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Virginia Commonwealth University

This is to certify that the thesis prepared by Dennis Christian Schebetta entitled From Darkness To Light: Examining The Role Of Playwright/Director On *Obscura* has been approved by his committee as satisfactory completion of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Theatre

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FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT: EXAMINING THE ROLE OF
PLAYWRIGHT/DIRECTOR ON *OBSCURA*

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Abstract

FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT: EXAMINING THE ROLE OF PLAYWRIGHT/DIRECTOR ON *OBSCURA*

By Dennis Schebetta, M.F.A.

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2006

Major Director: Dr. Noreen C. Barnes
Director of Graduate Studies, Department of Theatre
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The aim and scope of my thesis is to examine the process of playwrights directing their own work, using the production of my play *Obscura* as an example of personal research, as well as examples of other dramatists. I will examine the advantages and disadvantages that playwrights face when directing their own work. I will compare several methods to my own production of *Obscura*. I wrote the play in the Spring of 2005 which culminated in a reading in April, followed by a workshop production in the Fall of 2005 in the Newdick Theater at Shafer Street Playhouse.

CHAPTER 1 Introduction: My Role as Playwright/Director

What are the advantages and disadvantages that playwrights face when they undertake the goal of directing their own work? I intended to explore this question as I directed my own new play *Obscura*.

My first exposure to directing my own work was shortly after I arrived in New York City to further my training as an actor. While studying at the William Esper Studio, I also worked in the Literary Department at Ensemble Studio Theatre, as well as volunteered on several productions all over the city. I was an eager addition to the overwhelming talent pool known as off-off Broadway. I had already written some plays and seen several of them performed in my undergraduate years. In college I had written an early draft of a comedy which very few people had read. This circle included a few teachers and close friends, but no theatre professionals. I had recently worked as Assistant Director and Stage Manager for a New Works festival organized by an off-off company named Vital Theater. They were young and looking for more artists to incorporate into its community. I approached the Artistic Director and Producing Manager about reading my script for possible inclusion in their spring festival. Although they liked the idea of the play, they rejected the script. When I requested the chance to direct a staged reading of this play for the purpose of development, though, they eagerly agreed to donate rehearsal space and

their forty-five seat theatre to see what I would do with the play, not just as playwright but also as director.

Unfortunately, the reading was not quite the developmental nirvana I was hoping it would be. The task of simultaneously wearing both the playwright and director hat was far too much for my inexperience as both director and playwright. Although I had a talented group of actors to help shape the play and round out the characters, the limited amount of time gave me little room for reflection on textual choices and revisions. The playwright took a backseat to a director trying to stage a text that needed more work.

However, the reading was fruitful in that, as a playwright, I was allowed the opportunity to see and hear my play performed, if even in a limited capacity. A small audience received the work well, but I knew that there were problems and issues with the script that needed tending to and it was painfully obvious from the reading. I then went back to my writing desk and rewrote about forty percent of the script, revising some characters' lines completely as well as changing the ending entirely. With these new revisions I then approached the Producing Director with a revised script, which was then accepted into the New Works Festival that Fall. The play was my Shakespearean spoof entitled *Love's Labour's Won or Benvolio is Alive and Well and Living in the Bahamas*.

That was my first experience as a playwright directing my own work and up until last fall, my last. As an artist who has worked as actor, director, stage manager, literary manager, dramaturg, as well as playwright, I understand and value the collaborative process that is theatre. I welcome working with a director whose contributions about performance, staging, and characters add to the development of the play. It is not just a

matter of having another person in the room whom you can bounce ideas off of, although that is important. It is about a person whose main role in the process is in the art of staging the work for performance in front of an audience. The playwright, who usually until this point spends so much time alone at the writing desk, may not be quite as focused on performance. It sometimes lurks in the back of his/her mind, but the details can sometimes be left out. Things like costume changes and shifts in time/place are never completely thought out and are given to the director as challenges to overcome. Sometimes these challenges can be solved without any manipulation of the text. What initially might have been thought of as oversights by the playwright become imaginative challenges for the director.

Theatre is a conversation. Ideally, it is a conversation between audience and production, between spectator and play. In addition, it is a conversation between artists. The script is the starting point; a question, a problem posed, a story in space. This begins the discussion and it carries through to the audience. The playwright begins a dialogue with a producer or director and then the director converses with designers, actors, and stage managers. The most vital dialogue, though, is that between the playwright and the director, for if they cannot communicate, then the developmental process and the production itself suffer. When there is a combination of playwright and director that really works, as in the ensemble where all the chemistry is electric, it creates a kind of magic. Examples of this ideal are Tennessee Williams and Elia Kazan, Marshall Mason and Lanford Wilson, August Wilson and Marion McCClinton, Sam Shepard and Joseph Chaikin, etc.

So what happens when the director and playwright are one person? Who does someone like Maria Irene Fornes talk to about her play (the artist is renown for abhorring not just opinionated directors but dramaturgs, as well)? Some artists like Samuel Beckett have enough intelligence, talent and clout to overcome any kind of obstacles, especially the ones smart enough to employ an Assistant Director or Dramaturg. Does a Playwright still have a conversation with the Director, even if they are the same person?

This question was in the back of my mind as I began the pre-production work on my new play *Obscura*. My goal was to direct it myself and face my fears and erase the bad taste in my mouth from the first experience of working on *Love's Labours Won*. Perhaps there were advantages to gain in this method, like the idea of eliminating the middle man, the interpreter. Many times I have been assigned a director to my text that either didn't understand my play or was less experienced than I. As my career as a playwright developed, I started to have less patience for clueless directors. This is how the impetus to direct my plays myself started to blossom. To clarify, I did not feel this way with every director—I have had wonderful experiences with talented directors where I find myself trying hard to stay out of their way.

By undertaking this project, I aimed to discover more about my own process as a theatre artist as well as come to a better appreciation of how directors overcome the obstacles I give them as a playwright.

Chapter 2 OBSCURA: From Page to Stage

Origins and Early Drafts

“Every photograph is a certificate of presence.”

Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*

WOMAN: I know. But I want to feel something for you. I’d rather it be love, but even if I feel hate, it would be something.

MAN: With memory, comes emotion.

WOMAN: It would seem so. That’s what the doctors said.

MAN: What if it was the other way around? With emotion comes memory? Will that ever happen?

--excerpt from *Remember Passion*, early draft of *Obscura*

The origins of *Obscura* stemmed from a simple writing exercise begun in the summer of 2004 while working on my production of *Burning Botticelli* in the New York Fringe Festival. Working from a prompt about a woman in a bedroom hearing the sound of a shower, I started writing about a married couple coping with her amnesia. The exercise yielded about twenty pages, all taking place in the bedroom in a country house. It was initially titled *Remember Passion* and then *The Persistence of Memory*. Strawberries were present throughout, for no particular reason other than it gave the couple something to eat and refer to. (These strawberries, like other elements of the play, would linger in that scene through several drafts, finally to be cut in the production.) The man was

initially the owner of an art gallery and they fought about how she hated art, though she can't remember it. This would later change into her hating to travel, or hating to travel with him as his profession evolved into being a travel writer. It also dealt with the issue of the woman remembering how to love him again, which became the core idea of the play.

Here is an excerpt from the draft:

MAN: I don't know. Had an affair for all I know.

WOMAN: I would never do that.

MAN: How do you know?

WOMAN: I know that in my heart I would always be loyal.

MAN: You have this picture of an ideal, a woman you were, but who was the real you?

WOMAN: Do you love me?

MAN: What do you think?

WOMAN: Tell me.

MAN: Do you love me?

WOMAN: I do. Yes.

MAN: You don't. You said you don't.

In this early writing I was still exploring the idea for a play not just about memory and identity, but about loyalty and love. Most of this scene is written like a rough sketch without a clearly defined story. It has a tendency to ramble along. Like most of my plays, it begins with a few generic people talking about an idea and if there is something of more substance then it gets developed into a story that can work theatrically. The generic characters Man and Woman became Annie and Michael. The key sentence that I latched on to in this early draft was "You have this picture of an ideal, a woman you were, but who was the real you?" Images and perceptions started to infiltrate the world of the play. As

the scene progresses, it is confirmed that she definitely had a lover before the accident, though neither know who it was. There is a reference to the lake and to the proposal and how all the edges of the lake are so blurry. The scene ends with them both vowing to find out the truth together.

The next step in writing the play was to add the third person to the love triangle and so I choose a photojournalist. This character was James. The idea of a photographer helped integrate the camera as a device in the play that could show how perceptions can be altered by time, space and light. Therefore, our perceptions of memories of past events and people can also be altered. It also opened up the play to more visual metaphors and somewhere along the line I connected this to the camera obscura as a metaphor for the disorientation of Annie's world. This is a note from my journal:

1/15/05

Photo—image of Annie's mom and her tricycle

Projection of image upside-down on screen behind her

Rachel as neurologist, explaining amnesia, brain injury? (and camera obscura metaphor, too much?)—"This is how your eye sees the world. Upside-down.

What if your mind could not put it right-side up?" Or something to the effect that Annie is only seeing the world as a projected image in a dark room, and cannot see anything else?

Suddenly I knew what I wanted to do with the play and what I wanted the play to do to the audience: it was about disorientation. I wanted a fractured world, shattered the way Annie's world had been shattered. The problem became how to disorient the audience without causing too much confusion and/or complete alienation.

The camera obscura led me to the idea of using projected images throughout the play, further experimenting with multimedia as I had previously done in *Burning Botticelli*.

The idea that James would create camera obscuras in his hotel room had actually come to me quite early and I wanted to find out how I could incorporate it even more into the rest of the play.

I knew that the images would help me, but I also wanted to work on a narrative structure that would be fractured. When I wrote *Burning Botticelli*, I had begun experimenting with structure and the idea of how a play is shaped. Usually, we think of structure as a graph with a line that rises to a climactic point then drops back down again. My question with *Burning Botticelli* was, instead of visualizing narrative in such a classical way, could I structure the play as if it were a Rauschenberg combine? This idea freed up my imagination and gave me permission for many of the theatrical moments and shifts in time/place that I could do—for instance, the burning of the painting “The Birth of Venus”, which is completely false (although it is known that Botticelli did burn up some of his work in “the bonfire of the vanities” in February of 1497). For *Obscura*, I equated the structure to the idea of a matryoshka nesting doll. There is one reality hidden inside another reality hidden inside another. Although I did not limit myself strictly to this pattern in the final results of the play, it did help me delineate which “reality” I was dealing with on a scene by scene basis. This layering technique is still evident in the final draft of the play.

The presence of James, the photographer, also allowed for a change in Michael’s profession. He was no longer an art gallery owner, but now a writer and editor of a travel magazine. This opened up possibilities for locations that could be exotic and interesting as well as creating a triangle that moves in the same social and employment circles. Now the

story of how the lovers would meet and fall in love became more obvious to me. Also, the characters of James and Michael became more specific—one was more intellectual and loved words, while the other was more physical and loved images. Annie would be caught between those two personalities for various reasons.

Another reason for the travel references was in the use of foreign languages. An amnesiac victim that I had spoken with described social functions as disorientating, as if “people were speaking in a foreign language”. And so the interludes became a chance for the play to deliver that disorientation not only to Annie, but to the audience, as well.

At some point, the neuro-psychologist Rachel was added into the mix. A doctor seemed necessary to help with Annie’s recovery. I initially chose a female character to even out the cast. Upon reflection, after casting the play with an older female actor, I realized the importance of establishing a mother/daughter relationship, which could still be explored further.

The story developed through working out the scenes one by one, delving into one reality, then another, breaking up the scenes and moving them around, then back again, and playing not just with the form of the story, but the story itself. I concentrated on the repetition of moments, which eventually led to the Circle of Confusion scenes, as well as repetitive statements like “Who are you?” and “Where am I?” At some point, I decided that not only would James die, but Michael would as well. In fact, in the initial drafts there was little ambiguity concerning the nature of Michael’s death, as Rachel describes him “tying a rock to his legs and jumping in the lake.” But I didn’t want that fatality of the

story to be so blunt and obvious to the audience and eventually altered that line before rehearsals had begun.

Of course, I also delved into research which helped shape the story tremendously, as well as kept me grounded in scientific reality. One of them most valuable assets was Christus Murphy, who suffered a traumatic brain injury about twenty years ago. His candid conversations with me about his experiences were helpful in shaping so many of my choices. In addition, his wife Janet Rodgers also generously offered her time to answer questions about the caretaker role in the process of his rehabilitation. Without her comments and feedback, the role and actions of Michael would remain superficial and ungrounded. My library research was concentrated on cases of amnesia, memory, neurology and cognitive functions, types of brain injuries, as well as forms of treatment. Several of the books are listed in my works cited in this thesis, but the most helpful to me were *Memory, Brain, and Belief*, Edited by Daniel Schacter and Elaine Scarry and *Past Forgetting* by Jill Robinson. The latter is a memoir by a writer who suffered an epileptic stroke and then began the ordeal of stringing her life and world back together, eventually coming to the point of writing a book when it was almost impossible to finish typing up a sentence because she would forget how she began it.

Two valuable websites were www.memorylossonline.com and the Brain Injury Association of America at www.biausa.org. *Shutterbabe* by Deborah Copaken Kogan was an excellent resource for the world of the photojournalist, especially in its examination of gender roles in that world. Also important to the ideas of the camera and perception were *Camera Lucida* by Roland Barthes and *On Photography* by Susan Sontag. In addition, I found confirmation of the

possibility of photographing images from a camera obscura in various cities when I discovered Abelardo Morrel's wonderful photography book *Camera Obscura*.

Readings and Pre-Production

The first reading of the early draft of *Obscura* was in April, 2005. The readers included Joe Sampson as Michael, Julie Phillips as Annie, Timothy Bambara as James, Jenna Nielsen as Rachel, and Brad Brubaker who read stage directions. Since this was an informal reading solely for the developmental purpose of receiving some feedback, there were only a few people in the audience. They included: Dr. Noreen Barnes, Janet Rodgers and her husband Christus Murphy, Lisa Jackson, Shaun McCracken, and David White. The reading time was roughly one hour and six minutes.

It was at this reading that I had realized that the obvious statement that Michael had drowned himself by tying a rock to his leg was entirely too obvious. I felt his death needed to be more ambiguous.

Chapter 3 Directing OBSCURA

Casting

As with any university production, my casting choices were limited by the availability of actors. Most of them were already committed to main-stage productions. Ideally, this play requires actors with a certain amount of training, experience and age. Julie Philips had agreed to play Annie and so my task was to find a cast that would fit with her in that part. As I wanted someone with more age and life experience to play Rachel, I had asked graduate student Catherine Bryne to be part of the production and she accepted. This left me with casting the two men, Michael and James. Joe Sampson, who was brilliant in the reading as Michael, would not be available for the production, as he had accepted an acting job out of town. Also, Tim Bambara, who read for James, was also unavailable as he was directing his own show that was scheduled to open the week before mine.

I narrowed my choices down to three men. Two of them were undergraduates and one was a graduate student. Of the three, I realized that I could go with any number of combinations in that two of the actors were possibilities for both Michael and James, depending on how they read with Julie. With the help of my dramaturg, I choose three scenes for them to read at the audition; Scene 8 (Michael & James), Scene 12 (Michael & Annie), and the Barcelona interlude (James & Annie). The first hour I had the men read Scene 8 and then added Julie into the casting process for the second hour.

As a director, I looked for their ability to make strong choices with the text, their ability to take direction, as well as their interaction and chemistry with Julie. It was important to me that the actor playing Michael was able to use the words and understand the subtext without overstating. I also wanted to see how well these actors could negotiate status transactions with each other, especially in the excerpt from Scene Eight.

Ultimately, I cast Brandon Crowder as Michael and Drew Vidal as James. To me, Brandon had that eccentricity and introspective quality that could enhance Michael's character. My greatest concern with Brandon was that he might be intimidated by the other older actors. He was a sophomore and they were all graduate students. I also felt that his youth and inexperience might be a huge hurdle to overcome. Although, it would be a tough role for him, I was confident he would be up for the challenge based on outside opinions of him and watching his work in a Grotowski lab. His enthusiasm would be a wonderful benefit to the process. Drew had more of the rustic charm that I was looking for with James, as well as an ability to pick up the pacing in the lines (especially in the Barcelona Interlude which needs some light-heartedness). My main concern with him was that as a movement student, he was committed to working on the main-stage productions and would not be available for rehearsals.

As a director, I prefer to cast an ensemble rather than a group of individual talents. I like to see how all the actors work and fit with each other. For the purpose of this production, I felt that I had a good mix of actors that I wanted to work with and that they would be helpful for the development of the text.

Design Elements

The play *Obscura* was the first play I had written where I had imagined specific lighting elements essential to the script. The lighting cues and colors of the lights became an extension of the intent of the script—blurring the realities, creating shadows, finding moments of light and darkness. The idea of creating a camera obscura effect on stage excited me as a playwright but plagued me as a director with a minimal budget and very few technical resources. As stated before, I had contemplated performing the show in a room in the Singleton Performing Arts Center because then we would have had access to a projection screen. In the end, though, we found a solution that would work for the Newdick Theater. It was only possible because we had acquired the talented Dave Watkins to the production, as well as his access to a projector.

I had drawn sketches of several different designs of the set for the Newdick space. I knew that I needed a bed and Jessica, my set decorator, was finding ways of procuring one. The bed would be center stage, the focus of the triangle of relationships. It had to be a bed that could be evocative of many locations, from a hospital to a country house to many hotel rooms. We found a great big bed with a wooden bed-frame and headboard at Diversity Thrift. We also found two matching wooden and steel chairs that we could use, as well. They had enough specificity to match the bed, but were minimal enough in design to also serve for the Paris café and the seats of a Barcelona taxi.

The problem of creating an adequate surface for the projections was slightly more difficult but was eventually solved by the idea of using white sheets. These sheets were to be draped in an expressionistic style from the walls or rafters of the theatre. I had wanted a

feeling of drapes blowing in a breeze without having the literal representation of that.

Also, the sheets hanging would create some nice vertical lines.

The greatest technical problem we encountered was one we had anticipated—how do we get the projections to show on the screen but still have enough light for the audience to see the actors' faces? Jessica had hung the sheets according to my initial design. They looked beautiful because they accented and helped to frame the large bed and chairs that we had on stage. It evoked a bedroom and hospital and became a practical screen, as well. However, white sheets are not projections screens. They are not the best surface for projections and so many of the images could not be seen as clearly as I would've liked. Part of the problem was figuring out how much light to put on the stage—we needed enough to see the actors, but too much would cause the projection images to fade. Although I wasn't too concerned about how well-lit the actors were for most of the scenes with projections (like the interludes), I did want their faces to be seen. The technical limitations of the Newdick Theater were extreme: due to the small amount of Fresnels in there we had the option of hardly any light or too much light, without any way of focusing lights specifically or using any kind of specials. In initial conversations with my lighting designer, Andy Waters, I told him my ideal design would be to have darkness everywhere for the projections of the upside-down cities to show up and lights on just the area around the actors' faces. Unfortunately, this was not possible in this space. For the Venice interlude, both Drew and Julie were in the center, around the bed, and the only way to light that area was to use three lights that illuminated downstage and upstage. This caused the projection of the Venice canal to bleed out. I had Andy dim these lights as much as

possible to let us see the projection, which then caused Drew's face to disappear and Julie's face to be mostly shadow. This look, though, was acceptable to me because this moment was, after all, a blurry memory.

The other scenes were not as difficult. We found that we could adjust the blocking to accommodate the limited technical issues. The Paris interlude took place downstage left on the two chairs and this area was easier to isolate and maintain the dark area upstage for the projection of the Eiffel tower to show up. We made this same adjustment for the London and Barcelona interludes.

Unfortunately, we had to change some of the initial images after seeing them in the space with the lighting. The first image of the Eiffel tower that I choose had appeared in the dark hole of the stage and could not be clearly seen. Without that central monument, it was unclear where the characters were supposed to be. We changed that image so that the tower would appear more on the white sheets than the black wall and could be seen more clearly. It was the same for the initial picture used for the London interlude. This had the image of the London Bridge upside-down, but it was too fragmented from the gaps in the sheets to distinguish it clearly. We changed that image to a skyline view of the city, which included Big Ben and the Thames in the foreground.

Another issue with the set was the idea of having photos "blanketing the stage", as it is stated in the stage descriptions. In the end, I chose not to implement this for safety reasons. It might have been possible to glue many of the photos to the stage floor, but this would have required a lengthier strike than we would have had time for.

Acquiring the photos to use as props was actually quite easy. Not only did I rummage through my old boxes of pictures, but we had a donation from fellow student, Jenny Hundley, of her family photos which she was getting rid of.

As for the Polaroid camera, it was already in my possession, as was the Pentax that the character James used.

Rehearsals

After a brief meeting with my Assistant Director, Dianne Baka, the cast and production members assembled in room 204 of the Shafer Street Playhouse for the first rehearsal and read-through. The cast members were Julie Phillips as Annie, Brandon Crowder as Michael, Drew Vidal as James, and Catherine Bryne as Rachel. The production crew present was Dianne Baka, Shaun McCracken (dramaturg), Lisa Jackson (vocal/acting coach), and Joe Carlson (stage manager).

Rehearsal began with minor administrative duties like completing the necessary information for the contact sheet, discussing the rehearsal schedule and passing out a scene breakdown of the play. Then I thanked my actors and briefly discussed the process and the challenges and opportunities that await us in discovering this new play. I told them that the textual changes would be kept to a minimum. In fact, at my meeting with Dianne, I told her that her main function on this project would be to keep the viewpoint of a director who didn't write the play. I had difficulty managing some distance from the text as I was still finding it difficult to separate the playwright from the play. I did warn the actors, though, that the monologue in scene two that James had would definitely change, but other

than that I anticipated only some minor adjustments here and there for clarity. My goal was to work on this piece as a director and focus on staging the play as written. Although it was an experimental process for me working as a director on my own work, I was determined not to take too many liberties with the story and characters. I wanted to rely on the strength of the play and trust the words that the playwright had given me.

Many of my notes from this first meeting were related to basic questions regarding relationships and specifics that needed to be set for us. Although I have a tendency as a writer to seek clarity and specifics, the beauty of this play is that it lives in this world of ambiguity—a world of memory and perceptions that alter and shift radically. My goal as a director was to create the specifics that would enable the actors' security and comfort so that they could embody their roles, play their actions, and fully commit to the story of the play. There was plenty of playing room for us and I enjoyed the liberty of knowing that I could make choices that were not already in the text—and that just because it's not in the text does not necessarily mean that it needed to be added.

