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Bear with me : signs are tricksters, and reality is invisible to the naked eye: a one-person play

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BEAR WITH ME:
SIGNS ARE TRICKSTERS, AND REALITY IS INVISIBLE TO THE NAKED EYE:
A ONE-PERSON PLAY

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts

in

The Department of Theatre

by
Chia-Wen Hsu
B.F.A., National Sun Yat-Sen University, 2008
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ABSTRACT

The creation of a one-person play is required in order to complete the Master of Fine Arts degree in acting. There are no official guidelines, only twenty to forty minutes in length is required. Although I was very excited about receiving the challenge, I did not breathe a sigh of relief until I found the topic I wanted to explore — Signs and Reality, and the one-person play that followed: *Bear With Me*.

Since I am not a native English speaker, I have been frustrated by miscommunication through words in the English-speaking world, which gave me the eagerness to talk about the problem. Later on, I found out signs and words as well as the meaning of them change based on time and place, in other words, signs and words in themselves are unreliable, and also efficient and effective communication does not need to depend on them. These two thoughts wove into the spine of my play. Ironically, it is impossible to create a play without using words, so using words precisely became a big challenge, especially for the person who tried to create an English play and whose native tongue is not English.

I believe theatre can take place anywhere, and either traditional theatre or experimental theatre has been a comfortable, convenient space for theatre creators. I think theatre should not be confined to a small box, but it should try to reach its extremes instead, so I challenged myself to have my play in a forest as the location and the atmosphere of my play.

Except for the challenges mentioned above, I needed to figure out the journey of my central character and what I wanted my audience to get from the play. These both are essential questions for the play; if I did not solve the problems, my play would be just

making a fuss about nothing. Fortunately, bear with me to say that my performances turned out to be a bare success.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

As candidates of the Master of Fine Arts degree in acting, we were informed before coming into the program that creating a one-person show and producing a written thesis based on that show are required in order to complete the program of study. However, unlike the written theses, there is no official format for creating the one-person play. As a result, I adopted the form of physical theatre to frame my one-person play, *Bear With Me*, and the thesis as a record of the creation.

For me, the assignment of creating a one-person play is showing what I have learned in this three-year acting program like drawing to a close an epic full of beautiful memories and special experiences. As the first international student of the program, I challenge myself to address the most stubborn barrier I have faced: language. This barrier has made my learning here not only harder but also more unique than others. Hopefully, by completing this task I will prove that I control and understand the English language better than I did upon entrance.

I believe theatre is a safe playground where we can create without fear and a wonderful dreamland where we can fulfill our imagination. My ideal theatrical creation will be like an alien planet where no one has set foot, the issue discussed inspired from real life. When the audience wakes up from the dream and walks out of the theatre, their minds will be full of questions, thoughts jumping up from their experience of the play. Instead of being disturbed, I would hope they would have the confidence as well as the courage to believe they are able to answer the questions and solve the puzzles raised by the show.

I revel in body language and truly believe we can have effective as well as efficient communication without words; moreover, it cannot be denied that sometimes words bring

confusion. In order for my audience to understand me better and to demonstrate the fruits of my life-long physical training, physical movement will be the essence of my piece, a footstone to help me create an unreal, dreamlike atmosphere in the play.

I hope the creation of the play is the fulfillment of my ideal of theatre and also a tangible testimony of three years of productive acting training at LSU.

CHAPTER 2: INSPIRATION AND SOURCE MATERIAL

In the summer of 2012, I was pondering long and hard over the topic for my play. One of my close friends came to me and said he knew exactly what I should write about: bears. At first, I took it as sarcasm because all my close friends know I am in love with bears. The show should be full of cleverness, and writing a play about bears sounded stupid to me. Nevertheless, I did some research on bears.

The first thing I did was to look up the English and Chinese definitions of the word: bear. And then I found out the English word “bear” is not equal to the Chinese word “bear” (熊). “Bear” in English can mean carry, endure, produce, a kind of animal, etc., and “bear” in Chinese can be flaming, enormous, rude, a last name, and so forth. Figure 1 is the relationship between “bear” and “熊.”



Figure 1. The relationship between “bear” and “熊.”

Only the intersection, the dark brown part, was the meaning I was looking for: a furry, two-eared, four-legged, short-tailed mammal. That is to say, “bear” and “熊” both cannot exactly stand for the creature I am fond of. Also, words can be changed with time, and the meaning of words also varies. In short, words are signs and these signs fail to fully represent reality. This discovery encouraged me to look at words and signs in a different way. We are accustomed to use words to communicate with each other; however, words also prevent us from knowing each other at the same time. This thought ended up

becoming the unifying principle of my play: See with your heart not your eyes, because signs are tricksters and reality is invisible to the naked eye.

After I decided the message of the play, the next step was to figure out how to say it. The answer came quickly: *Winnie-the-Pooh*. Before throwing myself into A. A. Milne's Three Acre Wood, I reviewed a book I've had on my bookshelf for a while entitled *Pooh and the Philosophers* by John Tyerman Williams. I did not give it much attention when I first read it, but this time it blew my mind. The book claims that the whole of Western philosophy is a long-term preparation for *Winnie-the-Pooh*, and those philosophies that came out after *Winnie-the-Pooh* become the commentary about the bear himself.¹ In addition, Williams also states Winnie-the-Pooh is not a bear of very little brain but a smart bear following Socrates' tradition and pretending to be ignorant.² The proof is in the anxious song Winnie-the-Pooh sings, "Well Pooh was a Bear of Enormous Brain (Just say it again!) Of enormous brain---."³ With Williams' opinions in mind, my first read of *Winnie-the-Pooh* explored Pooh's cleverness hidden behind his words. Here are two of my favorite examples. "Pooh stores a very large jar of honey on the shelf, and it had HUNNY written on it, but he says, 'you never can tell', so he takes off the paper cover, puts his tongue in, takes a large lick, and then he says, 'yes, it is... right down to the bottom of the jar.'"⁴ Some hours later, Pooh, waking up from hunger and looking for the jar of honey he stores on a shelf, says, "That's funny. I know I had a jar of honey there. A full jar, full of honey right up to the top, and it had

¹ John T. William, *Pooh and the Philosophers* (New York: Dutton Books, 1996), 1.

