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The Logic of Art: A Thesis on Directing Catherine Butterfield's Joined at the Head for LSU Theatre's Studio Season 2004

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The Logic of Art:
A Thesis on Directing Catherine Butterfield's
Joined at the Head
for LSU Theatre's Studio Season 2004

by

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Undergraduate honors thesis under the direction of
Dr. Leigh Clemons

Department of Theatre

Submitted to the LSU Honors College in partial fulfillment of
the Upper Division Honors Program

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Louisiana State University
& Agricultural and Mechanical College
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

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DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE

Art serves us best precisely at that point
where it can shift our sense of what is possible,
when we know more than we knew before,
when we feel we have -- by some manner of a leap --
encountered the truth.
That, by the logic of art, is always worth the pain.

(T.S. Eliot)

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I. Preparation



Why I want to Direct

When I started my career at LSU, I registered as a Theatre major, Performance concentration. I wanted to do one thing during my time in college: act. I had been involved in community theatre since the age of eight, and harbored not-so-secret dreams of growing up to become a famous actress. I loved myself in the theatre.

In the LSU Department of Theatre, however, one doesn't get to "just act." Three weeks into my college career I was not performing, but washing costumes backstage as part of the running crew for a Swine Palace show. I was putting out a lot of time and energy for very little thanks. Already I was getting an education on life in the theatre. Over the next four years, I would wash a lot of costumes. I would also act, dance, sing, dramaturg, design sound, assistant direct, and even stage manage productions. At the end of my sophomore year of college, for many various reasons and after seeking a great deal of advice, I decided that my heart and my talents really lie in directing and writing. It was a natural choice that grew out of being made to work in every avenue of theatrical life, and I have never regretted it.

I decided I wanted to direct because the idea of manipulating "the big picture" appealed to me. The idea of crafting all of the myriad parts of a production so that they reflect a very specific theme or view, of forcing unity onto the various pieces of a production so that they can clearly speak to an audience really grabbed at my imagination. An actor, I felt, at best contributes only his or her individual piece of the production. Designers operate the same way. The stage manager facilitates these contributions, but has less artistic input than anyone else. I wanted to be the person to bring these contributions together under one vision. I was learning to love the theatre

in myself.

So: here I was. Twenty years old and I desperately wanted to direct. The problem with this was, outside of basically trying to control every production or scene I'd ever been in, I had no experience and no clue about the actual directing process. My first step in acquiring knowledge about directing was actually accidental. Through an unexpected sequence of events, I ended up co-stage managing the LSU Mainstage production of *Tartuffe* in the fall of 2003. Because I knew I wanted to direct, I paid close attention to director Ellen Beckerman's process: warm up, improvisation, blocking, text development, etc. My next move was to ask Dr. Jennifer Jones Cavanaugh if I could be her assistant director for the LSU Mainstage Production of *Violet* in Spring 2004. She agreed, and I was able to observe a very different kind of rehearsal process. I will discuss in further detail the impact that Ellen and Jenny had on my directing style at the beginning of *Section Three: Directing Influences*.

Selecting the Play

At the beginning of my third year at LSU, I began searching for a play to propose as part of the next year's studio season. I had a few basic criteria, the foremost of which was to select a play written by a modern American female playwright. "Modern," because I didn't feel confident that I could surmount a language barrier at this early stage in my experience. "American" for the same reason, a lack of culture barrier. "Female" because I wanted to speak with a female voice, and I like the idea of supporting female playwrights in general. I also knew I wanted a mixed cast. Other criteria had to do with logistics: would this play be believable if the characters were

played by 18-to-22-year-olds? Could it be done in Theatre 150 or Theatre 106 of the Music and Dramatic Arts Building? Could lighting, sound, costumes, etc. be managed on a studio budget (\$250)? Then there were artistic concerns: Do I believe in the message of this play? Do I believe in the relationships of the characters? Is the dialogue too stilted or archaic? Whose play is this, and is that person someone I want to see win? All of these concerns made it difficult to find a suitable piece.

I began reading through anthologies after anthologies of works by female playwrights. I spent a lot of money ordering acting editions online. At some point I consulted Jane Brody, who lent me several books, among them *Women Playwrights: The Best Plays of 1992*. This is where I found *Joined at the Head*, a play I had never heard of by a modern American female playwright who was just as unknown. I liked what I perceived to be the themes of the play: the essentiality of relationships to human life and the ways in which everyone around us affects us in some way. I liked the big, mixed cast: three leads and an ensemble of six. I especially liked the non-realistic structure, the jumping from point to point, location to location. The thing that I liked most, however, was the relationship between the two female leads, Maggie and Maggy. To me, their relationship was complex, sincere, and genuinely loving. I was (and still am) so tired of seeing female friendship portrayed in the movies and on television as petty, superficial, and back-stabbing. A play featuring an honest-to-goodness unfeigned, non-erotic female relationship was something I hadn't even known I'd been looking for. I filled out the requisite paperwork, submitted it months ahead of time, and began to really examine the script and my thoughts and ideas about it.

I began doing background research on the playwright and past productions of

Joined at the Head. Catherine Butterfield has won several prestigious playwrighting awards, but has not really achieved a high level of fame or success. I found that the first production of *Joined at the Head* was staged at the Manhattan Theatre Club in New York, with the playwright in the role of Maggy. Apparently this run was highly successful. Unfortunately, the rest of the play's productions did not seem to have fared as well. When presented at colleges and regional theatres, *Joined at the Head* received tepid reviews from critics who found it either syrupy sweet or vague and unfocused. The show had not been staged many times. I made note of these problems and vowed not to let them characterize my production; I would have to be on guard against letting the potential sappiness of the script overcome its very present sarcasm and anger, and also be sure that the audience could clearly understand the message of the play. In retrospect, I believe that I did convey a very pointed message, but I did so by creating a message that was not necessarily that of the playwright.

Preliminary Ideas and Proposal Defense

The first thing I realized was that I wanted to stage the show in Theatre 106. Theatre 150's proscenium seemed too confining for what I considered to be a non-realistic work. It seemed to me that Theatre 150, with its traditional box-like proscenium stage and rows of audience chairs, would present difficulties during the number of scene changes that we would have to perform. I also liked the idea of the actors being very very close to the audience; it seemed to fit with the theme of the piece. Theatre 106 is essentially an "open space." It is just a large, bare room in which folding chairs can be placed in any configuration to form the audience section. Although there are risers

that are used to create levels of seating, the first row of the audience shares the “stage;” that is, they are on the same floor as the actors, separated by only inches at the most.

From my earliest imaginings, 106 was the place I set my show.

I also realized that music would be an integral part of the show. I wanted music at most of the transitions, and the ones that did not have music would be silent for a particular reason. I began to lay out the music almost as soon as I picked the play. My thoughts on other technical aspects began to come together as well: the ensemble and Maggie and Jim would be in bright clothing, with the ensemble in matching outfits by gender. Maggie would be in black. There would be no shoes. The noise of nine people clomping around while moving furniture and props would be terribly loud. Also, bare feet would ground the actors and the play in non-realism. Non-realism was to become a catchall for many decisions I would make during the process.

Here I will take just one paragraph to outline what it is I mean by “non-realism.” This term is hugely generic, and it encompasses many different movements in theatre history, but I use it as I have come to understand it through my classes and research in its most general sense. In reading Robert Edmund Jones’s *The Dramatic Imagination* and Anne Bogart’s *A Director Prepares*, both of which I refer to in *Section III: Influences*, I found that what these authors refer to as non-realism was much like the vision I had in mind for *Joined at the Head*. Jones speaks of “The value of simplicity in the theatre” (Jones 32), meaning that a play set at the beach can be successful without throwing two tons of sand and a water tank onstage. Non-realism is about giving the audience the *impression* of the elements of the play, and letting their dramatic imagination carry them through the performances to an understanding of its meaning.

Bogart says that in expressionism, one has to “do violence to external facts to lay bare internal facts” (Bogart 34). If the audience is introduced to this style of theatre at the outset, if we open with sound and lighting that doesn’t look like it’s necessarily “supposed” to and none of the actors are wearing shoes, then half an hour later when we take the audience into a restaurant scene, we can convey the sense of “restaurant” without there being food on the tables and wine in the glasses. This pared-down approach to acting and the design elements, that engages the audience’s imagination to flesh out the play’s reality, is what I refer to as non-realism in this thesis.

I knew that lighting would be a large part of the production; it would be needed to establish scene changes and also to jump back and forth between narration and action. It had to be non-realistic. I wanted to have a screen and slide projections to establish location, and I knew I could borrow those things from my father. I wanted to mime as many props as possible, and to have the physical ones be very significant.

All of these considerations swirled around in my head for the better part of six months before the meeting at which we were to defend our proposals. I hadn’t thought much about the set, except to establish that it wouldn’t be fixed and would be as sparse as possible. I was brought to task for not having thought through this at the meeting, but the rest of my proposal went over smoothly. *Joined at the Head* was accepted into the Studio Season and given a fall slot; this was key, as I wanted to have the spring to write and defend my thesis on the show. Now, it was time to make concrete plans.

I have included my proposal for *Joined at the Head* on the following page.

(please see attachment on following page)

Proposal for LSU Studio Production

Please fill out both sides and return.

Student's Name Chelsea Marcantel

Directing Classes Taken Directing 1 (Fall 03) and Directing 2 (Spring 04)

Name of Play Joined at the Head

Playwright Catherine Butterfield

Genre Drama, Full Length

Number in Cast 4 men 5 women (with doubling)

Year of Publication 1992

Publisher Dramatists Play Service

ISBN 0-8222-1334-6

Performance Fee \$ 60 per production

Space requested Theatre 106 (preferably) or Theatre 150

Semester requested Fall 2004 (will write dissertation in the Spring)

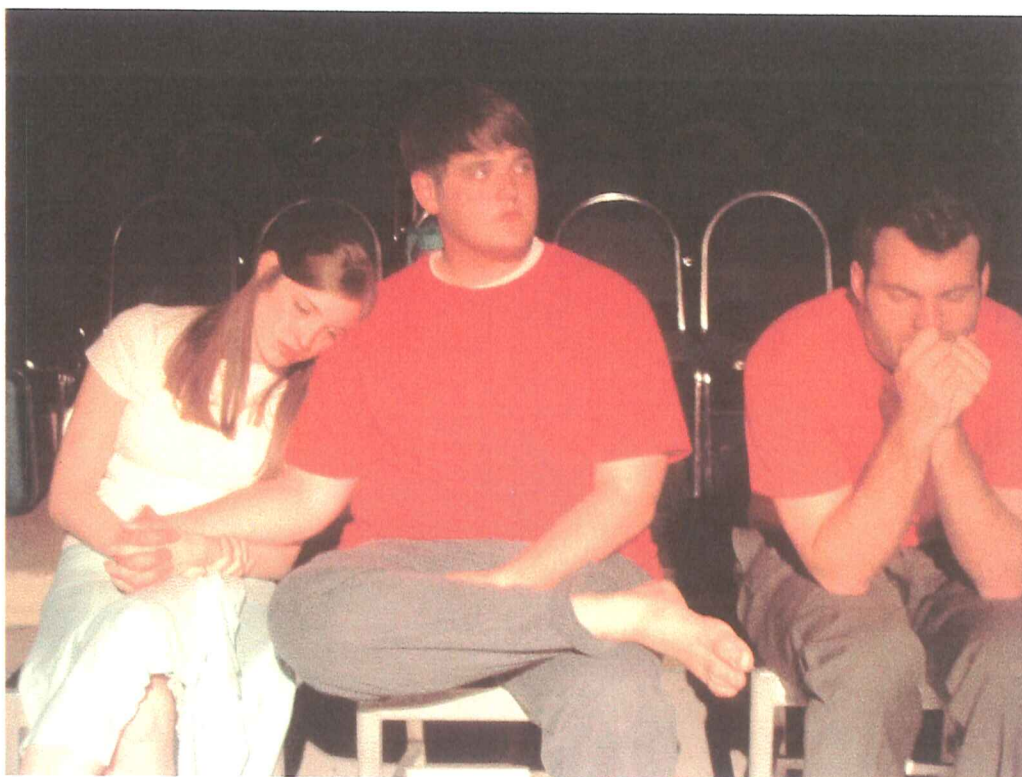
Story: (can be copied from catalogue or play back)

Maggie Mulroney is on a promotional tour for her novel JOINED AT THE HEAD when she gets an invitation to visit with her old high school flame, Jim, and his wife (also named Maggy) who is dying of cancer. The two women strike up an immediate friendship notwithstanding the total disparity in their characters: Maggie the novelist is intensely self-examining and analytical while Maggy, even in the throes of her illness, retains a warm and giving response to the world and others. Maggie acts as the play's narrator from time to time, commenting upon the process of her writing while also shrewdly dissecting her relationship to her former boyfriend's wife. As Maggy's illness becomes the central question in all their lives, Jim and Maggie begin to confront their own assumptions about mortality, ambition, and what it means to make a truly lasting impression in this world. In this riveting portrait of self-awakening, art and life come fluidly to interact as Maggie's instinct for the fictitious collides with a newfound yearning to relate to life with the immediacy of her newest, closest friend.

Dramatists Play Service



II. Casting



General Auditions

Three months after the meeting at which I was told my proposal had been accepted, it was time to cast *Joined at the Head*. In preparation, I went through the script and made a list of the basic characteristics of each of the characters. For the three leads, this was pretty straightforward. For the ensemble, however, I had to really examine each of the different parts played by each member, and try to find the characteristics that united them. I did my best to figure out why the playwright would have chosen to assign the parts the way she did. I came up with the worksheet on the next page. I gave each character a number, so that during the general auditions I could put down numbers next to auditioner's names in order to remind myself for which parts I wanted to call them back.

(please see attachment on following page)

J&H

- 1 **Maggie Mulroney**
outwardly: introspective, outspoken, self-assured, successful, sarcastic
inwardly: uncertain, alone, self-isolated, defensive
 - must be able to pull off the audience-addressed narration of the piece
 - must show evidence of the ability to make an arc
- 2 **Jim Burroughs**
outwardly: jovial, friendly, successful, well-adjusted
inwardly: tortured, guilty, afraid, lustful, angry
 - we must love him whole-heartedly, but I want to see darkness
- 3 **Maggy Burroughs**
outwardly: perky, sarcastic, giddy, mature, well-adjusted
inwardly: panicked, regretful, angry, jealous, mournful
 - I do not want a saint, but someone with a biting wit and fear
- 4 **Ensemble Actress #1**
Needs to be someone who can play professional. Someone who can be a ball-buster, but also soften it up a bit.
- 5 **Ensemble Actress #2**
Needs to have a good Irish accent. Needs to be able to be caring, and very motherly. Would be nice if she were older.
- 6 **Ensemble Actress #3**
Someone young, cute, bubbly. Has to be able to do giddy and somewhat vapid without being annoying.
- 7 **Ensemble Actor #1**
Someone young, friendly but also sarcastic.
- 8 **Ensemble Actor #2**
Someone who can do both bitter and tranquil. Someone who can be a smartass, but can tone it down as well.
- 9 **Ensemble Actor #3**
Has to be able to be very aggressive, very overbearing, but in a sympathetic way. We have to still like Mr. Mulroney, but hate Raymond Terwilliger. Also has to be able to do giddy.

Katherine:

225.288.5285

When the time came, I took my place in the Shaver Theatre with the season's other directors and prepared for my first experience with general auditions. The hours were long. I remembered being told by several different books and instructors that a casting agent or director makes up his or her mind about an auditioner after the first ten seconds of the monologue. I had previously doubted the validity of this statement, but by the six or seventh monologue I found myself doing just that. I would finish writing my comments about an actor before he or she even finished their piece.