Some more detailed notes from my notebook include:

- Sc. 4 should have feeling of strangers, or play with levels of comfort from familiar to distancing
- Michael and Annie dressing themselves—how to stage?
- Note for Julie—playfulness as survival technique
- Brandon—find the hope and positive expectations—more levels
- Staging of Circles of Confusion Pt. II—disappearances, etc.
- Drew & Julie—comfort levels and flirtations, different energy

- Drew as Interlude characters—is he a perception of that city from Annie’s point of view or is this a game that James would’ve played? Is he comfortable with these accents or just a representation?
- Can’t rip up a Polaroid—how else to destroy it? (Not by fire.)
- How do the photos get in the houseplant? (This question could be answered by how long the affair lasts, which is never stated.)
- Julie—“Is this what it was like?”—is really “Is this my life?” –Major Dramatic Question is search for identity, finding out who you are and why...

Some of the other notes were more basic and were addressed in the next read-through which involved a lot of table work. I wanted see this play on its feet as quickly as possible so I had only planned one day for table work. The staging of this play needed to be smooth and the transitions needed to flow from one to the other. I wanted little attention to details like changing of costumes or locales, except when necessary and indicated by the text (such as Michael entering from the shower in robe).

The running time of the first read-through was one hour and six minutes, which was faster than the previous reading. I knew that there would be a lot of time that might be added with the staging of the script, but I was relieved to know that I wouldn’t have to concentrate too much on cutting or worrying about time constraints. My goal was to find a running time under one hour twenty minutes, but no less than an hour.

After the rehearsal, I had a brief production meeting with Joe, Lisa, and Shaun. I told them my idea of possibly staging the play in an alternate space, other than the

Newdick Theater. The reason for this was that I wanted the visual element of the camera obscura projections, and there were rooms that have projector screens where we could use video with the performance. The drawback of this was that we would have to supply theatre lights for this space, as well as break it down and set up each day. Joe informed me that he knew someone with his own projector and equipment to project video (Dave Watkins)—which meant that we could use it in the Newdick Theatre.

The next rehearsal was devoted to table work. We explored different questions regarding how James and Annie met, where, how long they have been having this affair, and further defining their relationship together. A lot of the details needed to be finalized. We needed to fill in those things that were not givens in the text.

I was conscious of my wording in rehearsal. I started to refer to the “playwright” when talking about the script and the textual elements. Separating myself as director seemed to lighten the tone, almost as if the playwright had left the room. My approach as a director was simply to ask questions about the play. These questions were ones that a playwright might have known or not. In fact, some of them, I did know. Others I did not. As the director I could only rely on the given text and needed to allow freedom for myself and the actors to create within the parameters of that given text. Julie had commented on my word usage, saying “I like that, talking about the playwright as if he isn’t here...”. I know that there is always that constant pressure on actors when the playwright is in the room—this idea that they have to get it “right” and that there is only one way to say the lines. I had already let go of most of my own preconceptions of how and why certain lines were written.

However, there were many moments in rehearsal where being the playwright helped me answer questions or discuss matters with the actors that a director may not have known. I talked about several scenes in the context of where they took place in time and why, from the interludes to the different scenes of Annie just waking up. There were also medical issues that I could relate to the actors because a lot of the research had influenced my writing choices.

But there were also times when I would say, “so the writer has given us this and I think it’s because of this so we should do that...” For instance, the scene between Rachel and Michael is filled with medical jargon and exposition and as a playwright I know that this is necessary information that needs to be conveyed not just to Michael, but to the audience, as well. As a director, though, I had two actors with actions to play and I needed to discover their own personal relationships with each other and how they were going after what they wanted. So the questions I asked were guided towards that purpose.

All the actors became more comfortable with the idea of me directing my own play and after a few weeks it wasn’t any kind of issue at all. In fact, several times we found humor in referring to “that damn playwright” and commenting on how nice it is that he wasn’t in the room to interfere.

The next phase of the process was blocking all the scenes. The main challenge I had as a director was that the playwright had given me a lot of two person scenes. In particular, scene four has about twenty pages of only Annie and Michael. I found that my actors continually wanted to talk to each other in a straight line and so creating stage pictures and diagonals became a real challenge. Another challenge was logistics of scene

changes and costume changes. When Michael is dressing and Annie gets dressed, where are the clothes? How much time was I to devote to their dressing? Another added difficulty was that the script called for the floor to be blanketed with photos. Photographic paper, however, is very slick, and unless we pasted all of them down on the floor (which we would not be able to do) they would become a safety hazard. I had not considered issues like this in the writing, but they had to be dealt with head-on in the staging. These were the moments when I had to confer with myself as playwright to find the compromises that could be made in the script. The presence of the assistant director and the dramaturg became quite helpful in discussing how to solve these problems when they arose.

Another challenge that arose at this time was figuring out how to present the projected images. My set design involved white curtains that could drape parts of the stage, leaving some areas still in black. The projections would hit the stage, but would not create a complete picture for the audience. Also, the idea of drapes and curtains was more evocative of different landscapes as well as providing that dream-like quality for the production.

During the blocking phase, some rewriting had to be done. In particular, scene two between Annie and James had to be reworked. As a playwright, I felt like it was the weakest scene of them all and although I had considered cutting it, I felt there was some reason for it to be there. James' monologue was really the stickiest part of the scene, but as I started to work on the blocking of it, less and less made sense and I promised the actors that a rewrite was going to occur. That rewrite was given to them a few weeks later, just at the tail end of the blocking phase. The scene had been almost completely rewritten. One

of the cuts had to do with mentioning James and his photographing of dead people in Afghanistan. I felt like this was inserting a political statement or red herring into the script and decided that if it were something unpleasant, then his character wouldn't even mention it. Ultimately, the scene was too contrived and obvious. The rewrite concentrated on simplicity and the two characters' wants. I also wanted to cut the monologue about Mrs. Patrick, but still feel compelled to keep it in. There was something important about this moment in James's life, but I wasn't sure what it was. The monologue was trimmed and rewritten so that it felt less clunky, but Drew had a difficult time finding meanings for the text, regardless of the questions and direction I gave him. As a director, I felt like I didn't understand what the playwright was doing, but as a playwright, I felt like I needed more time to figure out what I was doing. So, because of that, the monologue stayed in the final draft.

After the blocking phase came the most difficult phase for me to watch, both as director and playwright—the “getting off-book” phase. Not only did the pacing slow to a crawl, but actors were forgetting lines and the order of the scenes. For a period of a week or two, we concentrated not so much on individual scene-work, but on running the show in its entirety. Due to the nature of the script and its disjointed feel, this was essential for the actors simply to figure out what their own journey would be—most of the time Julie really needed help deciphering what scene came next. Fortunately, this disorientation as the actor stimulated her disorientation as the character Annie. Unfortunately, it also caused many stops and starts as actors tried to figure out what scene was next. Some rehearsals became simply memorization exercises.

As a playwright, I learned one tremendous advantage to watching rehearsals every day. It allowed me to facilitate detailed cuts in the dialogue. For instance, I cut Rachel's line "she will be filled with anger and rage" to simply "she will be filled with rage". I also changed many of Brandon's lines, as well, fine-tuning specific words and focusing on eliminating any clutter. I wanted to retain any beauty and poetry inherent in the lines, but I also wanted to avoid redundancy. As I directed, I concentrated on the rhythms and pacing of the lines. Lisa, my acting and vocal coach, who has collaborated with me many times before (usually as director), gave most of my notes related to pacing and language as her thoughts were always aligned with mine.

After the actors were off-book we had a run-through in the Newdick Theater. According to my rehearsal log, this run-through took about one hour forty minutes with minimal stopping and starting. I called out the light cues and sound cues so that the actors could start getting used to the flow of the final production. The main problem was that there was too much "air" between lines. They were acting in the pauses between the lines, instead of on the lines. Lisa had routinely given them the note about picking up cues, as had I and Dianne, but there had been little improvement. One aspect I was hoping to reinforce was the idea of energy and intention—this is life or death and they must all want something and need it urgently. I began comparing the script to a musical number and said they were playing it at half speed. I told them there were no pauses except where noted and that they should use the language to get through it. There were many moments of the play where there was no build where there should have been simply because the pacing was too slow. It was at this point that I instructed Dianne to focus on the blocking

and acting notes while I aimed for the language and pacing of the play. Since it was a new work and the music of the words were vital for me in order to evaluate if they needed rewriting or cutting, pacing became my ultimate priority.

Paying attention to the language and pacing did eventually pay off. After several speed-throughs as a warm-up to scene work and moving along to adding props and reworking trouble spots, the actors became more confident about their roles. About a week before the opening, I brought in a buzzer from my board game Taboo. I took the cast upstairs to room 201 and we did a speed-through of the entire play. Every time I heard a pause or any other air between lines, I buzzed. I told the cast my only concern was how fast they could get through the play—no acting, no moments, no audience, just speed. Afterwards I told them, “this isn’t just about pacing and lines, this is about a sense of urgency, a need to express something, to get something, which has to be activated in your body as an actor and character.” In addition, what was really helpful to me as a playwright was that I could finally close my eyes and listen to the play for the first time since the read-thru without worrying about the blocking. We could’ve done the speed-through in the back of the auditorium of the theater, but I didn’t want anything to remind them about the technical elements we would soon add.

The final week of rehearsals we added the design elements, including the set. The set consisted of a large bed, two wooden chairs and the white sheets hung on the walls. We also added costumes and lights. The actors were starting to get used to the theater space as well as to the bed and how and where to find their lighting. In rehearsal we used five or six rehearsal blocks to create a make-shift bed. The blocks were smaller and lower

to the ground than a real bed. Also, we had no bed frame in rehearsals and so this was an element we further played with in the final week. The addition of this major set piece was a huge adjustment that all had to make as they moved in and out of the stage space.

In the final week of rehearsal, we had a few disadvantages. First, due to a massive winter storm on Monday evening, school was closed and we had to cancel our dress rehearsal. Second, the main-stage auditions were being held during our scheduled tech and dress rehearsals. This meant that both Brandon and Drew could not be available on Tuesday night. Also, Julie was teaching a class that evening so was unavailable, as well. Instead, I used that time to run through the technical cues with Andy, Joe, and Dave Watkins, who ran the projections. The third disadvantage was that the graduate Theatre History class was on Wednesday nights and we could not rehearse until after we were released from that at 9:00 p.m. Since by that time everyone was tired, I had them get into costume, check their props and do a run-through, giving them notes the following day.

The next evening we began rehearsal with a cue-to-cue. Andy, Dave, and Joe stressed how important it was for them to time their cues out with the actors. This was perfectly suitable to me because a lot of my notes from the last run were technical in nature, both for the cast and the crew. After the cue-to-cue, we did the run-through.

The night before the final dress rehearsal, I made one more revision to the script. The note was given and incorporated on Wednesday but was not fleshed out until the final dress on Thursday. We scheduled time to specifically work it out before on that evening, but this was not enough.

What I had thought would be a minor change since I was literally just adding one word, I realized later was quite major. Scene twelve, when Brandon ripped up the photos had never quite worked. Part of the reason for this was lack of rehearsal time, but it also had to do with the timing of the stage business. He found it difficult in the limited amount of time given in the script to rip up all the photos as well as throw them in the air. The change addressed this problem and allowed him to concentrate on the business of ripping up only a few pictures, but not all. Instead, he would have a pre-set box of ripped photos. He would then reach into this box and throw those shreds of memories into the air. The idea was that Michael had been sitting there all night ripping them up while he waited for Annie. The line changed from “I have plenty of photos to choose from” to “I’ve *had* plenty of photos to choose from.” With one simple word change, I completely revised the entire scene. Now Michael’s outburst and act of destruction could no longer be interpreted as something that happens in the “heat of the moment”. It became a cold, calculated act.

This was one of the most difficult decisions that I had to make on this project because I knew that inserting the change at such a late period in the rehearsal phase could have drastic repercussions. However, I knew that it wasn’t working as it was and we needed to find a solution before we opened, even if it was at the last minute. As a director, I would have loved more time to work on the blocking and change of intentions. In the same way, as a dramatist, I would have loved to have more time to develop even further the idea of Michael ripping up these photos before her arrival.

We had some invited audience members attend our final dress. These included a few friends and fellow graduate students who were unable to attend the performances as

well as Kelli Williams-Jones. Kelli Williams-Jones was a doctoral student studying neuropsychology at MCV as well as a survivor of a traumatic brain injury resulting from a car accident. She would be leading the talkback on Saturday after the performance. The show was in good shape and seemed ready for a small audience. I was happy that the cue-to-cue work had tightened up a lot of transitions. The actors seemed fresh and found some nice moments within the scenes. Their intentions and use of language was quite clear, even when they could not be seen by the lights. I purposefully put more moments of speaking in darkness to accent the ideas of Annie waking up and the audience seeing things from her point of view. One moment where this worked nicely was the camera obscura scene where Annie and James are in the hotel room in Barcelona. The only light was from the projection of the skyline of Barcelona. We can see the colors of the picture and see Drew and Julie only slightly. This lighting helped with the playfulness of the scene, but also added intimacy to the kiss and the moment when James says “I love you” which had not been so clearly present before. It also added a more stark contrast to the moment in the play when James turns on the light and Annie finds herself in the hospital with Rachel.

After the run, we gave notes. I let Lisa address the cast first so she could give combined acting and vocal notes. Some of the notes addressed the same issues that I had also written down. The cast still seemed to lack any kind of performance energy. This may have been a residue of the stressful final week and insufficient rehearsal time due to the canceled and late night rehearsals. My note was that they had to commit to their

choices 100%. They needed a sense of urgency which would help them to pick up their cues. Other things of note were technical issues, like not upstaging themselves.

One key note that Lisa gave, which was helpful to me since it reiterated my notes to them, was regarding the fight in scene twelve. For some reason they hadn't quite found the music of it, where the build was. Julie seemed to think that the repeat of "fuck you" was all loud and screaming—despite my constant urgings that the screaming comes from the ripped up pictures, and the "fuck you" is a cold deliberate one, the next level after screaming. Part of the confusion may have been caused by the way the slap was choreographed. Drew wanted the slap to be an angry outburst, despite my notes to the contrary. He was concerned about realism, believability and the angles of the slap. My feeling was that it's a stage slap and if the actors are doing their job and playing the truth of the moment, the audience will believe it, regardless of getting the right angles for believability.

I also made a few minor text revisions to fit the lines with some of the things they were doing, things like changing "skirt" to "dress" and the line about the dress "hanging around your hips". I also cut Julie's line "I scream" during the Barcelona interlude because it reminded me of the childish phrase "I scream for ice cream". I hoped she could take that last minute adjustment, but I also told her it was okay if she didn't. Not all of these textual cuts were going to be necessary for the final version of the script, but were needed for this production.

I also let them know about the KCACTF respondent who would be watching the show the next evening. I told them it was not an evaluation of their performances or the

production but something for the development of the script. They were also welcome and encouraged to attend his talkback session and brief critique of the show.

Performance & Talkback

The opening night performance on Friday went well and it was interesting to see where the audience responded. There were about twenty people in the house, maybe twenty-five, including Roger Hall, the KCACTF respondent who drove in from James Madison University. The audience laughed a lot during the interludes, which I hadn't expected, especially during the Paris one. They also laughed about the "favorite dress/skirt" moment, which came after Julie's emotional explosion, but this one I had anticipated. There were even a couple of "oohs" and "aahs" on some lines, most memorably Michael's "I'd remember" when talking about whether or not they'd been to Barbados.

I was unsure of audience reactions to the play, mainly because I have written a lot of comedies these past few years and this was the darkest and most dramatic text I have ever written. My last play, *Burning Botticelli*, had some darkness in it, but it also had a lot of clever lines and jokes throughout. My weakness as a writer has always been to go for the joke first, sometimes to hide behind the humor. As a dramatist, I feel I've overcome that weakness, but now I'm unsure how to gauge audience reaction. With a comedy, it is fairly easy to know when it's good—people are laughing. With this piece, I wasn't sure how the audience would respond. It was my hope that they would feel the disorientation of

the main character, but the fear was that this disorientation would distance them and possibly alienate them from the events and characters of the story.

Roger Hall, the KCACTF respondent, talked with us afterwards and gave some great notes about the piece. He seemed to enjoy the play and said he had trouble taking notes because he was so engaged and felt that if he looked down he would miss something. He said the structure and the play itself was quite “sophisticated” and because of that he thought I could dig deeper and give more passion to the main characters and their relationships, especially Annie. He also felt that there were few lines that seemed unnatural, except for one or two, most specifically the line “every image alludes to another darkness.” He loved the metaphors and the use of the upside-down images as a way of conveying what was happening in the play. One helpful criticism was that he didn’t think I needed Rachel delivering such obvious exposition to the audience at the end. Roger had already discovered what had happened to Michael earlier and felt that this was redundant and clumsy writing. I asked him specifically about how and when he knew Michael was dead and when he knew Michael killed himself. He replied that he had already gotten that he was dead from Rachel’s lines in scene five and when he left in scene twelve that he was going to the lake to kill himself. However, Roger was confused about the time lapse, thinking that six months had lapsed from Michael’s suicide. However, six months had lapsed from the Barcelona accident. His comments on the acting and the directing were favorable, saying he believed the relationships and the differences in James and Michael as played by Brandon and Drew. He said the blocking seemed natural as well, and not forced.

All in all, he enjoyed the piece, compared it to plays like *Fuddy Meers* and another play about a stroke victim (Arthur Kopit's *Wings*). He then congratulated me on the play being a finalist for the David Mark Cohen Playwriting award. I hadn't yet told my cast and crew, and they applauded.

The most memorable thing he had said was that he wished that it had been entered as a Participating production rather than an Associate production. If the production had been seen earlier he would've recommended it for the regional festival.

Chapter 4 Conclusion

Challenges and Opportunities

What are the advantages and disadvantages that playwrights face when they undertake the goal of directing their own work? The process of directing *Obscura* brought many answers to that question. The greatest advantage is that there is no mediator between the author of the text and the interpreters (the actors). Without this mediator, there is no error in translation and no confusion about “author intent” or the meanings inherent in the play. This advantage has several consequences. The first includes the major part of directing: casting. Casting also effects any other character rewrites for it is what an actor brings to the role that can add or take away from the character. It also effects textual revisions since the director can immediately make any changes based on the direction without having to consult a playwright or gain permission for the change. As a tool for testing the stage-worthiness of a script and focusing on revision, directing it your self is invaluable.

The disadvantages, though, are also numerous. Because there is no mediator means there is no one to help you when things go wrong. Also, a director may find meanings that a playwright may not have thought of, but certainly add to the ideas in the script. A director may notice certain recurring elements of the script which can be emphasized by the staging. A director is able to concentrate on staging the play, not rewriting the play, and so valuable time, energy, and creativity is focused solely on that task.

The greatest disadvantage I had on this project was that I had no collaborator to converse with on suggestions for staging. This outside eye would have been invaluable to me in the process. I had hoped to better utilize my Assistant Director and Dramaturg in this manner, but found that I was unable to incorporate them into my process. As a director, I was not comfortable with delegating that authority to them. As the creator of the text, I found it difficult to trust only certain parts of the text to others while I directed. In fact, I found it difficult to trust myself as director with the text, feeling that my directing capabilities were insufficient. I found that I had hesitancy in directing with any kind of strictness—unsure about my choices because I was unsure about the text. In addition, it was an educational environment and I was unprepared for some of the acting coaching that needed to be done, and vastly different levels of training and experience in each of the actors.

I did not effectively utilize my assistant director or stage manager as much as I should have, trying to do too much on my own. However, the stage manager was cast in another Shafer production that went up the week before mine, so was only in rehearsals a few times. When he was present, he was amazingly helpful and energetic, eager to do whatever was necessary to keep rehearsals moving. He was also great at correcting lines for those actors with troubles. My assistant director sometimes seemed disengaged from the rehearsals and the material, even when I discussed the play with her and told her to take specific acting notes. We also had some communication issues regarding her schedule and when she would be in rehearsals. In addition, I wanted to use her notes as much as possible but was unaware how unhelpful her notes were going to be. One of the notes

actually said something about the light on actors faces during a run in the theatre space before any tech, when the lights were the work lights, not the lights we would be using for the show. Also, I let her give some acting notes to the actors and this is when I realized she had not yet developed the skill of giving helpful notes in a supportive way. One note she gave to an actor was simply confusing and delivered in a tone of voice that was condescending and patronizing. I did not find time to address these issues with her and should have done so.

In the same way, I wish that I had had more discussion with my dramaturg regarding rewrites and changes in the script during rehearsals. After the extensive rewrite of scene two I received no feedback at all. I realize now that there needed to be a discussion at the beginning of the process about the expectations of both of our roles. I felt like having a dramaturg present in rehearsals would allow me to distance myself from the text, but ultimately, I didn't trust the dramaturg to understand and safeguard the playwright's intentions. One moment, specifically, that set off alarm bells was in discussing the scenic design being curtains on the back walls and having her tell me about getting hospital curtains and the sound that the curtains make. Although this would be helpful if we were doing a realistic play with some attempt towards verisimilitude, it wasn't helpful to me, especially after showing her my preliminary sketches for the set. I was going for evocative settings, not specific realism. This was just one example of us sometimes feeling like we were not sharing the same vision of the play.

The actors did not meet certain expectations. I was unprepared for this as a director and found it difficult to overcome. The biggest expectation concerned accuracy of lines.

As a playwright, it is no surprise that this is vital to me, but also as a director, I find it important as well. The main problem for the actors had been getting off-book. They had the script for at least a month before the off-book deadline, and yet, they still had problems with lines up until the week before the opening. Also, they learned lines incorrectly, despite my reiterations of having to hear the line as written. As a director, I was not strict enough and had very few ideas of how to overcome this hurdle. This memorization problem also affected the pacing and cue pick-ups. I have always concentrated on this aspect of the performance even on texts that are not mine, but I felt like I particularly had the music of the words in my head and was not hearing it spoken in those rhythms. I tried to relate these notes in musical terms to the actors, but since none of them are musicians, this was fruitless.

The one person with whom I did have an open communication with was someone I had worked with before numerous times—Lisa Jackson, the acting/vocal coach. She had directed four of my plays in New York City and I had just finished work with her as a dramaturg on her devised adaptation of *Othello* called *In the Belly of the Beast with Two Backs*. Frequently, I would consult with her in regards to blocking, movement, language, as well as costumes and other technical issues. The trust that I have in her capabilities allowed me to freely communicate and discuss many of my ideas and be open to her suggestions. Brandon Crowder's performance had progressed to a level of confidence and dexterity far beyond my expectations and this was due entirely to her coaching, not my directing.

