

**An Acting Process Analysis and Record of the WVU 2004 Production of *Kolonists* with a
Focus on the Character Alexei**

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Abstract

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An exploration of the acting process in the play *Kolonists* by Stephen Dykes, focusing on the character Alexei, with special examination of the socio-political context in post-Soviet Estonia, actor/character choices, and ensemble dynamics.

Dedication

This process and the analysis thereof are dedicated to protecting and enlivening the art of theatre as a valued and essential part of any and every community.

Acknowledgements

I would like to make a special thanks to Kendra Ortner for supporting me from afar throughout this process, Phillip Beck for directing me and guiding my learning, Jerry McGonigle for reminding me to be myself, Jim Held for serving as my chair and trusting me to do my own work, and the ensemble who all (in one way or another) compelled me to work harder.

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Introduction

It is my assertion that the job of the actor—in the case of realism—is to avoid generalizations and aim for specificity, to reject the arbitrary and challenge him or herself to make informed choices about the character being created. These informed choices should be positive¹ and must be derived from a limited number of sources, namely historical and socio-political research about the setting/s and circumstances of the play, details and given circumstances mined from the script, the influence of the director's concept, and above all, commitment to the sanctity of ensemble common sense.² Conversely, choices which are uninformed, arbitrary, or blindly impulsive serve to weaken the clarity of the character and undermine the strength of the ensemble. In addition, though not purposefully, the ensemble's choices are often affected by the energies of their own interpersonal relationships—this is the given variable in the theatrical situation.

In part one of this paper, after a brief synopsis of the play *Kolonists* by Stephen Dykes and a concise description of the director's concept of the play, I will present historical and socio-political research about the setting of this play and relate that research to an analysis of the overall circumstances of the play, focusing on the character Alexei.

In part two, through an examination of my own experience in the Fall 2004 production of *Kolonists* at West Virginia University, I will test my assertion directly by analyzing my experience through the rehearsal and performance process. I will test the details of the process in this production against the criteria I have set out to define successful characterization and strength of ensemble. I assert that ensemble success is greatly dependent on trust between actors

¹ Dramatic choices can be defined as the mental determination before taking a specific action. They determine how that action is performed in the context of a situation. All dramatic actions involve choices, small and often obvious but always specific to a particular action as an action cannot be performed without a choice. A *positive* choice is a choice that supports the greater action of the scene as a whole. Each actor must be in tune with the ensemble at all times in order to determine the difference between a positive and negative choice at any given moment. Positive choices are based on the aim of perpetuating and energizing the forward movement of the dramatic situation. A positive choice puts one in a better position to be of use (either as aid or obstacle) to the other characters on the stage. Positive choices make the scene more active, not more stagnant. Negative choices are not only boring to watch, they drag down other actors and often contradict what is written in the script. This does not mean a positive choice is necessarily more exciting, it means that when an actor chooses a positive choice rather than the negative, it makes that actor's character a more active part of the scene. In essence, a positive choice puts a character into the line of fire. It is a choice of confrontation rather than retreat.

² Ensemble common sense refers to an actor's ability to sense the continuous exchange between actors on stage and make choices that are consistent with the spirit of the ensemble.

and informed, specific, and positive character choices create an environment of trust, while arbitrary, inconsistent, and negative choices breed mistrust and tentativeness into an ensemble. In addition to the analysis of choices onstage, I will examine actor relations off-stage and outside of rehearsal and how those relations affected work onstage.

I will conclude by assessing the value of the process as a whole. I will synthesize my work, as well as the record and analysis of my work, and examine how it served as a culmination of my actor training at West Virginia University.

Part I

Play Synopsis³

Scene One opens in Estonia with three sisters (Lenya, Manya, and Svetya) once again back at their dacha on the beach, lounging in the sunroom/porch enjoying the warmth of summer. There is a Chekhovian reminiscence of summers past and the death of their father amidst the years of political change. While they reflect on how this has affected their family, there is preparation for celebration of Lenya's twenty-first birthday and a visit from cousin Vassily.

Alexei (Sveta's husband), Kolya (Lenya's fiancé), and Yakov (the family's handyman) enter with champagne, and Alexei honors Lenya's special day with a toast encouraging Lenya to count on the strength of her family in the face of an unforgiving world. As the family bustles to get ready for the evening out, Yakov and Manya discuss Yakov's family difficulties as well as the upcoming arrival of Andrei (brother to the three sisters) and Vassily (cousin to the sisters), and Manya invites Yakov to the welcome dinner planned for the next evening.

As they prepare to leave, Alexei teases Svetya with an old Soviet revolutionist poem as he finishes dressing to go out. Lenya tries to convince Manya to come along, but she refuses, and the family leaves without her.

Scene Two opens with the arrival of Vassily, Andrei and Natasha (an unexpected and attractive companion of Vassily). Manya is startled awake to meet Vassily; the two were childhood playmates, but have not seen each other for twenty years. Vassily drives the conversation into a tense discussion of the relations between his father (Sergei) and Manya and Andrei's father (Alexander) emphasizing the frequent arguments between the two. Throughout this scene, an ever-drunker Vassily grows increasingly critical of his "Uncle Alexander" and of Andrei, who has been working for him in Moscow for the previous six weeks. His anger peaks as he spills his drink and then passes out. Natasha tends to Vassily and attempts to stand him up; Vassily confusedly continues his tirade and eventually leaves for the garden to take a "piss."

³ Synopsis based on Stephen Dyke's script edited and printed by Phillip Beck as well as staging elements from the West Virginia University production in the fall of 2004.

Natasha falls asleep on the couch, leaving Manya and Andrei to have a long intimate nostalgic talk about the past and their father.

The family returns from their night out with overenthusiastic introductions as Alexei gawks at the beautiful Natasha and Sveta tries to be a good host. Alexei flirts and tells Natasha he is in business with Vassily but has never actually met the man. Natasha leaves to find Vassily, and the rest are left eager to discuss with Andrei his past six weeks in Moscow. Sveta scolds him for not confronting Uncle Sergei about his absence at his brother Alexander's funeral, but Andrei insists that Sergei is not who they think he is, implying ties with the mafia—his implications are lost on Sveta and Alexei. Kolya and Lenya arrive very drunk; Kolya's babbling is interrupted by the violent entrance of Vassily thrown in by Yakov, both bloodied and angry. Having mistaken Vassily and Natasha as trespassers, Yakov confronted and attacked them. The confusion is cleared up, but the situation remains tense as Lenya confronts Yakov for spying on her and Kolya. The scene ends with Vassily kissing Lenya and a "mistaken" drunken reference to her as his sister.

Scene Three takes place the following afternoon. Sveta prepares for dinner as Lenya and Natasha look through old photographs commenting on pictures of Andrushka (young Andrei) and their mother. Natasha comes across a photograph of Manya's former fiancé, who was killed in combat years ago. Kolya is left to explain the situation to Natasha and Vassily after Lenya and Sveta excuse themselves. The discussion turns to Kolya's time in the service; Natasha and Vassily question him about his work as a police officer. The questioning turns to vicious interrogation as the two threaten Kolya concerning his past and his current relationship with Lenya.

Everyone returns, and dinner starts with a hitch as Vassily makes a toast to Russia causing discomfort amongst the family members. All dig into the food and wine, and Alexei questions Vassily about the business and pressures Andrei to speak about his time in Moscow. The discussion progresses to the question of the value of learning a foreign language, pitting Alexei's academic views against Vassily's militaristic perspective. Eventually, Vassily bullies Alexei into giving up his argument as he extends the discussion into sweeping generalizations about Estonians and insults directed at academia, and Alexei in particular. Vassily's views of government and military power clearly differ from those of the family.