I was feeling very good about finding actors for the ensemble, and saw several promising prospects for Jim. I was worried, however, about casting the narrator, Maggie. This actress had to be able to pull off jumping in and out of scenes, addressing the audience in a way just as believable as the rest of the play. She also had to be able to make a convincing arc, a real transformation over the course of the play. I was worried because the only actresses I saw who immediately struck me as right for the part were two I assumed would get scooped up before I got to cast.

I was also concerned about the other female lead, Maggy. I needed someone who was energetic and bright, to serve as a foil for Maggie, but also someone who has a lot of anger and darkness inside, as well as sarcasm and wit. I knew this was going to be a tall order for a college actress. Also, there was the physical fact that Maggy had been a cheerleader in high school and had never had children, so a certain body type was implied by the script. During the general auditions, I didn't really see anyone I thought would be perfect for the part. I hoped that someone I felt okay about would surprise me in callbacks, and that the few actresses I wanted to call back wouldn't get cast in other shows first.

I had several casting advantages over the season's two other studio shows.

First, mine was the only show that didn't conflict with the Mainstage production of *A Lie of the Mind*, so there was the possibility that I could double-cast an actor from that show. Also, I didn't have to post my callbacks until after *Macbeth* was cast, so I wouldn't end up calling back an actor who couldn't do my show.

Once *A Lie of the Mind* and *Macbeth* had posted final cast lists, I posted the callback sheet on the facing page.

(please see attachment on facing page)

Joined at the Head Callbacks
5:15-8pm, Wednesday, 25 August 2004

- * Please pick up sides in the Theatre Office.
- * Take one stapled packet of sides per character you are called back for, as well as an "Ensemble" packet.
- * People cast in *A Lie of the Mind* can also be in *Joined at the Head* !!
- * Callbacks are from 5:15-6pm for those in *A Lie of the Mind*, and 6-8pm for everyone else.
- * Be prepared to do cold readings from other sides.

Callbacks:

Maggie:

✓Katrina Redmond
Courtney L. Clark
Aubrey Schwartz
Claire Treadaway

Doctor:

Stephanie Harper
Eme Udoh
Andrea Graugnard

Salesman:

Daniel LeBlanc
Chris Greenwood
Zach Harvey
Stephen Kernion
Jake Loup

Jim:

Keith Claverie
✓Jonathon Butts
✓Neal Rivet
Keith Kellum
Gavin Robinson

Nora/Mrs. Mulroney:

Nancy Litton
Katie Sills

Maggy:

✓Rebecca Buller
Elizabeth Godley
Courtney Clark
Shauna Rappold

Raymond/Mr. Mulroney:

Danny Washington
✓Luke Siddall
Josh Toups
Hunter Robertson
John Jackson

Callbacks

Callbacks were interesting to say the least. To begin with, my grandfather suddenly died and his funeral was the day of callbacks. I literally drove from the burial to the theatre. I was late and frazzled when I arrived; luckily, my stage manager was on top of everything and I had done my preparation in advance. I had called back twenty-eight actors and actresses, only one of whom did not show. They ranged in age from first-semester freshmen to seventh-year seniors, and their experience was just as varied.

I called back five actors who had already been cast in *A Lie of the Mind*. A problem arose in that the first rehearsal for that show was set to begin at the same time as my callbacks. I ended up having a special callback session for those five actors, and they all did extremely well. I could have cast any of them, but I really wanted to give other actors in the department a part that semester as well. The only person I really wanted was Katrina Redmond; I had liked her best for Maggie since general auditions, and she did excellent work at callbacks. I hoped to find someone else who could do just as good a job as she would, but my gut instinct told me that I wouldn't.

At 6:00PM, the *A Lie of the Mind* cast members left and the rest of those called back arrived. I herded them all into Theatre 106 and gave a small speech in which I explained a bit about the play and tried to calm down anyone who might be overly nervous. Despite that, I could tell some of them still were. I saw some actors whose hands shook and whose voices trembled. I couldn't help but think, "They're nervous in front of *me*? It's like they think I know what I'm doing!"

At callbacks I was surprised by my lack of perception during general auditions. People I had called back were awful in the roles I had called them back for. Others were

very good in completely different parts. I don't know how much of this was the actors' lack of experience at choosing monologues, and how much was my lack of experience at watching them, but somewhere along the way mistakes had been made. I weeded out several people after their first sentences. Others I wanted to see in every part. The chemistry between Maggie and Jim, Maggy and Jim, and Maggie and Maggy was hard to nail down as well, especially since the actress I really wanted for Maggie was not present to read with the other actors.

Another challenge I faced was that the parts of the talk show host, Raymond Terwilliger, and Maggie's father were to be played by the same member of the ensemble. Even though the stage directions depicted Raymond as dry and humorless, I had always read him as sort of funny and clueless, and I wanted to cast him that way. The problem was that Maggie's father was supposed to be overbearing and authoritative, and I wasn't seeing an actor who was particularly good at both. I saw two actors that would each be excellent for one of those parts, but to cast that way would necessitate extending the ensemble by another man. I didn't have a problem with this, wanting to give as many undergrads parts as possible. I wanted to even it out by adding another woman to the ensemble, but I didn't know if this would be okay with the department. As it turned out, Jane Brody was fine with these additions to the cast.

I made notes during callbacks, and they are included as the next eleven pages.

(please see attachments on next eleven pages)

Name

Role(s)

Notes

5:15

Katrina Redmond	Maggie	funny, perky good narration > just great
Courtney L. Clark	Maggie	
Aubrey Schwartz Short w/ curly hair	Maggie	too quiet, hesitates, wordy, but confident attitude
Claire Treadaway	Maggie	Young, nervous, bad voice
Keith Claverie Armand-looking	Jim	very good w/ words, funny, big face understands words, def. ensemble too sad in monologue,
Jonathon Butts	Jim	maybe too flip, but can tone it down, pausy
Neal Rivet	Jim	understands well, but accent is distracting, very Neal
Keith Kellum forehead V	Jim	stumbles w/ text, maybe ensemble weak monologue
Gavin Robinson	Jim	Cute + good w/ text, gestures well excellent monologue → best
Rebecca Buller	Maggy	Perky, too young?, good work
Elizabeth Godley short, cute, + blondish	Maggy	hesitant voice, but so pert, ensemble? not Maggy, I really like her
Courtney Clark small, skinny + brunette	Maggy	not Maggy , but def. ensemble, very pert, presence Maggy?
Shauna Rappold	Maggy + Maggie	Solid work as Maggie, good good good with words; really good w/ Jim in scene
John Jackson	Ensemble Actor + Jim	good work, def. ensemble, but too weak for Jim, stumbles over text, not funny enough for Ray not old enough for Mr. Mul

5:15

5:15

5:15

good as
Maggy, too

Name	Role(s)	Notes
Stephanie Harper	Ensemble Actress	
Eme Udoh	Ensemble Actress Doctor	confident, funny
Andrea Graugnard	Ensemble Actress Doctor	confident, presence
Nancy Litton	Ensemble Actress Nora	excellent accent, right age
Katie Sills	Ensemble Actress Nora	excellent energy, Irish accent is all over the map
Daniel LeBlanc	Ensemble Actor Salesman	ok salesman, funny + good to be young
Chris Greenwood	Ensemble Actor Salesman	excellent as salesman, good + over-the-top, great
Zach Harvey tall + lanky effeminate	Ensemble Actor Salesman	okay, nervous, okay w/ text, maybe a maybe, good w/ laughs
Stephen Kemion	Ensemble Actor Ray/Salesman	quirky + Stephen-like, best as Terwilliger, def. ensemble, funny as Salesman
Jake Loup male Allison payer	Ensemble Actor Salesman	back off the Hunter! too shaky as salesman, but, maybe somewhere → really gay
Danny Washington black guy	Ensemble Actor Ray	nice, nice voice, cute, pausy, a bit uncertain, ensemble?
Luke Siddall	Ensemble Actor Mr/Ray	great as Mr. Mul, but not as Raymond, loud + tough
Josh Toups black hair, round	Ensemble Actor Mr/Ray	young, not funny as Raymond, but ok, good ensemble work
Hunter Robertson	Ensemble Actor Mr/Ray	good as Raymond, semi-funny, better as Mr. Mulroney

Ensemble Men

Hunter
Stephen
Chris * Jake/Zach

Ensemble Women

Eme
Nancy
Elizabeth * Andrea/Ka

Maggy Burroughs

Notes:

- outwardly: perky, sarcastic, giddy, mature, well-adjusted
inwardly: panicked, regretful, angry, jealous, mournful
- I do not want a saint, but someone with a biting wit and fear

Playwright's Notes:

Maggy Burroughs is a full-blooded, no bullshit kind of person. The temptations are to a) fall into the self-pity trap, and b) play her as a saint. Avoid both of them, please. Nothing is less attractive onstage than self-pity, and nobody believes a saint.

Sides:

- Maggy interrupts Maggie, pgs. 14-16
- Maggy with Maggie in the hospital, pgs. 40-41

Call-back List:

Name	Notes	Grade
Courtney C.		
Elizabeth		
Rebecca B.	*	
Shauna	*	

Jim Burroughs

Notes:

outwardly: jovial, friendly, successful, well-adjusted

inwardly: tortured, guilty, afraid, lustful, angry

- we must love him whole-heartedly, but I want to see darkness

Playwright's Notes:

Although Jim's monologue in Act Two is his only chance to say what is really going on inside him, it is important that the actor playing him not regard this as an opportunity to pull out all the emotional stops. The more matter-of-factly this speech is delivered, the more powerful it will be. Please, no tears.

Sides:

- Jim's monologue, pg. 38
- Maggie and Jim at "the dinner," pg. 33-34

Call-back List:

Name	Notes	Grade
Gravin		
Jonathon		
Keith Clavie		

Ensemble Actor #3

Parts:

Engaged Man (pg.1): giddy, perhaps patronizing, kissy

Man in Pajamas (pg.19): confused, desperate, nice, lonely

* Raymond Terwilliger (pg.24): lugubrious, very PBS, accent?, egotistical+

* Mr. Mulroney (pg.27): dead, aggressive in the extreme, but loving

Arguing Man (pg.43): philosopher, ego-central

Notes:

Has to be able to be very aggressive, very overbearing, but in a sympathetic way. We have to still like Mr. Mulroney, but hate Raymond Terwilliger. Also has to be able to do giddy.

Sides:

- opening ensemble scene, pgs. 1&2
- interview with Maggie, pgs. 24-26
- Maggie speaks to her father, pg. 27

Call-back List:

Name	Notes	Grade
Hunter	Mr. Mulroney	
Stephen	Raymond	
Jake LOUP	Raymond	

Ensemble Actor #2

Parts:

- 2nd College Boy (pg.1): cute frat guy, very young as well
- Waiter #1 (pg.2): bitter, annoyed, tired
- * Crystal Salesman (pg.18): calm, maybe an ex-hippie, but knowledgeable
- Visitor at Hospital (pg.19): non-speaking
- Daddy with baby carriage (pg.21): agitatedly concerned
- Second Man in final scene (pg.44): smartass, far-fetched theorist
- Stage Manager at TV studio (pg.24): non-speaking

Notes:

Someone who can do both bitter and tranquil. Someone who can be a smartass, but can tone it down as well.

Sides:

- opening ensemble scene, pgs. 1&2
- Maggie buys a crystal, pg. 18-19

Call-back List:

Name	Notes	Grade
Chris		
Zach		
Daniel		

Ensemble Actor #1

Parts:

1st College Boy (pg.1): cute frat guy, very young

Waiter #2 (pg.2): perplexed

Waiter in Restaurant (pg.13): blunt, either uppity or friendly

Orderly (pg.19): non-speaking

Young Man at book signing (pg.20): self-assured, amazed by own intellect

First Man in final scene (pg.44): shrewd, incredulous

Lighting technician in TV studio (pg.24): non-speaking

Notes:

Someone young, friendly but also sarcastic.

Sides:

- opening ensemble scene, pgs. 1&2

Call-back List:

Name	Notes	Grade
Take Take		
Zach		

Ensemble Actress #3

Parts:

Engaged Woman (pg.1): giddy, excited, kissy
Coat Check Girl (pg.16): young, excited, perky, personable
Woman in Wheelchair (pg.19): non-speaking
1st Woman at book signing (pg.20): bubbly, excited, perceptive
2nd Nurse (pg.37): bubbly, inexperienced, prone to slip-ups
Younger Woman (pg.44): sighing, a bit vapid, romantic
Terwilliger's assistant (pg.24): non-speaking

Notes:

Someone young, cute, bubbly. Has to be able to do giddy and somewhat vapid without being annoying.

Sides:

- opening ensemble scene, pgs. 1&2

~~Maggie and the Second Nurse, pgs. 37~~

Call-back List:

Name	Notes	Grade
Elizabeth Grellay		
Andrea		
Katie		

Ensemble Actress #2

Parts:

- 2nd Political Woman (pg.1): sarcastic, shrewd
Muttering Woman (pg.2): perhaps crazy, or just scared or annoyed
Visitor at Hospital (pg.19): non-speaking
3rd Woman at book signing (pg.20): non-speaking
* Nora (pg.22): Irish accent, kindly, caring, eager to help, older woman
* Mrs. Mulroney (pg.26): over-bearing, but completely loving
Older Woman (pg.44): wise, caring, shrewd, incredulous

Notes:

Needs to have a good Irish accent. Needs to be able to be caring, and very motherly. Would be nice if she were older.

Sides:

- opening ensemble scene, pgs. 1&2
- Maggie checks into Nora's B&B, pg. 22
- Maggie speaks to her mother, pgs. 26-27

Call-back List:

Name	Notes	Grade
Nancy Hutton		
Katie Sills		

Ensemble Actress #1

Parts:

1st Political Woman (pg.1): astute, bitter, shrewd

1st Nurse (pg.19): caring, in command, perceptive

2nd Woman at Book Signing (pg.20): presumptive, funny

Mommy with Baby Carriage (pg.21): easy-going, gentle

* Doctor (pg. 29): professional, nice, wry, seemingly unhelpful

Arguing Woman (pg. 44): confused, offended

Makeup Woman--segue into TV studio (pg.24): non-speaking

Notes:

Needs to be someone who can play professional. Someone who can be a ball-buster, but also soften it up a bit.

Sides:

- opening ensemble scene, pgs. 1&2
- Maggie with the Doctor, pg. 29

Call-back List:

Name	Notes	Grade
Eme		

Casting

After my callbacks, which were the last of the season, my stage manager Katherine and I sat down and determined where we thought people might fit. We both liked Katrina for Maggie, hands down, the only concern was whether or not Jane Brody, as head of undergraduate acting and director of *A Lie of the Mind*, would let her be double-cast. It would take a lot of work to get any other actress we'd seen to the point where she could pull the part off convincingly. When I asked Jane about using Katrina, she had no objections. Katrina was cast as Maggie.

For Maggy, my first pick was Shauna Rappold, but I also really liked Courtney Clark. Shauna has the obvious experience and she's very good with text, but Courtney has a what I think is a Maggy-esque quality: she seems at first very sweet and unassuming, but is really no-bullshit and even a little caustic once you get to know her. Also, with her short and skinny body, it is no stretch to imagine Courtney as a high school cheerleader. At the casting meeting later that night, Alex Beck wanted Shauna for the lead in *Betty's Summer Vacation*, so I cast Courtney as Maggy.

