



**VOLUME 5 ISSUE 1 | 2019**

# **ARTSPRAXIS**

**ISSN: 1552-5236**

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*ARTSPRAXIS* provides a platform for contributors to interrogate why the arts matter and how the arts can be persuasively argued for in a range of domains. The pressing issues which face the arts in society will be deconstructed. Contributors are encouraged to write in a friendly and accessible manner appropriate to a wide readership. Nonetheless, contributions should be informed and scholarly, and must demonstrate the author's knowledge of the material being discussed. Clear compelling arguments are preferred, arguments which are logically and comprehensively supported by the appropriate literature. Authors are encouraged to articulate how their research design best fits the question (s) being examined. Research design includes the full range of quantitative-qualitative methods, including arts-based inquiry; case study, narrative and ethnography; historical and autobiographical; experimental and quasi-experimental analysis; survey and correlation research. Articles which push the boundaries of research design and those which encourage innovative methods of presenting findings are encouraged.

This issue of *ARTSPRAXIS* reflects on and responds to the issues raised during The NYU Forum on Ethnodrama: The Aesthetics of Research and Playmaking (2017). This forum is part of an ongoing series NYU is hosting on significant issues that impact on the broad field of educational and applied theatre. Previous forums have been dedicated to educational theatre (2016), site-specific theatre (2015), teaching artistry (2014 and 2005), developing new work for the theatre (2013), theatre for young audiences (2012), theatre for public health (2011), citizenship and applied theatre (2010), theatre pedagogy (2009), Shakespeare (2008), drama across the curriculum and beyond (2007), ethnotheatre and theatre for social justice (2006), and assessment in arts education (2003).

The NYU Forum on Ethnodrama invited the global community to propose workshops, papers, posters, narratives, and performances to contribute to a robust conversation about the aesthetics of ethnodrama, the practice of creating a play script from materials such as interview transcripts, field notes, journal entries, and/or print and media artifacts. Theatre artists, academic researchers, and artist-researchers came together to share ideas, vocabularies, and techniques for engaging audiences with the aesthetic presentation of data and data-based playmaking, while also discussing the opportunities and challenges that emerge when working with this style of theatre and research.

Contributions for this special issue of *ARTSPRAXIS* were by invitation only among participants in the Forum. Our goal was to continue the dialogue started at the Forum with a wide variety of practitioners and researchers that would enrich the development of ethnodrama.

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Layout edited by Jonathan P. Jones, 2019.

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July 2019

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## **Editorial**

**JOE SALVATORE**

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

In April 2017 artists and scholars from around the world descended on New York University for the Program in Educational Theatre's Forum on Ethnodrama: The Aesthetics of Research and Playmaking. This interdisciplinary gathering explored a series of guiding questions, which included the following:

- What are best practices for the development and performance of ethnodramas created within a variety of different contexts (e.g. communities, therapeutic settings, schools, colleges and universities, and professional theatres)?
- Why does such varied terminology exist for this style of data-based playmaking, and what effects does this have on it?
- What is the significance and effect of the interplay between aesthetics and ethics in the creation and presentation of an ethnodrama?
- What are the best methods for assessing the quality of the research and performance/presentation of an ethnodrama?
- What does the future hold for ethnodrama: what's new, what are the trends, where are we heading?

Given the state of world affairs back in April 2017 and our current state at present, these questions highlight the ongoing importance of ethnodramatic work. At a time when so much of what is real and actually unfolding seems unreal, our collective work in ethnodrama takes on an even greater importance. We have largely forgotten how to see and hear one another, bear witness to one another, be in the presence of one another. I believe wholeheartedly that the ethnographic process of gathering data, listening carefully to another's story, actually seeing another person, and re-presenting those stories in theatrical ways, is the only way we can move forward through these tumultuous and unsteady moments of our shared experience. Our mediated understanding of one another via social media platforms has contributed to our estrangement from one another. While geographical distance between people seems to grow smaller and less cumbersome, the chasm between one person's perspective and another's seems to get larger and deeper. Ethnodramatists have great potential to fill in these chasms through our creative processes. Our power lies in our understanding of aesthetics, and the way our artistic choices can make the familiar strange in ways that shine a penetrating light on situations, circumstances, phenomena, and each other.

This invited special issue of ArtsPraxis features voices from that two-day forum and offers just a small snapshot of the varied perspectives and practices that gathered together at NYU. I was keenly interested in sharing the powerful and resonant comments of established leaders in the field alongside new and emerging artists and scholars whose work covers new ground either in form or content. The issue begins with an excerpted version of the forum's opening keynote conversation with **Dr. Patricia Leavy**, best-selling author, book series creator and editor, and internationally recognized leader in arts-based and qualitative research, in which she discusses her origins and evolution as an artist and scholar and shares her thoughts on the aesthetics and ethics of ethnodrama and arts-based research. This is followed by the text of a keynote delivered by leading scholar in ethnodrama and ethnotheatre **Emeritus Professor Johnny Saldaña**, in which he situates our practice as theatre makers within the complex world at large, shares examples of plays from across the genre that illustrate this "art of fabrication," and makes recommendations for how we move forward as artists and scholars in a post-truth era. Emerging

scholar and drama therapist **Darci Burch** introduces the term “ethno-actor” and defines the aesthetic and ethical implications for an actor who performs the speech and gestural patterns of an actual person.

The issue then includes three ethnodramatic scripts, each of which takes a different approach to the form and content of the genre. **Thomas Murray's** *The Right of Way* examines the circumstances surrounding the death of a cyclist in Chicago while simultaneously offering historical contextualization of transportation in the United States, highlighting the growing tensions between cyclists, automobile drivers, and pedestrians. **Jamila Humphrie** and **Emily Schorr Lesnick** explore how young members of the lgbtq+ community choose to express and explain their identities with their interview theatre play, *How We GLOW*, which has been performed over 30 times in venues throughout the United States and Ireland. And the special issue rounds out with *My Other Job* by **Cali Moore** and **Rachel Tuggle Whorton**, their humorous and insightful homage to the actor's “survival” vocation, and how that plays out across a variety of experiences and contexts.

I hope that this issue can serve as the beginning of more dialogue around ethnodrama and ethnotheatre, as I look forward to learning more about new works and practices that emerge in the coming years. I'm grateful to all of the contributors for their willingness to share their work and their patience as this issue came together over an extended period of time. Also thanks to *ArtsPraxis* editor Jonathan Jones for this guidance and ever steady hand in completing this process.

## SUGGESTED CITATION

Salvatore, J. (2019). Editorial. *ArtsPraxis*, 5 (1), i-iv.

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**Joe Salvatore** is the director of the [Verbatim Performance Lab](#) and teaches courses in ethnodrama, ethnoacting, new play development, and applied / community-engaged theatre in NYU Steinhardt's Program in Educational Theatre. Verbatim Performance Lab projects include *The Democratic Field* (with Artists' Literacies Institute), *The Serena Williams Project*, *The Veterans Story Collecting Project* (Johnson County, KS), *The Kavanaugh Files* (including a live version at Geva Theatre Center), *No(body) but nobody*, *The Grab 'Em Tapes*, *The Moore / Jones*

*Challenge*, *The Lauer / Conway Flip*, and *Of a Certain Age* (in collaboration with The Actors Fund). In 2017, Joe collaborated with economist Maria Guadalupe (INSEAD-France), to create [\*Her Opponent\*](#), a verbatim re-staging of excerpts of the 2016 presidential debates with gender-reversed casting (nominee: [Off Broadway Alliance Award](#) for Best Unique Theatrical Experience). He is a member of the Dramatists Guild of America, American Alliance for Theatre and Education, Association for Theatre in Higher Education, and an alumnus of the Lincoln Center Directors Lab.



## **A Plenary Conversation**

**PATRICIA LEAVY** with **JOE SALVATORE**

*Edited by Joe Salvatore with transcription assistance from Cassie Holzum*

The Forum on Ethnodrama sponsored by New York University's Program in Educational Theatre opened on Friday, April 21, 2017, with a plenary session featuring Dr. Patricia Leavy, best-selling author, book series creator and editor, and internationally recognized leader in arts-based and qualitative research. Dr. Leavy joined forum chair Joe Salvatore for a dialogue that covered her origins as a sociologist and arts-based researcher, her thoughts on terminology, aesthetics, and ethics, and her commitment to engaging and impactful scholarship in troubling times. These are edited excerpts from their conversation that took place in the Loewe Theatre at NYU.

**Joe Salvatore:** So we said that we would do this as a discussion, right? Which is exciting because that's kind of what we do.

**Patricia Leavy:** Because we don't know what's going to happen.

**JS:** Right, exactly. Dangerous and uncertain. I think it makes perfect sense to begin with how you have arrived where you are in this moment as an arts-based researcher.

**PL:** I think the question people often ask is how did a sociologist end up in the world of arts and always in rooms with artists? I have to start in my childhood before I can sort of get to academia. I grew up immersed in the arts and loving the arts from a very young age. My mother was a painter, and she was very involved in the art scene in New York in the late 70s and early to mid-80s when the big pop movement was happening, so we were always going to art gallery openings and traveling from Boston to New York to see art shows. I started ballet classes when I was five years old and took ballet for fourteen years. I loved movies. I would take my meager allowance, and I would always save it to go to the movies and get popcorn and that sort of thing. And I loved ballet so much, my mother bought season tickets to the Boston Ballet. I probably had season tickets to the Boston Ballet for about thirty years of my life. So the arts from a very young age were an enormous part of my life, and I realized recently that whenever I'd go to a show with my parents—whether it was a concert, a dance performance, a movie—I would always get in trouble because I would always turn around to watch the audience at all the big moments. My father would literally poke me in the arm and say that I was looking the wrong way. I went and saw *Swan Lake* about two months ago—I've probably seen the ballet between fifteen and twenty times—and it occurred to me that I have never seen the Black Swan's full pirouette because I always turned to see the audience. I've been doing it my whole life. So not only did I love the arts, but I loved watching people consume art, enjoying art, being moved by art.

In high school, I became passionate about theatre for two reasons. One is I have a learning disorder, and so reading was extremely challenging for me when I was growing up—it's still challenging but less so—and I found that reading plays was easier than reading novels. Partly because of the way they're formatted, and partly because it's mostly dialogue. They were just a

lot easier for me to follow, so I started reading plays a lot in high school, and I actually did my senior thesis on a play—Arthur Miller’s *The Price*, which I just saw [here in New York] two nights ago and remembered why I loved it so much. It was something that I was able to read. I also loved being involved in theatre, so I joined a theatre company, and I was in that for a few years while I was in high school. I actually auditioned as a theatre major for colleges, and I think the only reason I went to college was because of theatre. School had been incredibly difficult for me my whole life. I did not enjoy school, but I loved theatre and that got me into college. Ultimately, I ended up changing my major to sociology, and I went on and eventually got a PhD in sociology and became an academic.

When you become a sociologist, I think there is this thing where you want to do something positive in the world. Sociology is supposed to have some sort of impact in the world, which is why I chose it. When I got to academia, I had two horrifying realizations—one of which is that most academic writing is just god awful. My own included. I was writing articles that I didn’t want to read. My favorite quote of all time is, “Hell is sitting on a hot stone and reading your own scientific publications.” Erik Ursin, a biologist, said that, and I think it’s pretty much spot on. So it occurred to me that a lot of academic writing, particularly journal articles, sort of lacks the qualities of good writing, of engaging writing, and I was now a part of this process of writing things that were not terribly engaging. I also realized that it didn’t really matter that the writing wasn’t good because nobody was going to read it anyway. The average academic article has an audience of 3-8 readers. I mean really stop and ponder that number. 3-8 readers. You could spend years doing the research and working on an article. I think the 3-8 is grossly overestimated because they count the author and the editor among the 3-8, so you get credit for reading your own article. That’s how desperate they are to say that anybody read it. Beyond that, you can download an article, cite an article, without having read the article. I’ve certainly done that many times; read the abstract for a citation to advance your own research agenda in an article that nobody else is going to read. So as somebody who was always interested in audiences and the issue of audience and how we consume knowledge, it was very disheartening and heartbreaking to realize that I was suddenly in this field where I love the work, but people didn’t seem to be thinking about audience. That’s when I learned about arts-based research. I didn’t even know the term “arts-based research.” I still have folders of articles I had

collected that I called “creative methods” because I didn’t really know what they were. I found some articles by Johnny Saldaña and others, and it made sense to me. I thought, “Okay, this is something that makes sense because we can take our work and we can think about audience because artists create for others. They are always thinking about audience implicitly or explicitly.” That’s what led me to arts-based research.

**JS:** So you mentioned that you saw *The Price* two nights ago, and it’s been an interesting moment to be holding this forum on ethnodrama in New York because we’ve had a season of work that I think we could classify as ethnodrama. Lynn Nottage’s play *Sweat*, largely based on interviews that she and the director conducted, just won the Pulitzer. We have *Indecent* by Paula Vogel, which includes trial transcripts from the *God of Vengeance* indecency trial. Anna Deavere Smith had a new piece this year, *Notes from the Field*. There’s a musical that’s making a giant splash—*Come from Away*—based on the experiences of people on 9/11 who were rerouted to this small town in Newfoundland. So there’s actually a lot of commercial theatre that’s happening that could be classified as ethnodrama, but what I find is that artists who identify first and foremost as theatre makers don’t use that term. I’m curious what your thoughts are about terminology and ways to either bridge those gaps, or is there a gap, or why we use different terms depending on where we are making our work?

**PL:** I was thinking about this when I saw *The Price* the other night, which I’ve seen many times before, and it’s probably the play I know best because I read it so much in high school. When I was young, I was so attracted to Arthur Miller’s plays, and then I became a sociologist. I look at his plays now, and I think his plays are sociology. They are social commentary like the other more recent examples you mentioned before. So I would say two things. First, I think the work that those in the theatre arts and those in the arts in general do and what researchers do are actually very similar in a lot of ways. So yes, we have different tools in our tool boxes, and so too we have a different perspective we’re coming at things, but we’re trying to do similar things. We’re trying to illuminate something about the human experience. We’re trying to generate meanings. We’re trying to produce insight into some phenomenon, and it takes a lot of research in order to put on a play that will resonate, that will be believable, that will seem like the real world. When you’re doing research, you have to find ways to make it resonate. So these

things are similar in a lot of ways.

I've spoken to so many different groups over the years, from neuroscientists to artists to psychologists to people in many different fields. And when you get past the terms, everybody sort of agrees "Yeah, you know you're doing similar things. We're coming at it from a different vantage point, and we might have a different goal, but we are doing similar things." But then when you get into the terminology, it's like a turf thing almost. Especially in academia. I use the term "arts-based research" simply because I wanted to use a term that was already legitimated in the field. It probably wouldn't be the term I would personally create, but it was legitimated so I used it. But there are more than twenty-five terms people use to replace "arts-based research," and the same is true with ethnodrama. In academia people have a lot of incentive to create something that's original, to coin some sort of term, to have their name and identity linked with some sort of term or concept. So I think you get a plethora of terms that might be slightly different from each other, but they're more or less talking about the same things. I think you have less of that in the arts themselves, and so you encounter less of that. I also think that in academia, one of the reasons we're doing this kind of work is to push against the norm. I think if you say that you are writing a play, that doesn't have the scholarly cachet of saying, "I'm writing an ethnodrama." If you are going against a system that is built based around citations and journal articles, and you're already going upstream, you need to do those kinds of things. I think that academics have also created a plethora of terms to make the work we're doing sound more scholarly even though it is anyway. I think what Arthur Miller does is scholarly anyway, but if we don't give it some sort of academic sounding term, I think it's very difficult. Particularly if you're a graduate student and you're trying to do something for your thesis. How are you going to get past a committee that doesn't understand that art making can be a part of the research process?

**JS:** Along with thinking about terminology and moving in and out of these different contexts, we start to think about aesthetics and aesthetic presentation. And I think in the work of the ethnodramatist there are also lots of questions about ethics because we're dealing with real people's stories. Can you talk about the interplay of aesthetics and ethics in the creation and presentation of an ethnodrama and with arts-based research in general?

**PL:** First, what I would do is point out what I think the tension is. And to do that, I would draw on Johnny Saldaña's work because he's written really beautifully about this, talking about how as a researcher, you are supposed to have fidelity to the data. Whereas as an artist, you need to focus on the juicy stuff to make your piece of art engaging so that it does work as an aesthetically enjoyable piece of art. I do think that there is this tension that exists between how you balance those two worlds if you're doing ethnodrama or if you're doing sociological fiction or if you're doing something that's explicitly combining our research and our artistic point of view. For me, these things come together through the concept of truthfulness. I think it's all about truthfulness. I think that's what we're really trying to get at. When we talk about fidelity to the data, we're trying to get at something that's truthful. It's not the truth, it's not the truth with a capital T, but it's something that is truthful relative to the data.

We've talked about why aesthetics are important. Genuine craft and the art form are important so that it will resonate with audiences. That is the reason, which again is linked to truthfulness. So I do see that there is this tension, but I think where they come together is that we use the data we have in honest ways bearing in mind important things like protecting people's anonymity if that's what we promised to do or whatever it might be, whatever the constraints that we've gotten ourselves into or that we just feel are right at that time because it can be unfolding and evolving. We need to pay attention to that, but we also need to pay attention to the fact that the better piece of art it is, the more people engage with it, the more memorable it will be the more likely we are to get them thinking about what we want them thinking about. So it all comes together in this—is it truthful? It doesn't mean this person said that in this interview in this way. That's not how I think of being honest. Are we using artistic devices to communicate something that is honest and truthful so that it will resonate with people? That's how I think about it and how I reconcile those concepts.

**JS:** And as you think through the question of ethics, and as someone who works in fiction, when you're writing, how do you think about the ethics of that storytelling?

**PL:** In some ways the first novel that I wrote—the first piece of fiction I wrote—which is loosely based on my interview research—truly happened

by accident. In retrospect, I'm so glad because it was a completely organic process. I never intended to write a novel. I was bored. I was on sabbatical, and I had just laid on the couch and watched TV and ate donuts for a week like you do when you're on sabbatical, and then I thought, "Eventually you're supposed to do something." So I started doing something, and it was something that was boring and not engaging to me, and I thought "I'm going to do a little creative writing." I really thought, "Maybe I'll write a poem." Then I thought, "Maybe a short story." Twenty pages into it, my partner came home that night and said, "What did you do?" I said, "I wrote." And he said, "What did you write?" I said, "Honestly, I don't know. I thought it might be a short story, but it's like twenty pages, and there are some characters I haven't introduced yet."

So he read it the next day, and he said, "You should write a novel." And I did. It was really a personal release. It was frustration I had felt over the years from things I learned in my interviews and my classes that I had nowhere to place. I had no intention of publishing it, truthfully, until it was done. I didn't even tell anybody about it. It was just sort of an exercise, and that was very freeing because I didn't have to ask myself these big questions. I didn't draw directly on anybody's individual words; it was all thematic. Since then, more books in and thinking about it, collecting more interviews specifically knowing they'd be used in this fictionalizing way, I try to get at themes that come up in people's interviews, and I put them in fictional scenarios. I take their experiences and their feelings about their experiences, and I create scenarios in which these things might have happened or could have happened. It's amazing how much mundane stuff you can weave into fiction that is important because it does mirror real life. For example, in my interviews over the years with women about body image issues, relationship issues, etc., I ask a lot of mundane questions about things they eat, exercise habits, daily habits, and a whole range of things, and I've woven all of those things into my novels. So in one of my novels in which the protagonist has very low self-esteem and is always depressed and she feels bad about the way she looks, every food item mentioned in the book is something that came up in dozens of interviews where women said, "You know I eat this and then I feel badly." So I've taken all these mundane things and they've become the backdrop of a character's life, and that's what my process for doing that is like.

**JS:** So it's kind of like creating composite characters from all of these details?

**PL:** Exactly. When I wrote the first novel, I never intended to do it, so when I had interviewed people over the years, of course I got permission to publish, but I never said, "Can I fictionalize your experience?" It just never occurred to me that I was going to. Now I ask people if I can publish their work in ways that I have no intention of doing just in case, because now I know I don't know what I'm going to want to do in a year or five years or ten years. Every art form, things I've never used, that I have no skill in, websites, you name it. I ask for explicit permission—"Is it okay if I use these forms?" Most of which I probably will never do.

**JS:** I want to ask you about assessment. How do you think about assessing the quality of a piece of arts-based research?

**PL:** I think there is a long list of evaluative criteria, and we can discuss some of them, and I've written about them before. In the first edition of *Method Meets Art*, I didn't really write about evaluation. It was the number one question I got asked, so in the second edition there's a whole chapter. We can talk about some of the things, but for me it all comes down to one primary thing—how is this useful? In what way is this useful? For what use is this? Of what use is this? It's about usefulness, and that can mean many different things in different contexts, but what is this good for? And that doesn't mean we don't value craft and rigor, and we all need to learn the disciplines that we're working in, and that's important. The better the piece of art you make will ultimately probably have a greater impact and will resonate more. All that being said, I think that people can get very discouraged, especially students, from trying out these kinds of methods if there's so much attention placed on "Is it great art?" I mean even in the art world, very few people can live up to the "Is it great art?" It's so subjective.

I went to the MOMA (Museum of Modern Art) two days ago because I'm here in New York, and there was an exhibit of women's art, which I'm always thrilled to see because, as you know if you go to museums, it is predominantly the work of white men that we find in those walls. I was very excited to see this exhibit, and because it's so infrequent, it drew attention to everything else around it and what and who has been deemed great.



These are really dangerous categories because, historically, and I would say through the present, that which has been deemed great art is art by white men, and so everybody else is sort of excluded from that in every genre of art. Yes, there are exceptions the same way if we're talking about race in this country and somebody says, "Barack Obama was president." Well yeah, so what? That doesn't mean that we don't have racism in this country. It's the same thing in the arts. It's one of the reasons I'm very reluctant to say each [piece of arts-based research] should be great art. Not only because it discourages people from trying these methods, but because the whole idea of what is great art has been constructed in a way that is not inclusive. So I think it's really important to ask what is the value or the use? In what way is that piece of art useful? Did it jar a relevant audience into thinking about something differently? Did it produce insights into something? Did it unsettle stereotypes? Did it just teach some kids something that they remembered a week out, five weeks out, five months out versus studying something for a task that they don't remember two days later? If you're looking at audience for any kind of piece of art whether it's an ethnodrama or something else, there's always audiences you're intending to reach. The stakeholders that are linked to your topic. The reason that I've written novels in this sort of chick lit format is because my key audience was women in their twenties and thirties, like the women I had interviewed, and I wanted women outside of academia in that age range to have access to this work. I tried to use a genre that for some is appealing, and then subvert that genre.

There are other criteria you can go to. You can look at somebody's methodology. You can look at the link between their research question, if they have a research question, and what they did, and the fit between those things. You can look at the aesthetic quality. If it's something like an ethnodrama, you can get audience feedback. There are so many different ways from a comment card to a survey to doing focus groups or a debriefing after a show. From that, you can assess: "These were my goals and what I wanted them to learn and what I wished to communicate. How closely to that did I come? Did I reach those goals? In what ways did I and in what ways didn't I?" Each art form is different and is going to have to be evaluated in a slightly different way, but at the end of the day, the number one thing I ask is "How was it of value?"

**JS:** So given the complexity of the world that we're living in right now, what

power do you think we have as arts-based researchers and ethnodramatists to create and/or catalyze change or awareness?

**PL:** I will start by saying that after the election, the very first thing I did once I stopped crying and I crawled out of bed and I put fresh clothes on, my first act of resistance was changing my occupation across my social media to artist. That is now my occupation on social media, and that was my first act of resistance for two reasons. One, in difficult times they always come after the artists. So it was clear to me that was coming. And, two, I think artists are incredibly powerful. I think that we can see that power more in challenging times, and that is the silver lining of a challenging time is it will produce brilliant art, it will produce important art, enduring art because that's when artists really have to rise, and we have to use our tools to rise. I think that the arts can jar people into thinking and seeing differently. In ways that nothing else can. I really mean that in a serious and deep way.

One of the things I'm interested in because I am an absolute nerd at heart is the neuroscience of creativity, so I've become obsessed over the last few years and trying to read as much I can, which is challenging for me. I'm learning as much as I can about the neuroscience of creativity and the field of literary neuroscience in particular, because I write novels and I like to read plays and all of that. The short version is that there is a significant amount of research that shows our brains behave differently when we are consuming literature or art than when we're consuming other things. For example, if we are immersed in reading a novel, it activates parts of our brain that researchers had no idea were activated when we're reading including those that are involved in touch. When people are really immersed in a novel, they feel like they are part of that world. You feel like you know these characters, and you are in their apartment, and you are a part of this world. Well, there's actually a physiological basis for that. There is actually something physiologically happening to us when we engage with fiction versus nonfiction. Researchers have also found that the effects last longer. There is heightened activity in these parts of our brains for days after reading a novel.

Two years ago, I attended the Salzburg Global Seminar, which is something in Austria where they invite fifty people to go for a week. It's like getting the golden ticket in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. I still don't know how I

got invited to this thing, but it was on the neuroscience of creativity, and half the people there were world famous neuroscientists from around the world. The other half were accomplished artists from different genres. Then there were random people—like me and a woman from NPR. The fifty people in that room at that time had tens of millions in active grant money to study these things, so there is a lot of money being put into this. We looked at brain scans of somebody who's a novice writing a poem versus an experienced poet writing a poem. We looked at these kinds of things, and it was just amazing because it confirmed what so many of us know and what I knew from childhood. What I knew when I was five years old in a movie theatre being poked by my father because I was facing the wrong way was that when people are experiencing art, you can literally see something happening to them. I've never seen that watching anyone read an academic journal article. That's more like watching someone being lulled into a slow coma.

There is something real that happens when people consume art that they are engaged in or that they are troubled by, that they are challenged by. Engaged doesn't have to mean they love it, but they are in some way engaged with it. There is a physiological basis for that, so it just confirms to me what I've already known: the arts are incredibly powerful. This is a way that we can create self-awareness and social reflection. You can jar people into seeing things differently, into thinking about things differently. Artists can present the world as it is and force people to see it in a way that maybe they haven't, and they can imagine how the world might be. I really think that those are the two things that artists in all genres attempt to do, and I think those are the two things that are needed in difficult times.

## **SUGGESTED CITATION**

Leavy, P. with Salvatore, J. (2019). A plenary conversation. *ArtsPraxis*, 5 (1), 1-12.

## **AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY**

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in Massachusetts). She has published over twenty-five books, earning commercial and critical success in both fiction and nonfiction, and her work has been translated into numerous languages. Her recent titles include [Research Design](#), [Handbook of Arts-Based Research](#), [Method Meets Art](#), [Fiction as Research Practice](#), [The Oxford Handbook of Methods for Public Scholarship](#), [The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research](#), and the bestselling novels [Spark](#), [Blue](#), [American Circumstance](#), and [Low-Fat Love](#). She is also series creator and editor for eight book series with Oxford University Press and Brill/Sense, cofounder and co-editor-in-chief of [Art/Research International: A Transdisciplinary Journal](#), and a blogger. In addition to receiving numerous accolades for her books, she has received career awards from the New England Sociological Association, the American Creativity Association, the American Educational Research Association, the International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry, and the National Art Education Association. In 2016 Mogul, a global women's empowerment network, named her an "Influencer." In 2018, she was honored by the National Women's Hall of Fame and the State University of New York at New Paltz established the "Patricia Leavy Award for Art and Social Justice."

## **Keynote Address: The Art of Fabrication**

**JOHNNY SALDAÑA**

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

*Delivered on April 22, 2017, as part of the NYU Forum on Ethnodrama*

What an amazing ontological and epistemological space-time we live in today. The sociopolitical era of the United States' Trump administration has been labeled "post-truth," where the phenomena of "alternative facts" "fake news," and pseudo-1984 "newspeak" have distorted perceptions of reality and our core assumptions of what is true, what is false, what is to be believed, what is to be fact-checked, and who is to be trusted.

Objective reality, if there really is such a thing, is no longer considered a valid construct in the post-positivist world. In spite of strong evidentiary warrants and the supportive magnitude of results from big data, we seem to be driven more by our personal values, attitudes, and beliefs of what we feel, sometimes more than what we rationally think, to be true.

I facetiously blame the post-structuralist movement, with its philosophical tenets of "complexity," "messiness," "ambiguity,"

“uncertainty,” “unanswerable questions” “troubling the data,” “rejection,” “refusal,” and “failure” for possibly getting us into this conundrum. Some social critics called Barack Obama the first socially conscious postmodern President. As an analogous leap, I call Donald Trump our first post-structuralist President. A recent journal article by me and a colleague, Leo A. Mallette, analyzed the discourse of a Trump campaign speech, and in grounded theory fashion, we concluded that the axial category that characterizes the environmental or cultural driver of Trump’s discourse and now his governance is *fabrication*—

Trump drives his presidential campaign through an environment of grandiose declarations of blame, and bombastic promises of what he can build. As suggested by his discourse on fences [and border walls], *fabrication is the core category and culturally codified driver of this ... environment*—that is, fabrication as things constructed for purposes of deception.