² Ibid., 3.

³ A. A. Milne, *Winnie-The-Pooh* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co. Inc., 1926), 149.

⁴ Ibid., 60.

HUNNY written on it, so that I should know it was honey. That's very funny."⁵ In the first case, Pooh does not believe the sign until he tastes the real thing; in other words, signs do not matter; only reality does, and in the second case, he mixes up HONEY and FUNNY to form his own word HUNNY. In my opinion, Pooh does not choose to use HUNNY by accident but tries to educate us that words are funny and unreliable. These two cases perfectly express how Pooh treats signs/words and it also illustrates half of the unifying principle of my play: Signs are tricksters. Numerous cases from the book prove that *Winnie-the-Pooh* is not just a famous children's book but a masterwork containing meaningful knowledge, which is definitely worth an adult read.

The other book giving me huge inspiration is *Le Petit Prince* written by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, and it completes my play's unifying principle by pointing out: See with your heart not your eyes because reality is invisible to the naked eye. In the book, the Little Prince talks to the roses he met on the earth, "You are not at all like my rose...No one has tamed you, and you have tamed no one...you are beautiful, but you are empty...One could not die for you...an ordinary passerby would think that my rose looked just like you...But in herself alone she is more important than all the hundreds of you other roses...Because she, is *my* rose."⁶ The Fox, the Little Prince's friend, says to him, "It is the time you have wasted for your rose that makes your rose so important."⁷ It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye."⁸ If *Winnie-the-Pooh* taught me that signs do not matter, then the Little Prince inspired me to dig deeper to see with the heart.

⁵ Milne, 61.

⁶ Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *Le Petit Prince* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1943), 70.

⁷ Ibid., 71.

⁸ Ibid., 70.

I used to think children's books were so imaginative and entertaining that they cannot address serious subjects, but after reading these books, I realized I was so wrong. Topics dealt with in children's books can be more significant than books for adults. These three books to which I refer, including two children's books, talk about life, love, and philosophy. They also form the soul, body, and heart of my one-person play. The creation of the play could not be completed without each of them.

In addition, I discovered the deeper I dug into the references, the more similarities I found I share with the personas, Pooh and the Little Prince. When the Little Prince visits dissimilar planets, everything is unfamiliar to him, so he needs to learn new terms as well as build new relationships. His situation is similar to mine. I threw myself into an alien place, where I needed to learn things all over again using different viewpoints and following different rules, and like him, I have been inspired by various people and have started to see things in different ways. Hopefully, at the end of the journey I will have my horizon broadened like the Little Prince had done. In the process of learning the new language of English, I am like Pooh. Since I am not a native speaker, I sometimes misspell, mispronounce, and misuse words like Pooh does. However, the difference is Pooh does that on purpose (Pooh follows Socrates' tradition and pretends to be ignorant), while I do it without knowing.

Based on the inspiration I got from the two characters, I set my play on an alien planet, and the central character, named Bear, is the owner of the planet. She visited Earth by accident and learned some terms and knowledge while she was there, but since the terms and knowledge are not native to her, she misuses, misspells, and mispronounces them. The way she communicates and thinks first will confuse her visitors from the earth (the

audience), but later on when the guests grasp her logic, miscommunication becomes a way to break habitual thought; and further, it offers the visitors a chance to open their minds to see things differently, which is also the goal of my play. Miscommunication in this way begins truthful understanding. The story unfolds with the search for the “North Pole”, which is what the central character believes can take her to meet her loved one. By misunderstanding the denotation of North Pole, as the idea of using a new way to see things, Bear finds her love and ends the journey.

According to Williams, honey is philosophic truth in *Winnie-the-Pooh*.⁹ In my play, honey plays an important role as well. Honey is a name of a mushroom accompanying Bear the whole time and also is the North Pole Bear finds in the end. For Bear, Honey leads her to a belief: there is no one thing to connect you and your loved one but two loving hearts; in other words, Honey becomes a philosophic truth that Bear discovers at the end of her expedition, and the play is about that journey of looking for the truth.

⁹ Williams, 9.

CHAPTER 3: CHALLENGE AND SOLUTION

After I grabbed the main idea of what I wanted to impart and read the books I mentioned in Chapter 2, inspiration gushed out so quickly that I completed the rough draft of my play in no time. However, during the first thesis meeting with one of my professors, George Judy, he told me that he saw the statement of the play but the play lacked a central conflict; in other words, he did not see the problem the character tries to solve, the journey the main character goes through, and the change of the central character from the beginning to the end. These ideas were related to one another and led to a simple but significant question: what does the central character achieve or learn from the play? We can regard a play as a journey of characters, who ask their audience to experience the journey with them. By the end of the journey, these characters grow with life lessons, and the audience should learn those lessons by witnessing them.

To work out the problem, I made the main character's desire more critical and crystal clear, created a quest for my character, and gave her a wrong clue to stop her from getting what she wants. This quest becomes the journey of the play, and toward the end she gains what she longs for by seeing the wrong clue in a new way, which not only demonstrates the unifying principle of my play but also brings the journey to an end. Unexpectedly, this adaption made the story more interesting and built a tighter relationship between the dramatic event and the theatrical event of the play. Hopefully, by going through the journey in the fictitious world of the character, my audience will learn from it as the central character does, bring the point of view of the play to the real world, and then solve problems taking place there.

Before I jumped into rehearsals, the next challenge coming up was the difficulty of writing an English play as a non-English speaker. Although my English ability is better than two years ago when I first landed foot in this country, the way I use English is still like the way I use chopsticks with my left hand, which is unsmooth and unnatural. If we think writing a play is hard, then writing a play in an alien language is like going through a maze. You know where you want to go but you never know how to get there. In my case, I knew exactly what I wanted to say and thought the path I chose was the right one leading me to the goal, but sometimes the path could be a dead-end, which means the audience would have no idea what I am talking about. In some even worse cases, there could be a monster hiding in the path who could confuse my audience in a totally different direction. Moreover, my thesis is about the unreliability of words and signs, and it is absurd from the start to rely on words to express a thought like this. If I cannot use correct words to present my thoughts and make my audience fully understand them, then the project would end up making no sense at all.