The discussion is derailed when it slips that Lenya is planning to go back to Moscow to live and work for Uncle Sergei. Lenya reveals that she believes Uncle Sergei is her real father—that their mother had an affair with him. Natasha expands on this with details and proof. Vassily adds that he and the company plan to take the dacha to use as a house of entertainment for rich clients, which will be run by Natasha. Sveta and Alexei leave in disgust and defeat, and Andrei is left to defend the family. When Vassily starts berating Manya about her dead fiancé, Andrei impotently attempts to hit Vassily; Yakov steps in preventing violence. Vassily claims the house as his and then leaves to the garden with Natasha. As the play comes to an end, the three sisters are left to ponder an uncertain and frightening future.

Director's Concept⁴

Kolonists has two themes: first, the destruction of the family; second, the tragedy of the political situation and moral climate of post-Soviet Estonia. “Which one [does one] choose to follow?” Or a larger question: how does one focus on a single theme without excluding the other? As an essential part of the rehearsal process, director Phillip Beck made clear the importance of understanding the politics of the situation and era thoroughly.. But as rehearsal moved forward, the politics became a background for the plight of the family. Beck wanted “everybody to know what the politics were so that that kind of thing would have a particular resonance. How hard is it for [each character] to ignore what is going on?” The ensemble was not asked to react specifically to politics, but each and every choice made reflected socio-political pressures surrounding the characters. Thus, the politics of the play were a private matter, while the family concerns became the dominating dramatic theme.

The problem with the family is centered on a collective sense of denial. All around them, critical transformations are transpiring—their world is changing, and they are stuck in the past; all but Lenya linger in various permutations of nostalgia. Events occur in the course of the play which should elicit response, but little comes. “They are being invaded, and they don’t see it, they don’t acknowledge all the things that are going on.” It is a family “without any sense of reality.” They move from scene to scene and day to day ignoring the obvious and denying the imminent. It is a “chosen blindness” that comes perhaps from the lingering echoes of a proud Soviet disposition or from the spirit of their deceased father Alexander, who refused to accept defeat and change. “Even at the end of the play, there is this sense as if nothing has happened. It doesn’t motivate them to fight or do anything about it.” They are all stuck in the patterns of the past and the habits of a lifestyle no longer afforded to them.

This lack of reality led Beck to an image of “floating”—a family floating away from their roots without any support in the present or hope for the future. They are attempting to hold onto anything they can grab, but there is nothing: just the smoke of broken memories and the fractured chains of a society disappearing from view. These images were reinforced strongly in the design, which placed the actors on a floating plane supported only by broken pieces of splintered nostalgia with falling broken chains that looked as if they once held up an empire.

⁴ All quotes in this section come from interview with director Phillip Beck

Pictures of the past, too, floated above everything: Alexander's cryptic stares smoking a cigarette. It is the face of a Soviet, the face of a spy, the face of a past that is floating away from the family and away from memory.

Beck emphasized the importance of a "character driven play"—how the themes of "chosen blindness" and floating had to be made real through the characters' choices. "Each one of the characters in the family sort of has a default way of dealing with how they go about ignoring:" Manya smokes and drinks until she cannot think of anything or anyone anymore. Andrei plays the "stand-up comedian"; he uses comedy to mask all the pain and fear living inside him. Svetya focuses on maintaining her routine—a familial routine—doing everything by the book and clock, her attention always there. Alexei swims in rhetoric, poetry, and petty problems and backs away at the slightest hindrance. It is only in Lenya that reality is at all confronted. She's the one at a point in life where she "can either look at things or cannot look at things" and she's looking at things that need to be confronted. "So she's the reason why all of these problems are existing for everybody: because she's looking at them." So the core of the play is this particular family conflict, conveniently catalyzed and compounded by the arrival of Vassily and Natasha.

A particular statement that found a regular place in rehearsal and notes was: "suffer the play." In suffering the play, Beck asked the ensemble to explore the specificity and reality of pain in each moment. "There are so many moments of pain: some are irritations, others are huge things." In a recognition of this pain, moments were able to expand into deeper levels of action; behind everything was this lingering ache of reality, the past, and the instability of the present and future. The pain became both an obstacle and a driving force: a reason to do something and a reason to do nothing. In effect, it injected the family with a paralyzing and numbing poison that inhibited not only movement but also thought. It was to "suffer each moment," and yet, somehow, to still feel nothing.

Research and Analysis

In 1991, after a four year struggle, politically and culturally heated by over four decades of oppression and injustice, Estonia reestablished its status as an independent democratic nation-state. This independence did not result in a “single politically motivated death or even hospitalization.”⁵ The fact that this political upheaval, though filled with discontent and insecurity, maintained a civilized tone speaks volumes about the maturity of both the native Estonians and the Russian colonists: “in a tense situation it takes only one violent party to have bloodshed...”⁶

“Living conditions were bound to worsen during 1992 as Estonia reorganized,”⁷ but by 1994 the economy and government of Estonia were remarkably stable. When weighed next to all the other nations of the former Soviet Empire, “the economic reforms that Estonia has carried out in the brief period of independence are nothing short of miraculous.”⁸

“Today, Estonia is a country of youth.... Estonian entrepreneurs are young, sharp, trustworthy...”⁹ and Old Town, the famed center of the capital city Tallinn, with its 12th-century cobblestone streets and authentic medieval architecture, is now “dotted with construction cranes, outdoor cafes and well-dressed young executives jabbering on cellular phones.” It is now commonplace to see the streets filled with new BMWs, a sight unheard of just a few years ago.¹⁰

Viewed optimistically, the cultural mix in Estonia can be seen as a great asset to the nation in their quest to become a respected player in the European scene. “Estonia becomes exciting where she is able to marry Russian depth and Scandinavian clarity. Estonia is perhaps the only place capable of such a feat; her Russian minority is able, at least on the level of its intellectual leadership, to have Russian depth without the nationalism and imperialism so predominant in Moscow....”¹¹ Alexei is aware of his cultural strengths, being of Russian heritage, but fluent in the Estonian language and knowledgeable of Estonian literature and culture. Unfortunately, he is facing the great challenge of being lumped in as a “Soviet” and the

⁵ Taagepera 1

⁶ Taagepera 2

⁷ Taagepera 215

⁸ Kohan 41

⁹ Herrera 61

¹⁰ Herrera 60

¹¹ Drechsler 111

Soviet attitude is not well liked in the new Estonian economy where the Soviet “work ethic” is stereotyped as negative.

“Reestablishing a work ethic was imperative” in independent Estonia, “but could not be done by government decrees.” By 1991, most work in Estonia got done in an “almost but not quite Western way. “ That final “extra bit of effort and care in workmanship, quality control, and politeness of service was missing ... The Soviet habit of mistreating customers still at times overrode the profit motive,”¹² and the blame for this often fell onto the shoulders of the Russian-Estonian colonist population.