Jim was a no-brainer. Gavin Robinson was the only actor who really handled the long monologue with ease. He has the experience, is nice to look at, and had excellent chemistry with Courtney during their readings together. I was sure someone else would want him for their show, but as it turned out I got him for Jim without a fight. The only problem with this casting was that Jim is supposed to play a musical instrument during the show, and Gavin does not play an instrument. However, none of the other actors I called back for Jim play an instrument, either. I decided we would have to figure out a way around that obstacle, and it would probably end up being a non-realistic solution.

The ensemble was difficult to cast because many of my primary choices were taken by the two other studio shows. I wanted to make sure I had a mixed-race ensemble; I felt that was integral to my concept of the show. In the end, with the okayed addition of one man and one woman to the ensemble, I cast Andréa Graugnard to be the no-nonsense professional, Katie Sills to be the bubbly and somewhat vapid young girl, Nancy Litton to be the older motherly type with an Irish accent, and Eme Udoh to be the political woman. For the men's ensemble, I cast Stephen Kernion as the obnoxious talk show host, Hunter Robertson as the overbearing and judgemental fatherly type, Keith Claverie as the suave and eager salesman, and Danny Washington as the exhausted waiter. I went back and forth between Danny Washington and Zach Harvey for that last part, but I ultimately cast Danny because he seemed more sure of himself and, frankly, because he is black and I wanted a multiracial cast as much as possible.

Immediately after the cast list went up, we began to have problems. Eme Udoh came up to me after class the very next day and told me that she couldn't do the show because of her work schedule. I hadn't seen any other actresses at the callbacks that I wanted to take her place. "No problem," I thought, "the show is written for three women, we'll just keep the three we have and divide the parts the way the script divides them." Then we couldn't get in touch with Danny Washington for days, and once we did, he told us that he couldn't do the show because he was already in another production that conflicted. This created problems, because I needed four men in the ensemble in order to divide the parts of Raymond Terwilliger and Mr. Mulroney. Also, this gave me an all-white cast, despite my best efforts. Luckily, however, I asked Zach

Harvey to replace Danny and he agreed with no hesitation. He was extremely excited to be in the show. Our third problem was with Nancy Litton's schedule: she was in a production of *Evangeline* at that time, and if the production were extended it would mean she'd have to miss the first half of the rehearsal process. We already knew we'd be doing without Katrina for three of the first five rehearsals due to *A Lie of the Mind*, so I had planned to do ensemble work during those rehearsals. If we didn't have the lead *and* we didn't have the entire ensemble, the first two weeks of rehearsal would be entirely pointless. However, there was no way that I was going to find another older actress with an impeccable Irish accent. After many frantic phone calls, we finally decided that all we could do was keep Nancy in the show and pray that *Evangeline* didn't get extended. It didn't.

The next two pages are an attached cast list, as it was posted and amended, and the final parts assignments.

(please see attachments on next two pages)

Joined at the Head

Cast List

Maggie	-->	Katrina Redmond✓
Jim	-->	Gavin Robinson✓
Maggy	-->	Courtney Clark✓

Ensemble

Hunter Robertson	Eme Udoh
Stephen Kernion✓	Nancy Litton*
Keith Claverie ✓	Andrea Graugnard✓
Danny Washington	Katie Sills✓
Zach Harvey✓	

- * Ensemble roles will be divided at a later date, and doubling will not be as indicated in the script.
- * Scripts will be given out at 5pm on Saturday evening, 28 August 2004, at a cast meeting. Meet in the MDA lobby. If you have a conflict, contact Katherine at kseghe2@lsu.edu or 225-288-5285.
- * You will be e-mailed with further details.

Congratulations!

JathH Parts Assignments

Katrina	-->	Maggie Mulroney
Gavin	-->	Jim Burroughs
Courtney	-->	Maggy Burroughs
M 1 Hunter	-->	mr. mulroney, arguing man, waiter #2, waiter in restaurant
M 2 Stephen	-->	raymond terwilliger, 1st college boy young man at book signing, first man in final scene
M 3 Keith	-->	engaged man, man in pajamas, crystal salesman, second man in final scene
M 4 ^{Zach} Danny	-->	2nd college boy, waiter #1, daddy with baby carriage
W 1 Nancy	-->	2nd political woman, muttering woman, nora, mrs. mulroney, older woman in final scene
W 2 Andrea	-->	1st political woman, 1st nurse, 2nd woman at book signing, mommy with baby carriage, doctor, arguing woman
W 3 Katie	-->	engaged woman, coat check girl, 1st woman at book signing, 2nd nurse, younger woman in final scene

After the cast list was posted and the two aforementioned changes were made, the actors, stage manager, and I had an informal meeting at my apartment. We introduced ourselves, passed out scripts, and chatted a little about the play. I was concerned that there were quite a few people in the cast who didn't know each other, because shows in our department so often start out with a sort of innate chemistry between actors who have pre-existing relationships. Since we were not set to start rehearsing for another month, I suggested to the actors that we have a weekly "ensemble-building" session every Wednesday of that open month, to get to know each other better. These sessions would be completely optional, and nothing we did would be required knowledge on the first day of real rehearsals. The actors seemed to like the idea, although we knew that Nancy and Katrina would not be able to make any of the ensemble-building sessions because of the shows they were already in. The rest of the cast and I set Wednesday night as our weekly ensemble-building night, and the meeting concluded on a good note.

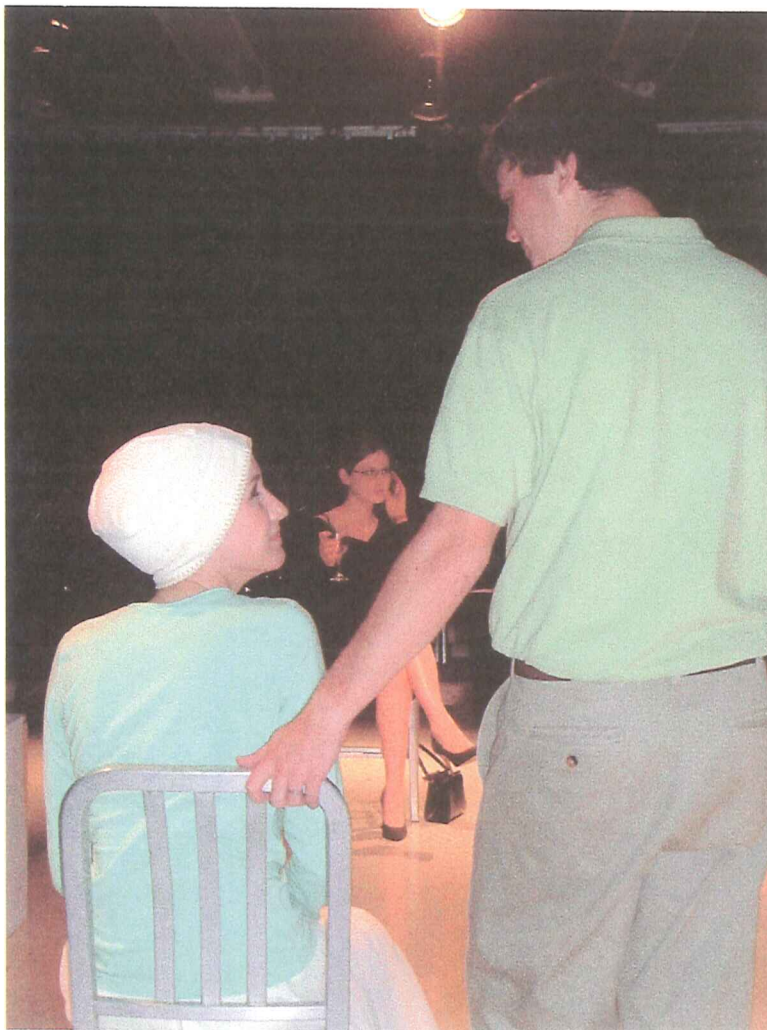
Finding Crew and Designers

The next step was to find a crew. The stage manager had been easy: Katherine Seghers e-mailed me at the beginning of the summer to ask if she could fill the position. Although I had asked Elena Hanson to work on the show the semester before and she had agreed, she had then been offered *A Lie of the Mind* and understandably took the bigger show. I asked Ali Bagbey, a sophomore who had been my freshman mentee and who I knew was interested in stage managing, to be the assistant stage manager. She accepted. My initial idea was that she would run the slide projector during performance.

Misti Zimmerlie approached me after the cast list went up, told me she had read the play and she really enjoyed it, and asked if I needed any help with the crew. I asked her if she wanted to assistant direct, and she agreed. She said she had never been an assistant director before, and I told her that although this was my second directing experience, I had never had an assistant director before. I decided that her major role would be to research on the alterations I was already planning to make to the script. About a week before tech, Katherine told me that she had two freshmen on her crew of *A Lie of the Mind* (for which she was assistant stage manager) who were interested in running our light and sound boards. With the addition of those volunteers, our crew was complete.

Finding designers proved just as easy. I asked my best friend, Wendy Morrill, to design costumes because she had worked in the costume shop both at LSU and the Depot Theatre in New York and had a lot of costume experience. I asked Erica Gharst to design the lights because I knew she wasn't working on a show that semester, and I had heard good things about her work. They both jumped on board. Nels Anderson recommended to me a graduate student in another department, Mary Mouton, who was taking his design class. Her primary focus is lighting design, but she wanted more experience in other areas and thus became our set designer. I asked Sarah Keller, a tech student I had worked with on the Saint Aloysius plays the year before, to be my sound designer. I had very specific ideas about songs to use, but I didn't think I would have time to be both sound designer and director. Sarah joined our design staff. Once the design team was in place, the planning portion of the process was firmly grounded and it was time to start executing my ideas for this production.

III. Influences



Directing Influences

Before rehearsals of any kind began, I sat down and tried to develop an individual system by which to navigate the directoral process. Although I had had practice running rehearsals the summer before, when I directed Noël Coward's *Private Lives*, this show was going to be very different. I had a cast of ten instead of four, I had a shifting set that was situated very close to the audience, and I was working within non-realism. My task at this point was to create a methodology that was my own, and by "my own," I mean an amalgamation of the various directing processes I had seen and read about.

Ellen Beckerman and *Tartuffe*

The first thing I did was consult the notes I had made during my time as a stage manager under Ellen Beckerman. I really liked the way she had taken the first twenty minutes of every rehearsal to center the actors of *Tartuffe*, bringing them out of daily life and into the space, getting them into the mindset of the play. She had also done a lot of work with the Viewpoints which I thought was amazing and extremely helpful; the problem was that watching her had been my only experience with the Viewpoints, and I was in no position to lead actors through such activities. I decided to keep the centering portion of the warm up (sitting in a circle, concentrating on posture and breathing, finding the voice) and modify the Viewpoints exercises to make them infinitely simpler, to put them on a level that I could feel comfortable using.

Let me take a moment here to give a rough overview of what the Viewpoints are. The Viewpoints are a set of definable tools used to create theatre and a standard

vocabulary used to discuss it (Jucha, 1). The Viewpoints themselves are a theory. Originated by dancer and choreographer Mary Overlie in 1977, and refined most notably by American director Anne Bogart (about whom I will say more later in this section), the Viewpoints are based on the idea that every theatrical experience of any kind has two givens: Time and Space. The actor relates to time and space by means of the six Viewpoints: spatial relationships, shape, gesture, kinesthetic response, narrative (story), and repetition. These are the bare bones of the theory, and the limit of my qualification to discuss them.

The other notes that I had on Ellen concerned her system of blocking. Her blocking method had been completely actor-centered; she might have had specific ideas in her head, but her script was free of blocking notes. She let the actors go where they would onstage, only setting a few very specific and non-realistic bits of stage business. The actors had the freedom to evolve the blocking, changing it incrementally or dramatically from night to night, but by tech they had fallen into a fairly set pattern. I remembered being frustrated as a stage manager, because I was supposed to keep track of the blocking and it was never the same until the very end. I also remember seeing the actors look somewhat bewildered from time to time onstage, because they were wandering around without a map. When energy was down, the entire show would suffer because the actors would just not feel up to moving, and because they could go anywhere, they chose to go nowhere. Although the result of this system of blocking was, ultimately, a beautiful show, I didn't think that this kind of blocking was for me. First of all, the actors in *Tartuffe* had been MFA students, so they had more experience and more training than my cast. Secondly, this was only the second show I had ever

directed, and I knew that I couldn't duplicate those kinds of results with the same system Ellen had used. Third, *Tartuffe* had not contained one of the major features of *Joined at the Head*: actor-fueled scene changes. If I let the actors do what they would during those changes, I would have absolute chaos on my hands. I decided to implement the freedom to experiment that Ellen had given her actors, while making sure that mine at least started off with a basic blocking roadmap.

Dr. Jennifer Jones Cavanaugh and *Violet*

The second set of observational notes I had made came from observing Dr. Jennifer Jones Cavanaugh backstage at *Violet* rehearsals. Here was a show about as far from *Tartuffe* as one could be. I had switched from a sort of Neoclassical non-realism to the highly structured world of the American musical. *Violet* was more like *Joined at the Head* in that it featured a large cast of undergraduates who did their own scene changes. It was less like *Joined at the Head* than *Tartuffe* had been in that the actors had much less freedom in their movements.

Jenny's system of warming up consisted of actors arriving early to stretch, and then going through a vocal warm-up with the musical director on the piano. The actors might then engage in some kind of short group activity, but there was very little improvisation and no use of the Viewpoints. There wasn't time. After rehearsals got rolling, a dance call and fight call would take place every night. Although there was to be no singing in *Joined at the Head*, and I didn't really like the idea of actors warming up individually without any group cohesion, I enjoyed immensely the concept of a dance call. I liked the way it warmed up the actors' bodies, got them into the world of

the play, and forced them into a group mentality. As an added bonus, dancing seemed to put everyone into a good mood. I decided to incorporate a dance call-type element into my warm up for *Joined at the Head*.

Jenny's system of blocking this musical was the diametric opposite of what Ellen's had been for *Tartuffe*. While Ellen had given the actors almost boundless freedom, with Jenny they got very little. There was no room for that kind of blocking; in a musical every step has to be highly choreographed, stylized, especially when the scenes are switching constantly between locations and times, and even past and present. Jenny came into each rehearsal with a blocking plan laid out on paper, which she then communicated to the actors. If they had problems or suggestions, or if something just didn't work, they could tell Jenny about it. Sometimes the blocking plan changed as a result of these suggestions, sometimes it did not, but I really appreciated the way the actors had something concrete off of which to bounce their ideas. I decided that I would arrive at every rehearsal with a blocking plan; whether or not I would force it upon the actors, I did not know, but I knew from my own experience how much more confident I felt in rehearsal when I had done my homework, when I had something written down in front of me to at least suggest to an actor. I also decided to implement Jenny's policy that actors should be off book for a scene after it was blocked, meaning they could have their scripts in hand the first time a scene was gone over, but by the second time they'd better be able to do without. This seemed more logical to me than implementing arbitrary dates and page numbers in a "memorize by" fashion.

I knew that I wanted to give my actors a level of blocking freedom somewhere between total liberty and enforced choreography. I also knew that I wanted a long,

group-based warm up with some kind of dance call component at the beginning of every rehearsal. To flesh out these ideas, I turned to various sources: *Play Directing* by Francis Hodge and *A Director Prepares* by Anne Bogart, as well as acting books that I have studied during my undergraduate career.

