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12-2012

## **10,000 Words: Creating and Subverting the Theatrical Process for Personal Insights and Practical Application**

Dimitar Christo Venkov  
dvenkov@utk.edu

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### **Recommended Citation**

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# *10,000 Words: Creating and Subverting the Theatrical Process for Personal Insights and Practical Application*

A Play and Synopsis  
By Dimi Venkov

[dvenkov@utk.edu](mailto:dvenkov@utk.edu)

December 14, 2012

Theatre 497: Senior Honors Project  
Chancellor's Honors Program  
University of Tennessee-Knoxville

Faculty Mentor: Casey Sams, Associate Professor, Theatre

## **Abstract**

The purpose of this project was to pursue a different method of theatre than I had ever experienced, namely being entirely responsible for the conception, development, and production of an original play. In the process, I wanted to ask fundamental questions about the nature and limits of theatre and, through potential answers, come to a more realized understanding of why I am so drawn to the medium and how I wish to pursue its potential in the future. Through the help of my advisor Casey Sams, priceless input from professors and fellow students, and liberal inspiration from some of my creative idols, I executed this project successfully over the past year. The apex of the project came with three performances between November 16-18, 2012 that resulted in a fantastic response from those in attendance and many new revelations and questions from my own experience. Through a step-by-step summary of my experience, I hope to convey the progression of the project from beginning to end, exploring my process as a theatrical artist, and provide insight into the struggles and joys of creating theatre.

## **Origins and Intentions**

My initial ideas for the project came in the spring of 2011, when I was thinking about my Honors Project and how I wanted to take advantage of my artistic major. While I was initially leaning toward using my directing experience for All Campus Theatre as a practical experience of my major, I wanted something more. Using my directing experience would suggest that my focus in theatre is entirely within the realm of directing, which is not true. I began to think of ways to incorporate all my experiences—acting, directing, backstage work, theory, administration—into some cohesive theatrical piece that could provide a synthesized account of everything I've learned about theatre in this moment in time and what that may say about my post-graduation career. At the same time, I attended a similarly non-traditional theatrical piece written, directed, and performed by friends of mine, which inspired me to believe in my capabilities as a student to explore the depths of my thoughts on stage. Finally, deciding to spend an

extra semester at UT gave me the confidence that I could apply enough effort to the project without taking away from other academic and theatrical pursuits that I had already laid out for myself.

Because of how personal I wanted the play to be to my current life and past experiences in theatre, the play contained metatheatrical elements from its conception. Since I wanted to provide an academic account of an artist's struggle, I reasoned that a theatrical artist's research would largely involve exploration and experimentation with the boundaries of the medium. In the lack of a more eloquent method of conveying this, the content of the play began to match the process of creating it, albeit an exaggerated one. Initially, due to my focus on directing, the play was envisioned as an exploration of a director's struggles in directing, involving long monologues, personal anecdotes, and autobiographical thoughts on the future. I had given it the working title of "MisDirected," something which I thought successfully conveyed the focus on directing and the pitfalls associated with it. Parallel to this, I had an idea about a director interrupting a live play and struggling to communicate with actors and designers (an idea lovingly taken from Michael Frayn's *Noises Off*). However, because I have very limited experience in the field of directing, the ideas for the play transformed into a student's account of creating a thesis project, interlaced with personal reflections from me as a student director. This personal fusion of ideas is broadly how the play remained until its production.

When arriving back on campus in the fall of 2011, I threw myself into practical experience in theatre, assistant directing three shows, serving as crew and dramaturge on others, and, most importantly, directing my first full length show, Edward Albee's *The Lady from Dubuque*, in February 2012. Finding time between this busy theatrical schedule and overachieving academic one (compounded stress that I now regret), I initiated discussions about my thesis with Casey Sams, who had served as an acting teacher and mentor for me and I felt could understand and cultivate my attempts to break out of the theatrical box. In these first conversations, I stressed my desire for the project to always

seem like a work in progress. No matter how much I prepared, the illusion to the audience should be that I haven't prepared and that the show is not going to plan. As Casey said, I was trying "to plan on not having a plan." To force myself into this uncertainty during performance, one of the major discussions initially was how much of the show would be improvised. In my most ambitious conception, I wanted to plan the first half of the show and then completely improvise the second, using a skeleton structure to move from each part of the show to the next. With these ideas, I wanted to challenge myself as an actor and artist to create spontaneously in the moment, in front of the audience. Furthermore, I was insatiable in my desire to make the audience in attendance uncomfortable, which I thought could be achieved if I didn't know what I was doing. Casey cautiously encouraged my ideas, but rightly reminded me that the audience has to have a reason for being there in the first place; I can't ignore them for my own pursuits. Since I was so scattered about my ideas, she advised me to come up with clear questions I wanted to ask for the project, which would inevitably lead to clear answers. Finally, I remember worrying about my scattered thoughts and my fear of giving up on the project or losing interest in it in six months. Like a sage out of a Zen koan, Casey asked me, "So what? Just write that into the play." This would quickly become my mantra for the entire process.

After these initial discussions, I realized that my principle problems involved trying to combine the moments of subversion and humor I envisioned for the metatheatrical play (what I lovingly refer to as "shtick") with the deeper, more opaque philosophical questions about the nature of theatre. Similar to this binary, I recognized the need to balance what I wanted to get out of the performance for myself, and what I wanted the audience to get out of it. I resolved myself to just sit and let words spill out of me, reasoning that I would write down any ideas I was having into dialogue and then parse through the rubble later. Given my tendency to overextend myself, I signed up for an Honors Thesis Research independent study to force myself into a tangible product by the end of the spring 2012. In the meantime, my time, patience, and sanity were slowly withering away to the experience of directing *The*

*Lady from Dubuque*. After finishing that show in February, I was burned out, exhausted, and needed a timely break from rehearsals, budgets, acting choices, and anything remotely associated with practical theatre. This need for a break would ultimately dictate the level of ambition I applied to the writing of the play.

## **Writing**

My first step in writing was to create a skeleton of scenes (actually a lay-out of all my shtick) that would at least comprise the first half of the show. This was, roughly: beginning with a play within a play, the director interrupts, the director and actor fight, the actor leaves the director alone onstage trying to find his way through the theatrical process, and the director and actor switch places, so the director can observe himself in action (an idea suggested by Casey). This skeleton provides a prescient look at what was eventually written, with the exception of the switch and the lonely director scenes alternating their positions in the structure. Working off of this skeleton, I began my writing in earnest in March and April, after giving myself a little time to relax after my show. What I realized almost immediately was that I had never written something creative of a substantial length before, leading me to moments of doubt and procrastination (many, many moments of procrastination). As I wrote, I noted all the questions that arose and I hadn't anticipated, such as clearing up character objectives and, more importantly, finding distinctions between characters. While I had initially conceived of each character as a different manifestation of my theatrical personality (i.e. the actor adopts my performance anxiety, the stage manager adopts my dictatorial traits), I realized this would become impractical when I began to use actors, not to mention how ultimately self-serving it becomes. Instead, I was much more interested in each actor bringing themselves onstage, without façade and without a clear objective for the audience.

These first writing sessions yielded a thirty-page first draft of the play that stops after all the shtick and before the director becomes isolated onstage. The working title now became "So...You're an

Actor?: My Life in Theatre,” a question I often get asked when I mention theatre and I thought perfectly encapsulated my frustration with common perceptions of theatre. Casey’s first thoughts about the draft were of pleasant surprise: she hadn’t expected it to be so broadly funny. In my instinctual need to please as a writer, I had written down plenty of jokes and moments of physical comedy, with the hopes that more ambitious, uncomfortable ideas would come to me later. Casey also mentioned that the play exposes much of what shouldn’t be seen about theatre (i.e. fight calls, line calls, rehearsal struggles), sentiments that would drive my writing in the fall. We discussed the myth of theatre: is it more interesting to create an entirely different myth in our art or to expose ones that already exist? I identified several questions that kept repeating themselves in the text: Why am I in theatre? What do I get out of it? What should the audience get out of it? What do I want to give? She gave me several ideas and urged me to keep exploring the play’s potential over the summer. I had a lot of ideas on what to work on next and what needed to be fixed but, instead, I decided to let it sit over the summer, while I gained more practical application in theatre through experience at the Utah Shakespeare Festival and the Directors’ Lab Chicago. After hours and hours of rehearsals, workshops, and discussions with many theatrical artists from different walks of life, I had more perspective on what I wanted to do with the project and ideas for what could be useful and/or funny for the writing of the play. This included more shtick I had thought of while sitting in hours of rehearsals. Again, this desire to show what shouldn’t be shown about theatre manifested itself in my thoughts.

Returning to campus in the fall of 2012, I felt more energized about the project’s potential, though I quickly realized that my thoughts were again scattered and I needed to focus in on one particular thread of the play or one question I was attempting to answer. With Casey’s help, I decided to separate the play from the project, separating my philosophical and creative pursuits in the process. Many of the questions I had identified in the past now became questions I ask the academic side of myself. The creative one, on the other hand, had to focus on a compellingly entertaining story for the

audience. The focus of the content became centered on a director's attempts to do his thesis project perfectly, while contending with uncooperative actors and the hijinks of the rehearsal process. With these distinctions in mind, I had identified "the academic" as the one concerned with philosophical questions about theatre, "the writer" as the one interested in subverting the nature of the rehearsal process, "the director" as the one struggling to figure out what his thesis is about, and "the actor" as the one figuring out what the process is like for him and what he finds compelling about theatre. While this may all seem confusing and lines blur between the characters of the play and the people involved in their creation, this compartmentalization was crucial to narrowing in on the play's purpose and potential.

