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Unidentified Human Remains And The True Nature Of Love: An Exploration on the Art of Directing

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UNIDENTIFIED HUMAN REMAINS AND THE TRUE NATURE OF LOVE: AN
EXPLORATION ON THE ART OF DIRECTING

By

Claude A. Giroux

B.F.A. University of Victoria, 1996

A THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts
(in Theatre)

The Graduate School

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May, 1998

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Thesis Advisor: Dr. Sandra E. Hardy

An Abstract of the Thesis Presented
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Brad Fraser's play Unidentified Human Remains and the True Nature of Love deals with love and relationships in a society devoid of morality and fearful of emotional commitment. This thesis focused on translating the conflicts in the script into action for performance, and creating a strong ensemble of actors, designers and crew. My process included an analysis of the play, examining it with particular attention to character and story. I also studied the playwright's previous and subsequent work as well as reviews to better prepare myself for the challenges of mounting this show.

The next stage was the application of this analysis and research to the physical production. My chief area of concern here was to create a collaborative environment that would enhance the creative processes of everyone involved. In working with the company I focused constantly on creating a performance that was unified by my shared vision of the script.

My ability to create this ensemble was reflected in the results we achieved. Although there are areas where the show could have been stronger, the energy of its performance and validity of its message made it a surprising success.

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Statement of Choice

The decision to direct *Unidentified Human Remains and The True Nature of Love* by Brad Fraser (henceforth to be referred to as *Human Remains*) as my thesis production at the University of Maine came about due to several factors. First, I had participated in a production of the play as an actor and although I had found the play mesmerizing and full of possibilities the director at the time seemed infatuated with the idea of doing the play in a very Brechtian fashion. We were instructed to act the scenes without emotion and any efforts we made to bring life to the lines was met with admonishments to refrain from such emotionalism and play the lines without fanfare. The result was a frustrating experience for all of the cast and a less than successful interpretation (I felt). This experience left me with a feeling of incompleteness in regards to this play so it had been on my back burner for quite some time when this opportunity presented itself.

Second, the importance of friendship in our lives as exposed by this play has always really touched me and reached out to my sense of purpose regarding this piece. To be really successful in the direction of a play William Ball states that one must see the general beauty in the text. A director must find something he/she is really attracted to in the play; an idea, a character or maybe a message, and only then can the director find passion for his/her work and have a chance to succeed.¹ We are so often isolated from each other, numbed to each other's personal experiences, incapable of and often prohibited (by society) from making the most basic connections with one another. The personal confusions this situation causes can cause enough pressure in our brains and hearts that our psyches eventually implode, driving us to irrational, destructive even murderous acts. The only bridge holding us back from this abyss is through one another, through the act of connecting to another human being, through the simple act of loving. These are the themes that drew me to Fraser's play in the first place and which I wanted to successfully impart to an audience.

Third, I needed to look where I was before making a decision on an appropriate text for my thesis production. Having looked at the seasons the department had done recently I saw a glaring absence in Canadian content. Granted we are in the United States but the proximity to Canada and the untapped body of work that existed there convinced me that I needed to do something Canadian if only to open up people's minds to the possibilities that existed. Three titles came to mind, Brad Fraser's *Human Remains*, Michel Tremblay's *Les Belle Souer* and a cooperative creation from Vancouver's Axis Theatre called *The Anger in Ernest and Ernestine*. At first I felt this last to be the most likely candidate because of its small cast size (2). This would allow me to work closely with two people and also not bleed the division's already depleted human resources. Then something happened which made me change my mind.