***Play Directing* by Francis Hodge**

In the fall of 2003 I took THTR 4024, Directing I, with PhD candidate Marla Dean. Although there was much of Marla's method that I disagreed with, such as the equation that a lot of crap onstage = physical obstacles = drama, I found the course's textbook, *Play Directing: Analysis, Communication, and Style* to be very insightful. I drew heavily from Francis Hodge's sections on blocking and composition.

Hodge refers to a system he calls "organic blocking," which I was pleased to discover is the balance between absolute freedom and absolute discipline. Organic blocking creates a specific series of physicalizations for actors as a way of communicating the impetuous of a scene or moment to *the actors* through their own bodies. It enables them to connect to relationships and text on a physical, subconscious level. When this connection is made, the audience reaps the benefits in the form of a clear understanding of what is happening at any given moment, both aurally and visually. This method of blocking is called 'organic' because, Hodge states, "such blocking is in no way superimposed on a play or forced on an actor, but...such blocking suggestions derive from the play itself (the organism) and are therefore inherent in it." It is the job of the director to create these moments of physicalization, and then give them to the actors that they might adapt and personalize them. At its

best, organic blocking is “an inherent activation of a playscript through a body of physical suggestions that can arouse imagination in actors” (Hodge, 66). I was extremely excited when I reread this chapter of *Play Directing*, because the system of organic blocking captures exactly the process I was trying to articulate.

One decision every theatrical director has to make is whether to work “inside to outside” or “outside to inside.” An “inside to outside” process implies that the director and actor first explore the emotional world of the characters, and then set physicalizations such as gesture and blocking. “Outside to inside” goes about this from the opposite direction, setting physicalizations such as blocking first, and then tackling each character’s inner workings and relationships. Both of these methods will lead, hypothetically, to the same result, so the choice usually comes down to which method the director feels most comfortable working with. As I tried to decide which of these approaches to take, I ran across this passage in Hodge’s book:

Actors frequently feels quite uncomfortable when they participate in first readings because a play--an ensemble effort--can be very confusing until it has been given some outward form. A director can be of great assistance in helping actors get over this initial discomfort by placing them physically in specific relationships to one another in conformity with the dramatic action. This process will not only give an actor time to locate himself but it will also allow him to know who his adversaries in the play are, something he may know intellectually but not in a physical sense. Anyone who has acted in a play knows the discomfort described here; yet, directors who are busy looking elsewhere too easily forget the strangeness and disorientation of first contacts. (67)

What Hodge advocates here is an “outside to inside” process, and reading this part of his book cemented my inclination to use this type of process myself. When an

actor approaches a stage for the first time, it seems a hundred miles square. When faced with the endless possibilities implied by a blank stage, an actor can become paralyzed with inertia. That is why I believe, as Hodge does, that giving an actor a definite place to *be* eliminates the wasted energy created in opening rehearsals by actors shuffling around unpurposefully with scripts in their hands. Giving the actor a place to be *first*, I reasoned, would open up the door for more focused interior exploration *second*.

The way to note Hodge's blocking system in a director's script was explained in detail in a later chapter. I had been taught this system in directing class, had used it in previous work, and found it extremely helpful. It consists of depicting the stage groundplan and numbered movements on the left-hand side of the script, and noting where those movements occur on the facing (right-hand page). In my script, I use a different symbol and ink color for each character; I have made color copies of one such pair of pages so that you may see the full effect. These copies can be found at the beginning of *Section IV: Rehearsal*, along with samples of the two other kinds of scripts I used in the rehearsal process.

It is true that some professional directors have a negative attitude toward paper blocking, saying that they never use it in order to leave stage positions and movement up to the improvisation of the actors. That attitude is not necessarily wrong, but the operative word in it is *professional*. I am not a professional director; I am not even an experienced director. My actors are not professional actors. Though it may work for directors and actors with years of experience to skip the paper blocking stage of the rehearsal process, my actors and I were going to need a firmer foundation for our show.

Also, blocking on paper does not inhibit the ability of the actor to improvise.

Many times, the blocking I wrote before rehearsal had changed considerably by the end of rehearsal, through exploration and experimentation. I had to remind myself not to get too hung up on sticking to my pre-blocking. As Hodge points out,

Paper blocking is in no sense an arbitrary director's decision that he will force on the actors, but a preexamination of possibilities for director-actor communication. Instead of leaving himself with only one way to illustrate a scene, a director has investigated the possibilities widely enough to enable him to move in several directions with actors, although he may personally think that one is superior to the others. Paper blocking opens up a director's imagination instead of closing it...Moreover, the job of rehearsal is to keep the actors working. If they must wait around while the director makes up his mind about how he thinks a play should go, actors will be tense and will not concentrate well. (147).

After reading this section in *Play Directing*, my mind was made up. I would work "outside to inside," I would use a system of paper blocking, but at the same time I would be flexible to alterations and additions to my paper blocking.

The second part of Hodge's book that I found extremely helpful was the chapter on composition, spacial relationships onstage. I had been fighting with myself over the amount of movement I wanted in the show, and how to find the balance between frantic and stagnant. Since I would be creating the organic blocking plan, how much and how often should I allow the characters to roam the stage? Hodge summed his theory up very nicely on the second page of the chapter, and this reading helped me to clarify my own thoughts on the issue: "Composition is static. It is a caught moment. It is a primitive form on which will be superimposed the other elements that make illustration--gesture, picturization, and movement...a performed play is a continuous alternation of composition and movement" (87). Hodge also states in this passage that, because a play is spoken, the actor's body should remain relatively quiet the majority of the time,

in order that the audience may hear and understand that speech. It is therefore of utmost importance that the relationship between these quiet bodies be significant at all times. This applied especially, I thought, to non-realism.

Hodge goes on to explain that the meanings of compositions are not arbitrary. Shapes have a subconscious and relatively universal impact on humans, and these shapes can be used by a director to easily convey messages. I became very interested in the compositional form of triangles. Triangles convey strong meaning by employing two diagonals, what Hodge refers to as the most “dynamic lines on the stage” (99). By varying the body position, relative distance, and direction of each of the three components of the triangle, a myriad of very forceful images can be created.

Hodge also speaks about the distance between characters, the direction in which they face relative to each other, and the meanings of various lines (vertical, horizontal, diagonal) and planes. The chapter also includes some invaluable helpful illustrations, such as this one on the basic meanings of the two-person composition:

(please see next page)

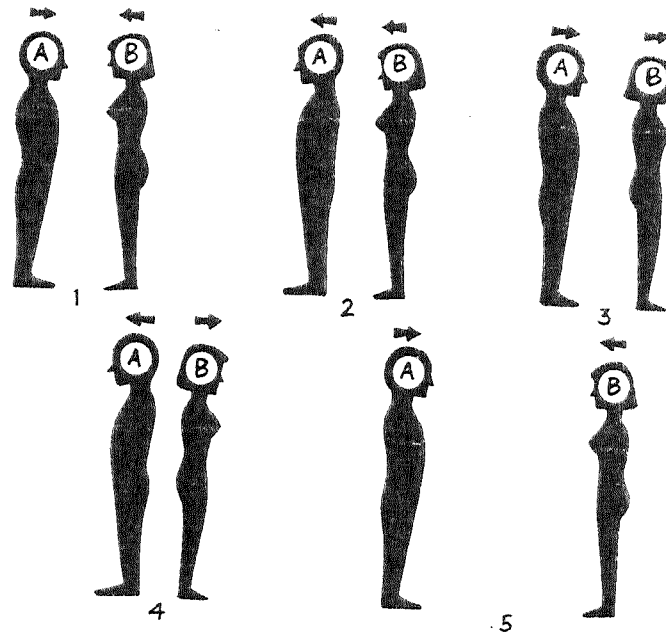


FIGURE 14

1. A and B either like each other or are confronting each other in anger.
2. A is playing hard to get, with B the weaker.
3. The situation in item 2 is reversed, with B playing hard to get.
4. The relationship between A and B is disrupted completely with backs turned to each other.
5. Although A and B face each other, A is now much separated from B, indicating a coolness, though opposition is still present.

Figure 14, Chapter 10: Composition (p. 88)

I was also particularly drawn to this next illustration, because it deals with the individual vs. group dynamic that is so useful in *Joined at the Head*. The idea of Maggie the narrator being separate from the rest of the characters, even Maggy and Jim, was a concept I wanted to strongly emphasize. The illustration below indicates one way to isolate a character from the others, and I expanded upon this in several places in my blocking by creating a ring from the ensemble and placing Maggie alone in the middle.

(please see next page)

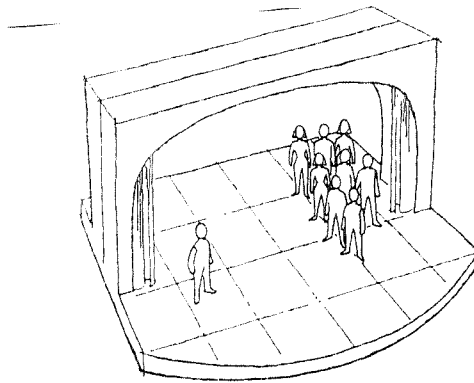


FIGURE 35

Space and mass. Effective compositions can be made by isolating one actor on one part of the stage and contrasting that isolation with a number of actors on the other side (see Figure 35). The single actor is thus surrounded by *space*, which gives him emphasis and individuality, and the others make a *mass* with only group identification.

Figure 35, Chapter 10: Composition (p.103)

The final crucial element that I took to heart was the climactic composition, which occurs when actors onstage are less than three feet apart. In acting class, this is referred to as (pardon the expression) “fight or fuck territory.” What Hodge says is:

Climactic compositions should be used for only two actions, including all their variations: (1) extreme love, in which the actors are about to embrace; or (2) extreme hate, in which they are about to fight. Climactic compositions must therefore be saved for the climactic moments of a play. Young directors and actors tend to overuse climactic compositions on the stage as a matter of course because they see them so continuously used in motion pictures and television, where it is necessary to bring two people close together to get them on camera...A climactic composition has the force of a close-up and must therefore be used sparingly for this purpose or it will have no meaning at all.

(104)

What Hodge does not mention is that climactic compositions also use very little of the acting space, and an effective use of the open space was a critical concern of mine, especially since the set and furniture would be so sparse.

Francis Hodge's *Play Directing* had a huge influence on my directing style in that it outlined the organic and paper blocking systems that I worked with, instructed me in the all-important aspect of composition, and confirmed my desire to use an "outside to inside" approach to rehearsal. These are the concrete, tangible techniques that I needed to begin rehearsals. On a more spiritual and artistic level, however, my inspiration was Anne Bogart's *A Director Prepares*.

***A Director Prepares* by Anne Bogart**

Exactly one week before rehearsals were set to begin, I bought *A Director Prepares* at the LSU bookstore. I had never read anything by Anne Bogart, though I had a marginal knowledge of the SITI company and the Viewpoints. I thought that reading this book would inspire me and put me in a directoral frame of mind to begin rehearsals, even if I didn't incorporate any of its methodology into my system. Because I had always heard that Anne Bogart was a revolutionary, I expected that *A Director Prepares* would completely contradict everything stated in *Play Directing*, since the first edition of that book was published in 1971. Because I was very excited about using the systems put forth by the latter book, I was wary when I began to read *A Director Prepares*.

What I read in that weekend, on a trip to North Carolina, I can honestly say changed my life. Or, if not my life, at the very least my approach to directing. This was

not because Bogart condemns or discards the methods of Hodge, quite the opposite. What I read about the Viewpoints and art in *A Director Prepares* in fact re-establishes and furthers those ideas presented in *Play Directing*. It changed my outlook on directing because it implanted in my brain the idea that there are no concrete answers or steps to apply to every play, and that the beginning of a new production should reduce a director's experience to a clean slate. There are theories of directing, yes, and directing styles that a director can and should keep in mind from play to play. However, as far as which pieces of those theories will work for a particular production with a particular cast in a particular space at a particular time, those things can only be established during the rehearsal process. That is what makes theatre a living and ever-changing organism.

There were several places in *A Director Prepares* that made me think, "Yes! That's exactly what I've been thinking/doing/feeling!" The first of these was in the essay on memory, in which Bogart gives a short history of non-realism. I was inspired by a quote from Robert Edmund Jones, "Realism is something we practice when we aren't feeling very well. When we don't feel up to making the extra effort" (Bogart, 33). Because of this quote, I bought Jones's *The Dramatic Imagination*, which helped to solidify my knowledge of non-realism, though I did not incorporate much of it into my directing style, since it is not a directing text. I wasn't sure if *Joined at the Head* could truly be considered expressionism, but the description of expressionism given in this chapter of *A Director Prepares* seemed to sum up very nicely what I wanted my production to achieve. Expressionism is, "An intensity of vision which tries to catch the throb of life, necessarily doing violence to external facts to lay bare internal facts" (34).

So maybe, if I wanted to depict a restaurant, all I needed was tables and chairs. There *didn't need to be food or menus or napkins, because the tables and chairs, when* combined with composition and the actions of the actors, would relate to the audience the "internal fact" of a restaurant. After reading this passage, my ideas about sparse props, set, and costumes were firmly settled. Non-realism meant creating a framework of the essentials and trusting the actors and audience to employ their dramatic imagination for the nonessentials. As long as this concept was firmly established at the start and maintained as fact for the entirety of the play, I felt the audience would go along with us for the ride.

The biggest "Aha!" that I encountered while reading *A Director Prepares* came during the chapter on stereotypes. I had been wrestling with this idea of the stereotype since my first reading of the play, with regard to the ensemble. I found myself explaining the ensemble as "Well, they aren't stereotypes, but..." But they are. The roles of the ensemble are divided so that each member can make consistent character choices, and those choices have to be based upon stereotypes. There is no background on the roles played by the ensemble, no history; they appear onstage for one or two lines and then never reappear. Add to that the fact that these characters are part of the narrator's recollection; they aren't real, they are the remembrances of one woman's very brief interactions with real people. How can you flesh out such a character if you cannot use stereotypes? Surely the narrator has stereotyped these recollections in her mind. But that word, "stereotype," is such a hated term in theatre. Every character one plays is supposed to be dynamic, three-dimensional, well-rounded. So I was stuck on that issue. I had no concrete idea what to do with that, how to articulate it to the actors. And then,

one week before rehearsals, I found out.

Bogart confronts the issue in exactly the same terms that I defined it.

“Stereotypes” are taboo in theatre, she concedes, but that is because people do not understand what they are or how to use them. Bogart notes that in her early work, she tried very hard to avoid stereotypes and clichés, always striving to come up with a completely innovative solution in rehearsal. However, after a discussion on the topic with Japanese director Tadashi Suzuki, she realized that the task of the director should be to, “embrace the stereotypes; push through them, put a fire under them until, in the heat of the interaction, they transform” (Bogart, 93).