With these revelations in mind, I set about revising the play to come up with a second draft by the beginning of October. I finally read and dissected my first draft, surprisingly didn't hate everything I had written, and set about expanding what I had already mapped out. Every time I wanted to go beyond what I had written before, I had a new idea or new stroke of inspiration that would lead me to continually revise the beginning parts of the play. As a result, whereas I may have initially wanted the director's isolation to last longer and perhaps enter the world of experimental theatre, instead the beginning shtick expanded and the focus became much more on subverting the rehearsal process and exposing many of the strange practices and traditions of theatre that have always amused me. Indeed, by the time I had a second and third draft prepared to workshop, I had hardly spent any time on the events leading to the ending. While I had discovered what my ending image and line would be over the summer, I struggled throughout the revising process in making the transition between the shtick and the final meditative thoughts more fluid. As I will expand upon later, I believe this lack of focus on the end to be one of my missed opportunities with the final product.

As I was revising the second draft, I began to assemble a cast as early as I could so they could help me in revising the parts of the play that needed work. For the actor character, I had long thought of my friend Tommy, who has had extensive improvisation experience and could challenge some of my perceptions and neuroses in the play. One of my major initiatives during this time was to differentiate the actor character from myself. This followed the notion that I didn't want each character to be a different part of me; the characters should reflect the actors. Tommy helped me greatly in putting his own flourishes on the character. Practically speaking, clearly delineating these two characters was crucial to their switch in the middle of the play, as we decided that it was only the roles of the characters that were changing, not their entire personalities. For example, when we switched, I became "the actor," not Tommy. Rounding out the cast were Brock as the (then) nervous stage hand and Molly as the exasperated stage manager. I met with them several times in October, executing several read-throughs of the play that helped me hear what words sound better on page rather than out loud. A major change that came from these sessions involved the change and expansion of Brock's stage hand character. Instead of the tentative, shy stage hand I had written to represent myself, Brock brought a performative energy that could not possibly go unnoticed. In addition, I used the cast to further my perspective on what theatre can do and what it means to different people. They all shared stories with me of how and why they started performing or writing or working backstage. A shared experience was this idea of community, something I wrote into the opening monologue of the show. In addition, I used each of their thoughts on what theatre can do to validate some of the more philosophical discussions in the play, reasoning that these are common questions and concerns being asked. When I finally wrote an ending to the play, I included some of their dialogue from these sessions. They had helped me immensely in figuring what worked and what didn't; I felt they were just as responsible for the play's existence. Luckily, their contribution was only just beginning.

Ultimately, I felt like the working draft of the play I ended on was a close representation of my intention in combining shtick with some philosophical musings on the nature of performance and creation. I had included humorous fights between the director, the actor, and the stage hand, as well as finding times to poke fun at the oddities of rehearsals. In my attempts to gauge the audience's feelings in the show, I included a scene where Tommy and I would leave the room while the audience answered questions about what they thought the show was about, what their expectations were, and what they think theatre is or should be. This scene came from an earnest desire to hear what people think of the show and the ideas it presents, emphasizing the anonymity of the questionnaires and the honesty of their responses. Finally, in the ending that I had written, I attempted to place myself alone onstage, pondering and struggling, in an attempt to continually devolve the structure of the play until nothing was really left. However, with the final scene and image (a spark of inspiration to do something else), I ended the play on a more hopeful note. The freshly minted title, *10,000 Words*, suggested to me by Casey, referred to some irrational goal I had set myself for reaching 10,000 words in writing the play. While I ultimately fell short of that goal, the title was a suitably irrelevant heading to a play that balances the line between academia and creative endeavor. It would be absurd to give an artist a word count in whatever he or she is working on, just as it would make an academic nervous to not have a finite goal to achieve in writing a paper. Ultimately, though, the line between the two is blurred.

## **Production**

Before I move on to the rehearsal process, let me describe some of the nuances of producing a play on campus. While I had experience in this with *The Lady from Dubuque*, this play required much less preparation and stress. Given support from the Honors Program Research Grant, I had the costs of set, costume, lighting, and sound designs covered, in addition to printing and marketing costs. Because of the stripped away nature of the show, I didn't have to stress too much over designs. Last spring, I

took the opportunity to propose the project to the Lab Project Committee, who gives opportunities to students to direct and produce shows in the Clarence Brown Lab Theatre. Given my experience in the theatre through classes and *Dubuque*, I had written the show with that space in mind, even imagining where certain lines would be spoken and which entrances to use. After some creative scheduling on the part of the committee, I was slotted in for a week in the middle of November, ideally situated to give me ample opportunity to develop and rehearse the play, while also giving me time afterward to reflect on what I had learned. Besides securing the space and bringing together the designers and actors, my job as a producer was light. This gave me the opportunity to focus on creative exploration.

### **Rehearsals**

My approach to directing the play was meant as a stark opposition to my approach in directing *The Lady from Dubuque*. Whereas I had stressed myself out trying to have every detail executed exactly the way I wanted with the latter, *10,000 Words* was an active attempt to let go. I had written the play in a manner where it could embrace things going wrong during production. As a director, I told the actors to constantly explore where mistakes could add to the purposes of the play, though I was careful to draw a line somewhere. When someone had to back out of rehearsal, I had the flexibility to reschedule for a time that worked for everyone. I planned on having 50 hours of rehearsal, as opposed to somewhere around 80-90 in my previous experience. My naïve hope here was that the less prepared we were, the more spontaneous our performance would be (a theory I would debunk in performance). The reality of rehearsal time was most likely somewhere around 30 hours, as we managed to block the show quicker than I anticipated and I couldn't direct as much since I was focused so much on my performance. The rehearsals themselves also had a much more calming environment than the one I fostered in *Dubuque*. Whereas in the latter we were dealing with heavy subject matter and difficult material to decipher as we all got frustrated, *10,000 Words* was an opportunity to clown around with friends,

finding more opportunities to make fun of each other and have fun in the midst of our stressful academic lives. For the first time in months, and this was true throughout the semester, I found myself looking forward to rehearsals, as opposed to worrying about preparing enough for them.

My major difficulty in rehearsals was distinguishing my directing and acting personalities. While I would see things I wanted to change about the performances around me, I needed to focus on my own characterization and following impulses to the end of their potential, given the work being done around me. To be honest, this dichotomy is one which I never quite figured out. While I wanted a certain amount of blurring in roles, I couldn't tell what was working or not about the play because I didn't have an objective perspective of the performance. However, this confusion did lend itself to priceless moments in rehearsals where my fellow actors had no idea whether I was improvising a scene or actually giving them direction, such was the level of metatheatrical content. This led to me using terms such as "actual hold" when I actually wanted to stop the rehearsal, to avoid too much confusion. My angst about the dichotomy was eased a bit by videotaping several rehearsals, where I got the opportunity to act as director to the rest of the actors and I critiqued my own work. As someone who often struggles with acting onstage in front of others, I felt a little better knowing that the only person's words who I was bungling were my own. And again, by structuring the play in a way to promote mistakes and failure, I felt better letting go of my acting anxiety and my worry of what was going on around me.

## **Performances**

Before discussing the performances, I want to briefly mention my attitude toward the potential audience and my marketing strategy in attracting them. I figured most people would come because they knew me or one of my actors, regardless of what the play was about. With this in mind, I set about sending as many cryptic signals as possible about the play. The poster was designed as a literal

interpretation of the title, with a jumble of words draping the background of the play's title and information, as well as pictures of kittens and kangaroos (a tiny nod to a scene in the play). My actors were complicit in my deception, as we described the play as "everything" and "nothing" and "whatever you want it to be," statements that, while intentionally vague, still held some truth to the content. I was more candid about the play to my professors, in the hopes they would come and see my work. In terms of utilizing social media to advertise the event, I developed the Facebook event with as much irony as possible in mind. I quoted non-existent newspapers and wrote nonsense from irrelevant movie critics. I figured that the play was made by young people for young audiences and this kind of advertising was the reality for our digital age.

On the whole, the performances were overwhelming, both in terms of their success and the reaction of the audience. I could not fathom how much the play resonated with people, especially those that had nothing to do with theatre. I had stacked so many theatre inside jokes into the play that I didn't think I could reach anyone outside that world. In terms of distinguishing one performance from the next, I ultimately felt like our Sunday performance had the right blend of active audience participation with enough spontaneous creativity onstage to create a fun atmosphere for all. On Friday, we were all quite stiff and nervous in front of an audience for the first time, though I would argue this was my most informative performance. Saturday, we had a couple technical glitches that hampered the ability to hear Brock in a crucial scene, and I was generally dissatisfied with the direction we were all taking. We had all moved away from the intentions of the play and were instead looking to land jokes for the audience. On Sunday, I felt liberated by the prospect of finally finishing the project. During the five minute break, I had a blissful reaction of ecstasy, knowing that nothing I did in the next hour mattered, because I had accomplished everything I thought I wanted to do with the project. On Sunday we were more spontaneous, less worried about our lines, and had a very receptive audience. I was on top of the world.

In discussions with Casey afterward, we agreed that on the whole, the play was a success, from both a personal and audience perspective. I talked about my frustrations with the audience questionnaires, where the majority of answers involved audience members trying to be clever about their reactions to the play and not seriously considering the questions. I realized that in a play with so many clever moments and general comfort, the audience was too passive to seriously consider these questions. Compounding this distraction was Brock, whom I told to entertain the audience while they answered the questions. Another point of critique that Casey and I shared involved the ending of the play, which seemed rushed and generally dishonest. Even in performance, I couldn't really connect to genuine lines of angst I had written months ago, especially since I didn't believe in what I was saying. This suggested to me that the more ambitious route I had envisioned, that of improvisation and unclear direction, would have perhaps been more compelling once the play stopped devolving and I seriously tackled the questions I wanted to ask. If I was actually in the moment of the play, with the audience in front me, I wonder what I would have actually said about my current state of mind regarding theatre. Overall, though, Casey was in agreement that I had managed to entertain while still forcing the audience to think a little, which is no small feat.