One major issue I discussed with Lisa was regarding her directing style, which is based on language usage. She coaches actors by forcing them to use the text as much as possible and to play the text as written. This comes from her background working on classical work, but she also understands new text and the importance of language.

Although my directing style is not too dissimilar from her, I felt that I was somehow blocked from approaching the actors and the text specifically in this way. Great directors can help the actors make a bad line sound great. Sometimes, this is what directors do for a whole script. But for me, I had difficulty separating the line from the actor performing the line. I concentrated on how the line was written, hoping that the way the words were structured would help the actor play the moment or intention in the way that served the play. If there was a fault, I immediately looked to the text, not to the actor. And since this was a developmental process for the text, I didn't focus on the actors performing it as written. This block hindered my process and the development of the script and production. The text might have been perfectly suitable, but the actors weren't finding the music of it or using it completely.

This separation from the text was difficult for me while directing my own work. For this reason alone, it is truly beneficial to have an outside director working on the text. In this way, the director can concentrate on working on the actors' performance and I can focus on the words.

Blurring of the Roles

The future of playwright-directors is uncertain. Although it is not completely uncommon for playwrights to direct their own work, we certainly find it more abundant in film. There are some theatre companies that refuse to let a playwright direct his or her own work, especially in the developmental phase, but this is still a tenuous position informed by the status and experience of the playwright.

Although film is a different medium, this practice of directors shooting their own scripts does effect the way theatre is being created. More and more of the lines are being blurred. Many practitioners are labeled “playwright-directors”; Maria Irene Fornes, Mary Zimmerman, Julie Taymor, Robert Wilson, Kenneth Lonergan, Sam Shepard, and Edward Albee, just to name a few. Other emerging playwrights are also directing their own work, like Adam Rapp and Richard Maxwell.

The idea of the playwright directing his or her own work does not fit into the traditional developmental model as we know it in the United States. The traditional developmental model usually follows this pattern; a playwright works in isolation on a script until it is given a reading, or two, then a staged reading, then perhaps a workshop before finally entering the golden gates of a full production. This journey can last as long as a few months to several years. Along the way, the playwright might benefit from the help of dramaturgs or several directors before finally seeing the play live as a full production. In this model, the lines are clear. The playwright writes the words, the director stages it, and the actors perform it.

However, many innovative theatre companies, inspired by the teachings of Jacques Coq and pioneers like Grotowski and Schechner, are abandoning this traditional development model. Companies such as SITI, Théâtre de Complicité, Joint Stock Theatre Group, Théâtre de Jeune Lune, the Pig Iron Theatre Company, and the National Theatre of the United States of America, are creating their plays as an ensemble. There is no clear line of who is playwright, director, or actor. The N.T.U.S.A. does not even have a director. All the actors serve as playwrights and directors as well as performers. The plays themselves utilize all the elements of theatre in ways that far surpass the traditional methods, building on the foundations of theorists like Artaud, Grotowski and Joseph Chaikin.

Of course, the idea of the playwright-director is not new. The most widely recognized playwright-directors are two master playwrights who revolutionized the way theatre is made forever: Bertolt Brecht and Samuel Beckett. One could theorize that Brecht's view of directing was that it was an extension of his control as director. In the same way, Beckett's desire to direct grew out of a decade of enduring misinterpretations by directors and actors about his plays and his performance style. Both of these playwright-directors had very clear visions of how they wanted their plays to be performed. They used their positions of artistic control as ways of creating their own kind of theatre.

Unfortunately, we cannot all be Brecht and Beckett.

For me, I found the process and role as playwright-director at times both liberating and lonely. It was liberating in that I had ultimate artistic control of the production, but

lonely in that I had no one with whom to share that control and therefore, carried the entire burden of responsibility. Perhaps this feeling may change the more I direct my own scripts. The loneliness came from not just missing the dialectic relationship of having a director around, but also of sharing and enjoying the separation of artistic control and responsibility. I believe that it is in giving up some control and responsibility that we can let go of our trappings as artists and learn from others, especially in such a collaborative art form like the theatre.

I found myself discovering things about my writing that I would not have discovered simply by observing someone else direct. These include my foibles as well as my talents. While I enjoyed the opportunity to directly relate my ideas about the lines, story, and character to the actors, I also found this to be an added challenge that could baffle and block me. Many falsely assume that the playwright and/or the director possesses all the answers, acting as a god-like creator of this fictional world. To be perceived as the ultimate authority is burden enough when you are only a playwright, but when you are directing the work, as well, it feels as if there is an added pressure. There is little room for uncertainty.

The collaborative nature of the playwright and director relationship benefits from not just the give and take of working on a script together, but also of companionship and support. As I mentioned before, I have gladly given up the control and responsibility to the director. It is in this way that I evaluate the stage-worthiness of my script. When the director has run into problems that require my assistance, then I am glad to help when I

can. I would much rather leave decisions up to talented and experienced directors who could imagine solutions to theatrical problems that I would never think about.

In conclusion, what I learned in this process I would like to incorporate into my ideal way of developing a script. After I have composed an initial draft and arrive at the phase where I need some actors, then I would direct a one to two week workshop production. In this workshop, I would make more changes and fully discover what it is I think I'm doing with the play. After this workshop, I would then rewrite and gladly hand it over to a director. Based on conversations with the director, I could either develop it more with readings or proceed forward with a full production. I feel that after developing it in this way, from one phase of concentrating on lines and textual changes to transitioning to bodies moving in space, that it would be ready for a director to take it to the next level.

This way of working, actually, is not too far removed from how I have developed plays in the past. I have always taken a proactive interest in development of my scripts and organized readings of my early drafts. These readings have been informal, usually in my living-room and with ample wine or beer. Most of my changes are made after working with actors and since I "cast" the reading, I have already started to form a directorial perspective on the script. It is difficult for me to work in any other way.

So what are the advantages and disadvantages playwrights face when they direct their own work? With every theatre artist this answer may be different, but for me this question has not only illuminated much about my own process, but also about the future of my collaborative relationships with directors, as well.

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APPENDIX A: PERFORMANCE SCRIPT

The following document is the performance script, including revisions written during the rehearsal process.

OBSCURA

By Dennis Schebetta

“Who would believe that so small a space could contain the image of all the universe? O mighty process!”

--Leonardo Da Vinci on the camera obscura

TIME: The present and the past, sometimes simultaneously.

PLACE: Hospital, country house, bedroom, hotel room, lake.

SETTING: A neutral space with a bed, two chairs, and minimal props. The bed should be able to evoke the feeling of the hospital, the hotel and the country house. Scattered photographs are everywhere, covering the floor as if it were its own haphazard carpet.

CHARACTERS:

ANNIE (30-40s)	-- an amnesiac
MICHAEL (30-40s)	--travel magazine editor
JAMES (30-40s)	--photojournalist
RACHEL (40-50s)	--a nueropsychologist

PERFORMANCE NOTE: The performance should have a fragmented, dreamlike quality. In the staging, many elements can be used for this purpose—lights, movement, overlapping dialogue at times, and music. Any striving for consistent “naturalism” is discouraged. Annie’s world is a struggle to find order in a world of chaos. This does not mean there are no moments of truth, but they are packaged in a different wrapping.

The Interludes: these should be played with a slightly different style, almost in the sense of feeling like commercials in the middle of regular TV programs—or those annoying ads that pop up on an internet site.

SCENE ONE: CIRCLES OF CONFUSION

Shadows and darkness. A flashbulb erupts like lightning, then the upside-down image of a small lake in the country, projected on the walls, floor, and ceiling, which then fades away as red light like in a darkroom slowly fades up. MUSIC of Vivaldi's "Adagio for Winter" plays softly and then a VOICE is heard.

RACHEL (V.O.): Now I'm going to read a second list of words. This time, you are to say back as many words of this second list as you can remember. Again, the order in which you say the words does not matter. Just try to remember as many as you can. Ready?

LIGHTS fading up to reveal ANNIE laying on a bed and the silhouettes of two men, MICHAEL and JAMES. MICHAEL sits next to the bed and JAMES paces around it, softly humming the Vivaldi tune. Photographs blanket the floor. A few moments later, ANNIE hums the same tune, stirring.

MICHAEL: Annie?

JAMES: Annie?

MICHAEL: She's humming. That's a good sign.

JAMES: She's waking. We'll get our first assessment of the damage.

MICHAEL: It can't be that bad. Can it?

JAMES: I'm sorry. It's all conjecture from this point forward.

ANNIE sits up, slowly, unsure of herself and her surroundings.

ANNIE: Are we there already?

MICHAEL: Annie, its Michael.

Pause.

JAMES: The doctors told you. She may not remember.

MICHAEL: Your husband.

JAMES: She still may not remember.

MICHAEL: Annie?

JAMES: Annie, answer him.

ANNIE: Who's Annie?

JAMES: You are.

ANNIE: Who are you?

MICHAEL: I'm Michael.

ANNIE: Are you my doctor?

MICHAEL: I'm your husband.

ANNIE: Are we not going to the park?

MICHAEL: Annie, listen--do you remember me? Do you know who I am?

LIGHTS gradually brighten, and we see more clearly the faces of the men.

ANNIE: *(Looks at them both.)* Why are there two strange men in my room?

MICHAEL: Annie, there's no one else here. It's just me.

ANNIE: Where am I?

MICHAEL: You're in a hospital. There was a car accident.

ANNIE: Oh my God. Is my husband all right?

MICHAEL: Annie, I am your husband.

ANNIE: You are?

MICHAEL: Yes.

ANNIE: *(Points to James.)* No, you're not. That's my husband over there.

JAMES: I think she's a bit confused. It might be the shock.

MICHAEL: Annie, there's no one over there.

ANNIE: That man. The one standing right there.

MICHAEL: I'm your husband.

ANNIE: Don't you see him?

MICHAEL: What's the last thing you remember?

ANNIE: The last thing...I don't know.

MICHAEL: Think back.

The LIGHTS change to a warm yellow.

ANNIE: My head hurts.

MICHAEL: Do you know where you are?

JAMES: You may want to be more specific.

ANNIE: I'm in...you told me I was in a hospital bed. This doesn't look like a hospital bed.

MICHAEL: You were. That was months ago. You're in the country now.

JAMES: Well, that's confusing.

ANNIE: What's going on?

MICHAEL: The injury has affected your memory. You're remembering moments from months ago.

ANNIE: That's not true.

MICHAEL: Calm down.

ANNIE: You're scaring me. I don't remember anything. Who are you? What do you want?

JAMES: Better tell her the truth, don't you think?

MICHAEL: It's going to be all right.

ANNIE: The truth about what? What's he talking about?

MICHAEL: Who? Annie, there's no one there.

ANNIE: Who the fuck are you? (*Screaming.*) WHAT ARE ALL THESE PHOTOS DOING ON THE FLOOR!

JAMES: TELL HER!

MICHAEL: Annie, please! Be quiet.

MICHAEL goes to her, grabs her shoulders.

ANNIE: Michael?

MICHAEL: Oh thank God, you remember.

ANNIE: Michael. Michael. Nice to meet you. My name's...my name is...? My name is...

ENTER RACHEL in doctor's coat.

RACHEL: (*To Michael.*) Memory defines our past, present, and future. It is our identity. When it disappears from our consciousness, the mind will do whatever necessary to construct an alternate reality. When a connection of neural pathways is disturbed in the brain, the tissue finds new connections. Annie will make sense

of her life. It may not be the same sense as before. It may not even be what you think resembles reality. But it will be a construct that she can deal with.

MICHAEL: When can she come home?

ANNIE: Where am I?

RACHEL: The first thing she will do is question.

ANNIE: Who are all these people?

RACHEL: And question.

MICHAEL: When can she come home?

ANNIE: Who are you?

RACHEL: I would like to say this will end with "happily ever after" and that Annie will endure a progressive journey from amnesia to conscious memories so that she can then move forward with her life. I would like to promise you a story with some resolution and complex questions answered, but sadly, I cannot. This jigsaw puzzle will always have pieces missing.

ANNIE: Where am I?

RACHEL: (*Turning to Annie.*) Do you know your name?

ANNIE: My name? Of course. My name is...oh, what's that word...it starts with a... it's...it's.. I remember. I'm not stupid. It's...is it Crystal? No, Julie. No. Carla? No, Jennifer. No...

SHE continues naming herself, her voice blending with the sound of James's voice as he suddenly has a long oar (like one used by gondoliers in Venice) and jumps up on the bed behind her, which begins the next scene. Bright LIGHT of a flashbulb erupts.

INTERLUDE – VENICE

Upside-down image of the Grand Canal in Venice, as seen possibly from a hotel room, is projected on the walls, floor, ceiling. SOUNDS of water lapping against the edge of the canals and bustling of crowds. JAMES is behind ANNIE with a long oar, and speaks in Italian accent.

JAMES: Scusi, signora? Come si chiama, Lei? [Excuse me, miss? What is your name?]

ANNIE: Alice, no--it's--What? I'm sorry. I don't--

JAMES: Non capisce?

ANNIE: No, I'm sorry--I--where am I?

JAMES: Dove volevi andare? Il palazzo? La cattedrale? Il Teatro? [Where do you want to go? The palace? The cathedral? The theater?] *(Beat. To himself.)* Lei e senza cervello! [She has lost her mind] *(To her.)* Americana, no? Where you wanna go?

ANNIE: Where am I?

JAMES: Dove? *(Shrugs.)* Venice.

ANNIE: That's impossible. I was in a hospital bed. No, a country house.

JAMES: You in my gondola. Where you go?

ANNIE: Home.

JAMES: Ah, la casa. Dove la casa? Where home?

ANNIE: I don't remember.

JAMES: What is your name, signora?

ANNIE: I don't know.

JAMES: No?

ANNIE: I can't remember.

Slowly the image fades and JAMES drops the oar as well as his Italian accent.

JAMES: Is it Jennifer? Sarah?

ANNIE: I don't think so.

JAMES: Jessica?

ANNIE: What happened to your accent?

There is another flash of LIGHT.

SCENE TWO: APERTURE

LIGHTS CHANGE to a hotel room. JAMES gets behind ANNIE and starts massaging her shoulders.

JAMES: Jill? Tricia?

ANNIE: What?...James, stop it. You know my name.

JAMES: What city is this? Barcelona? It must be Maria, then.

ANNIE: What time is it?

JAMES: Why? You have a hot date?

SHE gets up from the bed.

ANNIE: I really should go.

JAMES: Okay. Go. (*Beat.*) But you'll miss your surprise.

ANNIE: What surprise?

JAMES: Well, if I tell you, it won't be a surprise, will it.

ANNIE: You're lying.

JAMES: I'll give you a hint: it's somewhere in this room but you can't see it.

ANNIE: Is it invisible?

JAMES: Something like that.

ANNIE: Tell me.

JAMES: Guess.

ANNIE: I can't play guessing games all day.

JAMES: Why not?

ANNIE: This isn't a game, you know. This is my life here.

JAMES: It's my life, too.

ANNIE: This isn't real.

JAMES: What isn't?

ANNIE: You. Us.

JAMES: I'm real. Touch me. I'm real.

ANNIE: You know what I mean.

JAMES: What if it could be?

ANNIE: If you keep talking like a fool, then I'm definitely leaving.

JAMES: But it's such a lovely surprise.

ANNIE: Okay. Fine. I'll stay. But it better be good.

JAMES: Lie down on the bed.

ANNIE: (*Jokingly*) Didn't we just do that?

JAMES: Please.

ANNIE lies down, JAMES moves towards the light switch.

JAMES: Did I ever tell you about these things called ghost images?

ANNIE: Is this part of my surprise?

JAMES: They show up on the print. Out of the blue.

ANNIE: Are you going to take a picture of a ghost?

JAMES: I've taken pictures of lots of strange things, but never ghosts.

ANNIE: Like what?

JAMES: You don't want to hear about.

ANNIE: Yes, I do. You never really talk about your work.

JAMES: I take postcard photos, Annie.

ANNIE: That's not all you do and you know it.

JAMES: Lovely sunsets of exotic places to entice tourists to come visit.

ANNIE: You've done more than that. You're an artiste. Remember?

JAMES: Artiste?

ANNIE: Yes.

JAMES: I don't think so.

ANNIE: You said no one took you seriously, that you wanted to be more than what you were. Isn't that still true?

JAMES: Maybe my priorities are shifting.

ANNIE: Maybe you're different. You're older.

JAMES: Sometimes there's a moment of clarity when you snap that picture. The moment you know that you've got it. The shot. What I do boils down to that one millisecond that it takes for the shutter to open and close and capture an image on film. Snap. This is the one. It's like falling in love. You just know. There's no reason to take any more pictures. But you do anyway.

ANNIE: And you don't feel that clarity anymore?

JAMES: It isn't the same. Sure, there's some beauty in Spanish silhouettes or English tourists having cafe con leche in front of gothic cathedrals, but when I started out taking pictures it was something more.

ANNIE: What was it?

JAMES: The difference between looking and seeing. When I was fifteen I took a photo of a dead woman. Mrs. Patrick. She was this skinny old widow that lived down the street, always snarling at us when we rode our bikes past her house. I

thought about how she might look as a corpse so much that I got a friend of my older brother's who worked in the funeral home to sneak me in. Walking down the hallway I thought about what she would look like. Would her skin be pale? Shriveled? And then I saw her. Naked. Withered. The sneer was gone, replaced by this peaceful, empty gaze. It felt like I was really seeing something for the first time, not just looking, but seeing. I got down on her level, real close, with this great angle on her face--half her nose out of frame. I wanted to capture that look, and understand it. And when I snapped the shot, I knew. It was the one. Even when I look at it today it gives me chills.

ANNIE: Come to bed.

JAMES: (*Snaps fingers.*) Wait, I've got it. Your name's Annie, right?

ANNIE: Either come to bed now or give me my surprise.

JAMES: I can do both. You'll see the surprise when I turn off the lights.

HE moves towards the light switch on the wall.

ANNIE: Won't I be in the dark?

JAMES: (*He smiles.*) Close your eyes.

ANNIE: James.

JAMES: What?

ANNIE: Are you afraid of dying?

JAMES: Close your eyes. Please.

ANNIE: Are you?

JAMES: Isn't everyone?

ANNIE: I'm more afraid of never truly being alive.

JAMES: Close your eyes.

SHE does and HE turns the switch as LIGHTS OUT.

SCENE THREE: DEVELOPING

RACHEL and MICHAEL standing over ANNIE, who sleeps in the bed. The image of an MRI is projected above the bed during this scene.

RACHEL: On initial testing, she had a WMSMQ of 85 and a full scale WAIS FSIQ of 112. Her digit span was almost within normal limits. The MRI gives us a more accurate view of the damage to the temporal lobe--

MICHAEL: What about the hallucinations?

RACHEL: To her, they're not hallucinations. Right now these flashes of memory are her only reality.

MICHAEL: How long will she have them?

RACHEL: Months. Years. Possibly the rest of her life.

MICHAEL: They seem painful.

RACHEL: The MRI shows us that there's still some swelling in the brain.

MICHAEL: Is it normal for her to sleep all the time?

RACHEL: She's been in a coma for a month. Her cognitive thinking has been affected. Everything you do that you take for granted--standing up, going to the bathroom, looking at your watch--she has to concentrate to accomplish. Simple consciousness is exhausting.

MICHAEL: How long is the rehabilitation?

RACHEL: First of all, let me state clearly there is no cure for brain damage. Second, no two brain injuries in the history of science have ever been identical. It is difficult for me to ascertain how quickly her recovery may progress. Can I ask you a personal question?

MICHAEL: When can she come home?

RACHEL: What was the status of your relationship to your wife before the accident?

MICHAEL: What do you mean?

RACHEL: Were you getting along?

MICHAEL: Of course.

RACHEL: Please, be honest.

MICHAEL: What are you implying, doctor?

RACHEL: She was in Barcelona and you were in London?

MICHAEL: I had to return to the London office for a meeting. She chose to stay.

RACHEL: If there were marital problems, it might add to her confusion. So, please, tell me, were you having troubles?

MICHAEL: Moderate issues. Things all married couples go through.

RACHEL: The report said there was another man in the car. A photojournalist.

MICHAEL: Yes.

RACHEL: Did you know him?

MICHAEL: As an acquaintance.

RACHEL: I see.

RACHEL makes a note.

MICHAEL: We were happy. In our own way.

RACHEL: Of course. I'm sorry if I seemed to imply otherwise.

MICHAEL: We had arguments, of course. Annie was getting exhausted travelling to all these different countries.

RACHEL: I appreciate that forthrightness. Let me be honest with you, yes? Annie is a different person. Memory is a strong foothold. It gives a frame of reference. Over time, Annie might build it up, but her cognitive ability to form new memories has also been affected. She will repeat herself. She will forget simple things over and over again. She will encounter difficulty learning new concepts. Because of this, she will get frustrated by her own incapability. Do you understand?

MICHAEL: When can she come home?

RACHEL: The care-takers in this arduous re-habilitation process must be unconditionally committed.

MICHAEL: I'm her husband. I've been unconditionally committed to her for years.

RACHEL: Her behavior and personality will be different. There will be tantrums, mood swings, outcries, and an overwhelming anxiety that will suffocate both you and her.

MICHAEL: Mood swings? Like what?

RACHEL: As motor skills are weak, she will become full of rage over a small act like dropping a glass, to the point of screaming...it's uncontrollable. She will have emotion and not know where to put it.

MICHAEL: But what about the medication?

RACHEL: Medication is only a temporary solution.

MICHAEL: But you've already given anti-depressants, anti-psychotics, stimulants--

RACHEL: We do not recommend medication for long-term therapy. It is to help with her mental and physical pain in her transition out of the hospital.

MICHAEL: What are you saying?

RACHEL: She is not the Annie you remember. She does not know who she is, let alone her own husband.

MICHAEL: And she can't relearn it again?

RACHEL: The process is laborious and painfully slow.

MICHAEL: When can she come home?

RACHEL: You're not listening to me.

MICHAEL: No. You're not listening to me. This hospital has the stench of death and decay, of alcohol and sterile emotions. You work here and you swim in that stench so I'm sure you're accustomed to its nauseating affect. But not us. Annie sleeps all day because she's exhausted by your terminology, your relentless tests, your prodding into her every--

RACHEL: She sleeps all day because the mere act of thinking of her own name is exhausting--

MICHAEL: I'm tired of sitting by Annie's bed having her repeatedly ask me "Where am I?" and "who are you?" I'm tired of hearing a negative prognosis on her capability to recover. I'm holding on to the fact that Annie is alive, despite all of your conjecture. I'm constructing a collage of hope and all you're doing is sitting there talking about what a hard road we'll have in the future. We've had a hard road in the past, too, but we've overcome those troubles.