To deal with the problem, I had tutorials with my voice professor, Joanna Battles, who not only helped me pick specific words to clarify my thought but also adjusted my pronunciation to ensure the audience will exactly understand what I say. An example from my play is when Bear finds a pair of footprints and wonders if they are a grandpa's (Bear assumes grandpas are a kind of creature instead of a human). The original sentence was "Tracks! Are these a grandpa's footprints?" To make sure the audience is able to get the sense of "grandpas are a kind of creature instead of a human for Bear", Joanna suggested me to change "a" into "some", so the sentence became "Tracks! Are these some grandpas' footprints?" For me, the difference between them was just the use of a singular or plural of

the word, but the underlying change was huge, and the adjustment undoubtedly made my thought clearer. It is hard for me to use a second language to express my thought in a specific, exact way, and the tutorials assisted me in fixing that problem as well as communicating with my audience more efficiently and effectively.

When it became time to rehearse, there arose another question for me to deal with. I have been trained as a performer/dancer since I was young, so I have a good sense of how my body looks on the stage; however, being a director, choreographer, and performer at the same time is another case. I need a director's brain, a choreographer's eye, as well as a performer's heart, and then blend them altogether to create a figure, and once the figure is well formed, the audience should be able to understand its language, be impressed by its beauty, and be warmed by its heartfelt emotion. I tried my best to do the work, but I always missed something; luckily, Professor Nick Erickson, my movement teacher, had a quick eye for the missing elements of the performance.

In my one-person show, there is a scene called the double masks, in which the central character tells of an old memory of hers to the audience by placing a bag with two faces on each side of it over her head. Whoever she wants to portray, the only thing she needs to do is to place the person's face on hers by turning the bag along with a full-body turn, so by the time she finishes the turn, the audience will see the new character and she will have the other person's face on the back side of her head. That sounds easy and it was not hard to do either. I rehearsed in front of a huge mirror, so I could see the detail of my movement, and by the end I thought every part of the movement was clear and well set. However, after a rough run-through, Nick said the double masks scene was interesting but unclear. When I made a full-body turn and placed the following character's face on my face, he saw the first

character's face was left behind with my back side of body, and that was confusing. Besides, my voice was stuck in the bag, so he could not fully understand what I was saying. These were the problems I would never discover when I practiced alone since even with a mirror I could not see myself when I turned, and what I heard in the bag was never as the same as what the audience heard. In order to solve the problem without dropping the idea of using masks (since I liked it a lot), my friend and I came up with an idea of attaching the mask on a pair of glasses for one of the characters and using my own face for the other, which is young Bear, and then I will have both hands available to enrich the gestures of the characters. No pain no gain. I had a lot of trouble, but I also had great fun.

CHAPTER 4: IMPACT FROM MOMENT WORK

After finishing the first draft of our one-person plays, the acting graduate students had a two-week-long workshop with members of Tectonic Theater Project, a theatre company located in New York City, whose widely known theatre work is *The Laramie Project*. One month after the murder of Matthew Shepard, a gay student from the University of Wyoming, one of the founders of Tectonic, Moises Kaufman, and ten company members traveled to Laramie, Wyoming to interview people in the town torn apart by the crime. The play forged from these interviews was created collaboratively by the members of the company over a long workshop process in which participants were encouraged to operate outside their area of specialization.¹⁰ Leigh Fondakowski, the head writer of *The Laramie Project* and also a member of Tectonic Theater Project since 1995, introduced Moment Work to us assisting in creating our one-person plays.

Instead of heavily depending on text while rehearsing, the idea of the Moment Work is to explore every possible theatrical element that makes up a performance, text being only one. Each theatrical element can be anything but what it was used for originally. For instance, a pencil sharpener can be a big-mouth monster, and a LED light with a weird sound can be a kind of sea creature. Actors start the exercise by saying, “I (We) begin,” and the actors do their things, and then they say, “I (We) end” to finish the piece. In the first week of the workshop, we explored architecture, light, sound, virtuosity, objects, and costume to allow them to speak on their own, and then we added layering as well as text to create the moment before, the present moment, and the moment after. While doing these exercises, we kept asking ourselves questions like, “what is the relationship between these

¹⁰ Tectonic Theater Project, “Tectonic Theater Project,” <http://www.tectonictheatreproject.org/Tectonic.html> (accessed: January 22, 2013).

theatrical elements, between objects and performers, between objects and viewers, and between viewers and performers?" These exercises helped us individualize each theatrical element and gave them space to speak by themselves.

Later on, the workshop went to an advanced level, which was adopting the Moment Work to help us develop our writing work, the goal to make content and form, both theatrical elements, to serve one another. First, we were asked a lot of questions by Leigh about our one-person plays, and we were forced to answer the questions in two minutes, which is a short period of time. For this reason, we didn't have time to ruminate over the answer and needed to come out with the answer immediately, which brought out the biggest impact and image of our play. There was no hesitation or ambiguity so that when we reworked the script later, these answers helped us make every dimension of the play crystal clear. In addition, we were asked to bring three objects to rehearsal, each with important roles in our play, and our peers did the Moment Work for us to extend the possibility of the objects so that these objects became more irreplaceable and necessary to the play and serve the content in an inseparable way; moreover, every peer was asked to give each other a question related to the play after our first reading. These exercises isolated for us which part of the plays needed to be clarified or reviewed. At the end of each exercise of Moment Work, we discussed what the dramatic events of the plays were, what the theatrical events were, and what the forms were. The discussions illuminated what the shows were about, how the playwrights reveal the story to the audience, and what theatrical elements were used by the playwright to explore the story. If the play was not on track with what the playwright wanted to say, then he/she would know exactly how to fix it.

On the last day of workshop, Leigh asked us to redo the questions she threw us on the first day and see if anything changed.

From the first day of the workshop to the last, the work we had with Leigh had inspired me tremendously. She encouraged us to see things in a different way. I remember when one of my peers asked how to use the Moment Work to develop our one-person play when the writing process was done and most of the ideas in the play were set. She said, "Throw the text away and do the Moment Work!" That is the truth. We cannot confine our imagination into a frame we set for ourselves. By seeing the Moment Work my peers did for my piece, it opened my mind and tore down the barrier I set to keep new ideas away from my play. I also gained tons of interesting ideas which never entered my mind before. Definitely, the next step for me was to try it out, and I was eager to do so. Moment Work was the wind carrying our imagination anywhere as long as we opened our mind and embraced it without hesitating.