## **Conclusions**

In the little time I've had to reflect on the experience of the performance, I've made a couple of interesting observations that relate to how I see theatre and what my future may hold. To begin with, I was very interested in the audience's feedback about the five minute break we took twenty minutes into the show, many saying that was their favorite moment in the show. I was interested in this moment of exposing the façade of our acting, making the audience really think about what was actually performance and what real life was. As I discussed with Casey, I'm fascinated by the idea of performance art, using real life action or experience as the true theatre. The more we place a

performance outside the theatre space, the more honest it becomes. In the five minute break, my instructions to the actors were to actually take a break: drop their characters, their need to entertain, just be in the space and react to what's around you, including the audience. Indeed, my most cathartic moment came during the Sunday break, when I truly felt alive in front of an audience, even though I wasn't performing in the traditional sense of the word. Ultimately, though I dream of a theatre where every day mundane activities are the entertainment value, I can see where you need the façade to further make yourself aware of the honesty. If we didn't juxtapose the break with the scripted lines around it, it wouldn't have been so effective. This exploration of honesty leads to a further revelation about true spontaneity in theatre. Whereas I actively attempted to make us seem unprepared, this made us all self-conscious as actors, as we focused more on not making fools of ourselves, as opposed to being intentionally inept. Casey described this distinction as the difference between being prepared and having a plan. If we had over-rehearsed, to the point of routine with our lines, this would eventually open us up to more imaginative and spontaneous moments in performance. In terms of performance, I was interested in my experience of sticking to the script vs. improvisation. While we mostly stuck to the script and knew our lines in all three performances, I was anticipating much more improvisation in performance. The lack of it no doubt resulted from self-conscious attempts to look good for the audience. When I tried to incorporate more moments of subversion and stopping in the performance on Saturday, I felt myself as an actor draw away from the temptation. As it turns out, my training as an actor has forced me to be true to the character and the scene, no matter what lines may get dropped or hijinks may occur. The idiom of "the show must go on" remains true.

Overall, this process has been an amazingly enriching experience, giving me plenty of challenges and a wonderful conclusion to my undergraduate career. While I still may be uncertain about what specific path to follow in theatre, this project represents my synthesis of everything I've learned and is a fantastic moment-in-time account of my senior year. By being able to incorporate so many elements of

my theatre and undergraduate lives, I think I have shown what attracts me about theatre: the ability to create something new and finding new ways of communicating with people. While I may never pursue a practical application of the ideas laid out in the play, they encapsulate my feelings on what theatre means to me right now and what it should be doing. In my experience with this project and the production of "8" I directed, I have pinpointed social theatre and experimental theatre as two potential paths that are of great interest to me. I am grateful to all my mentors and friends who helped me in developing this project and am enormously pleased with the results.

### **The Play**

Attached

# 10,000 Words

A Chancellor's Honors Thesis Project By:

Dimi Venkov

[dvenkov@utk.edu](mailto:dvenkov@utk.edu)

(615) 275-9452

CAST

DIMI

TOMMY

MOLLY

BROCK

Writer (voiceover)

Writer of the writer (in the audience)

Audience

Note: Anything in brackets denotes dialogue that either will be improvised in performance or will be specific to the audience in attendance.

**The Prologue**

[a sound montage of voices answering the question: “What is theatre?”]

**The Monologue**

*(Lights up. Tommy walks on to the stage)*

TOMMY

I didn’t want to sing.

Or rather, I couldn’t sing worth a damn.

*(really theatrical rendition)*

“TRA-DI-TION! TRADITION! TRADITION!” Fiddler on the Roof. High school. Freshman year. I thought, “That sounds cool. I wanna do that...But I can’t sing.” So why not work backstage? And, so, the greatest curtain puller to ever grace the Hume-Fogg stage was born! *(beat)* Yeah, I know. I was hot shit. I held all the power in the auditorium with those two ropes. “Oh, what? You wanna start the show? Can’t do it without me motha fucka! Don’t you dare make fun of me Daniel Hainsworth, you egregiously talented senior destined for Broadway—I’ll close the curtain on you!”

Sidebar: Daniel Hainsworth didn’t really make fun of me. Or at least I don’t think he did. *(sad realization)* We never really...spoke.

Anyway, I guess that experience wasn't really about power. What really struck me in that first show was how fun everyone was and how we all got along. It was the first place I ever felt like I belonged. *(as he walks to the wing to pick up a broom)* Needless to say, I had a ball.

*(dances with the broom)*

“MATCHMAKER MATCHMAKER, MAKE ME A MATCH. FIND ME A FIND. *(as he throws the broom in the air and catches it)* CATCH ME A CATCH!

*(in-yer-face)*

Allie Schultz said I was cute.

Sidebar: Allie Schultz didn't really speak to me either. Even...when I spoke to her.

So I had fun. And there was something magical about watching these actors on stage in front of an audience. What would they do if they messed up? What if the audience didn't laugh when they were supposed to? What if lights went out? What if the knife was real? What if? What if? The spontaneity! The excitement! The...the...the! Well, it was awesome.

I had caught the bug.

As the years progressed (and my perpetual fear of singing and acting increased), I did more backstage work. *You Can't Take it With You, Bye Bye Birdie...*

### **The Interruption**

*(Note: from this point until “Solitary Confinement,” the backstage area will be on the SR wing of the stage. During this scene, Brock comes from backstage and settles into this area. He observes the action on stage out of character and becomes the “Brock” character when he steps on stage. While “backstage,” he performs several tasks of an ASM, most notably taping a box on stage, over and over and over again.)*

DIMI

*(from the audience)*

Hold.

TOMMY

*(caught off guard...tries to keep going)*

Um...*(ad libs)*... [“I assistant stage managed shows like *Noises Off, Brigadoon...*”]

DIMI

HOLD. HOLD!

TOMMY

[Um...like I was saying...there were other shows that I worked on...]

DIMI

It's just not working...damn it...it's just not working!

TOMMY

*(panicked glances to the audience...whispers)* Dimi, what the fuck are you doing?

DIMI

What are you doing?

TOMMY

Trying to perform?

DIMI

No, what do you want?

TOMMY

Huh?

DIMI

What is your objective?

TOMMY

*(shrugs shoulders)* Object...

DIMI

And how are you going to get it?

TOMMY

[Buy it?]

DIMI

Tommy! *(to himself)* I'm just not communicating this well. What can I do? New exercises?

TOMMY

We're in performance...it's over...you can't be up here!

DIMI

*(again to himself)* It's like I have to teach him how to do his homework.

TOMMY

*(preoccupied with the audience)* There's an audience right *there*.

DIMI

*(continues)* Action, objective, motivation...it's basic.

TOMMY

Molly! Tell him to get off the fucking stage!

*(Molly opens the window, starts to say something to Dimi, loses the courage, and retreats)*

DIMI

You're showing emotion rather than feeling, you're drifting out of your light, and frankly, your singing is a bit, erm, pitchy.

TOMMY

*(losing it)* That's probably because I'M NOT A SINGER!

DIMI

Well it can't be *that* difficult.

TOMMY

*(mostly to himself)* I mean, it's one thing to stop in the middle of rehearsal, but there are fucking people here. *(ad libs)* [important audience member] is here for fuck's sake!

DIMI

*(first time he notices the audience)* Hm...how about that? How are you [audience member]? *(ad lib about class or whatever seems relevant to the situation)* [I really enjoyed class yesterday. You gave me some really good feedback on that monologue. What are you up to? Oh, right, this play—yeah I hear good things...can't wait to see it...should be good...]*(loses himself in thought)*

*Beat.*

TOMMY

*(deranged at this point)* WILL YOU GET THE FUCK OFF THE STAGE!

DIMI

*(nonplussed)* Hm? Oh right, anyway. I repeat: what do you want?

TOMMY

For you to get off the stage.

DIMI

No, what does your character want?

TOMMY

Dunno...to fuck that girl Allie?



DIMI

*(catches him off guard...thinks)* Well, what if he's looking at the past as a way of searching for the future? *(pleased with his answer)*

TOMMY

Ok sure. But shouldn't there be a point where he actually talks about the future?

DIMI

*(knocks him off his high horse)* Pardon?

TOMMY

He never talks about what happens next in his life.

DIMI

Well, what if he's trying to establish what theatre means to him? And, through this, he comes to a realization of where he's meant to be? Like, understanding through doing?

*Beat.*

TOMMY

Yeah, I don't think that will work.

DIMI

Why not?

TOMMY

Drama should have conflict! Denouement! Antagonists! Major dramatic questions!

DIMI

Well now you're just spouting useless theatre terms at me.

TOMMY

This sounds more like somebody's journal. We're performing drama! Where's the conflict? Who's the antagonist?

DIMI

Will you please just go along with it?

TOMMY

Why should I?

DIMI

This is my thesis! Four and half years of education have led to this moment. Hours and hours of classes, rehearsals, late nights, slaving away...trying to say something significant about my time in theatre.

TOMMY

Well what is it you're trying to say?

DIMI

Wait, you're the one fucking up. Why are you turning this on me?

TOMMY

*(builds)* Because you're the director...our guide to the writer's work... the guy with a window into what the fuck the writer is trying to say!

DIMI

I do know what the writer is trying to say!

TOMMY

Obviously not.

DIMI

*(irrational)* Well why don't we just call the fucking writer and ask?

TOMMY

Ok.

DIMI

I...I was joking.

TOMMY

No. Let's do it. You obviously have no clue with what this shit means. Maybe the writer can help you. *(calling to the booth)* Molly. Molly! Get the writer on the phone!

DIMI

*(to himself)* Wait. Is Molly in this play now too?

TOMMY

Molly!

MOLLY

Shut up. I'm working on it.

*(sound of the old dial-up connection...several seconds pass...TOMMY and DIMI stand in awkward silence.)*

Well... TOMMY

Hmm... DIMI

Which sound cue is this? TOMMY

Uh, the writer on the phone? DIMI

Oh right, right. That's a fun one. TOMMY

Yup. DIMI

You wanna hear a joke? TOMMY

Sure. DIMI

TOMMY  
[So Mitt Romney is filling his binder with women when--]

**The Writer**

*(voice over the speaker system cuts Tommy off)*

Hello? WRITER V.O.

Does that voice sound familiar? TOMMY

Ah yes, hi there. We are currently performing your play and we had a couple of questions... DIMI

Who is this? WRITER V.O.

TOMMY

No, seriously...I can't quite place it.

DIMI

Well, I'm Dimi and this is Tommy. We're actors performing your play...

WRITER V.O.

You're actors?