RACHEL: This is what you don't understand: Annie is dead.

MICHAEL: She is out of the coma! She's alive!

RACHEL: There is a new Annie now. A woman you will not recognize and who does not recognize you. Are you prepared to handle that?

MICHAEL: When can she come home?

LIGHTS OUT.

INTERLUDE -- PARIS

Upside-down image of the Eiffel Tower as seen from a hotel room, projected onto the walls, floor, ceiling. MUSIC plays Yves Montand "Les Gamin de Paris". ANNIE sits at a table. ENTER JAMES wearing a beret and holding a waiter's tray. HE speaks in a French accent.

JAMES: Excusez-moi, mademoiselle? Je ne vous avais pas vu la. [Pardon me, madam. I didn't see you sitting there.]

ANNIE: I'm sorry, I think I'm in the wrong place. Have you seen my doctor?

JAMES: Doctor?

ANNIE: I'm waiting for--maybe I'm waiting for something.

JAMES: Ce qui sont vous attendant. [What are you waiting for?]

ANNIE: Do you speak English?

JAMES: Very well, thank you.

ANNIE: Oh, thank goodness. I seem to have lost my memory. Do you think you can help me find it?

JAMES: (*Laughs.*) You Americans. So witty.

HE EXITS.

ANNIE: Perhaps I could get an espresso while I wait for it to return? (*Beat.*) Or a glass of wine?

ENTER MICHAEL, kisses her on the cheek and sits at the table.

MICHAEL: I'm sorry I'm late, darling, but you know these meetings drag on and on.

ANNIE: I'm sorry, do I know you?

MICHAEL: What?

ANNIE: Oh. Uh...Michael. That's your name, isn't it?

MICHAEL: Annie, I don't have time for games. Do you want to go back to the hotel?

ANNIE: No. I just ordered. I think.

MICHAEL: I need to visit two restaurants, two bars, and a dance club tonight. Do you have any idea how abysmal it will be to go to a dance club? I think it's called "techno" or some such nonsense.

ANNIE: Aren't you a little old for that?

MICHAEL: That's what I told them. I asked for ballet performances from dance companies and they think I said I want to look at dance clubs. They should get a younger writer for this assignment--some snot-nosed kid just out of Yale, for God's sake--even an intern could write it. But there's no one else. So, do you want to dance tonight? Annie, are you okay?

ANNIE: That waiter looked familiar.

ENTER JAMES with a glass of wine. HE sets it at the table.

MICHAEL: Garcon, can I get a glass of Bordeaux and a quiche?

JAMES: (*To Annie.*) Look under the houseplant.

EXIT JAMES.

MICHAEL: What does that mean?

ANNIE: I have no idea.

LIGHTS Flash.

SCENE FOUR: GHOST IMAGES

A flashbulb from a camera then LIGHTS UP to reveal ANNIE sitting on the bed and JAMES taking a picture out the window. SOUND of a shower in the bathroom, with the open door next to it. JAMES hums the Vivaldi song as he takes another picture.

ANNIE: What is that tune you're humming?

JAMES: *(He stops humming.)* Don't you remember? *(Beat. She shakes her head.)* You hummed it the first time we met. At a party in London. Your mother used to hum it to you to calm you, ever since you were a little girl. *(Hums again.)* Ring a bell?

ANNIE: No.

JAMES: Are you even trying? It's Vivaldi.

ANNIE: Stay with me. Help me remember.

JAMES: You know I can't.

SOUND of shower stopping and JAMES starts to exit.

ANNIE: Don't go.

JAMES: Keep humming. It'll come to you in time.

HE hums the tune, takes a picture of her with the camera, then EXITS. ANNIE gazes where he left, still humming. ENTER MICHAEL wearing a terry cloth bathrobe and drying himself with a towel.

MICHAEL: Feeling better? *(Beat.)* What is that you were humming?

ANNIE: Hmn?

MICHAEL: Are you all right? *(No response.)* Annie?

ANNIE: *(Coming out of the daze.)* Yes. Fine. Sorry.

MICHAEL: What was that tune? You were humming again. Was that Beethoven?

ANNIE: I remembered something this morning, Michael. Like from a shattered dream, not like real life.

MICHAEL: Did you write it down in your journal?

ANNIE: No, not yet, I wanted to tell you what--

MICHAEL: Didn't your mother used to hum that to you?

ANNIE: Listen, my memory was something else, apart from her...it was a gorgeous sunrise over that lake. I woke up next to a young man. College age, I think. Did we go to college together?

MICHAEL: No.

ANNIE: Out that window I saw this beautiful light sparkling off the blue waters, and then I smelled fresh coffee brewing from the kitchen--

MICHAEL: I don't drink coffee.

ANNIE: I don't think...I don't know what--

MICHAEL: You're remembering something from when you were younger.

ANNIE: The faces get all blurry like in dreams, you know. I woke up that day to the sunrise, with this song in the background and I was telling him something...about my mother...? The song had some meaning and I was trying to convey that to him, so now I hear the song, and it has a new meaning for me. Not my mother. Now, I'm thinking of him. And I can't even see his face. Just some blurry blob.

MICHAEL: (*Sees photos.*) Look at this mess. You've strewn all the photos all over the place.

ANNIE: I wondered who did that.

MICHAEL: It's not funny, Annie.

ANNIE: I wasn't joking, Michael. I really didn't know who did that. (*He starts to clean it up.*) Oh, leave it. It's like some post-modern artistic collage.

MICHAEL: That's your whole life on the floor there.

HE bends down and picks them up.

ANNIE: I'm sorry. Please don't lose patience with me when I can't remember what--

MICHAEL: I'm not losing my patience.

ANNIE: It's not my fault.

MICHAEL: Let's go take a walk, all right?

ANNIE: Not yet. I love the security of a comfortable bed. Wrapping myself in the covers. There's safety here, like being in the womb. What a silly tune.

ANNIE keeps humming the tune, not listening to him. MICHAEL dresses himself throughout this dialogue.

MICHAEL: Stop humming. Come with me to the lake.

ANNIE: You always want to take me somewhere, don't you? Some exotic locale?

MICHAEL: There's something I want you to see.

ANNIE: Why don't you try travelling to this bed.? Please. Relax.

HE lies down on the bed. Silence.

ANNIE: I like the way you smell after a shower. So fresh. Your hair is wet.

MICHAEL: Is my face still unfamiliar to you?

SHE studies his face, touches it with her hands.

ANNIE: It's becoming more comfortable.

MICHAEL: Not blurry?

ANNIE: Only sometimes. In our past life.

MICHAEL: What do you imagine that past life was?

ANNIE: I imagine we travelled a lot.

MICHAEL: Do you have any specific memories of those places we visited?

ANNIE: Here and there. Flashes.

MICHAEL: Do you know if you even like travelling?

ANNIE: I'm sure I do.

MICHAEL: How can you be so sure?

ANNIE: Who doesn't like to travel?

MICHAEL: Name one exotic place you visited that you loved.

ANNIE: Let me think...

MICHAEL: Off the top of your head. One place.

ANNIE: Are you trying to pick a fight?

MICHAEL: Nothing?

ANNIE: It's a particularly tiresome task trying to remember things all the time. Most days I wake up and I don't even remember your name. The past couple of months--I don't even know how many--

MICHAEL: Six. Six months.

ANNIE: Thank you. Yes. The past six months I've seen your face every day but I don't really know it the way you know mine. And now I'm supposed to remember a place I visited that I love? You can't force amnesia to go away like chasing off an unwelcome house-guest.

MICHAEL: Just think of one. Any one. Give me a name, for Christ's sake.
(*Pause.*)

Can't you just think of something? For me?

Pause.

ANNIE: Barbados.

MICHAEL: Barbados?

ANNIE: It's a name.

MICHAEL: We've never been there.

ANNIE: Are you sure?

MICHAEL: I'd remember.

ANNIE: Sounds lovely, though, doesn't it? Maybe it's a place I would love. Let's go and find out.

MICHAEL: You hate it.

ANNIE: Barbados?

MICHAEL: Traveling. You hate it. You've always hated it.

ANNIE: What are you talking about?

MICHAEL: Would you know if that were true?

ANNIE: Stop trying to confuse me.

MICHAEL: We had an argument the night before it happened.

ANNIE: Why are you trying to spoil this lovely afternoon?

MICHAEL: You said you hated traveling.

ANNIE: It was a fight. I'm sure I said things I didn't mean.

MICHAEL: No, wait, now I remember. It's not that you hated traveling--no, you hated traveling with me. You wanted to stop roaming around with me. You stayed and did other things instead. I don't know what.

ANNIE: Yes, you do. (*Beat.*) Was I with someone else?

MICHAEL: I'm taking that walk now.

ANNIE: There's something terrible you're afraid to tell me, isn't there?

MICHAEL: I told you this before.

ANNIE: Tell me again.

MICHAEL: It's okay if you don't remember what we were like.

ANNIE: It's not okay! It's a curse! It's like my whole life has been stolen from me! You don't know how disorienting that is for a person. This simple state of constant nausea. I don't know what I'm supposed to feel towards you. I have no instinct anymore. No idea what I'm doing from moment to moment or why I choose to--

MICHAEL: Shh. Easy. Take it easy.

ANNIE: (*Screams.*) You take it easy! There is nothing easy about this! Nothing.

Beat.

MICHAEL: I'm sorry.

ANNIE: You're right. I should get dressed.

Beat. ANNIE walks to the closet.

MICHAEL: We went skinny-dipping in that lake, y'know?

ANNIE: When?

MICHAEL: Our wedding night. You wanted to do something adventurous, something you had never done before, and we had been talking about going to the lake, running down there completely naked--we were in bed when we talked about it--and had the idea of just jumping in. So that's what we did. Screaming like crazy teenagers. And it was all your idea.

ANNIE: Oh, God, look at this atrocious thing.

SHE holds up an orange skirt.

MICHAEL: That's one of your favorite skirts.

ANNIE: Uh, I don't think so.

MICHAEL: I've seen you wear it several times.

ANNIE: No one with any fashion sense would be caught dead in something like this.

MICHAEL: I gave that to you.

ANNIE: You did?

MICHAEL: You said you loved it.

ANNIE: Oh. I'm sorry.

MICHAEL: It was a Valentine's day present.

ANNIE: I'm really sorry. I'm sure I used to love it.

MICHAEL: No, it's okay. *(Pause)* Anyway, it was about three in the morning and our bodies were shivering as we swam. The goal, really, was to quickly jump in and quickly jump out, but neither of us wanted to leave the water, since we knew the outside air would feel even colder. Your body floated close to mine, clung to me, and we kissed. It was the most wonderful kiss we'd ever had.

ANNIE: Sounds romantic.

MICHAEL: Then we made love, standing in the shallow edge of the lake. We didn't seem to care about the cold anymore, or about disturbing any neighbors.

ANNIE: It must've made us feel young again.

MICHAEL: We're not that old.

ANNIE: I feel old.

MICHAEL: Why's that?

ANNIE: A woman with no memory naturally imagines herself as young, so when she looks in the mirror and sees this old woman staring back at her, with lines on her face from experiences she can't remember, she feels a little cheated. Was this the dress you talked about earlier?

ANNIE is now dressed.

MICHAEL: That's it. I've always loved the way it hangs around your hips.

ANNIE: Did we have an active sex life?

MICHAEL: Active enough.

ANNIE: Last night you seemed like a man who knows the terrain. Only...

MICHAEL: Only what?

ANNIE: With a hint of tentativeness.

MICHAEL: Well...

ANNIE: It's been a long time, I know.

MICHAEL: It was like the first time again.

ANNIE: Yes, but still...

MICHAEL: What?

ANNIE: Oh. Nothing. I don't know.

MICHAEL: Was it good?

ANNIE: Of course. I just wish I had more of a sense of what we did with each other.

MICHAEL: I'm sorry. I keep asking you questions. We should just be.

Beat. ANNIE sits next to MICHAEL.

ANNIE: Will you ever forgive me?

MICHAEL: For what?

ANNIE: For forgetting.

MICHAEL: Look at this. *(HE grabs an album from off the floor.)* Here. Our wedding pictures. Our friends. Your parents. It happened and here's the proof.

ANNIE: But every image alludes to a greater darkness. Even when I see an old picture of my younger self. I have to guess who that person is. My life has become one constant guessing game. *(Beat.)* Did we still love each other when I had my accident?

MICHAEL moves to the door. JAMES enters.

JAMES: Annie? The taxi is waiting. Vamanos!

ANNIE: No.

JAMES: Por favor?

ANNIE: I can't do this anymore, Jim.

JAMES: I like it when you call me Jim.

ANNIE: I have to go to London.

JAMES: He's had you for years. It's my turn now. *(He moves towards her and she turns from him.)* Or do you just want to hide in this bedroom forever?

EXIT JAMES. SHE moves toward MICHAEL.

ANNIE: Answer me. I want to know.

MICHAEL: I loved you. I will always love you.

ANNIE: But me?

MICHAEL: One day you stopped loving me.

ANNIE: Who is he? This man you think was my lover?

MICHAEL: I don't know. *(Beat.)* I'm going to the lake.

ANNIE: How did you know I'd had an affair?

MICHAEL: I felt it.

ANNIE: That's not proof.

MICHAEL: I don't have pictures, if that's what you mean.

ANNIE: At least you have your memories.

MICHAEL: I need some air. I'll wait outside.

HE kisses her, then EXITS. JAMES ENTERS.

JAMES: I've always imagined you in green. Ever since that first night we met.

ANNIE: Go away.

JAMES: Did you look under that houseplant in the corner? You'll find some memories.

EXIT JAMES as flashbulb erupts then LIGHTS FADE.

SCENE FIVE: CIRCLES OF CONFUSION (AGAIN)

Shadows and darkness as in Scene 1 before. Vivaldi's "Adagio for Winter" plays and we can barely make out ANNIE on the bed. In addition to the two men, MICHAEL and JAMES, there is the silhouette of RACHEL.

MICHAEL: Annie?

JAMES: Annie?

RACHEL: Annie?

ANNIE groans, then hums the Vivaldi tune.

MICHAEL: She's humming.

RACHEL: That's a good sign.

JAMES: She's waking.

RACHEL: We'll get our first assessment of the damage.

MICHAEL: It can't be that bad. Can it?

JAMES: I'm sorry.

RACHEL: It's all conjecture from this point forward.

MICHAEL: Annie?

ANNIE sits up, slowly, unsure of herself and her surroundings. LIGHTS gradually brighten and the shadows disappear to reveal only RACHEL and ANNIE in the room.

RACHEL: Slowly.

ANNIE: Where am I?

RACHEL: There's been an accident.

ANNIE: Who are you?

RACHEL: I'm Rachel. Do you remember me?

ANNIE: Where are the two men?

RACHEL: What two men?

ANNIE: They were here. Standing there. Talking.

RACHEL: There's only me.

ANNIE: I don't understand.

RACHEL: What's the first thing you remember?

ANNIE: Why are all those photographs on the floor?

ENTER MICHAEL in a terry cloth robe, drying himself with a towel.

MICHAEL: Feeling better? *(Beat.)* What is that you were humming?

ANNIE: Hmn?

MICHAEL: Are you all right? *(No response.)* Annie?

ANNIE: There's a man right there in a bathrobe. Who is he?

RACHEL: Annie, I want you to take a deep breath and listen to me very carefully.

ANNIE: Oh my God. I'm going crazy. Right? I'm insane.

RACHEL: Calm down.

ANNIE: What's happening?

RACHEL: These are only memories. They pop in and out of your head like flashes of light.

ANNIE: I don't want this. I want to go home.

MICHAEL: You are home. Our country home.

ANNIE: What's going on?

RACHEL: Your memories. They're trying to reach out to you.

MICHAEL: Are you feeling all right?

MICHAEL reaches for her.

ANNIE: NO! Don't touch me.

MICHAEL: Annie, it's me.

RACHEL: You have to learn how to relax.

MICHAEL: Your husband.

RACHEL: Let them happen and pass through you.

ANNIE: I can't.

RACHEL: You have no choice.

ANNIE: Who is that man?

RACHEL: There's no one here.

ANNIE: He says he's my husband.

RACHEL: Annie. Your husband is dead.

ANNIE: What?

MICHAEL: Annie? (*Beat.*) Annie? (*Beat.*) Annie?

Another flashbulb then LIGHTS OUT.

INTERLUDE—LONDON

Upside-down image of the London Bridge and the Thames, as seen from a hotel window. ANNIE jumps out of bed as JAMES ENTERS with tea cart filled with teacups and teapot.

JAMES: (*With British accent.*) I say, my dear Annie, jolly good show. Jolly good!

ANNIE: Who are you?

JAMES: Don't you remember?

ANNIE: Your face is slightly blurry. But I know I've been here before!

JAMES: Haven't we all been there before? Tea time.

ANNIE: This is London. I've been to London. But not with you.

JAMES: Quite right. Are you ready for some tea?

ANNIE: My father took me to London once when I was young. We saw Big Ben, the London Bridge, and the remains of Shakespeare's old theatre. I wasn't very impressed.

JAMES: No one ever is, dear.

ANNIE: Did we meet in London?

JAMES: I made the tea myself. It would be terribly rude not have any.

HE hands her a teacup and SHE takes it.

ANNIE: Who are you?

JAMES: Madam, my name is James, though sometimes you cater to the nickname of Jim.

ANNIE: Where did we meet?

JAMES: Don't you remember? I took your picture once. A long time ago.

HE walks away with the tea cart.

ANNIE: Wait! I'm sorry. I didn't mean to--

JAMES: Tea time is over, darling. Back to work.

ANNIE: But I have more questions.

JAMES: There are no answers here.

ANNIE: Please! It's my memory!

JAMES: Oh me, too, darling--the older I get, the less I remember.

ANNIE: I don't remember anything.

JAMES: Did you look in the flower pot? Might be something growing there.

*HE takes a picture of her with a Polaroid camera. The flash is bright and surprises her and she stumbles around as if blind.
LIGHTS flash.*

SCENE SIX: STOP

LIGHTS CHANGE and ANNIE is in the hotel room. JAMES is taking pictures of her with his Polaroid and dropping them to the ground.

JAMES: Love is a curse.

ANNIE: What? Why?

JAMES: It causes malfunctions.

ANNIE: In the head?

JAMES: The heart. Beauty is a curse, too.

ANNIE: Has my beauty cursed you?

JAMES: I was talking about me. My beauty.

ANNIE: Oh.

JAMES: I'm a gorgeous hunk but have the brain of an MIT grad. But no one sees that.

ANNIE: You're so modest.

JAMES: It's true.

ANNIE: You're only a photographer, not Adonis.

JAMES: I am an artiste, mademoiselle. A living reincarnation of Henri Cartier-Bresson.

ANNIE: You're too beautiful to be an artiste.

JAMES: See, that's the curse of beauty. No one ever takes you seriously.

ANNIE: And there are no other perks to being beautiful?

JAMES: None, whatsoever.

ANNIE: As you circumnavigate the globe I'm sure your beauty lands you in many a bed in many a country.

JAMES: Only a few.

ANNIE: What? Few countries or few beds?

JAMES: Few beds. And only one bed of one woman right now.

ANNIE: For today. But what about tomorrow?

JAMES: Tomorrow you'll be back with your husband and I'll be married to a ground-breaking story happening somewhere outside of Bilbao.

ANNIE: Promise me we'll never leave Barcelona.

JAMES: We'll never leave Barcelona.

ANNIE: My turn.

SHE grabs his camera and runs away. He follows at first trying to get it.

ANNIE: The curse of the gorgeous artiste. Ah, yes, give me that angst-filled brooding! Show me the brilliant and gorgeous yet tormented Adonis.

JAMES: You're in a playful mood today.

ANNIE: I have decided that misery is only for old maids. I refuse to be somber.

JAMES: Why would you be somber?

ANNIE: Tonight we say goodbye.

JAMES: But today we can keep saying hello and hello and hello.

ANNIE: Turn.

SHE points for him to turn and make a pose sitting on the bed. HE does.

JAMES: It's not my best angle.

ANNIE: But you're beautiful.

JAMES: Thank you. I know.

ANNIE: And still modest.

JAMES: Take me to London.

ANNIE: You can't.

JAMES: Why not? Just tell your husband you bumped into me on the plane.

ANNIE: Oh, please. He won't buy that.

JAMES: Why not?

ANNIE: It's too much of a coincidence, don't you think?

JAMES: True. Hide me in your suitcase.

ANNIE: (*Laughs.*) Don't be ridiculous.

JAMES: I'll make myself tiny to fit in there between your sweaters and your lingerie.

ANNIE: I don't have lingerie.

JAMES: Panties.

ANNIE: Let's go out for a bit.

JAMES: Again? I'm not done ravishing you.

ANNIE: Do you remember when we first met?

JAMES: Like it was yesterday.

ANNIE: You told us your crazy idea about a photography exhibit, all one night stands in black and white portraiture. All of your conquests, no doubt. Do you remember that?

JAMES: That was just mouthing off.

ANNIE: What good is such a display of braggadocio in front of an editor of a travel magazine?

JAMES: He knows people.

ANNIE: So do I, darling. (*Beat.*) Is this what this escapade is all about? Am I one of your exhibits? Will my face become artwork?

JAMES: Your face is already artwork.

ANNIE: It scares me.

JAMES: You scare me.

SHE stops taking pictures and picks up the ones of her off the floor.

JAMES: What are you doing?

ANNIE: I want to keep these.

JAMES: Leave them. We'll get them later.

ANNIE: No. I don't want to forget.

HE grabs some of the pictures from off the ground.

JAMES: Some of these came out nice. Oh, almost see a nipple there...

ANNIE: Give them.

JAMES: Easy, girl. These are the property of the artist.

ANNIE: Please.

JAMES: What's wrong?

ANNIE: Give them to me.

JAMES: Why?

ANNIE: All of them. Please. Now.

JAMES: What are you going to do with them?

ANNIE: Keep them close to my heart. Keep them locked up in a secret place. Keep them away from him. Keep them to myself. I want to keep them.

JAMES: Okay.

ANNIE: Promise.

JAMES: Don't you trust me?

ANNIE: *(Beat.)* Promise me you'll give all of these photos to me.

JAMES: But--

ANNIE: I can't have evidence.

JAMES: Why are you even here then?

ANNIE: Because it's something that I wouldn't do.

JAMES: Take them.

HE hands her the photos, except one.

ANNIE: All of them.

JAMES: I don't want anyone to have this one. It's my favorite.

ANNIE: Please.

JAMES: Relax. No one will have it.