Fabrication as things constructed for purposes of deception. Speaking of theatre....

## **BLURRY MOMENTS**

This address is not about politics. This plenary session is about art. But some people seem to have difficulty separating the two. I’ve never liked what was taught in our dramatic theory and criticism classes, that “all theatre is political.” I understood that as I was watching socially-charged ethnodramatic plays such as *The Laramie Project* or *The Vagina Monologues*, but I find it very hard to believe that all theatre is political as I’m watching a chorus of well-dressed waiters, played mostly by gay men, dancing to and singing “Hello Dolly!”

Theatrical fluff aside, don’t think that the arts are mere innocent imitators of life. We’re not just a reflection of human nature—we’re a distorting fun house mirror full of “blurry moments,” as Peter O’Connor identified it. The dramatic studio and theatrical performance space are

dimpled and broken, obscured in places, operating as a concave or at other times a convex lens. As such, it throws unexpected and distorted images back. It does not imitate what looks into the mirror

but deliberately highlights some things and obscures others. It is deliciously ... unpredictable in terms of what might be revealed and what might remain hidden.

Thus, theatre is not just a reflection, we're a refraction. If art imitates life, then for more than a decade, the arts have been digitally distorting the truth, just as discursive distortions of truth are happening today.

Nowadays, visual artists working with the medium of photography can digitally alter and photoshop images to doctor reality in order to make it appear better or more arresting.

Music, with its electronic recording wizardry can auto tune the imperfectly pitched voice, and change the dynamics of tempo to make something playback slower or faster without changing its original level.

Dance integrates technology into its onstage performances more and more, so that live bodies, light, and projections synthesize and interact in such ways that it's sometimes difficult to separate what is real from what is digitally produced.

And theatre? We've been lying for thousands of years. Fake news? Theatre is fake life. But you'd think that ethnodrama, with its focus on social reality—and especially verbatim theatre at its most unedited truthfulness—would cut through the pretense of our art form to present real life with unadulterated fidelity. But we are masters of fabrication and thus masters of deception.

### ***TAKING CARE OF BABY***

Case in point: I was absolutely engrossed and in awe of Dennis Kelly's ethnodrama, *Taking Care of Baby*. The story, the interview texts, were some of the most engaging I've ever read in the genre. So excited was I by the ethnodrama that I conducted some online searching to learn more about the play and its playwright. My excitement was soon quashed, however, by learning that *Taking Care of Baby* is a "faux" ethnodrama. Kelly uses the stylistic techniques of verbatim theatre and documentary theatre for a fictional set of participants recounting their experiences of a woman's trial for murdering her two children. Though the account is based on real life news stories, all reconstructed interviews in the play are fake. The script teases the audience to reconsider what is true, authentic, and real in today's sensationalist

media. In other words, what I thought was reality was, in fact, a fabrication.

### ***LADIES DAY***

Alana Valentine's *Ladies Day* is another fascinating example of truth slanted in an ethnodrama. The verbatim play examines a group of gay men in Australia with the playwright herself integrated as a character in the work. A gay rape scene, as recounted by one of the playwright's participants, is actually dramatized in the play, followed later with a climactic, highly charged physical struggle in which the rapist is killed by his victim—a story also told to the playwright by a participant, illustrating the severe homophobic violence that happens in gay men's lives.

In the final scenes, however, the playwright learns that some of her participants "exaggerated" the crimes, and changed the details of what actually occurred. Thus, audiences have witnessed highly dramatic and tragic events that never really happened but were initially accepted in good faith as fact by the interviewer. At the end of the play, the participants themselves challenge the playwright and us to consider what is true and what is real when stories are told. Scholar-playwright Tara Goldstein says of *Ladies Day* that Alana Valentine smartly lies to her audience in order to tell the truth.

In this era of post-truth, where fact and fiction seem to have blurry boundaries, do ethnodrama and ethnotheatre still have a place as genres of the art form? I would offer a resounding yes. In fact, I would offer, more than ever. But that comes with a caveat.

### ***HANDLE WITH CARE?***

I was not the first to develop the term "reality squared," but I applied it to ethnodramas and ethnotheatrical productions that utilized, indeed, exploited, the devices of theatre and media production to stylize and heighten the presentation and representation of reality on stage. Rather than the naturalistic, verbatim monologue presented by the sole actor on a bare stage, reality squared productions employ theatricality to visually and narratively arrest the audience member. Contradictorily, they skew reality in order to represent reality.

Here's just one example of a reality squared production: a chorus



of women representing the inside voices of a patient learning that she has breast cancer in Ross Gray and Christina Sinding's health care ethnodrama, *Handle with Care?* The texts are solidly grounded and derived from interviews with cancer patients and survivors, but collaged to heighten the dizzying array of thoughts that may go through a person's mind upon hearing a potentially fatal diagnosis.

### ***BLACK WATCH***

Psychologist Daniel Berlyne examined the construct of creativity, and posited three aesthetic variables that made something "creative": novelty, uncertainty or surprisingness, and complexity. These three variables are my own *modus operandi* in what I create, though the complexity construct is sometimes difficult for me to achieve since one of my own aesthetic principles is elegance.

But it's fascinating to think how even verbatim texts can be embellished with theatricality—the truth of interview texts in concert with the fabrications of theatre production. This scene from the celebrated National Theatre of Scotland's *Black Watch* by Gregory Burke is an exemplar of Berlyne's aesthetic principles with ethnodramatic narratives. A former soldier recounts to an interviewer the history of Scottish military involvement in war, and a bit about the Scottish military uniform—subjects not all that interesting to everyone, but given significance through clever staging. The monologue's language is rather coarse, as soldiers will often speak, and his thick dialect may be difficult to understand. But the focus here is on the visual accompaniment to the stories: truth told in a novel, surprising, and complex way.

### ***shots: a love story***

Reality is not a universal, indisputable truth, but a subjective experience for each person. As ethnodramatists, our goal is not to capture generic reality, but to understand someone else's reality and to portray it as faithfully as we can on the page and on the stage. Our interpretation and artistic choices, to be sure, may morph that reality somewhat when we give it aesthetic shape, but by looking at life from someone else's perspective—something that theatre people are very well trained to do—we can hopefully realize their reality in ways that may seem nonrealistic

to us.

As an example, let's watch a scene from the ethnodrama *shots: a love story* by John Caswell, Jr., this year's Page 73 Playwriting Fellow. In this autoethnodramatic rendering, Caswell portrays for the audience what it's like to be an alcoholic, not just through text, but through physical theatre and music that illustrate the surreal world of addiction. The only male character in the show, named he, symbolizes alcohol. Caswell represents himself through the use of three women, named her, her again, and her once more. His reason for using three women rather than one man to represent his personal experiences? I at first speculated that the three women symbolized the three times the playwright might have fallen off the wagon, but Caswell later admitted, three women were used simply because it was trendy in theatre production at the time. He may be an addict, but he's still an artist. You may not be able to detect a small prop in the video, but what the women are passing from one hand to another are shot glasses.

## **LONDON ROAD**

Anthropologist Clifford Geertz wrote about "blurred genres" several decades ago, in which the firmly fixed boundaries at the time of social constructs were becoming more fluid and porous. The defining differences between art and science, between fiction and nonfiction, became intermingled and synthesized to create hybrid forms. Anthropology today is relying more on video production, in addition to traditional written monographs, as ethnographic representation and presentation of fieldwork. And ethnographies as written texts themselves have evolved from fact-laden accounts into critical, feminist, arts-based, and autoethnographic forms.

The arts have always blurred our genres, mixing visual art and theatre for performance art, for example; or song, dance, and drama for musical theatre. Synthesis is an interesting principle. It's not an additive algorithm but an integrative heuristic—or, method of discovery. Synthesis blends different things in order to form a new whole. Last night's preview of Lifejacket Theatre's *America is Hard to See* was a beautiful exemplar of media, live action, and music in concert.

Eleven years ago, in spring 2006, on this very campus for a previous ethnodrama conference, I speculated that it would be fascinating to see

if ethnotheatre would evolve into operatic or musical theatre representations of verbatim interview texts. I love it when I'm right. Five years later in 2011, the National Theatre's production of Alecky Blythe and Adam Cook's *London Road* appeared on the professional stage. The musical play examined the tragic murders of prostitutes in Ipswich and the uneasiness the morbid crimes created among members of the community. Cook took excerpts from Blythe's interview transcripts to serve as verbatim, free verse lyrics. In this clip, there is a brief suggested sex scene—so heads up for those who may be concerned about such images.

## ARTISTIC RIGOR

In qualitative inquiry, Lincoln and Guba reconceptualized the criteria for rigor in naturalistic research. Instead of the positivist constructs of reliability and validity, two of the new domains for assessing our work are credibility and trustworthiness. These refer to the reader's belief that the way a researcher conducted the study, and the analytic processes and outcomes of the work, generated findings that make sense and persuade readers, or in our theatrical case, audiences, that an effective or trustworthy job was done. And what we attempt to create, particularly in ethnotheatre, is a sense of artistic rigor. This is what makes our work credible and trustworthy.

In my book, *Ethnotheatre: Research from Page to Stage*, I reflect that when I watch an ethnodrama on stage, I am seeking new knowledge about specific cultural groups. I seek significant trivia, not just big ideas. I seek artful moments, not just social activism. And I seek insight and revelation about *me*, not just the generic human condition. Every time I go to the theatre, regardless of genre, I search for entertainment, not just meaning. My personal goal as an artist—because it's also what I want as an audience member—is to develop an ethnotheatre aesthetic that captures on stage a complex rendering of what I label *ethnotainment*: "*Theatre's primary goal is to entertain—to entertain ideas as it entertains its spectators. With ethnographic performance, then, comes the responsibility to create an entertainingly informative experience for an audience, one that is aesthetically sound, intellectually rich, and emotionally evocative.*"

Just because Aristotle's been dead for several centuries, don't

dismiss his work. Millennia ago, I believe he hit the nail on the head with *The Poetics*. A good story still reigns as the most important component in maintaining the narrative and theatrical glue of our ethnodramatic work. We still need not characters but actual people we care about on stage, with conflicts we can relate to, themes that are relevant, dialogue that is not ponderous but melodious—the “organic poetry” that ethnotheatre pioneer Anna Deavere Smith captures in her verbatim texts, and perhaps more than ever, spectacle that engages our 21st century rewired visual and digital sensibilities.

I am privileged to read and peer review journal article manuscript submissions that include ethnodramatic play scripts. They vary in quality, to be sure, for some of them are written by well-meaning scholars ranging from education, sociology, and health care. But with no theatrical background, their attempts can be stilted or heavy handed, and their scripts sometime include such conventions as citations to the literature or referential footnotes within the monologue and dialogue. I’m always advising them that a play is not an academic journal article, so “Stop thinking like a social scientist and start thinking like an artist.” But sometimes I even need to remind theatre practitioners themselves to start thinking like an artist, to think theatrically. We’re working with substantive textual drama, yes, but don’t neglect the wide array of theatrical devices with which we have to work.

Today’s live theatrical productions have been significantly influenced by digital media and have progressed toward more visual storytelling through physical theatre and innovative entertainment technology. Reality theatre doesn’t always mean kitchen sink, fourth wall naturalism. Work that is novel, surprising, and complex will attract and engage the audiences we’re trying to reach and, if we’re successful, the audiences whose values systems and social worlds we’re trying to change.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

So, in this post-truth era, what is ethnodrama and ethnotheatre’s role? First, don’t you dare call it post-ethnodrama or post-ethnotheatre or I swear I will hunt you down like a dog.

Second, perhaps our dramatic content needs to shift more with what is dramatically current. Our topic choices should be timely, in hopes of

being, like *The Laramie Project*, timeless. We could address the immigration crisis, LGBTQ issues, women's rights in a time of misogynistic, patriarchal rule. What would I personally want to see ethnodramas about? Topics like the dilemmas of immigrants and Planned Parenthood personnel, protesters on the streets and at airports. And yes, I want to see an ethnodrama of everyday citizens who are Donald Trump's most loyal supporters to help me understand why they think and believe the way they do.

Third, we should not be afraid to experiment with the genre. Hybridity is our forte. Ethnodramas accompanied with participatory components, aside from post-show discussions and talk-backs, have already been explored by groups such as Michael Rohd's Sojourn Theatre and David Feiner's Albany Park Theatre Project. DV8 Physical Theatre presents visually stunning productions, like *John*, creating ethnodramatic dance drama. Most recently, Joe Salvatore directed the national news-making ethnodrama, *Her Opponent*, which cleverly switches the genders in selected re-creations of the 2016 Trump-Clinton Presidential debates.

Fourth, media accessibility, ubiquitous hardware, and intuitive software have made video production not as formidable as it once was. Perhaps in the near future other scholars will explore writing teleplays and screenplays, and making short films of ethnodramatic work such as David Carless and Kitrina Douglas's portrait of coping with mental illness in *The Long Run*. The Internet will also provide scholars worldwide with a forum to archive and showcase their performance research in scripted and mediated forms for others.

Ethnodrama and ethnotheatre as qualitative research genres are currently on a moderate yet solid trajectory of growth. Academic journal articles employing the forms have been published with more frequency in titles such as *Qualitative Inquiry*. Additional books in arts-based research now appear on the market, like Patricia Leavy's *Method Meets Art*, and the commercial theatre still produces occasional works with some financial success. Even a few theses and dissertations have presented their findings in ethnodramatic form. As more scholars in non-theatre disciplines learn about these approaches, several will experiment with the methods to write and produce their research. Also, the current surge in autoethnography's popularity may motivate some of its writers to venture beyond journal writing and sit-down conference

readings, toward more artistically rendered staged performances of their stories.

There are still some skeptics within selected fields who have difficulty accepting these art forms as legitimate methods of inquiry. Ironically, like good researchers, we're presenting the truth—we're just presenting it more vividly. As poet Emily Dickinson wrote, "Tell all the truth, but tell it slant." Only through quality exemplars of research as performance can nonbelievers become persuaded of theatre's ability to generate meaningful and powerful insights into human experiences.

## CONCLUSION

As ethnotheatre artists, we are in the business of fabrication. Or the art of fabrication, which has an even more deceptive yet still nicely aesthetic ring to it. Think about it: we are purposely deceiving others—not in order to lie, but in order to tell the truth. But why are we asking our audiences to employ the willing suspension of disbelief—another phrase from theory and criticism class I absolutely hate. Why don't we just ask our audiences what we really want them to do when they attend an ethnotheatrical production: willingly believe.

## SUGGESTED CITATION

Saldaña, J. (2019). Keynote address: The art of fabrication. *ArtsPraxis*, 5 (1), 13-23.

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Johnny Saldaña is an Emeritus Professor from the School of Film, Dance and Theatre at Arizona State University where he taught from 1981 to 2014. He is the author of *Drama of Color: Improvisation with Multiethnic Folklore* (Heinemann, 1995), *Longitudinal Qualitative Research: Analyzing Change Through Time* (AltaMira Press, 2003), *Ethnodrama: An Anthology of Reality Theatre* (AltaMira Press, 2005), *Fundamentals of Qualitative Research* (Oxford University Press, 2011), *Ethnotheatre: Research from Page to Stage* (Left Coast Press, 2011), *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, Third Edition (Sage Publications, 2016), *Thinking Qualitatively: Methods of Mind* (Sage

Publications, 2015), co-author with Matt Omasta for *Qualitative Research: Analyzing Life* (Sage Publications, 2018), and co-author with the late Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman for *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*, Fourth Edition (Sage Publications, 2020). His most recent work is *Writing Qualitatively: The Selected Works of Johnny Saldaña* (Routledge, 2018). He has received book and research awards from the National Communication Association, the American Educational Research Association, and the American Alliance for Theatre & Education. His research methods works have been cited/referenced in more than 10,000 studies conducted in more than 130 countries.

## **The Ethno-Actor: Encompassing the Intricacies and Challenges of Character Creation in Ethnotheatre<sup>1</sup>**

**DARCI BURCH**

ENACT, INC.

### **ABSTRACT**

*This article addresses a current gap in the research of ethnotheatre productions, specifically involving the role of the actor. Actor coaching and character creation varies so vastly from traditional theatre that the role of the actor is changed. The author proposes a new term to encapsulate the role: ethno-actor. The ethno-actor is challenged to create a portrayal that maintains the dignity of and respect for the interviewee while maintaining room for new discovery of knowledge and understanding. The ethno-actor is charged with the ability to have empathy for the person/role they perform in order to truthfully render the performance of the individual. The main difference between traditional*

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<sup>1</sup> Author's note: The following article is adapted from my unpublished Master's thesis entitled *The Space Between Us All: The Performance of Dissociation in the Drama Therapy Relationship*, completed in partial fulfilment of my Master of Arts degree in drama therapy at NYU Steinhardt.



*acting and ethno-acting is that more attention is paid to ethical considerations, aesthetic challenges, and empathy-based creation (faithful rendering) throughout the character creation process.*

## INTRODUCTION

Before I turned my interest and career toward a helping profession, I worked as an actor. My experience in the performance realm ranged from musicals to independent films to Shakespearean dramas and back again. I stretched myself to perform in period pieces, learned complicated stage combat routines, and experimented with semi-improvisational new works. Each form of performance came with its own challenges and rewards, most of which were very obvious and manageable. In Anthony Clarvoe's *Ambition Facing West*, where I acted as an immigrant from Croatia in the 1940s, I worked with a dialect coach to master the nuances of the speech pattern. When I was the fight captain for a production of *Cyrano de Bergerac*, I reviewed every step in the fight, learning the detailed movements so I could better aid the combatants and understand the impetus behind each physical beat in the battle. In both of these instances it was easy to identify how I would need to proceed with my rehearsal and actor's work in order to deliver an adequate performance. While exciting and stimulating, these pieces offered a very different challenge from the ethnotheatrical work I eventually studied.

Although I had some limited experience in ethnodramatic work as an actor, my artistic and research interest piqued while pursuing a Master of Arts degree in Drama Therapy at New York University. There I was fortunate to be cast as a researcher-actor in Joe Salvatore's production *Towards the Fear: An Exploration of Bullying, Social Combat, and Aggression*, and then moved into my own research for my Master's thesis performance *The Space Between Us All: Playing with Dissociation*. Both of these productions were original works that utilized interviews and verbatim transcripts to build the content of the show. It was in doing this work that a new kind of challenge, one dealing with ethics, transparency, and faithful rendering, emerged, and my skills as an actress were stretched in a way they had never been stretched in traditional theatre roles. It was also through this work that I identified

what felt like a gap in the conversation around ethnotheatre productions and acting. In this article I will begin a dialogue aimed at filling that gap and encouraging continued discussion and exploration of this performance style.

## PERFORMANCE-BASED RESEARCH

It is important to understand the theoretical and historical context within which the research I have begun is grounded. Both of the projects I will reference throughout this piece fall under the category of arts-based research, and specifically nested within that term, performance-based research. Artist and researcher Shaun McNiff (2012) pointed to the “bodily and sensory knowing through the arts” (p. 10), and its usefulness in this type of research. This type of physical knowledge gained through the arts is described by psychologist, Eugene Gendlin (1981) as *felt sense*. Gendlin wrote, “A felt sense is not a mental experience but a physical one. [...] A bodily awareness of a situation, person, or event” (p. 32). Through the arts, this felt sense is given passage to emerge from the body and into communal understanding without necessitating traditional verbal expression (Rappaport, 2009). The exploration of the actor’s role within ethnotheatrical production was deeply rooted in physical exploration and understanding in the rehearsal process as well as the performance. It was through the taking on of role and the process of creating character that the nuances of styles, aesthetics, and ethics within the process fully emerged.

Clinical psychologist Les Todres (2007) supposed that through embodiment, it may be possible to exhume background knowledge that may not enter the room via spoken words. This place of discovering embodied information “is where being and knowing meet” (Todres, 2007, p. 20); however, Todres argued that it is not without its risks. In this view, the performer must enter a space of unknowing and remain open to all possibilities of new information. While Todres explained that this experience can be anxiety provoking, it may also be the path to new data. Instead of focusing solely on existing information or the end product of research, space is created for the emergence of new data. Drama therapist Nisha Sajjani (2012) discussed the role of improvisation in this journey and its potential to unearth new information through unrestricted and unanticipated processes by urging the

researcher to focus on process rather than product. In performance-based research, the unexpected occurrences, feelings, and relationships are frequently fertile with new data.

Irwin (2004) believed that these new discoveries are made in the shared territory between individuals in relationship. It is in this shared space that old ways of understanding can transform into new knowledge and information. Todres (2007) also pointed to this re-creation and the ability to better understand another individual's experience through an embodied reenactment. The blending of the performer's own knowledge with the embodied exploration of another person's experience creates possibility for new information. Salvatore (personal communication, May 22, 2015) would say that the actor in performance never disappears fully during this blending process, while Landy (1996) might term this experience as living the double life. I would posit that this double life becomes considerably more complicated when the character being played is not a fictional being but rather a living person.

Todres (2007) would argue that if the performer never fully disappears into role, then they are always part of observable performance. In other words, the audience sees a specific performance that is created in a specific moment and impacted by the set of people involved in the performance. This is a postmodern understanding that the information discovered is not absolute, but rather relative and subjective. The information gathered is relevant and important data in that it is shared understanding, co-created in the performance space. Just as the performer affects and is affected by the role they take on, this line of thinking asserts that the audience and performer engage in relationship as well. Through this relationship, the audience may teach and influence the performer and performance as much as they are also influenced (Irwin, 2004).

## **ETHNODRAMA/ETHNOTHEATRE**

According to researcher and theatre artist Johnny Saldaña (2005), *ethnodrama* is the play script that is written based on transcripts, interviews, journals, field notes, and other authentic sources. This script may or may not ever be performed but is in itself a presentation of the ethnographic research. *Ethnotheatre* is the dramatic production of the ethnodrama through performance. Saldaña (2011) reminds us that the

decision to present data as a script or as a performance involves consideration of how the research findings will best be communicated. Ethnodramatic scripts are not all suited for performance and aesthetic choices are important in order to deliver to the audience an emotional and entertaining experience.

The purposeful choices that go into creating a piece of ethnotheatre involve not only aesthetics but also ethics. These decisions are especially important when the piece of ethnotheatre involves the representation of individuals' personal stories or when confidentiality issues are involved. This is one area where traditional theatre and ethnotheatre can diverge because of the potentially more stringent ethical requirements of ethnographic work (Burch, Kaynan, Salvatore, & Tomasetti, 2015). However, this line becomes blurry as different writers, directors, and creative teams view their work in myriad ways.

Saldaña (2011) has researched and written extensively about the various presentations of this style of ethnographic work, having identified over 80 terms used to describe it. With this much variance in terminology, there is also variance in how people produce these works and the choices they make while presenting them to audiences. Ethnographic work may appear as therapeutic theatre, entertainment, anthropological research, or a vast array of other presentations. There is currently not one definition or definitive term for the various forms this work takes.

One form of the ethnotheatre genre involves *interview theatre* and *verbatim interview theatre*. Although it can take shape in many ways, in both processes participants are interviewed and the transcripts of these interviews are turned into a script. In verbatim interview theatre the transcriptions are used with the exact phrasing the interviewee spoke and often with their specific speech patterns, accents, and pauses. Anna Deavere Smith, a prominent solo performance artist, has done extensive work in verbatim interview theatre, bringing characters to life through the idiosyncrasies of their speech (Burch et al., 2015). The most well-known example of interview theatre is *The Laramie Project* (Tectonic Theatre Project, 2015) in which over 200 community members in Wyoming were interviewed after the tragic murder of a young gay male named Matthew Shepard. From creating characters aimed at emulating specific individuals to generating roles that are representative or interpretive of participants, the specific choices made ethically and aesthetically are

imperative in the creation process.

Salvatore (personal communication, May 22, 2015) asserted that one of the most important decisions a creative team must make in developing this type of performed research is to determine the intended audience for the production. Intent becomes key and drives the development of the script and performance. In Salvatore's work, honoring and respecting the participants and their stories is considered paramount and influences script building, coaching of the actor, and delivery of the performance. The actor coaching and character creation varies so vastly from traditional theatre that the role of actor is changed. I propose a new term, *ethno-actor*, to encapsulate the role. The *ethno-actor* is challenged to create a portrayal that maintains the dignity of and respect for the interviewee while maintaining room for new discovery of knowledge and understanding. They must be conscious in their choices to avoid caricature, misrepresentation, or falsehood in their performance. The *ethno-actor* is charged with the ability to have empathy for the person/role they perform in order to truthfully render the performance of the individual.

Adding to the complexity of the *ethno-actor's* experience is the potential for the person they embody on stage to be audience to the performance. With this possibility, empathic experiences and ethical considerations come to the forefront of the *ethno-actor's* performance. Saldaña (2011) discussed these considerations as, "the ethics of representation and presentation—in other words, the moral and authentic use of participant materials" (p. 39). While the writer of an *ethnodrama* must consider how to sculpt the play to best represent the interviewee's words, the *ethno-actor* must continue that process in the development of vocalization, physical portrayal, movement, and acting intent. Unlike traditional pieces of theatre with fictionalized characters and speech, the *ethno-actor* creates verbatim or composited presentations of real people and real stories, thus adding to the responsibility of the authentic performance.

## **ETHICAL, AESTHETIC, AND EMPATHETIC CONSIDERATIONS**

In order to better explore the usefulness of this term, I return to the two *ethnotheatre* productions cited earlier: *Towards the Fear* and *The Space Between Us All*. It was through these two creative processes that the

need for this term and the intricacies of its definition became apparent. While many aesthetic and ethical choices varied between these two unique and original productions, the experience of creating, rehearsing, and performing both shows supported the development of this new term. In both productions, I had the privilege to play the roles of writer (or co-writer/collaborator as *Towards the Fear* was developed with the ensemble) and ethno-actor. My job was to truthfully render the words of those I had interviewed and present the essence of their being. Not a task to be taken lightly.

My first thoughts about the differences between acting demands in ethnotheatre productions and traditional theatre came early in the rehearsal process for *Towards the Fear* when our director, Joe Salvatore, challenged the cast with practicing verbatim interview theatre techniques with fellow actors from the show. This exercise was aimed at not only giving us the chance to practice the interviewing format, but also to then attempt a faithful rendering of a real person through verbatim presentation. This was complicated further by the understanding that as a cast we would perform a selection from the verbatim interview for the others, including the person we had interviewed. Because the cast was in the early stages of group cohesion, having only recently met and begun rehearsals together, nervous feelings were heightened. I felt particularly anxious about the activity, given that I was a white female paired with an Asian male, and had concerns about unintentionally playing into stereotypes or misrepresenting my partner in a hurtful or offensive way. I was quickly aware of the trust required for my partner to engage in the interview and allow me to portray him. I was also quickly aware of what identifiers, privileges, and thought patterns I brought to the interview and how that would affect my performance. This felt distinctly different than previous acting opportunities both in my ability to purposefully play across gender and racial lines, and in the deep consideration and reflection needed to truthfully portray my peer.

On the flip side, I experienced a different kind of anxiety and vulnerability in the process of trusting him with my story and preparing to view myself being represented through this art form. This exchange began considerations of empathy that would be important throughout the development of the production. I was quickly attuned to how our interviewees may feel in this process and the gift of them trusting us to

represent them on stage. Experiencing both sides of the interview and performance process gave us as actors a deeper understanding of the innate vulnerability in ethnotheatre work and the responsibility the actor holds in that dyad.

As the process continued and I began the character study of the individuals I would be portraying in the show, the levels of responsibility inherent in acting in an ethnotheatre production began to emerge. Joe created individual rehearsal periods with actors in order to create space for the development and practice of the individual speech patterns and mannerisms, and it was through these meetings that I was able to discern what felt different about these rehearsals than those I had taken part in previously. I would posit that the main differences I noticed between traditional acting and ethno-acting was that more attention was paid to ethical considerations, aesthetic challenges, and empathy-based creation (faithful rendering). I would also suggest that while naming these facets individually may help us categorize the process, that in practice, these considerations blend and overlap in various ways which make them difficult to singularly identify within the process.

It is also important to note that my work has focused on verbatim interview theatre which is only one style within the larger body of work that makes up ethnotheatre. As such, the examples I use to define and qualify the term “ethno-actor” are related directly to that style and are certainly not all-inclusive or exhaustive. I believe that the term could have relevance across all ethnotheatre productions, but more research into these differences within various types of ethnotheatre work would be helpful and necessary as the term is explored for usefulness and potential growth.