Alexei is an exception to the stereotype as he has good social business skills, allowing him to be an asset to the family company as a client entertainment facilitator. Unfortunately, this is not a satisfying or comfortable role for Alexei; he finds himself wishing he could embrace the ideals of capitalism. Ironically, it is a combination of his socialist upbringing and his aversion to such capitalistic tendencies that has left him particularly skilled academically and socially. This is an aspect of Alexei’s person that should be valued more by his family and surrounding culture, but “in the hastiness of the Westernization taking place in Estonia, much that is not so bad gets lost; much that is not so great becomes the rule.”¹³

Though it is unfortunate that most things Russian in nature are conflated, by native Estonians, with the ideals of the Soviet Union, it would be hard to imagine Estonians feeling otherwise. Their opinions are informed by “the policy of Russification¹⁴ under the tsarist regime since the second half of the nineteenth century, then the Soviet occupation, deportation to Siberia¹⁵, the official Communist ideology, and finally the intentional creation of a demographic ‘balance’ and the forced teaching of the Russian language in Estonia”¹⁶

Of the 600,000 non-Estonians in Estonia in 1989, “close to 400,000 were Russian colonists in the literal sense.” Some were war refugees or involuntary labor, but many came voluntarily to take advantage of job and housing offers made by the Soviet Union. “They did not know Estonia wasn’t another Russian province and did not care when they found out.” Many

¹² Taagepera 216

¹³ Drechsler 111

¹⁴ A process of changing the national identity of non-Russians to an identity culturally similar to that of the Russians. Although not the official policy of any Soviet regime, such assimilation often resulted from the policy of Russianization, particularly in the case of Ukrainians, Belorussians, and non-Russian educated elites. (definition Cold War Guide Glossary)

¹⁵ In 1949, Soviet authorities carried out a mass deportation of Estonians to Siberia

¹⁶ Černov 144

were encouraged to remain in Estonia after their military service had ended; “these individuals often were quite conscious of their mission as a civilian garrison.”¹⁷ Official Soviet military statements only made the problem worse. “Civilization supposedly had come to Estonia with Soviet rule. The colonists supposedly were invited by the native government to help the helpless Estonians.” This was a sort of “conscious imperialism among the active and retired officers” who held in great disdain the “natives”. Of course, not all colonists felt this way, but few would stand up in the Estonians’ defense, “and all of them profited from linguistic imperialism.”¹⁸

The colonists were caught unaware with the reforms leading up to independence. “For a long time they did not even notice that the natives were restless,” then, out of nowhere, their entire world collapsed. They felt that “Estonia had invited them and, after making use of their labor, now wanted to get rid of them.” On top of this, they were being asked to learn the Estonian language which for them “seemed indistinguishable from being forbidden to speak Russian or even being expelled” because this was their first experience of being dominated; they had no experience with such a subservient role. “The worst aspect was that the imperial insolence was not intentional—it came naturally.”¹⁹

During the Soviet occupation, ethnic Estonians were “cruelly exploited, suppressed, and treated almost like the natives in a nineteenth-century colony,” but now they are citizens in control of a free state and the people who formerly formed the oppressor class are a national minority, claiming “the kind of tolerance and multiculturalism they were never willing to extend themselves.”²⁰ The backlash at the Estonians of Russian heritage has been fierce and compared to white collar ethnic cleansing, but ethnic Estonians will argue that “immigration into Estonia during the Soviet period was illegal in terms of Estonian rights; that is why present citizenship policy as well as ethnic policy have to be seen as a part of the process of decolonization.”²¹

Although Estonians are known to be generous to those returning from long-time exile “whose speech has become tinged with alien inflections,” and even quite tolerant of various other immigrant minorities, “speaking Estonian with a Russian accent virtually assures exclusion.” Estonians acknowledge that they find many Russian habits and mannerisms unpleasant. “They criticize the way Russians eat, the manner in which they maintain their

¹⁷ Taagepera 219

¹⁸ Taagepera 220

¹⁹ Taagepera 220

²⁰ Drechsler 112

²¹ Vetik (a) 278

homes, their emotionalism, and a host of other allegedly obnoxious traits.”²² Nonetheless, most of the colonists are “stuck in Estonia, whether they [want] this or not. The question [is] how rapidly they [will] become sufficiently bilingual to function under postcolonial conditions.”²³

“Social dominance--the perceived political, cultural, technical, or economic superiority of a group--affects the likelihood of groups learning each other's languages. Russian status in Estonia during the Soviet era resembled social dominance, since many institutions used Russian to conduct business.”²⁴ During the Soviet occupation of Estonia, the Russian language forced out the Estonian language from many significant professions and areas—“the merchant navy, the railroads, civil aviation, etc.” As a response to this, and as a way to aid Estonia’s bid for independence, the Estonian language was declared the official language early in 1989. According to the law, “all civil servants and service personnel were to acquire a basic knowledge of both the Estonian and Russian languages within one to four years.”²⁵ For Estonians this requirement was no problem as almost all of them already had proficiency in Russian. But for the colonists, the requirement loomed over them: an impossible barrier. The law was criticized as discriminatory; ironically, it only asked of the Russian colonists what they had forced upon the native Estonians for the previous forty years.

The Estonians’ trump card was, in the end, that they had kept such a strong hold of their own language and customs through the time of occupation. “Neither Russianization²⁶ nor Russification seem to have undermined the [language].” Students in primary and secondary schools were allowed a choice between Russian-language schools, or mixed-language schools. “Russian children and children from other nationalities usually attend the Russian-language schools, whereas children of eponymous nationalities attended the schools in which the native tongue was the language of instruction,”²⁷ “The necessity of speaking Russian for involvement in day-to-day society and the pressure and expectation put on Estonians to learn Russian in

²² Dirks 151

²³ Taagepera 221

²⁴ Kemppainen 210

²⁵ Vetik (a) 274

²⁶ The policy of several Soviet regimes promoting Russian as the national language of the Soviet Union. Russian was given equal and official status with local languages in all non-Russian republics; it was made the official language of state and diplomatic affairs, in the armed forces, on postage stamps, currency, and military and civilian decorations. A prerequisite for Russification. (definition from Cold War Guide Glossary)

²⁷ Shafir 145

school “created a one-way bilingualism: most Estonians were bilingual in Estonian and Russian, while only a small percentage of Russians learned Estonian.”²⁸

Upon Estonian independence in 1991, “Russian-speaking children in Estonia maintained the right to receive basic education in [Russian] but [could] opt for education in the Estonian language or in bilingual programs”²⁹ Unfortunately, when Russian parents chose a language of instruction for their children, they tended to choose only Russian. This could be at least partly attributed to a backlash from the Soviet ideology in which the “Soviet identity was emphasized” and personal identity and ethnicity deemphasized. “The dissolution of the Soviet Union led to awareness of distinct ethnicities...the changed political environment and ethnic consciousness may have increased language loyalty among Russian speakers” in the threatening new context of being an ethnic-minority in Estonia.³⁰

Estonians hold an even greater dedication to the idea “that their language is central to their identity.” They do not consider qualities such as descent, religion, and place of birth as valid claims to national identity.³¹ Using language as the core emblem of national identity represents “a kind of optimal solution to the problem of inclusion and exclusion.” Unlike inherited descent, which is unchangeable, “language allows some flexibility.” A person can learn a language, though this learning is very difficult.³² Nonetheless, at the heart of both Estonians and Russian-Estonians ethnic conflict is the perception of their own language as “having the higher status.”³³ The question for the Russian colonists becomes: do they “conform to the language requirement, thus launching a competition between themselves, or [do] they reject it and convert their linguistic distinction into a collective resource that [will] enable them to restore self-esteem and demand special treatment?”³⁴

A particular and controversial concern of both ethnic Estonians and colonists at the time of independence was the manner in which property would be privatized. This privatization could occur in one of two ways: first, an advance from the premise of “legal continuity of the Estonian Republic and to take the principle of restitution as the basis.” This basically means restoring

²⁸ Kemppainen 209

²⁹ Kemppainen 209

³⁰ Kemppainen 211

³¹ Dirks 150

³² Dirks 151

³³ Kemppainen 211

³⁴ Vihalemm 93

expropriated ownership to the original owners from before Soviet occupation. The second option involves starting with a “kind of 'tabula rasa': this is giving equal starting positions to all,” and privatizing would primarily take place by all occupied property being auctioned off.³⁵ Russian Estonians would certainly profit more from the second approach and ethnic Estonians from the first. While grounds for compromise eventually were found in issues such as privatization, other issues, like education, became complicated and corrupted by the change-over. While discrimination was technically not allowed in academia, it occurred in a passive manner. This could be attributed to ethnic Estonian’s fear that the doctrines of the Soviet education system would undermine the strength of Estonia’s independence.