The way to approach stereotypes is not to look at them as rigid, untransformable archetypes that have no depth and no soul. A stereotypes is, instead, “A container of memory” (Bogart, 95). “Bingo!” I thought, “That’s it!” A stereotype is like a plastic container full of a culture’s images and concepts about a particular type of person; when you light a fire under that plastic container, it begins to bend and warp until its shape is completely transformed, but its contents remain the same. This idea was, I thought, a brilliant articulation of a solution I didn’t know I’d had. I wasn’t wrong to imagine the ensemble as stereotypes, but I was now faced with articulately conveying this new way of looking at stereotypes to the actors. My first concrete thought was to give them names. Every member of the ensemble would develop one stereotype to encompass their various roles, and they would give that stereotype a personal name. I finally had a plan for one of my major stumbling blocks. Acknowledging and accepting the ensemble as stereotypes would give me as a director something concrete to work from. As Bogart says:

These inherited solid shapes, images, and even prejudices can be entered and embodied, remembered and reawoken. If we think of a stereotype as three-dimensional, as a container, isn't it encouraging to interact with substantial shapes in the hyper-ephemeral art of the theatre?...The task is suddenly so concrete, so definite. (95)

I had a plan for the rehearsal process. I had culled together pieces of my experience and my reading into what I hoped was a directing system that would carry me through my first real venture into directing. Armed with a slew of notes and highlighted pages of books, I walked into my first rehearsal. That's when I found out that a director can't really create a "system," because that implies a series of steps that can be repeated in every situation. What I needed to develop was a "style," and that would only come through experience, frustration, and trial-and-error during the rehearsal process. I was to have more than my fair share of those elements during *Joined at the Head*.

Although the four aforementioned experiences and books made up the basis of my directing foundation, I think that it is important to acknowledge that a lot of my directing style comes out of how I was trained as an actor. Also, because I was working on a show at LSU, every actor in the cast had been trained by the same professors using the same methods and books that I had; this created between myself and the actors a common understanding and vocabulary to use in regards to the acting process. I would be remiss if I did not outline these acting systems and sources here, because they constituted the backbone of what actually happened between the cast and myself in rehearsal.

Audition by Michael Shurtleff

In the LSU Department of Theatre, everyone develops a strong relationship with Michael Shurtleff's *Audition* and the acting method described therein, The Twelve Guideposts. Shurtleff's Guideposts are the core of our vocabulary, and an understanding of them is critical to the success of any LSU Theatre production. The Guideposts are:

1. Relationship
(how is your character related to every other character in the play?)
2. What Are You Fighting For?
(what does your character want; what keeps him/her from getting it?)
3. The Moment Before
(what happens immediately before the beginning of the play or scene?)
4. Humor
(what is funny or ironic in the play or scene?)
5. Opposites
(what actions does your character purposefully perform that will not help him/her get what he/she is fighting for?)
6. Discoveries
(what is your character learning and experiencing in the scene?)
7. Communication and Competition
(how do you communicate what you feel to the audience? how are you trying to best or change the other characters in the play?)
8. Importance
(how high are the stakes for your character? every moment should be the most important of his/her life.)
9. Find the Events
(what is happening in the play? how does your character drive the events of the plot?)

10. Place
(what place are you creating with your actions? what reality?)
11. Game Playing and Role Playing
(what is game your character is playing in each situation? what role does he/she assume to best play that game?)
12. Mystery and Secret
(what is there about your character that no one knows?)

Because the actors and I have all read this book and taken classes using this method and terminology, it is supremely easy for me to say to an actor, “I don’t know what you’re fighting for,” “raise the stakes in this scene,” “find the humor in that monologue,” etc. As a director, the language I use to communicate with my cast is Shurtleff’s.

Other Sources

Backwards and Forwards by David Ball is not as widely-read within the Department as *Audition* is, but it is well-known enough to help in certain situations. Specifically, Ball discusses at length the nature of dramatic conflict, which all theatre professionals agree is the basis of every play, even if that is where the agreement stops. Ball speaks of dramatic conflict as deeply rooted in and inseparable from human life, and he explains how it differs from the conflict found in a poem or novel. Whereas a novel’s conflict can be free will versus destiny or man versus woman, and a poem’s conflict can be youth versus old age or truth versus falsehood, a play’s conflict is *always* between what a character wants and what hinders him or her from getting it. Dramatic conflict is about the obstacle. The term “obstacle” is much more concrete and useable to an actor than the more abstract “conflict,” and this understanding of the nature of conflict in a

play can be communicated easily to actors using Ball's notion of 'the obstacle'.

A Practical Handbook for the Actor is also a book assigned in more than one theatre class. The major tool I used from this book is the idea of 'action,' which I have already made reference to several times in this thesis. Simply stated, an action is "the physical pursuance of a specific goal" (Bruder, 13). It refers to what an actor is physically *doing* onstage to get what he or she wants. In theatre, we define these actions as infinitives of action verbs, meaning they have to be able to be physically performed in relation to another person. An example: "to wound" is an action an actor might take against someone who is hurting him or her in a scene; "to have," "to be," and "to want" are not actions, because they cannot be physically performed and they do not relate to another character. I used our shared understanding of actions to communicate to the actors the essence of what I wanted them to do with their bodies onstage.

After reviewing these sources, it is easy to see that they flow into and compliment each other. I believe that is the result of the theatre faculty creating a cohesive training system for its actors, and bringing together many sources that utilize and highlight each other's elements. In the professional world, it is not realistic to believe that every actor and director will share a common vocabulary and ideology of the theatre, but that very crucial shared understanding saves a lot of time and confusion in rehearsal, and it is one of the many advantages to doing a show within the LSU Theatre Department.



IV. Rehearsal



Alterations to the Script

There were some obvious alterations that needed to be made to the script before rehearsals could begin. To start, *Joined at the Head* is set in the 1980s, featuring characters who have been out of high school for twenty years. No one was going to believe that my cast was in their late thirties. The assistant director and I decided to set the action of the play in the year 2000 (though that was never explicitly stated) and have the characters only ten years out of high school. This made the ages of the actors and the characters more compatible, and it also allowed us to change the 1960s references to 1980s and 1990s references, which we thought would be more accessible to an audience of modern college students.

The alterations of the characters' ages and the time period of the play necessitated a few more minor changes. Maggy and Jim would have been married for five years, not ten. Maggy and Jim's song would have to change from "Whiter Shade of Pale" to a more recent song to be decided upon in rehearsal. It no longer made sense that Maggie had protested the Vietnam War, but she still had to protest something. We discovered that a rather large student protest against apartheid in South Africa had taken place Boston in 1988, just two years before Maggie and Jim would have been seniors in high school. Since apartheid was not ended until 1990, the same year Maggie graduated from Newbridge High School, we agreed to make her an apartheid protester.

Other cuts and alterations were made to the script during the rehearsal process, but they constitute the kind of evolving that most scripts do on their journey to performance. The most significant of these are noted in entries of the Rehearsal Journal, and less significant ones can be found in the margins of the Director's Script, both of

which are attached for reference in the second volume of this thesis.

The Rehearsal Journal

The Rehearsal Journal follows the evolution of *Joined at the Head* from our first informal ensemble-building rehearsal to the night before opening. It is very personal. Though I tried to establish some degree of professionalism during editing, professionalism has, for the most part, given way to candor. The journal has been modified from its original form, to conserve space. The pages of specific notes I made each night are not here; I have spared you that. Each rehearsal is presented on its own page(s). The first three entries describe the optional hour-long ensemble-building rehearsals. The rest of the entries are for regular rehearsals. The rehearsal journal comprises the majority of an MFA Directing thesis in the LSU Department of Theatre, but here it is attached for your reference in a separate volume.

The Rehearsal Process

The rehearsal process for *Joined at the Head* began with optional ensemble-building rehearsals held once a week. In these rehearsals, we did not touch the text of the play; instead, we focused on physicalizations and improvisations that emphasized the group nature of the show, and also taught the actors to trust their bodies and each other. More than anything, though, these three rehearsals brought together a group of people who knew very little about each other and bonded them as a cast. We never had full attendance at any of these rehearsals, and I never expected it; theatre majors are always very busy, and some were in other shows at the time. But the time that we did

have together in those weeks before rehearsals really kicked off were invaluable to me, because I got to know the actors I had no previous relationship with, and they got to know me and each other. I also used those rehearsals to create and fine-tune my system of centering and warming-up the cast, and to create the dance-call like element I wanted through the use of a series of yoga poses set to the text of Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself." When we got into rehearsals, about half the cast already knew the yoga warm-up, and that sped things along considerably. (For the text of this yoga warm-up, see the Rehearsal Journal.)

Our first few real rehearsals were interesting because we didn't have our lead actress, the narrator Maggie. Katrina Redmond was in an LSU Mainstage show at the same time that did not close until a week into the rehearsal process. I took those rehearsals without her to build the ensemble; I knew that the sense of Katrina's character being outside the circle of the others would carry over into performance, and that was exactly what I wanted. Choreographing the opening and closing sequences during those first rehearsals, as well as the complicated scene shifts, really saved us *time in the long run*.

I knew from the first week of rehearsal that I had made a wise decision in going with Francis Hodge's paper blocking system. It was so easy for me to communicate with the actors when I had something concrete to go off, and a lot of what they did naturally matched what I wrote down beforehand. When I realized that the cast and I were on the same page with our physical interpretations of the script, I knew we had a good dynamic going.

I tried my level best all through the rehearsal process to make no distinctions

between the three leads and the seven ensemble members. They did all the same activities and improvisations. They all had names. They all had relationships with each other. Through the use of stereotypes, we were able to create ten complete personages, not three well-rounded characters and seven flat background images. The cast knew they were all equals; no one was ever given special treatment. I think that this carried into our performances. Every actor was giving 200% because they believed in our show and they wanted to be there. We spent so much time bonding in and out of rehearsal that the feeling of a cohesive whole was always around the ensemble, and that made for a tight, controlled production.

As rehearsals went on, we had all the usual problems: people didn't know their lines, actors couldn't make strong enough choices, notes given in rehearsal were not heeded, etc. I also began to notice that this script I loved so much is actually, truthfully, poorly written. Actors had a hard time wrapping their minds around certain lines, and there were a few passages that really made me cringe when I heard them aloud. Some scenes were extremely overwritten. We edited these problem areas as we came to them in rehearsal, if we just could not find another way through them. I figure we probably edited about twenty minutes from the show in the final analysis.

We didn't add anything to the script in all our editing, except for the musical funeral sequence after Maggy's death. That, I felt from my first reading of the play, would be crucial. The playwright gives the audience nothing when this main character dies: no closure, no exit, no anything. The narrator just states that her new best friend is dead. I always felt this was a cop-out and knew I wanted to add something in that place to really let the audience grieve for a character I hoped they would have come to care

about by that point in the show. The rehearsal at which we created the funeral was probably the most draining and exhilarating one we had. We tried many different expressions of grief and several different songs, and after about an hour and a half we had the candlelight vigil that stayed in the show. Some of the actors cried all the way through the rehearsal. I thought this moment in the play was its most climactic and most meaningful, and it ended up bringing the audience to tears consistently, as well as the actors. It thrills me that my actors and I created something entirely on our own that moved people in such a profound way.

I realized at some point near the end that I had hit a wall in the process and gone around it by stepping outside the script. The reason I had so many problems with the script, I realized, was that the playwright and I were not on the same page thematically. The things I saw as the essential messages of the play--the need for human beings to form relationships, the strength of a true female friendship, the pursuance of goals that fulfil a person, and the importance of giving attention to everyone you meet--were not supported by the text. Yet, I had crafted my show around them. I ended up with a production that emphasized my messages using someone else's text. I think this was for the best. The script of *Joined at the Head* needs a lot of work, and productions of this play are often accused of being vague and pointless. My show was neither, at the expense of the script. I don't think that this solution necessarily negative, but I do think that next time I pick a script to direct, I'll have to be more careful to choose one that has the same scope of vision for itself as I do.

I found that the "outside to inside" process worked very well for me. There was a time, after the entire show was blocked and actors were still having problems, that it

seemed to have been the wrong approach. The actors complained that while everything was blocked, we had never worked through anything in depth and they were uncomfortable. However, many of them are not used to working in this method, and they didn't realize as I did that we still had two weeks left to work on the internal aspects of their characters. I was correct in assuming that these interior issues were easier to deal with when the actors were off book and had a definite blocking pattern to come back to. Though there was a rough patch in the middle, I believe that this "outside to inside" method of rehearsal is the best fit for me as a director.

Many productions experience problems during opening week. I hope that not many of them experience two dimmers exploding and electrocuting an electrician, a costume designer going missing with all the costumes, and a set whose pieces can't come together because every carpenter in the department is working on another show. Nonetheless, we banded together as a cast and crew and somehow made it to opening night. Two nights before we opened, we were really tested. We had no lights, no costumes, and no set. Instead of running the show that night, I decided to divide the cast into three groups: one would come with me to buy costumes, another would paint the set and props, and a third would help refocus lights. By the end of the night, we had all our technical elements in place, and we were stronger and more bonded as a team because of what we'd been through together.

I think that the feelings of camaraderie and unity established during rehearsal for *Joined at the Head* had a lot to do with the audience's positive response to the show; they could tell the actors were all on the same page and that they were all fully engaged

in the world of the show. This cast had an incredible natural chemistry, and I take no credit for that beyond casting them. Overall, though it had some bumps, the rehearsal process was productive, artistically fulfilling, and even fun.

Rehearsal Scripts

Following this page, you will find three different kinds of scripts from *Joined at the Head*. I used all three of them during my rehearsal process.

The first is a **blocking script**, which is based in Francis Hodge's paper blocking method (see *Section III: Influences*). I used this script to help the actors physicalize their actions, as well as to keep track of complicated movement patterns such as the opening and closing sequences and the scene shifts.

The second is a **technical script**. In it are marked light and sound cues, as well as costume and prop notes. I used this script mainly to communicate with designers and to keep track of what was happening technically in each scene of the play.

The third script is a **character script**. In this script, I broke each scene down into *beats*; each beat represents a different *action* for the characters (for notes on action, see *Section III: Influences*). I wrote down my feelings about each character's action in each beat. I never imposed these actions upon the actors, because their craft is discerning them, but I kept the notes for my own reference to make sure the actors and I were on the same page, and just in case an actor was really stuck on something and asked for my help.

(please see attachments on the next four pages.)