TOMMY

It's got a certain...pretentious, beardy quality to it...

DIMI

Well he's an actor. And I'm a director and we want to...

TOMMY

*(overlapping)* Must...be...my imagination...

WRITER V.O.

Wait. Why are you saying my lines?

DIMI

Pardon?

WRITER V.O.

If you're the director, why are you saying my lines?

DIMI

Erm, well, I guess I'm acting as well as directing. I thought there was an opportunity to insert myself into the action. You know, acting has always been a hobby so I thought I might—

WRITER V.O.

Great. Rogue directors. My worst nightmare. You can't just manipulate my words like this! You thought you might? That's just great! *(imitates)* "Oh, well, I thought I might change the ENTIRE fucking process of theatre! THIS ISN'T HOW IT WORKS! I write the words. You choose an actor. The actor acts THE WAY IT'S WRITTEN ON THE FUCKING PAGE! Do you understand that?"

TOMMY

Well I think what he was trying to say was—

WRITER V.O.

You stay out of this!

TOMMY

Yes sir.

DIMI

Well, I guess I chose to act as I did because I couldn't quite understand what the play was about without adding the director into the mix.

WRITER V.O.

Which play is this? Is this the one about the guy who sells sleep?

TOMMY

No, this is your nostalgic reflection on your life in theatre.

WRITER V.O.

*(contemplates)* Are you sure there's nothing in there about a guy selling sleep?

TOMMY

Erm, yes?

WRITER V.O.

Dang. I gotta use that character somewhere. It's brilliant. Maybe in the next play...

DIMI

Well I'm sure that would be lovely. But what we're having trouble figuring out with *this* play is what your intention with writing it was.

WRITER V.O.

Why does that matter?

TOMMY

Well how are we supposed to perform the work without a clear direction on what we're trying to say?

WRITER V.O.

You're not saying anything asshole. This is my play.

DIMI

Well, yes, I suppose, but this is my thesis.

WRITER V.O.

Your what?

DIMI

My thesis project. My attempt to research a certain hypothesis and provide a synthesized account of what I've learned.

WRITER V.O.

Isn't that a job for scientists?

DIMI

Well, most of the time, yes. But the scientific method is a pretty useful tool to research a hypothesis of mine.

WRITER V.O.

Which is?

DIMI

What?

WRITER V.O.

What's your hypothesis?

*Beat.*

DIMI

*(ignores the question)* Will you please just tell us why you wrote the play?

WRITER V.O.

Look, I throw words down on the paper because they amuse me. I don't think about intentions, objectives, actions...it's just funny to me.

TOMMY

Well then why write in the first place?

WRITER V.O.

Because you jokers will perform it.

DIMI

But surely you're trying to say something by reflecting on your past in the theatre?

WRITER V.O.

Ahh.

DIMI

Like, something that you want the audience to take away?

WRITER V.O.

Hmm.

DIMI

Maybe reflections on where your future in theatre lies?

WRITER V.O.

Mmmm.

DIMI

How about a humorous representation of the many theatrical personalities that live in your mind?

*Beat.*

WRITER V.O.

Yeah those sound stupid. Can we skip to the part where it's funny? Like, maybe a little slapstick? A rip-roaring, Chaplinesque sequence of mistaken identities and boisterous behavior?

DIMI

NO! There has to be a meaning to this! These people didn't pay all this money—

TOMMY

The show was free.

DIMI

These people didn't take all this time out of their schedules—

TOMMY

It's only an hour.

DIMI

*(continues)*--for something that will ultimately amount to nothing!

WRITER V.O.

Wait, there are people there right now?

DIMI

Erm, yes.

WRITER

That's a fucking theatre taboo, you know that right?

TOMMY

*(aside)* That's what I said!

DIMI

Well it's your fault!

WRITER V.O.

*(awkward realization)* Yes...well...that doesn't matter...*(beat)* Why don't you ask them what the play is about?

TOMMY

Well, we're only 14 pages in—they haven't had time yet to digest.

WRITER V.O.

No no...come on, ask them! Ask the lady with the pink hat in the front row.

*(A couple of beats as we realize there is no such person)*

DIMI

Who are you referring to?

WRITER V.O.

*(no matter what the response is...at this point, nothing that the voiceover says will correspond with what the actors are saying)* Well I'm glad you asked that ma'am. I actually started writing poetry when I was a boy and released a collection in my early twenties.

DIMI

Erm...nobody asked you anything.

WRITER V.O.

You know, there were a lot of people back then who told me I couldn't make it. I refused to listen.

TOMMY

*(to Dimi)* What is he talking about?

WRITER V.O.

See, I always had a natural ear for dialogue. When my friend said I should write a play, I told him it was just too easy for me and I'd rather challenge myself.

TOMMY

Did *you* ask him about his life story?

DIMI

I...I don't think I did.

WRITER V.O.

But after a couple of my plays were really successful, I realized that I could make a buck off this shit.

TOMMY

Asshole.

DIMI

Erm, excuse me, could we get back to the real question—

WRITER V.O.

But I only write plays to fund my poetry. That's where my real passion lies.

TOMMY

Molly! Hang up the phone!

WRITER

That should clear things up. Let me know if you have any other questions. Bye now!

DIMI

Wait—

MOLLY

*(reads stage direction)* He's gone...long silence as we realize we're no closer to the truth.

*(Dimi and Tommy perform this action after Molly reads it.)*

TOMMY

Sooooooooo

DIMI

Yeahhhhhh

TOMMY

Did you recognize his voice?

DIMI

Actually...yes.

TOMMY

Let's both say who it sounded like on 3. Ok? 1...2...3!

TOMMY

DIMI

Roseanne Barr!

George Clooney!

*Beat.*

TOMMY

Huh.

DIMI

Really?

TOMMY

So, that didn't really work...

DIMI

Was it the wrong sound cue?

TOMMY

Yeah! I bet it was! It's all one button you know...it's pretty easy to just skip ahead or something...

DIMI

Yeah exactly! She pushed the wrong button!

MOLLY

*(from the booth)* I did not! We do this every night.

*Beat.*

TOMMY

Is she allowed to say that?

DIMI

*(defeated)* I don't even know anymore.

*Beat.*

This is a disaster.

### **The Table Work**

TOMMY

Hey, hey...it's not that bad. We'll figure it out.

DIMI

Yeah?

TOMMY

Sure. Well, *you'll* figure it out. (*starts to walk away*)

DIMI

I really thought we could glean something from the writer.

TOMMY

...I mean, if there's anyone with the knowledge of how to... (*keeps walking*)

DIMI

There's gotta be something we can do.

TOMMY

...it's just a matter of... (*almost offstage when...*)

DIMI

Oh I know!

TOMMY

Fuck.

DIMI

Let's do some table work!

TOMMY

No, I mean, if you don't know what to do, there's really no point in...

DIMI

No no. Table work is definitely the answer.

TOMMY

*(defeated)* What's that?

DIMI

Table work? Like scoring the text? Finding antithesis, key words, interesting punctuation... An actor's preparation?

TOMMY

I'm unfamiliar.

DIMI

Like, know what the fuck you're saying?

TOMMY

Is that...is that important?

DIMI

Whatever. Get your script.

TOMMY

*(trying to figure out the Sunday crossword, slowly)* Scriiiiiipt?

DIMI

Jesus Christ.

TOMMY

Does He have this script of which you speak?

*(beat)*

DIMI

Oh lord.

*(calls offstage)*

Brock. Hey. Bring the script out here!

TOMMY

*(overlap)*

What about Him?

*(Brock runs up behind Dimi, who is facing in the opposite direction)*

DIMI

BROCK.

BROCK

*(over eager)* Yes Dimi?

DIMI

*(jumped surprise)* What the fuck?

BROCK

How can I help? Is there a set change? Do you need me to say lines? Do you need *(walks over to pick up a top hat and cane to dance with)* a spontaneous musical number? *(turns to audience and begins a number)*

DIMI

No. Can you just—

BROCK

*(singing and dancing)* ["I'm singing a musical number and dazzling you with my dance moves"]

Brock!

DIMI

BROCK

*(continues)* ["And this is how this musical number goes. Look at my jazz hands!"]

Molly! Shut him up!

DIMI

MOLLY

Brock! Stop it.

*(Brock abruptly stops)*

BROCK

*(dreams dead)* What?

DIMI

We just need you to bring out the script.

BROCK

Oh.

DIMI

Yeah.

*(Brock slumps off to retrieve the binder)*

DIMI

*(nervous glance to the audience)* Can you hurry up Brock...these people didn't pay money to watch us sit—

TOMMY

The show was free.

DIMI

*(honest, to the audience)* Really, why are you here right now?

*(Brock returns with an unnecessarily large binder.)*

BROCK

*(depression)* No acting?

DIMI

No.

BROCK

Can I get ready for a scene shift? Maybe there's a quick change coming up?

DIMI

Have you been watching? Nothing happens. Look at the set! There is absolutely no purpose for you being here!

TOMMY

*(aside)* What set?

BROCK

Then why am I here?

DIMI

Well the stagehand has lines.

BROCK

*(perks up)* Lines? Yes!

DIMI

Actually, more like nine lines.

MOLLY

*(reads stage direction)* Brock tries to speak but no words come out.

*(Brock performs this action after Molly reads it.)*

DIMI

Yep, nine.

*(Brock drops the binder and frantically tries to speak, checks throat, pounds chest, etc.)*

TOMMY

What's wrong with him?

DIMI

*(checks the scripts to make sure)* Yup. Nine.

*(Brock gives up and storms off...to the wing, of course)*

TOMMY

Shit. What if that happens to us?

DIMI

What do you mean?

TOMMY

What if we just...run out of words. Like, there's nothing else written for us to say.

DIMI

Well, we're the two main characters. He wouldn't do that.

TOMMY

You mean the writer who thought we were sleep salesmen?

DIMI

He wouldn't bring us here unless we had a specific purpose or something to say to the audience.

TOMMY

But you've already deviated from what's on the page.

DIMI

Huh?

TOMMY

The writer—he said you weren't supposed to be onstage. He got angry at you for giving yourself a role.