It had always been on my mind that *Human Remains* would be a better, more challenging script for me to direct, but I was concerned that the division would not view it as appropriate and I didn't (for once) want to rock the boat. However during that year Campus Living, my sponsor had to deal with two incidents of violence against gay people and several less violent incidents of mistreatment towards people of alternative sexual orientation. These events were ugly to deal with and it seemed, changing attitudes, was not going to be easy. I was even exposed to an incident in my own

building (Aroostook Hall) where three residents grafittied a residents room door with very ugly and scary threats. In dealing with these residents I discovered that most operative in their behavior was ignorance and parental attitudes that had been handed down. The question I asked myself, (and still ask) is how do we go about effecting change in these very inbred societal attitudes. Doing a play that had nudity in it and strong subject matter I knew would bring some of these people to the theatre. In the process it would expose them (like it or not) to alternative relationships that I felt were presented in a positive light. The idea is not to change attitudes overnight but to begin to open the doors to eventual understanding and hopefully acceptance. With all of these lofty ideals in mind I chose to push as hard as I could for *Human Remains*.

The subject matter was pertinent to my experiences here, it would attract audiences. Audiences would be exposed to all types of lifestyles that would serve to humanize gays, lesbians and bisexuals in a positive way. Additionally the challenges it presented me with as a director were most important to my personal growth as a student of theatre.

The last and perhaps most important reason for my choice of script relates to my belief in theatre as a truly cooperative art. I have experienced too many productions where a director is too autocratic and great ideas and input get squashed in favor of personal vision. I believe that a director's vision comes out of a careful consideration of other people involved in the process of a production. Any success a play has is directly related to a director's ability to develop a successful working ensemble of people working in a unified fashion towards a common objective.

In making the choice to direct *Human Remains* I was choosing a script that required all of the actors to be on stage for the whole show. I was also choosing a production that required great emotional availability from all involved and in doing so demanded a great deal of trust to evolve between both cast members and director. This would be my greatest challenge as director and would certainly serve as my measure of success² in this production.

Bringing a group of people together and in a short period of time, having them care for each other and creating a safe emotional place for all to feel free to have input and be creative was the challenge I was looking for . The nature and subject matter of the play would require these team building skills that I felt I had but had never really tested.

In his book *A Sense of Direction* William Ball states that actors when in rehearsal are challenged most often not by the director or the script but by their own fears and personal apprehensions. Fear, Ball says, is the biggest enemy of creativity, and a director's job is to release the creative juices of the actors through positive reinforcement and ensemble building techniques.³ The opportunities this play presented to me as a director specifically in this area were the most important reason for my choosing it as my thesis production.

Process

The process of directing *Human Remains* broke down into three areas of work: pre

production, design and production. They all represent specific steps that were taken en route to the successful preparation of the play.

Pre-Production.

This includes all analysis work that went into preparing myself for the rehearsal process. I read the play several times and developed ideas about the script and took notes as I went along. I read the script for general comprehension, set requirements, lighting requirements, sound requirements, costume requirements, beat breakdown, character analysis, continuity and thematic emphasis. I also tried to research the playwright as much as possible, looking for any interviews he might have given, reading his other eleven published and two unpublished plays, as well as watching two movies he wrote the screenplays for (Love and Human Remains and Beauty). I also contacted the Alberta Theatre Project's Artistic Director Bob White, who directed the first production of this play, and asked him to mail me any reviews and information he might have about it. The playwright's agent was also helpful in procuring me all newspaper reviews of the play, including one from the New York Times. This research was crucial for me to develop some basic ideas about how I wanted to direct this play and what themes I felt were important to get across to the audience. Once pre production research was done I was ready to proceed. The first task was to prepare for auditions by putting together cuttings from the play for auditioners to use and creating a list of qualities I felt were essential to each character. Once the play was successfully cast I was ready to move on to the technical design and physical appearance it would have.

The Design Process.

This began when I started reading the script and preparing myself to direct. This process prepared me for the meetings I would eventually have with the designers involved in the production. Because of the limited amount of time allowed to me for preparation designers were not solidified until just a few weeks before rehearsals began. This would mean a very tight schedule for everyone. Once I had all my designers selected we met for the first time and immediately set deadlines for each design element. I then proceeded to set up preliminary meeting times with each of them individually. These would happen weekly along with a weekly production meeting for all to attend. It was imperative to the successful design of the show that all of the designers be on the same page about what we were trying to achieve thematically and visually. I hoped these weekly production meetings would create a co-operative environment that would foster a unified vision.