To illustrate these differences, I will attempt to give examples from the actual rehearsal and performance processes. In both *Towards the Fear* and *The Space Between Us All*, the ethical considerations included determining which parts of the interviews would best represent the intent and weight of what the interviewee related. Even using a verbatim transcript, the words could potentially be altered in a way that misrepresents what the speaker intended and I, as ethno-actor, needed to be aware of my own biases in the production so as not to favor a particular voice or particular viewpoint. Working in a collaborative setting through *Towards the Fear* potentially helped keep biases in check, but as the play was a living and changing entity throughout the process,

individual ethno-actors revisited and altered the script to reflect their interpretations of the speech patterns of the people they were portraying based on their own experiences of listening to the recorded interviews. So, consistently keeping the intent of the original speaker in mind was vital to our process.

In the same vein, the physical mannerisms and vocal qualities needed to be detailed and rehearsed in a way that avoided caricature or misrepresentation. This aspect of the work blurred the lines between the ethical considerations and aesthetic challenges, as we had to ensure that our movements were realistic and not stylized or mocking while also presenting specific movements for certain characters. This was especially challenging as the cast of *Towards the Fear* purposefully played across gender, age, race/ethnicity, and nationality identifiers as mentioned earlier (Salvatore, 2016). I was cast to play the role of a broad-shouldered man, over 6 feet tall. As a 5'2" woman, Joe and I had to work to accurately portray the interviewee's movements but do so in a way that looked natural and made sense in my body, a very different body than the original speaker's. The intricacies of this work were exhausting and on-going as slight adjustments, revisions, and clarifications were made up until the opening performance to ensure that the audience viewed the most faithful rendering possible.

As an ethno-actor, the need to be self-aware and constantly reflective throughout the rehearsal as well as the performance periods felt largely different than what I had experienced as an actor in traditional plays. In traditional plays I was able to find or create mannerisms and speech patterns that grounded me in my character and could be altered as needed to help with messaging and delivery of plot points or character traits. When restricted by distinct and identified mannerisms and specific speech patterns of verbatim interviews, I had to constantly be active in containing my "character" to render it truthfully and utilize a very small number of predetermined tools for communication with the audience.

At the onset of *The Space Between Us All*, I intended to create a verbatim interview theatre piece similar to the production process in *Towards the Fear*, recreating speech patterns and mannerisms that directly represented a single individual whom I had interviewed. I realized quickly that I may have to alter my research design as I considered who I would be interviewing and for whom the production



was intended to be performed. I began to ethically consider the outcome of rendering the characters in this way. Because drama therapy is such a small field, and because I intended that community to be the audience, I wondered how I could present these voices in an accurate way while maintaining confidentiality requirements.

After careful consideration, I decided to blend characters to create a composite voice instead of isolating individual voices. Rather than having a character that only spoke the verbatim dialogue of one interviewee, I combined interviews so that one character may, at different times, have selections from several different interviewees. Saldaña (2011) explained that by using composite characters an author establishes “a fictional creation that nevertheless represents and speaks the collective realities of its original sources” (p. 17). In this way I could honor the verbatim dialogue and themes present without breaking confidentiality. This choice also meant that I would not physically represent an individual interviewee but instead create an easily identifiable but unique character profile. Once again, I blurred the lines between ethical and aesthetic considerations as I determined how best to maintain confidentiality while presenting characters through my physical body.

During the building of *The Space Between Us All* script, I deliberated carefully about each monologue combination in an attempt to capture the intent of the participant and faithfully render their experience without altering it to fit my own biases. Once I identified overlaps throughout the interviews, in both style and belief, I felt comfortable blending stories into one character. I ensured that each character was heard from at least twice throughout the play. This repetition allowed the audience the opportunity to grow accustomed to the style of the show and the presentation of the unique characters. It also allowed me, as performer, an opportunity to explore those characters fully and present a complete personality instead of delivering surface level distinctions or emotions.

It is also important to add that the blending of characters did not mean that individual voices were only bodied in particular characters. Occasionally, sections of speech would fit in with another closely related, but slightly different character, and be blended into their monologues. In this way, one character was not identifiable as a single interviewee and one individual was not necessarily connected to one particular

character. This was how I honored the participants' confidentiality while still maintaining the essence of their voice and the message of their experience. This process which started in script creation and continued through performance, involved all three components mentioned above. I was focused on building empathy for my interviewees as a way to better understand their point of view and as such represent them as faithfully as I could, I was concerned with the ethical considerations of confidentiality, and I was considering the aesthetic choices of composite characters and engaging storytelling for my audience.

In both productions, the act of moving into performance carried its own considerations, again different than what I have experienced as an actor in traditional theatre. My reflection turned to the research participants/interviewees who may come as audience members and whose interview would be witnessed in the performance. Saldaña (2011) discussed this concern and his belief that even with the best intent, the playwright cannot control how the audience will receive the material. The ethno-acting preparation up until this point supported the delivery of the performance in that I knew the ethical, aesthetic, and empathetic deliberations and choices I had formed with my director over the course of the production. This did not mean that I was relieved of any anxiety or worry about how interviewees may react to my portrayal, but I was fortified in the creation process and the care taken to faithfully render these people with dignity and respect. However, this meant that in addition to my usual actor anxieties about my performance, I was also holding the concern for the people being represented in the show and how that level of interaction with the audience might alter or affect the performance.

Important to note here is the interaction with the director and the importance of that relationship in the development of ethnotheatre roles. Similar to performing in a more traditional play, the directors I worked with helped me to shape my performance in truthful and aesthetically pleasing ways. They challenged me to finesse my character creations and pushed me to utilize my actor training to best deliver intent, action, and character development. However, they engaged with me in discussions, formulations, and reflections that mirrored the three distinctions I listed above that differentiates the ethno-actor. A full article could be committed to exploring this relationship but for the purposes of this writing, I will say that there is no way an ethno-actor could ethically,

aesthetically, or empathetically build characters and act in an ethnotheatre production without a guiding director with whom to negotiate the shared space. Collaboration with an artist who fully understands the intricacies and differences of this style of theatre and performance is paramount in order to produce an effective and engaging piece.

## CONCLUSION

Three years after performing in *Towards the Fear* and two years after *The Space Between Us All*, I am still ruminating on the challenges, differences, and complexities of acting in an ethnotheatre piece. Anecdotally, after that much time I am also still able to remember specific speech nuances and detailed mannerisms that comprised many of the characters I was fortunate enough to play. It is in some ways surprising to me that I am able to recall a verbatim script with the important but subtle patterns and mannerisms that are reflective of the real voices contained in the production. In other ways, this makes complete sense to me in that I, as ethno-actor, experienced, created, and delivered these productions through a method that was uniquely different than any other traditional theatre productions in which I have ever performed. The need for such specific and detailed work in ethnotheatre productions is mirrored in the need for a term that more fully encapsulates the work being done by actors in this style of performance. It is my hope that by introducing the term “ethno-actor,” more conversations and considerations of the complexities of this work can take place and as such richly enhance ethnotheatre work and production.

## SUGGESTED CITATION

Burch, D. (2019). The Ethno-actor: Encompassing the intricacies and challenges of character creation in ethnotheatre. *ArtsPraxis*, 5 (1), 24-37.

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## **The Right of Way**

**THOMAS MURRAY**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In early 2013, my friend Catherine introduced me to her new boyfriend Bobby. Two months later, he would be killed on his way home from work - knocked off his bike by a drunk driver. Bobby was one of seven such fatalities in the city of Chicago that year. Mutual friends asked what we could do to draw awareness to these disturbing losses and advocate for change.

Much of my work as an ethnodramatist has involved telling transportation-related stories. With my ensemble, Waltzing Mechanics, I created a docu-comedy in 2010 entitled *EL Stories*, crafted from brief interviews conducted with Chicago Transit Authority train and bus riders. In 2012, I wrote *Over My Dead Body* about the mass disinterment of a cemetery located in the path of a new runway at O'Hare International Airport. Interviews with next-of-kin to the buried formed the spine of that storytelling, which confronted the human scale of eminent domain proceedings.

The desire to extend the conversation around bicycle fatalities on

our city streets—particularly in a way that would engender consideration from everyday motorists - seemed ripe for documentary storytelling. The media condensed a fatal crash into a 90 second story on the evening news, but an ethnodrama could ask an audience for a full hour of sustained engagement.

One might conclude, as one of my interviewees did, that drunk driving was the culprit in these fatalities. But I was surprised by a common refrain from the driver defendants in many of these cases: “He came from out of nowhere. I didn’t see him.” In other words, a fellow traveler sharing the same roadway seems to be invisible until the last moment. Intoxication may slow response times, but I was not convinced that it caused people in our field of vision to disappear. I became further intrigued when this defense was raised similarly by sober drivers who hit and killed bicyclists.

By the time I started my research, there had already been another crash. Hector Avalos was killed in December 2013 on Ogden Avenue on Chicago’s West Side. He worked as a line cook at a Mexican restaurant in River North. After quitting time, he hopped onto his bicycle for the five mile ride to his home in the Pilsen neighborhood. Half an hour later, less than a mile from home, he would be struck from behind by a driver in a white minivan. The blood alcohol concentration of the driver would be measured at 0.11, exceeding the legal limit in Illinois.

In February 2014, I reached out to Ingrid Cossio, Hector’s mother, on Facebook. I asked her if she would be willing to sit for an interview about the loss she had endured. She called me back to ask how I was planning to use her story; even though I do not think she fully grasped the concept of ethnodrama at the time, she was willing to meet me. We conversed over morning coffee in a diner in Whiting, Indiana. For more than two hours, Ingrid articulated her love for her son through stories about raising him as a single mother. She was a Honduran immigrant, and English was not her first language, but nevertheless she crafted organic poetry through the words she attached to her broken heart. I was deeply moved by her shattering tale. At our interview’s end, Ingrid offered to introduce me to Hector’s girlfriend and his close circle of friends.

A few months later after several more interviews, I shared a first adaptation of *The Right of Way* in an invited reading for Hector’s family and friends. At the time, the script only drew from their interview

transcripts. They were invited to offer feedback, although the emotion in the room seemed to overwhelm dialogue. The friends were appreciative that Hector's story was memorialized; Ingrid hoped others would see the pain of her loss and change their driving habits.

From there, Hector's story sat on my shelf for a couple years while I matriculated to the M.F.A. program in Directing and Public Dialogue at Virginia Tech. I knew *The Right of Way* wasn't finished. The driver pled guilty in 2015 and was sentenced. The criminal court transcript of that case came into my possession. The resources of the university introduced me to urban planners, historians, civil engineers, personal injury attorneys, and alternative transportation advocates nationwide. I believed contextual interviews with these professionals might allow an audience's experiences as motorists and bicyclists and pedestrians to sit alongside Hector's tragic story. I proposed the production of a completed script for *The Right of Way* as my final M.F.A. project.

The result has been an ethnodrama sourced almost entirely from interviews, transcripts, and media imagery. In 2017, the script was workshopped through regional partnerships with Theatre in the Square (Marietta, Georgia) and Forum Theatre (Washington, D.C.) and was sponsored by Virginia Tech's School of Performing Arts and the Institute for Creativity, Arts and Technology. Working with spatial audio engineer Tanner Uptegrove, we crafted an environmental sound design that could efficiently differentiate the various locations in the script.

*The Right of Way* premiered in an arena staging in the Cube at the Moss Arts Center on the Virginia Tech campus in March 2018. Each performance was followed by a brief conversation led by members of the Town of Blacksburg Corridor Committee, board members from the recreational New River Valley Bicycle Association, and alternative transportation advocates from RIDE Solutions. My hope is that *The Right of Way* can be a catalyst for conversation in communities that are struggling to engage citizen support for Complete Streets or Vision Zero initiatives. Placing myself in the shoes of Hector's family has been a memorable experience for me, and it has certainly changed my understanding of how we as fellow travelers share passage on our city streets.



## **THE RIGHT OF WAY**

a docudrama by Thomas Murray

### **CHARACTERS**

HECTOR AVALOS, a 28 year-old former Marine

INGRID COSSIO, his mother

ROB MANCHA, his best friend, a fellow Marine

CRISTINA VALENCIA, his girlfriend

VANESSA, his friend

EMMANUEL, his friend

JAMIE, his friend

INVESTIGATOR MUSIAL, City of Chicago Police, Major Accidents Division

OFFICER TEGTMEIER, City of Chicago Police, Tenth District

SHAWN CONCANNON, assistant state's attorney

TOM BREEN, defense attorney

JUDGE FORD, Circuit Court of Cook County, Illinois, Criminal Division

THE RIGHT OF WAY received its premiere at the Moss Arts Center, in Blacksburg, Virginia, on March 29, 2018. It was directed by Thomas Murray; the sound design was by Tanner Upthegrove; the costume design was by Mary V. Rathell; the lighting design was by John Ambrosone; the video design was by Mordecai Lecky; the properties design was by Felysia Furnary; and the production stage manager was Andrew Schurr. The cast was as follows:

INGRID OSSIO

HECTOR AVALOS

ROB MANCHA / INVESTIGATOR MUSIAL

CRISTINA VALENCIA / OFFICER TEGTMEIER

VANESSA BLY / SHAWN CONCANNON

JAMIE / TOM BREEN

EMMANUEL / JUDGE FORD

Maya Garcia

Rodney McKeithan

Stephen Balani

Alexandra Yau

Anastasia Conyers

Andrew Bartee

Ryan Chapman

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[Thomas Murray](#)

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*(As the lights dim, we hear the clicks of a chain engaged - a bicycle in motion. It is night. As the bicycle continues in motion, we hear the pedaling disengage as intersections approach and then re-engage as the bicyclist crosses through. A truck approaches us from behind, getting closer, closer, and passing us at close range. The bicycle continues. Other traffic passes in our direction and in the opposite direction.)*

*In time, the sound of our bicycle and fellow traffic is contained by the walls of a viaduct. As we come out of the viaduct, we hear a van closing in behind us - not unlike other traffic until the last moment, when seeming perhaps too close, it CRASHES. The hood of the van crunches. The glass windshield shatters. The passenger mirror tears off. The bicycle is thrown. The van comes to a stop at a distance away from us. We faintly hear the door of the van open. As the clicks slow to a stop, we hear an ambulance siren approaching from a distance. As the siren gets closer and louder, it merges into the news jingle:)*

VOICEOVER: This is ABC 7 News at 10. Chicago's number one news.  
(stinger)

*(The video of the following segment is projected.)*

ANCHOR: A former Marine was struck and killed by a car as he was riding his bike in Chicago. That driver stayed on the scene and was taken into custody. Tonight, police say alcohol was probably a factor. We get the latest from Eyewitness News reporter John Garcia.

VOICE: "That was my baby. I don't care how old he was, but that was my baby."

*(INGRID enters center and silently watches the video.)*

REPORTER: Ingrid Cossio says she and her 28-year-old son Hector Avalos were very close. He spent a lot of time with his mother and his two younger siblings since his active duty in the Marines ended a few years ago. He loved to cook and after graduating culinary school, he started working at El Hefe Restaurant in River North. That's where he was last night before riding home on his bike. He never made it. He was hit by a car in the 2500 block of West Ogden just before midnight.

VOICE: "It's one of those things where, you know, you say goodbye to someone and they go off doing the same thing they do every day and something tragic happens."

REPORTER: The driver stayed on the scene and was taken into custody. His family says Avalos loved to ride his bike. He loved the outdoors. They say he was tired after leaving work last night and told co-workers he was considering taking the train home instead. But ultimately he decided to ride home. It was his favorite form of transportation.

VOICE: "He felt free riding it, he felt freedom. He loved it." (*INGRID exits.*)

REPORTER: His Christmas stocking still hangs on the wall with those of his co-workers.

VOICE: "Hector was a great guy. Us being in a new town, only being out here six months, he was one of the guys who was very welcoming to us. Busted his butt every day at work. Put in his all, he was a great chef. Great guy."

REPORTER: Chicago Police say they are continuing to question the driver, and they suspect alcohol may have been involved, but at this point, they have not yet filed charges. In River North, John Garcia, ABC 7 Eyewitness News.

*(At "filed charges," JUDGE FORD, SHAWN CONCANNON, and TOM BREEN face off in opposing vomitoria on rolling stools. Projected text: This play reflects a true story. The words spoken have been compiled from interviews and transcripts.)*

BREEN: Good morning, Your Honor. I'm Tom Breen on behalf of the defendant.

FORD: Thank you, Mr. Breen. The driver of the minivan entered a plea of guilty on the last date, and we are gathered today for sentencing.

*(Projected text: Sentencing Hearing, Cook County Criminal Court)*

CONCANNON: That's correct, Judge. I'm Assistant State's Attorney Shawn Concannon.

FORD: Very good, Ms. Concannon. Do you wish to call witnesses in aggravation?

CONCANNON: I do, Judge. The State will call Investigator Elliott Musial of the Chicago Police Department. *(MUSIAL enters and raises his hand as if taking the oath.)*

FORD: *(to audience)* Investigator Musial, called as a witness by the People of the State of Illinois, testified as follows:

CONCANNON: Investigator, I want to draw your attention back to the early morning hours of December 7th. Did you receive an assignment at about 1:30 in the morning?

MUSIAL: Yes. I was assigned to a traffic crash that happened on Ogden Avenue.

CONCANNON: Can you describe that area as it looked when you arrived?

MUSIAL: I saw a white minivan parked in the westbound lanes of Ogden. There was a bicycle on the street, some distance away near the entrance to a viaduct.

CONCANNON: Can you describe the minivan?

MUSIAL: It had significant crush damage to the hood, the windshield was shattered, and the passenger mirror was broken off. There was also some damage to the front fender.

CONCANNON: Did you notice if there was any blood on the scene?

MUSIAL: Yes. There were two separate pools of blood.

*(Courtroom freezes. INGRID enters the center of the playing space, addressing the audience. She pushes a bicycle wheel as HECTOR follows her. We also hear periodic traffic.)*

INGRID: I taught Hector how to ride a bicycle.

*(She lifts the bicycle wheel into the air as he watches. Projection: Ingrid Cossio, Hector Avalos's mother)*

As a matter of fact, when he was, two and a half? I had bought him a little black bicycle, you know, he had the training wheels in back. And he went to the corner, and I was watching him.

HECTOR: I did it!

INGRID: I said, see? You can do it! But as he came back down the block, my sister was across the street with her friend. And as soon as he saw her...

HECTOR: I did it! *(He runs off.)*

INGRID: He got off that bike and he ran for her. "DON'T DO THAT!" *(We hear the brakes screech and stop. Beat.)* He went to the tip of the bumper. I just couldn't move... And when I saw he was fine... I ran.

*(INGRID runs out as the courtroom proceedings resume.)*

CONCANNON: How far was the victim's bicycle from the defendant's minivan?

MUSIAL: From the rear tires of the defendant's vehicle, it was 146 feet.

CONCANNON: And could you describe how the point of impact occurred?

MUSIAL: My belief is that the defendant's vehicle struck the rear tire of the victim's bike, which caused it to go underneath the vehicle. At that point, the victim was thrown off of his bike. He struck the hood, then the windshield, was thrown onto the pavement - tearing off the passenger side mirror as he fell, and then rolled for some feet.

*(The sound of each action becomes broken up in isolation as each element is spoken.)*

CONCANNON: And would that account for the two different areas where you saw blood?

MUSIAL: Yes.

CONCANNON: And were you able to come to an opinion about what happened in the early morning hours that night?

MUSIAL: Yes, that the defendant was driving his minivan westbound on Ogden when he came in contact with the victim - also westbound on Ogden - who was subsequently dislodged from his bicycle.

CONCANNON: Investigator, when did you learn that the victim, Hector Avalos, had died from the injuries sustained in the crash?

MUSIAL: I went to the hospital around 2 a.m. I was told that Mr. Avalos was unresponsive when he arrived there, that they were unsuccessful in reviving him, and that he had massive blunt trauma to his head and his chest.

CONCANNON: Did you learn what time the doctors pronounced Hector Avalos dead?

MUSIAL: 12:38 that morning. *(The courtroom participants roll back on their stools to the entrance of the vom. INGRID enters the center with HECTOR and the bicycle wheel. He wears a helmet and knee pads.)*

INGRID: When he was in the first grade, I took him to Calumet Park. And I took the training wheels off. His father left when he was a baby, so I started him instead-- *(she balances him and then walks cross the circle in the direction he moves)* I got 'em on, I held him, and I let him go. And I was walking, and he would fall. *(HECTOR falls.)* Pick him up. And like three times then, he got on. Go. Fall. On. Go. Fall. On. Gooooo. Fall. *(again, he falls)* The last time, I got on my own bike and went ahead, and all I could hear was him screaming--

HECTOR: "Ahhh, I'm not riding this bicycle! I can't ride it!" *(HECTOR's protest brings him to center stage as INGRID addresses both the audience and HECTOR from the vom.)*

INGRID: And he was crying. He had red shorts. And a little white shirt. And I said, "it's either you leave the bicycle there, or you ride it. But we have a long way to go. Right now, we just got started. So what's it gonna be?" *(Beat. HECTOR sets up one more time, INGRID meets him, and he slowly - but successfully - starts to ride off.)* And by the time we came around the park, he knew how to ride it. *(INGRID smiles and exits. The courtroom participants roll back into place.)*

CONCANNON: Were you able to make a determination about fault?

MUSIAL: I contributed both parties to being at fault.

CONCANNON: But didn't you make a finding that the driver of the minivan should have reduced his speed upon entering the adjacent viaduct, because it was dark and it would have been difficult to see what was on the other side?

MUSIAL: I did say that, yes.

CONCANNON: Nothing further.

FORD: Cross.

BREEN: Good morning, Detective.

MUSIAL: Good morning.

BREEN: Detective, just very quickly. On that evening, the viaduct was illuminated by artificial lighting, is that correct?

MUSIAL: Yes.

BREEN: But not all of that artificial lighting was in working order, would that be correct?

MUSIAL: That is correct.

BREEN: Thank you. I have nothing further.

FORD: The witness is excused. *(MUSIAL rises and the court freezes.)*



## INTERLUDE: HISTORY

*(Projections: We see modern day traffic, but it is moving in reverse - it speeds up and cuts to traffic from previous decades also moving quickly in reverse. By the time we reach the early 1900s, the reversing slows, pauses, and moves forward. Over the footage of the 1906 San Francisco streetcar, we briefly see the words, How Did the American City Become an Automotive City? During this reversal of imagery, the courtroom participants slowly roll off backward through the voms.)*

VOICEOVER of Peter Norton: To start with, we have to step out of the world we learned to think of as normal. One way to do that is to imagine a person from a hundred years ago looking at our streets today, and they would be amazed. They would be amazed that we surrendered the street to vehicles completely and it would look crazy to them. You have an amazing consensus a hundred years ago among officialdom, authorities, engineers, judges, police and also average people, we know that because they wrote letters to their newspaper editors, that says, "Streets are for people."

VOICEOVER of Ralph Buehler: If you go way, way back when you only had trolleys, pedestrians, and bikes in the street, and the car emerged — the car needed that space. People, trolleys... were slowing it down. They had to get out.

VOICE of Peter: When cars were new on streets, they mixed badly with people. Of course, that meant they hit people a lot, and when they hit people, most people blamed the car.

VOICE of Ralph: And the big part of the campaign then, and it was not targeted at cyclists but at pedestrians, was to force pedestrians to only cross the street at crosswalks. The term jaywalking was coined. The idea was to sort of brand pedestrians as... it's their own fault when they get hit by cars, because they don't behave according to the law. And that happened in the 20s and 30s. So the car lobby or whatever you would call it-- they started blaming the victims... for being hit.

*(Images of safety campaigns populate the video screen.)*

VOICE of Peter: A lot of people find it's hard to believe that they could change our conception of what a city street is for, but this is the era

that retrained us in a lot of ways and they used the same techniques. For example, this was the era when we found out we have to shampoo our hair, when we found out we had to use mouthwash or people would hate us, when we found out kids have to have three tall glasses of milk a day, which no nutritionist believes but we all grew up believing it.

VOICE of Peter: The transformation in street safety moved from the early message being, "Everybody be more careful, especially drivers," to the later message being, "Keep the kids off the street, streets are for cars." You can transform people's perceptions of what's normal.

*(Video fades and ROB enters.)*

ROB: There's never been a period where I didn't talk to Hector. Like, you know some people, they hang out for so many years, and maybe they go to different high schools, they split up? *(Projection: Roberto "Rob" Mancha, Hector's best friend)* I've known him since fourth grade. And I've always been in constant, constant uh contact with him and always knew what was going on in his life. *(HECTOR enters with JAMIE from the opposite vom. They have backpacks. They're looking at ROB.)*

ROB: But I can tell you the first time I really talked to him. We were at school, and uh, he said something to me about my last name, Mancha- it means stain in Spanish. So he, you know, I think he said something smartass--

HECTOR: Hey, Mancha! Mancha de mierda!

ROB: So, translated, basically, it's "shit stain," and I was just, "ha ha—funny"...

HECTOR and JAMIE: Manchaaaa! *(INGRID enters from opposite vom.)*

ROB: But also like, "man, fuck this dude," you know what I'm saying? I don't want to hang out with an asshole like that.

INGRID: He was a quiet kid though. He was never giving me any types of problems-- rowdy or-- I never felt like I had a kid, because he wasn't

the type of kid asking me for clothes-- asking me for shoes. (*HECTOR and JAMIE start around the circle. ROB falls in with them.*)

ROB: But we lived on the same block, so we had the same path home from school. And so I guess I'd walk home with him. Not intentionally, but I'd always see him. (*INGRID moves toward the center.*)

INGRID: His father didn't give me child support. He told Hector when he was young that he wouldn't give me money because I would spend it on another man. And as soon as he got an order to pay child support, he quit his job. So I worked as a bus driver. Nine dollars an hour. And it was just Hector and I. I struggled with the rent. I struggled—I wasn't on welfare or nothing, but I was living by myself. And so I didn't have much of— say, cable back then. Or a telephone. The only time I remember him bugging me was--

HECTOR: "I want my own TV in my room. And I want my own VCR."

INGRID: "No. What you get in your room is your radio and your alarm."

HECTOR: "But all my friends have it!"

INGRID: "Well, go live with your friends-- see what happens."  
(*HECTOR turns to ROB and JAMIE; they swiftly exit.*)

HECTOR: "Maybe I will."

INGRID: (*she laughs as she exits*) "By the third day, they'd be throwing you out!" (*ROB enters again, this time with a backpack of his own.*)

ROB: So before long, I'd be walking with him home from school, and next thing you know, I started walking with him in the morning as well, and along the way, like we'd talk and like, he just grew on me and that was... 'came my homie ever since.

(*ROB walks in HECTOR's direction and they move off again through the same vom. The courtroom restores. TEGTMEIER enters when called.*)

FORD: Next witness.

CONCANNON: The State will call Officer Matthew Tegtmeier, Chicago Police.

FORD: *(to audience)* Officer Tegtmeier, called as a witness by the People of the State of Illinois, testified as follows:

CONCANNON: Officer, I want to direct your attention to the late night of December 6th. A little before 11:45, did you monitor a call of a traffic crash on your radio?

TEGTMEIER: Yes, I received a call, a vehicle versus bicyclist on Ogden near Western.

CONCANNON: Now, when you arrived on the scene, can you please describe to the court what you saw?

TEGTMEIER: Yes. I observed Chicago Fire Department personnel were on the scene working on an individual. There was a large crowd as well.

CONCANNON: Can you describe how that individual appeared?

TEGTMEIER: It was... not good. The individual was lying on the ground and appeared to have his head caved in. He didn't appear to be breathing. He had a lot of clothing on. It was very cold that night so he had on a large coat. He had what appeared to me to be a scarf wrapped around his head, hat on as well. All dark clothing--

CONCANNON: *(interrupting)* Okay, and did you have a conversation with the paramedics at that point?

TEGTMEIER: Well, I asked them how does it look, and their initial words to me were that it doesn't look good.

CONCANNON: Now, you had said that you observed a large crowd when you arrived. Did you approach that crowd?

TEGTMEIER: I did. Obviously I'm looking for a driver from a traffic crash, so I approached the group and said, who's my driver? And most everyone scattered, started walking away, but the defendant approached me, pointed out his vehicle, said that's my car.

CONCANNON: Did you bring the defendant anywhere?

TEGTMEIER: I took him over to my squad car and had him sit down in the back. He asked over and over, "how is he doing," meaning the gentleman who was lying on the ground.

CONCANNON: Now, when the defendant was talking, were you able to make any observations about his breath, smell, or the way he was talking?

TEGTMEIER: Yes. He had bloodshot eyes, odor of an alcoholic beverage, and he was speaking repetitiously. He was very distraught.

CONCANNON: And what did you do?

TEGTMEIER: I closed the door, and it seemed to me that we had a fairly significant event on our hands here - that this man had been driving under the influence, so I spoke with my partner to let him know this was going to be a long day.

CONCANNON: Did you take the defendant anywhere?

TEGTMEIER: I did. Back to the station. To conduct a Breathalyzer analysis.

CONCANNON: And what were the results of that breath test?

TEGTMEIER: I believe it was a point 1-1-8.

