

Playful Transformations:

Directing Sarah Ruhl's adaptation of *Orlando* by Virginia Woolf

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ABSTRACT

This thesis documents my artistic process as a director for a production of Sarah Ruhl's adaptation of *Orlando* by Virginia Woolf. The research and preparation for this process begins with Ruhl's aesthetic and approach to adaptation, and the influence of Joyce Piven's work in Story Theatre. A sample of contemporary versionings of *Orlando* in film, visual art, theatre, and music reveal not only a resurgence in popularity of Woolf's novel, but also its role in the current cultural dialogue of gender and sexual politics. These research findings informed and shaped my conceptual approach to the play and the premise: **Keeping reality at bay reveals poignant truths**. With this in mind, the rehearsal process explored gender, essential selves, and the unity of selves which were brought to light through languages of intimacy, physicality and characterization. Focusing on transformation, playfulness, metaphor and emptiness for our design premise led to the interactive nature of costumes, set and props, as well as lights and sound that transformed technologically. The creative process is outlined in the journal section which details the application of the research and preparation, ideas and concepts, as well as the development of the fluidity and movement of the ensemble work. The final section reflects upon the outcomes of my artistic process from the initial concept, to the rehearsal process, and the production.

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Chapter One: Introduction

In the Russian tradition of Stanislavsky, the actor says, “I will tell you a story about me.” In the German tradition of Brecht, the actor says, “I will tell you a story about them.” In the Vietnamese tradition, the actor says, “You and I will tell each other a story about all of us.”

—Jenkins (qtd. in Ruhl’s “Notes on *Orlando*”)

Orlando is a challenging play due to its complex set of factors of time, place, and the central event of Orlando’s transformation from male to female. These factors shape the actions and behaviour of the characters and are key to my investigation and preparatory work. My goal is to build a world that can travel in time, place, and gender, and that honours the entwined voices of Sarah Ruhl and Virginia Woolf. Through this play, I am also aiming to offer the audience a relevant experience that contributes to the contemporary dialogue of inclusivity in gender politics. *Orlando* is a satire, and thus one of the challenges as a director is to ensure the purpose of satire is served—that I am in service of the truths that are the target of the satire. The targets of Woolf’s gentle satire are the social construct of gender, relationships, and sexual politics. Alongside this satirical thread, there is also a pointed commentary on the history of writers, writing, and their role in society that is integrated into the concepts of immortality and gender. To our 2019 audience, the voices of gender and sexual politics have garnered momentum and the notion of political satire in our society has shifted significantly; however, *Orlando* can still give us pause, can still provoke contemplation, can still speak to us in a new way.

The beauty and power of Virginia Woolf’s language is poignant, resonant, and speaks so clearly to a modern audience. Sarah Ruhl’s adaptation distills the original novel by underscoring the freedom and privilege of maleness juxtaposed to the constraints and misfortunes of femaleness. Most importantly though, this depiction of the plight of women in society across the

centuries does not compromise Orlando's power and strength of being, or his/her overall journey toward self-knowledge. It is this strength of being, her determined voice, her sense of self that, magnet-like, continues to captivate readers' and audiences' attention. This voice, though originally penned in 1928, speaks volumes to us today and it is my intention to make this voice heard. The silencing of women's voices, women's art, women's essential selves, that has existed for centuries and continues to pervade all levels of culture and society is what breaks my heart. In this production of *Orlando*, we bring together a lineage of women's voices—Virginia Woolf, Vita Sackville-West, Sarah Ruhl, and the all-female design team—and together, with the actors, my goal is to give voice to this story 'about all of us'. The quotation above refers to the musicality of the acting style and commitment to connecting with the audience that is the basis of Vietnamese Ceo theatre. I have embraced these elements as key ingredients of my approach to the play, the concept, and the work I will do with the actors.

The premise that will underpin my work, interpretation, and staging of Ruhl's *Orlando* is: **Keeping reality at bay reveals/provokes/engenders poignant truths.**

The central questions that I will be asking during this process will be: **How do we navigate the governance and influence society holds over human relationships?** and **How do we reconcile the historical silencing of women's voices?**

This endeavour is a coming together of passions. Years ago, I focused my doctoral research on the staging of biographical plays, specifically plays of women's lives—from Sally Clark's *Saint Frances of Hollywood* to Edna O'Brien's *Virginia*. Fresh from adapting Jimmy McGovern's screenplay, *Priest*, for the stage, and Virginia Woolf's novel, *To the Lighthouse*, as well as Emily Carr's short story collection, *Klee Wyck*, for CBC Radio and the Shaw Festival's Reading Series, I was steeped in theorizing the process of adaptation. Combining my adaptation

process and interest in women's lives became a study of the dramaturgy of staging women's lives as, what I termed, biographical adaptation. And now, somewhat magically, all these years later, I am back with Virginia Woolf and staging her *Orlando: A Biography* via Sarah Ruhl's adaptation—a full circle of sorts, a twirl and swirl of fate perhaps...

Director Challenges

The first of three main challenges that I will attempt to address as a director is about clarity—clarity of my point of view and my voice, clarity of my conceptual approach to the play, and clarity of my work with the actors. Underpinning my point of view will be the 'Four Ruhl's'—playfulness, transformation, metaphor and emptiness—and will serve to help bring the idea of the play and the reality of the production together. The aesthetic of Ruhl's poetic adaptation informed my preparatory work, the many discussions with the designers, and my point of view. The challenge will then be in how I apply my point of view to my work with the actors; creating compelling and emotional relationships, engendering and fostering opportunities of virtuosity in the Chorus and their multiple roles, balancing of the role of Orlando with the Chorus ensemble, as well as the actors' direct address relationship with the audience.

Secondly, being a decisive leader will be a significant challenge as I fear conflict and choose instead to being open to the ideas of others, facilitating, supporting, and collaborating effectively to avoid negativity and conflict. Decisiveness, I realize, does not imply conflict, but does demand trusting myself and ensuring I have built trust in the room to be both open and receptive to other perspectives and opinions. This particular challenge will certainly come into play when we explore physicality and choreography. I often enter physical exploration with images, but my lack of confidence spurs me to defer to others in the room. Often, however,

actors have discovered and created powerful offerings which I then integrate into specific moments and scenes. For this production and knowing the cast, I hope to take a more decisive role in the movement by trusting my own experience in movement and my preparation. I am looking forward to working on the skating scenes and am confident that I will be clear, decisive, and able to work with the actors' skill set.

Balancing my work with the actors will be my third challenge, yet no less significant than the previous two. Managing time in rehearsals to work individually with actors and also build a strong ensemble—working with the lead (Orlando) and the larger Chorus roles (Queen Elizabeth I, Sasha, Archduchess/Archduke, and Marmaduke), and also ensuring to integrate the eight-member Chorus into the heart of the play. Balancing my attention toward assisting the eight actors in the Chorus will be necessary to explore how each of their various characters have a place in the world we are creating. In addition, I will need to balance my attention to how the Chorus is integrated into the action and the main action itself. A significant aspect of this challenge is ensuring that all actors are in the moment, actively telling the story, and clarifying relationships even when they are transforming or serving a more utilitarian role to support the larger action. The objective of this 'balancing act' is to achieve a clarity of focus for the audience, that the line of action is given focus and that it is supported by all eight actors.

Being an actor's director who creates strong ensembles is what I strive for as a theatre artist. I believe that prioritizing balance will serve the clarity of my point of view and the artistic needs of the individual actors in the ensemble. Balance and clarity will also shape the dualistic nature of the play—the time-travelling, sex-changing playful exterior and the gentle, satirical commentary that flows through the play. The abundant, overarching questions begin with: How to balance a clear interpretive concept of Orlando's transformation and the emotional journey of

not only Orlando, but the Chorus as well? How to assist the actors in the Chorus to find clarity of identity and intention in each moment within this world? How to assist the actors in the Chorus to find an emotional connection to Orlando and to the story? What are the stakes for them and how can we raise these stakes to find emotional importance and a deeper connection with the audience? What is the nature of the relationship between the Chorus and Orlando? What is the conceit between Orlando and the Chorus? What are the rules of their relationship(s) and do we break them and when and what does that mean? The abundant, overarching questions appear to never end...

Chapter Two: Sarah Ruhl

Sarah Ruhl's *Orlando* exemplifies her distinctive playwriting style that has evolved over the past twenty-years. Although the majority of the words are Woolf's, Ruhl's contemporary voice comes through in the shape and form of the narration and the role of the Chorus. In interviews and her thoughtful *100 Essays* (2014), Ruhl offers a contemplative and refreshing perspective on all aspects of theatre beyond the craft of writing. Striving for a new form for each play, for example, is an integral element that Ruhl embraced upon the advice of her teacher, playwright Paula Vogel: "I always find the structure as I write. Every structure of every play is different, depending on the story...I usually hope that if I'm discovering as I'm writing, the audience will discover as they're watching" (Tichler & Kaplan 77). Similarly, Woolf was equally adventurous with form, and *Orlando: A Biography* is a prime example of her approach to both biography and novel forms. The agreement between these two writers is evident concerning form and the notion that "the idea is embedded in the form rather than in the conversation" (*100 Essays* 23). The resonant relationship between Woolf and Ruhl achieves greater and greater amplitude as we consider their approaches to the act of writing, attention to detail, and desire to push boundaries and challenge the status quo of form. The satirical, parodic, time-travelling escapade aspects of Woolf's novel are answered by Ruhl's meditation on lightness:

A suspicion that lightness is not deeply serious (but instead whimsical) pervades aesthetic discourse. But what if lightness is a philosophical choice to temper reality with strangeness, to temper the intellect with emotion, and to temper emotion with humour. Lightness is then a philosophical victory over heaviness. (*100 Essays* 36)

Giving attention to Ruhl's use of language, stylistic choices, and her commentary notes about theatre prove valuable and informs an approach to the text, actor-character relationship, emotions, physicality, the role of the Chorus, and relationship with the audience. Preparatory

research to direct Ruhl's *Orlando* began with an examination of Ruhl's approach to the adaptation process, her aesthetic, the influence of the Piven Workshop Theatre Company, and her guidance in moving the play from the page to the stage.

Approach to Adaptation

The adaptation of *Orlando* was commissioned by Joyce Piven and the Piven Theatre Workshop in Evanston, Illinois, where it premiered in 1998 under the direction of Joyce Piven, and has enjoyed a transformation of its own up until 2010. The earliest version of the play featured two actors playing the role Orlando, one male and one female, Sasha/Singer, and seven actors, both male and female taking on the remaining thirteen roles. Five years later, in 2003, the distinctive role of the Chorus emerges in *The Actor's Gang* production in Los Angeles, directed by Piven. However, it's not until 2010, after a development reading and subsequent production by the Classical Stage Company in New York, directed by Rebecca Taichman, does the adaptation begin to take a more streamlined approach to casting with five actors; Orlando, Sasha, and three male Chorus. This evolution is worth noting with regard to Ruhl coming into her own aesthetic over the years, but also how the gender suggestions for the casting, particularly for the Chorus, reflect the societal shifts in gender and sexual politics. The three Chorus actors take on twenty characters, which inevitably enhances Ruhl's intentional playful approach to the telling of the story and bringing Woolf's novel to life on the stage.

Ruhl's approach to adaptation of *Orlando* (1998, revised 2010), and also of Anton Chekhov's *Three Sisters* (2009), is centred on respect, faithfulness, and accuracy. Regarding her treatment of Woolf's novel, Ruhl states that "all the narration in the piece is [Woolf's] and hers alone" ("Notes on *Orlando*: On Narration" 138). In an interview with *Playbill*'s Thomas Peter

during the 2010 New York production, Ruhl addresses her relationship with Woolf and Chekhov as an adapter:

I am not really interested in doing an adaptation of a writer who I don't bow down to in my head. So working on Chekhov or Woolf is like being a student and kneeling at the feet of a master. I mean, it's just getting their language in my head and trying to be clairvoyant and trying to think about what they were thinking and what their intentions might have been. So I'm really not trying to put a stamp on it as much as I am trying to think how to make it live theatrically in this particular moment in time. (Peter)

Making her adaptations speak to contemporary audiences and 'live theatrically in this particular moment in time' acknowledges both the central challenge of adapting, but also Ruhl's way of taking ownership of her version amidst the cultural backdrop of 2010. Time plays a key role in Woolf's novel and, somewhat ironically, time has also affected the shaping of Ruhl's adaptation in the years between its commission and when it received its New York premiere. Further in the interview with Peter, Ruhl speaks about her faithfulness and how she found her own voice within the adaptation:

I felt pretty passionately about staying faithful to the novel, especially when there was prose involved. If I was inventing dialogue, it might be mine, because there's not a huge amount of dialogue in the book. [When I found dialogue] in the book, I made an effort to use it. But most of the prose is Woolf's, and sometimes it's reordered or it's taken from a different spot, but it's hers...I think the novel is so exquisite and incandescent; I would have just put the whole thing in if I could have. (Peter)

Ruhl's reordering of events in the novel as an adaptation strategy echoes her linguistic principles when it comes to playwriting, on a macroscopic level. Zooming into the individual moments, the phrases, images, words and sentences, Ruhl's poetic impulses for specificity order and reordering are key in the adaptation process as well:

the contribution of the playwright is not necessarily the story itself but the way the story is told, word for word. So that there is a drama in the linguistic progression: what word will follow what word? I might call this the drama of the sentence, how will it unfold, how will it go up and down, how will it stop...a writer's special purview and intimate

power is how a word follows a word...or, (in Virginia Woolf's words) how a voice answers a voice...the way their sentences unfold might determine the course of their stories. It's a different kind of listening, to listen to how the phrase unfolds as opposed to listening only to how the story unfolds. (*100 Essays* 25-26)

Microscopically, Ruhl's strategy illuminates the 'drama in the linguistic progression', the 'drama of the sentence' by attending to each word and allowing the adaptation to 'live theatrically'. The way the play looks on the page is of utmost importance to Ruhl, and is intrinsically linked to her attention to aurality--how she listens and how she desires others to listen.