The Production Process.

My main objective with rehearsals was to create a powerfully driven ensemble fueled by creative energy that everyone felt a part of, this meant no "I" statements from me and an acceptance of all ideas as useful to the process whether I liked them or not. The concept is that bad ideas will fall on their own but only when the whole company is convinced that the idea is unproductive. This meant discipline from me but also from the actors and would serve as the measure of our success throughout.

Playwright

Controversial, scathing, in your face, insightful and gratuitously sexual; these are only some of the words commonly used to describe thirty-nine year old Canadian playwright Brad Fraser from Edmonton, Alberta. Since his first professionally mounted play *Wolfboy* graced the stage at Saskatoon's Twenty-fifth Street Theatre, Fraser's plays have been both lionized and highly criticized. Nonetheless they have always been produced, because above all they are highly theatrical and compelling to their audiences.

In a world where we reap what we sow, playwright Brad Fraser has harvested a bumper crop of insight from a generation inundated by TV sitcoms and comic books, so says reviewer John Colbourn of the Toronto Sun⁴. Uncertain and controversial openings, accolades and eventual extensions; these are the Fraser trademarks.

Brad Fraser was born in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada in 1959. He began winning provincial playwrighting competitions when he was a seventeen year old student of theatre arts at Victoria Composite High School. For two summers he attended The Banff Center Playwrights Colony headed by perennial award winner Sharon Pollock⁵. He wrote and directed his first play, *Mutants*, solicited for the 1981 season at the Walterdale Theatre, Edmonton's community theatre, where he was also an actor, set designer and stage manager. The following year, 25th Street Theatre of Saskatoon, premiered *Wolfboy* featuring a young Keanu Reeves. The play received subsequent productions at Touchstone in Vancouver and Theatre Passe Muraille, Toronto. Passe Muraille produced two further productions, *Noises* and *Young Art*. In 1985 and 1988 Fraser plays returned to the Canadian stage with Fringe Festival entries that solidified his standing as Canada's theatrical bad boy⁶, *Chainsaw Love* and *Return of the Bride*.

In 1986 Fraser became playwright in residence at the Edmonton Workshop West Theatre. It is at this point that *Human Remains* had its conception and three long years later opened in Calgary Alberta at the annual Playwrights Festival of 1989. Although the play suffered a turbulent birth, which included the resignation of its director and designer one week before its opening, it was an instant success. Bob White, the artistic Director of Calgary's Alberta Theatre Projects took over direction of the original production and the play went on to become a national and international sensation with productions in Toronto, Edmonton, Montreal, Vancouver, Chicago, New York, Milan, Edinburgh, London and even Tokyo. Fraser also went on to write the screenplay for the movie version of the play, directed by Denys Arcand, which was released in 1994 and garnered Fraser a Genie Award for the adaptation. Fraser has also worked writing plays for teens, and for the three seasons of its existence he wrote and directed plays for the Edmonton Teen Festival at the Citadel Theatre. While there he wrote *Prom Night of the Living Dead (a musical)*, *Blood Brothers* and a revised *Young Art*. In 1992 Fraser's play *The Ugly Man* opened in Calgary at the Plarites Festival of that year and received critical acclaim. The play went on to play internationally and along with *Human Remains* was translated into six languages in 1993⁷. In 1994 Fraser's most recent play, *Poor Superman*, opened in Cincinnati with whirlwinds of controversy attested to by the presence of Cincinnati police (vice squad) at the opening. The play went on to be named one of the year's best by both Time Magazine and The New York Times.