CONCANNON: No further questions, Judge.

*(Courtroom freezes. INGRID, HECTOR, and ROB re-enter.)*

INGRID: There were a lotta' gangs in the city, and I was worried about that. When he was in high school, I told Hector, "Hey! I didn't come to this country to be in gangs. I came here to get educated. To look forward to life. My parents gave that right. So I'm here for that. You are born and raised here, but that doesn't give you the right to go backwards. If you get yourself into a gang, I will leave everything and go back to Honduras. You are seventeen years old. And you are going

to get your diploma. From here on, it's nothing but school. So what's it gonna be?"

ROB: My whole family's been in the Marines. My uncles, I always looked up to them and I wanted to be like them. So why not be a Marine, you know? Just like them. So Hector, I think, when he knew I was gonna join the Marines, I think he was like...

HECTOR: *(to ROB)* You know what, I don't really want to go to college.

ROB: *(to audience)* Don't get me wrong. He coulda probably went to just about any college, the guy's so goddamn smart.

INGRID: I remember one afternoon, he came to me, and he says--

HECTOR: I gotta tell you something, ma.

INGRID: Oh no... please don't tell me you got somebody pregnant. Because that'd be the last thing. You're too young. There will be plenty of time for that when--

HECTOR: No! Why you gotta say that, ma?

INGRID: Because you know, your age. Everything's about sex right now.

HECTOR: I don't wanna talk about sex.

INGRID: I'm not talking about sex. I'm just saying that everything's about sex right now. But okay... come then, what is it? *(Beat.)* Just say it, please.

HECTOR: I decided what I'm doing after graduation. I'm joining the Marines. *(Beat.)*

INGRID: Where'd this come from?

HECTOR: Well, Robert is doin' it too. *(She looks to ROB.)* And I just wanna get away from the house for a bit, try somethin' new, somethin' fresh... see the world, challenge myself. *(Beat.)*

INGRID: Go. I think that would be good for you. (*HECTOR exits with ROB. INGRID moves to center stage to watch him go.*) He didn't have a dad. And he's grown up next to me for so long, and I thought it was gonna be a great way for him to be with other guys-- getting to be the man. And um... I was glad he did that.

(*Lights suddenly change back to courtroom. INGRID remains centerstage but is now surrounded by the courtroom proceedings.*)

FORD: Cross-examination.

BREEN: A few questions, Your Honor. Officer, from the moment he said, "I was the driver," to the moment you finished your interview of him, the defendant was always thoroughly cooperative with you, was he not?

TEGTMEIER: Absolutely. The entire time.

BREEN: And he was always concerned about the health and well-being of the person who was on the bicycle, correct?

TEGTMEIER: Very concerned. (*INGRID storms out.*)

BREEN: I believe he stated to you, as a matter of fact, when you were at the scene that, "I never saw him; he just came out of nowhere and hit my van." Did the defendant say that, sir?

TEGTMEIER: Many times.

BREEN: And we're not able -- I mean, you're probably not able to even estimate how many times he asked about the well-being of the deceased?

TEGTMEIER: I don't think I could. It was definitely on his mind the whole time.

BREEN: Thank you, Officer. Nothing further.

FORD: You may step down, Officer. Thank you.

## INTERLUDE: INATTENTIONAL BLINDNESS

*(Light change. Projected video and imagery accompanies this narration.)*

VOICE of Tara Goddard: What's interesting to me are people who are not impaired, they're not drunk, they're not on their phone, they have no intention of hurting someone or acting out on that, but somehow are still hitting and killing bicyclists and pedestrians. You hear the phrase, "Oh, they came out of nowhere."

*(Projection: "Selective Attention Test" by Daniel J. Simons begins to play.)*

VOICEOVER: This is a test of selective attention. Count how many times the players wearing white pass the basketball. *(Video plays.)* How many passes did you count? The correct answer is 15 passes. But did you see the gorilla? *(Video replays. Courtroom dismantles.)*

VOICE of Tara Goddard: Inattentional blindness is this idea that as humans we don't process everything in our visual environment. There's just no way. We can't. Our brains are constantly making decisions, usually subconsciously, about what we attend to, what we look for, and what we mentally process. So if you're watching a basketball game, you're not expecting a gorilla, and we miss it entirely. *(Projection displays of "Driver's Cone of Vision.")*

In high speed environments where a lot is coming at us, we're not evolved to handle the amount of information at the speed that it comes at us of the driving task, and yet we go out and operate these 4,000 pound things all together on the road. At a certain speed, your cone of vision includes a lot more of your peripheral, right? So you're going to see that bicyclist or that pedestrian approaching, or that you've just passed or whatever. Whereas the faster the speed, the more that we're looking in front of us, which necessitates a much smaller vision.

*(Projections fade. A whistle blows. ROB enters wearing a military cap and doing high knee kicks.)*

ROB: In the Marine Corps, Hector fixed radios. That takes— you gotta be smart to do that. And at this point, like this is probably the first time I



think like in our lives where we kinda didn't see each other every day. But still, we knew we were still homies, and we had that connection even more tighter because we were both Marines. (*ROB moves to center stage.*) One day in boot camp, I broke my leg, and I was at the hospital there, and out of nowhere I hear...

HECTOR: (*from offstage*) Manchaaaa!

ROB: And I thought, "what the hell? Was I in trouble?" (*HECTOR marches on wearing a military cap.*)

HECTOR: Mancha de mierda!

ROB: (*laughs*) Who is this skinny dude lookin' right at me? I was hyped!

HECTOR: Dude, let's go to church on Sunday. We'll hang out there and try to talk. (*HECTOR exits.*)

ROB: 'Cause you couldn't get no conversations done in boot camp anyway. They're up our ass everywhere. But it felt good. Kept me motivated, you know, kept the morale up! (*Exits.*)

INGRID: (*entering*) When he was in the Marines, he would come and surprise me. You know how you see all the soldiers come in? He would never say, "Mom, I'm coming in." He would just show up at the front door. Christmas, Thanksgiving, Fourth of July--

HECTOR: (*entering*) "Hi, ma!" (*INGRID embraces him and then exits.*)

(*CRISTINA moves to center as others join ROB on the periphery. Projections reveal colored lights on the wall of a party. As she narrates, HECTOR approaches her. Projection: Cristina "Tina" Valencia, Hector's girlfriend.*)

CRISTINA: Hector and I dated for three years. I first met him in like oh-six, 2006, at a party. He was home on leave from the military, and he was very obnoxious that night -- he kept following me around and he kept making comments to me, like--

HECTOR: "You got a sweet ass, chica."

CRISTINA: "Um?"

HECTOR: "No, really. I'm a fan."

CRISTINA: "Yeah, I'm gonna go find my cousin."

HECTOR: "Wait, wait... what are you doing tomorrow? We're gonna have a barbecue, like, do you wanna come?"

CRISTINA: "Oh wow. Um... no." (*She moves away.*)

ROB: (*to audience*) Like if it's one thing, Hector was really outspoken. I was a shy guy. Hector wasn't shy, so if I talked to any girls, it was usually because of him, so...

CRISTINA: (*to audience*) And yeah, so I decided to leave. (*CRISTINA pulls EMMANUEL aside.*) I told my cousin, "Emmanuel, I'm just gonna go, I don't even know why you hang out with guys like him."

EMMANUEL: "I know, but he's like one of my best friends, Like, don't be upset, you know, he's just a little, you know, drunk."

CRISTINA: And that was that. (*Party lights fade.*)

ROB: (*taking off his military cap*) I got out of the Marines in '07, Hector got out in '08, we came back to Chicago, and then, shit, we been kickin' it since then. (*The friends cross to opposite sides of the stage.*)

CRISTINA: A few years later, my cousin invited me to hang out one night, and we wound up at Hector's apartment. And at first, we didn't understand the connection. So some of the guys were telling Hector--

ROB: (*pointing toward Cristina*) "No dude, that's the girl that-- you know, you were bothering at Emmanuel's party that one time."

HECTOR: "Really? That's Emmanuel's cousin?" (*ROB, JAMIE, VANESSA, and EMMANUEL laugh and exit.*)

CRISTINA: And so, the next day he wound up sending me a message on Facebook like--

HECTOR: "Oh hey, how's it going? Um, the guys were telling me that we've met before, but I don't remember. Do you remember?"  
(*Facebook ding*)

CRISTINA: "No, I don't know what you're talking about." (*Ding*)

HECTOR: "They said we met at a party." (*Ding.*)

CRISTINA: "Whose party?" (*Ding.*)

HECTOR: "I think it was at Emmanuel's house. I invited you to a barbecue and then you just ghosted." (*Ding.*)

CRISTINA: "Oh my God, that's you?!" (*Ding. To audience.*) I'm like WOW, and I just like X'ed out of the conversation. (*Window close sound.*)

HECTOR: "Oh, I shouldn't have said anything"-- (*New window sound.*)  
"I'm so dumb, like I should have just not even said anything." (*Ding*)

CRISTINA: "Well, you did, so..." (*Ding*)

HECTOR: "Still, it was nice seeing you. Would you want to go out sometime?" (*Ding.*)

CRISTINA: "I don't date men who have been in the military." (*Ding*)

HECTOR: "Okay, well what about... would you like to come over to my house, and I'll make you dinner?" (*Ding*)

CRISTINA: (*pause, considers*) "Okay, fine." (*Ding*)

HECTOR: "You won't go with me somewhere in public, but you'll come over to my house? That makes no sense." (*Ding*)

CRISTINA: (*laughs, to audience*) At the time, he had two big white dogs - like pit bull mixes - a boy and a girl, Rolf and Nana, so... I don't know, it was something about his dogs that sort of made-- gave me this soft spot about him. I could tell on Facebook he took such good care of them, and it kinda showed me a different side of him. So I was

like, *(to Hector)* "Okay, well I feel safe, because, you know, your dogs are there. And okay, I'll come over." *(Ding.)*

### **INTERLUDE: "Fun Fun Fun"**

*(We hear "Fun Fun Fun" by the Beach Boys while projected video shows a point-of-view of a car along a coastal highway. Members of the ensemble move with increasing speed in and out of the center of the space as the speed of video traffic accelerates.)*

VOICE of Becky Katz: We fetishize the car. All our policies, our whole transportation system is focused on getting people around in cars.

#### **LYRICS:**

Well she's got her daddy's car  
And she cruised through the hamburger stand now  
Seems she forgot all about the library  
Like she told her old man now  
And with the radio blasting  
Goes cruising just as fast as she can now

And she'll have fun fun fun  
'Til her daddy takes the T-bird away  
(Fun fun fun 'til her daddy takes the T-bird away)

Well the girls can't stand her  
'Cause she walks looks and drives like an ace now  
(You walk like an ace now you walk like an ace)  
She makes the Indy 500 look like a Roman chariot race now  
(You look like an ace now you look like an ace)  
A lotta guys try to catch her  
But she leads them on a wild goose chase now  
(You drive like an ace now you drive like an ace)

And she'll have fun fun fun  
'Til her daddy takes the T-bird away  
(Fun fun fun 'til her daddy takes the T-bird away)

*(Instrumental reprise gives space for the following voiceovers.  
Projected imagery becomes "Futurama," the General Motors exhibit at the 1939 World's Fair in New York.)*

VOICE of Peter D. Norton: The story to connect with the automobile was freedom. You connect freedom with urban automobility by selling a vision of the future of the city, where you can drive anywhere, anytime, without delay, and park for free when you get there. That's a utopia. Lewis Mumford said around 1960 that, "If you want to have a city where you can drive anywhere whenever you want, you have to erase the city to do it."

LYRICS:

And we'll have fun fun fun now that daddy took the T-bird away  
(Fun fun fun now that daddy took the T-bird away)

*(Video changes to that of a small town Main Street. Actors become obstructions in the path of the onstage motorist.)*

VOICE of Thanh Dang: The private land that's adjacent to the right of way is also important. You know, I'm gonna walk more if there's interesting things to look at. If the buildings aren't set back really far away from the road. When there are trees and buildings and everything closer to the street, there's a tunneling effect on drivers that causes them to drive slower, as opposed to if you were driving in an environment where it was just like an open field. Or parking lots forever.

VOICE of Michael Stapor: Thinking of what I've been exposed to as a young person growing up in northern Virginia where it's traffic congestion everywhere and feeling unsafe just simply going to the grocery store. It's like, "Oh, somebody cut me off. Oh, almost hit somebody. Oh, I have to park in the giant surface lot and dodge the cars all the way to get into the grocery store." *(Actors form a traffic jam.)*

VOICE of Jeremy Holmes: When you have a community that's based around cars, it's very isolating. You see machines, and you don't even really see the buildings around you. You're focused on that space that you're in. You may not even know your neighbors. But the moment that you are out of it, even if it's walking to a bus stop, if it's walking to the corner store rather than driving to the Walmart across town, right? You see and appreciate things that you don't otherwise. You value, I think, where you live more. Because you can't ignore either what's bad about it, um, and you get to experience what's good about it. And you can't

do that with the windows rolled up and the radios blaring and you're worried about, am I gonna kill that person? Is that other person gonna kill me because they're not paying attention?

*(As the music ends, the ensemble exits and INGRID enters.)*

INGRID: I remarried when Hector was in the Marines. And I didn't have no other kids up until he was 21. So for years he was, per se, my partner. His father was not involved, where we had to be fighting or custody... part of it was so great that he was only mine, and I got to enjoy him. I got to know him. And that's how he learned how to cook. (HECTOR enters.) You know, I would call on my way home from work, and he would tell me...

HECTOR: "Ma, what're you gonna cook tonight?"

INGRID: "I think I'm gonna do steaks and rice when I get home."

HECTOR: "Can I get it started?"

INGRID: "Sure." And he would. And it was just him and I, until I got together with his step-dad. (*CRISTINA enters from the opposing vom.*)

CRISTINA: And that's how it started, you know? I remember what he made for dinner that first night--

HECTOR: Steak, and broccoli and cheese, and mashed potatoes.

CRISTINA: And it was like, the best steak I had ever had! He was going to culinary school at City College, because he had the GI Bill. And I was really impressed!

INGRID: My family had a restaurant. Since Hector was going to school, he was getting all these recipes, and he wanted to do that with my restaurant. But since the restaurant is Mexican, you know, it's more like tacos.

HECTOR: "I want to incorporate more healthy foods."

INGRID: "You can try a new dish, but you can't change the whole menu."

HECTOR: "Ma, I gotta move. I need my own kitchen."

INGRID: "What are you talkin' about?"

HECTOR: "Well, you know, I like to cook. I want to be able to cook for my friends."

*(ROB enters carrying a folding table and a plate of something for the potluck. The sounds of the city are heard.)*

ROB: Dude, this guy-- this was the go-to guy for fuckin' ribs-- this dude knew how to cook. Ingrid taught him a lot. *(He begins setting up the table, putting down a plastic tablecloth, and collects his friends' plates for the potluck as they enter.)*

VANESSA: *(enters with food)* I was the first of our friends to move to the West Side. And everybody would come to my house like every day in the summertime, and we'd cook out on my porch. *(EMMANUEL and JAMIE enter with food.)* Then our friends Emmanuel and Jamie moved into Pilsen...

JAMIE: And little by little, people just started trickling in.

ROB: And like suddenly we're all moved from the East Side to the West Side, you know? It's pretty cool.

INGRID: Every Tuesday, he would get together with his friends. And I think they called it the Lucky Pot? Everybody would bring food.

CRISTINA: His last apartment-- it was on top of a Chinese restaurant and he didn't have access to the backyard. They were like, no, you guys can't park there, can't hang out back there, so on Tuesdays the restaurant was closed, and people could come and park in the back, and we could just grill back there without them being there. That's why it became like this Tuesday potluck thing. *(CRISTINA and HECTOR exchange a kiss.)*

VANESSA: And the fact that it was Hector's day off. I thought that was very special. He could have gone to his mom's house. He coulda' done anything. And he chose to always, like, in the evening, he would start preparing stuff, and then just send us a text saying--

HECTOR: "Come on over! I'm grilling!"

EMMANUEL: It was always bring whatever you could, and cook it up – and he'd always have the burgers or something ready to eat there.

*(The others keep eating together as CRISTINA moves away.)*

CRISTINA: Ingrid really liked riding her bike, so she would put him - as a child - in the back. She had a little seat, and she would just ride her bike with Hector. So in 2010 at some time, he bought a bike from a co-op and he started riding. Rob, he also bought a bike around the same time.

ROB: Hector and me had cars. But I crashed my car, and then his car got repo'd or whatever, so then we were just like, how are we gonna get around now? They say you never forget how to ride a bike! *(ROB exits.)*

CRISTINA: So then Hector was like--

HECTOR: "Tina, we should get you a bike too."

CRISTINA: "Oh. Do we have to?"

HECTOR: "Come on, don't you wanna ride with me?"

CRISTINA: We went to this co-op-- I remember it was one of my birthdays and he bought me a bike. And I liked it. But then, you know, if we wanted to go to the movies or dinner somewhere that was close, like a bike ride away, he'd be like--

HECTOR: "We can go, but we have to ride our bikes there."

CRISTINA: "No, I'm tired."

HECTOR: "Come on!"

CRISTINA: "Uh! It's so far!"

HECTOR: "Come on, you can do it!"



CRISTINA: "Okay, fine!" And I'd do it. (*ROB re-enters with two bike wheels.*)

ROB: I remember specifically this one time, we had just started riding our bikes. I was kind of afraid a little bit, like timid on the street, on a bike, you know, you feel naked on a bike. So, we were riding in the sun... a guy on a motorcycle came up on the side of me like (*motorcycle engine noise*) really loud, and I said to Hector, plain out-- "hey man, let's race him man!"

HECTOR: (*laughs*) Yeah, dude!

ROB: Should I tell him, like, "Hey, get a real bike?" (*HECTOR laughs*) "Nah, I'm just playing. He's got a real bike, We're the ones on the little bicycles."

HECTOR: "Nah, dude-- If you think about it, he's on a machine. And we are the machine. Who's the real man now?"

ROB: (*nodding*) Oh yeah... I got you. And, and ever since then it resonated in my head.

## INTERLUDE: DAISY DAISY

(*Full ensemble choreography set to Nat King Cole's recording of "Bicycle Built for Two," which clears the stage of the potluck.*)

Daisy, Daisy  
Give me your answer do  
I'm half crazy  
All for the love of you  
It won't be a stylish marriage  
I can't afford a carriage  
But you'll look sweet  
Upon the seat  
Of a bicycle built for two

Daisy, Daisy  
Give me your answer do  
I'm half crazy

All for the love of you  
We'll spend all our life together  
Regardless of the weather  
And you'll look sweet  
Upon the seat  
Of a bicycle built for two

Daisy, Daisy  
Give me your answer do  
I'm half crazy  
All for the love of you  
We'll leave when the ball is over  
Get married in the clover  
And you'll look sweet  
Upon the seat  
Of a bicycle built for two

## **INTERLUDE: CONFLICT**

VOICE of Peter Wilborn: The word conflict implies there are two sides that are angry at each other. Cars versus bikes. Bikes versus cars. I think that narrative is impoverished.

I think it's more like there's one remote control and one of the partners in the relationship weighs about 200 pounds more, is much stronger, and is very very opinionated about what they want to watch. They get the remote control.

The answer would be let's create two remote controls. Let's add some more screens or let's have a split screen. There's all kinds of ways of solving the problem.

*(Sound of a gavel. Courtroom restores.)*

FORD: State, call your next witness, please.

CONCANNON: Judge, at this point I have no further testimony.

FORD: Does the Defense wish to offer any evidence in mitigation?

BREEN: We do, Your Honor.

FORD: Go ahead and proceed.

BREEN: Judge, I will try very hard to be brief even though this is an extremely important moment.

There is nothing obviously I can say or do or the defendant can say or do that will bring Hector Avalos back into the arms of his loving mother. There's nothing we can do. We can, however, maybe even in Hector's honor, seek a just sentence in this case.

The defendant goes to a party he probably didn't even want to attend and takes his normal route home which puts him westbound on Ogden Avenue in a dark viaduct. Suddenly out of nowhere, which is the uncontradicted evidence, suddenly out of nowhere, Hector appears and he is struck. Nothing can change that moment in time. But what does the defendant do? He gets out, he calls 911. He stands there, "I'm the driver, he came out of nowhere, I'm the driver; is he okay?" How many times did he ask if he's okay? He wasn't, but he didn't know that.

He's called a murderer by some; but he's not, Judge. It was an accident. A horrible accident. And I want the Avalos family to understand something because it is so true. When a decent human being like the defendant is involved in this type of accident, the punishment he suffers is in every day of every week. He is half the person, is half the bright light he was before this accident. His remorse and anxiety are palpable. Thank you.

## **INTERLUDE: ACCIDENT**

*(Projections: we see words highlighted in isolation: accident, cyclist, person, crash, risk. The courtroom dismantles one person at a time in response to different words.)*

VOICE of Tara Goddard: I have scrapped from my vernacular - as best I can - the word accident. It's hard. It's a hard habit to break. The idea being that most crashes are preventable. For example, if someone blows a tire on the freeway and they rollover and are killed, that seems like a freak thing. But if we take a step back, maybe the tire should

have been replaced sooner or maybe that truck that dropped the nails on the freeway should have had better safety controls, et cetera. You can almost always take it upstream and find a preventable moment. VOICE of Mackenzie Jarvis: I don't use the word cyclist. Even though I am one. I call myself a person on a bike and that's very very intentional. It reminds you-- I'm a person.

VOICE of Tara D. Reel: I would dare to say if you had a group of people, and you asked them, "have you been in a car crash or do you know somebody who has?" Every hand in the room would probably go up. (Projected imagery of crash statistics on overhead highway signs.) We're so comfortable getting behind a wheel and taking other people's lives in our own hands... and it's kind of a crapshoot really. If there was an illness or virus that killed that many people in a year, there would be a public outcry. But this is one of those things that we've just-- it's a risk that we're willing to take.

*(INGRID and ROB return. They face each other from opposing vomms. In slow-motion, HECTOR crosses the space between them.)*

INGRID: Two weeks prior to him dying-- I'd been having headaches. And the last week, twice I woke up early in the morning-- at 2:22 AM. Thursday prior to him dying, I look at the clock-- I have to go pick up the kids, and I turn to my mom-- we look at the time, and I says, ma, it's 2:22 again! What's going on? (pause) Not to realize that, February 22nd is my son's birthday.

ROB: It was a Wednesday I had seen him, that week before he died. So when I seen him that day, he looked really tired. So I took a shower, whatever. I get out the shower, and I'm leaving. Like, I'm, I shit you not, I'm about to roll out and I'm like, "Hey Hector, um, hey dude, I'm about to leave right now man, I'll see you later." He didn't respond. And I kinda peeked in the room real quick, and he was-- he was knocked out. So I was like, poor little bugger, he's asleep.

I'm walkin' down the stairs and I stop on the first landing, I'm like, "Man" and thoughts like this go through my mind sometimes-- and I was like, "man, dude, you never know when it's your last time." But I was like, it's Hector. We were meant to fuckin' rule the world, so I don't see our story ending any time soon. But I stopped and I considered going back

around to wake him up-- But I didn't. I continued on my way. (*ROB leaves.*)

INGRID: One week before, I had told my daughter we're gonna go show her the Christmas tree downtown. So it's around 9:00, 9:30, and my daughter says--

VOICE of BRANDY: "Mommy, you been promising me-- you been promisin'--"

INGRID: I have twins with my second husband. They're seven years old. And I said, you know what? Gimme my hat, let's go. We're just gonna run up to the tree, and I'll take your guys' picture. And after taking pictures at the tree, we went up Michigan Avenue to look at all the lights. (*Projected imagery of Christmas lights on trees.*) And I remember, I said, "let's pick up Hector!" It was exactly 11:00. He was getting off work. And I called him up.

HECTOR: (*entering*) "Hey. What're you doin' downtown?"

INGRID: "We're looking at the lights. Are you ready to be picked up?"

HECTOR: "Yeah, why not?"

INGRID: "Okay, come on, let's go." And I wanted to take a picture with him too, but my husband had already driven past the tree... and I thought, ah, okay, forget it. So when we get to his house, I said, "what are you gonna do right now?"

HECTOR: "The guys are over at this bar. I might go over there."

INGRID: "How you gonna get back home?"

HECTOR: "I'm walkin'."

INGRID: "You're not walkin'. It's like Zero below, and it's a few miles from here. The street is really dark. And if anybody passes through here, they can shoot you, and you can fall, and nobody knows about you until the next day. You frozen." (*pause*)

*(to audience)* I dropped him off in front. And he usually-- ever since he moved to the West Side, um, he started something different-- where he would give me a hug and a kiss when he left. Something, that in my family, we don't do. Maybe he learned it from his friends. I don't know who, but-- I would feel a little embarrassed to do it. Even though I said to myself, why should I? I'm his mom.

But he gave me a hug and a kiss. Said--

HECTOR: "I love you, mom." *(He exits.)*

INGRID: And that was the last that I seen him.

## **INTERLUDE: THAT CHANGE**

*(The projected video of a spinning bicycle wheel fills the screen. INGRID watches HECTOR exit and then regards the spinning wheel.)*

VOICE of Peter Wilborn: If you die in an industrial accident or if you die behind the wheel of a car, you do not have that change in emotion from the sublime to death. If you die in some tragic way, you're not ecstatic the moment before you die. When you ride a bike, you're ecstatic. There's endorphins, you're where you want to be, you're outside, the adrenaline is good, it's a real positive experience. And it's that transition from euphoria to catastrophe, which I think is very poignant to recognize. There's very few things that people die from that are as great.

*(A cell phone starts to ring.)*

INGRID: Saturday morning, my husband's phone rang. And I saw 3-1-2, the area code for downtown. And I said, this is a 3-1-2-- it dawned on me, this is something different. My husband called it back, and I could hear English, and I said, gimme the phone. It's a lady--

OFFICER VOICE: "Are you the mom of Hector Avalos?"

INGRID: Yeah.

OFFICER VOICE: "Is his father there?"

INGRID: And I got really angry because... his father? He's been estranged for twenty-six years almost. And I just got irritated and said-- "Look lady, his father's not here."

OFFICER VOICE: "Well, can I-- can I speak to him?"

INGRID: "I'm Ingrid Cossio-- I'm Hector's mom, but I'm remarried."

OFFICER VOICE: "Well, I would really like to speak to his dad."

INGRID: "NO. Would you please get it over with and just start talking to me?"

OFFICER VOICE: "Well, your son has been in a car accident."

INGRID: "No, my son doesn't drive a car. You're wrong."

OFFICER VOICE: "Well, he was on a bicycle."

INGRID: And I threw the phone. (*INGRID collapses center stage.*)

OFFICER VOICE: "An accident happened on Ogden Avenue about 11:40 last night. Paramedics took him to Mt. Sinai, and he was pronounced dead at 12:38."

INGRID: I was just sitting there blank-- thinking my son is in the morgue-- cold. Didn't have no one to hug him or warm him up.

ROB: (*entering*) So on December 7th, wake up, I go to my mom's house, and I'm chillin' there next to my brother... Happy Birthday, Bro. And I'm sitting there, and watching TV and my mom's phone rings. (*Landline rings as JAMIE enters from opposing vom.*) And it's Jamie's number. Like, Jamie calling me on my mom's phone? Like what the hell? So I answered it, I was like, "What's up?"

JAMIE: "Hey bro, um... whatcha doin' right now?"

ROB: "Shit, chillin' man. I'm at my mom's."

JAMIE: "Hey, uh... have you talked to Hector's mom?"

ROB: "No, why?"

JAMIE: "Hector didn't come home last night."

ROB: "What do you mean? Maybe he went to Cristina's house or something, like you know, that's what he does."

JAMIE: "No no no no. Someone called his mom and they-- the city or somebody called his mom and told 'em that Hector got hit by a car."

ROB: "Dude... oh shit... like, is he in the hospital? Is-- is he okay?"

JAMIE: "No... he died." (*beat*)

ROB: "Dude... this is the fuckin' worst joke in the world. Quit fuckin' playing around, dude-- that's, that's not funny man."

JAMIE: "No, yeah, I really wish I was like, playing around, but no."

ROB: "Dude, who called you?"

JAMIE: "His mom."

ROB: "Dude, this ain't fuckin' funny. He's not dead." (*JAMIE looks away.*) And I hear on the other end, I hear Jamie start to cry. And I'm like, damn is this real?

So I was like, "dude, let me call Ingrid real quick. Cause maybe it's a mix-up dude, maybe, maybe something's wrong here." (*JAMIE exits.*) I call Ingrid, she didn't answer. I was like, well, let me call Cristina. He hadda be with Tina, and she didn't answer either, I'm like goddammit, no one's answering their fuckin' phone! And now I'm like freakin' out and shit. (*Phone rings.*) And then the phone rings again, and it's Ingrid. She's calling me back. Answered the phone, and she's crying.

INGRID: Robert, have you talked to Hector?