Aesthetics

Ruhl's attention to how words encounter one another, the meter, the rhythm, and how they sound are essential considerations in bringing *Orlando* from the page to the stage. In *100 Essays*, Ruhl asks thoughtful questions about the language of theatre that began as poetry and has shifted to predominantly a language of prose in the modern era: "The meter of poetry used to be thought to have a curative effect: the ancients used certain meters to calm the breast and other meters to inflame. Did we lose some of the medicinal power of language in the theatre when we lost meter?" (46). Ruhl expands her argument for recapturing the importance of the sound of words and identifies a key moment during her experience of Paula Vogel's play *The Baltimore Waltz* when language "seemed to have meaning in sound divorced from content" (Ruhl "*The Baltimore Waltz*" 124). As a poet Ruhl "longs for that alchemical thing where the meaning was the *sound*—wherein the sound of the word can actually imitate experience" (*100 Essays* 46). Ruhl's attention to diegetic sound, which stems from the Greek meaning 'recounted story,' is reinforced by the significance of the role of the Chorus, and attunes to the sound of Woolf's words themselves by giving them central focus.

Ruhl's desire to have "actors merge with the language" is achieved by adhering to the rhythm of the language, so the play can metaphorically jump off the page and 'live theatrically' (*100 Essays* 77). Similarly, Woolf esteems rhythm as stylistically essential to her own writing: "Style is a very simple matter; it is all rhythm" (qtd. in Ruhl *100 Essays* 92), and Ruhl notes that "Some language-driven plays might use small words sparingly (Churchill or Fornes or Beckett) as the rhythm of the language is as important as the rarity or length of words themselves" (*100 Essays* 23). To aide in establishing rhythm, Ruhl sculpts the words on the page in all of her plays, not just *Orlando*, by using line breaks as a way to communicate rhythm to actors: "[using line breaks] is how I lay out my own plays... and how I see the way I hear the actors speak, I thought it would be useful for the actors to hear the rhythms in my head...But they aren't intended to indicate an overly poeticized approach, or epic pauses. They are more about the rhythm of thinking than anything" ("Author's Notes" *Three Sisters* 8). Placing the words on the page in a particular way, for Ruhl, is as instrumental to conveying the essence of her work as the meaning of the words themselves. It is in this way, among others, that Ruhl's ear aligns with Woolf's in that they are both listening intently and discerningly. Ruhl explains the aesthetic of her writing in an interview with Rosemarie Tichler and Barry Jay Kaplan in *The Playwright at Work* (2012):

I think, starting as a poet, I'm always interested in how a play looks on a page and how it reads...It's partly just an instinct. It's how I see what I write. It just makes sense to me. I think maybe starting in poetry, that it's justified to the left and then I hear the rhythm in my head as I'm writing. The rhythm is a clue for the designers and actors and director in terms of how long to spend on each image. The same with the dialogue. The line breaks are a clue in terms of how much time to think about each line or how much breath to take. (78)

Ruhl's attention to how the words look on the page is as informative to directors and actors about the rhythm and breath (and therefore movement and gesture) as is Shakespeare's use of catalexis.

However, unlike Shakespeare, Ruhl has editorial control over every black mark on the white page and proclaims that in addition to line breaks, “Punctuation is philosophy and rhythm in a play” (*100 Essays* 199). Considering Ruhl’s play is an adaptation of Woolf’s lengthy, stream-of-consciousness sentence structure, both writers desire to direct, and perhaps control, the reader’s and actor’s experience of their language and rhythm through punctuation, and in Ruhl’s case, line breaks as well.

A range of typographical punctuation in Ruhl’s play are peppered throughout the five acts, each providing specific, finely tuned, information about a single moment. Since the actors are required to switch from narration to character to narration, sometimes all within three lines, Ruhl’s punctuation again offers a guide as to how to approach a merge with the language. This also becomes a discussion in rehearsals and for the ensemble to agree on what a semi-colon sounds like versus an em dash versus an ellipsis:

THE QUEEN

A thin hand with long fingers always curling as if ‘round an orb or scepter;

ORLANDO

a nervous, crabbed, sickly hand;

THE QUEEN

a commanding hand, a hand that had only to raise itself for a head to fall; yes, the Queen had a hand—

ORLANDO

—Orlando guessed, attached to an old body that smelt like a cupboard. (1.2.145-146)

Ruhl also chooses enjambment, or a lack of punctuation at the end of a line which, again, demands an attentive approach to the rhythm and auralty of *Orlando*:

CHORUS

But green in nature is one thing
Green in literature quite another. (1.1.142)

Woolf's early musings on the novel included a vision of the ending: "And it is to end with three dots" (Woolf *Diary III*, 131), and Ruhl has duly retained this final, yet suspended moment with "I am about to understand..." / *Lights fade out.* / *The end* (5.1.236). Ruhl speaks definitively about her approach to ending a play:

'The End,' for me somehow implies the opposite. It's very finality implies a new cycle beginning...There is a natural dread of endings. One wants to feel as though endings contain beginnings, in spite of, or perhaps because of, their finality...We no longer see time going in a circle, we see it marching forward ceaselessly, soundlessly... (*100 Essays* 210).

The elliptic ending of both novel and play supports the suggested immortality of Orlando, and conveys a sense of continuance rather than a conclusive summation. The ellipsis here also echoes Ruhl's claim that "comedies (which often end in marriage) use linguistic structures that describe life in general persisting after the play is over" (*100 Essays* 10). The bird crying, "Life, life, life" on the penultimate page further reinforces this aversion to finality, and reminds us that *Orlando* is an escapade and a meditation on Time.

Page to Stage

Turning to Ruhl's approach to character, the significance of who does or doesn't have a first and last name sheds light on a commonality that Woolf and Ruhl share. Orlando and the majority of characters in Ruhl's plays are given a singular name.¹ Although not referring specifically to Orlando in this instance, Ruhl offers a perspective on character names that underscores the consequences of Orlando's transformation as he, and later she, moves through the centuries:

¹ Examples of Ruhl's character names include: Red, Crick and Mary in *Late*; Matilde, Ana, Charles, Virginia, and Lane in *The Clean House*; and Gordon, Jean, Hermia, and Dwight in *Dead Man's Cell Phone*.

The act of naming a character is sacred and mysterious...The state of having a first and last name is a cultural practice closely aligned to patriarchy, land rights, and the individuation of the self, some would say the illusion of the self. So before giving one's character a first name and a last name, one must consider whether the world one is creating on stage is a world of first and last names. (*100 Essays* 19)

Musings upon Woolf's choice of the singular name for her protagonist include "Charlemagne's knight, Roland or Orlando, the hero of Ariosto's epic poem *Orlando Furioso* (1532)" (Gilbert 234n), which are supported by the numerous literary allusions throughout the novel. The Orlando/Rosalind plot in Shakespeare's *As You Like It* is also relevant to note here not only for the 'breeches role' aspect but also that a great many of Shakespeare's characters often exist in single name only. Patriarchy and land rights have a significant impact on Orlando's life as a man and also as a woman. As a man with a singular name, Orlando "seems to have been born into a central and privileged position in society" (Gilbert xxv) and, in the Elizabethan Era, gains the attention of the Queen, becomes a member of her Court, and then ambassador to Constantinople. Orlando's singular name then, comes across as a status symbol—a name beyond reproach. The early appearance of the Queen in Woolf's first chapter and at the end of Ruhl's first scene, quickly affirms Orlando's status as a young man of sixteen, and the paved way of the world for one with "the shapeliest legs of any nobleman in England!" (Ruhl 146). As a woman, however, Orlando must leave Constantinople—as a female British ambassador is untenable in the seventeenth century.

Woolf states several times in her diary and in her letters that Orlando is based on Vita Sackville-West, and the novel follows the lineage and adventures of her esteemed family. The death of Lord Sackville-West in February 1928 elicited an inevitable rift in Vita's life as she was denied inheriting the Knole estate solely because she was a woman and thus had no land rights. This moment is given equal magnitude in Ruhl's adaptation as Orlando returns to England as a

woman and “No sooner had Orlando opened her mail that she discovered that she was now victim of two major law suits” stating that she cannot hold any property whatsoever (196). Similarly, post-transformation Orlando comes face to face with the ubiquitous symbols of patriarchy as she learns her new role in society as both “the Angel in the House”² and a product known as the ‘London lady’. Orlando is female for the majority of both the novel and the play and, as a woman without a last name, she is not aligned with patriarchy or land rights, and thus is no longer beyond reproach. The Queen makes a posthumous appearance in the last act and justifies the visit by choosing to retain the image of the sixteen-year old nobleman worthy of her attention in Act I, rather than the thirty-six year old woman before her: “To me, you are a boy with delightful legs in silk stockings—apparently you have changed. But no matter” (Ruhl 231). The significance here, from a director’s point of view, is that attention to detail is needed regarding how characters interact with Orlando both as a man and as a woman, and how these interactions inform the world we create on stage.

Subtext, or rather the avoidance of subtext, is an essential detail in Ruhl’s theory of acting. In *100 Essays*, she writes quite passionately about subtext and offers advice to actors (and therefore to directors) to avoid embarking upon a subtext quest in her plays:

If you’re acting in a play of mine...please, don’t think one thing and then say another thing. Think the thing you are saying. Do not think of the language of the play as a cover or deception for your actual true hidden feelings that you’ve felt compelled to invent for yourself. Don’t create a bridge between you and the impulse for the language: erase the boundary between the two. Think of subtext as to the left of the language and not underneath it. There is no deception or ulterior motive or “cover” about the language.

² Woolf’s phrase “The Angel in the House” comes from Coventry Patmore’s narrative 1854 poem of the same title. Woolf uses it in her essay, “Professions for Women” (1931) to refer to the demure, self-sacrificing maternal figure of the Victorian household:

She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. If there was chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draught she sat in it—in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. Above all...she was pure...every house had its Angel” (*Women and Writing* 59).

There are, instead, pools of silence and the unsayable to the left or to the right or even above the language. The unsayable in an ideal world hovers above the language rather than below. (66)

Ruhl brings this advice back to the ultimate purpose of language and her approach and desire is to connect with the audience as directly as she can through language. Subtext has the potential to mar that process. Offer the language to the audience, let the words resonate within them, thereby allowing them to make meaning and associations and conjurations and sensations: “Here we are in the dark, dark woods. By speaking it, we make it so...One declares the imaginary world into being...having language bring to life the invisible world...language invents worlds” (Ruhl *100 Essays* 79). Ruhl addresses the interconnections between language, emotion, and subtext in her interview with Tichler and Kaplan: “I think it’s the rhythm and the emotional honesty that is not about subtext. Being able to be emotionally available to the language and to the thought without any kind of subterfuge...So there’s a kind of...forthrightness or simplicity about the relationship of the thought to the language” (82). Again, Ruhl’s prioritization of the simplicity of the spoken word actually speaks volumes when contemplating directing *Orlando* and working with the actors to resist the temptation of searching for and playing subtext.

Regarding emotional honesty, Ruhl makes an insightful connection between emotionality and theatrical spaces in contemporary plays. Plays that offer spaces that are public or private, intimate or distancing, interior or exterior, for Ruhl, parallel the characters in these spaces: “I like plays that make visible the interior. That is to say the interior of a person rather than the interior of a living room. As our plays culturally become more and more about the indoors—living rooms, bedrooms, and offices—are they also increasingly about the exteriors of people?” (*100 Essays* 42). Ruhl’s statement resonates with Woolf’s signature interiority, to which Ruhl finds an equivalence in her adaptation through the Chorus as well as Orlando him/herself. Tennessee

Williams, according to Ruhl, “redirects our eye to the moment; every moment is emotionally or aesthetically important for its own sake, rather than having an additive effect” (*ibid.* 34). Similar to attending to the placement of each word or phrase on the page as a guide for rhythm and intention, discovering and shaping every moment to maximize its emotional or aesthetical importance is what I seek to achieve in my own work as a director. For Joyce Piven, emotion is regarded as a state, “‘*l’état*’—the necessity for the actor to begin in a state at the beginning of the play, a state that then transforms” (*ibid.* 76). Piven further identifies “four extreme states of emotion that transform speedily, one into the other—happiness, sadness, anger, and fear...the actor needs to be ‘stated,’ or in one of these four states, at all times” (*ibid.* 76). Each of these perspectives on emotion provide points of access into the emotional landscape of Ruhl’s *Orlando*.