Currently Brad Fraser is under contract with the Disney Corporation's Touchstone division. So far he has written two screenplays; Beauty and Our Man in Manila, the latter of which has yet to be released. Fraser is also in negotiations with Showtime to develop a late night soap opera and is also said to be on the verge of releasing his latest play, based on his personal experiences as a battered child. Brad Fraser still lives in Edmonton, Alberta and is a vibrant member of that city's theatre and gay community.

Chapter 2: Directorial Analysis of the Playscript

(based on the model from Francis Hodge, Play Direction and Analysis) The first step to any successful production is a director's analysis. This literary and investigative process helps the director discover key themes in a play as well as develop a strong sense of what they want to create and convey for the audience. If anything, a strong analytical process will at least make a director intimate with the script, and force many readings of the material. In this repetitive reading lies the questions and answers that must emerge for directorial creativity to evolve.

In approaching a work such as *Human Remains* there are a number of avenues to explore. How does the violent nature of the script relate to the themes of love and the search for it, and what drives the characters to do what they do? What is Fraser's objective in using the choral- like text that colors the whole script, and how do we make sense of these very monosyllabic references? What patterns has Fraser carried over from his other work, and what is distinct about this one? How do the reactions of critics other previous productions of this play reflect on the nature of the work?

All of these questions must be examined carefully to attain a rounded view of the play as a piece of theatre.

Given Circumstances

Geographical.

Fraser has set the play in his hometown of Edmonton, Alberta in Canada's prairie capital. The bulk of the play is set in several different interiors of that city, including Candy and David's apartment, Benita's room, Robert's bar and room, a video bar, Kane's family house, Bernie's house, a restaurant where David and Kane work, a gym, David's bedroom, and Candy's bedroom. There are only four exteriors and they are a park, the outside of David's house, a rooftop and a street in downtown Edmonton. In all there are fifteen settings established by the playwright.

We know the play is in Edmonton textually from David's line

"Now now Edmonton has some fine men" (p. 41) there are also some geographical statements that make it unmistakably Edmonton such as references to Jasper Avenue (p. 40) and Victoria Park (p. 88).

We can also assume that most of the action takes place in or near the downtown core of the city, based on the lack of reference to any specific methods of transportation. The only location that seems to be on the outskirts would be Kane's home, which is

indicated as being more suburban (p. 160) and is supported by the fact that Kane does own a car. "I was given this car and its insurance when I was sixteen" (p. 58)

Time.

The only solid textual reference to time that we have is this conversation between David and Bernie.

David: '79

Bernie: '80

David: "Because the Night" was released in '79.

Bernie: It was '80!

We can assume from this that they are referring to the Bruce Springsteen Album which was in fact released in 1979. David admits to being "thirty in a few months" (p. 56) which would mean that in 1979 he was 19 years old. The play was written in 1989. So it would be logical to assume that it does actually take place in 1989. We also know that Kane was born after 1970 (p. 38) and that he is in fact 17 (p. 78) this would support the fact that it is 1989 as well. As to the season the play occurs, the text seems to support late summer.

David: When it snows.

Candy: I dread the thought of another winter here.

David: Why? It's only ten months.

Jerri also describes the weather in the morning as being chilly

(p. 99).

The time span the play seems to cover is the hardest to pinpoint accurately. The play seems to pick up on a week night, which is supported by Bernie calling David from his office in a government job (p. 38); also Bernie wakes up at David's the next day and is late for work (p. 48). The next reference is David saying he always works on Saturdays; working backwards from this point seems to indicate that the play begins on a Wednesday and working forward from there we can ascertain that the whole play takes place over a ten day to two week period, with the possible addition of a few days to a week before the final scene of the play at David and Candy's apartment. The lack of specific textual information makes the establishment of time frame a matter of taking an educated guess.

Economic Environment.

