The final testimony is inside. It is in fact the transcript taken from the film archive, seen earlier. She transforms into the Actress again and sits. Perhaps she will be given a microphone. Perhaps she too swears in on an astronomy book. The Actress is about to begin, but then there is a clear shift as the stage manager takes over. As she speaks, there are projections of shooting stars, slowly at first, but that by end take over the playing space, ideally in an immersive 360.)

The Final testimony: *(note the references to cigarette inhales and exhales are sourced from the original monologue, which was an improvised speech given while smoking a cigarette)*

Um

My father

was...

a really lovely human being. He was born
in the city of Odessa, Ukraine, by the Black Sea
and he was trained in classical piano and
he discovered science later in life.

He slept over in my Phila apartment once. This beautiful apartment. Mostly he just wanted to sneak
cigarettes.

he still had brain damage but he was largely recovered from the toxins.
So his philosophical self was still intact (inhale)
but his short term memory was shot and he could never work again.

(long pause)

I remember many good things about that visit.

There was a lot of ease.

I mean really, it was it was about the pleasure of his company. He was very sweet. And he loved sweets. He
loved cakes se and he also loved cigarettes. And Paris.

That night he opened up to me a little about his father, the story of when his father was taken away by the
KGB and how it had traumatized him. It's always been unclear to me if he ever saw his father again.

Among the many things that were striking about that night
(cig smoke)

um
was when he shared
that despite it all
HE believed that civilization had evolved and had gotten
better.

(pause)

true he was a historian
as well as a radiologist
and a physicist
and a mathematician (laugh lite on word mathematician)
and a professor
and a pianist.

yeah.

and you know
something i'm coming to really understand
(cig exhale)
about my father's --
uh it was more than misdiagnosis
it was far more dramatic than that --
i mean it was murder
as far as i'm concerned it was
Murder
with an overabundance
of Evidence

and I know this
because

shortly after he died I began to visit

the house

and in the back of the upstairs closet

I found a briefcase

With copies and copies of papers

from the trial that never happened

and medical records

and there is one particular paper

where the doctors write

-it's in their handwriting it's not typed up it's in their handwriting-

“could it have been the medicine?”

And this is after multiple specialists after specialist, over years

have encouraged them

To look at the medicine, and stop.

but they don't.

and the damage is done.

I mean there are lots of theories.

I would say that my husband suspects that anything else was The Abyss that they couldn't

that my father's drs couldn't

acknowledge the depth of their error

despite it leading to permanent brain damage. Am I supposed to be crying here?

I am sick of crying. I am done.

my theory

my fucking theory
is that
there was a lack
of awareness around cultural discrepancy

they didn't get him:
he was raised russian
he was jewish
he had such clear PTSD
they didnt understand it

and they didn't undertand the neurodivergence of GENIUS

they just didnt get him
they just
fucking
didnt get him.

i get alerts all the time that my scholarship is quoted
and i get so honored and excited
and i go to the page
and it's my father's scientific research that's still getting cited
decades
later

about a year after my father died a princeton neuroscientist um discovered me.
he asked
where,
is your dad? And he said
you know I've been looking I've been searching for him for years
because we were close collaborators once and I have a new project. And i want to work with him again.

because he was special.

my dad entered disability around 2000

or so.

Um

there's a good note somewhere in here too

and i think it has something to do with the grandchildren

i think it has something to do with legacy

and this notion that goodness

this belief

that goodness

doesn't die.

(The shooting star projections have turned into luminous galaxies; it is a planetarium. It is as if the court room is dazzling in space. There is a reflective pause. There is some sort of change, perhaps lighting, change of posture and ambiance. There is possibly a spotlight on the briefcase as the sound of the father's early letter is now heard, read in the voice of a man from Odessa – the Father. It is a pre-recording. It may be scratchy, it may not. If design allows, it would be good if it was coming from a cassette tape, or seemingly, directly within the briefcase. As he speaks, the actress/SM goes to the Father's briefcase. She is immersed in the projections, a looping image of the universe that glistens like stars, or like fireflies. Sweeping music; it would be good to get the rights for [Philip Glass's Fields of Justice](#), or perhaps Claire du Lune, whole and sweet.)