(80) M' X to MSC

(81) J enter on phone, exit after

(82) J move off big box

(83) S move off small box

(84) H exit, re-enter w/ chair, to USR

(85) Z exit, re-enter w/ chair, to MSR

(86) A exit, re-enter w/ chair + plant, plant on table
X to DSR

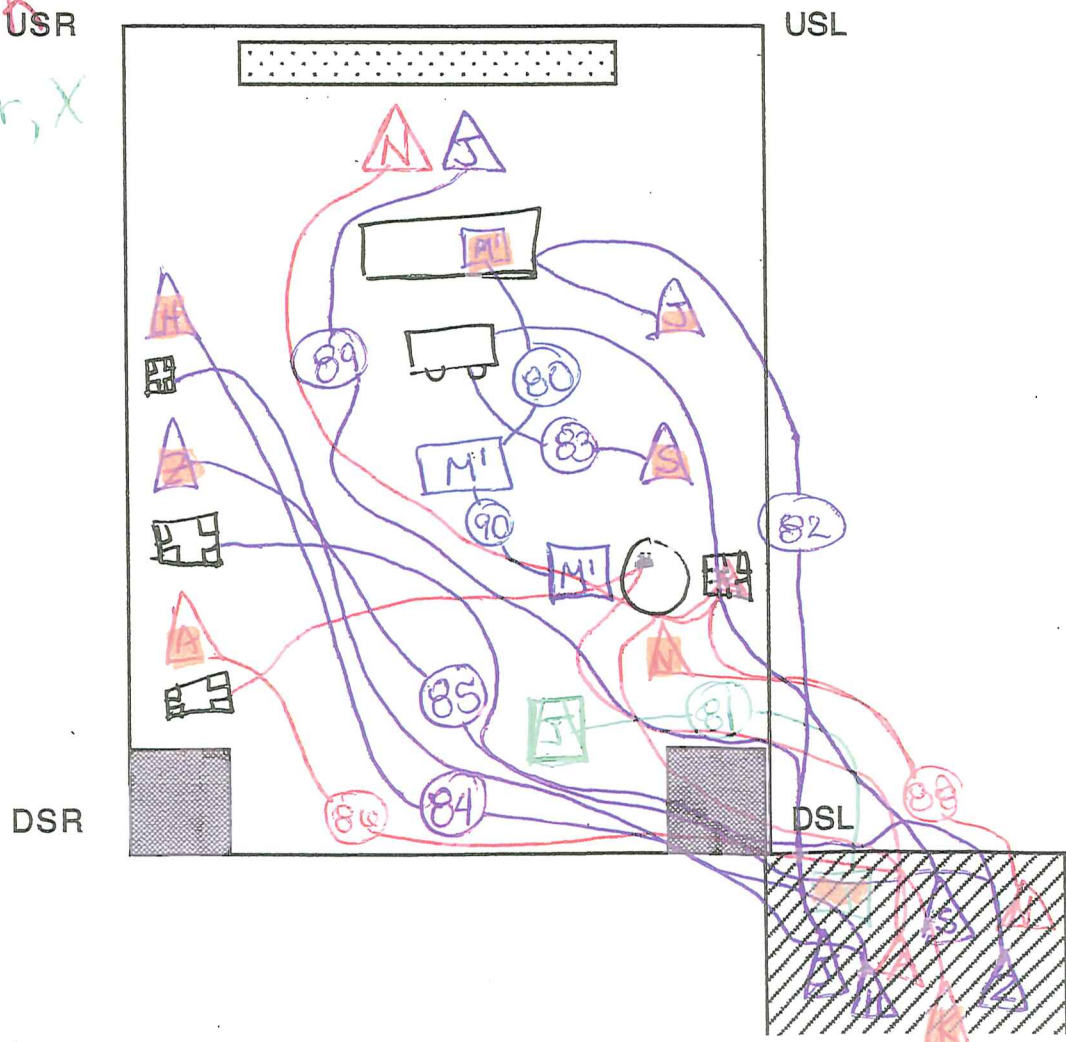
(87) K enter w/ table, to DSL, sit

(88) N exit, enter w/ chair, to DSL, X to USE

(89) J enter, X to N w/ IV

(90) M' X to ^KUSR

(91) J enter, X
to M'



II : 12

MAGGIE: (To Audience.) So anyway, where was I? Oh, yes. Maggy was doing about as well as could be expected, according to the hospital, and... and I was still scared to visit her, and... Listen, let's do this another way. Here are all the things that happened from this point on. This story is just going to have to tell itself.

(The phone rings. Maggie picks it up.)

MAGGIE: Hello?

JIM: Maggy's worse. An infection has set in, she's running a high fever.

(Pause.) Hello?

MAGGIE: Yes, I'm here.

(Black out. Lights up on the hospital. Maggie enters carrying a plastic bonsai tree. She walks up to the front desk.)

II : 13

MAGGIE: Excuse me.

NURSE: Yes?

MAGGIE: I wanted to check on the condition of one of your patients. Margaret Burroughs.

NURSE: (Paging through files.) Burroughs. I'm sorry, she's passed away.

MAGGIE: What?

NURSE: (Pause.) Oh, no, wait. That's Burris. Margaret Burroughs. Stable. Sorry about that. Haven't had my morning coffee.

MAGGIE: Please have it now.

JIM: (Entering.) Maggie! (He takes her by the arm, leads her away from desk.) It's good to see you.

MAGGIE: How is she?

JIM: She's being pumped full of antibiotics. She really gave us a scare, but the doctor says she'll be fine.

MAGGIE: Oh, what a relief.

JIM: It's amazing how quickly she bounces back from these things. She's got a lot of fight in her, that girl. But hey, I'm sorry to have dragged you out here in the middle of the night.

MAGGIE: No. I'm glad you called. I...I have very strong memories of this place.

JIM: You do?

MAGGIE: I used to visit my father here.

JIM: Oh. Well hey, Mag, you don't need to stick around. I'll tell Maggy you dropped by and—

MAGGIE: No. I'd like to see her. I mean, if she can handle visitors.

JIM: Yeah, she can. In fact, she asked for you. She thinks you're a kindred spirit.

MAGGIE: Are you okay? You look exhausted.

JIM: I'm fine, I'm fine. Why don't you go on in? It's Room 36. I'll be in in a minute.

MAGGIE: Okay. Listen, about last night—

JIM: Magpie, let's do ourselves a favor and forget about last night.

MAGGIE: (Smiling.) Magpie. You call Maggy that, too?

T20: 82 83
84 85 86 87
88 89 90

JIM: ⁹Yeah. That'll be good.

(There is a silence. We can hear the engine of the car. The street lights play on their faces intermittently.)

MAGGIE: Lamarr Street.

JIM: Yeah.

(There is another pause. Then, as if by mutual consent, Jim speeds up the car. We hear the engine being pushed further and further. The street lights accelerate as they play over their faces. Neither says a word for about thirty terrifying seconds. Finally, Jim slows the car down, pulls over and parks. There is a pause. Then he puts his head on the steering wheel and begins to weep. He sobs audibly, and Maggie puts her arms around him. After a moment, he stops. They look at one another. It appears for a moment as though they might kiss, but they disengage. He starts up the car again. They drive in silence.)

JIM: What's that stuff you use on your hair?

MAGGIE: Creme rinse. I've used it for ages.

JIM: Yeah—I remember. (Pause,) Maggy uses this herbal stuff. It smells really fresh. (He drives a bit more, then pulls over.) Well, here we are.

MAGGIE: (Getting out.) Will you call me? I want to hear how Maggie's chemo goes.

JIM: Sure. Or why don't you call me? I get kind of forgetful sometimes with all this going on.

MAGGIE: Oh, sure. (She reaches out, puts a hand on his.) It's going to be okay, Jim.

JIM: (He pulls his hand away a little self-consciously, smiles.) Oh, sure, yeah, I know. This is just a trying time. You look great, Mag, you really do. (The engine starts, he waves.) 'Bye!

(The lights go down on Jim.)

MAGGIE: The next day I took a walk down Newbury Street.
(Maggie walks over to a counter behind which stands a Salesman.)

SALESMAN: Hi, can I help you?

MAGGIE: Well, I'm kind of interested in this crystal thing. I've heard a little bit about it, and I was thinking of maybe getting something for a friend. Although, (She half turns.) I don't know. Maybe this is silly.

SALESMAN: Not at all. What kind of stone were you thinking of getting?

MAGGIE: Well, I don't know. She's not very well, and—

SALESMAN: How about amethyst? It will put her spirit in balance and promote tranquility.

MAGGIE: What? How could it do that? It's a stone.

SALESMAN: For thousands of years, stones have been recognized for their healing powers.

MAGGIE: By whom?

SALESMAN: By those who know.

MAGGIE: Scientists? Geologists?

SALESMAN: Not everything that happens in this world can be embraced by the parameters of science.

Sound = car speeding

light effect:
speeding car
(flashlight spin)

transition:
Newbury Street
transition:
Crystal shop

music:
"Everybody's
Gotta Learn
Sometime"
track 3

I:10

Joined At The Head

①

ACT I

Lights up on Maggie.

I:1 MAGGIE: I was walking down Newbury Street in Boston on a very brisk, very clear day, late afternoon. Low on the horizon, the white winter sun shone directly in my face. It dazzled me, this light. I could see shadow forms of people coming toward me, but I couldn't make out faces, and I couldn't make out buildings, and I felt like I was almost blind, although my eyes were wide open. How to describe it—I felt like a camera with its lens open too far. And you know, it's funny about the drivers in Boston, they don't honk very much. They drive like madmen, but they don't honk. Which is unexpected to a New Yorker, who expects not only honking but yelling, sirens, distant gunfire. So here I was, having this strange, silent walk down Newbury Street, strange not only because it seemed so civilized, but because, being blinded by this light, my sense of hearing was unusually keen. And without meaning to, I found myself eavesdropping on a number of conversations.

to
trap

(Two College Boys appear. They speak without noticing Maggie.)

1ST COLLEGE BOY: And then you know my mom asked her, "So tell me about yourself?" And she said, "Well, I was born and raised in California but I moved here to go to school." I mean, it sounded like the Dating Game. "I like tennis, skiing, and hope to become a dental hygienist." That kind of thing.

to pull

2ND COLLEGE BOY: Uh-huh. God, yeah.

1ST COLLEGE BOY: So everybody's passing the peas, and my Aunt Janice starts to talk about the trip she took to California, and it looks like everything's gonna be okay, you know?

to push
to pull

(Two Women walk by.)

1ST POLITICAL WOMAN: Oh, yeah, like we won this war. He got exactly what he wanted, he trashed the place, and he's still in power. That's an interesting definition of victory for our side.

to slap

2ND POLITICAL WOMAN: The feel-good war of the 90s.

to pat

1ST COLLEGE BOY: But then my dad turns to her and says, "So what do you kids do for excitement?" And she says, "Well, Jim and I are still in the early stages of our relationship, so basically we stay in bed and have sex all day."

to yank

2ND COLLEGE BOY: She said that?

1ST COLLEGE BOY: Yeah. She'll say anything. I think that's why I'm so crazy about her. Listen to this one...

to trip
to tug

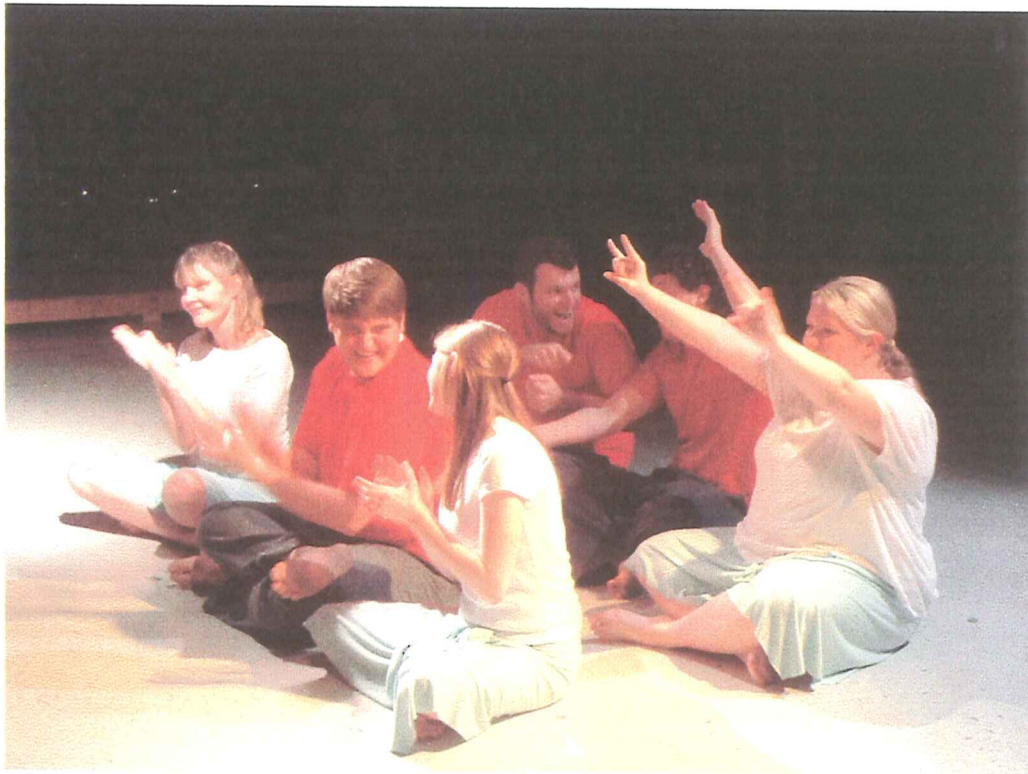
(Maggie comes up to a couple in their thirties, holding hands.)

ENGAGED MAN: Let me see it again. *(She holds up the ring on her finger.)*

to pet
to stroke

ENGAGED WOMAN: It's so beautiful. I can't believe how beautiful it is.

❧ V. Performance ❧



Final Preparations

The last thing I had to do before the show opened was finish my director's notes for the program. I wrestled with what to write, how to sum up the message of show, because now I knew that the messages I had created were not those written in the script. Finally, the pragmatist in me won out. I wrote about *my* show, *my* messages, because that is what I hoped the audience would take away from the performances of *Joined at the Head*.

Director's Notes:

Do you know the name of your dry cleaner? Your drive-through server? Your landlord? Do you know where he or she grew up? What his or her favorite song is? Chances are you don't. Each of us goes through life, interacting with hundreds of people each day, but stopping to notice very few of them. Although we may not realize it, every person we come into contact with has an effect on us; every person is significant and each life has a purpose.

In *Joined at the Head*, we meet Maggie, a woman who is better than most at shutting out the world around her. Barriers up, cell phone in hand, she charges through life while systematically ignoring the world and chances to form real relationships. Although Maggie does not realize it, everyone she interacts with over the course of the play changes her life irrevocably. Each person she sees, hears, or meets gives her information that pushes her down a new path. This is especially true of her encounter with Maggy, a terminally ill cancer patient, who shows her how much power there is in letting oneself be vulnerable to life.

During the limited span of two hours, within the dimensions of this room, ten people will use their bodies and voices to represent the entire world. It is the freedom of theatre and the nonrealistic form that allows them to attempt this herculean feat, but its success hangs

in the balance of trust. We must trust the audience to suspend your disbelief, to allow us to tell you our story within our world. And you must trust this process (the actors, the lights, the costumes, the music) to reveal to you something you did not know or notice or believe before today.

Joined at the Head is a play about opening up to life and all its beauty, wonder, disgust, pain, suffering, and joy. It is about acknowledging that every person on the street, in the restaurant, at the hospital has a story and wisdom for your journey. Life is always going on all around you. Participate.

Reflections on Performance

Do performances of a show ever turn out the way a director expects them to? Needless to say after that remark, mine did not. I didn't expect people to laugh at the flashlight parade. I also didn't expect to see grown men (and a lot of other people) crying their eyes out. I didn't know the audience would invest as much into this play as the actors had, but cancer is a very personal issue to a lot of people, and they have deeply rooted sentiments about it.

My grandfather, who watched my grandmother die of Alzheimer's Disease and his second wife die of cancer, called our depiction "sensitive." I think that's about the highest validation I could want. A reporter from LSU's *Reveille* came in not knowing what a blackbox was, and left with tears in her eyes (and proceeded to write a really depressing review, included at the end of this section). We got standing ovations. People who "hate theatre" told me they liked the show. I don't think anyone really hates theatre. I think some people just haven't seen enough of it to find the branch of theatre they really connect to.

I think what we did was use some symbols and some heart and some comedy and

some real emotion to create something that a lot of people connected with on a very personal level. We sold out every show but two, added thirty seats to our final performance, and still turned people away. The show made money for the department, which is excellent, and generated a lot of positive buzz among professors and students.

I consider *Joined at the Head* a success, if only because it made me realize the power of the collaborative effort and how much *wanting* a show to succeed translates into success, if you back it up with hard work and a group-oriented attitude.

I have included here the House Manager's reports from the entire run of the show as reference for those aspects of its success that can be quantified. You can find as the last item on the last table of each page the number of tickets sold at that particular performance; in the Notes section below the tables, there is interesting information about whether or not we turned people away, if we put out extra seats, and what time we sold out, etc.