DIMI

Well does he expect me to follow the script religiously?

TOMMY

Uh, yeah. That's kind of standard practice.

DIMI

Who says?

TOMMY

Everyone involved in theatre. Ever.

DIMI

But this is my thesis.

TOMMY

Well how much can you actually affect a script that already exists?

DIMI

What do you mean?

TOMMY

The writer had a reason to write what he did. You can't completely change it to whatever you want to do.

DIMI

Sure but I can show how the writer's view maybe coincides with something that I'm trying to say about my life and experiences.

TOMMY

Such as?

DIMI

What?

TOMMY

What are you trying to say?

DIMI

I'm trying to...My point is...What were we doing again?

TOMMY

I don't know...something about a table.

DIMI

Right! Let's break down the text. It will help you in your choices.

*(Dimi grabs a music stand from SR and sets it DS center. He sifts through the text.)*

DIMI

Would you hand me your pencil?

TOMMY

Pen...cil...Why would I need that?

DIMI

What do you do outside of rehearsal?

TOMMY

*(indignant)* I smoke pot.

DIMI

Brock. *(no response)* Brock!

*(real Brock sits undisturbed offstage...taping the stage)*

MOLLY

*(from the booth)* He left.

DIMI

And why would he do something like that?

MOLLY

Probably because you told him his presence here was unnecessary and he realized that he didn't have any more lines.

DIMI

But his job is to work backstage, not take over the show.

MOLLY

[Yes, well, nobody puts Brock in a corner.]

DIMI

DAMN IT. Will somebody just give me a fucking pencil?

*(a shower of pencils from "backstage" and from the booth hit Dimi and the stage. Beat.)*

DIMI

*(sighs)* Whatever. Let's get to work.

*(both settle back down)*

TOMMY

*(looks at pencil)* So how does this work?

DIMI

Well, this is the part of preparation where you can really figure out what the script is saying to you. The first step—

*(Before he can finish, Tommy begins to stare intently at the script waiting for something to happen. He hits the page to see if that will change anything. He puts an ear down to the page in case the script is whispering. Several seconds pass as Dimi observes this in bemused silence.)*

TOMMY

*(frustrated look at Dimi)* I...I don't think it's working.

*Beat.*

DIMI

No shit. Ok. Doing table work with the script means breaking down the language so you can find clues about how to say the line.

TOMMY

O....K...

DIMI

For example, "To be or not to be." That's antithesis. The "not" should be emphasized to contrast the second "be" from the first. "To be or not to be." Easy.

TOMMY

I don't see that in the script.

DIMI

You don't see what?

TOMMY

"To be or not to be." I don't remember memorizing that line.

DIMI

No it's—*(not a battle he wants to fight)*—Look at the first lines of your monologue: "I didn't want to sing. Or rather, I couldn't sing worth a damn." You see the repetition of "not"? There's a comparison between your desire to sing and your ability to sing.

TOMMY

I don't see that.

DIMI

The comparison? It's in the first line. It sets up—

TOMMY

No...I don't see the word "not." It says, "I couldn't and I didn't." Where's "not"?

DIMI

*(building anger)* Not is still part of the word.

TOMMY

Then why doesn't it say "I could NOT and I did NOT?"

DIMI

It's more natural! It's easier to use contractions.

TOMMY

So how am I supposed to emphasize the word "not" when I don't actually say the word, Dimi?

DIMI

*(blows up)* Then emphasize the "could" and the "did"! *(calm)* Look: "I didn't want to sing. Or rather, I *couldn't* sing worth a damn!"

TOMMY

*(ham)* Woah. That was really good! It sounded so...believable!

DIMI

*(mistakenly flattered)* Well...honestly...I never really thought of myself as an ac-tor you know...*(stage step forward)* it's just one of those things—

TOMMY

*(Still playing his game...starts walking off)* No no no no no. I think you would be much better for this part and I'll be backstage or something.

DIMI

Well, you know, I guess that's not a bad idea...it shouldn't be too difficult.

TOMMY

What a great idea: you'll just direct yourself.

DIMI

I mean, I like to think of myself as pretty objective about my abilities as an actor...it's one of my best—*(realizes the game)*—wait wait wait. You're trying to get out of—No you don't.

TOMMY

Goddamnit.

DIMI

No way. You're in this to the end. Now look at your next line: "Wait. That's not my next line."

TOMMY

Wait. That's not my next line.

DIMI

Right. That's the line. But you're not saying it believably yet.

TOMMY

No. That's actually not my next line in the monologue.

DIMI

No. You're adding words to it. It goes "Wait. That's not my next line."

TOMMY

But that's not my next line.

DIMI

Wait.

TOMMY

What?

DIMI

Wait. Not "but."

TOMMY

But—

DIMI

Wait.

TOMMY

What?

DIMI

No that comes later.

TOMMY

What does?

DIMI

Right.

TOMMY

But—

DIMI

Wait.

TOMMY

But—

DIMI

It's "Wait. That's not my next line." Not "But"!

TOMMY

What's the next line?

DIMI

No that comes later.

TOMMY

What does?

DIMI

After "Wait that's not my next line," I say "Right. That's the line. But you're not saying it believably yet." Then there are a couple of more lines until you say "What's the next line."

TOMMY

So what's my line right now?

DIMI

"Oh."

TOMMY

Oh?...Can we go back?

DIMI

Sure. Now look at your next line: "Wait. That's not my next line."

TOMMY

....Ok...

DIMI

No, it's "Wait. That's not my next line."

TOMMY

"Wait. That's not my next line?"

DIMI

Ok that's a start. Would you say it again, but now with a little more...conviction.

TOMMY

Um...say what?

DIMI

No. Now you say “What does?”

TOMMY

Wait. That’s not my next line.

DIMI

Perfect! See what I like about that delivery is that it seemed like you actually didn’t know what your next line was. That’s the first honest moment I’ve seen from you all night. How did it feel?

*Beat.*

TOMMY

Line?

MOLLY

DIMI: How did it feel? TOMMY: Line? DIMI: I think we’re really making progress here. TOMMY: I have no idea what’s going on.

DIMI

I think we’re really making progress here.

*Dimi flips through the script.*

TOMMY

I have no idea what’s going on.

*Beat.*

**The Reader**

DIMI

Uh oh.

TOMMY

What?

DIMI

Page [30].

TOMMY

What about it?

DIMI

Do you see who speaks?

TOMMY

Do you mean the part where you're asking the audience to read from the script?

DIMI

No what I mean is that Brock has lines on page [30] and *(turns a couple of pages)* the next [four pages].

TOMMY

Well that's nice of the writer. You know, I really like Brock's energy on stage he's—

DIMI

No. I mean, how can Brock say his lines if he's not here?

TOMMY

Just give them to the understudy?

*(Dimi gives him a look)*

What? Isn't that how it's done?

DIMI

Where do you think we are right now?

*(no response)*

Erm, Molly!

MOLLY

*(tired of this shit)* What?

DIMI

Nice to see you too...Brock's left but he's got lines coming up.

MOLLY

I thought he only had nine lines.

DIMI

Well I guess that was just that scene. It doesn't matter. What are we supposed to do?

MOLLY

Well can you just skip that scene?

DIMI

Skip that scene? It's my thesis!

MOLLY

Then have someone read his lines.

DIMI

Like who? Tommy's got lines too.

TOMMY

*(aside)*

Damn straight.

MOLLY

Oh I don't know...maybe the people sitting RIGHT IN FRONT OF YOU.

DIMI

*(calculus)* Right in front of m—*(sees the audience)* Oh you're still there! Brilliant! Does anyone want to read some lines for us?

*(if no one volunteers, Molly will read...maybe Dimi just hands the script pages to someone?)*

So just read all the highlighted lines. No acting. Just read. Beginning with "stop!" right there.

AUDIENCE BROCK

Stop!

DIMI

*(speaks to where Brock is supposed to be standing on stage; mock surprise)* What the fuck!

TOMMY

Cool. He's back.

AUDIENCE BROCK

How could you replace me with an audience member?

DIMI

Can we just move on with this fucking play?

AUDIENCE BROCK

I mean, I understand if you use my understudy but no one can match my brand of heroic cowardice.

DIMI

YOU LEFT! What was I supposed to do?

AUDIENCE BROCK

I wish you had waited for me.

TOMMY

Guys—

DIMI

This play isn't about you. We have to move on whether you're here or not.

AUDIENCE BROCK

But you cast me in this role. I'm perfect for it.

TOMMY

There's really no point—

DIMI

It's my thesis. I can do whatever I want.

AUDIENCE BROCK

But that's not the way it's written.

DIMI

Look, Brock, you need to calm down and stop shouting. Your sense of self-importance is getting a bit hard to bear.

TOMMY

His self-importance?

AUDIENCE BROCK

I am not feeling self-important!

DIMI

I know you're this big shot undergrad and everyone loves you but sometimes you gotta know when to stand by.

AUDIENCE BROCK

But I'm so musical!

DIMI

Nobody wants to watch stagehands. It's dull.

AUDIENCE BROCK

I am not dull.

DIMI

Get off the stage.

TOMMY

Don't you think that's a bit harsh—

AUDIENCE BROCK

I'm the least dullest person you'll ever meet. I'm going to sing a song now.

DIMI

No! Not again!

AUDIENCE BROCK

But they really love me.

DIMI

They're all drunk.

*(everybody pauses during this next line)*

MOLLY

*(reads stage direction)* Actual Brock appears and assumes his position on stage

*(Brock performs this action after Molly reads the line...at some point during this, Tommy grabs the script from the audience member)*

BROCK

Stop!

DIMI

*(speaks to where Brock is supposed to be standing on stage; mock surprise)* What the fuck!

TOMMY

Cool. He's back.

BROCK

How could you replace me with an...*(bad word)* audience member??

DIMI

Can we just move on with this fucking play?

BROCK

I mean, I understand if you use my understudy but no one can match my brand of...heroic cowardice.

DIMI

YOU LEFT. What was I supposed to do?

BROCK

*(sad puppy)* I wish you had waited for me.