(The recording is heard:)

Farewell.

I was born in fight or flight in a tortured country. When I was a boy, my father was arrested and wrongly condemned. My father had wanted me to become a pianist; but I fell in love with science instead. I asked my father for his blessing to allow me to become a physicist. I asked him from his jail cell.

After my father died, I joined the underground. I was detained, interrogated, and eventually, I was stripped of my citizenship and sent to another country. My whole life I strived for a world where actualization was in reach, for an idyllic harmonious country, for the creation of universal utopic childhoods, where the alignment of the stars and the yearning for something larger than oneself was possible.

My story is not from the rose garden, but the rose garden is what I seek.

If you must remember only one thing, know that even in these very last moments, I have made substantial achievements -- for Science. I fought and fought, until I could not.

I was born too sensitive for this world.

Yours very truly,

The Professor

IX. Briefcase Reveal

work tie

roses

a gun

Boxing Gloves

The Invention: a thing of light and radiance that floats away

(Fade out. The Invention or designated SPACESHIP light continues to glow.)

~Finis.

Appendix C: Select Logs

Oct 12, 2021

The most clear and helpful advice I have been revisiting is the notion of plunging back into the performance work “non-apologetically.” I can be tentative about the work which comes from not only feeling a bit rusty (correction: telling myself I feel rusty because in the moment of performance I actually feel fresh) but also from general life trauma. I think it’s a real gift to be reminded to just take space and have ownership.

I often think about a Stella Adler quote where she refers the energy of the actor back to nature, and the natural inclination of flowers and trees to grow outward. She also has a quote where she is known to have said: “Shyness is vulgar; Keats died at 28 and so what are you waiting for?” I think about this quote too though it sometimes leaves me more ruffled and internal than perhaps is intended; more often I think about my interview with Quinn from Pig Iron and his description of the artist with a “fire in the belly” which inspires me and reminds me how much I love acting.

I think there is an interesting tightrope between non-apology and ownership within the experimental theatre. I think cohesive dramaturgy plays a role in performance integrity, as well as the contemplative practice I hope to embark on. Some of the most beautiful and engaging work I’ve seen from the experimental theatre lens was not only 1990’s New York but also the MFA programs I’ve had the pleasure of artistically collaborating with and engaging with as audience member. I refer back to the beautiful work of Pina Bausch I saw at BAM during my first year at NYU as well as the prolifically strange and evocative work happening in my home department, the Experimental Theatre Wing at Tisch, as well as the gorgeous and strange work happening at the Boulder MFA dance department and the now defunct MFA in Performance at Naropa University. I think in all of these works scenography and dance-gesture played as much a role towards meaning as text itself. It’s good to ruminate on legacy.

Nov 3, 2021

These days I am pushing myself to be as DIY as possible in my design and allow for pleasant surprises and happy accidents that dramaturgy will sculpt and align. I’ve also been encouraged to take on a more delegator approach which is foreign to me as a self-identifying collaborator. I do feel comfortable in leadership roles and particularly in the classroom but also as a director but perceive theatre as a collaborative act and I am not used to being pure authoritarian.

In the past when directing I've sometimes gotten in trouble when being not direct enough; I'm realizing its important to code these professional relationships (even with friends) from the beginning in terms of expectations. I find directing devised works among undergrads to be a pleasurable and smooth experience in that I identify more as a curator and guide in the beginning and then patch the work together from a more directorial lens near the end allowing students to have expression and ownership. My dream would be to find lifelong collaborators who share aesthetic vision and methodological values and continue to make work over a lifetime.