CHAPTER 5: THE SCRIPT: BEAR WITH ME

Theme:

See with your heart not your eyes. Signs are tricksters, and reality is invisible to the naked eye.

Characters:

Bear

No Bear

Mr. Red-faced Fatty

It is a planet, small and tiny, feeling lonely. It is a place where laughs have been taken away; only dryness, chilliness, and lonesomeness stay. Umbrellas are placed upside-down here and there. An umbrella-like tree has been standing at the top of the planet waiting for a century for a rainbow. On the tree's arms two silks are hung, and there is an attached sign saying, "Take the RITE, see me CRY. Take the LEFT, see me laugh." Oh! And a flower-like mushroom sitting next to the tree is waving. All of the lines Bear utters are directly to the audience.

Bear: (In the beginning, we hear the sounds of the planet and then see an umbrella rolling and pausing among trees. Bear, holding an upside-down umbrella, runs toward the audience. When she stands straight up and happens to see the audience, who are aliens for

her, she hides back to the umbrella immediately and then runs back to the umbrella-like tree until she can't see them; meanwhile, she leaves her whole body fully visible to these strangers.)

Bear: (Bear runs forward quickly and speaks to the audience.) Is it...? (She stops and hides back.) Who not on earth are you?!

Bear: (Bear runs forward the third time and breathes dramatically) Is it your planet? No, but you plan it, yes? No?! It's Mai planet! (She realizes and nods.) Is Mai here? No? What? It's MY planet, and I plan it? (Pause) Oh! So it is. Well, welcome then to not YOUR planet but MY planet. (Bear waters the tree with the upside-down umbrella and realizes there is no water left.)

Bear: She is Umbrella, a flower, a...nut, a...s...quir...rel? (She questions to the strangers.) A SQUIRREL! Umbrella is a squirrel! Good afternoon, Umbrella! (Bear blends earth and water together, and then she applies the "medicine" to the tree.) She has been standing here for a century waiting for a rainbow, but I'm afraid she is too old to wait. (Pause) There is Honey. Well, obviously Honey is not "honey", which is golden, sticky, tasty, and Bear's favoriite... (While saying this, Bear touches, smells, and almost licks Honey, and then she gets embarrassed.)...anyway she's my honey. (Pause) Which honey are we talking about? Pooh bother! (She tries to water Honey with an upside-down umbrella but realizes there is no water left.)

Bear: Water Polo, which is my planet, used to have plenty of water, but now it is very, very dry, so I have to save the rain as much as possible to water us later. (Bear takes a small jar full of water and notices there is a sign attached saying “wadder.”) Water. (Bear shrugs.) But you never can tell. (She takes off the sign.) You need to hear it (She does so.), smell it (She does so.), feel it (She does so.), and... (Bear pours water on her head.) taste it! Um...It IS water! Oh, are you thirsty? (She takes a bigger one, rushes to the strangers, and intends to pour water on the audience. Bear waits for the audience’s reply, and then she shakes the head and nods.) Okay. (Pause)

Bear: Where are you from? (Something jumps on Bear’s mind.) Did you also have a dream? One morning I woke up from a long, long dream and suddenly discovered I was on a planet, called the earth, where I’d never been before. (She falls into an old memory.) I was so tired, exhausted, torn from my dream that I could barely bear my body. My face was bearing tears when I met my bear for the first time. I said, “Hey big bear, play with me...I’m lonely and unhappy.” The bear replied, “I can’t. I’ve never been tamed.” In silence we looked at each other. Almost a century later, the bear broke up the stillness saying, “please don’t cry. I can’t bear it.....tame me. I’m No Bear.” I smiled and said, “Hi, No Bear.” The bear looked at me with a big, warm smile, and then I said, “I am Bear.” When I was with No Bear, I had no fear. Since then my heart’s been bearing a sign of the bear. I bare my soul to my bear, but No Bear is lost to me. (She walks to the right silks.)

<Aerial performance>

(The following is voiceover with music.)

No Bear: For me, you are just a little girl, and there is no difference between you and thousands and thousands of others. I don't need you; you don't need me either. For you, I am just a big bear, same as the others. But, if you tame me, we'll need each other deeply. For me, you will be one and only. For you,我會是唯一. If you tame me, my life will be full of energy. I'll know there's a kind of footsteps different than others. Hearing others' footsteps, I'll hide back to swamps, but your footfalls, like music, will call me out of waterfalls. I don't eat green peas; for me peas are tasteless, and green reminds me of nothing else. But your eyes are green, so, once you tame me, things will become lovely. Green peas will remind me of 妳.

Bear: And then I fell asleep again...when my eyes opened after a century long moment I was returned to Water Polo...and I've been missing No Bear for another century. (Bear awakes from the memory.) Since I said ta-ta to No Bear, my planet has never rained. I've been crying and crying and using my tears to water Umbrella and Honey, but it's never enough. They are dying. WE are dying. (Pause) Wait! Do you know Mr. Red-faced Fatty? Did you find the North Pole?! When I was on the earth, I met a guy, called Mr. Red-faced Fatty, and he said if I find the North Pole, I could travel from planet to planet. Earthmen are odd. Actually, Mr. Red-faced Fatty is not an earthman. He is a rubber chicken...Wait! I will show you! (Bear puts Mr. Red-faced Fatty's mask on and uses an umbrella to be Mr. Red-faced Fatty's body or Bear's belongings while switching one character to the other.)

Bear: Excuse me, sir. Do you know how to go back to Water Polo? I need to water Umbrella and Honey.

Mr. Red-faced Fatty: Three plus two equals five. Five plus seven equals twelve. Twelve plus three equals fifteen. It's not my business and it's not important for me either. Get off! Fifteen plus seven equals twenty-two. Oh! Total is five hundred thirty-seven million and six thousand one hundred twenty-two.

Bear: Five hundred million of what?

Mr. Red-faced Fatty: Oh, you're still here! It's five hundred thirty-seven million...five hundred thirty-seven million...I...I forget! I have so many important things to do! No time for a chat! No time to play! I gotta work! I gotta work! Two plus five equals seven...