Economics do not play a large role in this play and do not impact the basic themes in any way. What does bear mention, however, is the different economic backgrounds that seem to be represented in the play. The middle class influence clearly established by the characters of Candy, David, Bernie, Robert and Jerri are a stark contrast to the

polarities of Benita, the low class dominatrix prostitute, and the upper-middle class Kane.

Cultural Environment.

The cultural emphasis in this play is not religious or political but rather social. The whole play is a social commentary on the eighties generation. *Human Remains* captures the "motion sickness of urban life"⁴. The various characters in their teens, 20's and 30's jump from one bed to another, often not even taking the time to get names or protect themselves for that matter, to find that ever elusive state of mind called love. *Human Remains* solidly captures the flavor and torment of the MTV generation as they deal with life in the metropolis. Most people who live in the large cities of our society have to deal with what Fraser presents us: Who are you looking for and where do you find that person? How much can you trust strangers you are attracted to? Where do you draw the line sexually? What sexual orientation are you and how can you be sure? Finally have we come to a point in our society that we are more sexually stimulated by the violence in sex than its inherent potential for love. To conclude, the play sets out to chronicle a sample of the beastiality and carnage, not to mention the psychological toll of modern urban life.

A secondary yet still unmistakable theme that touches this play is the danger of sexual encounter not only attached to the possibility of violence but from the even more terrifying specter of AIDS.

Bernie: I can't stop lookin for women to bone.

David: I hope you're playing safe.

Bernie: Ah c'mon straight people don't get AIDS.

David: Don't talk stupid.

Bernie: straight men don't.

David: It kills you Bernie. It doesn't matter who you are.

(p. 112)

Through dialogue such as this the playwright exposes another element indicative of the perils of life in the eighties.

Previous Action

I wanted my characters always to operate in the here and now and refer to the past even less than in real life" (prologue p. 5)

There is very little in the way of previous action in this play; almost all of the action is in the here and now. There are only three elements of previous action in the first act. The first and most prevalent is the story of Dana, which is delivered by way of choral reminiscences by the characters of Bernie, David and Candy (p.93-98) . The tragedy of

Dana's self demise is told through these characters chorally and we see the resultant situation it created in real time action.

Bernie: Quiet this morning. Not feeling well..?

Candy: Fuck off!!

David: Candy?

Bernie: Sure hates my guts.

David: Dana was her best friend.

Bernie: She killed herself. I didn't do it.

David: I know.

Bernie: Why does Candy blame me?

David: Let it go. (p. 49)

This exchange helps develop and set up the relationship between the three old friends and is integral to understanding that chemistry. The second form of exposition is David's recounting of his walks in the park. These are important in setting up his character and further establish his inner conflicts. The third expository action is David and Bernie's choral remembrance of their episode at the graveyard (p. 102). This sets up Bernie's psychological struggle, which is imperative to the second act confrontation between him and David.

In the Act Two there is only one section dealing with previous action: it is Benita's line about David's friend Sal being diagnosed with AIDS (p. 153). This brings the character of David closer to identifying his own sickness (psychological self-destruction) and serves as a metaphor for what is to come as well as establishing a cultural statement for the playwright. For the most part this play deals with previous action very little, giving the audience's imagination as much creative license as possible.

Language

Choice of Words, Phrases and Sentences.

There is a familiarity to the language in this play that makes us immediately understand and believe the people in it. Profanity is used liberally and sets the stage for us to know who these people are right away. There are very few big words in this play, the playwright prefers to keep the language at street level where these characters live and breathe. The character of Kane is most indicative of his background and youth by the words he uses, words like "cool", "toast" and "bogus".

Fraser uses many colloquialisms in the text that remind us constantly about the environment of the play or the character of their speakers: "Honey I'm Homo"(p.33), "I feel like I just got fucked by a football team"(p.34) and " The one with War and Peace in braille on her back"(p.168) to name a few.