Published by the Soviet government shortly before the collapse: “The purpose of public education in the USSR is to train highly educated, comprehensively developed and active builders of communist society, reared on the ideas of Marxism-Leninism, in the spirit of respect for Soviet laws and socialist law and order... ready to selflessly defend their socialist Homeland, to preserve and augment her material and cultural wealth, protect and preserve nature.”³⁶ This is the philosophy which Alexei practiced in the profession of education for over two decades before the revolution. A top priority of the educator, no matter the field, was to “inculcate communist ideology and moral principles” and support qualities cherished by the communists such as “desire to work for the common good” and working for “public benefits” with an overarching aim of cultivating “discipline and duty.”³⁷ This became a strong place to start when defining the given circumstances for Alexei and the play as a whole. It states simply and strongly the Soviet priorities that ruled this household and Estonia until the revolution, and it points to Alexei’s former academic life as something that the family would frown upon, as it perhaps had something to do with their alienation upon independence.

Alexei’s recitation in Scene One of a poem by Natalya Gorbanyevskaya sets him apart from the typical Soviet educator. Knowledge and study of such poetry in the Soviet Union would have most certainly caught the attention of the authorities. Still this poem seems to be a piece of personal history to Alexei, something of which he had knowledge long before the fall of the iron curtain. Embracing such knowledge is difficult for Alexei as he attempts to fill the shoes of Alexander, an ever-present father figure, that “was the very model of the good Soviet, Lenin

³⁵ Vetik (a) 275

³⁶ Fundamentals 4

³⁷ Zverev 23

reborn!”³⁸ Alexei seeks to find a commitment to both his family and his personal ideals, but he confronts sobering reality as an impassable obstacle. He cannot maintain his faithfulness to both, and this fact is difficult for him to accept. At best, his attempts end up further alienating his position, becoming a critic of Estonia and Russia, finding himself and the family thrust into a dysfunctional echo of “identity”. A majority of Estonian Russian-speakers “do not feel any strong collective solidarity with any group,” and they find that there are “far more similarities between themselves compared with the ethnic Estonians or Russians in Russia.”³⁹

Unfortunately, this is not a viable cultural identity in the independent Estonian context. This is a precarious limbo between two rigid and opposing societal identifications.

Perhaps this is the reason why Alexei is so adamant with his advice to Lenya in Scene One. “All of us are free. And that is why it is imperative that we are all here today, together. Precisely because we are free.” The emphasis on the importance of togetherness points to a weakening and confusion of the cultural and family identity. Alexei, earlier in the same speech, sets in opposition capitalism and his formerly secure identity as a lecturer at the university, illustrating the free market as something in which “we Russians are no longer welcome...”⁴⁰ The irony in this statement is that Alexei cannot identify with Russians either, and we see this played out during the dinner in Scene Three when he sides strongly with the Estonians. It is only in criticizing one culture that he can temporarily identify with the other as “identity requires difference in order to be, and it converts difference into otherness in order to secure its own self-certainty.”⁴¹ An overarching objective for Alexei (and possibly all the characters in the play) is the search for a solidified collective identity.

Collective identity can be defined as “an accumulative construct, an assemblage of various symbols, rituals, *habitus*, re-created by different institutional and individual actors and shared by the community members.”⁴² With this comes the comfort of togetherness and security of likeness. But identity is subject to “securitization” as the claim can always be made, as a result of some happening or development, that “we will no longer be us”, no longer be what we were or what we ought to be in order to be “true to our identity.”⁴³ As the idea of “what 'we' are

³⁸ Dykes 81

³⁹ Vihalemm 108

⁴⁰ Dykes 6

⁴¹ Connolly 64

⁴² Vihalemm 95

⁴³ Buzan 23

is intrinsic in the construction of what 'we' fear," threats to identity are an important and often intentional part of "identity construction and consolidation."⁴⁴

In recent years, Russian Estonians have "adapted themselves to the rapid fundamental changes of the socio-political environment." They have developed new and shared symbols of a diaspora, retreating from attempts at becoming more "Estonian" as well as from attitudes and values characteristic of Russians in Russia.⁴⁵ This has created more solidarity amongst Russian-Estonians and put them in a more culturally stable position. At the time of the play, however, there is no solidified identity. The characters and family are stuck in-between cultures and in-between eras. Their choices, their life decisions, and their political stances are all mitigated by the underlying context of struggle without identity—floating without solid ground on which to stand.

⁴⁴ Kuus 93

⁴⁵ Vetik (b) 147

Part II

The Process⁴⁶

At the time of auditions, it was not yet solidified whether or not a role in *Kolonists* would serve as a topic for my performance thesis. I was considering other options that would have traveled more in the direction of the experimental and absurd. Shortly after being cast as Alexei, I realized, if I wished to also direct shows in the fall and spring, my schedule would not allow for an individual thesis project. I examined my priorities and made the decision to use my experience in *Kolonists* as the topic for my thesis, giving myself more time to cultivate my directing skills during my final year in West Virginia.

I was disappointed in having to use *Kolonists* for this project, but this disappointment was a symptom of my dissatisfaction at the very nature of my performance thesis. I wished for creative freedom, individual challenge, something out of the ordinary, but I could not linger in that wishing place as the process was to be short; I could not afford to rationalize an unprofessional attitude. If this was to be the culmination of my training at West Virginia University, then I would do my best to commit to it professionally. It became a job and a role I had to play because my livelihood (as a student) depended on it. After the initial dissatisfaction, this mindset became a comfort to me: a signal of my growing maturity as an actor and artist.

The process began assiduously with table work and research. This work included each of us presenting on different topics relating to issues in Estonia, Russia, and the Soviet Union. I committed less effort to this work than I should have at the time; I would have to catch up on my research late in the rehearsal process. My lagging at the beginning of the process, not only with research but with memorization as well, was partially due to the fact that I was working on directing another show simultaneously. The scheduling worked out, technically, but I found myself starting my directing rehearsals at eleven in the evening, after *Kolonists* rehearsal had ended, and it was not uncommon for me to still be at school until two or three in the morning. This also meant that I had to focus fiercely to keep myself from falling into thought about my directing project while in *Kolonists* rehearsal. I partially regret my decision to work on both

⁴⁶ Any and all quotes in this section, unless otherwise footnoted, are taken from the rehearsal journal of Marc Friedman

shows at once, but I think that my heavy schedule forced me to cut to the quick with both projects and avoid time waste. Unfortunately, when I had to make a choice of which to prioritize, *Kolonists* tended to take a back seat. What would it have been like to have the time to completely devote my energy and focus to *Kolonists*? I feel it would not only have altered my attitude about the process, but also the nature of the character into which Alexei eventually grew. For better or for worse, Alexei's growth was affected, twisted, and shaped by the work I was doing outside of rehearsal.