Bear: Five hundred million of what?

Mr. Red-faced Fatty: Stars.

Bear: What do you count these five hundred million stars for?

Mr. Red-faced Fatty: It's five hundred thirty-seven million and six thousand one hundred twenty-two. I am an exact person. I count exactly.

Bear: What do you count these five hundred million..., five hundred million...twenty..., thirty..., four...teen, pooh bother! What do you count these stars for?

Mr. Red-faced Fatty: Nothing. I own them.

Bear: You own stars?

Mr. Red-faced Fatty: Exactly.

Bear: What do you own these stars for?

Mr. Red-faced Fatty: Well, they make me rich.

Bear: Why do you want to be rich?

Mr. Red-faced Fatty: So, I can buy more stars.

Bear: But what do you do with stars?

Mr. Red-faced Fatty: Well, that's easy. I keep them in a bank. I write down the total of the stars I own on a paper and then lock the paper in my drawer.

Bear: That's it?

Mr. Red-faced Fatty: That's it.

Bear: Pooh, you must be the master of stars.

Mr. Red-faced Fatty: Exactly.

Bear: Then, You must know how to travel from star to star.

Mr. Red-faced Fatty: Exactly.

Bear: HOW?

Mr. Red-faced Fatty: Exactly.

Bear: What?

Mr. Red-faced Fatty: Oh, what's your question again?

Bear: HOW?

Mr. Red-faced Fatty: Um...the exact question.

Bear: Oh, how to travel from star to star?

Mr. Red-faced Fatty: Well, that's...easy. The only chance you can travel from planet to planet is... when you...find...the North Pole. (He is unsure.)Yes! Exactly. It's when you find the North Pole.

Bear: North Pole?

Mr. Red-faced Fatty: Exactly.

Bear: What's that?

Mr. Red-faced Fatty: It's just...a thing... you discover. (He is careless.)

Bear: (She nods slowly and tilts her head.) How do I find it?

Mr. Red-faced Fatty: It's not my business, and it's not important for me either. I have so many important things to do. No time for a chat. No time to play. I gotta work! I gotta work! Eight plus two equals ten. Ten plus four equals fourteen... (Bear takes off the mask.)

Bear: You must know Mr. Red-faced Fatty...You are here, which means you've found the North Pole, and... you are gonna take me there!! Let's go to find the North Pole with my dear horns and bare feet, so I can meet No Bear again! (Bear starts walking carefully around the tree with her "deer horns" and "bear feet".)

Bear: You know what? No Bear told me he had a grandpa. If we could find No Bear's grandpa then the grandpa could find No Bear!...Do you know what a grandpa looks like? (She shrugs.) I don't. Anyway, No Bear said his grandpa had had two names in case he lost one. Isn't that smart? I should have two names, too! Gummy Bear, Little Bear, Ninny Bear, Dancing Bear, Jumping Bear, Zombie Bear... (Bear finishes the first circle of walking around the tree.) Look! Tracks! Are these some grandpas' footprints? If this is a grandpa I'm after now, do you think I am allowed to take him home? Oh! And I'll give him two names as well! Wow..., what a brilliant idea. (Bear lies on the ground and sways her limbs happily.) Cheers! (She pours water from an umbrella on her head.) Do you think these grandpas like to have some oak seeds? I've got some! (Bear gets up with a big smile hung on her face, grabs a bag of oak seeds, and then places them one after the other on the ground.) How smart I am! I'm gonna catch some grandpas. (Pause) At least one! (Bear keeps tracing the tracks around the tree. Couple minutes pass.) Do you remember which one is the one I placed? (Bear sees oak seeds she put on the ground blend with others which are already on the ground. She ponders. A minute later, Bear finds something interesting. She shows her face slowly, opens her eyes widely, and shakes her head dramatically to the strangers.)

Bear: You won't believe this. There are TWO pairs of tracks! You think there are two grandpas? (Something jumps on Bear's mind.) Wait! Maybe...maybe it is No BEAR, the bear I met on the earth, the bear who doesn't like green peas COMING TO VISIT me?!(Bear keeps walking around the tree while trying to convince the audience.)You know, usually bears walk, so you get one pair of tracks. When they are tired they may start to crawl and then you'll get two pairs of tracks. My bear is kind of lazy, so he lies... (She looks at the spot

where she lay before.) ...a lot. (Bear doesn't believe what she looks at.) He is here. Someone has been lying here!! No bear is HERE!!!! My honey bear IS here!!!! (Bear spins happily and happens to hit Honey.) Will my bear eat Honey? Of course?! Bears love honey. (Bear is terrified.) No?! Bears don't eat flowers. (She gets released.) Wait! Are you saying Honey is A FLOWER? NO! She's not. (Bear thinks the idea of "Honey is a flower" is the most ridiculous one ever.) Honey is definitely not sticky like some flowers. Honey doesn't smell as good as some flowers. Honey is of course not beautiful like some flowers. (Bear looks at Honey and becomes unsure.) And, Bear never loves Honey like she loves some flowers. (Bear puts her hand on the chest undoubtedly.) Wait! Bear loves flowers, and she DOES love Honey. (Pause) (She turns her head slowly looking at Honey.) So...Honey IS a flower. (Bear gets confused.) Pooh bother! (Pause) Ah, A MUSHROOM! (She looks at Honey.) Honey is a mushroom. What? (Bear turns toward the audience.) It's not important? You said whether Honey is a flower or not is not important? You said whether No Bear eats Honey or not is not important? Then what's important?! You speak like an earthman. You think like an earthman. You don't understand a thing; you mix up everything! Is that your job? (Bear is panting with rage.) You...you...you are Mr. Red-faced Fatty! He never smelled flowers. He never raised his head to see stars. He even never fell in love with any creatures. Except making mathematical calculation, he's been doing nothing. He's like you, who keep saying, "Nothing is important except work. I gotta work! I gotta work!" That is the trouble on your planet, WORDS, WORDS, WORDS. Earthmen name everything but mix up everything. You are all Mr. Red-faced Fatty. You are all rubber chickens! (Pause)