HE rips up the photo into little pieces, drops them, and EXITS. LIGHTS CHANGE as SHE gathers up the Polaroids and looks through each one, carefully, as if seeing them for the first time. Each picture becomes more painful to bear and she sobs. ENTER MICHAEL.

MICHAEL: What are those? *(No response.)* Annie? *(SHE looks at him.)* What are those?

SHE shakes her head and hugs the pictures close to her body. HE goes to take them from her, but SHE moves away from him, trying to keep them from him.

MICHAEL: Let me see them. *(Grabs them.)* Where were these taken? *(Beat.)* Annie? Do you remember these at all? *(SHE shakes her head.)* Where did you find them?

ANNIE: Under the houseplant.

MICHAEL: These are you.

ANNIE: I looked at them for hours, thinking--trying to remember when they were taken. It's odd, don't you think? It's me. No one else but me. Laughing. Eating strawberries. Lounging on the bed. Drinking wine with a coy smile. Looking out the window to some exotic city, possibly in Europe, but maybe Africa or South America. No one else featured in this small, nondescript hotel room on that small, nondescript bed. Why? It's so absurd. Don't you think? *(Nervous laugh. Beat.)* Did you take them?

MICHAEL: No.

ANNIE: I know. Don't ask me how. I just know. I stared at them for hours, wondering who's eyes gazed at me through the camera lens, punctured my soul like that.

MICHAEL: I've never seen these before.

ANNIE: Are you lying? It seems I should remember how my husband tells me lies.

MICHAEL: I really don't know. Do you?

ANNIE: Please, hold me.

SHE moves towards him, but he steps back.

ANNIE: Are we still going to the lake? *(Beat.)* Michael?

LIGHTS CHANGE.

SCENE SEVEN: OBSCURA

In darkness we hear the voice of JAMES.

JAMES: Open your eyes.

Slowly an image begins to illuminate on one side of the wall, upside down. It is the skyline of Barcelona, in color, as a ghost image on the wall. ANNIE is in the bed. JAMES has just turned off the light. This is a continuation of a previous scene.

JAMES: Do you like your surprise?

ANNIE: What is it?

JAMES: This, my dear lady, is what they call a camera obscura.

ANNIE: It's outside!

JAMES: Yes.

ANNIE: But it's inside.

JAMES: I have brought the outside inside, but, well, upside down. Watch. If you lie this way its right side up.

ANNIE moves and they lie together.

ANNIE: The clouds are moving.

JAMES: It's like watching a movie only it's live.

ANNIE: We're seeing the world in a whole new way.

JAMES: This is how you make me feel all the time.

ANNIE: Liar.

JAMES: It's true.

ANNIE: So what are you telling me, that I make you feel confused?

JAMES: Upside down.

ANNIE: Shut up.

JAMES: Haven't you ever felt that way?

ANNIE: Lately.

They kiss.

JAMES: Annie, I love you.

SHE gets up, moves away from him.

ANNIE: I'm done looking at it.

JAMES: What's wrong?

ANNIE: How do you get rid of this thing? I'm done looking.

JAMES: Why are you so afraid?

ANNIE: I'm not afraid!

JAMES: Let's enjoy this.

ANNIE: You're going to leave. That's what you do.

JAMES: I'll come back.

ANNIE: No, you won't. You're not even here now.

JAMES: What are you talking about?

ANNIE: You're just a memory. A flashbulb in my head.

JAMES: This time I'm real.

ANNIE: Nothing's real.

HE moves towards her.

ANNIE: Stay away from me. Please.

JAMES: I'll turn on the light. Okay?

HE walks to the light, turns it on. It seems brighter than it should be, as if wakening after a long sleep. JAMES has disappeared. SHE looks around.

ANNIE: James? James? Where did you go?

ANNIE notices her surroundings.

ANNIE: Where am I?

RACHEL enters with food tray.

RACHEL: What are you doing out of bed?

ANNIE: Who are you?

RACHEL: Come on. Back in bed. You need your rest.

ANNIE: Where's James?

RACHEL: Who?

ANNIE: He was just here.

RACHEL: Lie down, Annie. Please.

ANNIE: What's going on?

RACHEL: Let's have some lunch and I'll explain it to you, all right?

ANNIE: Why am I in the hospital?

RACHEL: We've got some chicken for you today. I know it's not much, but if you give it a chance, it's not so bad. (Beat.) You want me to do the little choo-choo train, like I do for the little ones?

Slowly and reluctantly, ANNIE gets into bed.

ANNIE: I keep having these dreams. They seem so much like my real life. Am I losing my mind?

RACHEL: No. You're finding it. (*Hands her the tray of food.*) Here.

ANNIE: Who are you?

RACHEL: I'm Rachel.

ANNIE takes a bite of the food.

ANNIE: It tastes good. Juicy. It tastes like...what's it called?

RACHEL: Chicken. Well, it's supposed to be herb chicken, but you know, it's hospital food.

ANNIE: Have I had chicken before?

RACHEL: I would think so.

ANNIE: Where's my husband?

RACHEL says nothing as ANNIE eats. LIGHTS OUT.

SCENE EIGHT: THE SHOT

MICHAEL and JAMES sit in a hotel lobby in Barcelona.

MICHAEL has packed bags and JAMES reads the local paper in Spanish.

MICHAEL: The thing about it is... I love her so much.

JAMES: Her?

MICHAEL: Her? Did I say her? I meant here. I love it here so much. Barcelona.

JAMES: Oh. I thought you meant her like...

MICHAEL: Like a woman?

JAMES: Yes.

MICHAEL: Nooooo. No. Silly. No. (*Beat.*) It wouldn't be a bad analogy for Barcelona, though. Would it?

JAMES: Not at all. She is quite like a woman.

MICHAEL: What kind of woman I guess would be the question, wouldn't it?

JAMES: A Mediterranean woman, of course. Tanned skin. Relaxed face. Plenty of leisure time for siesta and tapas.

MICHAEL: And make love by moonlight after eating paella?

JAMES: That sounds about right.

MICHAEL: Just spend the day in bed. Nap and have sex all the time.

JAMES: Sure.

MICHAEL: You've known a lot of women here, haven't you?

JAMES: (*Pointing.*) You have a spot.

MICHAEL: What?

JAMES: A spot of something--looks like ketchup--on your shirt.

MICHAEL: Oh. Must've been from dinner last night.

JAMES: It's a nice shirt. Calvin Klein?

MICHAEL: J.C. Penny.

JAMES: So. Heading back to London?

MICHAEL: Meeting with the London office, then back to New York.

JAMES: God. Exhausting.

MICHAEL: Yes. It's been an exhausting trip.

JAMES: Has it? Why?

MICHAEL: Well, honestly...and this may sound a bit crass, but I've been up all night. Having some fabulous sex.

JAMES: Really? Good for you.

MICHAEL: I'm a bit sore...down there, if you know what I mean. The balls are on fire. The ass is tired. The legs are a bit cramped from all the positions. Just awful what a bit of nocturnal recreation can do to you.

JAMES: Isn't it, though.

MICHAEL: The thing about her--my wife--the thing about it- having sex with her--is that it's so wonderful. No, wonderful isn't the right word. Is there a word that can encompass how I feel when our bodies are tangled together under the

sheets? I don't know. Ecstatic. Extraordinary. Enchanting. This, too, only scratches the surface. Marvelous. Amazing. Thrilling. That only sounds like the advertisement for the next summer blockbuster. No. Because there's subtlety there, too, not just the fireworks in some idealistic view of fantastic sex. Sublime. That's a better word. I'm sorry, but I work with words so that's how I think. You work in pictures so I imagine you see the world a bit differently. The thing is-- there is a connection there untold, unspeakable, unknowable to anyone else. Anyone. So I have that comfort, no matter what happens, of this shared experience. It lives in me, in my memory, and cannot be stolen. That indefinable connection will remain. Forever.

JAMES: How do you know the experience is shared?

MICHAEL: What?

JAMES: Your perception of the experience might be different than hers.

MICHAEL: A different viewpoint?

JAMES: Like a different lens.

MICHAEL: See, that's what I mean--you see the world in a different way. Images, not words. The world, however, is not made solely of images.

JAMES: But images illuminate what is beyond the surface.

MICHAEL: You think so? You think you can tell what's going on under the surface?

JAMES: That's my job.

MICHAEL: And it's my job to look at the reality of things, not just the image. If I only wrote down facts and statistics, it would be as illuminating as spreadsheets with mathematical figures. You can't tell what's going on under the surface with just the image. Can you tell what I'm thinking right now? Just by the look on my face?

JAMES: No.

MICHAEL: Take a picture of me and what would be the reality below the surface?

JAMES: Perhaps I should leave you.

MICHAEL: Oh no, please, James. I don't mean to offend.

JAMES: I have some work to do in my room.

MICHAEL: Is this philosophical banter too much for you?

JAMES: Have a good trip back to London.

MICHAEL: James, don't be such an ass. I heard you were a man's man. Or are you just another pretty face come to steal away all of our women?

JAMES: Please say goodbye to Annie for me.

JAMES walks away.

MICHAEL: Oh, I'm heading off to London all alone. No wife on this trip. (*JAMES stops. Beat.*) She's decided to stay. Wants to see Parc Guell. I don't know. Perhaps she has a man to show her around. A pretty boy with a pretty face. Some Spanish gigolo looking for a lay.

JAMES: Annie isn't with any gigolo, Spanish or otherwise.

MICHAEL: I know. So, tell me, who is she with?

JAMES: She's with you.

MICHAEL: You're a terrible liar, James. No, she is with someone. A man isn't always blind. Sure, he wants to forget things now and then, look the other way. But he can't. Not always.

JAMES: Has she told you this?

MICHAEL: I've seen it in her eyes.

JAMES: That's not really proof, is it?

MICHAEL: You would seem to think so, wouldn't you? If you took a picture of her, you might be able to get to the reality.

JAMES: This really isn't any of my business.

MICHAEL: I've tried to find out who it is. It's fairly recent. I had thought it was you, of course.

JAMES: Me?

MICHAEL: You with your chiseled face, perfect haircut and Calvin Klein shirts. You with your phallic lens protruding from your cameras, your sensitive artistic soul or whatever persona you cultivate with the fairer sex. You. But maybe I'm wrong. If it were you, I'd suspect you'd live up to your reputation as a man and be bold enough to confess. Wouldn't you? (*Beat.*) Then again, I could be wrong. Why so silent?

JAMES: You're the man with the words. I just do pictures.

MICHAEL: I didn't tell you the most awful part about sex with Annie. And by awful, I mean painfully good and deliciously bad at the same time. Although I love it when she goes down on me--performs fellatio, that is--

JAMES: Jesus, Michael, for God's sake--

MICHAEL: No, this is important, Jimmy--see, I get so excited that I want to skip that bit entirely and just get inside of her. Do you find that? I mean, with women--not with my Annie, of course. It's not because she's bad at it, either. Not at all. She's quite skilled in that department. It's just that I find that even though her mouth feels so comfortable wrapped around me, that it feels even more secure to be inside of her. It feels more like home. Of course, it is home. For me. (*Looks at watch.*) Ah. Time to catch a flight. So I'll see you in New York? We should set up a meeting next week. Talk about your doing some more work for us. Oh, if you see Annie, can you give this to her? Just a little love note.

HE gives JAMES a letter.

JAMES: I'll give it to the hotel desk. They can send it up to the room.

MICHAEL: I want you to deliver it personally. Take care, James, old boy.

EXIT MICHAEL. JAMES waits for him to leave, then opens the letter and reads. HE crumples it up. ENTER ANNIE.

ANNIE: Where's Michael? He was waiting for me to say goodbye.

JAMES: He left this note for you.

JAMES hands her the note.

ANNIE: It's open.

JAMES: Yes.

ANNIE: Why did--?

JAMES: Read it.

ANNIE: (*Reading.*) "I knew you'd open this before giving it to Annie. Send her my love, Michael."

JAMES: (*Gives her the letter.*) Why aren't you going with him?

ANNIE: I changed my mind.

JAMES: We discussed this last night.

ANNIE: He's just trying to rattle your cage.

JAMES: It's working.

ANNIE: What's wrong?

JAMES: Everything. Do you love me?

ANNIE: I'm trying to find out.

JAMES: You may never know.

ANNIE: Are you going to leave me this time? James?

EXIT JAMES as LIGHTS CHANGE.

SCENE NINE: LUCIDA

ANNIE and MICHAEL in the country house. JAMES behind them. MICHAEL is standing by the doorway, holding the polaroids from the earlier scene.

MICHAEL: James. Don't you remember James?

ANNIE: The man at the hospital. At my bedside.

ENTER JAMES.

JAMES: Annie? The taxi is waiting. Vamanos!

MICHAEL: I was at your bedside. Not him!

ANNIE: I saw him.

MICHAEL: You saw a ghost.

ANNIE: What do you mean?

EXIT JAMES as ANNIE watches him leave.

MICHAEL: You saw a memory of him. He's dead. Both of you were in the taxi when the bus smashed into the left side. The car rolled and his body was flung out the open window, his neck crushing on impact.

ANNIE: Oh my god.

MICHAEL: I'm sorry.

ANNIE: Why...why didn't you tell me this...?

MICHAEL: The doctors advised me to wait until you remembered on your own.

ANNIE: What was he doing in the car with me?

MICHAEL: Maybe he was showing you around the town.

ANNIE: And where were you?

MICHAEL: London.

ANNIE: These are his pictures, aren't they?

MICHAEL: It seems like the logical conclusion.

ANNIE: Why would I do that? I'm a loyal person.

MICHAEL: Do you love me?

ANNIE: I need to remember how to love you. The doctors told us to come here to the country and try--

MICHAEL: What do they know? They don't know what our life was like before the accident.

ANNIE: So tell me...what was our life like?

MICHAEL: I don't remember.

ANNIE: Look at me. Yes, you do.

MICHAEL: How does that feel? Huh? When you want an answer and can't get it?

ANNIE: Michael, please.

MICHAEL: I choose not to remember. Call it selective amnesia, if you need a medical definition. There are some things I choose to remember and some things I choose to forget.

ANNIE: That's not fair. I haven't chosen to be like this!

MICHAEL: Are you sure?

ANNIE: What happened?

MICHAEL: That's my mystery, Annie. Yours is your whole life. Mine is my whole life with you. I constantly ask myself what happened. What could I have done to keep you in love with me? Then I started to wonder if you ever were in love with me.

ANNIE: You're my husband. I need you.

MICHAEL: That's not the same as love. You need me to help you remember where we parked the car when we go to the mall. You need me to help you remember what our address is, our telephone number, and who your family is. It's different. (*Beat.*) Do you remember when I proposed to you?

ANNIE: You know I don't.

MICHAEL: It was at that lake out there. A special spot. I want to tell you all about it, describe it in detail, but it's all fuzzy.

ANNIE: Did you choose to forget it?

MICHAEL: No. I remember the moment, the blundering conversation about marriage, me saying something like, "well, it might as well be as if we're married, right?" And you said it wasn't such a horrible idea, so I got on my knees, grabbed your hand and proposed. I used a key-chain for a ring, slid it on your thin, shaking finger. At that moment the joke became a reality. Don't you think it's important to have that place memorialized in our brains? And yet, I can't find it. All the edges of the water, all the trees and branches and stones on the ground look exactly the same. It's not like these photographs here on the floor, all these people and all these places that you've been to, these formative events that you have a chance at

remembering because you at least have some sort of visual aid. I'm talking about an ephemeral experience we had that wasn't captured in a photograph.

ANNIE: I don't understand what you're asking of me.

MICHAEL: Come with me to the lake.

ANNIE: Why?

MICHAEL: Maybe you can remember the feeling we had at that moment, the feeling that our lives would change forever by an off-handed remark and gesture that I made one summer day three years ago. Maybe a feeling could find that spot. Maybe that feeling could lead to other feelings which could lead to other memories.

ANNIE: I can't remember my own childhood and you want me to distinguish a spot on the ground?

MICHAEL: All I'm asking is for you to take a walk with me around the lake.

ANNIE: I can't even remember the way there.

MICHAEL: I'll show you.

ANNIE: I won't remember my way back.

MICHAEL: We'll find it together.

ANNIE: And if we don't?

MICHAEL: Take my hand.

ANNIE: What if we don't?

MICHAEL: Take it. Please.

SHE takes his hand. THEY EXIT. LIGHTS change.

SCENE TEN: FLASHPOINT

Red light and shadows, then the image of a lake upside down projected onto the walls and floor. ANNIE steps into the image, looks around.

ANNIE: Michael? Where did you go? I lost the trail.

SHE walks around, MICHAEL ENTERS behind her, kneels with a key ring, holds it out. ANNIE turns, sees him.

ANNIE: Oh my god! You scared me.

MICHAEL: Will you marry me?

ANNIE: Is that how you did it?

MICHAEL: Come on, I'm serious now. Let's get married.

ANNIE: Is that what you said? Is that the spot?

ENTER JAMES behind her.

JAMES: I love you, Annie.

ANNIE: James?

JAMES: I love you.

MICHAEL: Marry me.

ANNIE: What are you doing here? This is our lake.

MICHAEL: What's wrong, Annie?

JAMES: Let's go to the hotel.

ANNIE: I'm confused.

MICHAEL: We should go back to the house.

ANNIE: *(To James.)* You're not here!

MICHAEL: What are you talking about?

ANNIE: I don't know what's real and what isn't!

MICHAEL: I'm real.

JAMES: Touch me. I'm real.

JAMES holds out his hand. ANNIE touches it.

MICHAEL: Annie?

ANNIE takes JAMES hand and they EXIT.

MICHAEL: Annie? I'm right here. I'm real.

ENTER RACHEL.

MICHAEL: Why is she acting like this?

RACHEL: I warned you.

MICHAEL: We transferred her here because we thought you could help her.

RACHEL: Her mind is leading the way on this journey.

MICHAEL: It's not just her life that has been erased. It's mine, too. There are moments we shared--birthdays, anniversaries, vacations--years of our life together, completely vanished. What good are all these photos for us? This is like looking at someone else's album, not ours.

RACHEL: You both need rest. May I suggest you retire to the country? Somewhere quiet and unobtrusive. A special place that may jog her memory.

MICHAEL: If that doesn't work I don't know what I'm going to do. I can't live like this.

RACHEL: You need to be strong. For her sake.

MICHAEL: Who will be strong for mine?

LIGHTS CHANGE.

SCENE ELEVEN: FOCUS

ANNIE in bed and RACHEL sitting in the chair. MICHAEL and JAMES stand by the wall in the back. SOUND of music--Tom Waits song "Please Call Me Baby"

RACHEL: Just try to remember as many as you can. Ready?

ANNIE: Don't you hear that music?

RACHEL: No.

ANNIE: There's no radio playing down the hall?

RACHEL: I don't hear anything.

ANNIE: I hear it clearly. (*Sings.*) "Please call me baby, wherever you are..."

RACHEL: It's in your head.

ANNIE: It doesn't feel like it. Oh, who sings that song? I can't remember his name. Tim somebody.

RACHEL: We'll find out for you, okay?

ANNIE: God, I just can't concentrate.

RACHEL: Are you ready to play the game?

ANNIE: Sure, but its hard to concentrate with that song going.

RACHEL: Just try, okay? Here we go: Drum. Curtain. Bell. Coffee. School. Parent. Moon. Garden. Color. Farmer.

ANNIE: Farmer. Curtain. Coffee. Moon. Drum. Farmer.

RACHEL: You said that one.

ANNIE: Oh. Sorry. Okay. Parent. Coffee.

RACHEL: You said that one as well.

ANNIE: I'm forgetting them.

RACHEL: That's enough for now.

RACHEL makes a note on her clipboard.

ANNIE: I can get it.

RACHEL: Let's try another game, okay? *(Takes out a photograph.)* Take a look at this photo.

ANNIE: Am I supposed to know someone in the picture? I don't recognize any of them.

RACHEL: I just want you to look at it for a minute and try to remember everything you see, okay?

ANNIE: Like what?

RACHEL: The clothes, the people, the objects, that sort of thing.

ANNIE: *(Pointing.)* Why are those men standing back there?

RACHEL: *(Looks behind her then at Annie.)* What men?

ANNIE: Right there. One taller than the other.

RACHEL: There's no one there.

ANNIE: Are you sure?

RACHEL: Yes.

ANNIE: Where's my husband? I bet he could tell me the name of that song.

RACHEL: Take a look at the photo. What do you see?

ANNIE: I'm looking.

RACHEL puts the photo away.

RACHEL: Now, tell me what you remember. What was in the photo? *(Beat.)* Annie? What was in the photo?

LIGHTS FLASH.

INTERLUDE --BARCELONA

Upside-down image of the Sagrada Familia projected on the walls. SOUND of flamenco clapping which turns into flamenco guitar MUSIC. JAMES at the doorway and ANNIE in bed. There is bright light, the sunlight, beaming in the room, making the colors brighter.

JAMES: Annie! The taxi is waiting! Vamonos! Parc Guell is calling our name, el nombre, that is.

ANNIE: (*Excited.*): Oh! You're James!

JAMES: You remembered!

ANNIE: And I'm in Barcelona!

JAMES: That's excellent! I'm very proud of you.

ANNIE: But I'm here with my husband.

JAMES: No.

ANNIE: What?

JAMES: He left.

ANNIE: Where? When?

JAMES: For London. Yesterday morning.

ANNIE: That's right! So I go off with you.

JAMES: Isn't that delicious?

ANNIE: And we get in the taxi.

JAMES: Yes.

ANNIE: And we tell the driver where we want to go.

JAMES: In my broken Spanish.

ANNIE: And he drives away.

JAMES: Yes. I mean, si.

ANNIE: Past the Cortes Engles.

JAMES: Where I bought you shoes the day before.

ANNIE: You bought me shoes?

JAMES: Si, senora.

ANNIE: That's a little weird, I think, but ...okay.

JAMES: They were exquisite. Italian. (*In Italian accent.*) I bought myself a beautiful blue shirt.

ANNIE: And we take a left--

JAMES: Yes!

ANNIE: And a right.

JAMES: Yes!

ANNIE: And another left.

JAMES: Yes!

ANNIE: Up the hill.

JAMES: You've almost got it.

ANNIE: And then--

JAMES: Almost.

ANNIE: Then.

JAMES: Here it comes!

ANNIE: A jolt of lightning hits the taxi!

LIGHTNING flash erupts and then the LIGHTS start fading.

JAMES: Not quite lightning!

ANNIE: A thunderbolt erupts on the left side!

JAMES: Actually, it's a bus!

SOUND of thunder which transforms into the squeal of brakes.

ANNIE: I hold my breathe. My head explodes. Glass shatters. Metal screams. Everything lives in slow motion. The car rolls over and over. I tumble and tumble and tumble.