Indeed, there were many times when the schedule weighed me down. One stands out: it was off-book day for Scene Two, and I had not prioritized the time to adequately prepare. I had spent all my free time on my directing work and counted on others being unprepared as well in order to cover up the fact that I was unprepared; I was the only one holding my book in the first run-through. I got a prompt "talking-to" from the director who was very displeased, and I was forced to set my book down for the second run-through. I did the run-through and made it through ... somehow, badly perhaps, but acceptable. I realized that it took so little for me to get that book out of my hands; had I just put in twenty minutes before rehearsal ... but I had not. And it was from that moment on that I decided that I had had enough with rationalizing laziness in this process, because laziness had played a part in shaping my prioritization. I did not really need that extra time for the other show, but was continually using that as an excuse for myself to avoid committing fully to *Kolonists*. I was ashamed of myself because this was my thesis: what was I thinking coming in unprepared like that? And I saw it all around me, too: others trying to minimize what they would have to do to get through rehearsal guilt-free, not pushing themselves, and there I was one of them. As the disease spread, I could see others testing the waters and testing their limits and in them a reflection of myself. This was a defining moment in my process and drove me forward into making active choices to counteract my disgust and distrust with myself and others.

It seemed a proper time to make a commitment to challenging myself. I made sure to always show up at least fifteen minutes early and to prepare specifically for each rehearsal by going over the circumstances and lines. The results were just as one would expect: my work came easier and was much stronger. Even before the book was out of my hands, I was "finding great ease in making choices, and my comic timing was becoming more polished" each evening. While working in such a manner took more energy, it also gave me a reason to drive

myself harder in both projects. The sense of satisfaction at the end of each long night of work was worth the effort.

A side-effect of my committing more energy to rehearsal and preparation was that I felt freer and more relaxed in the rehearsal environment. When one is fully prepared for a task, the possibilities of how to perform the task expand. Suddenly, I felt at-ease in making choices and was able to approach Alexei from various new angles. One of these angles was his humor. I had not anticipated the level of comedy in Alexei's character, but as I grew to know him more intimately, I was able to allow myself to have fun exploring the humor in his charm mixed with his awkwardness. It was the simple matter of juxtaposing his confidence and his clumsiness. Sometimes the contrast was physical, other times it was social, and at my best I was able to mix the two. Positive choices were flowing and I felt confident and calm on stage.

Through all this, I held with me a fear of losing Alexei's journey by making choices based too much on the intricacies of moments and not enough on the overall given circumstances. For this reason, I made sure to watch the rehearsal of other scenes in which I was not involved. This became an exercise more valuable to me than being on the stage itself. The more I watched, the more I understood of the family situation and my place in that situation; the play became less about all the research I had done on Estonia and more about the ins and outs of being in this particular family unit. The political pressures became background noise casting shadows on the main conflicts within the family. Watching others also helped me to become more in tune with the "style" of the play. The acting "style" was not consistent across the board, but I sensed how some of my fellow cast members were "connecting to *their* journeys"; it gave me insights on how to approach my own.

Much of this acting "style" that I observed had to do with spontaneity, unpredictability, and willingness to adapt to fellow actors in each moment. These moment to moment choices were very closely tied to family needs and microdynamics within the family. While the choices I made had to be informed by the overall givens of the situation, there was much flexibility to move away from the script and try adding ideas of my own as clarification of relationships and character. Many of these ideas found quick success in rehearsal. This excited me, but I told myself, "don't get stuck in any one way, even if it works the first time." While this attitude seemed healthy to me and encouraged me to challenge my creativity, Beck was not in agreement. For him, if something worked, I was to keep it. Example: during a rehearsal early

in the process, I was faced with the line from offstage, “I am coming, damn it!” in response to Sveta’s urging from the other room. I chose to split the line in two and explore pitting my determination against my clumsiness. The line became, “I *am* coming,” followed by a huge crash of something or other I had accidentally knocked over and then, “damn it!” I got huge laughs; everyone loved it, so I decided to *not* do it the next time—to explore other options as to not get stuck. But when I did not do it, Beck looked at me confused; my only note that rehearsal was to “keep the crash” because it worked.

In the words of director Anne Bogart:

“When an actor achieves a spontaneous, intuitive, or passionate moment in rehearsal, the director utters the fateful words ‘keep it’, eliminating all other potential solutions. These two cruel words, ‘keep it’, plunge a knife into the heart of the actor who knows that the next attempt to re-create that result will be false, affected and lifeless. But deep down, the actor also knows that improvisation is not yet art. Only when something has been decided can the work really begin.”⁴⁷

The next chance: I attempted to replicate that moment, but the timing was not quite right. And the next time it was the sound that was off. That particular moment took the entire process to solidify so that I could get the laugh every time, and it never seemed as good as the first time I did it without thinking.

As rehearsals progressed, the specifics of relationships and the quirkiness of Alexei’s personality came easily for me, but some of the more specific physical qualities of his person eluded me. In particular, finding his voice was a frustrating uphill battle. For some reason the voice and speech patterns that were coming naturally did not feel consistent with how I imagined him to be; they were too much like my own. Because of this, I began to sink into my head, analyzing every word (and how it sounded) and trying to think my way around something that should have been visceral and experimental. I was determined to find “a distinctive voice” for him that had come from his academic upbringing: a voice “too careful and too practiced, but also deeply connected emotionally.” I began playing with images of him having a “voice that makes him naked to all.” After two weeks of fighting with it and analyzing it and changing it and second guessing myself, I found myself recording in my journal that he had “a deep voice that if it belonged to a man of more confidence and vigor would open many doors of

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opportunity ... while this makes him seem humble at times, it generally makes him awkward, out of his element, a professor in a strange land.” And I read back over it and realized that I was reading a rather accurate description of myself. All that work had come around to Alexei’s voice being very much my own. And so I had unintentionally proven to myself the importance of physical and vocal discovery and that no matter how much I tried to think my way around it, my voice and body were just that, *my* voice and *my* body. If I trusted them to find the character, they would.

This experience reminded me that I needed to let go of intellectualizing in general. This was not a new lesson but one that was easy to forget in the heat of rehearsal. Intellectualizing is a long time bad habit that creeps up behind me the moment I forget it is there. I over-think a moment and so I over-play it because my ego likes to think that I can think my way out of anything, yet time and time again I have been proven wrong. So I made a contemptuously conscious decision to make fewer conscious decisions: better to connect with my center—trust Alexei's breaths for Alexei's thoughts for Alexei's words for Alexei's point of view. And then, like a spoonful of irony, it hit me: the similarity between my actor dilemma and Alexei’s social dilemma. He too, an intellectual, unable to conquer the phantoms of his ego and struggling awkwardly forward, thinking his way into problems and then trying to think his way back out of them. And in this “thinking” I caught myself falling off the wagon and decided not to push my luck by pondering it any further.

Beck told us frequently during the process to “suffer the play.” This was an interesting direction to deal with as I found the exact meaning of such a statement to be elusive. It had to do with pain, dealing with the pain behind every moment; I was certain of that. It suggested a deep and personal response to the given circumstances, especially the charged history that lived behind each character; this history could serve as an obstacle to contentment. But also in the word “suffer” was a sense of need—a need to not suffer alone: “being chained amongst many is a terrible thing, but perhaps being free and alone is, in the end, the worse fate.”⁴⁸ And this loneliness manifested itself more as group loneliness than personal loneliness.