Bear: For centuries and centuries, honey is sweet and tasty. For centuries and centuries, bears eat honey. Isn't it important to figure out if my bear eats Honey or not? How can the war between my bear and Honey be not important? Isn't it more important than Mr. Red-faced Fatty and his calculation? And, if I happen to meet a mushroom and a bear, who are unique in the world, and I will never ever find another pair exactly the same as them...However, one morning the bear, with a very little, tiny brain, has no idea what he is doing and eats the mushroom with one single bite. Isn't it important? If that happens, of course, it's not the bear's fault. He's just an old silly, silly bear. But it's not Honey's fault...Would a bear by any other name smell as sweet? What about Honey? (Bear starts moving in a way of Meyerhold Biomechanics style and tearing extremely slowly.) My bear is not just A BEAR. He's not the "bear" bearing tears. He's not the "bear" bearing hunger. He's not the "bear" bearing youngsters. He's not the "bear" bearing an umbrella of water. He's not the "bear" in a bear market for sure. He is the bear you've never seen before. Always bearing me in mind, he is a bear at protecting Bear. He is not a bear but a comfort. Do I lose him forever and ever?

<Dance>

(Music flows in, and Bear puts on a dress.)

(In the beginning of the scene, it's like fall. Loneliness fills the space. Toward the middle, it gets hotter and hotter. Anger erupts everywhere, and everything burns. At the end, the atmosphere gets so heavy like the air before an afternoon thunderstorm that it is almost impossible to breathe.)(The following is voiceover with music.)

No Bear: If there is a bear falling in love with a foreigner among millions and millions of stars, a special, unique creature, no matter she is Bear or a stranger, as long as he raises his head looking at these millions and millions of stars, in the universe he is the happiest for sure. When I raise my head gazing into the sky, because you live on one of these stars, because you smile on one of these stars, for me it seems like stars all over the sky are smiling. I will own these smiling stars. If so, the things you gave me are not stars but little tinkling bells. If one day you disappear, the stars, the bells will become tears. (Bear ends up freezing in a pose with upside-down Honey. The following voiceover is issued after a century-long pause.)

No Bear: Distance will never separate us; only the heart does. As long as I gaze into the darkness, I'll see you without doubts. As long as I keep you in thoughts, I'll know you are with me always. Stars are either bells or tears; stars are neither bells nor tears. Stars are not stars but loves. (Bear slowly unfreezes from the pose and doesn't believe what she sees.)

Bear: Honey, how clever you are! The expedition is over. You have FOUND the North Pole! Actually, you ARE the North Pole---Not Original, Real...the Honey!! N-O-R-T-H, North! And...pole! (Bear lifts upside-down Honey.) You are the warmest place in the world! You are not there but here. How silly I was! North Pole is with me ALWAYS! It's not something you discover but a thing just there, like... hearts! (Bear realizes.) And you don't need to look for the North Pole to see someone you love, because there is no barrier between two loving hearts. No Bear is right! He'll suffer from my suffering and laugh from my laughing. Distance will never separate us, and the North Pole within us is connected always to Honey. Honey is

No Bear and No Bear is Honey and No Bear is Bear and Bear is Honey and No Bear is not lost and No Bear is not found and No Bear is there when Bear is here. (Bear grabs a sign saying “NORTH POLL” and attaches it to Honey, and then she plants Honey back to her place. After getting satisfied with what she did, Bear swings on the swing created by the left silks with an extremely happy smile.)

Bear: (She speaks to the audience.) My bear in your eyes is just a bear, zero difference than others, but for me, he is the bear, a thousand times different than others. We play with each other and then yawn together. Asking him to eat green peas? He'll say NEVER! He is a bear with a very little, tiny brain and a big, warm heart. He's kind of a bear not an exact bear. He's the bear beyond a bear. You can never tell he is a bear or not a bear, because he is No Bear! (A long pause)

Bear: This is a game for children who are our teachers and must be respected. Only children know what they are looking for. They put stars in the air; adults put stars on the white paper. Children share stars with one another; adults lock stars in their own drawers. Children see the reality; adults fear the reality, and they have no idea how to be. (Pause) If there ever comes a day when we can't be together, keep me in your heart, think of your bear and no bear will stay there forever. (Light is slightly fading away while Bear utters her last speech, and a golden, bear-like creature shines on a rainbow.)

~The Restart~

CHAPTER 6: AUDIENCE RESPONSE

“When the sunlight sprayed on your hair and body through the leaves, the brilliance made you become an angel,” said Greg Leute, one of my peers. “During your performance, there was a squirrel sneaking in and staying by the oak tree to watch you, and then when you suddenly made a turn, it rushed up into the tree. That was so cute!” said Donald Watkins, one of my peers as well. Matthew Duvall, a MFA candidate in technical design also added, “Your play talked a lot about Nature, like water, trees, honey, mushrooms, and bears, so it is a natural, excellent idea to have the performance outside in the woods.”

One week before I opened the show, it had been raining for weeks, and the weather forecast said it was going to rain for another couple days, so I compromised my original plan of having the show take place outside in an oak forest and had the preview indoors, which ended up unexpectedly well, so I was persuaded to open my show in the building. However, two days before the opening, the sun showed up, and the weather forecast predicted it would be sunny for the following days! The result of the preview was so good that it made me hesitate to bring the show outside, but my instinct and Nick Erickson, my movement professor, kept pushing me to take my performance out of the building, so on the day before the opening, I gave it a try to have one rehearsal in the forest. After that, I handed over all the uncontrollable problems to Mother Nature. In my performances, there was warm sunlight, a gentle breeze, the smell of earth, the sound of school bells, some unexpected neighbors showing up (lively squirrels), and also people walking or biking around. If the squirrels and people were interested in my performance, they stopped to watch, and then I made them a part of my performance! I set my script in the oak forest, and the outcome proved to me that the woods are the home of the play.

In addition, the audience loved the aerial silk piece, the dance, and also the music, which was composed by Vincent Jou, one of my friends, and especially the live violin performance, which added a wonderful layer of flavor to the music. In the dance section, Ming-Ying Chiu, the violinist, improvised based on my movement; as it happened, the sound and dance ended up melding into one. There is no denying that the live violin performance played a significant role in the show and the audience was definitely aware of that.