JAMES: In circles and circles.

ANNIE: And there is darkness.

JAMES: Yes.

ANNIE: Darkness for a short time.

JAMES: Actually, you are out of consciousness for a month.

ANNIE: Darkness for a long time.

JAMES: For me there is darkness forever.

ANNIE: I don't want be in this darkness.

JAMES: It's too late. I'm sorry.

ANNIE: Where are you?

JAMES: Over here.

ANNIE: Where?

JAMES: Annie.

ANNIE: James? (*Beat.*) James? (*Beat.*) Where am I?

Slowly throughout this scene the LIGHTS and the image on the projection have been fading until they are finally completely OUT.

SCENE TWELVE: EXPOSURE

MICHAEL sits on the edge of the bed in semi-lit darkness, staring at a photograph. There is a box of photographs beside him from an earlier scene. ENTER ANNIE. SHE is happily humming the Vivaldi tune again, tosses her sweater on the bed.

MICHAEL: Where were you?

ANNIE: What?! Michael, you scared me.

MICHAEL: I've been waiting.

ANNIE: Why are you sitting here in the dark?

MICHAEL: It wasn't dark when I came in.

ANNIE: Turn on the light.

MICHAEL: I got used to the darkness. It made it easier not to see certain things.

ANNIE: What things?

MICHAEL: This picture in my hands, for starters.

SHE turns on the light.

ANNIE: Funny how I can still remember a simple act of flipping a switch. It's so unnecessary. There are far more things I'd care to remember.

MICHAEL: Where did you go?

ANNIE: What do you mean? We went to the lake. *(Beat.)* Didn't we?

MICHAEL: I went to the lake. You were right behind me.

ANNIE: Wasn't I?

MICHAEL: And then you weren't.

ANNIE: I think I got lost.

MICHAEL: Following me?

ANNIE: It doesn't take much. One wrong glance and I don't know where I am.

MICHAEL: You never know where you are.

ANNIE: I'm here now.

MICHAEL: No, you're not.

ANNIE: What's wrong?

MICHAEL: Do you know what this picture is of?

HE goes to her and shows it to her.

ANNIE: I don't appreciate that.

MICHAEL: What?

ANNIE: I haven't forgotten my own image. That doesn't change.

MICHAEL: Are you sure?

ANNIE: Why are you acting like this?

MICHAEL: Look closer.

ANNIE: At what?

MICHAEL: Look!

ANNIE: Don't yell at me, goddammit! What do you want me to say? It's me. Okay? Me. Younger. Happier. But me.

MICHAEL: No. Don't you see? It's you but at the same time it's not you.

ANNIE: What?

MICHAEL: A representation. An ephemeral moment in time captured in a tangible form, perhaps, yet it's really just colors and shapes on a piece of photographic paper. There is nothing real about it. It's a representation of the past, not you now. It's from before the accident. Before the loss of memory. Do you know that some doctors equate the loss of memory with a death?

ANNIE: Have you been drinking?

MICHAEL: I'm quite sober.

ANNIE: What are you upset about?

MICHAEL: Nothing. Do I seem upset?

ANNIE: You're starting to frighten me.

ENTER JAMES.

JAMES: Don't be frightened.

ANNIE: What?

MICHAEL: Why are you looking over there?

ANNIE: Where? I'm sorry, there's--

JAMES: Tell him it was nothing.

MICHAEL: There's no one there, do you understand?

ANNIE: It's nothing.

JAMES: There are such things as ghost images.

MICHAEL: No one.

JAMES: Sometimes they show up on the print.

ANNIE: I'm not looking over there. It was...

JAMES: Out of the blue.

ANNIE: It was a flash of light. Caught my eye.

MICHAEL: A flash of light.

ANNIE: Yes.

JAMES: A flash. That's good.

MICHAEL: This picture of you here--this representation--it isn't you then and it most certainly isn't you now. And you never will be you. And, therefore, because you will never be you then we can never be us. And if we can never be us I can never be me. So, in your loss of memory there is the loss of us. And the loss of me. Do you see?

JAMES: I think he's finally gone over the deep end. You know those writers.

ANNIE: Shut up.

MICHAEL: So what now? When we see it presented before us like this? What are we to do?

JAMES: What do you want to do, Annie? Not talk?

MICHAEL: What do you want me to do, Annie?

ANNIE: Be quiet.

JAMES: Pretend like I don't exist anymore?

MICHAEL: I no longer exist anymore in relation to you.

ANNIE: *(To James.)* Shut up! *(To Michael)* Shut up!

MICHAEL: If I could erase my memory the way you erased yours perhaps we might both be free.

ANNIE: Go away! Both of you, go away!

MICHAEL: But I'm trapped in my prison of memories. I can only erase the representations.

HE rips up the photos of her that were taken by James.

ANNIE: No!

JAMES: Hey!

ANNIE: What are you doing?

JAMES: Those are my babies!

MICHAEL: Maybe if I can erase the representation we can pretend like the whole thing never happened? How would that be? It won't be so difficult for you, I know.

JAMES: He's got no right to do that. That's my artwork!

MICHAEL: Let's not stop there. I had several photos to choose from.

Throughout the following dialogue he begins picking up photos off the floor or out of the photo box and rips them into little pieces.

ANNIE: Why are you doing this?

MICHAEL: I'm destroying it all, Annie. Let's not be tied down to anything tangible. Let's swim in disturbed pandemonium, bask in absurdity, embrace our own circles of confusion. It will be liberating, don't you think? Nothing to tie us to each other. Do that and we can run off with whoever we want, whenever we want. We can erase the past like it never happened.

ANNIE: Please, stop it!

JAMES: I won't be erased so easily.

ANNIE: Those are all I have.

MICHAEL: But they're not yours anymore. Don't you get it? The rewards have been spent, the memories are gone. They don't exist anymore. Let's celebrate our liberation day!

HE throws the ripped photos in the air like confetti. ANNIE starts crying, hugging the pieces and photos to her.

ANNIE: Why are you doing this!? Why?

MICHAEL: I'm not doing anything. I don't exist.

ANNIE: I don't remember you like this.

MICHAEL: This is how we were.

ANNIE: I don't believe it.

MICHAEL: We started out wonderful and ended up tragic. Who would want to remember that?

ANNIE: I don't want to see you like this. I don't want us to be like this.

MICHAEL: Don't worry. You'll wake up tomorrow and forget everything.

SHE slaps him.

ANNIE: Fuck you. *(She slaps him again.)* Fuck you. Fuck you. Fuck you.

HE throws the rest of the ripped photos down and moves away.

MICHAEL: I've ripped up all my pictures. It won't take you long to forget that I ever existed.

ANNIE: Michael, please. Stop this. I can't have you desert me.

MICHAEL: I was wrong. You don't need me. You never have.

ANNIE: Where are you going?

MICHAEL: To the lake.

EXIT MICHAEL. JAMES moves towards ANNIE.

ANNIE: Stay away from me.

JAMES: You wanted to remember the truth.

ANNIE: No, I don't want to know the truth. I don't want to know any of it.

JAMES: Come here.

JAMES picks her up off the floor and puts her to bed. LIGHTS flash.

SCENE THIRTEEN: CIRCLES OF CONFUSION (AGAIN AND AGAIN AND AGAIN)

Shadows and darkness as in Scene 1 before, but something is slightly different, almost as if more in focus. We can barely make out ANNIE in the bed. RACHEL sits on her bed next to her.

RACHEL: Annie? *(Pause.)* Annie? *(Pause.)* Annie?

ANNIE sits up, slowly, unsure of herself and her surroundings. LIGHTS gradually brighten and the shadows disappear to reveal only RACHEL and ANNIE in the room.

RACHEL: Slowly.

ANNIE: Where am I?

RACHEL: There's been an accident.

ANNIE: Who are you?

RACHEL: My name is Rachel. I'm a neuropsychologist. Do you remember me?

ANNIE: Where are the two men?

RACHEL: What two men?

ANNIE: They were here. Standing there. Talking.

RACHEL: There's only me here.

ANNIE: I don't understand.

RACHEL: What's the first thing you remember?

ANNIE: Where's my husband?

RACHEL: Your husband is not here. There's been an accident.

ANNIE: I remember that, I think. James. A car crash.

RACHEL: That was a long time ago. Before.

ANNIE: Before what?

RACHEL: That car crash was six months ago. When you lost your memory.

ANNIE: Six months?

RACHEL: Yes. I'm talking about your husband, Michael.

ANNIE: My husband...

RACHEL: Do you remember Michael?

ANNIE: What does he look like? Do you have a picture?

RACHEL: There was a detective in here the other day who explained this all to you.

ANNIE: I don't remember. What did he say?

RACHEL: I wasn't prepared to tell you this again.

ANNIE: God, what is it?

RACHEL: It's okay. Please, be calm.

ANNIE: It's not okay. I don't know what's going on--I feel nauseous.

RACHEL: Listen to me--

ANNIE: It's all darkness behind my eyes.

RACHEL: I have something important to tell you.

ANNIE: Darkness.

ANNIE stares as RACHEL speaks to her.

RACHEL: Your husband drowned in the lake. You jumped in, but couldn't pull him out. The neighbors called 911 and when the paramedics arrived you had developed hypothermia from being in the cold water too long. They notified me...

ANNIE has started to hum the Vivaldi tune as RACHEL'S voice fades, although her mouth keeps moving, continuing to speak throughout the next section of dialogue. ENTER MICHAEL in his terry cloth robe, drying himself with a towel. ANNIE sees him. SOUND of Vivaldi music.

MICHAEL: Feeling better? (*Beat.*) What is that you were humming?

ANNIE: Hmn?

MICHAEL: Are you all right? (*No response.*) Annie?

ENTER JAMES.

JAMES: Annie? The taxi is waiting. Vamanos!

ANNIE: Darkness.

MUSIC grows louder as the projected image of the lake upside down is seen on the wall.

RACHEL (V.O.): (*Fading.*) Try to remember. Try to remember. Try to remember. Try to remember. Try to remember. Try to remember.

LIGHTS FADE OUT until only the projected image is seen and then BLACKOUT.

END PLAY.

APPENDIX B

The following is Scene Two before rehearsals began and the subsequent rewrite.

SCENE TWO: APERTURE

LIGHTS CHANGE to a hotel room. JAMES standing by the mirror, fixing his hair.

JAMES: Jill? Tricia?

ANNIE: What?...James, stop it. You know my name.

JAMES: What city is this? Barcelona? It must be Maria, then.

ANNIE: Answer the question.

JAMES: Don't you want your surprise?

ANNIE: I want the answer first.

JAMES: Why I got into photography?

ANNIE: Yes.

JAMES: All right. And then the surprise. Okay, so college was where it really got serious, where I learned different lenses, about f-stops, and developing and making the print. Do you know sometimes there are these things called ghost images?

ANNIE: Don't get on a tangent. What was your first picture?

JAMES: The first image...the one I remember being life-changing, at any rate, was of a dead bird.

ANNIE: Gross.

JAMES: Yeah, it blossomed into an obsession with death. Birds. Cats. Dogs. Whatever.

ANNIE: Why?

JAMES: I don't know. The bird image literally stopped me in my tracks when I was about fourteen. I had just started jogging everyday, with some delusion of grandeur that I would make the varsity football team. One morning I saw this little bird upside down on the sidewalk, his eyes wide, mouth open, legs up. Dead. This was something, I thought, something real, something bigger than myself. So I went home, grabbed my camera and took a picture. I still have it in a small frame on my desk at home. Not exactly on the same scale as a Capa photo on the cover of *Life*, sure, but the beginning of a fascination with faces of the dead. So I started

to search for dead animals--down by the highway, by the river, by the ditch behind the schoolyard, wherever I could. Finally, one day I decided that I had to see the ultimate--a dead human. I called a bunch of funeral homes. I said it was for a science project, but they all thought I was crazy, except for one. I remember walking down the hallway to where he kept his bodies, the smell of formaldehyde overpowering me and then seeing it--her--seeing her. An old woman of about seventy, stark naked, gray and withered, but peaceful and almost nonchalant. I got this great angle on her face--it was a bizarre shot, half her nose out of frame, very artsy, y'know. There was something so stirring about her look. I still have it, too, next to that first bird. In some ways they look quite similar. A few years later, I read Barthes who said that all photography is capturing images of Death.

ANNIE: Are you afraid of dying?

JAMES: Aren't you?

ANNIE: I'm more afraid of never truly being alive. Come to bed.

JAMES: Wait, I've got it. Your name's Annie, right?

ANNIE: Either come to bed now or give me my surprise.

JAMES: I can do both. You'll see the surprise when I turn off the lights.

ANNIE: Won't I be in the dark?

JAMES: Not completely. Close your eyes.

SHE does and HE turns the switch as LIGHTS OUT.

APPENDIX C

OBSCURA REHEARSAL LOG

Saturday, October 29th 2005—First Rehearsal

After a brief meeting with my Assistant Director, Dianne, the cast and production members assembled in the Shafer Street Playhouse, room 204, for the first rehearsal and read-thru. The cast members were Julie Phillips as Annie, Brandon Crowder as Michael, Drew Vidal as James, and Catherine Bryne as Rachel. The production crew present was Dianne Baka the A.D., Shaun McCracken the Dramaturg, Lisa Jackson, the vocal/acting coach, and Joe Carlson, the Stage Manager.

I felt it necessary to adjust to the presence of so many others on the production staff sitting beside me as we heard the play. I am so use to directing shows on my own, without a stage manager, dramaturg, or even lighting or sound person. One of my challenges as a director will be how best to utilize my staff and the talents of those that I have assembled. The cast themselves will be easier to deal with—they are only four and all are quite well suited for their roles. Brandon as the only undergraduate will be a bit more difficult to work with. I feel he was intimidated by those present in the room.

Rehearsal began with minor administrative duties like completing the necessary information for the contact sheet, discussing the rehearsal schedule and passing out a scene breakdown of the play. I have not taken the time to plan a detailed rehearsal schedule but plan to do that before the following rehearsal on Monday. Then I thanked my actors and

briefly discussed the process and the challenges and opportunities that await us in discovering this new play. I told them that the textual changes would be kept to a minimum. In fact, at my meeting with Dianne, I told her that her main function on this project would be to keep the viewpoint of a director who didn't write the play—that distancing that is so difficult for me to manage as I am still finding it difficult to separate the playwright from the play. I did warn that the monologue in Scene Three that James has will definitely change, but other than that I may just make some minor adjustments here and there for clarity. My goal is to work on this piece as a director and focus on staging the play as it is written. Although it is an experimental process for me working as a director on my own work, I am not going to take liberties with the story and characters. I will rely on the strength of the play and what the playwright has given me.

Many of my notes from this first meeting were related to basic questions regarding relationships and specifics that need to be set for us as actors and a director working on this text. Although I have a tendency as a writer to seek clarity and specifics, the beauty of this play is that it lives in this world of ambiguity—a world of memory and perceptions that alter and shift radically. My goal as a director is to create the specifics that enable the actors' security and comfort so that they may embody their roles, play their actions, and fully commit to the story of the play. There is plenty of playing room for us and I have to enjoy the liberty of knowing that I can make choices that are not already in the text—and that just because it's not in the text does not necessarily mean that it needs to be added

There are, of course, central questions for each character (like what do they want from each other and what do they do to get it?). Michael wants Annie to restore her

memories, but only certain memories. Brandon has to find ways of taking care of Annie, as well as exploring those survival tactics that caretakers have for victims of brain injuries. Annie wants to discover the truth about her past, make sense of her life and essentially define her identity. She has to be played like a private detective, looking for clues in everything and every one. Julie has captured that sense of wonder, hope, and expectation, but still needs to find different tactics of exploring her world. There is also the emotional roller-coaster ride that she is on and so there will be some intense and intimate work in that way. James in some ways also wants to take care of Annie—or perhaps just win her over from Michael. He really is in love with her, and he's not used to that, so also is uncomfortable with that emotion. It scares him. Drew has the charisma and energy for this character, but can also find different levels of intimacy and emotion with Annie. There is a physical closeness and intimacy that they share that must be different than the physical energy that is shared between Michael and Annie. Essentially, this play is a love triangle. That is what needs to be established early on—and really is the central idea from the first scene with Annie in bed and Michael and James on either side of her. It is also the first time we ask the audience, which one is the husband? Who does she belong to? And it really is a matter of belonging, as Annie defines her identity by the man that is with. The question is, do the men know that? Also, Michael defines his identity by his life with her, as well. They are all trapped by their own perceptions of each other.

The play is about memory, of course: remembering and forgetting and the prisons that our minds create for us. Michael is a man who wishes he could forget and Annie can't remember anything. If it were the other way around, if Michael had amnesia and Annie

didn't, there would be little conflict. Annie probably would've just left Michael and run off with James. Michael would've forgotten all about it.

Rachel, the neuro-psychologist, also has a caretaker role in this play. I start to wonder how much she would like to remember and forget—she certainly has to repeat things over and over with Annie. What is repetitive about her daily life? Catherine certainly understands the clinical nature of the doctor, but I will have challenges in balancing the personal aspects of this character with the stereotypical “doctor”.

Some more detailed notes include:

- Sc. 4 should have feeling of strangers, or play with levels of comfort from familiar to distancing
- Michael and Annie dressing themselves—how to stage?
- Note for Julie—playfulness as survival technique
- Brandon—find the hope and positive expectations—more levels
- Staging of Circles of Confusion Pt. II—disappearances, etc.
- Drew & Julie—comfort levels and flirtations, different energy
- Drew as Interlude characters—is he a perception of that city from Annie's point of view or is this a game that James would've played? Is he comfortable with these accents or just a representation?
- Can't rip up a Polaroid—how else to destroy it? (Not by fire.)
- How do the photos get in the houseplant? (This question could be answered by how long the affair lasts, which is never stated.)

- Julie—“Is this what it was like?”—is really “Is this my life?” –MDQ is search for identity, finding out who you are and why...

Some of the other notes were more basic and will be addressed in the next read-thru on Monday which will involved a lot of table work. I only have one day planned for table work as I would like to see this play on its feet as quickly as possible. I feel that the staging of this play should be smooth and the transitions should flow from one to the other. There should be little attention to details like changing of costumes or locals, except when necessary and indicated by the text—like Michael entering from the shower in robe.

The running time of the first read-thru was 1 hour and 6 minutes, which seems faster then the previous readings and I’m not sure why. Of course, there is a lot of time that might be added with the staging of the script, but I think that I won’t have to concentrate too much on cutting or worrying about time constraints. We have some time to enjoy this play. Ideally, I would like it to come in at around 1 hour 30 minutes. No more than that, at least, and I’m sure it will be less.

After the rehearsal, I had a brief production meeting with Joe, Lisa, and Shaun. I told them my idea of possibly staging the play in an alternate space, other then the Newdick theatre. The reason for this is that I would like the visual element of the camera obscura projections, and there are rooms that have projectors and screens where we could use video with the performance. The drawback of this would be that we would have to supply theatre lights to this space, as well as break it down and set up each day. In this talk, Joe informed me that he knows someone with his own projector and has equipment to project video—which means that we could use that for the Newdick Theatre. So I will

hear back about that soon and make a decision. I would like to experiment with video and possibly add some film clips that would represent scattered memories that Annie would have in her head. Of course, this makes the play slightly different, as well as provides more production work and possibly more rehearsal. However, it is in keeping with the spirit of the play. *Obscura* is a technically demanding work, but necessitates a visually oriented approach.

Monday October 31, 2005

We began tablework with Drew and Julie (playing Annie and James) and explored different questions regarding how they met, where, how long they have been having this affair, and further defining their relationship together. A lot of the details need to be finalized, those things that are not givens in the text.

I was conscious of my wording in rehearsal. I started to refer to the “playwright” when talking about the script and the textual elements. Separating myself as director from the playwright seemed to lighten the tone, almost as if the playwright had left the room. My approach as a director was simply to ask questions about the play, questions that a playwright might know, but as a director I can only go on what words have been given to me and the rest I have to allow freedom for myself and the actors to create. I hope to further that idea. Julie had commented on my word usage, saying “I like that, talking about the playwright as if he isn’t here...”. I know that there is always that constant pressure on actors when the playwright is in the room—this idea that they have to get it “right” and that there is only one way to say the lines. I have already let go of most of my

own preconceptions of how and why I have written certain things, but am still working on it.

However, there were many moments in rehearsal where being the playwright helped me to answer questions or to discuss things with the actors that a director may not have known. I talked about a few different scenes in the context of where they took place in time and why, from the interludes to the different scenes of Annie just waking up. There were also medical issues that I could relate to the actors because a lot of the research had influenced my writing choices.

But there were also times when I would say, “so the writer has given us this and I think its because of this so we should do that...”. For instance, the scene between Rachel and Michael is filled with medical jargon and exposition and as a playwright I know that this is necessary information that needs to be conveyed not just to Michael, but to the audience, as well. As a director, though, I have two actors who have actions to play and I need to discover their own personal relationships with each other and how they are going after what they want. So the questions I began asking were guided towards that purpose.

All the actors are becoming more comfortable with the idea of me directing my own play and soon it won't be an issue anymore. Hopefully, through the course of our staging the text, we will forget that damn playwright for awhile and get to the heart of this play. There were lots of discoveries that we made concerning what these characters want and why; mostly that they are all defining their identity by seeing themselves in other people's eyes. This was happening for Annie and Michael and James even before the car accident that caused her amnesia. And this way of living is really what kills them.

We didn't get the chance to work all the scenes, but I did deal with the most major relationships—James and Annie, Annie and Michael, James and Michael, Annie and Rachel, Rachel and Michael. Some questions were planted and some choices made that will help the blocking. I didn't get to most of the meat in the major scenes between Annie and Michael, and trust that I will need more extensive time to work with just the two of them. I also want to bring Lisa in to do some physical work with them all—gestures of embracing as well as a accept/reject exercise. The element of physical intimacy needs to be added slowly but surely.

Thursday November 3

Started blocking the first couple of scenes tonight, starting with scene three and then going back to scene one. I only had Cathering for the first hour which I realize was not enough time to block both scene three and one. I also didn't have Drew until 6:45 because of a prior conflict.

We read through the scenes first before putting them on its feet. There were a couple of questions regarding the text. At one point, Catherine stopped in the middle of the reading to argue for a more grammatically correct sentence that Rachel says. At the moment, I didn't even discuss it with her but quickly said, "Please keep reading until the end of the scene, please, and then we'll talk about it." The line was referring to Rachel's line about Annie, "She doesn't know who she is, let alone her own husband." Catherine went so far as to even suggest a rewriting version of the line. I told her to keep it as it is as the playwright wanted the word husband to be mentioned in just that way. We shouldn't

be so concerned about grammar at this point—that is the job of the playwright and possibly the dramaturg.