So “suffering the play” meant it was essential to pursue a strong ensemble, and this was a frustrating pursuit to say the least. In the early weeks of the process, the ensemble had yet to

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really meld into anything cohesive or consistent. It was not bad or good, just finding itself. But by the third week of rehearsal, the ensemble had established itself as a collective of mistrust and bitterness. The tension between actors was immense, and this tension was the topic of countless post-rehearsal “discussions” I had over beer or coffee or video games. The discontent became a part of my process: after a rehearsal, a sort of decompression was necessary to recover from the dysfunction of the ensemble. The rehearsals started to feel like stagnant water, waiting for a post-rehearsal purge—a violent and bitter purification. This created an environment of complaining and pursuing every single mistake of others in the cast as a reason to distrust them and be angry at them. Whether or not justified, it was happening on some level within the ensemble and had a very interesting effect on my work. The feelings I was having about these actors off-stage were working their way into my perception of their characters and our relationships onstage. Though I think it was, in the end, an “unhealthy” part of the process, it was something that became a major force in shaping the relationship dynamics of the play, enough so that I think it is important to briefly comment on the backstage/onstage dynamic of some of my fellow cast members (as perceived by me) and how that dynamic specifically affected my work and the ensemble.

I grew into having a particular frustration with the actor playing the role of Vassily, who repeatedly came into rehearsals extremely weak on his lines. I mention this because it became a constant trigger in my mind, and I took it onstage with me until the play closed. Even in performance I frequently got the feeling he was unsure of his words which made the dinner scene in Scene Three more tentative than it should have been. Though it annoyed and angered me, because his weakness on lines often weakened the effectiveness of rehearsals, I was able to connect my anger at the actor with my annoyance and disdain for Vassily, and my fear of the Vassily with my fear of the actor forgetting a line.

A similar situation occurred with the actress playing Sveta, who was frequently tardy to rehearsals and became rather unpredictable and volatile onstage. I had a personal bias against her at the time; therefore, I was quick to jump on what I perceived as her weaknesses. If she missed lines or snuck into rehearsal late, I was quick to criticize, and my trust for her dwindled. I felt that I could not count on her to be responsible for her work. Because I had trouble trusting the actress, I had trouble trusting the character. My onstage relationship with Sveta became about mistrust and lack of respect. This gave me a strong obstacle against which to play in

scenes where I struggled to connect to our love and history, and it also informed my condescension toward her and flippancy in response to her nagging in other scenes. By the end of the process, my negative feelings for this actress had shriveled into trivialities, but Alexei's feelings for Sveta went on.

On the other side of the coin, the actress playing Manya and I became a lot closer during the process. We spent many rehearsals and hours on end supporting each other in our dissatisfaction with the process and the ensemble. These discussions were not particularly productive, but they allowed us both to blow off steam. As our artistic friendship strengthened, so did the relationship of our characters. Though her character Manya and Alexei almost never exchanged words on stage, we became very connected and came to depend on each other non-verbally in many moments. I could always count on her presence to ground me during difficult moments in Scene Two and Scene Three in which I often found myself getting frustrated due to my opinion of other actors.

The actor playing Andrei became a saving grace for me onstage as well. I had a completely different relationship with him, because he was playing the lead in the show I was directing at the time. Both of our schedules were equally ravenous, but we also made sure to make time to decompress as well. Even after late rehearsals we would find time for recreation activities. My role as director/friend seeped into my role as brother-in-law, and so I felt close to Andrei, but in an odd way; we shared the same activities but different social positions in the scheme of things. Alexei was desperately trying to be Andrei's boss in the family business, but he was also discovering himself as Andrei's equal, as they both struggled to gain command of capitalism. The specifics of this dramatic relationship dynamic came into greater focus as I allowed them to be affected by the intricacies of my dualistic real-life relationship with my fellow actor.

Once again, these opinions I have presented of my castmates are purely subjective and biased, but they were true to me at the time and heavily influenced the energy I committed to rehearsal and performance. I will go as far as to say that these relationship conflicts made *Kolonists* a better show. I have no doubt that I, too, had annoying traits and habits that drove others in the cast to some of their choices and energy on stage.

As the rehearsals went on and I focused increasingly on being prepared and professional, my process became more seamless and took very little effort on my part. I received few notes, which was in a way frustrating but also freed me to explore the character on my own and know that Beck had faith in me. Though much of the work came easily, there were difficult parts, namely the birthday toast to Lenya in Scene One: a moment which I never felt came together for me. I hit it a couple of times, but it was never “great” in performance. The lines and ideas were solid, but I had trouble letting go as it had become a consistently difficult moment. With fear on my mind, I tightened up when what I should have been doing was letting go and committing to the simplicity. Indication eclipsed relaxation and the speech lost any quality of being organic and true.

To further analyze the moment: the scene begins with the three sisters discussing the weather, Lenya’s birthday, and father’s death. Alexei leads a group entrance of himself, Kolya, and Yakov—they bring in champagne and birthday cheer. The Champaign is a bribe from Alexei’s business, and after a brief explanation of that, Alexei moves directly into a toast for Lenya’s birthday. His toast grows long and eventually evolves into a political rant. Svetya “tactfully” gets him back on track, and he advises Lenya to stick with the strength of the family and wishes her the best in days to come. As the first thing the audience sees of Alexei, the speech carries a great deal of importance in character development. I was compelled to present a character that was immediately distinct; it became difficult to decide what should be the priority at any given moment. Which obstacle did I play? I could play my need to be the father figure, or my care of Lenya, or my difficulty with the political system, or my sadness at the changes in my life, or I could simply focus on the technical task of defining my character. The monologue went all over the place. Beck told me the key was to ride the fence between composure on Lenya’s special day and anger and discontent with the family and political situation, but this direction only increased my anxiety about the scene.

Much of my monologue work in that section ended up devoid of clearly defined choices which weakened the scene as a whole. I had too many options and failed to commit securely to any one. My objective, being so divided, was weakened and obscured. My inability to make a solid informed choice in that moment damaged my own work and the strength of the ensemble. Luckily, it was early enough in the play not to harm the overall action too much, but I think it severely harmed the clarity and specificity of my character. I should have put more work into

the monologue until I was able to feel completely comfortable, adding more confidence to the equation. I remember nights when even recalling the lines correctly was difficult; at that point of insecurity, I was no longer acting. I was extremely hypocritical backstage as I scoffed at others for being insecure on their lines and then experienced the same thing I had just criticized. It was less identifiable as I was not missing cues or hindering someone else's, but still I knew inside that I should have been more solid on the lines.

I think another issue that played into my difficulty with that monologue was my overall confusion surrounding Alexei's identity. Much of my research on colonists in Estonia emphasized the problem of confused or convoluted cultural identities making social progress difficult for colonists. It also pointed out that much of this difficulty came from the fact that their role in society and been turned on its head: a once powerful oppressing minority had become, in the span of just a couple of years, an oppressed and discriminated-against minority. Particularly important to examine was the contrast between Alexei's life before the fall and after. So rather than 'Who am I?', a point of departure became 'Who would I have liked to have been?' Did I feel my life had gone by? Gone wrong? In my early-fifties, did I feel I had passed middle-age? Had the effects of my teaching faded from the world? I did not confront these questions until very late in the process and the answers did not emerge until performance. I discovered during tech week that "Alexei [was] in an existential crisis, trying to justify existence in a diasporic socio-political context." He was trying to take charge of things, make a difference, and yet felt increasingly alienated from his former identity. He was "an old dog too tired and overfed to learn any more tricks" but one that still was trying desperately to convince himself that his old tricks were still adequate.