Influence of Joyce Piven and Story Theatre

The role of the Chorus and narration in Ruhl’s adaptation is influenced by her work with Joyce Piven. Key aspects of Piven’s Story Theatre are integral to the form, approach to character, and relationship with the audience. At the core of Story Theatre is the “process of transformation and improvisation,” and to support this, similar to Bertolt Brecht, there is no fourth wall, and the “actors are in open admission that they are actors transforming into roles” (Piven xvii). Most importantly however, in how this approach connects with *Orlando* is the “placement of narrator puts the story in the hands of the individual actor who would narrate his own character” (*ibid.*). The image of “the story in the hands of the individual actor” is quite meaningful with regard to *Orlando*, as Ruhl has captured this essence of storytelling through the Chorus and her casting suggestions. Additionally, this aesthetic choice informs all aspects of the play and its production,

because it involves the actor-character relationship, the actor-audience relationship, and the ensemble as a whole—all of which need to be supported with design choices to aid in establishing this world. Piven notes that “the actor was the guide for the audience and they could see the wheels in motion with no pretense” (xviii). Ruhl’s choice in embracing this approach fits with the transformative nature of the play with regard to not only Orlando’s gender transformation but also the time-gallop through four centuries. Piven’s term ‘emotional statedness’ will be the starting point for the character-narrator transformations “the goal for both player and actor is to be present and creative in the moment on stage before an audience and to be in a ‘state of play’” constantly (Piven 3). Again, finding balance in rehearsal to give attention to the many acts of transformation in order to attain this constant state of play will be a challenge, and yet will need to be prioritized to be in service of the world of the play.

Ruhl’s “Notes on *Orlando*” that address narration echo Piven’s approach, but are also customized for *Orlando* specifically. Ruhl acknowledges the potential clumsiness that may occur as actors find themselves switching quickly from narrator to character to narrator: “because of the dominant mode of naturalism, narration on stage has the power to flummox some actors and some audience members. Even some directors” (137). To aide in bridging any gap in understanding, Ruhl offers five “cardinal rules”: “1. Simplicity. When in doubt make a simple choice” (137). Similar to her reflections on subtext, Ruhl’s emphasis on simplicity is peppered throughout her theory of theatre. Rule 2 is a reflection of Piven’s approach to emotional statedness: “There is an emotional undercurrent in narration; it is not the neutral tone that a narrator in a children’s play would adopt” (137). The third rule addresses the physical demands of this form: “Non-literalness or non-illustration: The actor need not always do the thing he or she is doing; the gesture need not illustrate the narration precisely” (137). Ruhl adds in her Notes

section “On Movement” that “the non-literal language of dance should work in counter-point to Woolf’s surfeit of language” (136). In the 2010 workshop of the adaptation, Ruhl worked with choreographer, Annie-B Parson, and realized in the bringing together of her text and Parson’s choreography that “we didn’t want there to be redundancy between the language and the movement” (Peter). The adaption evokes images of gesture and movement; exploring the physicality of the four centuries of this world is exciting and will be challenging. The fourth rule is “Flux: The nature of the narration will change, moment to moment. It needn’t have static rules to guide it” (137). As previously mentioned, moment to moment specificity is a directorial goal and the ‘Flux’ of the narration will demand this level of detail from all aspects of the acting and production companies. The fifth and last rule concerns the audience: “The story is always for the audience. They are always there. The narration invites them in rather than distancing them” (137). The relationship with the audience is key, and using Ruhl’s narrative technique as an invitation to the audience to engage, rather than feel distanced, is a crucial differentiation to consider how the actors approach their roles as narrators *and* characters. Ruhl refers to Martin Buber’s book *I and Thou* (1937) to propound her thoughts about the relationship with the audience:

in considering the tree I become bound up in relation to it. The tree is no longer *It*...relation is mutual...How to give an audience an I/Thou relationship with the stage rather than an I/It relationship with the stage? That is to say, how can the audience exist in relation to the stage as opposed to watching the stage as object? Can the play itself encourage an I/Thou relationship? Can a production? ...I’m not sure if this desire to create a “thou” in the theatre is shared in the contemporary American climate, where it seems we put all our efforts into becoming more of an “it”—glossy, cinematic, bold. (qtd. in Ruhl *100 Essays* 111-112)

Pursuing this “I/Thou” relationship with our audience is imperative because Ruhl’s adaptation demands it. The narration demands a break in the fourth wall and the transparency of actors’ transformations from characters to narrators inevitably invites the audience into the playfulness

of the piece. Bringing the audience as close to the performance space as physically possible can aid in developing this performance-audience relationship. Although having seating on the stage is not possible for this production, we are using the apron to extend the playing space toward the audience to maximize the proximity and intimacy of this relationship.

Chapter Three: Contemporary Re-imaginings of *Orlando*

ORLANDO

I can begin to live again.
The little boat is climbing through the white arch
of a thousand deaths.

(5.1.236)

These penultimate lines of Ruhl’s adaptation are, to me, a metaphor for the enduring critical acclaim for Woolf’s novel and the journey of Orlando. The image above is of a ship on the sea, rising and falling on the ocean waves—near death as it plunges perilously under the white-capped waves, and then alive again as it rises triumphantly upon the next wave. Since its publication in 1928, *Orlando* has lived again and again in ever-expanding circles of academia—literature, feminist, gender, cultural studies—and in various forms from visual arts, cinema, dance, music composition, and theatre—as well as contemporary dialogues of gender and sexual politics. The context in which my 2019 production of *Orlando* thus resides is upon this metaphorical sea that is driven by the current of gender identity politics and elicits a resurgence of *Orlando*’s relevance, and marked by the recent ninetieth anniversary celebrations of the novel this past year. Woolf’s *Orlando* has experienced a multitude of versionings and re-imaginings throughout the ninety-one years since its first publication. Ruhl states in an 2015 interview for Profile Theatre that “We are at a watershed moment for transgender politics and the conversation has shifted so much.” Acclaimed British author, Jeanette Winterson, echoes Ruhl’s perspective and offers a concise account of the relevance of the novel and its reception in her recent article in *The Guardian*: “*Orlando* has sometimes been dismissed as a romp... This is to misread it. It was far ahead of its time in terms of gender politics and gender progress” (37). The critical response to Woolf’s writings, *Orlando* and subsequent versionings, as well as Woolf herself as an icon,

gained momentum in the 1960s and has continued to gather acclaim and attention amongst academics, feminist politics, and popular culture ever since. Gillian Beer's 1984 article, "Virginia Woolf and Pre-History", claims that "Re-writing sustains and disperses, dispels, restores, and interrupts" (100), and it is clear that adaptations and re-imaginings of Woolf's novel *Orlando* have indeed 'sustained, dispersed, dispelled, restored and interrupted' the critical dialogue of the original text amongst scholars, sexual politics, and contemporary culture. Sally Potter's 1992 film, Robert Wilson's one-woman productions (1989-2011), productions of Ruhl's adaptations by Manchester's Royal Exchange Theatre (2014) and by Toronto's Soulepper (2018), plus the recent celebration of the ninetieth anniversary of the novel at Charleston, as well as the Fitzwilliam Galleries, I feel are best to include here as they each interpret Woolf's novel from different angles and intentions.

The contemporary reception of the novel *Orlando*, like almost anything connected to Woolf, is far reaching, especially when considering the significant shift in gender and sexual politics since Woolf was writing. Joanna Scutts' article, "*Orlando* Is the Virginia Woolf Novel We Need Right Now" (October 2018) offers an erudite perspective of how the novel is embraced by contemporary culture:

As a work of political satire and feminist fantasy, *Orlando* laid the groundwork for today's cultural landscape, in which the boundaries of both gender and literary genre are more porous than ever. Through a protagonist who, over the course of several centuries, takes multiple lovers and writes reams of poetry in every possible style, Woolf makes a joyful case for the transgression of all limits on desire, curiosity, and knowledge. Yet at the same time, Orlando constantly runs up against the limits of that freedom, exposing the persistent vise-grip of patriarchy even on a character blessed with the privileges of wealth, beauty, and close-to-eternal youth. Woolf invites us to imagine what it would feel like to escape, and yet, over and over again, reminds us that we are trapped. When we talk today about the tantalizing potential of a gender-agnostic society, of a world in which masculine and feminine traits are recognized for the performances that they are, or when we explore such possibilities in fiction and fantasy, we do so in *Orlando*'s shadow. (Scutts)

Similarly, Connie de Pelet's response to the recent visual art exhibition at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, England, (October 2018) suggests that "The overall effect is one of a carefully curated representation of this halo that surrounds Woolf. There are explorations of femininity and of androgyny, of the craft of writing and of craft itself... To walk through this exhibition is to walk through a kind of visual manifestation of everything that Woolf has come to represent" (de Pelet). Winterson's September 2018 article in London's *The Guardian* points to the current value and real estate that the novel continues to hold on contemporary culture: "Is *Orlando* the first English language trans novel? It is, yet in the most playful way. Orlando manages his transition with grace and a profound truth. On seeing himself as a herself for the first time in the mirror, she remarks: 'Different sex. Same person'" (Winterson 36). The argument continues by addressing the sociopolitical climate of 1928, when the novel was first published, to underscore the shifts in audience reception and perspective between then and now:

That difference of sex, though, had legal and social implications... Woolf was preoccupied by the social and economic differences between the sexes--differences, she believed, that were gender biases masquerading as facts of life. *Orlando* had paved the way for this more serious and disturbing exploration. The protagonist spends hundreds of years trying to reclaim his own property and cast, legally sequestered after he wakes up as a woman. (Winterson 36-37)

Charleston, a Farmhouse Gallery dedicated to the Bloomsbury Group, inaugural exhibition "*Orlando* at the present time", presented contemporary artistic responses to Woolf's renowned novel, including works by Kaye Donachie, Paul Kindersley, Delaine La Bas and Matt Smith. The Gallery noted that "*Orlando*'s innovative use of a protagonist who appears to change gender has made it an important reference point for those interested in gender and feminist theory and its re-examination at Charleston this autumn will connect both with the Bloomsbury group's queer history and the ever-increasing interest in discussions about gender" (*Charleston.org.uk*). This exhibition included a reading of the novel by Winterson that was also broadcast by BBC Radio.

Sally Potter's 1992 film, *Orlando*, featuring Tilda Swinton in the title role, was considered a breakthrough version and, unlike any stage adaptations, reached a wider audience for whom Potter's film was their introduction to Woolf's novel. Swinton is an incredibly engaging actor and her strikingly androgynous appearance enabled a beautifully poignant transformation. In an interview, Potter admits that she "decided to be ruthless and meticulous in trying to find the essence of the book and taking that into the essence of cinema—rather than really trying to be too faithful to every detail in the book—edited out some characters, I changed the story in certain places, I changed the ending" (Potter). This is somewhat contradictory to Ruhl's approach to adaptation in which accuracy and faithfulness were priorities. Although both had to cut characters and details in order to manage the scope of the material for a two-hour experience, the most striking and memorable elements of the narrative remain compelling in their respective mediums.

Robert Wilson's *Virginia Woolf's Orlando*, extracted and arranged by David Pinckney and Robert Wilson, was a one-woman performance that toured Berlin, Lausanne, Edinburgh, and Taiwan from 1989-2011. Similar to his other work, the image was all, and the text was cut significantly and poetically re-imagined. Because he attracts renowned artists, the production received critical acclaim in response to the performances by Jutta Lampe, Isabelle Huppert, Natasha Richardson, and Hai-Ming Wei. The fact that Wilson chose *Orlando* as a stimulus is intriguing and his visual approach to this story is particularly stunning in its focus on the solitary silhouette of Orlando. Images of Wilson's production sparked my approach to Ruhl's concept of emptiness that she includes in her "Notes on Orlando" (135), especially his striking images of silhouettes against a lit cyclorama.

Max Webster's 2014 production of Ruhl's adaptation at Royal Exchange Theatre emphasized the relevance of Orlando "because it's about loving a person regardless of sex" (Royal Theatre Exchange). Suranne Jones, who played Orlando, points out in an interview that the play features "men being able to be feminine and women being able to be masculine" which reflects contemporary culture and the shift to non-binary and pan-sexual perspectives (Royal Theatre Exchange). Webster brought a devised approach to the production with regard to physicality which was influenced by his physical theatre work with Complicité and DV8. This production, as a director, is the closest to what I envision and hope to realize on stage.