TOMMY

Guys—

DIMI

This play isn't about you. We have to move on whether you're here or not.

BROCK

But you cast me in this role. I'm perfect for it.

TOMMY

There's really no point—

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But that's not the way it's written.

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Look, Actual Brock, you need to calm down and stop shouting. Your sense of self-importance is getting a bit hard to bear.

TOMMY

His self-importance?

BROCK

I am not feeling self-important!

DIMI

I know you're this big shot undergrad and everyone loves you but sometimes you gotta know when to stand by.

BROCK

But I'm so musical!

DIMI

Nobody wants to watch stagehands. It's dull.

BROCK

I am not dull.

DIMI

Get off the stage.

TOMMY

Don't you think that's a bit harsh—

BROCK

I'm the least dullest person you'll ever meet. *(turn to audience...begins a song again...)* ["Not dull! Not dull! I'm definitely not dull!"]

*(starts to dance)*

DIMI

No! Not again! *(stops him dancing)*

BROCK

*(calling back as Dimi pushes him offstage)* But, but...they really love me!

DIMI

They're all drunk.

### **The Fight**

TOMMY

You know, I think you were a bit hard on him. He's just trying to do his job.

DIMI

Well he's not really living up to my expectations.

TOMMY

What *are* your expectations?

DIMI

*(calling offstage)* I expect people to know their place!

TOMMY

Well that's not elitist of you at all.

DIMI

You know, I wish you would have a better attitude about this. I'm giving you a pretty great opportunity with this role.

TOMMY

What opportunity? An opportunity to embarrass myself in front of a bunch of people I know and heed to your irrational demands? You're not even paying me.

DIMI

Well this *is* my thesis after all.

TOMMY

Fuck that! You said all I would have to do would be memorize a few lines, banter a lot and act with Brock Ward. Instead, I have to deal with you berating me all the time and staring at your god-awful beard. I don't care if it is your thesis—you don't know shit about directing!

DIMI

Well you're certainly not making my job easy.

TOMMY

What? After the last rehearsal you gave me one piece of direction: "Just be." What the fuck is that supposed to mean?

DIMI

Well you were obviously not being.

TOMMY

WHAT?

DIMI

I couldn't feel your...essence...on stage. Only your physical incarnation.

TOMMY

Then tell me how to fix it!

DIMI

I'm afraid you're a lost cause. If you can't understand what it means to be then you really have no business standing on this stage.

TOMMY

Well if you stopped being such a pretentious, beardy prick, maybe I would actually listen to some of the shit you spew on a daily basis.

DIMI

If by pretentious you mean well-spoken and far more intelligent than you, then yes, I am pretentious. But don't go after the beard!

TOMMY

That's it.

*(TOMMY charges at DIMI and attempts to spear him to the ground. Before he succeeds though...)*

MOLLY

Slow!

TOMMY

*(drops the act)* What?

MOLLY

You guys forgot to do fight call earlier. Half speed.

TOMMY

Oh right. Of course.

*(TOMMY backs up into original position)*

TOMMY

*(to DIMI)* Ready?

DIMI

Yup.

*(TOMMY and DIMI go through fight sequence at half speed)*

TOMMY

That good?

DIMI

Yeah almost. [If you could try and kick me with your left foot instead of your right, I could ease you down better. It would be safer.]

TOMMY

Sure.

MOLLY

Ok full speed.

*(TOMMY and DIMI have the fight at full speed.)*

DIMI

No you're not doing it right. [You elbow me with your right arm, not your left.]

TOMMY

That's not how we rehearsed it.

DIMI

Yes it is. This is how it's been since day one!

TOMMY

[But if I elbow you with my right arm, I can't show off my sexy bicep to the audience.]

DIMI

[But the point is you don't actually elbow me, which means you have to elbow me with your upstage arm!]

TOMMY

That makes me out to be a wuss.

DIMI

Well that's the point.

TOMMY

I don't like being portrayed like that!

DIMI

That's how it's written!

TOMMY

No, it's shitty fight choreography!

DIMI

That's how I want it to be! IT'S MY THESIS!

TOMMY

That's it.

*(TOMMY charges at DIMI and the two proceed to have the exact same fight sequence without interruption.)*

DIMI & TOMMY

[Improv angry insults and ordinary fight vocabulary]

**The Switch**

TOMMY

You hack director!

DIMI

Mindless drone!

TOMMY

Fuck off!

DIMI

You're completely ignorant to anything even remotely resembling acting.

TOMMY

Oh sure...blame *me!* Because your directing is *flawless*. So obvious...so motivating!

DIMI

*(lost for words)* YOU CAN'T ACT!

TOMMY

YOU CAN'T DIRECT!

*(a bell/ buzzard sounds...both release the emotions, Brock runs out and helps them change costumes. They replace each other's position on stage)*

DIMI

YOU CAN'T DIRECT!

TOMMY

YOU CAN'T ACT!

*Beat.*

DIMI

All I'm saying is that sometimes you have a tendency to be really scattered about what you want. I have no idea what to do because you have no idea what you're trying to say.

TOMMY

Well that doesn't excuse your piss poor attitude.

DIMI

I'm trying to help now. Look, you interrupted a *live* play because it wasn't going well. Do you even know how to let go?

TOMMY

*(first moment of self-reflection)* I've been working on this for a year and a half...it has to be perfect.

DIMI

It's been a year and a half and you still don't know what you're trying to say.

TOMMY

That's not true. I've had hundreds of ideas.

DIMI

Such as?

TOMMY

Well, I want to explore the nature of the theatrical process. Like, show people why we do what we do. But, you know, have it be entertaining and shit.

DIMI

Ok good. That's something I can run with—

TOMMY

*(excited)* Oh oh and also explore the intentions of the artist for an audience.

DIMI

Alright that can definitely—

TOMMY

Like, do we want the audience to leave the theatre and change the world or would we rather have them sit back in their seats and enjoy?

DIMI

Well I think—

TOMMY

And then! Make it really uncomfortable...like, an awkward situation for both the audience and the actors!

DIMI

Well now we're veering—

TOMMY

And improvise half of it!

DIMI

That doesn't sound—

TOMMY

And we play ourselves! And we switch roles!

*(Brock runs onstage)*

BROCK

And cast Brock Ward!

TOMMY

Brock, get the fuck out of here!

BROCK

I just think it would be a really great idea if—

TOMMY

Out!

*(Brock Charlie-Brown-walks off the stage, mugging to the audience. Maybe he tries to get a collective “Awww” from them. Tommy improv if audience responds.)*

TOMMY

*(sheepish)* Anyway, that's all I want to do.

DIMI

Let's focus on one of those: why do you do what you do?

TOMMY

Pardon?

DIMI

Hold on: could you say that again with a little more nonchalance?

TOMMY

What?

DIMI

I just don't think the character would say it like that.

TOMMY

The word “pardon”?

DIMI

Yeah.

TOMMY

Wait. Who’s the director here?

DIMI

Pardon?

TOMMY

Oh but you get to use it?

DIMI

What were we talking about?

TOMMY

Why I do what I do.

DIMI

Right. You mentioned exploring why we’re in theatre. Why did you get in to theatre?

TOMMY

I don’t follow.

DIMI

It’s your thesis about the theatrical process. What about the process is personally interesting to you?

TOMMY

I don’t see how my personal interests are relevant to the story.

DIMI

You keep saying “it’s my thesis...it’s my thesis.” It’s obviously personal. If you want to talk about your perception of the process, you need to talk about why you got in to theatre. Or why you’re still doing it.

TOMMY

You mean I get to talk about myself for an hour?

DIMI

Well not exactly—

TOMMY

*(flashes smile to audience, tells a story)* [If you watch the video of my first bath in the sink...]

DIMI

Oh no.

TOMMY

[...in the background you will hear the soundtrack to *Gyps and Dolls*. It's true.]

DIMI

Tommy! That's not what I meant.

TOMMY

Oh. [You mean they don't want to hear about the four Groundhog awards I won last year?]  
*(toothy smile)*

DIMI

[You won four Groundhog awards!]

TOMMY

*(again, to audience)* [Tommy Corts. For your consideration.]

DIMI

Wait, no. That's not the point. I'm saying there's a way to frame the play in the context of your experiences without making it all about yourself.

TOMMY

How?

DIMI

Um...well...maybe you switch roles at some point in the play so you question yourself as the director?

TOMMY

That sounds stupid, Dimi.

DIMI

Yeah I guess it does. Hang on: why didn't you write this play?

TOMMY

Huh?

DIMI

If you're looking to explore all these different things, why not write it yourself?

TOMMY

Oh...well...I'm not a very good writer.

DIMI

I'm sure that's not true. We all start poorly.

TOMMY

No, seriously, if I wrote this play, my characters would just sit around talking nonsense and commenting on the fact that they don't know what they're doing.

DIMI

Wow, that sounds awful.

*Beat.*

TOMMY

I wish I knew what to do.

DIMI

*(sigh)* I know.

TOMMY

I wish it was worth the money to see this show.

DIMI

The show was free.

TOMMY

Oh right.

*(Beat.)*

**The Lights**

TOMMY

Um...you're not in your light...

DIMI

...what?

TOMMY

You messed up your blocking...you're supposed to be [over there].

DIMI

No that's not right. We fight [over here], you lament your frustrations as a director while I'm standing [over there], then I go sit down [in the corner].

TOMMY

Then why is the light on [in that corner]?

DIMI

I don't know. Faulty lighting design.

TOMMY

Hmm...I guess so. I thought we teched this pretty well though.

DIMI

Well you know lighting designers during tech...sitting there yelling out circuit numbers, channel numbers, cue numbers, lottery numbers...eventually some number has to get crossed with something.

*(Brock peaks out)*

BROCK

I guess you could say, our lighting designer isn't too bright. *(enjoys his joke)*

TOMMY

[Get the fuck out of here Brock!]

DIMI

[Get off the stage!]

*(Brock scurries off)*

TOMMY

Dang. That one cue was so important too! Like, a real dramatic moment where you consider the existential angst of not knowing what to do. I'm gonna have to have a word with Nick.