ROB: Nah. Is it true?



INGRID: I don't know, Robert. Go find out. Call Cristina. Go figure it out. You guys live close. (*Call waiting tone.*)

ROB: And as she's telling me that, Tina's calling me back. (*CRISTINA enters.*) So I was like, "hey, it's Tina, let me call you back."

INGRID: "Okay, call me back."

ROB: Click over and I'm like, "Tina?"

CRISTINA: "What's up, Rob?" (*beat*)

ROB: "Where you at Tina? What are you doing?"

CRISTINA: "Nothing. I'm home, watching TV."

ROB: "Are you with Hector?"

CRISTINA: "No."

ROB: "When was the last time you seen him?"

CRISTINA: "Yesterday. Before he went to work." (*Beat.*)

ROB: "Is somebody home with you?"

CRISTINA: "Yeah, my parents are upstairs."

ROB: "Okay, are you sitting down?"

CRISTINA: "No. Do I need to be sitting down?"

ROB: "Tina, I got really bad news."

CRISTINA: "What's wrong?"

ROB: "Ingrid just called me right now, and she said that Hector got hit by a car."

CRISTINA: "Oh my God, is he okay?"

ROB: "No, Tina... he's dead."

CRISTINA: "No! Noooooo!"

ROB: I just-- "Let me find out more and I'll call you back." Bam, hang up the phone. (*CRISTINA exits.*) Call Ingrid up. I'm like, "Ingrid, where you at?"

INGRID: (*entering*) "I'm gonna go see the body right now. Go confirm it."

ROB: "Let me go with you." (*He follows her on a circuitous path.*) So she comes, and she's crying, she's holding this picture of Hector like-- the picture is of him in a diaper, with this smile, at the beach at Cal Park. (*They stop.*) But at the morgue, there's no doctor. They can't let us see him without the doctor being present. Ingrid's fuckin' like hysterical--

INGRID: "What do you mean? I gotta see my baby--"

ROB: And like the security guard won't let her go past. It was terrible. So we're like, come on Ingrid, let's go. (*They start traversing the space again.*) And still, it's not like, clicking in my head yet-- I'm still in denial.

INGRID: "It supposedly happened on Ogden. Supposedly it happened on Ogden by California."

ROB: So we're going on Ogden, I didn't see nothing. Like, any sign of a accident.

INGRID: And in my mind, I'm just recalling what could have been. Why didn't I call him yesterday? I could've stopped it. Maybe if I would've went to pick him up? It was eleven o'clock— what was I doing? I wasn't doing anything. I was watching TV, sitting down, Friday night—"Hold it! Pull the car over! Pull the car over!" (*INGRID collapses in a vom as a timelapse of heavy traffic is heard.*)

ROB: And she gets out the car, not saying nothin', we're on Ogden, It's pretty busy-- we're in the middle lanes-- she runs to a big puddle of bright red blood. And I'm like, holy shit. I went to Iraq-- I know what

fresh blood looks like. And she's on her knees like, grabbing the blood and she's like--

INGRID: "My baby!" (*We hear cars at close range.*)

ROB: "Ingrid, let's get off the street-- this is not safe!"

INGRID: "No! Get away!"

(*The timelapse traffic continues. ROB gives her space before offering to help her to her feet. The sound cross-fades with a sustained tone. INGRID stops center stage and motions for ROB to leave her. He exits.*)

INGRID: When we got back to my mother's house, the media was there. And they wanted interviews. So we interviewed with Channel 7-- I don't remember which ones. But um, I took a pill to go to sleep. Laid down about 1:00. And as I'm laying there talking to my husband, I felt something. Like a whisper. I heard a voice...

Voice of HECTOR: "It's okay."

INGRID: And a kiss. And I told my husband, I don't know if I'm going crazy. Or is it that I want to feel him. But my son is here. I know he just gave me a kiss. I felt like the heat-- this side. But that's the only time I have ever felt... nothing after that.

(*Gavel is heard. The courtroom restores. INGRID remains at center.*)

FORD: State - your closing argument?

CONCANNON: Judge, Mr. Breen made a very impassioned argument on behalf of the defense. But what happened that night was not only a tragedy; it's something that this defendant needs to be held responsible for. This defendant that night decided to go out and drink and then he made the choice to drive.

Judge, counsel's right. Nothing can bring Hector back; however, the defendant needs to be held responsible for what he did, and also this is a clear case where society can be sent a message that it's not okay to drink and drive. And now the Cossio family has to live with this for

the rest of their lives. Judge, the Illinois legislature advises that in most cases, an aggravated DUI resulting in the death of a person carries a sentence of between 3 and 14 years in the Illinois Department of Corrections. I ask that you sentence the defendant to such a term for what he did. Thank you.

FORD: Thank you, State. I would like to begin by indicating to all those concerned that it is my sincere wish that we could have met under different circumstances.

In this case, at the time the defendant struck the victim, the defendant was legally drunk, but still closer to the minimum than many of the other blood alcohol contents I see on a weekly basis in this courtroom. Another thing I look at is that the defendant remained on the scene, and I mention that, because had the defendant left the scene where this occurred, it's possible he could have completely escaped criminal responsibility. That doesn't depreciate the death that he caused.

A sentence of a court like this always has to reflect a series of concerns. One of them was mentioned by the State and I think that's a legitimate one, so that other people don't commit the offense. That can't be the only one.

Some supporters in these proceedings have mentioned that Hector was murdered. He wasn't murdered. He died during the course of an accident, which is different than picking up a gun and pointing it at another person and pulling the trigger. The facts and circumstances are noteworthy, ladies and gentlemen, because it happened late at night, it happened in an area that I think anyone would have to acknowledge is a pretty dark area, it happened in a circumstance in which the person on the bike was in dark-colored clothing.

Those are the sorts of things that the law requires me to consider in cases like this. I've done that to the best of my ability. These are terrible cases.

For the offense of an aggravated DUI causing death, the defendant will be sentenced to 100 days in the house of corrections. We'll take a short recess.

*(The courtroom dismantles. INGRID is left at center stage.)*

INGRID: Ever since I seen-- the first time I see the judge the day after my son died, I knew he wasn't... I told my husband, I said, the judge looked at me like saying sorry, there's nothing I can do.

I wish that the world could stop, you know. Just stop and bring him back and put it back the way it was. I asked God to take the pain away, but... I don't know how to push it away. It's grief, but for how long? Cause I need to live. I want to move on, but it doesn't let me move on. I sleep with his pillow. His shirts... (*VANESSA, ROB, JAMIE, and CRISTINA enter with the white bicycle. They begin assembling the memorial.*)

VANESSA: The Ghost Bike means a lot to me, because it's the only public memorial we have of him. It just where he spent his last moments. He was almost home.

ROB: Jamie's a hands-on person. He wanted to start building shit.

JAMIE: "Ghost bike, let's do this ghost bike, let's DO this ghost bike!"

CRISTINA: I don't even know who went and got the bike.

ROB: Jamie spray painted it white.

VANESSA: One person bought the chain. Somebody brought a lock. So we all put it together.

JAMIE: My friend Albert made the most awesome painting.

CRISTINA: People were working on signs, and I think I was just sitting there-- just shocked still. I was not very helpful. But everyone who was able to was just moving around.

ROB: All the friends worked like fuckin' gears in a clock. You know, we were able to tell time! Efficiency!

VANESSA: It hits close to home when you're a cyclist. It's really beautiful that it's a public place where anyone can go. But it's also important to me because it's the only place we can go. And every time, there's something somebody has added.

JAMIE: Whether it's a dollar--

VANESSA: Or art-- somebody put up this beautiful installation of forks and spoons and a plate.

ROB: Bike lights.

JAMIE: A hat.

ROB: We go, and it was snowin'-- and it's like, y'know, all these cars are passin' by and they probably just see a buncha' kids like standin' outside and shit. Little do they know, like, this is-- we just lost a really important person, like-- not only to us-- I feel like the whole entire world is gonna shaped by this loss. 'Cause this dude had an impact not just on us, but he coulda' been-- he coulda' been anything.

CRISTINA: Sometimes Ingrid will call me and say--

INGRID: "I feel like I really need to go. Will you come with me?"

CRISTINA: We went like a week ago. It was a Friday night. I think Friday nights and Saturday mornings are difficult for her.

INGRID: But I told my other kids -- I want to get them into riding their bicycles. My son rode it to school too. Since he was little. So.

VANESSA: Me and Rob decorated the ghost bike for Christmas. The snow was finally melting, and I ended up finding Hector's glasses. One of our friends was very adamant about finding something that Hector left behind. What he was searching for-- so he could be free. We didn't say goodbye...and we've never said goodbye.

*(JAMIE and EMMANUEL reenter with white balloons and hand one to each of the cast except for INGRID.)*

CRISTINA: After his funeral, we walked into the parking lot and released balloons.

ROB: We bought like over a hundred of them. *(They gather around INGRID at the ghost bike.)*

CRISTINA: The following Friday night, we got together at the ghost bike, and released more of those. And on his birthday, we had 29 birthday balloons, because it was his 29th birthday. And that was really nice.

INGRID: I realize my son is not coming back. It's something that is hard for me to understand. I mean, I know I cremated my son. But there's always-- I don't know. (She looks out toward her front door.) You see my front door? I leave it open. Just to feel him. In the hope of him. Because he used to come in, "hi ma," you know? My husband tells me, close it, but I can't... I can't. I have to let the sunshine in. He was my sunshine.

*(The balloons release and float to the height of the auditorium. The lights follow their ascent and fade as the balloons disappear from view. A single column of light remains on INGRID at the ghost bike for a moment before the light and the music fades.)*

**END OF PLAY**

## **SUGGESTED CITATION**

Murray, M. (2019). The right of way. *ArtsPraxis*, 5 (1), 38-80.

## **AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY**

Thomas Murray is a Chicago-based ethnodramatist, stage director, community organizer, and teacher. He directs Storycatchers Theatre's ensemble at the Illinois Youth Center-Warrenville, where he collaborates with incarcerated youth to adapt their life stories into works of musical theatre. He is also the executive director of documentary theatre ensemble Waltzing Mechanics, where his original interview-based productions include *EL Stories*, *Extraordinary Interruptions* (with Kristin Rose Kelly), and *Over My Dead Body*. His newest docudrama, *The Right of Way*, has been presented at conferences hosted by the American Planning Association, the National Academy of Sciences, Bicycle Indiana, and the Smithsonian Institution. He is a member of the Lincoln Center Theater Directors Lab, The Midwives, and The Space Between. Thomas holds a B.A. in Theatre Production from Ball State University and an M.F.A. in Directing and Public Dialogue from Virginia Tech. View his [artistic portfolio](#)



## **How We GLOW**

[JAMILA HUMPHRIE](#)

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

[EMILY SCHORR LESNICK](#)

### **INTRODUCTION**

Ethnodrama alleviates the burden on young people to explain to others the words and meanings that define their identities and sexualities. Our play, *How We GLOW*, explores the ways LGBTQ+ youth craft their own identities and communities, building from the past and utilizing new modalities like social media. As co-researchers, collaborators, and partners, we combine theoretical study with daily work in schools. The desire to connect with youth on their own terms drove this research.

As adults, being in GLOW, a gender and sexuality student discussion group which stands for Gay, Lesbian or Whatever, offered opportunities to not only support LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and beyond) youth, but to explore new labels and terminology and understand the issues that most impact LGBTQ+ students. The question of identity labels, and how students (dis)connect on and offline, emerged from informal discussion with young people and

were the questions that helmed our research.

Too often, research about youth imagines young people, rather than listening to them and their stories directly. Not only did this form allow for those sharing their stories to feel empowered, but as the play grew and we produced it for over 20 schools, we saw the power of this piece in audience members seeing themselves in the stories.

## METHODOLOGY

The desire to create *How We GLOW* came from a curiosity about young people's experiences and a desire to hear their voices directly. Too much of youth work talks *about* youth, rather than *with* youth. Our methodology blended traditional ethnographic interviews with theatrical storytelling tools, allowing for an authentic portrayal of truth. Researchers Judith Ackroyd and John O'Toole (2010) write of ethnodrama: "It's a natural development of the new-found confidence in acknowledging the subjectivity of their [researchers'] human research and of celebrating rather than reducing the richness of rich data" (p. 3). Ethnodrama draws on the rigorous anthropological process of describing, interpreting, and in turn constructing cultural behavior. This method lends itself to understand the ways people create their own cultural meaning. Ethnotheatre, the performance of ethnodrama, brings this process to life in a process of bearing witness to stories and moving to action. In outlining our process, we hope to illuminate potential steps that institutions can take to listen to and share their community's stories.

We reached out to email listservs of LGBTQ+ students at the high school and university level, narrowing our scope to youth between the ages of 14-24. We also connected with educators who put us in touch with interview participants. We conducted 21 open-ended interviews. Our questions were: *How would you describe your identity and how did you come to understand it? Do you have a coming out story or stories to share with us? Do you or have you participated in any identity-based groups in your school or elsewhere? What do you think is the biggest issue or issues facing the LGBTQ+ community? What do you know about the Stonewall Riots?*

Our participants attended a diverse range of schools. Of our interviewees, 7 were college students, 5 were in public school, 6 were independent school students and 2 were not in school. Interviewees had

the option to share their name or use a pseudonym. This practice and others were informed and reviewed by NYU's University Committee on Activities Involving Human Subjects.

Upon completing the interview process, we coded the data for emergent themes (performative coming out experiences, feeling a generational divide between parents and/or teachers, exploration of identity, and intra-community differences emerged as themes) and transcribed the interviews verbatim (every uh, um and pause was included). Although we interviewed everyone individually, many of the stories that emerged in our conversations were in congruence or in conflict with each other. The beauty of this form is that we can explore these tensions and divergences through theatre. Our transcription method borrows from the style of MacArthur Genius/researcher/actor/playwright Anna Deavere Smith and theatremaker/professor Joe Salvatore, which tries to capture the poetry of human speech verbatim: language is identity and identity is language. The richest details, the patterns and pauses of speech, illuminate as much about a person as the content of their words. By using a "hard return" to connote a break in the flow of speech, this style really imitates each person as a unique character in this play. We then wove the transcriptions into a script which featured sections from 11 of our 21 interviews.

We then worked with actors to devise parts of the performance, and presented the show to our community. Our casting intentionally cast actors in roles that were incongruous with their racial or gender experiences, as we wanted the audience to challenge their assumptions about the stories we ascribe onto certain bodies. Feedback from educators and youth members of our audience encouraged us to share the piece with schools, and we have spent two years touring the show to assemblies, conferences, and festivals from Seattle to Dublin. We have performed for students as young as ten years old, in gymnasiums of large public schools and in black box theatres of selective independent schools. Some schools organized pre-discussions in advisor groups, and each performance ended with a larger talkback to clarify language, provide space for student reflection and testimonials, and to ask about our process. Sharing the piece in schools allowed for simultaneous exposure to LGBTQ+ voices for straight or cisgender students, as well as an affirmation for LGBTQ+ students.

Hearing the stories of LGBTQ+ youth revealed the powerful

intersection of identities: age as a social identifier uniquely impacted their gender and sexual identities along with other social identifiers. Additionally, interviewees identified homelessness and intra-group divisions as strong issues facing their communities (interestingly, nobody identified marriage as a key issue, even during our interview period of spring 2015). Last, though the ways that youth engaged with labels varied, the access to claiming or rejecting a label almost always came through internet communities. Facebook groups brought youth together with other young people outside of their social circles to build virtual communities of consciousness raising and support.

## HOW WE G.L.O.W.

Created by Jamila Humphrie & Emily Schorr Lesnick

### CREATORS' STATEMENT

We seek to amplify the voices of LGBTQ+ youth through interview theatre. We conceived this project in an effort to explore the process through which young people navigate identity development, specifically around gender identity and sexual orientation, and how those identities intersect with other cultural identifiers. In a political and cultural environment where demonstrations of non-normative identities can be dangerous, we aimed to create a space for LGBTQ+ youth to share openly, in their own words.

We completed 21 interviews with young people of diverse backgrounds about their identities, the labels they claim or create, and the biggest issues facing their communities. This script comes verbatim from interview transcripts. Inspired by The Laramie Project and the work of Anna Deavere Smith, this project blurs the line between audience, theatre and community. By learning about how these young people G.L.O.W. (Gay, Lesbian or Whatever), we hope audiences will leave with a desire to deepen cross-generational dialogue and to work in solidarity with these young people towards structural changes that support their identities.

*We are forever grateful to the young people who so bravely shared their time and stories with us.*

### CHARACTERS

The names and descriptions used by each character are derived from verbatim interview data.

ANDREA LI	21 year old Asian American asexual "neut"
ASIA	19 year old Hispanic cisgender lesbian
ERIC	17 year old Vietnamese bisexual male
JACK	15 year old White gay cisgender male
JENNY	18 year old White bisexual/queer cisgender female

KYLE	16 year old “White for the most part, but I’m Puerto Rican as well” cisgender male, homosexual
MB	19 year old Indian bisexual female
ROCCO	16 year old White bisexual cisgender male
RYAN DE LA CRUZ	17 year old Filipina gay female
SAM	18 year old White homosexual biromantic gender-fluid female
SHANTANA	19 year old Black Jamaican lesbian with no gender label

## INTERVIEW OBSERVATIONS

*Andrea Li is Asian American and identifies as asexual and as a “neut.” Ze has greasy, long black hair and wears simple glasses. While Andrea speaks, ze sits with arms crossed and picks at zir inner elbow skin. Andrea does not smile the entire time ze speaks.*

*Asia wears a backwards hat which reads “I am” on the back part in hand-stitched writing. She is very happy and has great energy. She is very expressive in her face and hands and makes lots of eye contact. She has short hair and wears glasses.*

*Eric has braces and hair an inch long. He makes good eye contact and keeps his hands under the table.*

*Jack has blue eyes and is built like a football player--short but stocky. He wears a black hoodie and articulates with his hands, which shook with nerves. He got emotional and his eyes glazed when speaking.*

*Jenny has long, light brown hair, pale skin and light eyes. She smiles the entire time, even through the difficult moments. During difficult moments she held her own arms, extending her left arm through her legs, and holding that arm with her right at the elbow. She would cross and uncross her leg. She squints and looks away with an upwards glance, otherwise making eye contact. She has very white and straight teeth.*

*Kyle has light eyes/skin and some pimples covered by makeup. His hair is long and curly on top, short/close shave on the side, and he has a*

*beard, which he plays with. He also plays with his long necklace chain. He makes eye contact, but looks away when he thinks of more to say.*

*MB is a medium-toned Indian woman with rectangle glasses and a mole above her left eye. She makes a lot of eye contact, and looks up when not looking directly at the interviewer. She does not play with her long black hair.*

*Rocco is skinny, White and as long stringy hair. He has moderate acne and wears rectangle glasses. He sits up straight, but keeps readjusting.*

*Ryan has black hair, black eyes, with teeth sticking out. She is focused, yet jovial. She crosses and uncrosses her leg, putting both of her hands on her knees.*

*Sam looks away when speaking and pushes up her square glasses as a tick. She has dark, mousy hair, pale skin and pronounces “women” as “woman”. She wears a Pippin the musical t-shirt.*

*Shantana has a thick Mohawk dyed blonde then dyed aquamarine green. She has pierced ears and nose and dark skin. She break into smiles and her eyes water when emotional. She fidgets with headphones that were looped through her shirt. She has two visible tattoos. One on each arm.*

## **SUGGESTED CASTING**

This play is to be performed with actors in multiple roles. Below you will find suggested casting options.

Actor 1: Jack/Shantana	Actor A: Ryan de la Cruz / Kyle
Actor 2: Andrea Li/Sam	/Jack
Actor 3: Eric/Ryan de la Cruz/ Kyle	Actor B: Andrea Li / Sam
Actor 4: Jenny/MB	Actor C: Jenny / MB
Actor 5: Rocco/Asia	Actor D: Eric / Shantana
	Actor E: Rocco/ Asia

## **FLOW OF PLAY**

Part I: My Identity

Part II: Coming Out

Part III: Find the Strength

Part IV: That's the Last Thing I Want to Say

## **PERFORMANCE RIGHTS**

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[Jamila Humphrie & Emily Schorr Lesnick](#)

914.260.0288



## **PART I: MY IDENTITY**

### **RYAN DE LA CRUZ**

so

I identify as

a gay

female

um

for some reason I've always been uncomfortable with the word lesbian

like it really took me a while to work up to saying that word

and

sorry

what was the second part of the question?

### **SHANTANA**

oh

um

like right now I'm claiming no label

because

um

I feel like

I

dress very masculine

but I also feel very feminine--

feminine

and I don't

want

to

be

considered only masculine

or feminine

I feel like I'm like a mix of both

so

I just go with no label

does that answer that?

### **ANDREA LI**

I identify as a

person who does not

*(pause)*

who does not belong to the  
female or male part of the g-  
gender binary

**MB**

it took me  
maybe  
two years  
to figure it out?  
like I started off like saying  
I think I am because I realized that I liked girls as well  
it was around middle school  
and um  
at one point  
I was like  
okay  
I'm definitely attracted to girls  
I'm definitely attracted to boys  
and then  
and even later when I found out about the whole spectrum of genders  
there was no difference in my attractions

**ANDREA LI**

ze for first person  
spelled z-e-  
zir spelled z-i-r for third person

**ROCCO**

mhm  
I would  
describe my identity  
like a modified form of bisexual I guess  
um  
it's

um

I don't really see the entire point of fitting people into I--  
into boxes and into labels

**ANDREA LI**

my mother wanted me  
wanted me to be  
wanted me to be a girly girl growing up  
but it didn't fit me

**ROCCO**

um  
obviously as humans we have a need to categorize things very  
specifically  
but

*(clears throat)*

excuse me  
tsk  
but we  
not everybody fits cleanly into those so  
we really need to  
I don't think there's a need  
to say this person's xyz this person's abc  
you can just say  
I am  
I am a person and  
as a person I'm very complicated and um  
there is no need or requirement for me to fit into these predetermined  
labels  
so the way I see my identity is that  
I  
don't see gender as  
anything that matters in terms of potential relationships  
it is  
you can see  
my mother once said this to me is that you fall in love with people not

with genders  
so there's  
no need to limit yourself by saying I only like females  
I only like males

**KYLE**

I would describe as a  
as a gay man  
um

*(clears throat)*

and  
I guess I kind of um  
I never really had a word to put with  
how I was feeling  
um  
up until maybe  
sss  
seventh grade

*(clears throat)*

which is when  
you know  
in middle school and  
it starts being thrown around like the  
word gay and  
you know  
the f-word  
as kind of like  
a bad thing  
but um

*(clears throat)*

when I learned what  
it actually meant I kind of

realized that oh I was that  
that bad thing  
I guess  
um  
but  
then  
you know  
we've got  
the internet and all that so kind of delving into all that  
um  
that entire new world

*(Company begins "Internet Noise" and pantomiming.)*

**ASIA**

I  
took the course of looking at the internet and seeing other people  
who  
identified as something different  
and  
I saw this like  
world  
of like  
just  
different ways that people express themselves and I like  
first got really confused

**KYLE**

kind of  
helped me come to terms with the fact that  
maybe it wasn't such a bad thing  
and that being a gay man is  
a normal thing and that there are many other people like me

**ASIA**

*(breathes out quickly)*

what?

was like  
pansexual  
and asexual  
and a-romantic  
and I was like  
what I don't know any of these  
and what does that even mean  
and I don't know what bisexual is  
and I was  
totally lost and  
really confused

**RYAN DE LA CRUZ**

I went around like social media like Tumblr  
Facebook  
little things like that  
um  
and I tried to find  
people who were basically like me  
people who were gay  
and people you know  
who were teenagers  
and identified the same way I identified  
and  
in a way  
I kinda looked towards those people as support  
and like  
kinda like my goals  
my future goals of where I want to be  
later on  
in my life  
and  
as  
I  
have slowly come out to  
you know  
various people in my life  
I've begun to take more pride

in my identity  
I've  
become to  
I've  
understood more of what it means to be gay  
what it means to be gay in our society

## **ASIA**

and  
um  
I started  
uh  
identifying as nothing for a while  
I was just like  
I'm just a person  
and I don't care what happens  
and  
um  
I am who I am  
and  
and for a while  
it was like  
that's my motto  
and I kind of didn't find any happiness in that  
and it was so weird  
because I knew a lot of people that were like  
oh I'm so happy being  
like  
unlabeled and content in that  
and I really wasn't because I was so confused about everything  
and  
so I like sat down and I  
this sounds like a really weird thing but I  
went through  
like  
different definitions of what everyone thought  
like  
what pansexual is

and a-romantic  
and  
bisexual  
and  
just everything  
and I was like  
okay  
I don't  
none of this applies to me  
and this doesn't apply to me  
and I understand like  
certain aspect of things  
and there's still a ton of stuff that I don't understand  
but  
for me it was just like  
I needed a simple label of  
what I was  
and what I was doing  
and for me that was  
cisgendered female  
that happens to love girls  
and I had a nice connection with them  
so  
I started identifying as lesbian  
and  
I  
I dunno  
I've never not liked it

*("Internet Noise" ends.)*

**ERIC**

*(clicks tongue)*

um  
I currently identify as a bisexual  
male  
um that's with gender



male  
um  
and I kind of  
know this about myself in  
in 6th and 7th grade  
um  
do you want me to tell you how do I know?