Soulpepper's 2018 production of Ruhl's adaptation marked the Canadian premiere and confirmed continuing cultural relevance and interest in *Orlando*. Toronto theatre critic, Karen Fricker, found that the production "articulated views about gender and sexuality that continue to enlighten and challenge, and that are further complicated on stage" and "invit[ed] the audience to consider everything through the lens of today." In response to the casting and character transformations, Fricker comments that "We move beyond the limited interest in male actors playing clichés of femininity to a meatier exploration of gender roles." This 'meatier exploration of gender roles' on our contemporary stages is challenging for a director in order to find a balance in the gentle satirical nature of the novel and the play. Contributing to the on-going exploration of gender roles is indeed a goal of mine for the production but I also do see it as a significant challenge to achieve.

These examples are but a small sample of the butterfly-effect *Orlando* has enlivened and engendered in contemporary culture. *Orlando*, and Woolf's oeuvre, still holds space for and elicits culturally relevant discussions and explorations with regard to feminism, gender and

sexual politics. Woolf, herself, and her novel with all its re-imaginings and versionings have—quite wonderfully—achieved relative immortality.

Chapter Four: Approach to *Orlando*

What strikes me as most resonant about the world of *Orlando* is its satirical playfulness. Reality is kept at bay in this world in order to illuminate enduring social truths. *Orlando* appears fanciful on the outside but it calls attention to the perpetuated silencing and disenfranchisement of women and their art. The titular character defies nature's laws of death and sex and, in doing so, underscores the freedom, privilege and even immortality of maleness (consider Socrates to Shakespeare) juxtaposed to the constraints, misfortunes and relative absence of femaleness (consider the 'sisters' of Socrates to Shakespeare) across four centuries. But underpinning the apparent whimsical nature of this piece, lies the satirical edge that is at the heart of the play. This world asks us to consider social history and how the construct of gender is perpetuated. *Orlando* also invites us to contemplate our essential selves, our many selves, for we are all 'more than just one thing.' The play asks us, today, to reflect on how we all participate and engage in the dialogue about gender and society as we move through 2019.

Orlando's immortality and transformation are not fanciful, but rather a call to arms for social change. Woolf's playful approach to time and place, immortality, sex—the basic laws of nature—are delightful elements to consider portraying as a director because they are inherently theatrical. The handwriting that appears in the design concept is a heartfelt reminder that women's writing and their voices haven't always been heard or given space in public forums let alone culturally immortalized. The male Orlando of the Elizabethan Era and seventeenth-century lives a life of privilege and freedom as a poet and an Ambassador to Constantinople as he chooses, and yet, as a female, Orlando is stripped of her role as Ambassador and her legal right to own her family home. The dichotomy of the playfulness that drives the play and the

poignancy that lies at the heart steered me toward an overarching premise: **Keeping reality at bay reveals poignant truths.**

The metaphoric world of *Orlando* was inspired by Su Blackwell's book art in which trees, characters, ships and landscapes are created from the pages of a book. Blackwell makes tangible the intangible images conveyed on the page and is thus, remarkably quite theatrical. I was inspired and compelled by Blackwell's book sculpture, *Migratory Words* (2014), in which a tree seamlessly sprouts from the pages of a book because it resonates metaphorically, symbolically and thematically with my perception of the world of *Orlando*. The tree as a central and organizing principle of this world demanded that it transforms to serve Orlando's journey through time and various places. The tree needed to be considered as interior architecture of Knole House, Queen Elizabeth's court, a ship, a department store, as well as what it is literally. Woolf's playful approach to time and place, immortality, sex—the basic laws of nature—are delightful elements to consider as a director because they are inherently theatrical.

On one level, the significance of the oak tree in the play is not only where Orlando flings him/herself, but it's also the title of his/her poem—the tree is Orlando's muse, a source of inspiration and creativity. The oak tree as a central organizing principle also supports Orlando's deep love of nature, trees, birds and the "greeny green of the grass" (1.1) throughout the play and culminates in her realization that "I have found my mate. / I am nature's bride" (4.1). The tree is also a cultural symbol of knowledge, strength, and nature—all of which Orlando strives for throughout his/her journey. Orlando's apparent immortality is reflected in the enduring presence of the oak tree, as a metaphorical clock that denotes seasons, years, and centuries. In addition, in keeping with Blackwell's work and the use of paper, the tree as a source of paper connected with the act of writing the poem that weaves throughout the play. The discovery that all of these

elements of the play, and more, could be supported by the oak tree became a powerful stimulus for me as a director. This paper tree / book image facilitated my initial dialogues with the design team who eagerly embraced and embellished the concept to launch the process of creating the world of *Orlando*. For me, personally, what became most important was incorporating handwriting and paper in as many aspects of the design as possible—using words from the play to give homage to the lineage of books and writers that are the roots, the source, of *Orlando*: Vita Sackville-West’s family history, *Knole and the Sackvilles*; Virginia Woolf’s novel; and Sarah Ruhl’s adaptation.

The handwriting and the act of writing are equally important metaphors to underscore a sense of the ‘indelibility’ of Woolf’s words, making them immortal. As previously mentioned, the narrative of *Orlando* is considered to be the longest love letter ever written, so entwining handwriting in the design and including writing in the action of the play are key elements of this world I want to share with the audience. The presence of handwriting in the design concept, especially as the bark on the oak tree aims to convey the importance and impermanence of women’s writing. Woolf argued in *A Room of One’s Own* that women writers, like other artists, were not taken seriously until Aphra Behn (1640-1689), “and so by degrees writing became not merely a sign of folly and a distracted mind, but was of practical importance” (62). As a way of integrating handwriting into the design concept—which will mirror the act of writing that the actors will take on—samples of Woolf’s handwriting were digitized by the costume designer and transferred onto paper to provide a bark-like texture, and also onto the Tyvek³, costume pieces.

³ Tyvek is a registered trademark of the DuPont company and is a synthetic paper product used in construction, packaging and labeling, and most known as housewrap paper. It has been used as an alternative material for costuming, and is washable which softens the texture and makes it look like smoothed out crumpled paper. Tyvek also takes dye and fabric paints well, and under theatre lights can transform in texture and colour making it an intriguing material to work with.

Metaphorically, Woolf's handwriting is the genesis of the play, and I wanted the world of *Orlando* to be steeped in her words, her images, her provoking ideas. The handwriting detailing would also be a gift to the actors, the characters who inhabit this world—something that the audience may or may not perceive clearly or understand fully—but enriches the world for those who are in and of the world of *Orlando* nonetheless. In addition, incorporating Woolf's handwriting in the set and the costumes supports my pursuit of making women's voices heard in my work as a director.

With this premise and these design concepts in mind, I have chosen to include an exordium in the form of a soundscape while actors are on stage to set the tone for the show and introduce the audience to the aural world we have created. For the past few years, I have tried various ways of starting the event as soon as I can for the audience: offering star gazing with a variety of telescopes prior to my production of Brecht's *Life of Galileo*, and having the audience enter the theatre *in media res* while soldiers are fighting in the trenches in my production of *Macbeth* set in World War I. For *Orlando*, the Chorus will be on stage, writing with white feather quills, when the audience enters. The intent is to complete the conceit that this is the entirety of their world—they never exit and, as such, never enter. In preliminary design discussions, I spoke of wanting a door in the tree from which the Chorus will emerge, or having them lying between pages of a giant book—trying to evoke the image that they are in and of this world. The reality of the tree structure shifted the exordium to be an introduction to the Chorus, the act of writing, and the sounds of this world—clocks ticking, chiming, and striking, sound of writing, waves, birds (including a goose), rain, and horse gallop.

Two additional soundscapes will help transform the final scene, the twentieth century. Woolf situated the end of the novel to align with her own present moment, identifying it as 17

March 1928. There will be a ‘time-warp’ soundscape to expand the ‘present moment’ from 1928 to 2019 and depict the ninety-one years in between with sounds of technology—cars, planes, helicopters, radio, and computers. This will be integrated with Orlando completing her poem and align with the dialogue about ‘the present moment’. The third soundscape will be added just before Orlando’s last speech and include an excerpt from the only surviving recording of Virginia Woolf reading her essay, “Craftmanship”, and four lines from a recording of Vita Sackville-West reading from her poem “The Land”. This last soundscape is my way of giving homage to both Woolf and Sackville-West, to the ‘longest and most charming love letter’, to their existence and immortality, and an end to silence.

I want to play with the law-defying elements alongside the honesty and truthfulness of human relationships. The social constructs with regard to sex and gender, and patterns of behaviour that dictate relationships are explored, called into question, and satirized to reveal what lies at the heart of the story—our essential selves. Seeing and being seen for our essential selves, which are perhaps genderless / sexless or, a unity of both, or as Woolf decries in *A Room of One’s Own* echoing Coleridge and the concept of the androgynous mind: “the androgynous mind is resonant and porous; that it transmits emotion without impediment; that it is naturally creative, incandescent and undivided” (93-94). This ‘undividedness’, this dualistic male/female nature, appears in *Orlando* not only in the transformation from male to female—in which it is simply, “Different sex. Same person”—but also in the three significant relationships Orlando has in the play with Sasha, Archduchess/Archduke, Marmaduke, and to a lesser extent Queen Elizabeth I who claims “I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king” (1.3.151). All of these relationships begin with an attraction and a question of sex—is Sasha male or female?:

CHORUS

And then *the boy* skated by—
for alas, Orlando,
a *boy* it must be.

CHORUS

Legs, hands, and carriage were a boy's.
No woman could skate with such speed and vigor.

ORLANDO

Orlando was ready to tear his hair with vexation that this fine person was
of his own sex.

He asks the Queen:

ORLANDO

Are all embraces out of the question?

The Queen nods.

SASHA

But no boy ever had a mouth like that—

CHORUS

no boy had those breasts—

ORLANDO

No boy had eyes which looked
as if they had been fished from the bottom
of the sea.

SASHA

The unknown skater came to a standstill.

ORLANDO AND CHORUS

SHE WAS A WOMAN.

(1.7.158)

The Archduke disguises himself as female to win the affections of Orlando as a young man (Act 2.1), and then later reveals he is a man to the now female Orlando (Act 3.3). The Archduke explains his attraction to both, the male and female, Orlando:

ARCHDUKE

Dearest lady, my story is a tragical one. (Tee-hee.) I am a man and have, indeed, always been one. (Haw-haw.) I saw a portrait of you long ago—at the time when you dressed in the stockings of a man—(Tee-hee.)—and I fell hopelessly in love with you. I knew no way of winning you but to dress as a woman...For to me, you were and always will be the Pink, the Pearl and the Perfection of your sex.

(3.3.200)

Here we have an attempt to abide by the hetero-normative laws of attraction in the Archduke's behaviour of disguise and truth. But it is indeed his attraction to Orlando, regardless of his/her sex that, to me, speaks to seeing Orlando's essential self. Albeit, the Archduke's love for Orlando is deemed quite ridiculous, but there is an element of truth in his constancy. The relationship with Marmaduke and Orlando is similar in nature but with a profound honesty and ease with one another. They question each other's sex and see both feminine and masculine traits in each other:

MARMADUKE

You're a man, Orlando!

ORLANDO

You're a woman, Shel!

ORLANDO

You think...you think I'm a man? Oh, no, I'm very much a woman.

MARMADUKE

And you, for a moment, thought that I was a woman? How ridiculous. (4.2.216)

Each of these relationships are stepping stones to Orlando's self-discovery and unity of selves that occurs at the end of the play—such that Sasha, the Archduke, and Marmaduke can be

considered selves of Orlando, just as integral as the Chorus is, in many ways, borne of Orlando. It is important to me that these relationships resonate on both levels—that they speak to fanciful encounters *and* the struggle for essential selves to be seen and heard that underpins the action in this world. It is a struggle that pits hetero-normative and social expectations of sex and gender up against nature and sense of self. My goal, and also my greatest concern, is to ensure that these ‘poignant truths’ are evident in the action of these relationships, that the audience sees themselves in the narrative, and that these truths resonate and linger long after the light-heartedness.

I hope to support these concepts through physicality and movement and approach the play as a whole like a dance. The aim of the gestures and choreography will be to reflect both the elegance of the various eras and the language of intimacy of Orlando’s relationships. Echoing historical images of dance will help inform the physicality and comportment for the actors, the stage pictures for each era, and shape the languages of intimacy. I will seek a process that centres on how the movement of the costume changes and character transformations are integrated seamlessly, transparently, and fluidly into the overall image, shape, and movement of the play. Dance and attention to physicality will lend itself to my approach to the concept of transformation and the many ways in which they occur both literally and metaphorically in production. The challenge for me will be in communicating my ideas and choreography to the actors, integrating the movement with specificity and characterization so that it supports the action of the play, and managing rehearsal time to devise, develop and refine this element of the production. I have years of dance, movement, and figure skating training—all of which include devising and improvisation; however, I find communicating choreography challenging.

Stemming from my premise, point of view, and approach are “The Four Ruhl’s”—playfulness, transformation, metaphor and emptiness—which Ruhl includes in her “Notes on Costume” (135). These four concepts formed the basis for all aspects of design, and my work with the actors. These “Four Ruhl’s” serve as a tiller that will guide and inform my decisions.