The blocking is going slower than I thought it would because of the fact that I only have two actors on stage, which I must admit I'm not used to. I don't mind it so much for a short play, of say ten to fifteen minutes, but for this piece which is much longer, I am trying to think of the different movements and visual pictures I can create. When there are three people on stage, there is less of a problem for me.

Some logistical things started to pop up tonight, especially in Scene Four when Michael and Annie begin dressing. Where are the clothes? We don't have a dresser on stage, so does Michael enter with them? Does Annie go offstage into the closet to get her dress before showing it to Michael and putting it on? What about the strawberries? Where do they end up? How many photos are we going to put on the floor? Too much and we have a safety hazard, but not enough and it won't be quite worthwhile. We are trying to solve some of these problems that the playwright has put down for us. I keep forgetting what it is I have put down as stage directions and in fact have been ignoring them completely, just because I can't even remember that they are there. I have Michael dressing much earlier than I say he does, but it seems truthful since what else would he be doing just as he enters from taking his shower? These are the details that we are starting to address as we stage the play.

Another concern of mine has been how to present the projected images. I may have a solution by creating a set made completely of white curtains that drape parts of the stage, leaving some of the black of the stage revealed. The projections would hit the stage, but

would not create a complete picture for the audience. Also, drapes and curtains are more evocative and more of the dream-like quality that I'm going for. Now it's a question of exactly how to achieve that design, since I don't have a scenic designer on this show.

The last scene we worked on in the evening was Scene Two between Annie and James. At this point, Dennis the playwright just couldn't keep his mouth shut and Dennis the director took a backseat. Not that I did any revising on the spot, but I felt there wasn't much I could do to that scene, knowing that it just isn't anywhere near what I need it to be. It seems contrived and false and James doesn't sound like James. So I have vowed to rework the monologue and possibly the entire scene.

Saturday November 5

Blocking continued for Scene Six, Nine, and Eight.

Tuesday, November 8

Worked with Catherine and Brandon tonight. Catherine seems to not be able to remember much of her blocking and doesn't take enough accurate notes, so spent much of the first part of rehearsal reworking the scene and confirming moments we have already blocked. Catherine has a bad habit as an actress of explaining things away or shying away from clear choices with the phrase, "I don't feel that my character would be like this..." I'm not sure how to get around this exactly, but keep asking specific questions on wants/needs/conflicts/actions in the scene. I spent some time talking about the language of the scene, how Rachel starts off with medical terminology and slowly but surely ends up

with the blunt statement of “Annie is dead.” I ask her why, what prompts each step—emphasizing the need for clarity to Michael.

Another thing that we worked on was the pace and energy at the top. “Brandon, how long have you been waiting here in the hospital? Are you tired of all this crap? Why do you keep asking when she can come home?” I told Brandon that the energy and frustration that he is getting from the “stench of death” speech should be where he starts the scene. They worked the scene again with that intensity and suddenly the scene started to take some life. I emphasized that they need to do this every time at every rehearsal.

Then we worked Scene 8 between Michael and James. Brandon is very good at taking notes and incorporating them into the scene and I can tell that his work with Lisa on the language and vocals is helping. There is still a lot of work to do. He needs to slow down his speeches and enjoy the words and the power that he has. I talked to Drew about the difficulty of the line “How do you know its shared?” which is a huge “fuck you” but also has to be a subtle curiosity about what Michael is saying. There are lots of layers and levels in this scene and I am aiming for simplicity. Less is more.

Saturday November 12

Worked Sc. 4 and Sc. 12, starting with Brandon and Julie, then adding Drew. We added some props such as the photos and cameras that James uses to take the pictures and Michael destroys in the end of Sc. 12.

Worked out the dressing of both Julie and Brandon—he dresses at the top going in and out of closet and Julie dresses in closet and comes out wearing dress he talked about.

Sc. 12 we did some overlapping of lines, but I don't think it will work all that well. The pacing is still off and they are having trouble with the props and holding the scripts.

Sunday, November 13

Worked in the theatre space (Newdick) and Lisa joined us for the first hour. We did some table-work on the rewritten Scene 2, though we had talked about many of the details before. I have cut the small bit of dialogue about Afghanistan and dead people and am considering whether or not I even want to keep the Mrs. Patrick monologue in there. Right now Drew hasn't done much work on it and has no idea what he's saying, so it is hard to tell if it will work at all. This is something that will have to wait for later.

This was an early morning rehearsal so energy was low. Mine as well as the actors. Doing table-work and asking them questions about their choices (or lack of them) gets very draining after awhile. It is also difficult in that these are my peers in the graduate program, and though I am director, I am also their classmate. Perhaps I need to just forget that and be harder on them? Perhaps I am feeling more timid and less confident because it is my own script, not someone else's?

Then we blocked the interludes, except for the Marrakech one, which I am completely clueless about. Barcelona interlude is blocked and should be a lot of fun once they get the pacing down.

Monday, November 14

Stumble-thru.

Pacing was slower than death. They need to get the scripts out of their hand and pick up their cues. Part of the confusion of one scene to the next was that we haven't worked all these scenes in awhile, so some were obviously better than others. Catherine forgot almost all her blocking. The energy at the top started out okay, but by the point we got midway through it the bottom fell out and everyone seemed to be "talking" their lines and not pursuing any goals.

Dave Watkins, who is working on the projections, was there to watch, as was Jessica who will be helping with the set and backdrop. Lisa was there, too, leading them in a quick warm-up and took copious notes for all the actors.

The one great thing about watching these rehearsals and being there every day, as a playwright, is that it allows me to make really great cuts for very minor details. For instance I've cut Rachel's line "she will be filled with anger and rage" to just "she will be filled with rage" and changing some of Brandon's lines to be more simple, as well. There is still a beauty in the poetry of the lines that I want to keep, but I also want it to be clear and not redundant, either.

However, as the playwright, the stumble-thru was quite painful to watch and listen to. In a sense they are exactly where they need to be, but it shows me how much work is needed and how little time we have to work on it. I keep reminding myself that it is a workshop production and the goal is in the development of the script. This run-through was helpful for them to get on their feet and see how demanding the play is going to be, how it moves and keeps moving and you have to focus and concentrate to stay with it—

there are very few easy scenes in this play. Most of them demand a higher level of energy.

I need to make sure they understand that.

Dianne has been taking some good notes on the rehearsals, too, and most of them match things I am already trying to address. I want her to help me out more and will split up the cast when I can so that she can rehearse scenes with Catherine and Brandon while I work with Julie and Drew and vice versa.

Tuesday, November 15

Due to a scheduling conflict that Brandon had we cancelled rehearsal and scheduled a make-up rehearsal on Thursday. Unfortunately, Drew cannot attend the rehearsal on Thursday, so I will have to work with only Brandon, Catherine, and Julie, but we have plenty to do.

Thursday November 17

Dianne led Julie and Brandon in a line rehearsal for Sc. 4 then got it on its feet. I got there at about 9ish, after the box office, and worked through Sc. 4 starting from Julie's line "You're right, I should get dressed.". Most of this was work with Brandon's monologue about the skinny-dipping in the lake and discussing the sexual relationship of Michael/Annie. I was glad that they were mostly offbook for this scene and remembered most of their blocking.

Then we moved on to Scene 11, which I could tell from the run-through needed some work. This, also, was helpful for Brandon to get his monologue about the proposal

by the lake and getting Annie to come with him. We clarified some of the actions and reiterated the blocking, changing a few things, but not much. One important aspect was that Michael should have the Polaroid photos at the beginning of this scene, which will link it to the other scene (Sc. 6).

Saturday November 19, 2005

No Dianne today, but had Joe instead. This was helpful as today was the first day to be offbook and I need another pair of eyes to give lines, when needed. We were in the actual theatre space so I wanted to utilize that as much as possible as their comfortability and ease of motion varies depending on what space we use.

I started rehearsals with the Annie/Rachel scene while the two men worked with Joe on lines for Sc. 8. Catherine has a tendency to forget her blocking (since she never writes it down) and so this scene looked particularly messy. But we went over the blocking and clarified a few things. We will have to add the two men standing in the back of the room and see how it goes with that.

Then I worked through the first half of the play, stopping and starting to find some things that needed change or work. We got through to Scene 6, which was where the lines were starting to get worse as far as how much was memorized. Most of the scenes went well and only a few really need some extensive work. Once they get offbook and get the script out of their hands, we will be able to get our hands dirty and play with it.

It was a bit painful for me today, hearing all the lines messed up, moved about, and whatnot. I must say, though, that I expected worse. It's just the playwright in me wanting

to hear the rhythms and music in my head. I don't necessarily have line readings that I want but I do have a tempo and rhythm. I know that we won't be able to address that issue until after the break, though, and then only with limited time.

November 27th

After almost a week off due to Thanksgiving, we come back into the space and do a run. It is the only thing that I have planned for the evening. I have added a few more props, but mostly, this is the rehearsal for the actors to brush up on the play and get used to the space. They are still getting closer to offbook and learning what the journey is of the play as a whole, not mixed up in a jumble of moments (which when they are similarly repeated moments makes it a bit more difficult for them.).

The run took about one hour forty minutes, with minimal stopping and starting. I called out the light and sound cues so that they could start getting used to the flow of the run of the show. In all, the main problem with the show is the "air" in between lines. No one seems to know or understand how to pick up their cues or why this would be a good thing. Lisa has given them the note and I have given them the note, and did again after this run. I compared it to music and right now we're playing it at half speed. These actors are trying to take moments and act between the lines—they shouldn't. It is like Pinter or Shepard—there are no pauses, just use the language and barrel through. Lots of acting moments aren't working because they are fighting against the text instead of using it. Some of this is because they are not as familiar with the text as they should be (Julie is one of the biggest culprits). Some of it is also because the scenes feel unrehearsed.

Unfortunately, they feel that way because we take two steps forward in rehearsal, then one step back in the next rehearsal. The actors don't write down their blocking or take notes on what we've accomplished so all is lost.

I have resigned myself to the fact that this is a workshop production. These are the best actors for the roles here at VCU for this time and place. I am using this experience as a way to hone and shape my play. In order for me to do this, I need to hear my play, as written, without pauses. So this next week I am going to concentrate on the text and the pacing and let Dianne, my assistant, handle the acting notes and clean up the blocking. Otherwise, I'm just going to get frustrated.

November 28

We worked the scenes that I had marked from the previous run of needing attention. Those were Scenes 5, 6, 7, 9, 11 and 13. We also did a quick run-through of the Barcelona interlude with the music. I brought in the CD player and the music cues to work the music with them so the actors could get an idea of how and when the music would play and interact with them in the scenes. This was particularly helpful for Sc. 5 (Circles of Confusion) and for the cue at the end of the play, as it played the Vivaldi tune that Annie will be humming. Also, I played "Please Call Me Baby" by Tom Waits during Scene 11, which helped Julie with her singing the tune of that song. We will have to work out the exact timing of that in the tech, but it will be rather nice.

Although I thought these scenes were problems, it seems that in this rehearsal they weren't so much. However, this was due to the fact that we worked on lines, then did a

speed-thru for each scene, before getting it on its feet and working on it. The pattern went like this: line-through once or twice (usually twice because they needed it), run-through with blocking, stop and start work-thru, then a final run-thru. For each scene, this took about thirty to forty minutes. Sometimes it took longer, depending on how off-book the actors were. I stressed the importance of going over lines on their own, so that we don't waste rehearsal time refreshing their memory.

Also, I think working on the scenes in small bits, instead of in the whole run, helps the actors focus on the scene. It seems that whenever we do a run, the actors are never sure what scene comes next—its almost as if they haven't looked at their script since last rehearsal, which I'm sure they haven't. This has led to my decision to do another run on Thursday, instead of any work-thrus like I was considering.

One gleam of hope is that they are finally getting the idea of cue pick-ups and that the pacing needs to be faster. My goal of taking out all their unnecessary pauses is paying off, but there is still a lot of work to do. They are fine when I get them to do a speed-thru, but they are still keeping these habitual pauses in when they play the scene. When I work-thru the scenes, I am going to pay particular attention to those moments when they act between the pauses. Tonight it got closer, but it should get better.

Tuesday, tomorrow, I will meet with Andy Waters, the lighting designer/operator and discuss the lighting cues with him. I wish that he might be able to see a run before the tech next week, but sadly, they keep him too overworked and he is running a show in Shafer right now.

Thursday December 1

Worked on Scene 9 with Brandon and Julie. They were much better with their lines, so I had them to a speed-thru to start picking up their cues. Dianne and Joe were not there this evening, so I had to remain on book for the actors. Shaun was there briefly, showed me the program and asked actors for bios, read a book during rehearsals, then left before the run. She is getting someone from MCV for the talkback on Saturday and we informed the actors about it.

After Scene 9 we just ran through Scene 4 with Brandon and Julie. It is starting to clean itself up and is running faster, which is great. We have gotten more photos from Jenny Hundley and now had too many for him to clean up during the scene, but I told him it is a fine activity that he can do throughout, even though it modifies the blocking slightly. Then Drew arrived and we worked on Scene 12, but most specifically the tearing up of the photos and the slap. I had an idea that I'd like to develop in regards to the photos—I think that Michael would've started destroying these photos even before Annie got there, so he could have the remains of the photos in a shoebox and toss out the remains all over the place. He could do this in addition to the photos he's already ripping up. I think it will be more brutal and more calculated, but definitely more effective.

We spent about twenty minutes trying to figure out the slap. While it is great to have Drew's expertise as a fight choreographer, we spent far too much time obsessing about how "real" the slap would look to the audience. I don't care about real. It's a stage slap and will never look like a real slap, regardless. Also, Julie still is playing up the "Fuck you" too much and putting too much volume and energy into it—it should be more cold

and venomous, not emotionally charged. Drew only fed into that misconception with how he is trying to stage the slap. I will have to go over this again on Saturday and be clear with all of them that it is not necessary how real the slap looks and that I don't want a melodramatic and loud "fuck you". It is the idea of the slap that I'm going for here—that will surprise the audience just as much as anything "real".

Then we did a run-through of the whole play, which was much better. The pacing can still be faster, but they are starting to get it and not feeling so confused about which scene comes next (except for Julie who constantly looks at where other people are going to figure out where she should be). The time came to one hour and twenty two minutes, which is about right. I think we can shave another five to ten minutes off in the pacing of it, but we are now in the ballpark of a show—any longer and I would've considered an intermission after scene 7.

However, we had to stop to stop the run right before scene 7 because Catherine's phone went off at the end of Scene 6. She went over to it, saying "sorry", and instead of turning it off and getting right back into the play, she answered and walked out the door. At first, I was furious. The other three actors were standing in the back of the rehearsal room, a little stunned, waiting because Catherine is in the next scene. I thought, it must be an emergency or something urgent. When she returned to the room, I asked her who that was and if everything was okay. She said it was. I said good, let's continue, and we finished the run. At notes, I made clear my anger and told her how disrespectful it is to her other actors, to me, to herself, and to this play to stop the run and answer the phone. I told her I've never seen anything like that in rehearsal and it should never happen again. What

I didn't tell her was that I was so mad that I would gladly replace her and have an actress with book in hand then excuse that again. Her phone has gone off more than once before in rehearsals, which I think is already disrespectful.

The notes were general. I was looking at the book most of the night and didn't pay much attention to blocking. I told them to look at their scripts and get their lines down cold so we can do some real work on Saturday and Sunday in the space before tech. We will do a run both days, as this is starting to help them get and keep momentum. I reminded them that they are doing wonderful work and need to trust that. Play the text and pick up the cues.

Sunday December 4

The cast and I went upstairs to 201 to do a speed-thru. I had brought a buzzer from the game "Taboo" and every time I heard a pause between lines or any space anywhere, I buzzed. I knew which problem areas to look for. The cast is much better on lines and the scenes move more quickly, but there were still some lags in momentum. I paced the room listening to the actors who were seated in a circle of chairs. I didn't have to buzz that much, just every now and then to remind them of pacing. Afterwards I told them, "this isn't just about lines or about pacing, but about a sense of urgency, a need to express something, a need to get something—this has to be activated in your body, as actors and as your characters". But what was really helpful for me was that I could close my eyes and hear the play for the first time since the first read-thru, without worrying about the blocking or the set. We could've done this speed-thru in the back of the theatre or on the

stage, but I didn't want anything to remind them about the technical elements we would be adding.

Joe and I had gone to Diversity Thrift that morning to get a bed, mattress, box spring and two chairs that they are donated for the duration of the run. The bed is a full size bed with headboard and footboard, wooden and sturdy. The chairs have a black steel back and wooden seats. Jessica had started hanging the sheets up on the walls and the set is starting to look really great. When I watched the actors moving around on it, suddenly there were added dimensions to the movements and more going on on the stage.

The run today had some slight malfunctions—mostly dealing with the added costumes. The pacing in most of the scenes was great, so not much to worry about there, though there are some scenes that feel a little slow. No one has to call for line, and except for Brandon who missed his entrance halfway through the show, everything went pretty well. Mostly the actors were getting used to the theatre space and to the new bed and chairs, but adjusting quite nicely.

Monday December 5, 2005

Due to inclement weather, there was no rehearsal tonight. It's a shame because we really need one more run before adding tech. I told the actors to brush up on their lines, but not having Julie and Drew tomorrow has now become more of a problem. I'm not worried about Andy and Dave being added in to the mix as far as tech cues, but I am worried about the actors not getting a solid run in tonight and going two days without any rehearsal. This cast has a tendency to forget things we've rehearsed and not implement

notes if there is too much of a break between rehearsals. Hopefully by Thursday night, we can fix some things.

Tuesday December 6

Cue to Cue Rehearsal. Only the SM (Joe) and tech crew were called this evening. Dave Watkins was doing the projections and Andy Waters were doing the lights. Although I had met with both of them and we have exchanged emails several times over what and where the cues were, this is the first dry tech and was important for us to see how the images of the projections could interact with the lights and see what we could do in Newdick theater with the equipment that we have in there.

The greatest technical problem we encountered was one we had anticipated—how do we get the projections to show on the screen but still have enough light for the audience to see the actors' faces? Jessica had hung the sheets per my initial design, which looked beautiful as it accented the large bed and chairs that we had on stage. It evoked a bedroom and hospital and became a practical screen, as well, though not ideal—sheets are not the best surface for projections. Although I wasn't too concerned about how well-lit the actors were, especially for the interludes where most of the projections appear, I did want them to be seen somewhat. The limitations of Newdick were extreme: due to the Fesnells in there, we had the option of hardly any light or too much light, without any way of focusing lights specifically or using any kind of specials. I told Andy my ideal design would be to have darkness everywhere for the projections of the upside-down cities to show up and lights on just the area around the actors faces. But this was not possible. For the Venice scene, both

Drew and Julie are in the center, around the bed, and the only way to light that area is to use three lights that illuminate DS and US, which causes the projection to bleed out. I had Andy dim these lights as much as possible to let us see the projection, which caused Drew's face to disappear and Julie's to be mostly shadows, but I was okay with that—this is, after all, a blurry memory.

The other scenes were not so difficult. Paris takes place DSL on the two chairs and this area was easy to isolate and still have darkness US for the projection of the Eiffel tower to show up. Unfortunately, we had to change the image of the Eiffel tower as the tower only showed up in the dark hole of the stage and it was unclear where we were supposed to be. The same for London, which had the image of the London Bridge which was too fragmented from the gaps in the sheets to figure it out. We changed that image to a skyline view from the Thames. This blocking changed so that the actors moved to DSL to play in the more isolated light.

Other than that, we worked out the cues without the actors, using Dianne, the AD to be a warm body on stage and for me to see where the stage had light. We worked the music cues as well and the rehearsal lasted about two hours.

The two things I am unsure about is the voiceovers, which haven't been recorded yet, and the slow deliberate cues going from pre-show into the show. I had a Tom Waits song playing "You're Innocent When You Dream" for about a minute as the house lights and stage lights slowly dim (taking about a minute and a half total). This may be too much, but we'll see it tomorrow with the actors.

December 7th

The run-through tonight was after a long day of school, starting at 9:30, just after finishing the last class of Theatre History 509. Although most of my crew are undergrads and aren't in the class so could be there early to set up, my graduate actors like Julie, Catherine, and myself, had to sit through History and then rush over the theatre for a run. Drew was sitting in the auditions for the mainstage productions next Spring (Three Sisters and Funny Thing). Brandon was auditioning but would still be able to be there by 9:00 for the run. This is not ideal, especially since we haven't had a run since Sunday afternoon. Although the actors were in good shape on Sunday, now we are adding in the technical element, which is going to be rough. Necessary, but rough. Also, I wanted to make a change to Scene 12, where Brandon rips up the photos and we have never had any time to work out the adjustment. The change is that now, instead of just ripping up photos and throwing them around the stage, he has a pre-set box of ripped photos (Michael has been sitting there all night and has already ripped them all up) and he dips his hands into this box to throw the confetti-like photos everywhere. Julie is aware of this change, but we have never worked it so have to play with it within the run tonight.

So we came in, I gave them a short speech about finding your light, playing the scenes just as we have done and let Andy and Dave and Joe figure out how to catch up. We did a fight call, and then did the run. We had two guests that night to watch, Paul Wurth and Tonia Comapenall, both fellow graduate students. Paul was leaving to go out of town early and wouldn't be able to see the run.

We finished just before 11:00 pm and I decided to let them go and give notes tomorrow before the run. Lisa and Dianne both had some comments about the costumes and the costume changes. Brandon had lots of trouble getting back into to the robe for Scene 5 and again for the last scene. This was the first time he actually had his full costume, though, his shirt and pants. Julie was trying to figure out how to change out of her pajamas and into her jeans and sweater then back into the pajamas, but I think the best way is to keep her dressed in pants and add the sweater here and there. This came after some suggestions from Lisa about it. I haven't paid much attention to this aspect of the production and the logistics of how and when actors change costumes. Part of this is that I figure actors can do that themselves and solve their own problems (alas, I don't have those kinds of pro-active actors on this production) but also in my planning I did not appropriate a costumer. This was a mistake, but a good lesson.