**JACK**

I went to a Catholic school and gay was only something I really saw  
on *Glee* at the time  
um  
and  
I actually remember having a girlfriend in sixth grade and  
being like  
y'know I remember  
seeing you know  
the only role model I had was Kurt and  
eventually Blaine and I was just like  
well I'm not really like those guys  
so I'm not gay or anything  
but  
like  
I kinda knew that I wa--  
let's just say I was more interested in male anatomy than I was in  
female anatomy  
so  
I kind of  
knew that  
and  
then eventually other things started falling into place  
um  
and yeah  
I guess  
that's basically the  
um  
the base of it

**MB**

I mean  
middle school was when people started talking about  
ooh boys  
you know everything and the girls around me would be talking about  
that  
and one time I was like  
ooh I kind of feel that way about girls sometimes  
and I said  
ooh girls  
and somebody was like oh you're you're a lesbian  
and they were kind of weird about it  
and um  
and I said no no no  
I like boys too  
I like both  
I like girls and boys  
and I said I think that's the way I am  
and like

*(As MB speaks, the rest of the cast looks at her.)*

**SHANTANA**

in middle school  
I was out  
but like  
I was like  
in this rough place in my life  
this life  
I feel like  
this was a part of me where I was still growing  
and finding myself  
but I wanted to find myself right then and there  
but I just didn't know how  
so I was like  
still confused  
um  
dating this girl online

and it was getting pretty serious  
we were already talking for like two years  
and  
it was  
very unhealthy  
cause like  
I didn't know how to  
like  
be myself and be gay  
I was more or less  
pretending to be a guy  
with her  
because  
that's how she wanted  
and she was the girl that I wanted  
and I was in this really bad place  
like I was  
cutting myself  
I was very  
self-loathing  
it was just terrible  
in middle school

**MB**

I didn't know what it was called

*(laughs)*

at the time  
I didn't know there was a word bisexual

*(Pause/Transition.)*

**JENNY**

so I identify as bisexual  
um  
well I really like to just  
say I'm queer

I like that word a lot because  
I mean there are so many different labels and  
people try to get like as specific as they can  
but  
I think that's kind of silly because  
I've come to realize at least that my sexuality's  
very fluid  
and even  
although I do say I'm bisexual  
even that  
kind  
having something clear-cut doesn't make any sense to me  
so just saying I'm not straight  
and  
that's kind of enough  
so I that's why  
I like the word queer

**RYAN DE LA CRUZ**

when I'm around my gay friends we'll say  
oh look  
we're a gaggle of queers  
and I'm like  
oh okay  
I guess this is an okay word to say?  
I never really had an opinion on it until I heard  
you know  
my gay friends saying it

**MB**

I personally don't use it for an umbrella term for GRSM  
gender  
romantic  
uh sexual minorities  
because I know a lot of people are uncomfortable with it  
it's still being used in slurs

## **ASIA**

It's not  
really definable  
I just feel like the word queer is just kind of  
this big umbrella of like  
everything under the rainbow

## **SHANTANA**

it's just underneath that umbrella  
that's what I feel like being queer is  
like  
being gay  
or whatever  
it doesn't matter  
just in the family

## **ROCCO**

um  
queer is like an umbrella term for all kinds of um  
basically  
anything that's not straight  
and cisgender

## **JACK**

it's just become  
the umbrella term  
for everybody  
I know we had  
GSA a big conversation about that word

## **SAM**

people  
tend to have a different idea on if it's  
if if it's a positive connotation or if it's a negative connotation and  
the way that I use it  
um  
it's sort of like  
something that used to be negative and now it's positive and when I

say queer I sort of  
it's just sort of to describe the entire community

**JACK**

kind of hard to  
you know explain for people to  
you know even I don't understand what that  
sole identity means  
but now  
I know a lot of people just use it  
as an umbrella term  
um  
so basically they'll  
they'll say just  
the  
queer people and it it  
even it is

**SAM**

like  
you know  
people who don't  
identify as being  
cisgender  
people who don't identify as being straight  
so it just it's  
it's sort of the way that  
at least people who I know and the way I've picked it up  
it's sort of been as um  
umbrella term  
so um  
at least for me that's what queer means  
I know it's different for  
um  
other people but  
you—for me and for some others it's  
um basically an umbrella term

**JACK**

I know I had a friend of my dorm ask me  
a  
couple nights ago  
is it offensive if I use  
queer to describe  
as an umbrella term  
and I was thinking  
you know I was just like  
you know I don't know  
I  
sincerely  
don't know  
um  
and there  
I remember when we were talking about  
queer  
at the Q and A  
there were a lot of adults there  
you could see  
kind of see tense up a little  
as the  
um  
the uh  
glbt  
um  
adults there  
remember it as being that  
you know  
offensive word  
uh  
and it was just  
kind of weird  
that generation gap is so huge  
between  
um  
something I've noticed a lot especially with my advisor  
you know

the generation gap is incredible  
and  
so for me it means an umbrella term  
but  
I also realize it could mean a lot of things  
uh  
to everybody else

**ASIA**

we're queer  
we're not  
you know  
what you would expect to be  
normal  
whatever that would be anyway



## **PART II: COMING OUT**

*(Actors stand in a vertical line, each stepping forward to speak and stepping away when complete.)*

### **JENNY**

once I reached high school I started  
realizing that I could be my own person that I didn't need to like  
fit other people's labels  
um  
I heard the word queer  
and that like made the most sense  
um  
because I was kind of tired of like questioning  
every single thought that I had and like feeling that I had  
and I felt I should just be done with it

### **ROCCO**

I've always been  
kind of like  
a loner student I've never really interacted with many people—I've  
always been reading  
and when  
I  
came out everybody was  
oh I thought you were asexual  
which  
kind of made me laugh and kind of made me sad  
because um  
it showed how little everybody understood me

### **SAM**

oh yeah I have a good coming out story  
this one's a more comical one  
um  
it was in my  
it was in my  
I guess  
do you mind if I share two actually cuz one's more recent

okay  
so one was um  
it was in my AP literature class  
and  
I remember that  
yeah  
it was  
we were  
basically  
given time to sort of get into Mrs. Dalloway and  
take notes on it  
and I mean it was two-  
I was between two of my friends  
and  
I wa-  
we were just you know doing our work and stuff like that  
and  
I don't remember what one of them said  
but one of them said something that was like  
something about being in the cl-  
like being in the closet  
it like not in any  
s- you know queer way just like  
about closets in general  
and I was thinking to myself there's this opportunity here  
like  
I'm going to take it  
like  
why not  
so I  
just kind of quietly whispered so that they could hear I was like I was in  
the closet once  
but the thing is like only one of them like picked up on it like  
I was talking to another one  
I made another closet joke  
with them because they were talking about  
like their dark abysmal place known as the closet and I was like  
you know I was in a dark abysmal place known as the closet once

and I added  
I'm bi he's like  
oooh so that's what you meant  
and I'm like  
yeah what else did you think I mean and he was like  
I'm sorry that I'm short and these things fly over my head  
so um  
that was one story

**MB**

coming out has always been  
um  
a really difficult concept for me to understand  
because it seemed to me that every time you meet a person  
you're technically coming out of the closet aren't you and it must be a  
very exhaustive process  
um  
and  
well  
the real issue  
is like

**ERIC**

um  
I  
I'm not  
I should  
I dunno  
I'm not actually out  
completely at my school  
and one of the reasons why I'm not is because  
well  
I should also say that I'm the president of the GSA at my high school  
and I  
I believe personally that  
the best way to fight homophobia  
is to show people that there can be a straight ally  
um to

lgbtq  
the community  
um  
one who is the president of the GSA  
it's not weird to  
b-  
you know  
be a gay rights activist and be straight at the same time  
and to kinda break that awkwardness between the straight people and  
gay people  
um

*(clicks tongue)*

so that's  
the reason that I'm not  
out  
at my school  
um  
my parents  
my parents know so I came out to them  
and that  
I don't think there was  
it really much of a story to tell there because  
they they knew that I liked this boy  
and so  
they could tell  
they could  
and I think at one point they asked directly  
and I said  
I said yeah  
basically  
and I never told them if I was bisexual or gay  
I just said  
you know  
I like this boy  
um  
and I had a girlfriend later in 8th grade so they

so they uh  
I think they know I'm bisexual  
and I've never really had a conversations about  
or our conversations were really only about that one boy  
or about that one girl  
they never were  
universal  
and so  
but  
back at school  
I  
I think  
it's a bummer  
that I don't feel comfortable coming out  
and I  
um  
but I felt  
well for me at least  
I felt like I have a pretty good reason not to  
yeah

*(Jack steps forward and speaks directly to Eric.)*

**JACK**

it's very  
kind of scary to just have to say it cuz there's no way to really just  
skirt around it  
it's kind of those things you just have to say like  
you know  
I I'm gay  
at this point  
I'm just  
you just have to say it

*(Ryan stands DSR, everyone else sits cross-legged to face her.)*

**RYAN DE LA CRUZ**

technically it's not anyone's business how I identify

but at the same time  
I wanted the comfort that  
um  
a lot of heterosexual people have  
knowing that they can identify how they would like to  
and  
you know  
no one questions it  
or forces another label upon them  
I wanted to be myself fully  
and not have to hide any of that  
so  
when I had come out to my school  
the only people I had told was my close friend group and a couple of  
teachers  
um  
and other than that that was it  
so I was the last person to go  
and  
I flashed on the screen the gay flag  
and the words

### **UNISON**

my gay agenda

### **RYAN DE LA CRUZ**

and I was like  
in case you guys didn't know  
I'm gay  
and I'm gonna talk to you guys about  
um  
some misconceptions people have about the LGBTQ community  
and I talked about things people have said to me  
who's the man in the relationship  
does this mean you're a boy  
right now  
um  
you have very like well-intentioned questions which are ignorant

and back-handed at the same time  
and when I was done with it  
that was probably one of the happiest moments of my life  
I felt so proud of myself  
I felt so loved by my school community  
I remember looking out into the audience  
and like  
everyone was smiling  
um  
the whole English Department of my school is gay  
so they all  
they all went up to me afterwards  
or like they emailed me  
or they spoke to me  
they were like  
we're so proud of what you've done  
for this community  
thank you for doing this  
I remember one teacher was crying as she hugged me  
just  
a really great feeling to know you're not alone  
yeah  
that was very exciting  
I loved that moment

*(Shantana stands DSL to speak, everyone scooches to face her.)*

### **SHANTANA**

but then um  
like my real coming out to my dad  
like telling him myself  
was at my senior year in high school  
I did this poem  
um  
it's called  
D.Y.K.E.  
but it stands for  
do you know arrogance [sic]

erro with an e  
and

*(clears throat)*

uh  
it was pretty much going off about how  
what I told you about my sexual identity  
I don't feel like a man  
and I don't feel like I have to wear skirts to prove that I'm a woman  
and that  
I love woman  
that's who I am  
and that was my  
that's the gist of my poem  
I invited my father  
and he was there  
he didn't clap  
but  
he heard me  
so that was enough for me

*(Sitting on the floor, cast shifts to face forward.)*

**ANDREA LI**

I never told my parents because I knew they wouldn't accept me

**MB**

um  
I  
my family  
is very  
they're not homophobic  
at all  
I know because I've heard them state their political views publicly  
I've heard them state their personal views  
but I also know that you're not supposed to talk about anything in my  
family



**ASIA**

first was when I came out to my parents through uh  
letters  
because again the internet taught me  
great things

*(laughs)*

*(Asia hands a letter to father, played by Actor 2/B.*

*MB sits in a seat next to car father, played by Actor 1/C.)*

**MB**

and I suppose the most difficult thing was when I tried to come out to  
my dad  
um  
I was like  
okay  
because he was  
he was t-talking about in the car  
I was like  
you know we never really talk  
I want to get to know you better  
and so I was like  
okay  
and he was like  
tell me what's going on with your friends  
so I decided to do the  
my friend  
thing  
and my dad's not very good at picking up on that so

*(laughs)*

so I said  
you know my friend recently came out as bisexual and he's like  
why are you telling me this  
and I'm like  
I don't know

I don't know  
you said you wanted to know what was happening with my friends  
and that's what happened  
I thought maybe he would pick up on me saying me  
but he wasn't  
so he was like  
okay  
well  
what does it matter  
you're in high school you should be studying anyway

*(laughs)*

and I said  
well yes  
but what do you think about it  
and he said  
well sooner or later you have to choose  
and I said  
why  
and he's like  
well you can't marry two people  
and I was like  
right but  
and  
then I realized because my mom was the first person he ever dated  
so I said  
dad  
you can date more than one person  
can't you?  
like  
you can break up with a person and then date another person and he's  
like  
oh  
I guess you could do that  
I mean  
I never did that  
so I wouldn't think about other people doing that

*(laughs)*

so I realized  
that  
there's like  
a sharing level that he's never going to be on that level

*(Cast goes off stage, except for Asia and father, played by Actor 2/B.)*

**ASIA**

and I went home  
um  
on the next Monday  
and my dad was there  
and my mom was still gone  
and  
he didn't say anything  
and I thought  
oh no  
he either didn't read it  
or he's so mad  
he doesn't wanna talk  
so we're washing dishes  
and he's washing and I'm drying  
and then  
he um  
he just turns to me  
and he stops and turns off the water  
and goes

*(exhales)*

really deep  
and goes  
um  
so there's like no chance whatsoever that you're going to randomly  
start dating men?  
and I turned and looked at him and I was holding this dish

and I was like  
I don't  
know  
I mean  
who knows?  
but right now I'm pretty sure no  
and he was like  
okay  
and then  
that was it  
and he turned the water back on  
and I was like  
okay  
and then he turned to me and he goes  
um  
hey uh  
you know  
everybody just  
a little  
little  
out there about things  
and I was like  
I don't  
know what  
that means  
and then he was like  
when I was in college  
and I was like  
oh no  
I am not ready for this conversation  
and he was like  
even your mom  
and I was like  
I'm not even ready  
for that one  
and he was like  
I don't know if your mom still does that  
sometimes

I do  
and I was like  
are you telling me that you're

*(laughs)*

he was like  
oh yeah  
like  
um  
I don't like to put a label on it  
but I'm sure you guys would call me bisexual or something  
and I was like  
okay

**JACK**

I say he was the best one to handle it because my  
second older sister  
um  
that night  
you know came into my room  
and you know  
she's just very worried  
I can still tell that she's very worried  
um  
we she had a big conversation for like the big three things that she  
wanted me to know  
like  
don't settle for people just cuz you're  
in a minority  
um  
don't get AIDS and die  
um  
and  
um  
yeah  
I guess and I guess just be careful  
of

you know  
um  
homophobic  
um  
homophobic  
homophobic environments  
um  
but  
well she did a really good job of freaking me out  
um  
and  
and my dad just said look that's fine  
like doesn't really change my opinion of you  
and that was it  
um  
yeah so that was basically  
like coming out to  
close people

**RYAN**

oh my dad was very relaxed about it  
he started jumping up and down  
he started dancing with the dog  
he was like  
she's gay  
I'm gay  
we're all happy, yay!  
okay  
dad  
thanks for putting the enthusiasm in that mom didn't

*(As Ryan speaks, everyone else starts jumping and dancing.)*

### **PART III: FIND THE STRENGTH**

*(Actors are seated in chairs and on the floor. Andrea faces away from the rest of the group.)*

#### **ANDREA LI**

*(sighs)*

I managed to be thrown in with  
the people that I live with  
because of  
bad circumstances  
I have run away from home  
and the place I now live in is a shelter

#### **KYLE**

there's a lot of  
a lot of um  
queer homelessness  
from what I've  
heard  
um  
so that's  
especially trans youth  
um  
I I'm not really  
knowledgeable on the subject  
but I just know that um  
a lot of  
lgbt teens are  
kicked out of their homes  
I've  
I've heard a lot of like  
success stories though  
where they get like adopted  
a trans  
um  
teen was recently  
adopted

but then you hear cases um  
like Leelah Alcorn  
um  
so  
I think  
just a lot of  
I think we really need to submerge  
um  
like our modern culture in  
mm  
the fact that  
lgbtq people exist and that we are  
everywhere  
we're coming

**ANDREA LI**

I guess you could say  
being homeless  
transcends  
this  
our sexuality  
or our gender identity sometimes  
to me that is  
like  
being homeless is the only identity we share  
outside of specific sexualities or gender identities  
well  
that's  
that's more a part of how I see myself  
I don't know about the others see themselves

**MB**

I think we need  
to  
focus  
a lot on  
like  
homeless youth



I think that's a really big issue  
you know  
just reading the statistics like  
a disparagingly high number of homeless youth are  
um  
you know  
lgbt  
and they're doing that because they're not accepted in their homes  
like  
um  
I recognize the need  
like how getting acceptance for marriage will get acceptance for  
will help gain acceptance for the kids  
but I um  
you know  
gaining acceptance over all  
but I feel as though  
maybe if we concentrate on that  
and  
you know  
giving  
resources  
so they could start their life  
like I feel like that would be very important

**ANDREA LI**

and I'm so tired of hearing about the suicides  
and murders  
and no one seems to care about them  
I would hope that the message of this community  
would spread through so that people stop killing themselves

**ROCCO**

I think we're  
we're building an understanding of trans people  
but it still  
has a long way to go  
a while ago I read a story on the news about this trans girl who

committed suicide

**ANDREA LI**

I can't tell you to stop caring about what other people think  
but I hope I can change the way you feel  
in particular about yourself  
namely that it is not wrong  
nor is it something to be ashamed of who you are

**ROCCO**

um  
and her parents had always refused to refer to her by her and she  
and instead said he and him  
um  
and even  
in  
her  
obituary  
they used her birth name  
and said  
him  
which  
made me really angry

*(coughs)*

excuse me

**ANDREA LI**

I hope you can find the strength to go on

**ROCCO**

um  
because  
it just showed a complete lack of respect  
for her  
own child  
and a complete lack of understanding of what

she actually was

**SHANTANA**

I had a few trans friends  
I don't have that many  
I'm not exposed to it as much  
and I think  
homelessness amongst the gay  
people  
like there's too many gay youth on the piers by my job

**ANDREA LI**

the space I'm in now  
is supposed to be lgbtq friendly  
but it doesn't always seem that way  
because how hostile being homeless makes everyone

**SHANTANA**

I see  
a lot of them  
they look stagnant  
in their lives  
they look like this is the rock bottom  
but it seems like there's more  
you know  
it feels like with them  
there's always like less like  
um  
I don't know  
more ground to go down  
this is just never it  
and like  
I don't know if they feel like they can ever climb up  
you know  
um  
so I feel like that's one thing  
another thing  
I don't know

I think that's all I can think of right now  
and those are just things that like bother me

**ROCCO**

a lot of people don't really understand what it means to be  
trans

**ANDREA LI**

The staff could do more but they can't because they're so understaffed  
and some of the program funding has been cut  
we're fighting for a limited number of resources

**ROCCO**

because these people don't understand and they lash out at what they  
don't understand  
which hurts  
the people  
and makes them  
depressed  
suicidal  
all these bad things  
um  
and  
with trans people specifically

**ANDREA LI**

*(sighs)*

I wish that my situation would actually be  
looked on not with pity  
but with  
respect  
like  
I wish  
even though  
I wish that one  
my gender identity  
the identity itself would be more normal

so people don't look at me like I'm crazy  
when I try to explain  
and two  
my living situation could always use more help

*(sighs)*

that just sounds like I'm begging  
like all the other homeless people people tend to ignore  
so I'm not sure really how to gain support for that  
like how to I get support without sounding manipulative

### **SHANTANA**

I dunno  
I just hope  
everything gets better  
for us all

## **PART IV: THAT'S THE LAST THING I WANT TO SAY**

### **ASIA**

um

I know that a lot of issues  
outside of the community itself that are kind of  
facing us  
but I

### **JENNY**

I think one issue with the lgbt  
like community is that everyone that's not in it kind of thinks  
that it's like this  
happy rainbow

### **ASIA**

the way we regard each other  
inside the community  
is the most like  
crucial thing  
that we've ever faced  
and it's still something that's a really big problem  
um  
like  
just  
like hate in the community itself

### **JENNY**

like  
warm community  
where everyone automatically like  
love each other and is there for each other  
and that's not always true and I think it's because

### **ASIA**

of watching people be like  
oh  
that's not a real thing

or  
like  
nobody has it as bad as we have it  
or like people  
inside of the community looking at other people  
like  
in the community thinking  
they don't belong here

**MB**

we very often talk about  
um  
the homophobia in  
you know  
minority communities  
you know  
like  
the Indian communities  
Black communities  
but we never talk about the racism that can come up in the lgbt  
communities  
and very often  
they're prevalent  
so

**ASIA**

that's always kind of been the biggest issue with like  
the lgbt community  
is that  
um  
for a community that wants to be  
all inclusive  
we're very like exclusive  
including to each other  
and I think that's probably our biggest issue

*(Group starts to hug and say goodbye. Lights dim. Group gathers around Jenny's character in a semi-circle.)*

**JENNY**

actually could I add something  
to the interview?  
is it still running?  
ok  
well  
so after I told my mom  
and she said well  
I still want grandchildren  
and there was no like  
fluffly like hug  
I still love you  
this is like great whatever  
um  
the next day I when I went  
I talked to my  
AP government and politics teacher  
who I'm pretty close with  
um  
and he had  
earlier in the year given me a book called um  
*The Fire Next Time* by James Baldwin  
which is about  
he was gay  
although he doesn't really talk that much about it in the book  
um  
but it's mostly about being black in the 60s  
and  
after sh- I told my mom  
I actually went back to the book and I read a couple pages  
that just made me feel really good about being different  
and like why that's great  
so I told my teacher about that  
cuz he's the one that gave me the book  
and  
while we were talking I was telling him how she reacted and  
how she probably wished I was straight  
which was fine



because I've spent so much time wishing I was straight because  
that would make things so much more simple  
and the one thing that he said that  
really rang in my mind I guess for the rest of the day was  
like I don't wish you were straight  
that's crazy  
and he's a s-  
heterosexual cisgendered man  
White man  
so like  
one of the pe-  
like least understanding people you would think  
when it comes to something like this  
but like that was the moment when I realized I didn't hafta  
like  
wish that I wasn't different  
and that that actually  
might mean something good

*(Group in the semi-circle says in the line in unison.)*

## **UNISON**

How did that feel?

## **JENNY**

it felt  
I don't know  
like surreal  
like I'd never been told that before  
like I'd always been told things like it gets better  
and  
like you'll find people that do love you  
but I'd never been told like  
y-  
this is how you should be  
and this isn't any better or any worse  
than being straight  
this is you and that's great

**JACK**

um  
maybe just a  
little  
I was thinking about how uh  
just  
another injustice in a way  
or I-  
my personal  
things that have bugged me  
um  
and  
one of the things I know I like to write and read a lot  
and  
I always find it  
um  
that it's been harder to do those kind of  
things  
after coming out  
in a way  
um  
which is another  
you know once you  
at least in my  
experience  
um  
when after I'd  
come out  
like would before  
I don't want to do things like stage makeup or write about why gay  
characters or read gay books  
because  
I was afraid that people were gonna think I was gay  
and now that I've come out  
um  
you know  
every single time I do these things that I actually have always liked to  
do but am afraid to

um  
it's because I'm gay  
you know it's becau-  
just because of that  
you know it wa-  
I'm changing myself  
so my sister  
my second older sister thinks  
that I'm  
doing this stuff to change myself to fit a stereotype  
and so does my  
advisor  
who  
likes to kind of tease me  
um  
I've asked to  
stop many times but I don't think he really gets how  
much of an impact it makes when he says  
you're putting yourself in a box  
you are  
making yourself entirely this  
my father said  
it is a part of you but you don't have to wear it like a badge  
but  
and I even had um  
I remember telling uh  
uh  
a few of my friends about this uh  
a play I wrote  
um  
where it had um  
a couple gay characters in it  
and they said  
do you write like any like straight characters and I was like  
yeah I write some why  
and they just like  
well it just seems like you're only writing  
gay characters

you know  
I just feel like that's really limiting yourself as  
a writer and I'm just like  
you know if I was straight and I was only writing straight characters  
even if I was gay and only writing straight characters  
you wouldn't be saying this to me  
like  
I know that because I would write things  
and only have straight characters and nobody said  
are you writing any gay characters and that was  
kind of limiting yourself  
and I  
you know I feel like it's the same  
for  
a lot of writers actually  
you know  
I know  
talking to my friend  
who is  
she's black and she said  
yeah I write a lot of black characters but everybody is like you know  
why can't you write  
any white characters  
yeah  
cuz we're in a shortage of white characters  
um  
so  
it's  
it's just crazy things like that that I feel like  
not an injustice you know  
I don't  
at least  
not an injustice widely  
it's been  
a difficulty  
trying to get people to understand that  
it actually  
yeah maybe

they think it's just my sexuality  
and  
but it is a little bit more of me  
and no I'm gonna try and shove it in your face  
but  
and not everything is gonna be  
about that  
but  
just so you know  
it's a little more than who I want to  
fall in love with  
who I want to sleep with it's about  
you know  
I  
cuz I  
I realize I'm standing on the shoulders of people  
in the Stonewall Riots and the AIDS crisis and  
um  
even though  
those were not my personal struggles  
I still  
feel a connection to those people and I'm thankful  
and I'm  
I should be able to feel that  
and I should be able to  
represent the way I feel  
in  
my  
sort of my  
artistic mediums  
anybody should  
and I feel  
that it  
strangely  
coming out  
which is supposed to be something that's freeing  
has inhibited that because if I was writing gay characters beforehand  
people would be a little too afraid to say are you doing this because

you're gay  
um  
so I just think that's kind of a  
fun little  
funny  
not fun  
little uh  
you know  
double standard  
like yeah we'll accept you just  
so you're not changing yourself  
it's like I'm s-  
I'm a teenager  
how do you know if I'm changing myself or just discovering who I am  
so  
that's the last thing I want to say

*(Cast walks around space, reciting lines from their characters, then creating a frozen image. This happens three times. On the last time, lights fade to black.)*

**END.**

## **SUGGESTED CITATION**

Humphrie, J., and Lesnick, E. S. (2019). How we GLOW. *ArtsPraxis*, 5 (1), 76-135.

## **AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES**

Jamila Humphrie (she/her) is a PhD student at NYU in the Educational Leadership program. Her academic and professional work includes; facilitating conversations for queer people of color, co-creating a piece of interview theatre, *How We GLOW*, with her partner Emily Schorr Lesnick, and presenting on her work at conferences and in schools across the country. Jamila serves on GLSEN's Education Advisory Committee and the Making Gay History Podcast Advisory Committee. In 2016, she was an intern in the White House in the Social Office of the First Lady Michelle Obama. Jamila also received a Fulbright Award to Brazil in 2012.

Emily Schorr Lesnick (she/her) is an educator, theatre maker, and equity facilitator who works primarily with middle and upper school students. With her partner Jamila Humphrie, she co-created *How We GLOW*, a piece of interview theatre that explores LGBTQ+ identity, which has toured to community spaces and schools across the world. An alum of Steinhardt's Educational Theatre program, she currently serves on GLSEN's Educator Advisory Committee.

## **My Other Job**

[CALI ELIZABETH MOORE](#)

[RACHEL TUGGLE WHORTON](#)

### **ABSTRACT**

*Actors in New York City are rarely just actors. Due to the mercurial, enigmatic nature of the profession (and, of course, the cost of living there), actors are more-often-than-not employed in at least one other job: their survival job. But which is an actor's primary job—the one that pays the bills or the one that feeds the soul? At what point does an out-of-work actor stop being an actor and start being a waiter, bartender, or babysitter? What makes actors choose to pursue an acting career in the first place; and what, if anything, might cause them to leave acting behind in pursuit of greater stability? These are just some of the questions posed to 5 real working actors based in New York City. The realities of an acting career are often glossed over for flash and fame, but show business is just that—a business—with all the strategy, politics, and compromises the word suggests. Using the actors' own words, *My Other Job* asks audiences to think a little more deeply about the lives of these active artists—their struggles, humor, grace, and determination—as they divulge very personal, very real stories about the*



*business of pretending.*

The creative spark for *My Other Job* ignited through spontaneous combustion, of sorts. During a rehearsal process for a theatrical reading, a fellow actor entered the studio complaining about his “other job”—how it often made him late for auditions and rehearsals but was ultimately necessary for paying rent, especially since performance work rarely offered such financial security. His offhand frustration provoked the cast into a spirited discussion related to the topic of work: sympathetic tales of juggling multiple schedules, creative techniques for organizing time around important auditions, profound desires to find balance between personally-fulfilling artistic projects and financially-lucrative, flexible employment. In that moment, we realized the conversation reflected recurring themes expressed in countless rehearsals, dressing rooms, and audition spaces throughout our careers yet rarely included in public discourse regarding the acting profession. We immediately agreed such stories needed to be investigated further and shared widely.

When choosing participants for the project, we deliberately endeavored to include actors from a variety of backgrounds, experiences, and points of view; still, we discovered inescapable overlap not only among their individual stories, but also among the way those stories were told. Most notably, all five interviewees consistently voiced multiple characters in dialogue within their own narratives. These actors—professional storytellers—expertly shifted from simple response to polymorphous portrayal and back again, blurring the line between conversation and theatrical storytelling even in the context of informal interviews. Their natural giftedness for embodying drama made our job of crafting a script quite simple; we merely picked up their cues.

When transcribing the interviews and formatting the script, we first adhered strictly to the common ethnodramatic convention of preserving stutters, pauses, and vocal interrupters verbatim; however, around the third or fourth draft, when characters and style were emerging cohesively, we began critically considering whether every “um” was serving the storytelling or hindering clarity to the point of distraction. As researchers and playwrights, we wanted to represent our participants

with the same spirit of generosity they gave us, believing in the power of vocal nuances to reveal unique character traits and even subconscious understandings. But as actors and directors, we concluded some minor editing could facilitate stronger aesthetic choices in performance such as pacing, comedic timing, transitions, and narrative arc without sacrificing vocal style in relation to character or plot. It was (and is) our belief that this script should functionally serve eventual production, so these stories and ideas can reach the widest audience in the most effective way. That intention, to us, felt more authentic and representative of our participants than unyielding devotion to a few “ums.”

The conclusion of the piece may be viewed as controversial by some ethnodramatic purists. Though rooted in the interviews, each character’s fate is revealed in a fictional final scenario. In reality, of course, they are still lives in process with endings unknown, but we decided to utilize the dramatic potential of reality-based fiction in an effort to reach beyond these five narratives and represent actors’ vast potentiality. Aspirational, realistic, even disappointing professional trajectories such as fame, steadfast perseverance, or divergence highlight beginnings and ends of roles yet to be played, other jobs yet to be discovered. Many of our participants have since viewed the piece in performance, often commenting how much their lives have changed since this fleeting career snapshot. Moments of despair or uncertainty depicted in the work are now outshined by accomplishments, whether in acting or other fields entirely. This speaks to the ephemeral nature of theater itself, and to the importance of ethnodrama as an extension of oral history traditions meant to offer guidance and reflect truth from specific people in specific times for purposes of understanding and growth.

The most consistent piece of audience feedback we receive is that reading or watching this play feels like “actor therapy.” *My Other Job* presents the successes and struggles of a group of actors in pursuit of their professional dreams, highlighting the communal intersections of their individual experiences. In a field that so often champions individuality, even to the point of exclusion, we found this exploration a welcome change. Many actors who have read or watched the piece claimed to feel authentically seen and heard, beyond stereotypical

misconceptions of their occupation as glamorous. Non-actors have expressed newfound respect for the level of difficulty inherent in the daily responsibilities of a performer. Our hope is that the work may find a home in secondary and post-secondary acting curricula as a means of fostering balanced expectations for those pursuing a path to professional artistry. *My Other Job* does not shy away from the challenges faced by professional actors in New York City—self-doubt, financial instability, familial and societal pressure, work-life balance, and perseverance in a field fraught with constant judgment—but it also reveals the steadfast strength of an artists' internal motivation, the ever-changing definition of success, and the enduring hope of achieving it.

## **MY OTHER JOB**

By Cali Moore and Rachel Tuggle Whorton

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### **SYNOPSIS**

Actors in New York City are rarely just actors. Due to the mercurial, enigmatic nature of the profession and, of course, the cost of living there, actors are more-often-than-not employed in at least one other job: their survival job. But which is an actor's primary job—the one that pays the bills or the one that feeds the soul? At what point does an out-of-work actor stop being an actor and start being a waiter, a bartender, or a babysitter? What makes actors choose to pursue an acting career in the first place; and what, if anything, might cause them to leave acting behind in pursuit of a more stable life?