My hope is that the production achieves a playfulness in space, in speech, in thought, and in physicality. The scenic design, which in part resembles a treehouse, evokes childhood adventures and memories. The circular construction of the tree is echoed in the circular platform and both invite a sense of movement, as there are no corners to get caught up in. The space encourages movement, and in movement there is playfulness, and playfulness easily lends itself to transformation.

Transformation in character, in representation of time and space, in the relationship between the character and the space. Everything will transform—sound will evolve in technology, lights will transform the performance space from interior to exterior, from the Elizabethan Era to the twenty-first century. The costumes will transform from cape to skirt, from short to long skirts, and will be shared between one character and another. The transparency of these transformations is important to me, and the audience will bear witness to these moments. With the direct address narration as an invitation to the audience, the visible transformations are a similar welcoming offer to our audience. Costumes will shift and transform to evoke the specific eras, props will always be more than one thing. Branches of the tree become a sword, a mirror, a larger mirror, a car, a ship. The tree itself will be the Russian ship, Orlando’s house in Constantinople, the attic in the opening scene. The final Act which ends in 1928, will be extended and the soundscape will transform the final two pages of the play into 2019. I have honed in on one composition, “Life” by Ludovico Einaudi, and have found several transpositions

of this piece including harp, guitar, string quartet, and hip hop—each of which will be used for a specific century starting with the harp for the Elizabethan Age and hip hop for twentieth century. In this way, the music will both transform with regard to instrumentation, but also indicate a transformation in time throughout the play. I have also given thought to echoing Orlando's transformation with a shift from male to female performers of Einaudi's "Life". The music for Orlando's transformation eluded me for many months, but I happily discovered Alice Phoebe Lou's "She"—a solo electric guitar, followed by breath-taking vocals of the single word "she" is both haunting and seductive.

Metaphors will be embedded into all aspects of the production. Circles are the predominant shape in the set design to echo the circle of life and self-discovery. The handwriting on the costumes and in the action will become metatheatrical. Movement and physicality, as well as the use of the scrim in the tree, will connote both our hidden and unveiled selves.

The concept of emptiness is similar to Ruhl's use of the word simplistic when she speaks of narration, movement and gesture, and acting to avoid subtext. In the set and costume design there is an emphasis on negative space and cages, such that the ribs of a farthingale will be exposed, for example. The use of the cyc in the lighting design will provide an expanse of colour and space, and offer an image of a blank canvas, a blank page.

In addressing my directorial challenge concerning striving for balance in rehearsals, I will integrate movement and choreography in our daily ensemble warm-up in rehearsals. The goal of this would be two-fold: to create and develop a physicality for each century, and to establish a language of intimacy for the variety of relationships in the play. Using my experience with 'collage theatre' to efficiently approach choreography as a starting point, I will then seek opportunities to integrate the choreography fluidly. Through these physical explorations, I hope

that the outcomes will also serve to build a trusting and supportive ensemble. It is important that as a director I guide the ensemble in the exploration of physicality in order for all of us to develop a language and relationships together through movement. The shifting of the physicality over time can be subtle, or overt, and I will need to guide the ensemble through a repertoire that serves the world of the play—the polite society, the social norms, and public versus private physicality. Similarly, the degree and intensity of the language of intimacy we incorporate will need to come from an informed and methodical approach. Providing the actors with the International Intimacy Directors protocols and involving an intimacy coach will be necessary. My experience as a director in this area is not as practiced and I look forward to gaining more insight and familiarity with the protocols to support my work by working with an intimacy coach. Seeking a balance of movement and intimacy exploration, repetition, and rehearsing scenes will be needed to embody the specificity and clarity I hope to achieve.

The rehearsal time required to meet the technical demands of the play will be challenging. The nature of the play and my approach of having all eight actors remain within the playing space for the duration of the play, will then require that all actors be at every rehearsal. I will need then to ensure and be aware of time and attention given to all actors. Focusing on the whole picture, as well as the detail work, will be a significant challenge to inform, shape, and support the tracks for each actor. The importance of some semblance of set structure, as many props and costume pieces as possible, will be required to integrate and execute the use of these items fluidly. The choreography of the costume changes will need time, and allaying fears and anxieties to complete these actions, seemingly effortlessly, will also take time to rehearse. Having chosen to have Orlando and Sasha actually in skates will shift focus and likely add just as many complications as it does excitement.

Detailed blocking and physicality likely will be addressed first and will allow all actors to layer in the text more and more competently as rehearsals progress. This choice comes from the need to have everyone in the space for every moment of the play—if they have a literal path. I am hoping that once that is established, we can zoom in and focus moment by moment and make further discoveries of relationship, intention, and emotional investment. Ensuring that everyone in the ensemble is physical and emotionally invested in every moment, will hopefully come out of this process. Through collaboration and being open to their offerings, I hope my leadership style will foster confidence but also keep the cast reaching for consistency and emotional specificity moment to moment. This approach, I trust, will also encourage strong choices with regard to the identity and function of the Chorus. I will enter the process with the Chorus with clear ideas but because of my collaborative approach the actors' individual perspectives and offerings will be heard and may be integrated.

Ultimately, I will strive to bring my 'idea' of the production as close as I can to the 'reality' of it. To achieve this as a leader: my focus and point of view will be in service of the play; my actions, language, and rehearsal process will be in service of the actors; and my collaboration and communication will be in service of the designers as their paper drawings transition into the concretization of our ideas. Ensuring the purpose of Woolf's gentle satire is served and that constructs of gender, relationships, and sexual politics are called into question are essential goals of both the idea and the reality of my production of *Orlando*. Inviting *Orlando* to 'begin to live again' will, I trust, give us all pause, provoke contemplation, and still speak to us in a new way.

Chapter Five: Journal of Creative Process

Company Meeting

After months of research and discussions with the designers, this was actually the first time hearing the play aloud. The ultimate goals I noted were ‘to be moved’ and ‘beauty is seductive, but does it affect you’. What I heard prompted the following notes and questions about character, relationships, staging, images, and how design elements can support key moments:

- Chorus: find moments to respond to each other’s lines
- Queen Elizabeth I: vocal expression? Who is she in public? In private?
- Chorus: what is the personality of the Chorus? Their attitude to the story? To Orlando? To other characters? What relationships exist within the Chorus? Are there character types? Leader, rebel, intellectual, caretaker, political voice, silent partner, judge, prima donna?
- What is the male perspective / gaze on female characters and vice versa? What do I want to say about the male gaze / the female gaze, through this play?
- Idea for the grand banquet scene: Chorus as nobility, dinner guests; mimed actions, choreography; exactly the same tempo, different gestures—eating, polite conversation, flirting, boredom
- What about characters who are emotionally invested in Orlando—what is their response when they see, hear, and speak words that describe his/her new lover? Is there residue of all the characters the Chorus play, do they embody all their characters together, or is there a switch – a gain and a loss of these fleeting identities? Queen Elizabeth I and Sasha

return, ghost-like, so it makes sense that the actors in these roles maintain something of these characters throughout the whole play.

- Find a Russian sailor song for them to sing!
- Find an Italian song for Eurphrosyne to sing!
- Images of everything they say are needed: Blackfriar's, Beefeaters, dahlia,
- Explain Petrarchan sonnet to them, and how the sonnet Orlando recites ("Shall I compare thee to a summer's day") is not a Petrarchan sonnet!
- The thaw: how to convey this section? Props? Use dress cages?
- Orlando's transformation: what is the tone of the Chorus? TedTalk-ish? How surprised / awed are they? How in control of this are they?
- Sasha appearing and disappearing: how to convey? In the tree / voile reveal? Support with light and sound? Bells chiming? Russian theme music that becomes Sasha's theme?
- Archduchess/Archduke: what are the similarities and differences? What remains when he appears as Archduke? What degree of ridiculousness / charm is there? Needs to play with the elasticity—fight to draw Orlando in
- Orlando: scenes with Captain Bartolus and the Archduchess/Archduke, Orlando is actively searching for behavior, how to feel, what to feel, questioning—"What should...?"
- Line assignments for the Chorus: how am I going to approach this? Can it happen organically, or will I have to assign sooner rather than later?

This first read-through was magical. I could envision this ensemble, moving moment by moment in storytelling. It was incredibly inspiring—lots of ideas for movement, dynamics, moments/images. Lots of questions to help us explore. Also realized how big of a show this is!!

A bit of a wild horse and I am really hoping I am strong enough to hold on and keep the horse going forward.

Week One: Overview

- Set, props, costumes orientation
- Discussion: approach to rehearsals, expectations
- Tablework: read-through + discussion; Ruhl's notes on narration
- Fight & intimacy scene breakdown, introduction, information
- Movement work: ensemble building, tableaux exercise, Elizabethan physicality

Week One: Preparation and Reflections

Brainstorming the first day and how I want to approach rehearsals, the space, and the work— setting up the first week of rehearsals. How important it is to set the tone, the priorities, language, and begin to explore the stepping stones toward building the ensemble and the performance. Using Katie Mitchell's book for inspiration I came up with the following notes on what I want to address during the first week both the tablework and floorwork:

- The writer & genre
- Practical work on ideas and emotions
- Character biographies
- Character work and character tempo
- relationships

Notes on Ruhl & genre:

- “the idea is embedded in the form rather than in the conversation” (*100 Essays*)

- The ideas of the play are the characterization, the Chorus, the narration, the treatment of time, the transformation
- The ideas= movement, transformation, action, playfulness
- Where transformation is at the heart of player/storyteller and at the heart of the story itself

Woolf's novel is a satire

- "Horacian" satire; more "The Simpsons than South Park"
- It's a parody of 'biography'
- The barbs of Woolf's wit are gentle, teasing, picking at the loose threads of hypocrisy
- Clearly commenting/nodding toward getting the attention of society
- Satirizing literature as it exists as an establishment or system with regard to women writers; the sexism, empiricism and conservatism of the literary establishment

Ruhl responds to the tone / the 'lightness' (*100 Essays*):

- There is "a suspicion that lightness is not deeply serious but instead whimsical....what if lightness is a philosophical choice to temper reality with strangeness, temper the intellect with emotion, and temper emotion with humour. Lightness is then a philosophical victory over heaviness"

Also inspired from Mitchell, are notes regarding my own conduct in rehearsals:

- patience & long-term thinking; resist solving right now; we are exploring, and developing, building
- be consistent, clear, and give encouraging feedback

- don't worry about being liked; focus on sharpening the work the actors are doing; the goal is to make the work clear
- the text = a mediator of any conflict or question
- don't blame the actor: ask what was unclear? Reflect on the timing of the feedback and/or instruction
- apologize if make an error
- alleviate pressure with regard to time: don't waste time, especially don't waste time explaining my ideas or justifying the process
- learn to differentiate between actions/ gestures that reflect the actor playing a character in a situation, and those that reflect a self-conscious actor on stage
- avoid last minute instructions

To address the 'storytelling narration form' of the play, games/exercises from Joyce Piven's book were selected specifically to explore to serve the storytelling aesthetic of the play. Games that lay the groundwork for transformation—both physical transformation and narrator-character transformations: when to go into the story, and when to step out of it; how to make a transformation and still keep in third person narration; how to exercise the discipline of detail. Piven's round-robin games, give and take exercises, suspension are intriguing.

Additional topics for first rehearsal to facilitate actors' ability to conceptualize relationships and context of each scene going forward with the work:

- *Languages of intimacy and relationships* will be prioritized throughout the rehearsal process. Intimacy coach, Siobhan Richardson, will be helping with this.

- *Entrances*: actors need to know event, location, action for every entrance
- *Place*: actors need to know the place in which the action occurs for every scene
 - o Knole House—exterior (oak tree, moor, hill) and interior (bedroom, banqueting hall); Elizabethan through to 20th century
 - o Queen’s Court—dining hall, dressing room, ‘day room’, boudoir?
 - o Frozen Thames River (Elizabethan)
 - o Blackfriar’s Inn (Elizabethan)
 - o Constantinople—apartment/house (17th century)
 - o Ship—sailing from Constantinople to England (18th century)
 - o London—streets, department store, elevator (20th century)

Set and costume designers joined us during our first rehearsal to further inform actors of details and brought the maquette and one of the Tyvec skirts that transforms. This was useful to help the actors get a more tangible idea of the interactive nature of the set and the costumes.

Studio space:

Images of portraits and of life in Elizabethan Age, 17th-19th century were posted in the studio and will remain there for the duration of the process. Included in the collection were images of people, the city of London, the carnival on the frozen Thames, Constantinople, and Knole House, as well as drawings of dancing done in the period in question. I shared these with the cast this week, and hope to be able to refer to them as we go along, and continue to build this image library.

The stage management team set up the adjoining office to house rehearsal shoes, costumes, props as well as personal items. A tea station was also set up, and the kettle was plugged in at the top of rehearsal and also just before breaks in an effort to establish a supportive and nourishing space in which to create.