Also, the audience liked the poetic, puzzle-like language. At the beginning of the show, they did not understand what the central character was talking about. It seemed like they were the foreigners in the play, and they were having the same experience as I have had here as a foreigner in real life. As the show progressed, they started to put the pieces together one by one, and then the whole picture emerged.

Because of the favorable climatic, geographical, and human conditions, my performances were a success. Without any of them, my show would have become a table lacking a leg, which would have served nothing.

CHAPTER 7: FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PLAY

“No piece of theatre is perfect. That is boring. But I do believe that great theatre is completely whole. Your show felt whole, rich and alive. I would be remiss to offer suggestions because I feel like it would be me imposing my ideas onto an already complete story. It’s like putting gummy bears on a cooked pizza... because I love gummy bears. The gummy bears are fine, but they add nothing to the pizza,” said Jessica Jain, one of my classmates, and Jason Bayle, a talented actor from my class also exclaimed, “I wouldn’t change a thing. It’s beautiful.” I was honored to take these words from my peers, but does that mean my piece has no place to grow? No. There are always places for me to explore and grow. Mr. Erickson thinks the Meyerhold Biomechanics section could be longer since it was beautiful, and if I increase the length of the section, it will help to build the emotion of the play and make the performance more complete.

In addition, I have been granted a monetary award by the Bureau of Cultural Affairs for Kaohsiung City Government in Taiwan to bring my play back home to perform. Although English is our second language, it will be hard to make the Taiwanese audience fully understand me. So am I going to translate my play into Chinese? No. First, there are a lot of interesting things hiding in English letters, and there is no way to translate them. For example, in the last scene Bear grasps Honey, which is made of a stick, and says, “... you ARE the North Pole---Not Original, Real...the Honey!! N-O-R-T-H, North! And...pole (She lifts Honey upside-down.)! ” Apparently, Bear gives North a new meaning and indicates “pole” is “stick”. In another example, Bear takes a small jar full of water, notices there is a sign attached saying “wadder” , and then she says, “Water, but you never can tell.” In order to

keep the word associations in the play, I am not going to translate it into my native language. Then, how do I help my Taiwanese audience to comprehend the play?

Since the play was based on my personal experience of studying abroad, I would like to present a short lecture in advance of each performance to share my story of American life as a foreigner and focus on the frustration and process of learning English and understanding people, so my audience will get the basic idea of Bear's situation.

Furthermore, I will utilize the definitions of Chinese and English bears, which I talk about in chapter 2 to introduce the unifying principle: See with your heart not your eyes because signs are tricksters, and reality is invisible to the naked eye. By this point, my audience should be able to grasp the theme of the play. The last step is to break the play down and give them the summary of each scene. After the introductory remarks, the audience will be ready to watch my performance, and if there is time remaining, I can hold a Q and A to resolve their doubts.

I think this performing opportunity in Taiwan will be a good test to see the possibility of bringing my play to other countries and get an idea of what kind of problems I will encounter. I truly believe the more different people I perform for, the more growth the play will get, and it is only good for me and my performance as well.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

This project was one of the most delightful tasks I have ever undertaken in my life. From writing the play to building the costume and props, I did it all by myself with expert advice. I was not afraid of creating a performance, and I actually enjoyed it a lot. Undoubtedly, blending all the talents I have into a piece was a rewarding experience for me, and it was a pleasure to cooperate with various types of artists: a violinist, a composer, and a graphic designer. I also learned how to make a performance absorbing, educational, and emotional touched my heart. Luckily, I was able to get opinions as well as suggestions from my professors and peers, which nourished my performance in a dramatic way.

In the process of making the performances happen, the most difficult aspect was to have the shows take place outside. In order to make my dream come true, I had to communicate with the authorities as well as persuade my supervisor, both skills I was not good at. Worst of all, even though I had enlist the help of an arborist to pick a proper tree from which to hang silks, to receive permissions from the office of Risk Management and Environmental Health and Safety as well as the police office on campus, I still needed to depend on God's will for good weather. If it had rained, I would have had either to cancel the show or move it into the building. Either option would have been a tragedy.

Producing the show tested my strength to the extreme, but I am glad I did it. What I achieved was more than what I could have ever expected. I am so grateful to be assisted by the people with whom I worked and be influenced by the people around me. It is true that artists are always juggling the balls named reality and dream. After working on the project, I believe as long as I do my best with the things I can control, give up the rest with which I have no power to the universe, and then go to sleep, things have a way of working out.