These are just some of the questions posed to 5 real working actors based in New York City. The realities of working as an actor are often glossed over for flash and fame, but show business is just that—a business—with all the strategy, politics, and compromises the word suggests. *My Other Job* reveals the struggles, humor, grace, and determination present in each of these 5 actors as it asks audiences to think a little more deeply about the lives of their waiters, bartenders, babysitters, or even their doctors, teachers, and real estate agents. *My Other Job* uses the actual words of these active artists to tell very real stories about the business of pretending.

### **PRODUCTION HISTORY**

October 4, 2014

Staged reading at Emerging Artists Theater in New York City

Alan – Erik Shuler

Ophelia – Inuka Ivaska

Scott – Nick Sakai

Jess – Elizabeth Nestlerode

Joe – Nathan Chang

July 24, 26, & 29, 2017

Equity showcase performances at NYSummerfest in New York City

Alan – Erik Shuler

Ophelia – Ambe Williams

Scott – Christopher Armond

Jess – Emily Batsford

Joe – Laris Macario

Nominated for 7 festival awards: Best Play, Most Creative Play, Best Director (won), Best Actress – Ambe Williams, Best Actor – Christopher Armond, Best Choreography, and Best Lighting Design.

## **CHARACTERS**

Alan (m) early 20s, a nice Midwestern boy, wide-eyed and eager

Ophelia (f) mid 20s, Black, New York City native, funny, warm, and genuine.

Scott (m) late 40s, a father with two children, practical yet dramatic

Jess (f) 30s, from the South, hopeful but conflicted

Joe (m) 30s, a bartender, determined and intense, his own number-one fan

## **A NOTE FOR PRODUCTION**

Any references that begin to feel dated to the point of obscuring understanding can be substituted for more current references that maintains the original intention of the speaker. These moments are noted with an asterisk (\*).

Unless specifically noted, characters may be performed by actors of any race/ethnicity. When casting, productions should actively seek to

represent the vast diversity present within the acting profession itself.

### **PERFORMANCE RIGHTS**

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## **MY OTHER JOB**

*Spot on Alan, an actor in his early  
20s, wide-eyed and well-intentioned*

ALAN

First and foremost, I'm an actor because that is my passion. That's the job I wanna have.

*Spot on Ophelia, an actress in her  
20s, New York native*

OPHELIA

I'm an actor and a musician and sometimes a dancer, but mostly an actor and a musician because that's what I went to school for. Not, you know, the other shit. It's the stuff that I've been training for since I was four years old. It's just the thing that I wanna do the most.

*Spot on Scott, an actor in his late  
40s, married with two children*

SCOTT

You know, I've been doing this forever and ever. I was in college in Massachusetts, so I did a few movies there, and it was awesome. It was like 'I gotta do this forever.' And I feel good about me. I'm good at it.

*Spot on Jess, an actress from the*

*South in her 30s.*

JESS

Well I would say I'm trying to get a [laughs] a performing job. I have a catering job right now...I have two catering jobs.

*Spot on Joe, an actor in his 30s.*

*Tall, thin, intense.*

JOE

Right now I'm a bartender at Broadway shows. So I serve drinks preshow and during intermission. I was at *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* at Studio 54, then I was at *The Big Knife*, then *Jersey Boys*. I did the Foxwoods for *Spiderman*, *Trip to Bountiful* at Stephen Sondheim Theatre, with a couple others sprinkled in there. We get to see the shows and we get to see the changes with different casts; and even though we're just the bartenders, we're human. We have our opinions about which performers we like. [laughs] And so I'll be cleaning the bar and I'll be like "Oh, he should have warmed up a little bit more tonight," or "He didn't have an A-flat in that song." [laughs] So I can have my opinions. They can be strong. They are worthless because [laughs] it's sort of like being a backseat actor. I'm not in the show...myself. I've been called in for *Jersey Boys*...5 times now? And so every time they get to the side that I've had to read a million times in screeners and callbacks, I go up there and watch and I'm always like, "There's not a single choice he's making that I'm not making. There is nothing about this performance that I cannot do. Why isn't it working?" And then I have to go get ice so I can serve intermission.

SCOTT

So many...not many...a few years ago I had just met with somebody and asked them to make a contribution to the organization. Oh, so I do fundraising for different organizations. Primarily I focus on the entertainment industry. I was asking for a lot of money. And it was a great conversation, etcetera etcetera. And a couple of days later I was called in for a show they were producing. And I auditioned for them and they didn't know that I did what I did. They were perfectly lovely. And the



producer looked very perplexed, because he couldn't place where he knew me from and I wasn't about to say "I just asked you for a lot of money." So he kinda let it go and then the next day he called me and he's like

ALAN (as producer)

I just want you to know that I know who you are now and it was a little strange that you weren't so forthcoming about it.

SCOTT

And I said you know, I keep everything separate. I'm an actor first and that is how I make money second.

JESS

Um, about the first month I moved here I was working for this producer named Alex Smith. And it was just like an internship, but I ended up being like his assistant everything. Like I was originally just supposed to work on his website, but I ended up calling people, trying to get them to invest. Um, and then I got...well, he was also shooting a coffee commercial at the time and called me the morning he was shooting it. I wasn't working with him that day, but he called me and was like

JOE (as producer)

Hey, can you come in? The seamstress didn't show up and we need someone to help. Do you sew?

JESS

So I'm like well yeah, I went to an all-girls Catholic high school and they made me take Home Ec. in order to graduate. Uh, I mean, I have some skills in how to sew and cook for my husband because I'm supposed to be getting married and having children because that is what the South promotes. I don't know. But anyway, I kind of got roped into that. It ended up being a lot of fun. I made a lot of costume pieces and, you know, made sure everyone was comfortable. And like, tried to de-stress everyone. So I got to get coffee for people [laughs]. You know, be everyone's slave. But it was fun...I kind of wish I still had it.

OPHELIA

I just quit my restaurant job because I got fed up with working in a restaurant. I've been working in a restaurant since I was right outta school. At first I lied about having restaurant experience. I made up a restaurant I knew in New Hampshire where I did my summerstock gig, but I don't like dealing with people that are so needy for everything. What I mean by this is like, I don't mind helping people, but I feel like when people go into a restaurant, like a switch turns off and all of the sudden they just become ass holes. I hate...old...women. I really hope that when I get old I am not that bitter about my life. Like nothing makes them happy. They don't wanna be on the mezz...

JESS (as old woman)

Why aren't we by a window?

ALAN (as old woman)

My feet hurt.

SCOTT (as old woman)

Can I get some water?

JOE (as old woman)

Where's the server?

OPHELIA

*[breathes out]* Hate it. I hate it!

ALAN

I love it! It is really probably the best survival job I've had. It's a pooled house, which basically means we're all supportive, we're all there for each other and the hours are incredibly flexible, easy for me to go to auditions, and the food is incredible. It's very educational. We have wine class. We're constantly learning about cheese. So even though I'm not in it for the career of service, it's a wonderful place to be with people that are career servers that have so much knowledge. It's kind of like working with your professors from college. I mean they're so intelligent and they know every backstory about the history of the milk from the cheese and

everything. It's...it's definitely [*clears throat*] it's the kind of place that I think I...I could see myself being at for a long time while I'm striving to hit my big break. It's like they always say

JESS, OPHELIA, SCOTT, and JOE (as they)

It takes 15 years for an overnight success.

ALAN

And I don't necessarily think it does happen in a big break situation. I mean, unless it is Broadway, which would also be nice. But I think, um, I have like little specific dream roles that I have actually, in my phone, an entire list of things that I'm aspiring for in my career. And as I get cast in them I'm gonna start to knock them off. It's kind of like my actor's bucket list. [*pause*] No! I can totally tell you. Do you mind if I pull it out? [*digs in his bag for his phone*]. I don't have it all...off the top of my head. Ok, so, in no particular order:

*As the following list is quickly rattled off, we see projections of Alan in costume appearing as each of these roles.*

ALAN

Um, Boq in *Wicked*, Princeton/Rod in *Avenue Q*, Franz in *Rock of Ages*, Seymour in *Little Shop of Horrors*, Benjy in *My Favorite Year*, Younger Brother in *Ragtime*, Abraham in *Altar Boyz*, Katurian in *The Pillow Man*, Moritz in *Spring Awakening*, Leo Frank in *Parade*, Anthony in *Sweeney Todd*, Cinderella's Prince in *Into the Woods*, The Gangster in *The Drowsy Chaperone*, Peter in *Bare*, Emcee in *Cabaret*, Roger in *New Brain*, Posner in *The History Boys*, Prior/Louis/Joe in *Angels in America*, and Leo in *The Producers*. And I'm gonna add one more to that which is Davey in *Newsies*. You know, I took my parents to see it on Friday and I just, I almost cried because I want it so badly and I see myself in either Jack or Davey and I know I could do it, you know. And it's like, it's just frustrating because I felt like I was seeing, not to be critical, but I was kind of realizing it wasn't such a perfect performance, and I was like this is so attainable. They got the leg up 'cause they were cast in the first

production, which I was out of town for the auditions, and it's like those kind of opportunities that make you kind of, it feeds your passion. I was born to play those roles. I look at that list probably on like at least a weekly basis if not every other day to kind of keep inspiring myself.

OPHELIA

One of my first dance calls in the city I was called back for *Hairspray* the tour and we had to go in for a dance call. I had a fear of dance calls for a long time after that cause I went in and I got called back, it was cool, then they gave us a dance to learn over the weekend. They're like

SCOTT (as they)

Alright, learn this dance. We'll make cuts on Sunday.

OPHELIA

So then they separated the, all the black performers and all the white performers you know. Whatever. It's fine. So then we were starting to do, you know, "Nicest Kids in Town" was what we were doing and then all of the sudden the choreographer was like

SCOTT (as choreographer)

You know what, screw this! We 'bout to get DOWN!

OPHELIA

And everyone was like

JESS, JOE, SCOTT, and ALAN (as everyone)

Aww yeah...

OPHELIA

Except for me. I was like wait a minute, I, I went over "Nicest Kids in Town." I know that really well...so then we had to do "Run Tell That." Ooooooh it was hideous. He taught it to us and everybody was just like going hard. Going so hard. I'm like this one guy, he started singing while he was doing it. He gave a full performance. Everybody was shouting out people's names like

JOE and ALAN (as everyone)

Go Kiki!

SCOTT and JESS (as everyone)

Show 'em what you're made of!

OPHELIA

[*laughs*] And of course Kiki was really good, and...I remember I did it and I, I'm dyslexic so it takes me a long time to learn stuff. And [*laughs*] I did the whole thing backwards. Like I did it to the one different side and I was like [*does an arm movement*] but everybody was already on that side. I ran out of the audition and I cried so hard down the street towards Macy's. Just like on the phone with my mom like, "I just don't know what I'm doing." And I didn't go to another dance call for a long time after that. Probably a couple of years cause I was so terrified. Yeah.

Everytime they're like

ALL (as they)

It's a dance call!

OPHELIA

I'm like...I'll go to sleep instead.

SCOTT

So I go in to audition for this Michael Douglass movie with a really awesome casting director. And the next day I get a call that I booked a role in a Michael Douglass movie. And I'm like [high pitched voice] "Oh my god!" And I call everyone I fucking know. Because it's not an under 5, it's a serious serious role! And so they say,

ALAN (as they)

Oh Scott, on Tuesday you're going to come in for the table read.

SCOTT

And it...like...I'm telling you there must have been more celebrities in

this movie than ever. And I go and I am like...so proud and thrilled. Thrilled! So I get there and the casting director is like

ALAN (as casting director)

Listen, hang tight, we are going to get to you folks in a little bit. We just have to set up the table. Look at the script.

SCOTT

And I'm like [*sing-song voice*] "Alright!" And I'm looking through it, flipping through the pages, and I'm like gosh! I have four scenes. This is major. And so I'm sitting there reading and like an hour goes by, and the casting director is looking at me and looking at the assistant and they're chatting. Finally the assistant comes over and she goes

OPHELIA (as assistant)

I've never in my career had this happen to me.

SCOTT

What's up?

OPHELIA

You're not going to believe this...we hired the wrong Scott Stringer.

SCOTT

[*laughing*] I'm sorry, I think I lost my hearing, I'm sorry what did you say?

OPHELIA

We hired the wrong Scott Stringer. I am...I don't even know what to tell you.

SCOTT

I don't know what to tell you either. How does that happen?

OPHELIA

Because the Scott Stringer we intended to hire is a 70-year-old man, and the role requires that.

SCOTT

But you...I signed a contract.

OPHELIA

I know. I don't even know what more to say.

SCOTT

[*laughs*] I...it was...I mean how horrible is that? How FUCKING...I was like...the worst...the wrong Scott Stringer? I was devastated. DEVASTATED. The wrong Scott Stringer?! So I was like maybe he's the wrong Scott Stringer, and she goes

OPHELIA

No. You should put an initial in your name.

SCOTT

And I was like "Alright?" I left there and literally, it was down on Hudson Street, I walked all the way to 103rd. I was just in a fog. It was just...it was awful. I don't know how it happened. I have no answer. It was perplexing. And she said to me

OPHELIA

Scott, we had to cast this. And you were Scott Stringer.

SCOTT

I AM Scott Stringer.

OPHELIA

Yeah, but you're not the Scott Stringer we intended.

JESS

We were putting on this show called *Rumple Who*. It was terrible. I mean it was really awful. But fun, and I kind of needed it. It was based on Rumplestiltskin, as you can tell. And it was for kids, as you can tell. I was the Queen. But, um...the dialogue was poorly written. It was the worst ever. And our set piece, our set PIECE. We had no scenery. It was a

chair.

*Projector shows picture of a chair*

A throne.

*Switches to a picture of a throne*

With this weird creepy clown face painted on it.

*Picture of a creepy clown face  
appears on the throne*

And it was falling apart. *[laughing]*.

*Switches to a picture of it broken*

And there was a forest,

*Picture of sad forest backdrop*

which was one tree *[laughing]* painted on the back of this shitty wooden throne.

*Picture of tree painted on shitty  
wooden throne*

So that was our set.

*Screen goes blank*

It may have had apples on it...

*Picture of the set just covered in  
apples*

but yeah, it was really sad. *[laughing]*. Some of our audiences were like two people. It was really depressing. But I mean, it's a great story. Oh,



and the music was so bad. I'm trying to remember it so I can sing it. Um...I don't know. I guess I blocked it out.

### JOE

And the reason it was the worst was not the people I was working with or even the theater I was working with. It was purely that the costumes were insane. I was doing a production of The Phantom Tollbooth. It was a children's show, playing at one point in the show The Dodecahedron who was literally a twelve sided walking geometrical figure.

*During the following, a silent film plays. It is Joe dressed as the Dodecahedron, ravaging countrysides Godzilla-style, being chased by villagers with pitchforks, etc.*

They built a dodecahedron costume out of...it was a band...marching band bass drum harness and they built out from that using particle board. And they tied them and connected them all with a metal frame or...no, it was like PVC pipe. But it was the heaviest costume. I mean it was huge! Once I was in it I couldn't even get my arms out, so only my hands were visible. Like elbows into my sides and hands out walking in a very...like a "We've got magic to do" pose where like the hands are out but the elbows are in. And I was forced into that position for the entire time I was in the costume. The costume was so big I couldn't fit through the doors on stage so I had to saddle through them sideways. And we didn't have normal doors because it was a traveling performance, so um, there was like a sort of beaded curtain but it was made out of ribbon. It was just like overlapping packaged ribbons hanging from floor to ceiling that could part when we went through them. But because of my costume they would always get caught. So I would be covered in these ribbons and I would try to swat them away. And all I can get out are my wrists and my hands in this giant dodecahedron costume while I'm trying to have a conversation with various characters on stage. I am supposed to just like appear on stage. Just fly through those doors. And I couldn't.

ALAN

The barn theatre that I worked at was actually an Equity theatre, but they were definitely long hours. So you'd perform the show, you work all day, then you perform at night, and then you go to the bar show and perform another show and then you get up and do it again and repeat repeat repeat. But so many things happened because it's such an old space. For instance, when we were doing a production of *Cats*, we had a spotlight tower within the set and of course McCavity goes to exit the stage and we had a big flash pot go off and we're all sitting there perked up [*holds hands up like cat paws*] and all of the sudden, right next to Deuteronomy's face,

JESS, JOE, OPHELIA, SCOTT

BOOM!

ALAN

During a performance, the entire spotlight tower just burst into flames and we're all looking at it and looking at him and, you know, of course, full cat face on...

ALL

Meow

ALAN

and we're like

JESS, JOE, OPHELIA, SCOTT

Oh!

ALAN

And then my friend Eric, without even thinking exits the stage and goes and grabs a fire extinguisher and puts it out and the best thing about that is that instead of the audience thinking that was a total mistake, they all burst into applause like it was the most amazing theatrical effect they'd ever seen.

JOE

And at one of the performances the ribbon got so caught on the dodecahedron costume that as I moved forward it pulled the back of the set onto me. The ribbons like pulled down the backdrop which was on these giant pipes. And it didn't hit me on the head but it landed on the top of the dodecahedron. So I'm tangled up in the ribbons with the entire set on my back and I can't reach it to get it off. So I have to ask...in character...the other actor, "Get me out of this thing!" And still go on with the show.

ALAN

And then further, we had done that performance on the 4th of July and the air conditioning went out. I don't know if you have ever had to wear a unitard, but let alone a unitard with full wig and full cat face. It was like impossible to keep our cat patterns from running together. We were melted kitties.

OPHELIA

So the first years out of school when Broadway was clearly not happening was really hard, and I was so depressed and down on myself.

SCOTT

And it's definitely come as I've gotten older. When I was younger I was always like "They should hire me. Why aren't they hiring me? What's wrong with them? What's wrong with me?" You know, that paranoia. Now I'm like FUCK THEM. This is what I am. Either I fit or I don't fit into your plan. But I'm 40-something. That outlook takes a long time.

JESS

I like New York, but I don't love it. I don't feel like I belong here...It's just different. [pause]. Before I moved up here I was so ready to...I guess I'll give you the backstory. So for college, or when I was auditioning for colleges to go to, I didn't really get in to anywhere I wanted to go for theater, but I had always been good at science and I like potentially wanted to be a doctor, but it was always my backup plan. Always. Then when I didn't get in, my heart was broken. So I decided OK, I'll go to Tulane in New Orleans, stay home. Tulane had this program called Creative Scholars where they offered students who were not your typical

science major a chance to get into med school without taking the MCAT. But it was a program that you had, um, you had to fit all these requirements before your sophomore year, like get such and such GPA and go through an interview process. And it was kind of intense for the first two years of college. I mean, I made it through. So then my whole plan had changed. I was just going to be a musical theatre major but also do pre-med.

*Cast reacts, impressed. Maybe they  
clap or comment.*

So I got into Tulane med school, and two weeks before med school started I was like fuck this. I'm so afraid right now. And I...I don't really want to do this. I kind of, like, this has been my dream to come up here and try to pursue this, so why, I mean the only time I'm going to have to come up here is right now. I mean, I won't be able to do this while I'm in residency. And after seven years of school, I'm not going to want to come up here again and try to make it happen. Um, am I talking too much? [laughs] So, like two weeks before school I ended up emailing them and deferring, because I have three years to go back without losing my spot in med school, without losing my scholarship. So I'm really not losing anything by not being there. Maybe some of the knowledge I had. Like I feel like I've gotten stupider since I moved here. Um, living here is hard. I don't know if I should go back to med school. Like, I had this acting teacher and he told me to

JOE (as acting teacher)

Make...a decision!

JESS

I couldn't, I couldn't do it. Like he gave me an ultimatum.

JOE (as acting teacher)

Tell your parents you are NEVER coming back to New Orleans, and tell your ex-boyfriend that you aren't coming back, and you aren't going to med school, and that THIS is going to be your life.

JESS

And I told my ex-boyfriend...but I didn't believe it. And I told my parents that I might not go back to med school, but I couldn't just say I'm not going to do it. I couldn't do it.

OPHELIA

Sometimes it's hard when it's like

ALAN

I went to school for this.

OPHELIA

I'm a hundred thousand dollars in debt for this.

JOE

And yet I can't perform it.

OPHELIA

But Snooki (\*) you know, she can make a million dollars getting drunk and showing her vag everywhere. I don't get it. [laughs] It's like if I went to school for this I should be able to work in the thing that I have put my blood, sweat and tears in. You know? Doctors go to school and make money off of what they do. Lawyers wanna do it. I don't know why people think that I just wanna sit in a tree and write songs, you know?

SCOTT

And when you're in between things and they're like

JESS (as they)

So, what are you doing?

SCOTT

Auditioning

JESS (as they)

Huh?

SCOTT

They don't get it. That it is part of the job. I'm like I'm doing a lot of auditioning, and they're like

JESS (as they)

What does that mean? Why do you have to do it so much? Why aren't you booking more?

ALL

WHAT?!

ALAN

I remember when I was going to school or just graduating high school and I was going to college, so my parents' best friends were like

SCOTT (as friends)

Oh, but you're gonna double major in business right? You have a backup already planned?

ALAN

They would constantly ask those leading questions and I was, I mean, my program that I went to, I majored in musical theatre but I took all the acting option classes so I pretty much got a double major of acting and musical theatre. I minored in dance as well and I studied abroad, so I worked hard. And it was funny because my answer to them would always be, like, I am majoring in business. I'm majoring in show business. And I have amazing parents. They're very proud of me, and they're always...you know I even apologized to them that I'm sorry I haven't made it yet because I know that they're rooting for me, but they understand it takes time and they, they believe in me so much that it makes me re-believe in myself.

OPHELIA

My mom is super supportive. Even to this day she's like

JESS (as mom)

How was your audition? How did it go?

OPHELIA

Or she'll hear me practicing, sometimes she likes to go to my voice lessons and sit in the corner and she's like

JESS (as mom)

That sounded really good.

OPHELIA

Or...

JESS (as mom)

Something doesn't sound good. Well you know I don't have the right terms but it just, well, you know, I think it was a little flat.

OPHELIA

Everything to her is a little flat.

SCOTT

Oh yes, my family is very supportive. My sister is a teacher and she loves to come check out my shows. And oh my gosh, my wife is the best. The BEST! She SO wants it for me. And when it happens she is so into it. And you know, when you don't have someone who is supportive, it can be the worst thing because you're battling that and also trying to have this career. So it's like no win!

JESS

I was in a five year relationship with this guy before I moved up here and, um, he understood that this was really important to me and it could potentially end the relationship if I moved up here. But he's been the one that, we're still very good friends and I still talk to him almost every day, and he's, um, he's probably been the most understanding of me following my dreams. He knows that I have to do this if I'm going to get on with my life, even if nothing happens up here. He knew, as angry as it made him that I was leaving him to move up here, he knew it was the right decision. We tried to do, like, it worked out for maybe six months long distance. But we were both getting very frustrated with one another and just not being able to respond and lifestyles and schedule changes

being a big factor. But I mean who knows. Especially if I move back home, I don't know. He is in school working on a Ph.D. in comparative politics. So, um, that's what he's doing.

OPHELIA

Actually, what I'm going through right now has made me really, slightly question how long I would be willing to work at this. Um, my, I guess he's my boyfriend. [*breathes out*]

*Cast looks at Ophelia, skeptically*

Whatever. Whatever he is. Um, he asked me if I would be ready, within about 2 years time, to get married and have children. 2 years now. We've only been dating for 6 months, and I mean we're at that point, you know, we love each other, things are going really well. But he kinda gave me an ultimatum. Weirdly. Now he'll be like

JOE (as boyfriend)

I didn't give you an ultimatum.

OPHELIA

But no, it was an ultimatum, 'cause he was definitely like

JOE (as boyfriend)

If you're not ready I may have to go somewhere else.

OPHELIA

Which is just like, you know, you know full well that the career I've chosen takes a lot of time. Takes a lot of energy. And he's like

JOE (as boyfriend)

Yeah, you can go hard for the next two years.

OPHELIA

What do you think I've been doing for the past four? Just being cute? [*laughs*] Just waitin'? Like you just met me in a time where now I audition smart, so I don't go to Music Man being like I can totally be Marian the



Librarian. I don't play that game anymore...On Sunday he was like

JOE(as boyfriend)

You know, if you get pregnant you could do maternity leave from Broadway.

OPHELIA

Or I'll just leave the show. It's like people get booked based on if they fit a costume.

JOE (as boyfriend)

That's so harsh.

OPHELIA

Yeah, I know. So please don't tell me I'm gonna have four kids. It's not gonna work. It's not gonna work. So it's hard, but it also made me realize that my dreams are so important to me and they mean so much to me and they've been here, here before him and they will be here after him regardless of what happens with us in the future. Like, I need to make this happen so either you're with it or you're against it. Like, it's that serious. And it's always been my fear, will I have to choose between being in love and being married or being married to my career?

JESS

Can I do both?

ALAN

Is it possible?

OPHELIA

I just need someone that is understanding of what the situation is and, you know, not trying to get me all pregnant and stuff. Like, why is your biological clock ticking and mine not? How 'bout YOU get pregnant and I'll watch! Come on. Dumbass.

SCOTT

So I was married once before. And I'll never forget she said to me

JESS (as wife)

I feel like your acting career is like an affair.

SCOTT

Uh, wha?

JESS (as wife)

Because you're out all the time with that other person. You don't talk enough about that person, so I don't know what's going on.

SCOTT

It was so hurtful. I feel like your acting career is an affair? She was all about: you work, you make money, you have a family. You know, and everything had its compartment. And I was with her for a long time. A long time. So...it was draining. Because it was like, do I take the tour that takes me away? Or do I not take it? And she would refuse to let me take certain things. And that's probably why we aren't together anymore. It's not easy.

JOE

Bartending is not easy, but we have some fun. My favorite was JK Simmons came in one night to *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*

*Headshot of JK Simmons appears on  
projector*

and I mean he is recognizable to most people as

ALAN

"Hey there's that guy."

JOE

But I KNOW him. I mean he was in *Spiderman*. He was on *The Closer*. I met him through summer stock. He came up through the theater, and every summer at the theater I worked at in Montana he would come to the company softball game. And so he just wanted a bottle of water, so I gave him a bottle of water on the house. That's one of the few things

we can do, and he was like

SCOTT (as JK)

No, I can buy a bottle of water

JOE

No, from one Big Fork alum to another. That's on me.

SCOTT (as JK)

Oh great! You're from Big Fork?

JOE

And suddenly we have this connection and we start a conversation instead of "Welcome to the theater at Studio 54." So it was cool to see him go from being like a begrudging celebrity to being a human being. He clearly put up a wall like

SCOTT (as JK)

I'm just here to see the show. I don't want to talk about Spiderman.

JOE

I'm not going to make you talk about Spiderman. We have a connection.

ALAN

You know my friend Tory won a Tony for *Kinky Boots*.

*Cast pic from Kinky Boots*

JON

Megan Hilty (\*) came to *Drood* one night too.

*Headshot of Megan Hilty*

ALAN

My friend Shawn was the understudy to Simba in the Lion King on Broadway.

*Pic of Simba from Lion King*

JOE

From behind the bar it's like oh, there's Daphne Rubin Vega and Leslie Odom Jr. They met during *Smash*. (\*)

*Side-by-side shot of D.R.V and L.O.J*

JESS

I worked a private party about 2 weeks ago. It was really privileged white women. It was like a scene for *The Real Housewives*. (\*) Does that count?

*Pic of Real Housewives of New  
Jersey*

SCOTT

I was a milk carton because Parmalat Milk, which is a non-refrigerated milk, came to the US and they had me dress up as a milk carton going around doing industrials. It was a freakin' nightmare. The costume was very bulky.

*Picture of cartoon milk carton with  
Scott's face photoshopped on top*

JOE

I've been a promoter for wine and spirit tastings, like going to liquor stores or wine shops and pouring wine or liquor and being like "Hi! How are you doing today? We are having a wine tasting. Would you like to try a muscat or a nice cab?" And the way that it works, the company sends girls to the sports bars and guys to the gay bars. There's no crossover. That's the way it is. So I've gotten to work at all of New York City's gay bars, and it can be fun because you're giving out drinks. You get hit on a lot. I've been groped my fair share of times.

OPHELIA

I served for, um, I wanna say like about two years, and I had a table that

came in, they wanted to see a show. We were in restaurant row so we're like right in the theatre district. And it was 10 people, they wanted appetizers plus their entrees and a dessert, but they have like an hour and half which is not a lot of time for all of those people. They're like

ALAN (as they)

Ok, what would take the longest to make?

OPHELIA

Probably a well-done burger. If anything, don't get anything well-done. So I put in their appetizers, everything came out fine. Their entrees...one entrée is missing and I was like, oh my god I forgot her entrée. And I didn't wanna tell her, so I was like near the bottom of the stairs just pacing around the kitchen, and the kitchen guys were like

JOE (as kitchen guy)

What are you doing here?