Rehearsal props, costumes, and shoes began to arrive this week which was very exciting and useful. This was something I pushed for early in discussions with the set and costume designers. The transformative/interactive nature of the costumes and the on-stage changes will need to be integrated into the process, not added on at the end during tech week. We don't have the skates yet, which is disappointing, and I have gently inquired again about their arrival.

Observations from the first week:

- Seeing the actors move in space during warm-ups was inspiring. Leading them through a “kinesphere yawn and stretch” was beautiful.
- Piven's “Balance the space” exercise was great and raised the question of what does balance mean in this world we are creating, and how can we incorporate this into our images/imagery.
- Piven's “3-way mirror” exercise was informative with regard to how we dress and undress (this action was mimed!), as the actors will be dressed and undressed by each other throughout the play. This exercise raised the question of when does a character's gender take shape? Prior to the costume or because of the costume? How much of the costume is needed, a single item, or the entire costume? Connects with the concept of Orlando's transformation as simply being “Same person. Different sex” – and in this exercise we asked the degree to which “Same person. Different costume” is applicable.

So this exercise connected to the on-going conversation of gender and transformation of all the characters/actors.

- Exploring the idea of *physical suspension* in Piven's exercises, aiming to incorporate this concept for the Archduchess/Archduke scenes and other moments to suggest a pause/time lapse/ a stepping out of time. Inspired by a sequence of suspensions at the end of Patricia Rozema's 1999 film, *Mansfield Park*, this might be a way to incorporate a pattern of representation / treatment of time for the play as a whole. I adapted one of Piven's exercises to suit this idea and called it 'gaze and go': Moving through the space, I call 'suspend', beat, I call 'look/gaze' (at audience, at a specific character), beat, go (resume moving through the space); after about 4-5 of these, I stop calling and the ensemble works on their own; someone suspends and everyone else goes into suspension, beat, look/gaze (made it the audience for this part of the exercise), beat, go; allowed the ensemble to find their own rhythm.
- *First table reads*: prelude to reading we talked about satire and lightness, and followed the reading with a chat. Many great observations that deepened the ensembles understanding of the story, characters, and key moments. Actors asked great questions, and tried new tactics with lines with each reading. We talked about punctuation, page layout, the exordium I have in my head for the opening of the play, and the relationship with the audience.
- *Regarding intimacy*: it was brought up that it is imperative that everyone is honest about their health (cold sores, illnesses, etc). I printed and gave each actor and stage management team the documents available on the Intimacy Directors International website: Tonia Sina's "Safe Sex: A look at the intimacy choreographer", "The Pillars:

Rehearsal and Performance Practice”, and Adam Noble’s “Sex and Violence: Practical Approaches for Dealing with Extreme Stage Physicality”. We reviewed the protocols and the documents, and informed the actors of upcoming sessions with the intimacy coach.

Struggles in the first week:

- Struggled to make a decision about how to arrange the mis-matched tables for our reading! Needed to be able to see everyone, including our three stage managers, and also ensure everyone had enough space. It was internally frustrating and just really hope it was because I was fading and needed sugar or something—any other reason is too foreboding for the entirety of the rehearsal process if I can’t even figure out the best way to arrange tables for us to sit around. Had to defer to stage management’s expertise to figure it out!!! Perhaps it was a sign to let them do things like that, as I am clearly incapable! I can talk Petrarchan vs Shakespearean sonnets for an hour, but give me tables to arrange and I am lost.
- I struggled with authority before and after the first table read, a bit. Struggled to be clear, having so many things to say to the cast about all the thoughts and ideas and images and research I have done—realizing that they don’t have to know everything I have ever thought about the play on this first day, week, or even ever! But need to figure out when to share this information, these ideas; when is the most appropriate time?
- I struggled to make a clear decision about accents; mainly because I don’t know what their capabilities are at the moment. The play is so clearly set in England, but eight actors all doing Received Pronunciation and having them actually ‘be in the same world’ vocally is really difficult. And do we have time, in rehearsals, to

spend on this? Does the vocal coach on faculty have time to work with all eight actors?

- I struggled to articulate how Chorus lines were going to be assigned. And I struggled to offer my thoughts about the ending of the play—does Orlando die or not. I never considered her dying, but the final stanza's stumped me a little and I felt I had spent so much time thinking about the play that I neglected to enter the space with that clarity of thought.
- Introducing the intimacy—I need to spend more time with the vocabulary, and build a greater facility with the language of intimacy work.
- Language overall—I need to aim to be more concise.
- I struggled at times to not treat them like students; to not shush them or correct their behaviour!!! Need to be professional! Quietly!!! Appealed to stage management to perhaps put a 'cell phone' policy in place if this behaviour continues.
- I could have guided the actors better in our ensemble warm-up that focused on relationships—asked them to label/qualify each relationship they have. This exercise was time consuming, and was a bit challenging. I made this exercise up and perhaps needed to ask the actors to select three important relationships they have in the play, rather than explore every relationship this first time through.

Priorities that became clear at the end of the first week:

- Intimacy work: making time for it and integrating it into rehearsal; figuring out the context and the content of each intimate scene
- The world of the play, the conceit, the rules of the game

- The role of the Chorus
- Relationships
- Images—found and created by the ensemble (tableaux exercise, entrances and exits)
- Emotions
- Line of action
- Working with rehearsal costumes

Week Two: Overview

- Tablework: read-through + discussion; Acts 4 & 5
- Begin blocking Act 1-3
- Movement work: languages of intimacy, entrances & exits, Elizabethan-18th century physicality

Week Two: *Preparation and Reflection*

I started the week feeling ‘off’ somehow, and felt that my preparation was ‘underprepped’. Still need to give considered thought to Chorus line assignments, but struggling to find an ‘in’ – a method of assigning them. Keying into a personality, or attitude is what I am hoping for, but its not jumping off the page. I had counted on allowing the actors to organically take on certain lines, but I think that the actors are too young and inexperienced with this type of text to do that themselves. I got the idea from my previous research on Ariane Mnouchkine, but realize now that she was working with an ensemble who have worked together for years in this way—being open to the beginning weeks of rehearsal and test-driving characters, making offerings in a variety of characters until things start to settle and the actors find their way to a

specific character. Thinking that the *Orlando* ensemble was ready for and open to this approach was naïve of me—one of the significant differences between Mnouchkine’s process is that she rehearsed for months and months which would allow such an extensive period of exploration. We don’t have that. Managed to figure out preliminary line assignments—adjustments might need to be made.

I also need to storyboard – but I have never done this before, and struggle to wrap my brain around a single image for each scene. Though I am quite comfortable and inspired by the tableaux exercise we did last week – which is a living breathing version of storyboarding perhaps. Though, I realize the purpose of storyboarding is to be prepared....I feel the need to be more open to what the actors offer and bring to the floor. Yes, I have specific images in mind for specific moments in the play—but I need them, I need the interaction and the impulse from the ensemble to compose a visual storyboard.

Bringing movement work together with text is a challenge for me. Robert Wilson composes images and explores movement and then finds appropriate moments to layer in the text and I think/ I hope to do something similar. Finding ways to integrate the movement work that we build somewhat abstractly—though connected to relationship—into moments of the play and then place/ weave the text through is challenging! But so rewarding when it works. Even the little bit of Elizabethan physicality has shifted the scenes in Act 1 which are very much in their infancy blocking-wise.

I need to:

- start working with the actors individually, but it is challenging since I have set up the convention that everyone is on stage at all times.
- find moments, and help them find moments for each of them.

- help the actors with the narration/character transformations.
- raise the stakes
- delineate a clear line of action + identify the ‘events’ + entrances and exits; more attention as to how/when entrances and exits are made and how this affects the world of the play
- There are so many things to attend to.

Chorus—individual identities? Part of Orlando? Give them names after the muses? Let each actor decide on their own name?

The actor playing Orlando expressed anxiety about the amount of skating while acting in these scenes. I tried to allay her fears, since we haven’t even got the skates yet, her fears are of the unknown. I reassured her that we will have helmet, kneepads, elbow pads, and that the coaching sessions will be used to develop repeatable actions and that we will work with her abilities.

Week Three: Overview

- Begin blocking Acts 3-5
- Movement work: languages of intimacy, review Elizabethan-18th century physicality

Reviewing Ruhl’s notes on narration:

- Simplicity
- Emotional statedness
- Non-literalness/illustration
- Flux

- Audience

Ruhl's notes on movement:

- Non-literal language of dance should work in counterpoint to Woolf's surfeit of language

Vietnamese Ceo theatre:

- Musicality of the acting style
- Commitment to connecting with the audience

Emotion:

- Find, explore, big emotions; emotional stakes; emotional importance of each moment

Personally: I need to make personal connections with all of the actors, and fully integrate everyone into the heart of the play.

Week Four: Overview

- First stumble through
- Afternoon sessions: skating, fight and intimacy, Orlando/Sasha scenes, Orlando/ Queen Elizabeth scenes, Orlando/Archduchess/Archduke scenes
- Act 1-3 detail work (moment to moment, character work, considering props, costume changes, scene transitions, integrating movement, fight and intimacy)
- Movement work: skating, languages of intimacy, entrances & exits, Elizabethan-18th century physicality

Returning to rehearsal after the Reading Week was exciting but daunting. The designers really needed to see a stumble through, so we managed to do exactly that on our first day back.

We warmed-up with the Piven exercises again, creating new forms of tag—this time “genteel tag” so “genteel” poses were struck when tagged. Balance the space, gaze and go, portrait exercises and reviewing the courrant dance moves. I feel that I need to isolate moves, gestures to create a specific vocabulary for specific moments in the play. Chorus physicality needs purpose and refining.

Questions of the week:

- What is the emotional journey of the Chorus? The emotional commitment?
- How much control does the Chorus have over Orlando?
- All have parts to play—as though to enlighten Orlando.
- What, if any, elements of surprise are there?

Week Five: Overview—on deck rehearsals

- Orientation to the set in the space
- Act 4-5 detail work (moment to moment, character work, considering props, costume changes, scene transitions, integrating movement, fight and intimacy)
- 2nd stumble through
- Begin tech: Levels, costume parade

I need to stop being the teacher. Stop explaining, let the actors ‘do’. The language of a director—ergo be direct!!

Week Six: Overview—back in studio

- Afternoons: transformation scene, skating, Orlando/Sasha scenes, Orlando/Queen Elizabeth scenes, Orlando/Archduchess/Archduke scenes, Orlando/Marmaduke scenes, extra time working with costumes and costume changes
- Run Acts 1 & 2; 3 & 4; full run
- Acts 3-5: continue detail work
- Tech: Q2Q

I need to find a balance between asking for their views/concerns/opinions and putting them in the role of the director! Asking questions that open the door to how *they* would rehearse is so awkward and debilitating and confusing. I often ask for their perspective because I value it and feel that I require it often to move on to the next thing. Perhaps this is my attempt to be anti-tyrannical—I need them to connect and value and believe in the work we are creating together, and checking in with them is my way of doing that. Perhaps I need to let go of asking and let their work be a testament to all that I am questioning?

As we went through Q2Q I asked the actors to:

- Think about the relationships you have with each other, as Chorus & Orlando
- Think about Chorus as individuals; as an entity
- How much are you affected by other Chorus members? Orlando?
- Listen and see each other
- It is a marathon; energize each other; stamina to make it through to Act 5 maintaining focus

This week is our last chance to take steps forward in the process. As challenging as it is to move back into the studio after nearly a week on deck, we need to address some of the bigger concerns:

- *Relationships*: with each other, with the audience
- *Audience*: discover the audience, know they are there; “this is us, we want to tell our story, the story of all of us”
- *Movement*: make movement mean something, it’s ok if movement is self-conscious at times (especially Orlando)
- *Language*: enjoy it! Find value and purpose to everything you say; revel in the poetry—it is stylized, not conversational; have to have the exact image in your head every time; discovery and constant surprise and awe; find the musicality; lots of opportunity for vocal expression
- *Character*: find, clarify, sharpen your journey overall; where are you as a Chorus before and after you are another character? Differentiate your character—keep layering in details; what are you bringing to each scene? Keep in mind that you are all in each scene from the top, even if you are getting your skates on/ waiting to get onto the horse; maintain clarity of intention;
- *Vocals*: articulation; projecting—connect to your need to communicate; come in ‘over’ so that you can build on the image/ idea
- *Entrances and exits*: distinct; be affected by them; see them! Listen to them!
- *Pace*: will help you realize moments of suspension, stillness, buoyancy; the silences will have more impact if there is pace

The saddest part of the week was realizing, being forced to realize, that I have essentially lost one, and kind of two, actors in a way. Two of the eight have ‘checked out’ or blocked me out for a couple of weeks now I think. Yes, they take personal notes which sometimes are embraced and sustained; but general notes to everyone, they have no interest. Nor do they take initiative – they say yes when asked directly, but they make few offerings and often seem more focused on whatever conversation they are having than to give focus to the task at hand. I should have ‘clocked’ this earlier, and tried to re-direct their focus to their characters—because the result is that they are the least engaged. Yes, their own shiny moment in the spotlight scenes are fine, but for the rest of the play, they are lackluster, unfortunately. There was an incident that was unprofessional on their part, and I tried to not make it bigger than it was but I had to address it—and in doing so, I could have been more professional. I didn’t completely lose it like I wanted to, but I wish I had handled it more articulately. Insincere apologies were exchanged. I was determined to start the next day and continue as though it hadn’t happened, which was the right thing to do. But it rattled me for days. I avoid confrontation, but I couldn’t contain the effrontery of this actor, and had to say something.