*(a paper ball flies out of the booth on to the stage. TOMMY picks it up and uncrumples it. While he reads, the light on him keeps changing so he has to chase the light around the stage, including a few fake-outs.)*

TOMMY

*(reads)* "Dear audience: Nick Brown, your lovely and loquacious lighting designer, would like to inform those ignorant pigs on stage that this mistake was not his fault.

*(light change...Tommy scrambles)*

He would like to blame Dimi, and inform the audience of his awful sense of blocking, his inability to ever find his light, and his judgmental nature as he then bitches about people whose job it is to make him look good. But of course, as director, Tommy must also share the blame. He has staged some awful blocking that no sensible actor would ever follow. He would like to remind both that there are repercussions to their actions.

*(lights change)*

Nick would also like to inform the audience that this show does not reflect his talent as a lighting designer. He agreed to the project under false pretenses about what his input and workload would be. At this point, he has no passion for the project and is only doing this for resume filler.

*(lights change)*

This should not suggest to you that he is difficult to work with—in fact, he is a perfectly affable and friendly collaborator—but rather: Tommy is an awful communicator.

*(lights change)*

If you would like to talk to him about actually designing a good show in the future, he will be in the lobby after the show—

*(lights change)*

--and is only too willing to tell you his ideas for how to make your show look amazing.

*(lights change)*

Thank you and please try and forget about this show as soon as you leave.

*(Tommy is exhausted from running around. The lights are back to where they were before. Dimi calmly moves into his right place.)*

DIMI

Well.

TOMMY

Huh. I probably shouldn't have kept reading after a certain point.

DIMI

Yeah...probably not.

MOLLY

*(reads stage direction)* Silence, as they re-examine their existential crisis.

*(Dimi and Tommy perform this action after Molly reads it. After an excruciating silence...)*

### **The Audience**

MOLLY

Hey guys...

DIMI & TOMMY

Huh?

MOLLY

There's still an audience here...

DIMI

What the fuck are you still doing here? I mean, there's really nothing you can get from this...

TOMMY

I think I have a brilliant idea.

DIMI

It's just inane bullshit. No artistic merit whatsoever...

TOMMY

Why don't we ask them what we should do?

DIMI

Oh boy...

TOMMY

Brock!

*(Brock runs out...he prepares for a dramatic monologue)*

BROCK

Nick! Lights! *(the lights focus in on him)* "Is this a dagger which I see before me?"

DIMI

What is he doing?

BROCK

"The handle toward my hand?"

TOMMY

Brock!

BROCK

"Come, let me clutch thee."

DIMI AND TOMMY

BROCK!

BROCK

*(breaks the monologue)* Guys...I'm trying to act here.

DIMI

What are you doing?

BROCK

A dramatic monologue.

DIMI

Is it from this play?

BROCK

No it's from William Shakespeare's legendary play set in Scotland, "Mac"—

MOLLY AND DIMI AND TOMMY

NO!

BROCK

What?

MOLLY

Don't say that here.

*(they all shrug in bewilderment)*

TOMMY

Brock, you're not here for Shakespeare. That's not in this play.

BROCK

It's not?

TOMMY

No. It's not in the script.

BROCK

Shouldn't I know? I've been following the script this whole time.

TOMMY

Shut up. Bring me a stack of paper and pencils.

DIMI

Do we have to do this?

BROCK

How many?

TOMMY

Enough for the audience sitting here.

DIMI

Maybe we can just skip this section?

BROCK

[Maybe improv joke about lack of audience.]

Where am I supposed to find all that paper and pencils?

TOMMY

Why don't you check the prop table?

BROCK

*(first notice of prop table in stage left wing)* Oh. Right.

DIMI

This is unnecessary.

*(Brock scurries off to get the props. Tommy instructs the audience in the meantime.)*

TOMMY

So we're going to give everyone a piece of paper and a pencil. Please write down what you think of the play so far and anything that you think would make it better. Here are some questions that can serve as your guide:

*[Maybe a white board with questions written on them? Maybe the questions will be written on the paper?]*

### Questions for the questionnaire

-What do you think was the intention of this project?

-How well do you think it was realized?

-What do you think of the acting?

-What do you think of the writing?

-How do you think it's going to end?

-On a scale of 1 to 10, what's the grade?

-Would you have paid to see this show?

-Why did you come?

-Why don't you leave?

-How much longer do you think we can go?

-How's your day been?

*(Brock comes back and starts to hand out the questionnaires)*

TOMMY

So I guess you got this covered Brock?

BROCK

What?

TOMMY

We're gonna go out for a bit.

BROCK

You are?

DIMI

We are?

TOMMY

Yeah. *(to Dimi)* Dimi, come watch me smoke.

DIMI

Huh? Oh alright.

*(Dimi and Tommy exit while people finish their questionnaires. Brock handles distribution and collection. Awkwardly, of course. Banter.)*

*(At some point, Tommy and Dimi will walk back in mid-conversation. Brock may not necessarily be done collecting.)*

DIMI

I mean, the fundamental question is: what do you want the audience to get out of it?

TOMMY

Wait. So who's who right now?

DIMI

*(through teeth)* What are you talking about Tommy? You've always been the director.

TOMMY

Oh ok still this shit. What was the question?

DIMI

What is the audience getting out of this?

TOMMY

Who says I'm doing this for an audience?

DIMI

Well then why are they here right now?

TOMMY

I dunno. False advertising? *(flashy smile to audience)*

DIMI

No seriously: you can't have theatre without an audience.

TOMMY

*(mystical)* Or can you?

DIMI

Cut it out.

TOMMY

If an actor acts and no one is around to see it, is it still acting?

DIMI

Not what we're talking about.

TOMMY

If I didn't have lines to say right now, would it still be theatre?

DIMI

Stop it.

TOMMY

*(enjoying himself...telling a ghost story)* What if, instead, everything we ever say was already written and we are merely actors playing out the part?

DIMI

No. Just. No.

TOMMY

*(just warming up)* What if each one of us is a character archetype? What if—

DIMI  
*(sighs)* Here comes the Shakespeare...

TOMMY  
*(majestic)* –“All the world’s a stage—

DIMI  
 Oh boy.

TOMMY  
*(undeterred)* –“And all the men and women merely players!”

DIMI  
 Can we get back on topic?

TOMMY  
 Huh?

DIMI  
 Despite your ridiculous games, you need an audience.

TOMMY  
 Ok fine. I suppose I do.

DIMI  
 And what do you want to do with them?

TOMMY  
 How do you mean?

DIMI  
 Do you want to entertain? Make them uncomfortable? Social commentary?

TOMMY  
 I want to challenge their perception of theatre.

DIMI  
 And what makes you qualified?

TOMMY  
 Well someone has to tell people what they’re doing wrong.

DIMI

*(sarcastic)* Aw, that's so nice of you.

TOMMY

*(superhero)* I know.

DIMI

Shut up. How are you going to do that?

TOMMY

Pardon?

DIMI

How are you going to challenge the audience's perception of theatre?

TOMMY

I dunno. Ask them what they want to see?

DIMI

Well that's stupid.

TOMMY

*(over the top)* Yeah. It really is.

*(awkward, then...)*

MOLLY

*(reads stage direction)* Dimi and Tommy share a hearty laugh.

*(Dimi and Tommy perform this action after Molly reads it.)*

TOMMY

I could...present the story in a manner where nobody knows what's real or not.

DIMI

No.

TOMMY

What if I tell them exactly what I'm doing as I'm doing it?

DIMI

No.

TOMMY

Throw rocks at them?

DIMI

Erm...let's not do that.

TOMMY

Ooh I know: have Brock Ward banter with them?

*(Brock peeks out...before he gets far, Dimi points him in the other direction)*

DIMI

Nope.

TOMMY

Stop being so negative. I'm trying to fix my thesis.

DIMI

I know. I'm trying to help.

TOMMY

By saying "no" to everything I propose? You're doing more harm than good.

DIMI

*I'm* doing harm. Look in the fucking mirror.

TOMMY

*(exaggerated)* Oh. So this is *my* fault?

DIMI

Yeah. It is.

TOMMY

Well if you actually made a choice in your acting, maybe the audience wouldn't be so bored.

DIMI

No. This is not my fault.

TOMMY

My thesis is drowning and all you're looking to do is place blame!

DIMI

*I'm* placing blame?

TOMMY

I thought you were someone I could trust...who could help me.

DIMI

That's it. I'm out of here.

*(Dimi leaves the stage. Tommy alone.)*

TOMMY

Uh...line?

MOLLY

"I don't know what comes next."

TOMMY

I don't know what comes next.

*(bell/buzzard sounds)*

TOMMY

Oh thank god.

*(Tommy and Brock switch places. Dimi helps them change. Brock remains alone on stage.)*

BROCK

*(peeks to both sides...nobody is stopping him...gets comfortable)* Ladies and—

*(Before he can finish, a bell/buzzard sounds)*

BROCK

Dang.

*(Dimi returns and switches places with Brock. Tommy helps them change. Now Dimi is alone)*

DIMI

Erm...line?

MOLLY

"I don't know what comes next."

*(beat)*

DIMI

I don't know what comes next.

**The Solitary Confinement**

*(Note: Tommy and Brock disappear out of view...no more backstage within full view)*

*(an excruciating silence...DIMI is frantic, contemplates leaving...stares at the audience...begins to speak and stops himself several times...finally just stops and closes his eyes)*

*(a voice comes over the speakers...it sounds a lot like Brock Ward. Note: this should be done live if possible)*

INNER MONOLOGUE

Ok. Breathe. You'll figure this out.

*(Dimi looks up confused.)*

DIMI

Brock?

INNER MONOLOGUE

*(scrambles)* No. Why would you say that? Can't you hear where I'm coming from?

DIMI

Um...

INNER MONOLOGUE

Your mind. I'm your inner monologue.

DIMI

My...inner monologue?

INNER MONOLOGUE

Well that's the character's name in the script.

DIMI

My inner monologue sounds very cowardly.

INNER MONOLOGUE

But it's heroic cowardice!

DIMI

*(slumps)* I'm doomed.