Black box production leaves audiences emotional

Theater student makes her debut

By Julie Chance
Entertainment Writer

In a tiny, candlelit black room on the west side of campus, people are bawling their eyes out. And this makes Chelsea Marcantel, theatre and English senior, a very happy woman.

"Joined at the Head" is Marcantel's University directing debut, presented by the LSU Theatre Studio Season at Theatre 106 in the Music and Dramatic Arts Building from Nov. 12 to Nov. 21.

The LSU Theatre Studio Season provides the opportunity for University undergraduates and doctorate candidates to perform several plays annually. This year, five production slots were available, and Marcantel was chosen to fill one of them.

Marcantel said she wanted to do a production by a modern female playwright, and Catherine

Butterfield, who wrote the play in 1992, fit the description.

"We took a lot of liberties with the script," Marcantel said. "I really don't believe the text is really sacred."

The play is about opening up to life and the people around you, Marcantel said.

Marcantel, who is also the show's sound and video designer, chose music from "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind" and "Garden State."

That supported the production's theme — "Life is all around you. Join in."

K a t r i n a Redmond, theatre senior who played Maggie, said the play revolved around the unwinding of her character, who starts as a high-strung woman with high heels and hair in a tight knot, and ends the night barefoot with her hair down.

The rest of the characters are barefoot the entire show. "She became one of us, she became normal," said Gavin Robinson, the theatre senior who

plays Jim.

Marcantel said the play appeals to most people.

"It's not one of those artsy things that makes you feel stupid," she said.

Brittany Rogers, education freshman, said "it's funny, it's sad, it's simple." She was in the audience Tuesday night for a class.

Marcantel said the Music and Dramatic Arts Building holds

two black box rooms, or black rooms without stages or back-grounds, which are good for non-realism, or unrealistic plays like this one.

Marcantel said this play is disjointed from reality, which makes it a non-realism play. Most plays suggest location; this one does not, because of the lack of background.

"The set director said just leave it, let the audience's reaction be the backdrop," Marcantel said. "I like to look around after [the show] and see how many people are crying."

The ten cast members have emotional roles, and the tears they shed are genuine.

"I cry every night," Redmond said. "It's pretty hard to control myself. But if it's not affecting us, it's not affecting anyone else."

Ali Bagbey, theatre sophomore and assistant stage manager, said "I have to watch it every night, and every night I cry."

Marcantel said the University gives each production \$250, so each play turns into something of a group effort, with actors chipping in and people working without pay or school credit. Only the technical designers get any school credit.

The typical Theatre 106 audience is mostly theatre majors. There are only 113 theatre majors at the University, Marcantel said, so they all support each other.

Before the show begins each night, a 30-minute collage-like film plays to music, said Marcantel.

There is a \$6 donation at the door. Shows are at 7:30 with extra 2 p.m. shows on Sundays.

To keep up with LSU Theatre Studio events, go to www.theatre.lsu.edu.

Contact Julie Chance at
jchance@lsureville.com

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HOUSE MANAGER REPORTS STUDIO PRODUCTIONS

Name of Production:	JOINED AT THE HEAD
Venue:	M&DA 106
Scheduled Start Time:	7:30 PM
Weather Description:	Threatening rain, started drizzling during performance
House Manager:	Charlie Mehler
Date:	November 12, 2004

Starting Bank:	0.00	Ushers	Sign In	Sign Out
Ticket Sales:	323.00	Phoenix Speed	6:30 PM	9:45 PM
Deposit:	223.00	Erin Smith	6:30 PM	9:45 PM
Ending Bank:	100.00			

Running Time	
Act I Start Time:	7:32
Intermission Start:	8:27
Act II Start Time:	8:37
End Time:	9:42
Total Running Time:	2:00

Ticket Type:	Number of Tickets:
Public:	51
Comps:	9
TOTAL TICKETS:	60 (Sell-out!!!)

NOTES AND MISCELLANEOUS INFORMATION:

No bank at beginning. I will take \$100 and get singles over the weekend. I'm HM'ing Sunday matinee, and will return the \$100 in singles then. Also, near the end of the show, the house manager should place her/himself near the door, to help the stage management staff allow the cast to file out of the theatre.

COMPS:

2 comps for ushers
 1 comp for Chelsea Mercantel – director
 2 comps for Katherine Seghers – SM
 1 comp for Wendy Morrill – Costumes
 2 comps for Ron Reeder – MFA student
 1 comp for Nick Ericson

HOUSE MANAGER REPORTS STUDIO PRODUCTIONS

Name of Production:	JOINED AT THE HEAD
Venue:	M&DA 106
Scheduled Start Time:	2:00
Weather Description:	Cloudy, cool
House Manager:	Charlie Mehler
Date:	11/14/04

Starting Bank:	100.00	<i>Ushers</i>	<i>Sign In</i>	Sign Out
Ticket Sales:	156.00	Both NO SHOW!!!		
Deposit:	156.00			
Ending Bank:	100.00			

Running Time	
Act I Start Time:	2:05 PM (problem with lighting board)
Intermission Start:	3:00 PM
Act II Start Time:	3:10 PM
End Time:	4:15 PM
Total Running Time:	2:00

Ticket Type:	Number of Tickets:
<i>Public:</i>	26
<i>Comps:</i>	4
TOTAL TICKETS:	30

NOTES AND MISCELLANEOUS INFORMATION:

We still have lots of singles, so no need to go to bank.

COMPS:

Katie Sills (cast member) (2)

Rebecca Many (concessions) (1)

Chelsea Mercantel (director) (1)

HOUSE MANAGER REPORTS STUDIO PRODUCTIONS

Name of Production:	Joined at the Head
Venue:	Theatre 106
Scheduled Start Time:	7:30
Weather Description:	Cool but nice
House Manager:	Suzanne
Date:	November 16, 2004

Starting Bank:	100.00	<i>Ushers</i>	<i>Sign In</i>	Sign Out
Ticket Sales:	370.00	Erie, Skye	6:30	9:45
Deposit:	270.00	Nelson, Kim	6:45	9:45
Ending Bank:	100.00			

Running Time	
Act I Start Time:	7:30
Intermission Start:	8:24
Act II Start Time:	8:35
End Time:	9:40
Total Running Time:	2.10

Ticket Type:	Number of Tickets:
<i>Public:</i>	45
<i>Comps:</i>	6
TOTAL TICKETS:	51

NOTES AND MISCELLANEOUS INFORMATION:

Julie Chance – 2

Mike Tick – 1

Steven – 1

Ali Bagbey – 1

Charlie Mehler – 1

We need ones

HOUSE MANAGER REPORTS STUDIO PRODUCTIONS

Name of Production:	Joined at the Head
Venue:	Theatre 106
Scheduled Start Time:	7:30
Weather Description:	Cloudy, cool
House Manager:	Charlie Mehler
Date:	November 17, 2004

Starting Bank:	100.00	Ushers	Sign In	Sign Out
Ticket Sales:	240.00	Ben East	6:30	9:50
Deposit:	220.00	Carla Barron	6:30	9:50
Ending Bank:	120.00			

Running Time	
Act I Start Time:	7:30 PM
Intermission Start:	8:28 PM
Act II Start Time:	8:40 PM
End Time:	9:45 PM
Total Running Time:	2:45

Ticket Type:	Number of Tickets:
Public:	40
Comps:	8
TOTAL TICKETS:	48

NOTES AND MISCELLANEOUS INFORMATION:

SOMEONE PUSHED THE BUTTON ON THE SAFE!! I have notified David Rodriguez that we need to find the key, and will reconcile the bank during the day tomorrow. I have all the box office cash on my person tonight, except for \$55 which is sitting in the safe. Also, we keep running short of singles, so I'm increasing the bank to \$120 – 3 10's, 6 5's and 40 1's. Finally, I left a stack of numbered programs (1 through 60) on top of the program pile.

COMPS: Chelsea Mercantel (1), Ushers (2), Concessions (1), Elissa Sartwell (1), Femi Euba (1), Jane Drake Brody (2)

HOUSE MANAGER REPORTS

STUDIO PRODUCTIONS

Name of Production:	Joined at the Head
Venue:	Theatre 106
Scheduled Start Time:	7:30 PM
Weather Description:	Cool
House Manager:	Reounodji Enoch
Date:	November 18, 2004

Starting Bank:	\$120.00	Ushers	Sign In	Sign Out
Ticket Sales:	\$347.00	Ashley Derousseau	6:35 PM	9:50 PM
Deposit:	\$347.00	André Fortier	6:35 PM	9:50 PM
Ending Bank:	\$120.00			

Running Time	
Act I Start Time:	7:35 PM
Intermission Start:	8:30 PM
Act II Start Time:	8:45 PM
End Time:	9:50 PM
Total Running Time:	2:15

Ticket Type:	Number of Tickets:	Comps:
Public:	56	Leon Ingulsrud 1
Comps:	9	Jessica Gray 2
TOTAL TICKETS:	65 (Sold out with extra)	Chelsea Marcantel 4
		Ushers 2

NOTES AND MISCELLANEOUS INFORMATION:

We sold out. However, the stage manager and the director got 6 extra chairs which we sold five.

HOUSE MANAGER REPORTS STUDIO PRODUCTIONS

Name of Production:	<i>Joined at the Head</i>
Venue:	Studio 106
Scheduled Start Time:	7:30 PM
Weather Description:	Nice
House Manager:	Reounodji Enoch
Date:	11/19/04

Starting Bank:	\$120.00	Ushers	Sign In	Sign Out
Ticket Sales:	\$305.00	Huy Nguyen	6:45 PM	9:55 PM
Deposit:	\$305.00	Colleen Rustin	6:30 PM	9:55 PM
Ending Bank:	\$120.00			

Running Time	
Act I Start Time:	7:32 PM
Intermission Start:	8:30 PM
Act II Start Time:	8:40 PM
End Time:	9:48 PM
Total Running Time:	2:16

Ticket Type:	Number of Tickets:	Comps:
Public:	51	<i>Andréa Graugnard (actor): 2</i> <i>Chelsea Marcantel: 2</i> <i>David Rodriguez: 1</i> <i>Gavin Robinson (actor): 2</i> <i>Hunter Robertson (actor): 2</i> <i>John Jackson (actor): 1</i> <i>Katrina Redmond (actor): 2</i> <i>Ushers: 2</i>
Comps:	14	
TOTAL TICKETS:	65	

NOTES AND MISCELLANEOUS INFORMATION:

Wonderful Show. Sold Out.

Like yesterday, Chelsea got 5 extra chairs.

UTA gave me its money (\$60.50) in 5 manila envelopes (11/14 -\$9.50; 11/16 -\$11.00; 11/17 -\$15.00; 11/18 -\$11.00 and 11/19 -\$14.00) which I kept together with *Joined at the Head* bank in the safe.

HOUSE MANAGER REPORTS STUDIO PRODUCTIONS

Name of Production:	Joined at the Head
Venue:	Studio 106
Scheduled Start Time:	2:00 PM
Weather Description:	Warm
House Manager:	Reounodji Enoch
Date:	11/21/04

Starting Bank:	\$120.00	Ushers	Sign In	Sign Out
Ticket Sales:	\$332.90	Kim Webb	12:50 PM	4:20 PM
Deposit:	\$330.00	Stacey Alexander	1:00 PM	4:20 PM
Ending Bank:	\$122.90			

Running Time	
Act I Start Time:	2:00 PM
Intermission Start:	2:58 PM
Act II Start Time:	3:08 PM
End Time:	4:15 PM
Total Running Time:	2:15 PM

Ticket Type:	Number of Tickets:	Comps: <i>Chelsea: 1</i> <i>Nancy Litten (Actress): 1</i> <i>Ushers: 2</i>
Public:	56	
Comps:	4	
TOTAL TICKETS:	60	

NOTES AND MISCELLANEOUS INFORMATION:

Great matinee. Sold out.

The show was videotaped this afternoon.

Tonight's HM: *I sold three (3) tickets in advance to Ian Jones, Jenna Brine, and*

Jeanne Marie Nourse who are going to pick them up for tonight's show. They are in the cash box together with the money. We have only 50 programs left.

PS: *UTA money (\$95.00) is also in the cash box.*

HOUSE MANAGER REPORTS STUDIO PRODUCTIONS

Name of Production:	Joined at the head
Venue:	Theatre 106
Scheduled Start Time:	7:30
Weather Description:	Rainy
House Manager:	Elissa
Date:	11/21

Starting Bank:	122.90	<i>Ushers</i>	<i>Sign In</i>	Sign Out
Ticket Sales:	345	Toby Aucoin	6:30	9:55
Deposit:	467.90	Cheryl Baichoo	6:30	9:55
Ending Bank:	0			

Running Time	
Act I Start Time:	7:31
Intermission Start:	8:29
Act II Start Time:	8:42
End Time:	9:52
Total Running Time:	2.21

Ticket Type:	Number of Tickets:
<i>Public:</i>	56 @ \$6; 1 @ \$5; 1 @ \$4
<i>Comps:</i>	25
TOTAL TICKETS:	83

NOTES AND MISCELLANEOUS INFORMATION:

COMPS: Preston Davis (2), Eric Little (2), Alex Manuel (2), Amanda Sager (1), Misty Zimmerle (2), John Jackson (1), Ali Bagbey (1), Chaney Tullos (1), Kesha Bullard (2), Michelle McCoy (1), Heather Gilbert (1), Laura Wayth (1), Tara MacMullen (1), Mark Jaynes (1), Sarah Jane Johnson (1), Ruben Mitchell (1), Kristin Hanson (1), Chelsea Marcantel (1), + the 2 ushers.

NOTES: We had sold out the house by 10 minutes till 7:00. Chelsea and Katie Seghers (SM) added additional seats in front of the existing side rows, bringing the total available seats to 84. Even still, we turned away probably a dozen angry students who let me know in no uncertain terms that it was unfair that they couldn't see the show, that I'm a mean person, and that this

wouldn't have happened on Broadway ☺. Most of them were coming for extra credit. Reasoning with them didn't work. Most of them arrived right about curtain time, and they refused to leave when I asked them to (at least 4 times). I told them there was no way there would be seats for them, and they still didn't leave and continued to yell at me. Finally, to get them to leave, I told them there was a SLIM CHANCE that the show would be extended. I made no guarantees, of course, and I emphasized that it probably wouldn't be extended. Why do I always get the angry, aggressive students?

During these lovely moments of confrontation, 6 students arrived who had purchased tickets and then gone off to get food. Since the show had already started, I couldn't let them in. They wanted their money back, and so I refunded them their tickets for the sole purpose of avoiding a further mutiny in the hall. These 6 tickets are NOT included in the ticket sales or in the total tickets distributed.

I know it's futile, but we've got to keep asking profs to tell their students to arrive EARLY. Not on time – EARLY.

elissa

❧ VI. Testimonials ❧



Testimonials from Cast and Crew

On the following pages, you will find short testimonials by members of the cast and crew of *Joined at the Head*. These were submitted to the Stage Manager anonymously, though I know everyone involved so well that I think I can guess who wrote what. I encouraged them to be candid about their thoughts on me as a director. They praise my treatment of every character as significant (I knew they liked having names!), but complain of having too much time to “goof off” in later rehearsals. I’m not sure if they knew that during those moments I was frantically dealing with light, sound, publicity, and costume disasters, especially after I took on the role of sound designer. Maybe those things are no excuse.

I find these essays enlightening and helpful, because they show me my experiences through other perspectives. It is very easy for a director to become so involved in and so defensive about her work that she loses all objectivity. It is always good to have a reality check. I hope you will find them to be a different and interesting way of looking into the process of *Joined at the Head*.