His comfort zone encompassed positions that echoed the tasks of a teacher: giving advice, lecturing, debating, dissenting, etc. He found discomfort in business, romance, fighting, stating anything definitively, and always has trouble getting to the point. He was afraid of the point as he would have rather gone on exploring—questioning everything, as he was allowed and even encouraged to do as a member of academia. Ironically, the one thing he really should have been questioning, he was blind to. In his heart, he knew the scrap-metal business was not clean. He could perceive the people he took to lunch and to the theatre: they had that glimmer of guilt and mischief in their eyes, telling him that they knew of crimes he could not even imagine. But he was stuck between a rock and a hard place because he knew that this was by far the best work

opportunity he, as a Russian colonist in the new Estonian state, could have. This hypocrisy scraped away at the foundation of Alexei's ego and rendered him increasingly impotent in social and business interaction.

Exploring his identity also led me to ask: "Did [he] realize how much [he] depended on the old system? As much as [he] hated it, it made possible [his] academic identity." He had to grapple constantly with the dialectic of his dependence on and his hatred for the system. This dualism was something that came to define his personality for me and echoed the existential problem of the colonist community as a whole: national pride versus local disdain and solitude. Dealing with the present reality, "how much [did] I really know about the business? How much [had] I guessed at? What blindside[d] me? What [did] I want out of all this?" Something: self-respect, peace of mind, validation, and an identity I could call my own. I did not have the courage to strive for these things in my business, but in my own home, I searched for situations in which I could try to stand behind my beliefs. The toast speech was an attempt at this, but even in the safety of my own home, I found my wife thwarting my intentions. By Scene Three, at the dinner, I was unable to stand up for my identity and beliefs at all. Alexei's journey ends with a withering whisper—a man with no place.

Into Performance

As performance inched closer, my work started to become focused on technically clarifying the text and finding a stronger breath connection to my thought and actions. A specific challenge was finding the volume and articulation that could fill the Gladys Davis Theatre while still keeping the simplicity and economy of the moments that I had discovered in the much smaller Vivian Davis Michael Theatre rehearsal space. In addition, I had to adjust to being on the set, which looked wonderful, but presented certain technical challenges. The construction of the “floating” room was such that the floor bounced significantly when one got near the edges. It was not a huge problem, but it took some time to get used to and we had to be careful about stepping too hard near the edges because the bouncing would make the grandfather clock precariously tip. Also, the railings, contrary to what we had been told throughout the rehearsal process, could not bear weight, and so some blocking decisions had to be adjusted. Otherwise, the set made a strong statement about the show and created a convincing and striking world for the play.

During the final technical rehearsal, a smoke machine was added to the set. The idea was that there were bonfires all over on midsummer night and that the smoke made its way near the porch. It was also designed to symbolize the burning of the family’s history. In practice though, the smoke got in the way of the action. It was not uncommon for huge bursts of smoke to float onto the stage during tense scenes and distract from the action. It was extremely frustrating; I did not think the smoke was worth the trouble it caused. It was most disruptive in the dinner scene during the preview performance, when we were interrupted at the table by this smoke. Though it added texture to the lights and bonfire effect, the smoke, in the end, was a bad choice that became a major obstacle for the actors. Nonetheless, we could not dwell on that problem as there was still much to be clarified in the relationships and interactions of the play and time was running short until opening night. We had to focus in spite of such petty annoyances, “be true to the thought of the moment and avoid distraction ... to the extent of living single thought by single thought.”⁴⁹

It was through the time of technical rehearsals and preview that Beck repeated a specific direction which I found supremely helpful. He would tell all of us again and again to really

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“ask” questions. He had been saying this throughout the entire process but his emphasis became heavier as performance approached. He asked me to “put myself at the mercy of my scene partner” when asking a question. It reminded me of the words of Lorna Marshall: “you have to use what you are actually given by your partner; not what you want to be given, or what you think you ought to be given.”⁵⁰ This meant really seeking an answer with questions and being completely vulnerable to that answer. This small direction took me to a place of greater relaxation and ease throughout most of the show (with the exception of the first speech which never settled.)

One of the last runs before opening was the day after the presidential election. Many of us had been up late into the night and I think it is safe to say that most of us were unhappy with the results. But the show seemed “newly energized”; Perhaps our aggravation with the results of the election had something to do with it. The cast needed somewhere to channel all that anger and frustration. Whatever the reason, the final dress put me at ease as I experienced higher stakes and more commitment from the ensemble. Now we would just have to make sure we could keep on channeling that negative energy and turning it into positive action as the show opened and moved through the week of performance.

When opening night finally came around, I did not sense that the ensemble was quite ready for the event. I felt we could have used another week of rehearsal to reach our peak, but we were where we were and had a decent play to share with the audiences. Opening night was not sold out but well attended. It was, as opening nights generally are, a friendly audience, and it was much appreciated, especially since the preview one day earlier had played to a yawning captive Theatre 101 crowd, which gave the show a sort of trial by fire in front of just about the most difficult audience imaginable. So compared to the cell-phone-text-messaging and resentful-angsty faces of preview, opening night was a breath of fresh air.

The run was uneventful and uneven. Each audience reacted quite differently to the show which kept us on our toes, and each night we found some new discoveries and lost some old ones. The playwright, Steven Dykes was able to visit and see a matinee performance after which we went to dinner and drinks. It was an interesting experience as he did not seem all that interested in the play. For him it was something he had written a long time ago and though he seemed to have enjoyed seeing it again, he did not say much about it. He seemed more

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interested in talking about a new play on which he was working and occasionally going to the bar to watch the Vikings game. I would say that I was disappointed in the meeting as I had hoped to really pick his brain.

The run ended with a very strong last showing. It was supremely satisfying as the show had matured immensely through the week of the performance. By closing curtain, I felt the ensemble was finally *beginning* to find its collective resonance. It seemed that all of us had finally tuned into the same frequency and amplitude of ensemble common sense. I think that a longer run of this show would have opened up an entirely new world of discoveries, but then one could say that with any show. Though much of the cast fought sickness throughout the run, the play ended up improving through the week of performance, and we received a great deal of positive feedback from peers, professors, and students. After that last show, we all collaborated one last time to strike the massive set. As the trees came down around the floating Chekhovian sunroom, I could not help but think of the Cherry Orchard. What was once a family in a dacha in the beautiful woods was being cut down, chopped up and used for firewood. The old ways were over; the new ways had won.

Conclusion

The preceding account and analysis of the rehearsal process examines the nature of actor choices and the influences on those choices. Through this, it can be observed how concrete chosen factors like research, director's concept, and play analysis can mesh and balance with the more fluid factor of ensemble common sense, and volatile factor of personal relations outside of rehearsal. The process of ensemble development and choices were based in a new system, created as quickly as destroyed—a system unique to this play and relatively worthless thereafter—as it is with every play. And so the life of the theatre artist is never stable, must not be stable, for the nature of the art is necessarily unstable and ephemeral. A performance is live, never repeated, and always adapting and changing.

What happens backstage, personal prejudices, annoyances, fights, insults: all these things are part of the equation. Perhaps the good director takes them into account when casting, or perhaps they create themselves out of necessity, but they are an essential part of the process: a part that is often hidden from the record, shamefully remembered but not spoken of except in closets or late night meetings over drinks, and even then spoken of as hindrances, problems in need of solution. It is from that need that energy is transferred to the stage. It is no accident that actors are a debauched people as a whole. It is this very lifestyle that creates the tension that builds the ensemble that makes a show great.