Week Seven: Overview

- Afternoons: fight and intimacy calls, skating, choreography detail work (dinner with QE, vulture, “Igray”, ship to England, car, elevator, toad, tea table; costume changes and transitions); notes from tech-dress & dress, work bits that need attention
- Costume change rehearsal
- Notes and work bits that need attention/sharpening
- Tech: Tech-dress rehearsal, dress rehearsal

Having the time to tweak, finesse, sharpen and clarify the details has been glorious. My notes on the runs are mainly details – for actors and for tech. Mostly things are sticking with the actors, or I am adjusting to certain notes that don't seem to be picked up—but these are minor at this point. And I realize that I need to give them less to think about to help them get more and more grounded in what they are doing so that they are able to play!

Made time for a costume change rehearsal. Ran the whole play, with repetitions of costume changes to 'work smarter' in these sections and make necessary changes to choreography of the change and the timing. I was very patient, gave up any ideas of doing anything other than this. Supporting their needs and encouraging them. Wardrobe team was present and able to identify adjustments they could make which was fabulous. I kind of surprised myself at how calm and patient I was; allowing costume changes / choreography discussions happen, involving wardrobe team take what they need to make adjustments. Seeing the actors' anxieties get higher and higher in the past couple of weeks has instilled in me an unfamiliar calm patience. Knowing that a costume change rehearsal was needed two weeks ago, it was imperative that we take as much time that was needed to work through each of the changes if we were going to survive!

Made time to listen to them and hear their concerns—which then shaped / dictated what we gave our attention to.

This week also proved to me, to a certain extent, that my prep is good. Yes, could always be more, but I need to use my prep more effectively. Trust it more. Use it more. Rely on it more. Ideas come to me and they are there on the paper—when too often I 'wing it', work on impulse rather than stick to the plan. The 'winging it' comes from responding to the room, to what the

actors bring to the floor, being open to what they are bringing and being keen to build on that rather than what I had in mind. But I need to do both – have my prep notes in my hand, *and* listen and respond to what is being offered in the room. Then assess, prioritize, rearrange plans.

Spent time on sharpening the opening, the exordium. Having the actors enter, one by one while the audience is entering. Going into suspension upstage, then crossing downstage to discover the audience before finding their writing place. The lighting is so beautiful and what the actors are beginning to discover in this quiet prelude is quite wonderful. Hoping it will achieve the effect of inviting the audience in as early as possible, draw their attention to some of the details in the piece, but allow them to settle in as well.

Also finally figured out the ending!!! Ruhl writes about endings in *100 Essays* that endings need to contain beginnings. This enlivens Orlando's final lines:

I can begin to live again.
The little boat is climbing through the white arch
of a thousand deaths.

I am about to understand...

Returning to the boat on the sea imagery, where the “white arch of a thousand deaths” are white-capped waves that send boats and all those aboard into potential peril. And the final statement, “I am about to understand...” is a beginning—with such potential in the phrasing. So we figured out that we need to face the tree, backs to the audience, give homage to the source of the creation of *Orlando*, the oak tree. Pairing this discovery with the recording of Woolf's “Craftmanship” is a yet another homage to Woolf, but also to immortality and words and...

I was able to give notes after the tech-dress to each actor about what I saw and how that moment could be sharpened or clarified. I also gave them a ‘next step’ note – something to reach for, because I need them to always be reaching with every run, every performance that they do.

The focus for the dress rehearsal was for the actors to have the exact image in their head and be affected by that image. My focus was to note when I was hearing the images and when do we need more clarity (vocal, physical, action and intent)?

Unfortunately, the dress rehearsal had a rather significant costume malfunction, which threw a few of the actors off; they soldiered on, but it was disheartening. It was also the first run we had the wigs and they were atrocious and not made to perform in it seems. Adjustments will have to be made to the wigs before preview.

Technical aspects are still being finalized and tweaked – levels mostly. And some lx, but it is coming together!!! And I know that I can't really change anything at this point, so I am acquiescing, and somehow focusing on supporting what has been achieved thus far...

Still trying to get through to one of the actors about connecting emotionally to what she is saying. When I speak with her about a specific line, she gets it and its consistent, but lines we haven't spoken about specifically are so disconnected and are stuck in 'detached narrator' mode. I also began to notice that if she has more than one line, the first one will be emotionally connected, but not the second one—half the 'work' is incomplete and it is so clear. Hearing her is usually the main problem, but this disconnectedness is a bigger issue that I should have addressed weeks ago. How do I pick up on which actor isn't going to 'get it' and which actor will get there soon?

Charting the Movement Work

Week One: Tableaux Exercise (à la Peter Hinton)

Under/Over (à la RashDash devising exercise)

Elizabethan physicality

The concept for the **tableau exercise** stems from early Renaissance paintings in which a hero is depicted in several different narratives in one painting, one composition. Elizabethan paintings depict several stages of life, for example. The exercise is then an offering, asking the actors to make an offering with the purpose of creating an image, creating stories with their bodies in space. As Salli Lyons would say in our movement course last term, “your body knows the story, your words merely confirm it.”

I analyzed the five-act play structure and came up with five sentences that described the Aristolean introduction, the development of the action, the climax, dénouement, and resolution. The ensemble was then given time to create a tableau for each sentence. Once those were established, we then ran them in sequence, giving focus on the journey from introduction to development, from development to climax, etc. What is the tempo of these individual journeys? What emotions are evoked? How can the journey inform the individual tableau?

1. *Introduction sentence* [Act 1.1-1.7]: The *dance of love* begins, the *freedom of youth, beauty and love of nature is rewarded* by the Queen with *social status and luxury* which stifles, but *brings illicit dalliances* and the *torrent of first love*. (a bit too convoluted for the actors to grasp, so I broke it down into the key words—italicized)

2. *Development sentence* [Act 1.8-2.1]: The despair of first deceit evokes a swearing off of women; the solace of writing is overshadowed by unwanted vulturous attention prompting a hasty escape to Constantinople.
3. *Climax sentence* [Act 2.2]: A transformation causes a different way of moving through the world, a different way of seeing the world, and a different way of being seen by the world.
4. *Dénouement sentence* [Act 3.1-4.1]: Moving through the world according to new/unfamiliar social conventions is negotiated and incurs a loss of status and property, and unwanted affection; solace, freedom, and love are sought in nature.
5. *Resolution sentence* [Act 4.2-5.1]: Romantic love is celebrated according to customs, and the modern world incurs an existential crisis, raise the dead, and reveals greater understanding of life.

The final exercise with these tableaux is to have the actors begin from the wings, enter the playing space on impulse and begin to recreate the first tableau. Once it is established, again, on impulse, they each journey to the next tableau, etc. I chose to play the song, “Cut the World”, by Anthony and the Johnsons to accompany this exercise. This song is incredibly powerful for me, and I chose it on impulse—it both is and is not of the world of *Orlando*. But it worked so beautifully and the actors were quite affected by it as well (I barely make it through that song without crying...not sure what it is about the song...)

What was most important about this exercise with regard to informing our work were the spirals and circles that the actors scribed in their journey from one tableau to the next, but also with their bodies within a tableau as well. We spoke often of circles metaphorically at our table read – circle of life, theme of time/ clock, plus the structure of the set – the circular riser, the

twist in the tree, the circular staircase. The actors also discovered a ‘reaching’ gesture, and ‘the gaze’ was very powerful and intentional with each actor. Relationships were clear, as was tension. There were notable shifts in tempo as the ensemble made their journey from one tableau to the next—the music eerily coincided with many of these tempo changes. Tempo is very much on my mind for this show as I hope to build a fluidity, flow, and changes in tempo that support the line of action, time travel, and changes in place.

Struggles during the tableau exercise:

- I struggled at times to adjust the tableau offerings (which is part of the exercise, to be the ‘director’! and adjust to sharpen and clarify the work). I struggled with one actor in particular to find the right word, language, to re-shape his offering. It took me a few tries, but ended up often saying ‘soften’, or find more curves—less angles, open up, let the pose you have breathe.

Under/Over Movement Exercise:

We did this exercise in pairs, with no specific intention who was partnered with whom. The structure is that A makes a gesture/move that goes ‘under’ a body part of their partner (ie. Hand under their elbow, under chin); B reciprocates with an ‘under’ gesture; A offers a gesture that goes ‘over’ a body part of their partners (on top of shoulder, head, nose, etc.), and B reciprocates. This cycle is done twice through, so that the movement is repeatable, and the actors explore eye contact, tempo, and flow.

I could have interacted with the actors more, maximizing and sharpening their offerings more with regard to tempo and flow. But some beautiful stories were told by some pairings.

Elizabethan Physicality:

I took the actors through curtsies and bows, comportment, ‘how the chins were worn’, and how to move in clothing of that time period—what accommodations had to be made in walking in heels, corsets, hoop skirts. What to do with the arms was the main focus, as well as tempo. I played Elizabethan music (lute, other period instruments) to help inspire them, and we watched a couple of YouTube videos—“How to dance through time” by Dancetime Publications (2010), and BBC’s Lucy Worsley. Images of the time period helped the actors visualize stature, poses, especially exposing the calf muscle, and also the strength of the spine, openness of shoulders.

***Week Two:* Elizabethan, 17th and 18th century physicality**

Entrances & Exits

Language of Intimacy

We continued to explore historical physicality, looking at the patterns of dances—the circles, weaving in and out, hop steps. Details of the changes in clothing continued to inform our movement and understanding of it – the addition of the lace cuffs led to a fluttering of the wrist in the execution of a bow. The notion of ‘polite’ society informed how the ensemble greeted each other, made an offering of a bow or curtsy, or an arm if the intention is to walk as a couple.

We looked at the 18th century minuet, a country dance, and the courrant step which was really interesting. There is a rise up in posture, followed by a sinking with a sigh as the left leg slides forward and the right knee bends – with the interior monologue being ‘life is grand, but I am weak and may fall in love’. This dance also has a wonderful ‘swing’ movement—“I see, I want, I mustn’t, I can’t” that involves a reaching out, and a hesitation of stepping back. This

exploration was quite delightful and informative for the ensemble. We also explored daintiness in feet with a strong upper body, and only physical contact is hand to hand. The idea of seeing and being seen in this time period was also effective in helping the actors adjust to this time period physically. My goal is to ‘pepper’ this physicality throughout the play – so that movement and gesture speak almost as distinctly as Orlando’s period costumes.

The ensemble has quite a wide range of skills—and anxiety about physicality and choreography is starting to surface. So I have adjusted my expectations, tried to balance my time and language, so as to quell any rising apprehension. I realize that I need to develop a greater facility with choreographic language, be consistent, and present clear ideas of what I am looking for. The devised work that they create is so beautiful, but I do want some element of authenticity regarding the time period throughout the play. So that we can transform from corsets and rigid and polite society into a freer, looser modern era.

Entrances & Exits: another Peter Hinton exercise which is similar to a Q2Q in that the actors take their positions when the first entrance or exit occurs, beat, move to where they are or for the next event whether it be an entrance or an exit. This is built and rehearsed—Act 1 has 8 scenes, so it took a while to chart each event. We also had to figure out what an entrance was when Chorus was transforming from narration into character and at what point does that start. It ended up slightly differently for each actor as they work differently in taking on and off their characters. Once the whole play’s entrances and exits were charted, we did a run through—similar to the tableaux exercise—and the actors began in the wings, and entered the space upon impulse. The music I used for this was Sasha Ventura’s remix of Ludovico Einaudi’s “Life”, which worked beautifully! Such an informative exercise – as it reveals the dramaturgy of the play and the inherent movement. It is for this reason that I was so keen to do this – to help the

actors feel the movement of the piece as a whole so that we can begin to discover, develop and define the movement of each century.

Languages of Intimacy: This is something I have been developing from collage theatre exercises. In partners, begin with consent to touch; then move through a series of 4-5 touches that are just one point of contact (hand to shoulder, hand to jaw line, etc), with one actor making contact, then the other actor, and so on until a repeatable sequence is built. Repeating these sequences, the actors focus on eye contact, tempo, and smoothing out the movement. Exaggeration, pauses, abstraction are also explored, as is separating and doing the sequences without physical contact. The point is to begin exploring how this 'pair' expresses intimacy, for the basis of further intimacy work. These sequences are shared with the group, with the intention to find moments to integrate these movements while blocking the scenes. Not necessarily the entire sequence, but some fragment, element of them. Building on these sequences we add two points of contact (two hands make contact), and also a manipulating version in which A places B's hand on their (A's) own body ("touch me here"), which is also very powerful. From here, with these variations, a more embodied expression is generated.