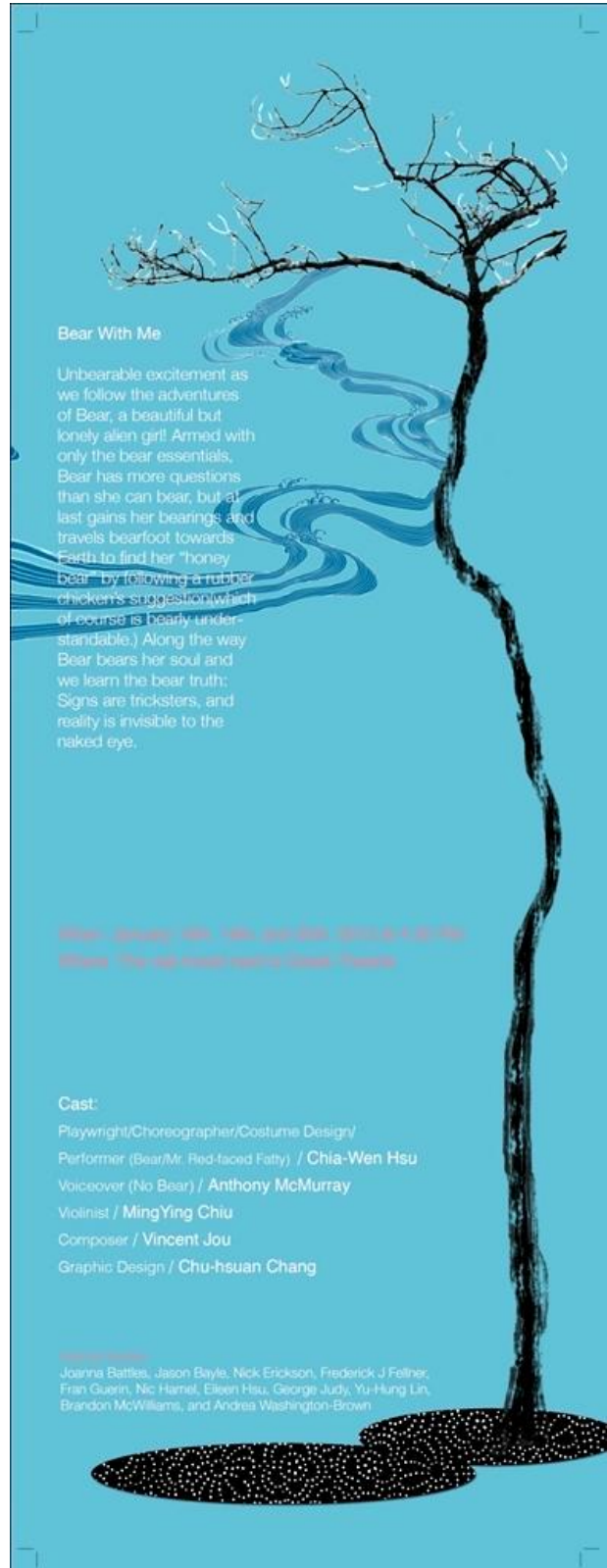
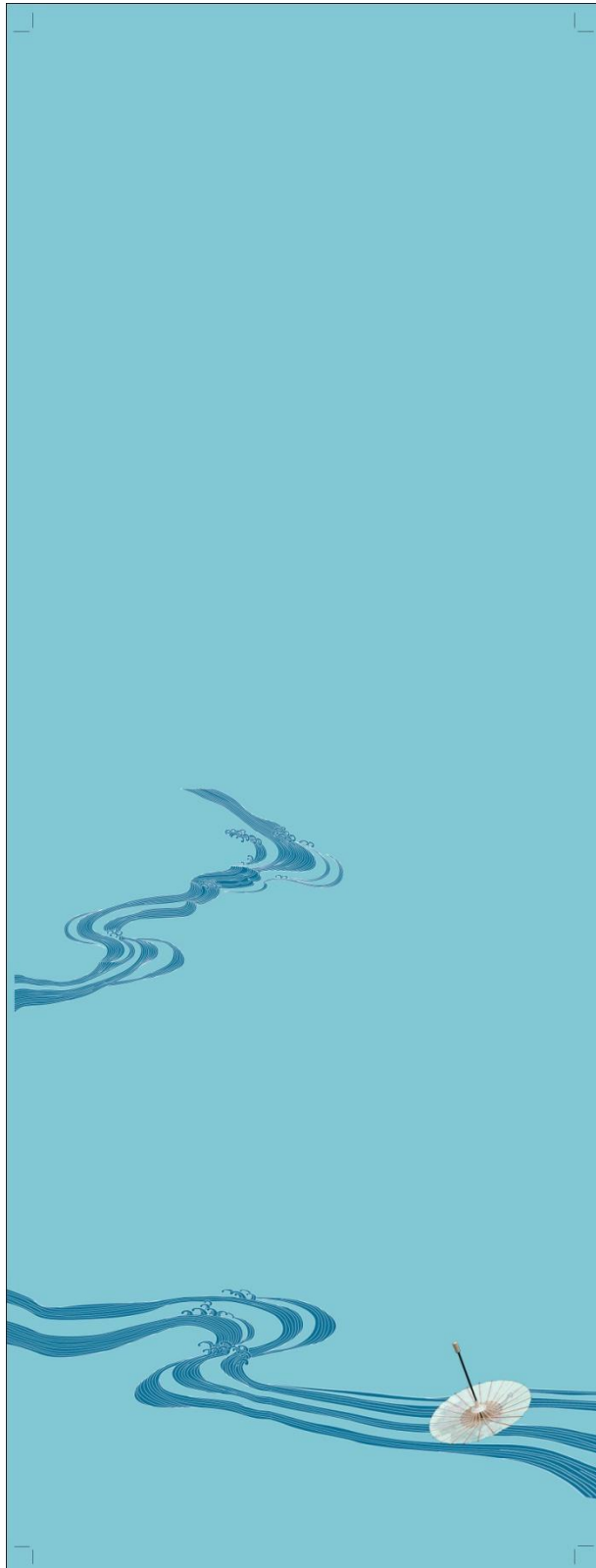
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INVITATION CARD



STAGE PHOTOS





VITA

Chia-Wen Hsu was born in Taiwan and spent her entire life there before she decided to study abroad for a Masters degree in the United States. She started to dance in a talent class when she was six, and at the age of sixteen she entered the dance class in the National Chia-Yi Girls Senior High School to be trained professionally as a dancer in ballet, modern dance, traditional Chinese folk dance, Kung Fu, and improvisation. After the three-year training, Chia-Wen felt that her desire for dancing was fading away. She did not know why she danced, so she determined to leave the stage.

After a year, something still pulled at her on to perform on the stage, so she had a conversation with one of her dance teachers, Chih-Ru Shih, who lent her some theatre books and encouraged her to study theatre. Later on, Chia-Wen was inspired by what she read and then applied for the department of theatre arts at National Sun Yat-sen University to begin her first training in theatre. In her college life, Chia-Wen went to see many international performances created by outstanding masters, and these experiences broadened her horizons. She came to believe that if she wants to become an artist, she should get out the country where she grew up to see how people from other countries work in the theatre and how they feel about life. By that time, she had an American instructor, and mentor in the theatre, John W. Maloney, who told her America would be a good place to start exploring theatre and recommended her to study at LSU.

Fortunately, Chia-Wen met a group of supportive, considerate, and talented faculty and peers and has been growing continuously day by day since she got into the acting program. During her study at LSU, Chia-Wen also had opportunities to work with artists from other states and even other countries, like France as well as Russia; moreover, in the summer

break of her second year, she went to Scotland with undergraduates in a study abroad program and performed in the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. These priceless experiences made her believe there is no boundary between the arts, no matter where they come from as long as they touch people's hearts.

Chia-Wen regards herself as blank paper, allowing great artists to draw on her, and hopes someday this blank paper will become a beautiful piece of art. If Chia-Wen has any step forward to become a professional performer, she attributes her success to the people around her to whom she is deeply grateful.