December 8th

Final Dress. I began at 6:00 pm and gave notes to the actors and the crew. Most of them were technical notes and blocking notes, but a few acting notes. Then I had planned a cue-to-cue with actors. This was due in part to a conversation earlier in the day with Andy, who stressed how much he needed to review how the actors would be performing the lines, so that he, Dave, and Joe could all be on the same page with the actors. I asked him how much time he needed and he said an hour would do it. This was a great idea, especially since my technical notes could all be fixed with this hour of time. So we worked through the cues and simplified some and tightened up others. I told my actors,

again, to find their light, to adjust some of the blocking so that they could be seen, but also adjusted the lighting levels so that we could use more of the space. Although I'd love to do more with levels and different lights for the different locations, I can't do too much in the Newdick space with that equipment. We also worked out the cues for the beginning and the end, adding the voice-overs which were recorded by Catherine's husband.

At about that time, it was a quarter to 8 and had the actors get into costume and check props, then we did fight call. We were planning the curtain at 8:30 and awaited for Dr. Kelli Williams-Jones, a neurologist from MCV, who agreed to participate in a talkback on Saturday evening, but wanted to see the show once before then to prepare for it. Becca Bernard, the House Manager, was also there that evening to watch the show.

Jessica had fixed the way the sheets were hung up so that more of the area in the center of the flats, behind and above the bed, were covered with white. The projection images could then be seen just a little bit better, although still had some fragmented gaps. One image, especially, was a night picture of the Eiffel tower which is all lit up, and the tower's base is seen at the top of the stage, with the top of the tower running down the white sheets of the bed. There have been many comments on how nice the set looks from people who have been in the space and not even seen the show. I must say that the bed and chairs donated from Diversity Thrift are perfect and the way that Jessica put up the sheets is quite beautiful and evocative. The simplicity of having a bed center-stage really works on many levels for the show and does not seem overstated, which I am pleased about.

The run was in good shape and I was happy that the cue-to-cue work had tightened up a lot of transitions. I decided to cut the Tom Waits song at the top and the very slow

fade into the play. So now it just starts with blackout and the Vivaldi music. The actors seemed fresh and found some nice moments within the scenes. They were quite clear, even when they could not be seen by the lights. I purposefully put more moments of speaking in darkness to accent the ideas of Annie waking up and the audience seeing things from her point of view. One moment where this works nicely is the camera obscura scene where Annie and James are in the hotel room in Barcelona. The only light comes from the projection of the skyline of Barcelona. We can see the colors of the picture and see Drew and Julie only slightly. This lighting helped with the playfulness of the scene, but also added intimacy to the kiss and the moment when James says “I love you” which was not there before. It also added a more stark contrast when James turns on the light and Annie finds herself in the hospital with Rachel.

After the run, we gave notes. I let Lisa address the cast first so she could give combined acting and vocal notes. Some of the notes addressed the same issues that I had. The cast, though good, still seemed to lack any kind of performative energy. My note was that they had to commit to their choices 100%. They need a sense of urgency and to pick up their cues. Play their objectives. Other things were technical things, like not upstaging themselves. They all have this bad habit of constantly looking at their fellow actor and are not able to cheat out a little to include the audience.

One key note that Lisa gave, which was helpful to me since it reiterated my notes that I have been trying to give them, is the fight in Scene 12. For some reason they can’t quite find the music of it, where the build is. Julie seems to think that the “fuck you”s are all loud and screaming—but I’ve tried to tell her over and over again, the screaming,

wailing comes from the ripped up pictures, and the “fuck you” is a cold deliberate one, the next level after screaming. Part of this is that Drew choreographed the slap to be this outburst, despite my notes and telling them what I want. He was more concerned about realism, believability and the angles of the slap. I don’t care if it looks “real”. I’m after the idea of the slap. It’s a stage slap. If the actors are doing their job and playing the truth of the moment, the audience will believe it.

I also made a few text revisions to fit the lines with some of the things we are doing, things like changing “skirt” to “dress” and the line about the dress “hanging around your hips”. I also cut one line of Julie’s lines during the Barcelona interlude so that she does not say “I scream” because it reminded me of the childish phrase “I scream for ice cream”. Hopefully, she will be able to take that adjustment, but I told her it was okay if she didn’t.

I also let them know about the KCACTF respondent who would be watching the show tomorrow night. I told them it was not an evaluation of their performances or the production but something for the development of the script. They are welcome to stay or to go.

All in all, as I watched the run tonight I realized that they are in good shape and though there are some things I’d like to work over, it’s the best that it can be with the cast that I have. It’s where it needs to be for the purpose of this developmental workshop.

December 9th

The call for the actors today was at 6 pm. I was there at 5:30 with Lisa who coached Brandon on the Paris Interlude as this was his weakest bit of acting, mainly because we hadn't worked on it at all. While she worked on that, I folded some programs and put up the collage of scattered photos on the lobby area of the theater.

At 6 o'clock, when all the actors had arrived, we went upstairs to 201 and did a speed-thru. Although they started sitting down, I told them that they could move around a bit if they want, especially since the room was so cold and they might want to keep warm that way. This time I didn't have my buzzer and I had wished I did. Instead of concentrating on speed and cue pick-ups, the speed-thru dissolved into a warm-up for the actors. As they got up and moved around, all they were doing was trying to get their lines and warm up their voices. At one point, I told them to all sit down and re-focus just on speeding through the lines, no acting, no pauses, just get through it. I could tell by looking at my watch that they were taking way too much time with it. So the speed-thru was about ten minutes longer than the last time they did one on Sunday. Afterwards, I told them their acting choices were there, they know their lines, and that they just need to trust all the hard work they've done, trust each other, and trust the text. I gave one note about changing the herb chicken line to chicken soup because we have been using a bowl and spoon. I'm hoping that after this performance they will realize that the work they've done will be appreciated by the audience, either in laughter or applause by the end of the show.

We then staged the curtain call briefly, then did fight call. Fight call seemed to take forever (as it always does since Drew seems to try to re-stage the fight every time we do

it). Finally, at about ten after seven, I told them to leave the stage so we could open the house and let those audience members freezing in the hall into the less cold theater.

The show went well and it was interesting to see where the audience responded. There were about twenty people in the house, maybe twenty-five, including Roger Hall, the KCACTF respondent who drove in from JMU. The audience laughed a lot during the Interludes, which I hadn't expected, especially during Paris. They also laughed about the "favorite dress/skirt" moment, which came after Julie's emotional explosion, but this one I had anticipated. There were even a couple of "oohs" and "aahs" on some lines, most memorably Michael's "I'd remember" when talking about whether or not they'd been to Barbados.

I was unsure of audience reactions to the play, mainly because I have written a lot of comedies these past few years and this is the most dark and dramatic text I have ever written. My last play, *Burning Botticelli*, had some darkness in it, but it also had a lot of clever lines and jokes written in. My weakness as a writer has always been to go for the joke first, sometimes to hide behind the humor. I feel like as a dramatist, I have overcome that weakness, but because of that, I don't know what to expect from the audience reaction. When you have a comedy, it is fairly easy to know when it's a good comedy—people are laughing. With this piece, I really don't know how to gauge any reactions. I hope to learn more from the talkback tomorrow night and ask the audience directly when and how things landed in them.

Roger Hall, the KCACTF respondent, talked with us afterwards and gave some great notes about the piece. He seemed to enjoy the play and said he had trouble taking

notes because he was so engaged and felt like if he looked down he would miss something. He said the structure and the play itself was quite “sophisticated” and because of that he thought I could dig deeper and give more passion to the main characters and their relationships, especially Annie. He also felt like there were few lines that seemed unnatural, except for one or two, most specifically the line “every image alludes to another darkness.” He loved the metaphors and the use of the upside-down images as a way of conveying what was happening in the play. One helpful criticism was that he didn’t think I needed Rachel telling the audience at the end what had happened to Michael since he had already discovered that. I asked him specifically about how and when he knew Michael was dead and when he knew Michael killed himself. He replied that he had already gotten that he was dead from Rachel’s lines in Scene 5 and when he left in Scene 12 that he was going to the lake to kill himself. However, Roger was confused about the time lapse, thinking that six months had lapsed from Michael’s suicide, when in fact, six months had lapsed from the Barcelona accident. His comments on the acting and the directing were favorable, saying he believed the relationships and the differences in James and Michael as played by Brandon and Drew. He said the blocking seemed natural as well, and not forced. All in all, he enjoyed the piece, compared it to plays like *Fuddy Meers* and another play about a stroke victim which the name eluded him but he would let me know about to research. He then congratulated me on the play being a finalist for the David Mark Cohen Playwriting award, which I hadn’t told my cast and crew, and they applauded. The most memorable thing he had said was that he wished that it had been entered as a Participating

production and had been seen earlier because he would've recommended it for the regional festival. I thanked him for coming and said I looked forward to his written response.

I anticipate a larger audience tomorrow night. I know that Dr. Noreen Barnes will be coming and possibly some other faculty. A lot of the students in the Devising Theatre class will be watching after their final presentations which are right before.

December 10th

Tonight there is a talkback with myself, the cast and our special guest, Kelli Williams Jones, who is pursuing her Ph.D. in neuropsychology at MCV.

In order to steer the talkback and audience response towards detailed issues, I composed some specific questions that I want to ask the audience to help me with the development of the play:

- 1. Did you know Michael was dead and if so, at what point in the play did you realize it?**
- 2. Who was the protagonist, Annie or Michael? Whose play is it?**
- 3. Were the shifts in time/place too confusing or not at all?**
- 4. Were there any moments you did not feel engaged in the material? (Anything that bored you?)**

APPENDIX D

TALKBACK NOTES

The following are the notes written by the dramaturg, Shaun McCracken. The first is the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival response from Roger Hall (JMU) and the second is the audience talkback with the cast, director, dramaturg and Ph.D. candidate in neuro-psychology Kelli Williams-Jones:

Notes from talkback with Roger Hall (KCACTF)

He didn't take too many notes because he was: 1. Very involved in the show and 2. He was afraid to miss anything if he looked down.

He saw the world of the play as the bed (felt that the bed conjured images both of a hospital setting and of the conjugal bed.)

He felt that the screen behind the bed also reminded him of hospital screens. He also felt that the sheets on the side walls were more symbolic than just for projections. He specifically noted that the bed became a character in the play.

He was reminded of Fuddy Meers and another play (he will e-mail this information to Dennis.)

He liked the playfulness of the play and felt that the dialogue was quite natural (except for: "Every image alludes to a greater darkness.")

He felt like there was a great deal of comedy from misunderstandings in the script and felt that the humor and the romance (with both Michael and James) could be taken further.

He felt that the play was largely about: words, images, memory and aging.

He liked the use of imagery (noting the differences between polaroids, regular pictures, and the camera obscura.)

In the actual camera obscura scene (scene 7), he thought about people and relationships-how certain people turn our world upside down. He noted that this scene “just was.” It wasn’t didactic.

He liked the vocal variety.

He felt that the overlapping lines in scene 12 could be used more effectively.

He felt that the movement around the stage worked well (nothing felt forced or unnatural.)

He specifically noted that the play was “intriguing. It was mental work, like solving a crossword puzzle.” He felt that there was a lack of passion between characters and in Annie’s drive to figure out people and her relationships with them.

He really liked the ripped photos but he wished that the image was bigger. He wanted to see Michael standing on the bed. He felt like the ripped photos were almost too easy and wanted to see more of an effort.

He felt like Catherine’s explanation at the end of the play (of Michael’s death) was not needed. He felt that the rest of the play is very sophisticated and that this moment was not.

He liked the fact that a lot of information is very clear to the audience, even though the world of the play is not clear.

He felt that Drew and Brandon are physically very similar.

He didn’t have any confusion about which of the men was Annie’s husband.

He liked the fact that Annie and Michael’s marriage wasn’t a “Hallmark card”.

Notes from audience talkback following the Saturday December 10th performance with Kelli Williams-Jones, cast, director and dramaturg:

- 1) Did you know Michael was dead and if so, at what point in the play did you realize it?
 - One audience member realized it when Annie said, “Who’s that man?”
 - Several audience members understood that Michael drowned but didn’t think he killed himself until the end of the show.
 - Several other audience members though Annie had mixed up Michael and James.
 - Several other audience members questioned if Rachel was real. (this comment was agreed with but the other audience member said that they LIKED not knowing.)

2) Did you feel that the last scene was hitting you over the head too much? Did you need Rachel to tell you what happened to Michael?

-The audience responded fairly universally that the last scene was fine and that they didn't want Rachel to tell us what happened to Michael (they had already figured it out.)

3) Who was the protagonist, Annie or Michael? Whose play is it?

-One audience member felt that this was Annie's play (because she was almost always onstage but felt that the scene between Michael and James broke that convention.)

-Several other audience members felt like the play was just as much Michael's as it was Annie's.

-One audience member felt that it would be Michael's play if there was more interaction between Rachel and Michael.

-This comment led to another audience member stating that he didn't understand why Michael wanted Annie to be moved to home care, instead of staying in the hospital (they felt that this move made Michael seem more sinister.)

4) Were the shifts in time/place too confusing or not at all?

-One audience member liked that the shifts were confusing.

-Another audience member stated that they liked the interludes.

-Another audience member felt that the jumps in time were an attempt to change the ending (they felt that the ending was predetermined.)

5) Were there any moments you did not feel engaged in the material? (Anything that bored you?)

-One audience member responded that the medical jargon pulled him out of the "moment."

-One audience member did not feel engaged by Michael in the first few scenes.

-Another audience member felt that Rachel was the narrator in a non-traditional sense.

APPENDIX E

Production Photos









APPENDIX F

What happens to love when it is forgotten?

OBSCURA

An original play

Written and Directed by Dennis Schebetta



NEWDICK THEATER

Shafer Street Playhouse

FRIDAY DECEMBER 9TH @ 7:30 PM

SATURDAY DECEMBER 10TH @ 7:30 PM

SUNDAY DECEMBER 11TH @ 2:00 PM

FEATURING

**Catherine Bryne, Brandon Crowder,
Julie Phillips, & Drew Vidal**

APPENDIX G

Program

OBSCURA**Newdick Theater**

Friday December 9th @ 7:30 pm
 Saturday December 10th @ 7:30 pm
 Sunday December 11th @ 2:00 pm

CAST

Annie.....JULIE PHILLIPS
 Michael.....BRANDON CROWDER
 JamesDREW VIDAL
 Rachel.....CATHERINE BRYNE

PRODUCTION CREDITS:

Playwright/Director: Dennis Schebetta
Assistant Director: Dianne Baka
Stage Manager: Joe Carlson
House Manager: Becca Bernard
Fight Choreography: Drew Vidal
Scenic Design: Jessica Fulbright
Sound Design: Dave Watkins
Lighting: Andy Waters
Projection Design: Dave Watkins
Dramaturg: Shaun McCracken
Acting/Voice Coach: Lisa Jackson

The use of any recording device, either audio or video, and the taking of photographs, either with or without flash, is strictly prohibited.



The Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival™

XXXVIII

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This production is entered in the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival (KCACTF). The aims of this national theater education program are to identify and promote quality in college-level theater production. To this end, each production entered is eligible for a response by a regional KCACTF representative, and selected students and faculty are invited to participate in KCACTF programs involving scholarships, internships, grants and awards for actors, playwrights, designers, stage managers and critics at both the regional and national levels.

Productions entered on the Participating level are eligible for inclusion at the KCACTF regional festival and can also be considered for invitation to the KCACTF national festival at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, DC in the spring of 2006.

Last year more than 1,400 productions were entered in the KCACTF involving more than 200,000 students nationwide. By entering this production, our theater department is sharing in the KCACTF goals to recognize, reward, and celebrate the exemplary work produced in college and university theaters across the nation.



This production is made possible from funding by the Guild of Graduate Students (GOGS), a Student Government Organization.

The Guild of Graduate Students (GOGS) is comprised of and supports graduate Theatre Pedagogy students in the Department of Theatre at Virginia Commonwealth University.

The GOGS mission is to assist graduate students in their artistic, pedagogical, and scholarly endeavors by providing support in securing the resources to make their projects possible.

GOGS goals are: to nurture graduate students' development as theatre educators by providing teaching opportunities beyond the classroom; encourage academic and creative exchange for graduate and undergraduate students and the faculty of the VCU Department of Theatre; foster graduate students' creative growth by supplying resources and support of artistic projects; serve as a community for graduate students to exchange ideas, network, and learn from each other.

SPECIAL THANKS:

Diversity Thrift for the bed and chairs, VCU, the GOGS, SGA, David S. Leong, Dr. Noreen Barnes, Dr. Aaron Anderson, Glynn Brannan, Kathleen Legault and everyone in the Theatre Department office, Lisa Jackson, my folks and family, Dr. Kelli Williams-Jones, the Brain Injury Association of America, Andy Waters, Dave Watkins, Jessica Fulbright, Brad Brubaker, Tim Bambara, Joe Sampson, Jenna Nielsen, Janet Rodgers and Christus Murphy, Monica Dionysiou, Jenny Hundley and the Hundley clan, SETC, Charles Getchell, KCACTF, Dan LaRocque, Steve Hunt, Roger Hall, Clark Endy, Clark Endy's truck, Pentax, Polaroid, Vivaldi, Tom Waits, Yves Montand, Abelardo Morell, Susan Sontag, Roland Barthes, Deborah Copaken Kogan, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Conde Nast, e-bay, Target, the cities of Paris, Venice, Barcelona, London, Bear Mountain Lake & Drew's gaucomole.

*THE RUNNING TIME IS ONE HOUR AND 20 MINUTES.
THERE WILL BE NO INTERMISSION.*

PLEASE NOTE

Flash photography is used several times in this production.

TIME: The past and present, sometimes simultaneously

SETTING: Various places including a hospital room, bedroom of a country house, hotel room, a lake, Venice, London, Paris, and Barcelona

SCENES:

One: Circles of Confusion

Interlude: Venice

Two: Aperture

Three: Developing

Interlude: Paris

Four: Ghost Images

Five: Circles of Confusion (Again)

Interlude: London

Six: Stop

Seven: Obscura

Eight: The Shot

Nine: Lucida

Ten: Flashpoint

Eleven: Focus

Interlude: Barcelona

Twelve: Exposure

Thirteen: Circles of Confusion (Again and Again)

CAST AND CREW BIOGRAPHIES

Dianne Baka (Assistant Director) is a senior performance major with a focus in directing. She recently directed the “Bridesmaid” piece in Clay McLeod Chapman’s *Drinking Games*. Upcoming projects include *The Raven Flies North* by Dennis Schebetta, for the Student Play Festival.

Catherine Bryne (Rachel) is a grad student in Theatre Pedagogy at VCU. In a peripatetic life, she has done some acting, including a one-woman show portraying Virginia Woolf. This is her first appearance on a Richmond stage. Having just moved here from Mexico, she is anxious to test Drew’s guacamole.

Joe Carlson (Stage Manager) First time stage manager Joe Carlson was most recently seen as Flaco in *Den of Thieves*, a member of the ensemble in *Carrey Me*, and Martin in *Feeding the Moonfish*. He would like to thank Dennis for the opportunity to observe the process from the other side of the script, his family and friends for their never ending love and support, and the creator for all the blessings in his life. Theatre is a weapon for liberation. Change is imperative.

Brandon Crowder (Michael) is a sophomore performance major at VCU. He has tasted Drew’s guacamole...it’s not that great.

Jessica Fulbright (Scenic Design) loves guacamole, especially home-made.

Lisa Jackson (Acting/Voice Coach) Lisa Jackson, a final year MFA candidate in the voice and speech track, is delighted to be working on *Obscura*. Also a director, her work has been seen Off Broadway at the Women's Project and Productions, and Off-Off Broadway at American Globe Theatre, chashama, HERE Arts Center, and the NY Fringe Festival. Her guacamole could give Drew a run for its money.

Shaun McCracken (Dramaturg) Shaun McCracken is a final year MFA candidate in dramaturgy and theatre history. Past productions include: *Metamorphoses*, *The Civil War*, and *The Summer in Gossensass*. Shaun is currently working with dramaturg/director Lynn Thomson on her adaptation of the Wilkie Collins novel *The Woman in White*.

Julie Phillips (Annie) Julie Phillips is proud to be performing again in the Newdick Theatre. Julie has toured with North Central University's premiere traveling theatre group, been a returning artist at the Emmrich Theatre Production Company in Edenton, NC, and is now in her second year of pursuing her MFA in Theatre Pedagogy at VCU. Some previous productions include *The Boys Next Door*, *Anne of Green Gables*, *Miracle Worker*, *The Fantasticks*, and *Fiddler on the Roof*. She has most recently been seen on stage here at VCU as Marion in Maria Irene Fornes' play *Summer in Gossensass*.

Dennis Schebetta (playwright/director) was recently awarded the SETC Getchell Award for *Obscura* and is completing his MFA in Theatre Pedagogy at VCU. His work has been seen Off-Off Broadway at Ensemble Studio Theatre, *fringeNYC*, American Globe Theatre, and the Samuel French Play Festival. Last year his play, *Love and Death in the Time of Crayola*, directed by the incomparable Lisa Jackson, won "Best Play" at the Turnip Festival. A proud member of AEA and The Dramatists Guild of America, he can also vouch for Drew's guacamole.

Drew Vidal (James) is a first-year MFA Theatre graduate student at VCU. He makes the best guacamole in the whole world. GO WHITE SOX!

Andy Waters (Lighting Design) is an undergraduate at VCU. His most recent show at Newdick Theater was *Den of Thieves* directed by Tim Bambara. He loves guacamole, especially in his fajitas.

Dave Watkins (Sound/Projection Design) is an undergraduate at VCU. His most recent show was *Statues in the Park* by Brad Brubaker. He can't get enough guacamole.

VITA

Dennis Schebetta grew up in Reno, Nevada and attended the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, where he received his B.A in Theatre Arts. He moved to New York City in 1998 to study the Meisner technique with Bill Esper at the William Esper Acting Studio. While in New York City, he directed and acted in several off-off-Broadway productions. His playwriting career began with his first professional production of *Einstein's Brain* at Ensemble Studio Theatre. Other notable productions include *Love's Labor's Won or Benvolio is Alive and Well and Living in the Bahamas* (American Globe Theatre & Happy Hour Productions), *Decomposition* (Semi-finalist 7th Annual Fifteen-Page Play Festival), *Mad at the World* (FatChance Productions), *Painting by Numbers* (Finalist, Samuel French Off-Off Broadway Play Festival), *Love and Death in the Time of Crayola* (Best Play, 10th Annual Fifteen-Page Play Festival), and *Burning Botticelli* (Eighth Annual New York International Fringe Festival). He was also an invited playwright to the Lincoln Center Directors Lab in the summer of 2004. His monologues were published in the Smith & Kraus series *Audition Arsenal* (Janet Milstein, ed.). He is a proud member of Actors Equity Association and the Dramatists Guild of America.

Obscura won the 2006 SETC Charles Getchell New Play Award and was a finalist for the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival David Mark Cohen National Play Award.