(please see attachments on next 6 pages.)

Testimonial # 1

Joined at the Head was an experience for me. It was definitely an eye opener. Being my second show at LSU, I expected it to be like my first, well organized with my immediate supervisor knowing exactly what she was doing. However, I was delusional. The stage manager was nothing like my first, and the show was hurried. But now I know that's ok, because greatness takes time and when professionals aren't running things, they're going to be different. But different isn't necessarily bad. I had more fun on this show and think it was a much better show overall than my first main stage because everyone's heart was in this show 100% and that makes a huge difference.

During rehearsals, I didn't have much to do because Erica hadn't written cues yet. That was kind of frustrating, because I like to be busy and just sitting there got kind of boring; I felt useless. That was definitely the nice thing about Lie because Heather actually let me help her write cues and stuff. Then, when all that mess with the dimmer pack was going on, it was very frustrating for me because I couldn't communicate what I thought to Erica and she couldn't understand what I was trying to ask. I never did get the dimmer check list I needed. And that was partly my fault, part her's. I got frustrated and just quit trying to communicate what I needed and she, I think, probably did a little of the same. I think the main problem on this show was lack of communication between the crew.

My least favorite part was the show calling. My cues were inconsistent and not what I had written in my script sometimes and that was frustrating for me. I learned that personality conflicts are going to happen in the theatre, and probably often, and that I have to learn to deal with them and move on with my life. The call times were also frustrating. Several times Amanda and I had different calls than what was on our time sheet and no one bothered to tell us. A phone call from the stage manager would have been nice, but apparently asking too much. We were just expected to know and that was maddening because we're not psychic.

Overall, though, this show was an amazing experience. It was my second show at LSU and I was treated like an equal, not a freshman techie, which made a WORLD of difference in my attitude. The cast was appreciative and gracious and made an effort to get to know us and include us in everything, which I know meant a lot because we're brand new in this department. I learned that heart makes all the difference in our field and if someone doesn't want to be there,

Testimonial #1 (cont.)

it will bring everyone around them down. The unity and togetherness and camaraderie I felt on this show is something I will never forget and be comparing all my experiences to for a long time to come.

Testimonial 2

Chelsea Marcantel created a production of *Joined at the Head* filled with laughs and tears. She was prepared, hard working, and able to keep it together when the dimmers died, and our light cues as well as our costume designer disappeared. She handled the bumpy road of an extremely low-budget student production rather well, and I feel as though I have truly learned a lot from her.

The best thing that Chelsea did for the cast was to concentrate on "ensemble building". For example, Chelsea had the ensemble give their characters names, and using viewpoints make identities for themselves and relationships with each other. These exercises aided in incorporating the ensemble into the show in order to make them a part of the entire process and eliminating the star/ensemble separation. This equality made everyone in the cast feel like an important member and made the production more intimate and true.

Although we used many different forms of exercises, such as yoga and viewpoints, I was not always clear on the purpose of all that we did. Also, we were very far ahead of schedule and began to waste a lot of time which put us behind. The night before opening we wished we had more time to prepare, or that we would have used our time a little more wisely. I would have liked to have dedicated more time to scene-work because we did not spend a great deal of time working on the acting within the individual scenes.

All in all, Chelsea did a wonderful job directing her first studio show. It was a little turbulent, but I have never been in a show that was not – and the final product was great. Chelsea spread her self a little thin out of a love for the craft, and she taught me a great deal as a director and friend.

Testimonial 3

Chelsea Marcantel gave every actor in her production the opportunity to be a member of a true ensemble. The leads did not feel like they were any more important than the ensemble members and the ensemble members were an integral part of the show. This was an impressive feat. I have been part of numerous productions that involved ensembles and the tendency is to have a separation between them and the leads. The melding of the two showed forth in watching the show.

Her problems with her directing actually led to good. She gave us a lot of freedom, but it slowly deteriorated the rehearsal process into goofing around. Of course, with a rehearsal schedule that included five days a week for five hours of working on the show, a little bit of fun was needed. It assisted us in the beginning to become a closer cast and to fully explore ourselves and our characters. But the closer it got to the show, the harder it was to deal with. This, too, was not completely her fault, though.

Technical difficulties were the biggest contributing factor to the stress level during the week leading up to the run. This added stress led to added fun time. With the lights constantly being a burden, a costumer that decided to simply not show up, and a non-existent sound designer, Chelsea had a lot to deal with and an immense amount of pressure being put upon herself and her actors. We had to chip in and do a lot of the technical work ourselves, which was not a problem with us, but it put a lot of strain on the show.

This production truly came down to the wire, but had it not been for Chelsea and the cast's perseverance, it would not have been as wildly successful as it turned out to be. Basically, I feel that if my only complaint was that she let me relax too much in the beginning, she did a really good job.

Testimonial 4

When coming to college, I didn't know what to expect as far as work needed to be done to fulfill a play production.

I was offered the chance to play Maggy Burroughs in my first LSU production. I was ecstatic! I had read the script and it seemed so simplistic, so I thought this can't be hard?

The director, Chelsea Marcantel asked us to meet every Wednesday to get to know each other a little better each week before rehearsals began. When I first met up with the cast to walk the lakes, I thought to myself, "Wow! These students are so much more talented than I will ever be....how am I going to pull this off?"

When rehearsals finally took off, I knew I had to keep up with these "veterans" of LSU Theater.

Chelsea had amazing ideas on how she wanted this production to go, and she was more than willing to compromise on situations and thoughts on how we thought it should go as well. I loved that! In high school it was set in stone one way and there was no turning back. I felt important in getting a say so in what went on in Joined at the Head. Chelsea never made one person feel more important than the other; the ensemble was just as needed as any of the main characters, sometimes even more so.

Each week that passed by we began to get closer and closer, (making rehearsals more fun and easier to get through). We visited different places as a group, ex: Indian restaurant. Having done all these amazing things together and going through all these experiences with these new found loves showed through on stage. You could see our compassion and respect for each other in our work.

In working in Joined at the Head, I not only learned more about others, but I learned about myself. It was truly a growing experience. I loved every minute of it!

Testimonial 5

Joined at the Head

When I looked at the callback sheet two days after auditions I was a bit skeptical at first when I saw that I had been called back for a play titled *Joined at the Head*. I immediately assumed that it was a ridiculous comedy about Siamese twins, but was I ever wrong.

Joined at the Head ended up being my most enjoyable acting experience thus far. The organization of the director, equal treatment of all the cast members, and bonding with the cast and crew beyond rehearsal time made *Joined at the Head* fun for everyone.

Chelsea Marcantel seemed organized from the get go. The show was perfectly casts from the get go and everyone saw this from day one with the read-through. Chelsea didn't have the I'm the boss so I decide attitude that so many other director's I have worked with have. I felt like I could voice my opinion at all times and she would respect it, even if she though it was totally ridiculous. Chelsea seemed to keep her head on straight no matter what troubles seem to come. Halfway through rehearsals one of the actors quit due to grade problems and Chelsea had him replaced within the hour with someone even more perfect for the part. We also had our costume designer completely vanish two nights before opening and Chelsea came up with the costume solution in no time.

Chelsea treated the entire cast as if they were the stars of the show. There were clearly three leads in the play, but Chelsea made it seem like every individual member of the ensemble was just as important as the three leads. The ensemble performed better and added tremendously to the content of the play because of the way Chelsea treated them.

We did tons of activities as a cast outside of rehearsals. I can hardly remember a night when we didn't grab dinner, a movie, or just hung out after rehearsals. This made me get to know every member of the casts in such a deeper way.

I will forever treasure the wonderful experience I had a friendships I mde when I had my wonderful role in Chelsea Marcantel's presentation of *Joined at the Head*.



VII. Reflection



Lessons Learned

I learned a lot from directing *Joined at the Head*. That may be the biggest understatement I've ever made. Directing *Joined at the Head* was one of the most difficult, most joyous events of my life. When I think of what we overcame to even arrive at opening night, it amazes me: three actors quit, lights exploded, the sound designer had to be let go, the costume designer disappeared, etc. Even after the show opened, we were plagued with a new difficulty every night: the preshow projector quit halfway through the run, I had to run sound one performance when the sound op had to go to the hospital, and a thousand other seemingly insignificant catastrophes threatened to send me over the edge every night.

Then I think of the cast, of people so happy to be acting, to be creating. I think of the bond we developed and still cherish, of the long nights we spent in rehearsal and then talking about the show at dinner for hours afterward. It was magic, the kind of magic that theatre creates in its practitioners onstage and off, during and after. Enough of the metaphysical. I learned many concrete lessons about being a director as well.

The first thing I learned was to leave myself a cushion of time at the end of the rehearsal period, because everything will fall spectacularly apart. If we had had to rehearse the show two nights before opening, the entire thing might have blown up in my face. But because I had carefully budgeted out our rehearsal time, we had run the show enough by that point to be able to take a night off to tend to our technical elements. I realized that it is better to push hard and have long rehearsals where a lot gets done than to get lazy and send everyone home when you figure you've done enough for one night. By making out a schedule, giving it to the actors, and strictly

sticking to it, I was able to ensure that everything was ready acting-wise in plenty of *time for opening*.

I also know now that no one can run my rehearsals but me. Actors, no matter how motivated, will sit around talking at rehearsal if they do not have a specific task to be doing every moment. It is up to the director to make sure that they maintain their focus, and that they are used enough to make it worth everyone's time for them to be there. I tried to use my ensemble as much as I could, and they never arrived for a night and then didn't work. But actors, I learned, have to be given specific instructions. I can't just assume that when they're not onstage, they're running lines with each other. I need to use them, tell them exactly what to be doing while they're waiting, or send them home. I ran into problems after taking on the role of sound designer, because I would be working on a sound cue and the actors would just be sitting around waiting for me. Because of this, they felt restless and underused, and that was my fault. If I direct and do sound design at the same time in the future, I will make sure to budget the time so that I can do my sound work without wasting the actors' time.

I found that the audience is as intelligent as you allow them to be. So many times, the actors and I wondered, "Will the audience get this?" We could have dumbed so many things down to make sure everyone understood them, but we would have ended up with a very crude product, insulting the intelligence of most of the audience. This play was non-realistic, and because we established that immediately, the audience stuck with us the entire time. We didn't pander to them, we didn't talk down, and we didn't automatically assume they wouldn't understand something. We crafted a show we thought was artistically sound, and hoped for the best. And the best happened.

The audience loved the show and they didn't feel, from what I heard, that we were trying to talk over their heads. *Non-realistic as it was, Joined at the Head* was accessible, and I believe that had to do with not taking the inherent intelligence of the audience for granted.

The actors are as intelligent as you allow them to be. Trust the actors. I found myself wanting to stop rehearsal sometimes and tell the actor how to do exactly what I thought he or she should do. But I found that if I waited, if I let the actor work through it on his or her own, most of the time they arrived at something much more profound than what I would have made them do. A good director, I feel, works with actors to craft and mold their separate performances into one grand whole. This cannot be achieved if you allow the actors no artistic leeway to experiment, and instead impose on the cast your vision of what the play should be. The further into rehearsal we got, the more freedom I gave the actors, and the more sincere and valid the show became.

Stereotypes are not to be avoided. No actor can actually play a two-dimensional stereotype for long, because personal experiences are always informing their choices. Embrace stereotypes and then warp them. This is how we created an ensemble with instant connotations for the audience, but very personal characterizations for the actors. The actors knew where to start and were able to feel artistically fulfilled by what they created. The audience was able to latch onto familiarity in each ensemble role, but they were also presented with very specific characters who had names, relationships, and lives of their own. Embracing stereotypes in their true sense composed the backbone of this production.

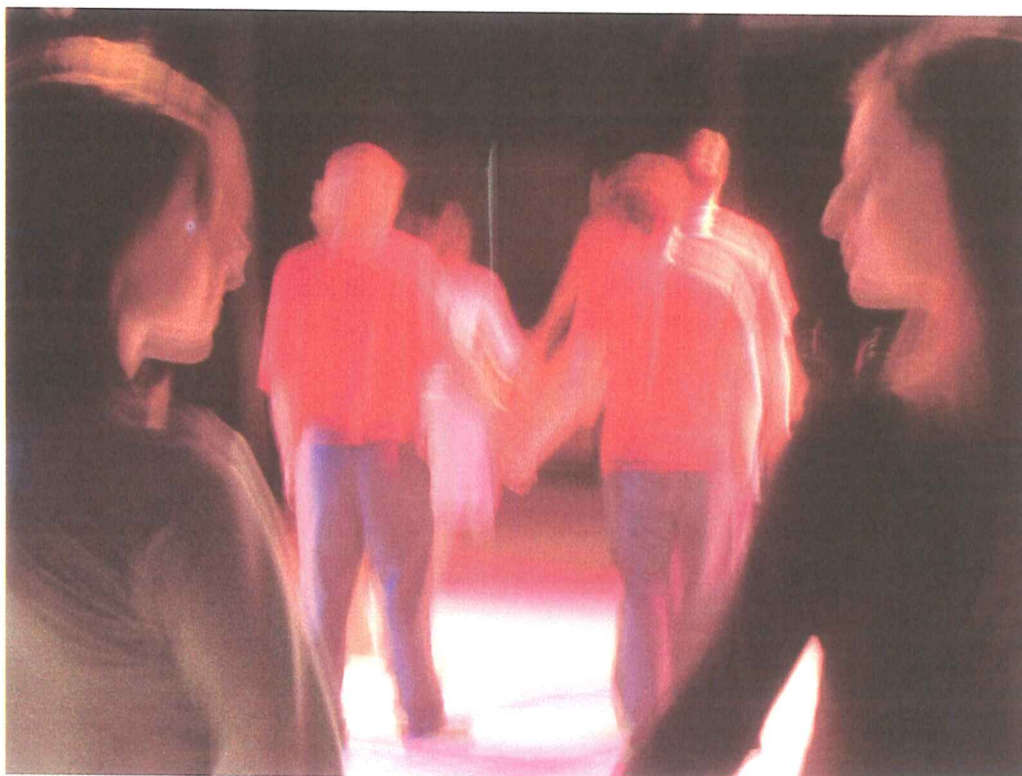
Composition makes or breaks the play. Know where every actor is at all times,

and make those placements mean something. In *Joined at the Head*, most of the scenes were short. With actors delivering only a few lines each in short spurts, body language became essential. "Just stand anywhere," was not something I said in rehearsal. The actors often could feel the onstage tension and moved into compositions that complimented the action of each scene, but when they did not, I used my paper blocking to ensure that their bodies were saying something, even when their mouths were silent. Along the same lines, I learned that if an actor really hates the blocking you have given him or her, he or she will be doing his or her own by the time the show opens. It is generally better to work through this with them before opening night.

I learned about letting go. Some ideas seem great at first, like slide projections and collages on the set walls, but after the show evolves in rehearsal, a director has to be able to get rid of those ideas that no longer work. Jennifer Jones Cavanaugh calls this "killing your darlings," and I did my fair share of that. I think that the removal of unnecessary elements helped to create the simplicity of the show, and that is something about it I valued highly. Letting go of good ideas one is really set on is never easy, but the sacrifice will ultimately make the production stronger.

These are the lessons I learned from *Joined at the Head*. These are the things I now know and can use in the future. I credit the instructors of the LSU Department of Theatre, the authors of my research materials, my incredibly supportive family and friends, and most especially the cast and crew of *Joined at the Head* for getting me through my first real experience as a director. This process has been the first of what I hope will be many.

❧ VIII. Bibliography ❧



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