These days I've often also been thinking of female and mother-artists who came into my life during emergent days; the brilliant Deb Margolin who told me I make art like someone who pulls the flower to them rather than lean down to the rose which I find so fascinating retrospectively, and wonder if it is still true. I think a lot about Rain von Waldenberg who directed me in my dream role of Cavale, when in her third trimester and to who I feel indebted to so much. I think a lot about the mother-hero artists and hope to be that role model myself. I'm thinking a lot about the role of nurturing oneself as an artist, and the boundaries between inspiration and directives.

Dec 5, 2021

I continue to talk and talk and talk and talk about all the perspective ideas that I have for this piece. I've moved on from the archive, and I am now focusing on an oldish memoir, *The Language of Time*, which *The Paris Review* and *The Walrus* rejected and which I have not sought a publishing home for since, but which best encapsulates my psychological response to my father's story in prose form. I tried reading it aloud from beginning to end in an early class and it was pretty and cathartic but it's a lot of text.

If the archives serve to launch the project itself, then this memoir is the seed for the performance, I think. In revisiting this memoir I created a storyboard: I imagined that my performance took place in a black box, which I'm naming the Pearl theater, the same beautiful vintage theater I worked in in my 20s in New York when I first realized the depth of my father's illness. He had come to a flamenco concert for Noche Flamenca, an international dance company I assistant stage managed, but he had fallen asleep. It was a tragic and revelatory moment for me.

In revisiting the memoir, I played with the idea that my performance is in fact just his dream at this concert. Or that it was my dream, imagining his own. Regardless of final outcome, I knew the dream would be important. In this way, the dream and the Pearl became infused.

I knew that there would be some other reveal, likely stars, movement dance gesture, and a stage manager. A chandelier, maybe. Moody music. Radiohead, (my music of choice) and poetry. At the time, I also imagined a second character: a man asleep in an armchair listening to music, and who would come and go adding more and more briefcases to the stage which I referred to as “a graveyard of briefcases.” I know the briefcase will be important somehow. I keep seeing a reveal where the briefcase spills out with endless peaches, or roses. I’m not sure. It’s all very early imagery but is feeling right. The chandelier feels important somehow, and the setting of The Pearl. Also trains, and ticking watches.



Fig. 2. Early Storyboard Image

Jan 11, 2022

Erika has been encouraging me to lean into my visual artist perspective and to create an installation for the class. Shortly before the pandemic and during I started to create movement for camera work inspired by my time working with the MFA dance department in Boulder, where I was especially inspired by their sans soucie dance for camera festival. In response to this, in an unexpected impulse, I decided to leave the archival-led dramaturgy behind over break, and spent two days in hyperfocus creating a miniature filmed narrative, constructed from dollar store figurines. Erika endearingly titled the project “the little people”, and

it is essentially the most comprehensive emotional narrative about my father, his depression and disability, our unique connection, and my mourning process. (link [here](#))

April 4, 2022

For a long while wanted to integrate my “little people” film into the larger live piece, but ultimately there was no dramaturgical room for it. For a while I considered separating and distinguishing the different chapters of the script i.e. characters through recurring projections. That proposal was tried and shelved, but made for an interesting launch deeper into the process. I like to think its imprint is still there regardless. I have pasted snapshots of the chapters, no longer in effect below. (Note the image of the Boxer, originally a romantic reference to an unseen character “serenading the fringes of the story” but who has been omitted from the final incarnation which focuses on the trial itself.)



Fig. 3. Early Projection Experiments: Sample “Chapters”

Dec 15, 2022

I’m very keen on happy accidents. When directing my first major multimedia piece in Boulder, I directed a work I had written and collaborated closely with a filmmaker towards the intersection of live and cinematic. The conceit was that a couple who had been separated by war had been reunited in the afterlife, and magical moments would crystalize, such as a bouquet of roses. We had hoped to use film as an answer to similar impossible staged moments I had inscribed into the script. I also had the very clear vision of the scenic film (which was presented as atmospheric backdrop) to capture the quality of light hitting water, such as at the

beach, or a summer pool, or aquarium. However, the filmmaker could not time the bouquet for whatever reason, and a visual loop became engaged: the effect was of rose petals constantly falling and dissipating into the ethereally-lit water. The visual symbolism of this moment became a suggestion of the heavenly, arrived at by happy accident.