Being able to look back on my experience of this process and performance has allowed me to see the progress that I and everyone in the cast made. I do not believe that there was one actor in this production who did not grow. As for me, I built from my experience a greater appreciation of specific and informed choices. I learned how committing to such choices not only helped me, but helped the ensemble, and when I got bogged down in my ego or in my head, it hurt my character and the ensemble. I learned that ensemble common sense is extremely important but is also not a particularly quantifiable factor; it is elusive and fluid and cannot be identified; it simply must be trusted. Most of all, I learned to not pre-judge an artistic experience. I entered this process with a very negative attitude, not appreciating the value of the work ahead. I exited this process humbled, realizing not only that acting in this show was a worthwhile experience, but recording and analyzing the process has been more valuable than I ever could have anticipated. My disappointment at the beginning of the process has turned to

contentment; I am glad that this served as the culmination of my acting training at West Virginia University.

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MARC FRIEDMAN

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Education

M.F.A. in Acting	West Virginia University	May 2005, expected
B.A. in Theatre Arts	Macalester College	May 2002
Certification in Single and Group Portrait Photography	ProEx Training Academy	June 2001
Summer Training Congress	American Conservatory Theatre	August 2000

Experience

Production / Administration / Marketing

Arts Administration Seminar 2004: West Virginia University: taught by Norm Fagan

A specially designed group study course focusing on the elements of creating and leading a non-profit theatre company. Topics covered included: grant writing, non-profit law, organizational structure, finances and budgeting, fundraising, artistic direction, and artistic production.

Administrative Work for *The Winter's Tale* Graduate Tour 2004-2005: West Virginia University (ongoing)

Acting as Production Manager, Budget Administrator, as well as contributing to the scheduling and arranging of tour bookings. *The Winter's Tale* tour, created by the WVU graduate acting class of 2005, will travel across West Virginia performing in regional theaters and high schools, additionally providing skill workshops for students.

Advertising Coordinator 2003-2005: West Virginia University (ongoing)

Coordinated various levels of public relations for productions of *BASH:latterday plays*, *The City Wears a Slouch Hat*, and *The Winter's Tale*. Duties included radio advertising, press releases, brochure design and production, poster design and production, postcard production and distribution. Required proficiency with Adobe Photoshop, Adobe Acrobat, Microsoft Word, Microsoft Outlook, Sonic Foundry sound editing software.

Theatrical Production: Macalester College and West Virginia University

Co-Producer of *Footfalls* and *Burn This*; Producer of *BASH:latterday plays* and *The City Wears a Slouch Hat*. Duties included choosing material, securing performance space, procuring lighting and sound equipment, fundraising and overseeing budget, coordinating/overseeing sound and video production, and finding/coordinating volunteers and artistic collaborators.

Public Relations/ Education

Graduate Teaching Assistant 2002-2005: West Virginia University

Assisted professors in large lecture sections of *Introduction to Theatre*. Duties included taking of attendance, grading, occasional lecturing, proctoring of exams, and answering student questions.

College Instructor 2002-2005: West Virginia University

Taught one or more sections per semester of *Introduction to Acting* for non-majors. Class size ranged from 16 to 26 students. Class focused on one-third scholarly study/discussion and two-thirds participation/performance.

Undergraduate Teaching Assistant 2002: Macalester College

Assisted adjunct instructor in teaching of Acting 2 to theatre majors. Duties included taking attendance, leading warm-ups, assisting in demonstrations, grading papers, occasional instruction of class, and monologue/scene coaching.

Portrait Photographer 2001-2002: ProEx Portrait Studio, St. Paul, MN

Served as portrait photographer and customer service associate. Majority of photo sittings were children or babies requiring skill in entertaining children and keeping parents relaxed and comfortable through the process.

Box Office Representative 1999: Ordway Theater, St. Paul, MN

Dealt with ticketing and customer service over the phone and in person during production runs.

Direction

West Virginia University

Texts For Nothing

The City Wears a Slouch Hat

Bleeding in the Dark

goodbye My gOdess when To find tHE thRill again

bash: latterday plays

Samuel Beckett

Kenneth Patchen and John Cage

Jeremiah Munsey (world premiere)

Original Choreographed Dance Piece

Neil LaBute

Macalester College

Footfalls

Motherlove

Burn This

24-Hour Theatre

Samuel Beckett

August Strindberg

Lanford Wilson

Original Ensemble Work

Sound Design

West Virginia University

Texts For Nothing

The Odyssey

Venus

bash: latterday plays

goodbye My gOdess when To find tHE thRill again

Theatre Collective: Prelude to Pinocchiomachine

Building compiled musical score

Composition and production original soundscore

Sound design and production

Building compiled musical score

Composition and production original soundscore

Sound design and production

Macalester College

Tales of the Lost Formicans

Battle of the Gods and Heroes

24-Hour Theatre

Sound Editing and Production / Compiling musical score

Mix design of live and recorded music as soundscore to dance

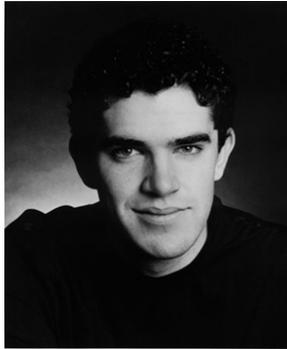
Original live improvised soundscore

MARC FRIEDMAN

actor

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Height: 6'0"
 Weight: 190
 Hair: Dark Brown
 Eyes: Blue
 Voice: Bass/ Baritone

Theatre

West Virginia University

The Winter's Tale
 Kolonists
 The Odyssey
 King Lear
 The Time of Your Life
 Getting Married
 Theatre Collective: Prelude to Pinocchiomachine
 The Ghost Sonata

Polixenes
 Alexei
 Odysseus
 Kent
 Tom
 Rejyy
 Ensemble Member
 The Student

Jerry McGonigle
 Phillip Beck
 Joanne Siegrist
 Lou Rackoff
 Jerry McGonigle
 Bob Leigh
 Bob Leigh
 Jerry McGonigle

Macalester College

Tales of the Lost Formicans
 Laughter on the 23rd Floor
 Hamlet
 The Cherry Orchard

Jim
 Announcer
 Barnardo / Fortinbras
 Homeless Man

Scott M. Rubsam
 Dale Ricardo Shields
 Sears Eldredge
 Beth Cleary

MACPlayers

The Mousetrap
 Twelfth Night
 Fool For Love

Giles Ralston
 Sebastian
 Old Man

Anna Stumph
 Ryan Kampe
 Hannah Dallman

Training

West Virginia University – Master of Fine Arts (In Progress – projected completion 2005)

Macalester College – Bachelor of Arts 2002

American Conservatory Theatre – Summer Training Congress 2000

Acting: Phillip Beck, Theresa Davis, Sears Eldredge, Jerry McGonigle, Stephen Pelinski, Dale Ricardo Shields, Melissa Smith, Brent St. Clair, Bruce Williams
 Voice: Cheryl Moore Brinkley, Jeff Crockett, Kate Udall, Imelda Villalon
 Speech: Lynne Soffer
 Singing: John Harney, Francis Epsen-Devlin
 Alexander: Theresa Davis
 Mask / Clowning / Improv: Letitia Bartlett, Rafe Chase, Sears Eldredge
 Dance / Movement: Becky Heist, Judith Howard, Jessica Morgan, Tom O'Conner, Priscilla Regaldo
 Stage Combat: Michael Anderson, Andrew Hurteau, Jessica Morgan, Darrell Rushton
 Special Skills: Dance (modern, basic ballroom), Trombone (classical, jazz), Guitar
 Stage Combat (Contemporary, Unarmed, Rapier and Dagger)

References

Jerry McGonigle

West Virginia University
Division of Theatre and Dance
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Norm Fagan

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Sears Eldredge

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