INNER MONOLOGUE

Look, this isn't a big deal. It's just your thesis—the one you've been working on for a year and a half and has suddenly started to crash and burn in front of a paying audience—no big deal.

DIMI

The show was free.

INNER MONOLOGUE

Ha ha ha...sure it was.

You know, you should have used *The Lady from Dubuque* as your thesis. This was too much. Too disorganized. Too little time. Too many inept actors.

Maybe it's a dream? If you squeeze your eyes shut really tight, maybe they'll be gone.

*(squeezes really hard...opens his eyes...panic)*

DIMI

Shit.

INNER MONOLOGUE

Calm. Calm. Ok so it's not a dream. It was worth a shot. Reassess.

Oh I know! Remember your motto: WWKBD?

DIMI

WWKBD? Wacky walruses kill boisterous dingos?

INNER MONOLOGUE

No you fool! What would Kate Buckley do?

DIMI

Oh right. Good idea Inner Monologue! She'll know what to do.

INNER MONOLOGUE

That's why I'm here, Dimi! Ok think hard. Empty your mind. You're walking to Kate Buckley's office. Across the bridge to McClung...down the narrow hallway...Kenton is meditating in his office...ignore him...through the door and...

*(recording of conversation with Kate Buckley)*

DIMI

Hey Kate I—

KATE VOICEOVER

What do you want?

DIMI

Erm, I'm in this play right n—

KATE VOICEOVER

Go away.

*(sound of interrupted recording...like that of a record scratch?)*

INNER MONOLOGUE

Hmmm...well that didn't work.

DIMI

Yeah no shit.

INNER MONOLOGUE

Well you can't just expect her to help you *all* the time.

DIMI

It was all in my head! You mean I can't expect my imagination to help me out when I need it?

INNER MONOLOGUE

She is a very busy woman. Why don't you try Casey?

DIMI

You think she's not busy?

*(beat)*

Fine.

INNER MONOLOGUE

Ok. Here we go. Back into the imaginative McClung...think hard...you pass the elevators...Jed Diamond walks by, you bow to him in reverence...Casey's door is open...you walk in and—

DIMI

Casey. I have a question.

CASEY VOICEOVER

I have an answer.

DIMI

My thesis—that thing you advised me about—it’s happening right now but it’s an absolute disaster.

CASEY VOICEOVER

Ok.

DIMI

*(rapidly)* My actors have left I don’t know what the play is about the audience is here they’re just sitting there judging me I don’t know what to tell them I’m being really uninteresting I wish I was at home watching a Woody Allen movie that would make me feel better—

CASEY VOICEOVER

Dimi—

DIMI

--maybe Annie Hall...or Manhattan...I’ll even take Melinda and Melinda JUST GET ME OUT OF HERE!

CASEY VOICEOVER

DIMI!

DIMI

WHAT?

CASEY VOICEOVER

Remember to breathe.

DIMI

I’m breathing does it sound like I’m not breathing who told you I’m not breathing you don’t even know what I’m doing right—

CASEY VOICEOVER

CALM DOWN

DIMI

--It’s like the foundation of living how can I not be breathing are you saying I’m not human—

CASEY VOICEOVER

I can’t help you if you don’t let me speak.

DIMI

--I mean I thought you were my advisor shouldn't you be advising me or something this is so unhelpful—

CASEY VOICEOVER

That's it. I'm out of here.

DIMI

--If I had known you weren't going to help at all I would have pick—

*(sound of interrupted recording...like that of a record scratch?)*

*(beat)*

INNER MONOLOGUE

Yeahhh that probably wasn't the right approach.

DIMI

WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO?

INNER MONOLOGUE

How about a new perspective? Maybe advice from someone you look up to?

DIMI

*(defeated)* No.

INNER MONOLOGUE

No come on. Take inspiration from others. One more ride.

DIMI

No.

INNER MONOLOGUE

That's the attitude. Here we go! One more time into the imaginarium...Think hard...you're sitting on your couch watching tv...you're a child...Child Dimi!...you change the channel and...*(voiceover of some bad impression of a famous celebrity (Kermit, Fat Albert, Kanye))* ["Hey Hey Hey! Fat Albert will help you."]

*(sound of interrupted recording...like that of a record scratch?)*

INNER MONOLOGUE

Hmm...perhaps the wrong direction...

DIMI

Fuck off.

*(DIMI sits on the stage and sulks. Inner monologue cautiously approaches)*

INNER MONOLOGUE

*(sotto)* Hey buddy. You ok? It's not a disaster. You just have to...pick yourself up.

DIMI

My actors have left. The audience is bored. My imaginative mentors have deserted me. My thesis is ruined. How is this not a disaster?

INNER MONOLOGUE

Hmmm...well when you put it like that, I guess you're right.

*(sound of interrupted recording...like that of a record scratch?)*

DIMI

Inner monologue? Inner monologue?

Even my inner monologue doesn't believe in me.

This wasn't the way it was supposed to be. It was going to be easy. Write some banter, invite some people...get it over with. Why did I have to do this?

Why do I have to be in theatre? Why am I a director? The books never prepared me for this.

*(A book is thrown on stage. Dimi picks it up, opens to random page, reads out loud)*

"Directing is the loneliest job in theatre."

Oh. I guess they did.

*(Dimi curls up in the fetal position)* Don't mind me. I'm just going to...disappear now...

*(Dimi tries to sleep away the nightmare. Eventually Brock walks on stage in a dinner party outfit.)*

**The Dinner Party**

DIMI

Brock?

BROCK

No. *(whispers)* I'm in character.

DIMI  
I...I don't remember this part.

BROCK  
Yeah we're gonna actually perform a scene now.

DIMI  
Did we rehearse this?

BROCK  
No, but we've got to do something interesting.

DIMI  
Who do I play?

BROCK  
Yourself. Duh.

DIMI  
What's my motivation?

BROCK  
Who cares?

DIMI  
Oh...ok.

*(Dimi gets up and composes himself. Tommy runs out to change him into appropriate dinner attire. The scene is a dinner party that Dimi's parents are having. Brock is one of Dimi's parents' friends.)*

BROCK  
Dimi my boy. I almost didn't recognize you with your beard.

DIMI  
Oh...yeah.

BROCK  
You're missing some parts.

DIMI  
Huh. Yeah.

BROCK  
So tell me.

*Beat.*

Tell you, sir?  
DIMI

Yes, tell me.  
BROCK

*Beat.*

Tell you what?  
DIMI

*(impatient)* Tell me about your life. What is it like to have graduated?  
BROCK

I haven't.  
DIMI

You haven't? What are you waiting for?  
BROCK

I'm doing my thesis.  
DIMI

Right right. What are you studying again?  
BROCK

Theatre.  
DIMI

Oh.  
BROCK

Yeah.  
DIMI

So...you're an actor?  
BROCK

Well...not exactly.  
DIMI

BROCK  
What do you do?

DIMI  
Well lately I've been directing a lot.

BROCK  
Oh. Like Steven Spielberg! Terrific!

DIMI  
Erm...that's film. I'm a theatre director.

BROCK  
Oh.

DIMI  
But actually, I've done a lot of everything: acting, directing, backstage, administration. It's nice to spread around a little.

BROCK  
So what are you going to do with that?

DIMI  
Erm...I dunno. You know, explore the human condition...pose philosophical questions to the viewing public...

BROCK  
Hmmm.

DIMI  
Yeah so basically, serve someone food someday.

BROCK  
Well. As long as you're happy.

DIMI  
Yes sir.

BROCK  
Fantastic. I'm sure you'll be great in....whatever it is you want to do.

DIMI  
Uh...ok.

*(Tommy comes in dressed as your dear Aunt Peggy)*

Yoo hoo...George? TOMMY

Tommy? You're back. DIMI

*(whispers)* Shhhh...I'm acting. TOMMY

What are you wearing? DIMI

*(ignores him...to Brock)* George? TOMMY

Yes darling? BROCK

Are you ready to go? I've simply had too much fun tonight. TOMMY

Yes darling. BROCK

Wait. No. Guys. Stop. I need your help. DIMI

Now you listen to me closely Dimi— BROCK

No—stop acting. Stop these characters. DIMI

--all you need in life is one letter: "k". BROCK

K? DIMI

Kangaroos. TOMMY

Kafka. BROCK

Kefir. TOMMY

Kaleidoscope. BROCK

Kerfuffle. TOMMY

Kelp. BROCK

Kalamazoo. TOMMY

Kraut. BROCK

Kiwi. TOMMY

Just avoid the letter “n.” Always. BROCK

Guys can you please stop— DIMI

Ok. Toodaloo. TOMMY

*(Brock and Tommy begin to leave. Right before Brock disappears, he calls back to Dimi:)*

BROCK  
Hey Dimi, are we almost done? I have homework to do.

DIMI  
Wait. Brock—

BROCK  
*(David Alley)* Ok. Super.

*(He walks off. Dimi is alone again.)*

### The Final Inquiry

DIMI

*(in despair, to the booth) Molly? You still there? Molly? Please? (no response)*

I wish I knew what to do.

I wish my life had a script I could follow.

I wish you hadn't paid to see this show.

I wish I could have controlled this play.

I wish I knew what kefir meant.

I wish I could give you something that made sense.

I wish I hadn't done this thesis project.

I wish I knew what theatre meant to me.

*(Mock cheer, to the audience) Well that was fun, wasn't it? (he sits down on the stage and starts to think)*

*(Molly, Tommy, and Brock appear behind him in a line)*

DIMI

What did they say?

*(each of them reads one thing written from the audience questionnaires...Brock will choose these in advance...or perhaps we'll have time during a break)*

TOMMY

[Audience comment/question]

MOLLY

[Audience comment/question]

BROCK

[Audience comment/question]

DIMI

What are we doing?

TOMMY

Communicating.

MOLLY

Amusing.

BROCK

Storytelling.

DIMI

Why do we do it?

TOMMY

I was empowered.

MOLLY

I was entertained.

BROCK

I escaped.

DIMI

*(a light bulb goes off...motions to others)* Let's try something else.

*Lights out.*

**The End**