Fig. 4. *Carnivals & Snowstorms* archive still: “Memory”

Similarly, I had been experiencing some audio challenges with the projections. The moment I wanted to especially showcase in my final term offering included the archive film I had created. It was suggested that I consider transcribing and performing the film monologue, and while playing the archive on silent in the background. The effect was wonderfully evocative and the fusion of live and filmed archive resonant.

April 5, 2023

Today was the first time in rehearsal bare-bones and did not consider tech at all. I just focused on changing the characters. I’m afraid that if I make them too full blown that they will turn into caricatures, and so I keep a throughline of my own body movement on purpose so there is a very visible thread. I like to think it’s a very soft imprint. I’m unsure if they will stay through the remainder, but this imprint has proven interesting to my process. I feel it gives a core experiential authenticity. It’s interesting to me how so much of my choices come from an intuitive and impulse-led place.

I also came to realize what an intensely emotionally draining production this is turning out to be. I've had a lot of dissatisfaction in my showings, largely because I often leave with the sensation of wanting to cry. At the same time, I want to lead with technique, which for me translates into riding the emotion and allow sentimentality (or not) to be a choice. I do think emotional receptivity is one of my dormant superpowers, but so is technique – or at least used to be. I'm still figuring that balance out through this development process. When I presented at University of Toronto the work got very personal very fast, but I was able to ride the momentum and energy waves and did not tear up. And there was actually a lot of freedom and catharsis within telling the story authentically without surrendering to the welling. I think that control goes back to the Alexander and breathe. Which is what makes the yogic practice essential. I think a lot about the phrase “dynamic stillness” and “dynamic relaxation” which is energetically very much my goal for the final performance. I think of the playing space itself as sacred. I am really zoning in on ritual: the ritual of breathe, of meditation, of stretch. I think I will only find my way in through embodiment.

When I ruminate on the dramaturgical structure of the piece I get a kinetic sensation: It feels like a spiral of some sorts or funneling down deep. This of course is very abstract but that's how I think and I think worth logging. I've also been playing with the Detective and his relationship to gravity. Time feels tighter than ever. It may be appropriate for a play that espouses to “stop time.”

April 8, 2023

In rehearsal I've been focusing on centering: I spent 20 minutes on Alexander including Alexander breath work, shifted into yoga and meditation with a focus on enlivening the spine, listening to the body and image, and finally did a quick and dirty link later vocal warm-up. It's hard for me to tell if I am rusty or insecure or if it is age, but my voice quality is not quite where I wish it would be. However, I take it in storm and have made the decision to integrate my voice quality however critical I maybe and to just focus on breath and support and imagination.

I spent significant improvising with the detective character. I'm a little stuck on this character as he is deeply outraged as a state of being, and yet is a little bit of a clown. I sometimes wonder if he is poetic or ridiculous and if it is wrong of me to create a character that so much encapsulates my rage but whose form is so jester. The specific things I am struggling with are character body; I am having trouble figuring out

how to balance his energy with the style of film noir. I wonder about the ethics of inviting an audience to laugh at or with this deeply pathos-driven character. When I slip into this character my own rage rises up immediately and vitriolic. I seem to find him from the internal out and am still looking for his shape and gestures.