Week Three: Skating!!!

Suspensions

Russian Ship sequence, boat back to England

Dinner scene, Vulture scene

Continued to integrate movement; especially Russian ship sequence and boat back to England sequence. And the skates arrived!!!! Both Orlando and Sasha are enjoying and working

well on the rollerblades and we have begun to find a movement for Sasha, and some preliminary blocking that we can integrate into Act 1.

Suspensions / Time lapse sequences for the Archduchess/Archduke scenes are starting to work. And I really like how well the actors are able to get into and out of a suspension. Finding more and more moments when we can employ this – as it seems to suit the commentary of the narration so well. Other moments we are beginning to explore through suspension are at the end of the Desdemona/Othello scene, the fly loo scene, the boat scenes, and the top of Act 4.

I butted up against varying levels of familiarity/experience with movement. How do I integrate choreography into a rehearsal, into my vision, my language to describe choreography to inexperienced actors.

There is high anxiety amongst those who have little experience / confidence with structured movement. Four of the eight actors really struggle with connecting with their movement in a structured way, as though there is some disconnection happening synaptically.

My leadership, with regard to communicating choreography, is challenged. Managing my time and structuring rehearsal to allow for enough time to learn and embody the choreography is also challenging. I am happy to work within their skill set, because it is clear that what is a physical challenge quickly becomes a mental challenge which shuts them down—rendering them less and less open to the physical challenge.

Weeks 4-7:

Reviewed, fine tuned, and layered in detail to the movement we managed to incorporate into the scenes: dinner scene, vulture, “Igray”, boats, car, elevator, toad and transitions.

Discovered more and more uses for the fabric—not just a wrap for the transformation scene, but a picnic blanket, a wave, table, a shawl. Happy with this!

Act 5 movement finally came together. Though using more specific 20th century images was late in coming into my head for some reason. Perhaps because we are more familiar with this so no research was needed? But got the thought of using iconic Martha Graham gestures for the top of Act 5; but it was too late to incorporate them and not fair to the actors to take these on board. Sigh.

Epilogue

The impulse to return to graduate school and pursue an MFA in directing stemmed from a desire to create and be in a space for creation full-time. With the prospect of two years, five productions, two Gathering projects, and a Shakespeare project, I utilized opportunities to explore my approach to the work with ensembles, and the shape of the work we create together. Figuring out a process that has a flexible framework to adjust to different projects and integrating movement more than I have allowed myself were at the centre of my focus. *Orlando*, in some ways, became a culmination of this two-year exploration. Although the scope of the piece was overwhelming at times, I surprised myself that I managed to helm the process through moments of calm and rough waters. Overall, am I happy with the work? Yes. Are there things I would do differently? Absolutely.

Preparation: Research & Design

Vita and Virginia and Sarah: Despite many months of joyful reading, I was unable to read many of the wondrous sources I discovered—so much research left to do of such an engaging and fascinating trio. There is something about Woolf’s writing that fills a void in me—it is tricky to articulate. The only simile I can think of is Vivaldi’s *Four Seasons* and how, to me, it just ‘clicks’, it is sonically/aurally perfect, as though it aligns my nervous system or something. Woolf’s writing has the same effect on me, like vivid poetry—poetry that expresses something you have always known but is only now pulled to the surface of your consciousness. Working with Woolf’s words again has assured me that I will work with her again, I need to work with her again, and again. The play became so much about Woolf’s desire to ‘write about death, but life

came rushing in.’ This became more and more apparent in the studio working with the actors—this overwhelming joy of life and adventure, but haunted and trailing clouds of death.

Delving into the world of Vita Sackville-West and Orlando as Vita is such an adventure! And although I dissed her poetry at first, having spent so many hours in her company, I am now rather fond of it. Her approach to life and nature is admirable in its seemingly unfettered freedom. Sackville-West is, herself, a garden and I have benefitted greatly from the attempt to immerse myself in her world. So much more to learn though. More in-depth knowledge and understanding of Sackville-West would have informed my process much more.

Sarah Ruhl has become more and more fascinating throughout the process. Her selection/distillation adaptation process, the journey we embarked upon is a challenging one. One that I am not sure how many in the audience understood—which I regret. The words are and were so important to me, but the movement of the piece—the ‘life rushing in’—seemed to catch us up and spun us around to perhaps lose sight of what is at the heart. Ruhl’s text is an incredibly rich and fertile offering, and she generously leaves room for us to enter, inhabit and embody her work—Woolf’s work thought Ruhl’s lens. Despite all the challenges the text presents, I would happily play in Ruhl’s world of *Orlando* again...differently, but definitely again. And I feel that my preparation and research into Ruhl was effective and useful in the process.

Historical periods: I mainly focused on trying to get at how people moved in these times so that I could help my actors ‘be in these historical moments’ physically. I gathered and collected hundreds of images that provided detail as to how people socialized, how they gathered together at events, how they gazed at the painter and at their ‘audience’. Expanding this research to historical dance was late landing in my brain, but it was effective nonetheless. Realizing that the play is very much a dance, this research helped shape the movement of each act through

dance poses, arm movements, poses. I would definitely spend much more time in this realm as it was incredibly rewarding in the process, and the actors responded to this layer and took it upon themselves to find moments to incorporate this twirl, this circle, this posture. This information was disseminated through the image library in the studio, as well as videos we watched together which generated fruitful discussions and discoveries.

Working with images: I always work with images and do my best to share my findings with my actors. The same went for this process, but I also shared my findings with my design team as well. I used the image library we had posted in the studio for the duration of the process frequently – and would draw the actors to specific images for inspiration. The ‘galleries’ scene, when Orlando returns home only to have lost it, we used the images of Knole House portraits and sculptures for inspiration. The images were an efficient way to help encourage the ensemble to find postures, poses, but also to inform their visualization of what they were describing – especially specific features of London. At times I wish the actors made better use of the images, and need to give thought as to how I can entice them with the wealth of information that can be gleaned for a piece such as *Orlando*. Prior to my preliminary design meetings I already had at least a hundred images for set and costume and initial ideas of the world of *Orlando*, and these were incredibly important in my discussions going forward.

Working with design team: From our very first meeting, set and props designer, Rachel Smith, was so well informed, so detail-oriented, and seemed as excited as I was to be working on this play. Her understanding of metaphor and the dominant imagery in the play aligned with mine, and the process overall was incredibly inspiring and fascinating. When I shared images with her she would often respond with ‘this is inspiring’—which assured me that we were speaking the same language, moving in a similar direction, and desired to create a similar world.

I brought the concept of ‘everything is made out of paper—this entire world is made of paper, as though everything has popped out of a book’ and Rachel ran with it. She brought the concept of the oak tree as the central image, which worked so perfectly with my initial concept that we quickly rejoiced and everything just continued to fall into place from then on. The idea of denoting time through letters and the form and shape of envelopes and sealings, was added to the concept. The circular nature of the tree, stairs, and riser connected with the fluidity of time and sense of movement that I wanted to create. Throughout the research and preparation process, set and props were consistently inspiring and a fulfilling, collegial relationship was formed.

My relationship with costume designer, Joyce Padua, was similar. Inspiring, respectful, and collegial. Her knowledge and creativity was as astounding as Rachel’s, and I feel so honoured to have had the opportunity to work with these two artists. Her integration of the transforming costumes and her work with the Tyvek supported the world I wanted to create with the actors.

Lighting is incredibly important to me and I find that the images I wanted to create could be made that much more powerful with lighting. Ashley Whitten and I immediately bonded over Robert Wilson’s images, use of silhouettes against the cyc, and working with the scrim from our reveal scenes. Her enthusiasm and personal aesthetic, again really supported and aligned with what I had in my head, only better.

Sound design was a bit more challenging as I felt that Maddy Delle Donne’s experience in this area was considerably less than what the other designers have in their areas. But, because the others were so experienced, I was happy to spend more time with the sound designer, worked hard to ensure communication was clear, and she was able to create some effective soundscape collages for us. She was also keen to ensure we had sounds in the rehearsal studio. Because of

her inexperience and knowledge of music, and my penchant for music, I felt I needed to fill the void and took more control of the design than I probably should have. Maddy was in agreement with me in terms of my music selection, and was always positive—as was I—about our progress. Communication with her was the most challenging of the process, but we seemed to work well together; it was just time-consuming.

Rehearsal Process

Ensemble building, transformation, suspension, historical dance, movement: I am happy with these aspects of rehearsal, and feel that I achieved what I wanted more than not. The most challenging was ensuring the entire ensemble was engaged, had motivation/intention/purpose, for each moment. Some actors took initiative, made strong choices, and did the work—which allowed me to fine tune and adjust these choices as needed. Others, seemed to require moment by moment guidance which, unfortunately, didn't always happen due to time constraints. But we did have time for sharpening and clarifying the work, so for the most part the ensemble was engaged for the entire piece—to a lesser or greater extent, depending on the actor in question. Some were so 'lit up' and just operate that way, others' 'embers' were barely aglow, but they were glowing!

The stage pictures were challenging at first and many times I felt I had no idea what to do with the Chorus. But, we eventually figured it out. Perhaps with a clearer idea going into the process would have helped us along a bit quicker—but, honestly, I felt I couldn't do that kind of work because I didn't know how the ensemble would work together, move together, or what offerings would unfold. So, working slowly, filling in bits as they became clearer and clearer, seemed to work and allowed us to let ideas and moments percolate until an impulse arrived. I

was pleased that we had time for more and more detail work; however, it became glaringly obvious that the deeper ‘dropping in’ work was not happening. More thought is needed in this regard—how to get actors to drop in deeper when they are popping in and out of narration and character. Yes, we aimed to get ‘emotional statedness’ in the narration, but we were unsuccessful in that because not everyone in the ensemble seemed to get there consistently. There was vulnerability in Orlando’s journey, but the Chorus and their text seemed to hold them back from dropping in. I take that as my fault in not mining the emotional importance more deeply. It’s a challenging text in that regard.

Production

I believe that what we achieved in production reflects a culmination of the work I have been developing over the two years in this program. As a leader, there are many details I need to review, reconsider, and incorporate, but there were many surprises as well—most notably my patience, and strength to be calm in some challenging moments.

I am so proud of the design team for bringing reality so close to their ideas. It was beautiful to witness their work become tangible. I am proud of many of the actors and what they accomplished. And I am pleased with the fluidity of the piece that we created.

Concluding Reflection

Returning to my initial questions: **How do we navigate the governance and influence society holds over human relationships?** and **How do we reconcile the historical silencing of women’s voices?** --did we address these in the production? I think so, to a degree. We talked a lot about ‘essential selves’ and attraction to people and their ‘essential selves’ that has nothing to

do with society's attitudes and influence. Whether we act on these is another topic, but being open to the idea that there is something that resides within us that has nothing to do with how we present ourselves to the world—what is often beyond our control and is just simply, us, who we are. The second question was addressed in the letter writing, in the handwriting on the tree and the costumes, the recording of Woolf's voice at the end. Orlando's immortality, for me, became more and more palpable—Woolf and her work have stood the test of time thus far, and have achieved immortality. And in some world, "The Oak Tree" is immortal as well.

The first challenge that I set out to address was about clarity—clarity of my point of view and my voice, clarity of my conceptual approach to the play, and clarity of my work with the actors. I think to a certain degree I did achieve this, more can always be done though in this regard. My point of view and conceptual approach are perhaps for others to assess. My work with the actors, I am well aware that much more could have been done to have a greater affect on the audience, to achieve a more powerful production—one that reaches out and changes the state of being of the audience. I do not blame the text for this, but it was tricky to get the actors to access and find emotional importance for each moment.

Secondly, being a decisive leader. I do not consider myself decisive, and it will likely always be something I have to work on. As a leader I am far more comfortable to being open to the ideas of others, facilitating, supporting, and collaborating effectively and collectively. I know I fail in the guise of a director in this regard; I do make decisions, in my own way I am decisive. But I need to ensure that my actors trust me to be decisive in key moments, and I think that I know that I can be decisive when they need me to be—but leading up to those moments, I may not have their trust until we get there.

Balancing my work with the actors was my third challenge. Managing time in rehearsals seemed to favour working with the ensemble, and I regretted many times to figure out how to work individually with the actors. Yes, I found moments to do so, and coaching sessions allowed me to spend time with pairs, but I did not build strong relationships with each and every actor. Not everyone needed or sought this from me, but I was attuned to whom I did spend time with and how this was received. Figuring out the finer psychology of the ensemble was challenging; with some actors it was clear what they needed from me, with others it was less clear, and unfortunately, I should have made the latter group a priority and will do so next time. What remains a mystery to me is really understanding each actor and adjusting how I work with them accordingly. Those with more visible or vocal anxieties are a bit easier to work with in a way because they let you know.

Speaking of next time....next time I may do this play Peter Brook style, in a white box with 'Laugh In' windows for the Chorus, and swings!

This entire process was an honour and a privilege and a delight, and I have learned, grown, and benefitted from the experience.

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