OPHELIA

I need, I need a barbecue chicken platter, please, I need it really quickly. Is there anything you can do? So the woman was eating bread and then everybody else's food came out and hers didn't and she was like

JESS (as woman)

Where's my food?

OPHELIA

Oh it's taking a little bit of time. Don't worry. I'll be right on it. So my manager sees me pacing a he's like

SCOTT (as manager)

Why are you pacing?

OPHELIA

I forgot someone's food! So her food comes out finally but everybody's almost done with their food, so she freaks out. Absolutely flips out.

JESS (as woman)

No! How could you? You told me that this wouldn't take so long. You said it was only a well- done burger. You just forgot! I need to see the manager right now. Right now!

OPHELIA

So I get my manager and one guy at the table was like

ALAN (as one guy)

I'm a chef. How long does a well-done burger take? And barbecue chicken only takes 15 minutes, correct? If it's already done? So she lied. She's a liar. So she should just tell the truth next time. Not lie.

OPHELIA

So then my manager's like

SCOTT (as manager)

Alright, we'll just bring them out a platter of dessert to try to make them feel better.

JESS (as woman)

No, we have no time for this. We're just leaving.

OPHELIA

So the guy comes up to me at the end and he gives me my check and he was like

ALAN (as one guy)

You know, the tip would be more, just next time don't lie. Lying is not becoming on young ladies.

OPHELIA

That's exactly what he told me. I was just like "Thank you sir, have a nice day." Lying is not becoming on young ladies...But then I ate all the desserts and I felt way better.

JESS

Um, I think one of the weirdest things that I had to deal with was one

lady, it was like, I don't know, a Sunday night dinner. And this one lady came in and was like

OPHELIA (as lady)

I want red wine and the salad, but I don't want anything on it. I want...basically...I don't want anything on the salad. I want to create my own salad.

JESS

So my kitchen would do all that kind of stuff, so I went to ask, after she finished her wine, I went to offer her another. And she said

OPHELIA (as lady)

Um, I kind of want another one but...do you think I'm fat? Like, that has a lot of calories in it, right?

JESS

And I'm thinking, you're at a fucking restaurant. Like, why would you come out if you're going to be that picky about what you put in your body? I mean, just cook at home. It was really awkward because I didn't know what to say. Like No! No. I'm not going to insult you, you're tipping me! Are you kidding me?

SCOTT

I can't be a waiter. I hate people too much to be a fucking waiter. I just...it's hard to be a waiter. Ugh! And people aren't nice!

ALAN

I was serving a nice Asian couple, I think they were Japanese, and I found out it was the wife's birthday so I went to pour the wine, I walk away to grab the menus, I come back and I notice that she has a teddy bear with her glass and she's going like this:

*Spotlight on Jess feeding the wine to  
a teddy bear.*

And I just kinda took it for granted; I was like maybe she's just wiping the

edge of the glass with the teddy bear? So I take the order and send amuse bouche for the first course. So when I drop the amuse bouche I notice the teddy bear has a bib on it. And I realize we're in a whole different ballgame.

OPHELIA

I used to be a choir director. I used to be a choir director for, um, a born again Christian in...it was Indian-based, so they were all Indian. There's another name for it, I just can't remember it. And I liked them but they were not too fond of me. The kids really like me 'cause I was a good time, but the parents didn't really like me too much because I wasn't Indian. They were very, like, you know, selective. They wanted to be their people, so they would speak their language in front of me...always.

ALAN

And through the four course meal she continued to share her food and drink to her teddy bear and act as if it was the most normal thing possible. Like, no, she wasn't acting all crazy. Grown woman in her 30s, and she had a lovely husband; and as much as I thought I'd seen it all at a restaurant, I felt like at a fine dining restaurant to have this experience was like wow. And it could be really sad. She might have lost a child or something, I don't know the answer, but I was just like itgetsbetter.org.

OPHELIA

And at one point I was like I'd prefer if everyone spoke English if I was in the room because that's what I would do. That didn't really go over too well so I wasn't asked back, but I mean, they wanted to win a competition. That's why I was hired, and they got pretty close but I just told them, I was like if you wanna win you need to rehearse. You need to practice. So they got 4th place. That's good 'cause one girl was tone deaf, so...

JOE

When I first moved to the city my job was working for a not-for-profit theatre company calling their past subscribers and offering them new subscriptions. Calling them between the hours of 5 and 9pm. "Hi! It's



your beloved theatre company. We wanted to offer you 3 shows for the price of one.” And you would either find people would be thrilled you had called

SCOTT (as subscriber)

Oh my god! I'd love to buy 3 shows for the price of one! What a great deal!

JOE

Or people would be so mad that you ever even thought to call them. Just yelling at you.

ALAN (as subscriber)

You've called me every day!

JOE

Sir, this is my first day on the job.

ALAN (as subscriber)

No, you've called here every day! I recognize your voice I know you. You've called me a lot.

JOE

I promise you I have never called this number before.

ALAN (as subscriber)

You're a liar.

JOE

And what you realize is that when people can't see you, they feel free to harass you in a way that you would not expect. Saying just awful things to you that you would never say to a person's face. And you want to calmly and clearly explain to them, like, I have your telephone number. I have your full name. I have your address. Sometimes I have your credit card information. I'm not saying you need to treat me like a prince, but I have a lot of power on this end of the phone. I would never abuse it, but there are people who might. Sometimes the people are so rude, it's like

you are just inviting identity theft.

JESS, OPHELIA, JOE, ALAN

Right now I feel like I have no money!

JESS

Well, that's all the time really. Especially these last couple of months, um, 'cause when I was working as a server it was fine but just the catering jobs are as sparse as the theatre jobs sometimes. I'm very lucky to be getting financial help from my parents so it hasn't been as hard as it could be. As much as I don't wanna ask them. Like, really don't.

JOE

That's one of the ways my parents have been the most supportive. They have supported me financially at times, because it's just...When I was first living in the city, I wasn't making money and so...and I would get down to the wire and I would have to suck up my pride and ask for help. And I haven't had to in a really long time and I'm really glad about that. But at the time it was like I'm failing. I can't make my bills. And I can't get a job doing what I'm supposed to be doing. Things are falling apart. And it feels bad because [long pause]. It's like you're an adult. You're out of college. You're living on your own, or you have a roommate depending on you to pick up half the tab. And if you're like

ALAN

I'm gonna give you this check for half the rent. Can I give you the rest next week?

JOE

That's a horrible question to ask. And. And there's. There's no option. Even though I am working from dawn to dusk and later. It's like. It's like I'm not...it's like I'm failing. And it makes you feel like [long pause] you're not done growing but you should be.

OPHELIA

Paying loans is always tough. I was supposed to do Passing Strange in P-town, got the gig, everything. They call me, everything is cool, so I had

to give my two weeks notice at my job. Then I didn't hear anything from them. Nothing. And they were like

SCOTT (as they)

Well, we're just having trouble because you're Equity. We're having trouble seeing if we can give an Equity contract.

OPHELIA

But I booked it, you know? And that's when I learned that you didn't book it until you sign something. So I'm just waiting to hear, waiting to hear, I already put in my two weeks notice. And I didn't wanna go back anyway, so...then come to find out I didn't get the job because they found somebody who was non-Equity who could do it. And I was heartbroken because I wanna do that show so bad and also, I mean, I just gave up my job. Like [breathes out]. It was terrible. So I didn't really save very much 'cause everything was going to my loans, so I had about 90 dollars to my name for about a month. And I wouldn't let my mom help me because my mom is taking care of me, my younger brother who was in school at the time, and sometimes my older brother 'cause he can be a deadbeat from time to time. And his four kids...but that's another story [laughs]. AND his...oh lord, anyway. So I just didn't feel right being like Ma, I need help. But she saw I was struggling so she gave me 300 bucks and I learned how to stretch that like nobody's business. I stretched it so hard until about April when I got my next job. January to April. So stressful. But that job wasn't making me happy anyway, and I feel like your side job should make you a little bit happy, you know? Like you shouldn't want to vomit every time you go, so...

JESS

I wouldn't do any type of office work whatsoever. I don't like to be in a very business oriented setting, although I'm sure it would be helpful if I were. But yeah, I don't know. I guess I wouldn't wanna be like a garbage man or something. Something really dirty.

OPHELIA

I would not strip. Would not strip. Would not. Um, I would not work at McDonald's. No fast food joints. I always thought it'd be really cool to be

a political analyst. Is that weird? I wanna be a judge. It'd be fun to be a pundit and rattle off things and wear a cute suit, you know. But I think through it all I'd start singing making my points, so maybe not. But really, I knew I wanted to be an actor when I was about 13 years old. I always knew I wanted to sing. I told my mom when I was about 2 or 3 that I wanted to be Whitney Houston.

*Projection of Whitney Houston  
appears*

I was like I'm gonna be a singer,

*Generic stock photo of a "singer"  
appears*

a judge

*Singer picture changes to a judge,  
complete with wig, robe, gavel, etc.*

and a figure skater

*Picture changes to a figure skater*

'cause I wanted to be Kristi Yamaguchi (\*) as well.

*Picture changes to Kristi Yamaguchi*

I always wanted to make entertaining a career. The idea of using your words and it's like you get so heightened in your emotion, all you can do was sing. It made so much more sense to me, so I'm thinking at that point I knew I wanted to make it a career. I never wanted to do anything else, I mean, except for the figure-skating judge thing.

*Picture changes to Ophelia as  
Whitney Houston as a figure-skating  
judge*

...however that can be accomplished.

JOE

I started doing shows when I was a kid and bit by bit realized it was a real job. Not just like hey, they're doing a show this summer community theatre style. But like oh wait, no, they like hire people to do this.

JESS, SCOTT, OPHELIA, ALAN

This is like a JOB.

JOE

Like once I realize that was an option, it's like oh yeah, I'll do that. That's who I am.

ALAN

I did *Odyssey of the Mind*, before it became *Destination Imagination*. So I did that starting in first grade and I did it every year, and by third grade I was doing this really funny character in a sketch and we did really well at regionals so we got to perform for our school, and I had the entire audience laughing and I was like, at that moment, I knew that I had to keep doing this.

JESS

I want to say it was when I did Annie when I was 12 at Tulane's summer theatre. I don't know...I guess it was this one guy that I was working with really inspired me to care about it and really believed in me. He was playing Rooster. He taught me everything I know about dance. I think after I did Annie and was working with him, I decided this was something, you know, more than just a hobby. Something that I loved and that was always enjoyable. I think the minute theatre becomes not fun or enjoyable anymore, that's when I'll give it up. That's what it's about.

JOE

I don't really know how to gauge lack of support. There's never...I don't...I don't think there has ever been anyone that discouraged me. I've been in for *Beauty and the Beast* tour a couple of times, usually going in for Gaston. The last time I went in, I did all the material several

times. And they were having all the Gastons stay to dance afterwards and I was the last one to audition. So I was like, if they want me to stay I have to know now. Like, they are walking in the room in 5 seconds. And so I'm pacing trying to figure out if I should get into my dance clothes, and the casting director comes out and is like

ALAN (as casting director)

You're good. You're done. You can go home.

JOE

What? I was in there for like 15, 20 minutes working on the material.

ALAN (as casting director)

Yeah

JOE

Now they've seen me dance before. Do they just not need to see me dance again? When you say I'm done, does that mean I'm not being considered for the role?

ALAN (as casting director)

They just don't think you're this part.

JOE

Was it my read on the scenes?

ALAN (as casting director)

No, they loved your read on the scenes. They thought you gave a great performance.

JOE

Ok, was it the song then? Are there different choices I can make in the song?

ALAN (as casting director)

No, they said that was the best they have ever heard the song sung. They don't really expect to hear the song sung better.

JOE

Ok, what is it? I...I need something here. I need to know why I can sing the song better than anyone else and read the sides better than anyone else and I'm still not right for the part.

ALAN (as casting director)

It's just...you're just...you're too pretty. When you do the part, it feels like Gaston is being played by the douche-y guy in an 80s movie.

*Picture of douche-y 80s guy appears*

JOE

That is the actual phrase that came out of his mouth. And I was like, I mean, one: I can't really process this right now. Two: I can't really change that. That's not a note I can take.

ALAN (as casting director)

No, it's not.

SCOTT

Several years ago, when I was called in for a replacement for a Broadway show, the song I had to prepare...I mean the notes were so through the ceiling and at 9am in the morning. Which is OK, I mean, I know it's my job. But I was so new to this. I was ready, prepared, to go in. There's probably 15, 20 people at the table. I'm still OK. The accompanist starts playing and I start singing. And the casting director, who I will not say her name, says in front of all of these people

OPHELIA (as casting director)

STOP!

SCOTT

Is everything OK?

OPHELIA (as casting director)

Are you even listening?

SCOTT

And I mean, oh my gosh. So when I get nervous I sweat, and I feel myself starting to sweat and I'm like, what do you mean?

OPHELIA (as casting director)

You don't hear any of the notes! You're so off key, you should be embarrassed.

SCOTT

Oh! Can I try it again?

OPHELIA (as casting director)

Sure.

SCOTT

And I do it again, and she stops me again.

OPHELIA (as casting director)

I want you to stand with the accompanist and he is going to plunk out the notes until you get them right.

SCOTT

And that was when I begged for the floor to open up and suck me down!

OPHELIA (as casting director)

You don't even know what you're doing.

SCOTT

And I was so naïve, I didn't even know how to respond. Do I leave? Do I yell back? Do I...and I was like [fake crying] "Oh my gosh! You're right. I'm so sorry." And I stood by the accompanist and he plunked it out for me. And finally I'm like OK, I'm ready.

OPHELIA (as casting director)

Are you sure? Because if you don't do it right this time you will not be asked to come back.



SCOTT

It was so mortifying. So mortifying. So anyway, I did it. Done.

ALAN

I did audition for Disney cruise line, or just Disney in general, and I think he told me I was too short. Which I'm confused because in the movie Aladdin's so short, and I'm 5'7. I mean obviously there is that age-old Broadway thing. Large stage so they want tall people you know. Mel Brooks, like in *The Producers*, I think they only wanted girls that were 5'11, and that's always very frustrating because I remember *Young Frankenstein* and they had height requirements too.

JOE (a la carnival worker)

You can only audition if you're this tall.

*Picture of a carnival worker with  
Donald Duck Yard stick to measure  
height for riding rides, you know?*

ALAN

*Newsies*, I'm the perfect height for, I look perfect for, and I can play it. I can't do the triple back flip into the fuerte turn, but I can play the character and tap. And I find that incredibly frustrating because in many respects I'm square peg round hole. I feel like, to look at me, a lot of people immediately assume I'm gonna be a high baritone because I am a smaller-statured person, and I have a very low bass-baritone voice and so immediately I think there's a disconnect from what their expectations are, um, [Alan's phone rings, but everyone checks their phone. Is it Broadway caling?...nope]. Sorry about that. I'll call them back. Um, so I think that I am constantly trying to overcome that and find a way to own...I realized the thing I can control is how well I can prepare for the role. And I know that there's a chance for me to identify with the material and show them and maybe prove them wrong that what they're looking for, what they think they're looking for, there can always be a concession to it and that's kind of my new outtake on it. I'm an incredibly positive person.

SCOTT

Well, I don't look my age thank goodness. But again, I think it comes more with getting older, you just don't think about it so much. I mean, I've been called in with guys that are much older and I've been in with guys who are much younger. But I think it's about the talent at the end of the day. And I really do believe that is true. And I feel like there is a time as actors where we come into ourselves. And you know, I used to get

ALAN

You don't look like your voice

SCOTT

Then as you get older it all sort of merges together at an intersection, so it's right. And you look like your voice and you're comfortably the right age range.

OPHELIA

The thing about it is like my family, they, they don't fully understand what I do. They kind of are just like

JESS (as family)

Oh, you know, you're doing that singing thing. Why don't you just be on *American Idol* or *The Voice*? (\*)

OPHELIA

And I wanna vomit. And then I got a call from my uncle. Well, he's a family friend but we just call him my uncle. He's my brother's godfather. He calls me and he's like

JOE (as uncle)

You know Ophelia, you know it's getting to that point in your life where you gotta really focus on something.

OPHELIA

Errrr! What do you mean? I am focused on something. My career.

JOE (as uncle)

You know you're going on 28.

OPHELIA

I am not 28.

JOE (as uncle)

I just don't want you to be 40 and still working those random restaurant jobs.

OPHELIA

He said a lot of crazy stuff and it made me so mad because my, my dad just passed and he just decided this would be the perfect time to call me and let me know that maybe I should work, and he told me I should work in a museum possibly.

JOE (as uncle)

You could use acting that way, telling people about paintings.

OPHELIA

I don't know. He was trying to think of like creative things that I could do because clearly what I was doing was just not enough. Like he wants me to make money off of it and jolly gosh I wanna make money off of it too. Like come on!

SCOTT

Oh yeah, my oldest one especially, she's sixteen, and she cannot wait to tell me what she did and did not like.

JESS (as daughter)

You know dad, maybe next time when you do it you could be...

SCOTT

It doesn't work like that Alexis. It's locked in. I can't be a different anything. And it's funny because she takes voice lessons and I'm always listening outside the door. And I befriended the voice coach, of course. So I'll be like what are you working on?

JESS (as daughter)

Some, you know, "Matchmaker" or some other traditional Broadway song.

SCOTT

And I'll say maybe you oughtta try it like this. And my daughter gets so annoyed.

JESS (as daughter)

This is my lesson.

SCOTT

We can do a duet!

JESS (as daughter)

No. Dad, it's not like that.

SCOTT

Not like what? I know what it's like. I'm in it every day. You don't know what it's like. She won't act in any of the plays at school. She likes to keep it separate. And if I go with her to see her school's play, I'll want to talk to the kids after and she'll be like

JESS (as daughter)

Dad, don't say a word.

SCOTT

Alright. You know, as a parent you encourage your kids to do whatever their thing is and let it take them wherever it takes them. I don't discourage them from things. I only want them to try. They love the idea of what it is but, you know, like most kids they don't get that there's work. They just think you show up and you get a part. You gotta put your time in. Like even if it's at home, I'll be prepping for an audition for hours and days in another room and they don't get it.

JESS (as daughter)

Why are you singing it over and over?

SCOTT

[*in a mock-scary voice*] Because you have to! Don't ask me questions!

OPHELIA

My measure of success has definitely changed since I was young, since I finished school. I always thought the measure of success would be, you know, Broadway.

*Every time she says the word  
"Broadway", a giant flashing light-up  
sign of "BROADWAY" appears and  
the company whispers "Broadway"*

That would be it. Like it's Broadway or bust, you know. So that was the goal, the goal was always Broadway and even in college I was like I'm gonna be on Broadway. And you never think if I got a degree that says I can sing and dance and act equally, why can't I use that in other ways versus just Broadway, you know? It's like if you're not doing Broadway or regional theatre, even regional theatre we didn't think of very much. Maybe the big ones that were like Broadway. It's like then I'm not, I'm not a performer. But as I've gotten older my measure of success has definitely changed where it's been like I wanna be able to perform and to be able to support myself in just performing. In any form or fashion. If it's just straight theatre or if it's just doing music or if I'm dancing in a gig, I think that is the measure of success. It's not really just about Broadway. I mean, it's the...it's the dream. It'd be nice to happen, but it's not...it's not the be all/end all anymore as it once was back in the day.

JESS

It used to be more about what other people thought, and I guess it still is in that regard but now it's, I've accepted that performing is a process and I just have to do it for me.

SCOTT

Umm, obviously my measure of success is booking the job. But getting the callback is always awesome. And I measure it for myself, it's when I leave the audition. Did I feel good about it? We have no idea what they're

thinking. Maybe I'm too tall? Which is never. Or whatever, the costume doesn't fit. But for myself I try to figure out what does and doesn't work.

ALAN

That's a really good question. I think, personally, I would like to be able to go from quality to quantity in some respects. But sometimes those little gems sustain your creative heart and your soul.

JOE

When you're doing a show, you think about 3 things: The quality of the show, the quality of the contract, and the quality of the role.

*Throughout this section, Joe's points are illustrated by a very business-like PowerPoint. Excessive charts and graphs are encouraged.*

And at least one of those things has to be good. It may be a bad show and a bad contract, but you have a good part and you can do it well. So you can suck up those other things. Or maybe you're not getting paid and it's not a good part, but it's a great show. Like you're waving a rose in the background, but you're waving a rose in the background of a show you really believe in. Or the money is great, the show is bad and the role is bad, but you are making some cash. One of those three things has to be in place. If all of those things are in place, that's great. That's a unicorn.

*The slide shows a math equation:  
Money + show + role = a My Little  
Pony unicorn.*

More often you have an ensemble part at a bad show, but you're making some money. Or you have a bad part and you're making no money, but it's a good show. Or it's a bad show...have I already done all three combinations?

SCOTT

I did something a few years ago, and it was one of those things where you're so covered. You're so in it that it feels like you are sort of hovering above it. Like, you just knew you were so in it. And that to me feels like oh, it all comes together. It was a play and I just felt like I was doing really good work. And it was definitely nice accolades, but I felt good about it. So that really made me feel proud.

OPHELIA

Made me feel proud to be a performer? [long pause] Let me see. The one that comes to mind is, it was my first summerstock gig and I was about a junior in college and I got my first like major role ever. I was so nervous and in summerstock you get like two weeks to put a show together and you kinda freak out. And then I remember opening night, going out on stage and just being like so enthralled by everything. And then also just improvising on stage, just being in that moment. I was like oh, all the stuff I learned in school I'm actually using and it makes sense. So that made me proud.

JOE

I did a brief workshop for part of *The Last Goodbye*. I mean it was so good. We were just doing three numbers from the show with different choreographers. But the bones of that show were so good and the spirit in the room was so creative and collaborative. I was so happy to be there and to be a part of it. Yeah, that was a good one.

ALAN

If you haven't performed for children before, it is probably the most rewarding job you'll ever have. And I know many actors that actually don't feel like they ever wanna do children's theatre. They might feel they're above it or it's just not for them 'cause they hate kids. I happen to love kids and some of the performances I got to do were their first experiences with live theatre ever and seeing that look on their faces was probably the most amazing experience.

JESS

I worked on this gig called *The Victory Belles* which was like an Andrews

Sisters show and they still do a bunch of performances up here, but we did this one event back in Louisiana for like a Veteran's Day experience. And just seeing the looks and how, how our singing affected the veterans and just made their day, um really touched me and it was always a compelling and wonderful experience to be able to move someone that way and like bring them back to a better time or a time that might have been hard for them. I don't know, it was a beautiful experience.

SCOTT

Nothing would stop me from performing.

JOE, JESS, OPHELIA, ALAN, SCOTT

It's what I do.

SCOTT

I think we all have this drive in us that we have to have it. We have to be around the same people. We love the energy that we all have. It's part of our DNA. It's what we are made to do, you know? And it feels right.

JESS

No, I don't think I'll ever stop completely. Even if I go back to school. I don't think so. Because it's like a drug. I have to, I have to be able to perform. It's such a big part of my life and my happiness so...no, I don't think I'll ever stop.

ALAN

I wanna be like Maggie Smith and Ian Mackellan (\*) and I don't ever wanna retire.

OPHELIA

I think that this job is not for the faint of heart. You gotta be Army strong to do this. And all of the rejections and failures, like every time I feel really low and down on myself I just know that the ending is gonna be so much sweeter and mean so much more because of everything that I've been through. I always say, you know, when I'm on that couch with Jimmy Fallon (\*) and he's asking me questions, I'm like I wanna



remember all of these so that, I want people to know it's possible. Like, success in this is possible and it doesn't come overnight. It's years and years of blood, sweat, and tears. And I got more years in me so I ain't gonna stop and I'm just gonna keep going. And that's it. Ta-da!

SCOTT

I will be in a show right down the street...the Broadway street, not on the 10th avenue street. I'm just saying that. No Naked Boys Singing (\*). Well, look, I don't care. I gotta work. A girl gotta work! But yeah, that's where I see myself in 5 years.

ALAN

Sometimes I wonder if there's a dream role that hasn't even been written yet. That'll be my chance to define the role and people after me are gonna be like

JOE (as people)

Man I wish I could sing that low. I look like the part but I could never sing that low

ALAN

'Cause that would mean, like, I can't wait to start creating my own pathway. But I will never not go in for the audition. I feel like the sky's the limit. Go in, own it, and prove them wrong. That's how I feel.

JOE

Hopefully soon I'll be working a real theatre job. I don't want to bartend forever. I want to hang up that apron. I mean 5 years ago I wouldn't have imagined this is where I'd be. I had very different aspirations. Probably where I see myself 5 years from now is where I saw myself 5 years ago. I sort of have to just keep moving it down the line. You know those people who say

OPHELIA (as those people)

If I'm not this by the time I'm that, then I'm gonna give it up.

JESS (as those people)

I'm gonna go to grad school.

SCOTT (as those people)

I'm gonna move back home and teach.

ALAN (as those people)

If I haven't made it by this time in New York I'll move to LA. If I haven't made it by this time in LA, I'll give up.

JOE

You can't put those kinds of deadlines and time limits on yourself because so little of it is in your control. It's not like saying I wanna learn Spanish in 5 years. You can control that. You have to say, I want to be here in 5 years. But if I'm not, that's OK.

JESS

I see myself booking something huge that I don't even know what it is yet. I hope to see myself on Broadway one day, even if it is some crazy small part and just, just live that for a second and take that in. That's what I really want. That's what I hope is in the future, but I really don't know. Where do I actually see myself? Um, I see myself back in New Orleans...for sure. I feel like I belong back in New Orleans. It's my home and I miss it terribly. But I see myself being a successful doctor. I don't know what kind of doctor, maybe a cardiologist. Maybe an ENT. Maybe even a general practitioner because I think they get more financial aid nowadays anyway. That's what I see in my future. I don't wanna believe that that's my future, but I think...yeah.

*Sound cue: applause A video clip of Jimmy Fallon saying "Thanks for being here"(\*) plays*

OPHELIA

It was a pleasure, Jimmy (\*). And I really mean it. I hope I've inspired somebody out there to keep trying. To not give up. Hell, if I can do it, I mean, come on.

*Sound cue: applause segue into  
sounds of busy medical office*

JESS

Sorry I went on and on about that. As far as registration, do you need any more paperwork from me?

*Sound cue: "All 1st year residents  
report to the nurse's station for  
orientation"*

*Jess stands, puts on white coat*

SCOTT

So yeah, I've been Alexis's number one fan from the start. I'm sure you don't wanna hear a proud dad just babble on and on, but it's Broadway! And it's my baby!

*Lights flash like "intermission"*

Oh my god, you're gonna fucking love the second act.

*Sound cue: cocktail lounge music  
with rumble of conversation, glasses  
clinking*

JOE

So that's where I'm at. You want another? On the rocks, right?

*Sound cue: 'I'd like to line up my  
11:15 appointments'*

ALAN

Oh, that's me. It was really great talking to you. This casting director is so nice so don't even worry about it. Just break legs and maybe I'll see you at the next one.

*He stands, headshot resume in hand. Blackout.*

***End of Play.***

## SUGGESTED CITATION

Moore, C. E. & Whorton, R. T. (2019). *My other job. ArtsPraxis*, 5 (1), 136-189.

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Cali Elizabeth Moore is a professional actress/writer in New York City. Appearing in a number of films and television shows including *Broad City*, *30 Rock*, *The Shvitzing*, and currently shooting the TV pilot *Fairwood*. Cali enjoys the hustle and bustle life of an actor in the city. With a love for all forms of acting, Cali has also been in various musicals including the Off-Broadway hit *The Bardy Bunch* and *Beulah Land*, making its world premiere in August 2019. And for her work as Abigail Marston in *Red Dead Redemption 2*, Cali was nominated for "Best Character in a Video Game" at the NY Game Awards. As a writer, Cali co-wrote the awards winning plays *Through the Glade* and *My Other Job* that both debuted at festivals in NYC. *Words on a Page*, Cali's monologue book, was published in 2009 and can be found on Amazon.

Rachel Tuggle Whorton is a performer, director, writer, and arts educator who has enjoyed collaborating with groups across the country, including Royal Caribbean International, National YoungArts Foundation, San Diego Musical Theatre, Blindspot Collective, The Acappella Company, Playwrights Horizons, The New School, SITl Company, CO/LAB Theatre Group, Looking for Shakespeare, Havas Luxe Events, Life Jacket Theatre Co., Verbatim Performance Lab, and New York City Center. Her recent Off-Broadway performance, *Her Opponent*, was featured in *The New York Times*, *The Hollywood Reporter*, and on *MSNBC*. Rachel holds a Ph.D. from NYU Steinhardt, where she has served as an adjunct instructor, student teacher supervisor, and music director. She has published articles in *RiDE: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance* and *Teaching Artist Journal*.