I have also given the character imaginary cigarettes and early trials did not work; I've discovered that looking at the cigarette (which manifests out of thin air, so he is a bit of a magician as well, maybe) before pretending to smoke it helps read better for the audience. I find the act of seeing the cig before smoking beckons to Brecht's "this, not that" as does much of the show. I'm certainly using a lot of Brechtian techniques in this performance which is interesting to me in how it also speaks to feminist film, but is more intuitive and not so much enacting theory. It's nice when revelation rises up and I notice that theory has been integrated and put into action in this way. I think a Brecht-scholar might find some relevance.

April 15, 2023

For a play about documentation, I would be remiss in not documenting keystones in the process. As I process the performance and the end of the MFA program, I wanted to make a list – a nonchronological recognition of the work that was done over the years and how it became organically embedded in the live project. I recognize the abstraction of some of the following, but as my father used to say, apropos, "c'est la vie". In no order (and all crediting Erika):

1. Our seed dramaturgy: going out into nature and finding seeds that spoke to us, researching their progression, drawing an enormous personalized seed map fusing the dramaturgical structure and journey of the seed as a metaphor for content. I chose cantaloupe, which I and the children grew in our West Philly front yard during the pandemic when the world broke down. I remember how much space only a few tiny seeds needed, and the enormity of the leaves, the winding circular path of the complex stems, and the glorious burst of flowers into golden fruit. To me this spoke to the play, particularly the radiance of the fruit, the enormity of its journey.
2. Fabric dramaturgy: I was drawn to a soft but cheap gold sheet whose threads were showing. It was a real awakening, really. The metaphor lay in its equal parts gaudiness and the symbol of grace and blinding beauty (it was very shiny!) and the veil like cut-out. I read it as mystical but also alluding to the DIY of my own show aesthetic. For a simple cloth, I found it extremely multi-layered. I knew

that fake gold would need to find a way into my design; I don't think I quite accomplished this, not in the way I would have wanted, but it is a design conversation for the future.

3. Clown: Erika led us through an incredible series of Pochinko and European clown exercises. The entrance exercise for me was "this is this, not that," which physically translates into the improvisation around an object where one describes it (sometimes with emotional height and strange narrative) as another thing altogether. This stemmed out of a class exercise where I deemed a bottle of used cigarettes "the most beautiful butterfly in the all the universe" and shared an improvisation around it. It's an incredible imagination and metaphor exercise: it lended itself to the object of "the starship" and "the chandelier" which were really just lighting fixtures. (I am realizing I should have pointed to it when referencing the mirrors as well.) On a larger scale, the premise that the performance was unfurling in real time in a play space called "The Pearl Theatre" summoned important existential questions surrounding reality, perception, and the notion of "the pearl."
4. Movement: we had a movement Pachinko exercise whose details I documented elsewhere and lost; ultimately we created a refined repeatable movement that stood for the essential question of the play, and which is a climactic dance-gesture in the final dance, which the Actress performs as "a means of remembering so as not to forget."
5. Erika led us on a fascinating physical dramaturgy process, where we generated the plot sequence of all the characters all stemmed out of a shared central question. Each moment in the plot had its own scrap of paper moving outward, so that the final product visually looked like a waving glorious figure of a child-sketched sun. This gave the piece both its cohesion and power.

April 17, 2023

It is mind-boggling to spend two years, really truthfully eight, no, really truthfully 23, composing an artistic piece in honor of your father, and finishing it, and hugging people in the audience because they have just lost their dad and you feel so very terrible, and you start talking about phone calls, last phone calls, and then Amazon sends you an alert for an alert that you never made that "working telephones are now available," and quite literally you have a vintage phone dangling in your show to signify the desire to speak to the beyond, and when you get home you have no idea how you're feeling, but what you do know is that you want so badly to be able to call your dad. But you take a little walk in the cool midnight and under the cold and glistening sky you also have a kind of relief, a sort of comfort in the knowledge that you have finally shared his story and now perhaps some part of the universe has realigned, but you feel a nostalgia too, for childhood, for the irretrievable: irretrievable except for the alchemy of art & memory. And love.



Fig. 5. *The Pearl* Briefcase Reveal Archive