The successful attempt to duplicate real speech is obvious in the way Fraser has crafted the play. "Gonna", "Willya", "hiya" and many other oral specificities dot the script. The Canadian phrase ending "EH" is used liberally to designate the location of the play. The attempt is to make the dialogue as real life as possible so that the audience is familiar with these people immediately and develop an affinity for them based on parallels they might sense in their own existences.

Images.

Imagery in the traditional literary sense is not used a great deal in *Human Remains*. The playwright seems to prefer to let reality live in the dialogue, while imagery seems inherent in the staging and "feel" of the script. The exception to this would be the character of Benita, who seems to be a sort of interlocutor for the audience. Her urban legends are full of dark images and serve as a bridge of interpretation for all the other characters' fears and psychoses.

Benita: Then all of a sudden this big big guy screams, turns white, and faints. The girl thinks "what the hell"? And gets out. When she closes the door she sees a bloody hook hanging from the door handle. That's a good one.(p.45)

The only other piece of imagery that appears in the script is David's speech about the dream he has.

David: I buy this baby on sale at K-mart. Only it doesn't have any arms or legs_ just little flipper things where its limbs should be. Its head's covered with purple booga things and its jaw doesn't close right. Sometimes its stomach bursts open and these slimy clockwork guts fall out. It can talk but all it can say is "I love you David. I love you"(p.43)

Perhaps this is a metaphor for David's inability to reach out to the people he really does love. It may also be that David sees his desire for love as deformed, inappropriate and unrealistic, like the baby doll. The doll may also be a metaphor for David's past as a child star. Cast out when time has passed him by, he struggles to re-identify himself in a world that no longer idolizes him for who he is but rather for who he was and can never be again.

Peculiar Characteristics.

Other than the persistent coarse language and sexual innuendo, this play has one other peculiar characteristic that makes it different from many others. Perhaps borrowing from the Greeks, Fraser has written a choral score for the play which underscores the whole script. One-word utterances from the actors not actively involved in the scenes being featured serve to elaborate themes, create atmosphere and further develop characters. Single words like "wet", "Dark", 'alone", "dying" and "no!" support scenes of violence (p.31-32). Without exception all of this choral text is directly related to the action of each scene for which it occurs as underpinnings . This choral technique is also used to bridge scenes together, so that the whole play flows seamlessly along with scenes that pulse and flow into one another. *Human Remains* is a stylized, staccato series of events that

ebb and flow into each other to create a wonderfully experiential and dramatic theatre experience. This poetic, connecting physical and vocal underscore is an integral part of the storytelling structure used by Fraser.

-

Dramatic Action Breakdown

The play is essentially a one act play with no scene breaks indicated by the playwright, although he does indicate a possible intermission break (p. 138). For logistical rehearsal purposes I have broken the play down into twelve sections or units. These are noted in the prompt script.

Playwrights Intention/Idea

The title of this play goes a long way in explaining the playwright's philosophies on its subject matter. As Fraser states in his forward to the play, his decision to use *Unidentified Human Remains and the True Nature of Love* breaks down into two separate themes in the play. The first theme he elaborates on is dealing with mutilated people missed by no one. These, Fraser says, are his characters, left with no one but themselves to guide them. This primary theme explores the world of these emotionally and physically assaulted people, isolated and intimidated by the world around them. They search for the true nature of love, uncertain what love might really be. As Fraser states, truly great titles are like good sex. "They always present themselves at strange times and are always worth their weight in gold".⁸

The second theme relative to the play and operative in all of Fraser's other plays is the idea of people being trapped in timewarps where behavior and survival are meant for a previous time. The consequences of such a situation are soul shattering and suggest a kind of caged animalism that the characters struggle through.

Fraser explores the world we live in as too fast moving for us to adjust to the constantly changing moral, ethical and societal landscape. Forced to cope nonetheless we find ourselves lost and grappling for anything we can. Most often we find ourselves holding on to the wrong things. Fraser may also be suggesting that the only real way to survive in this new world is through friendship, love and basic humanity. The abyss only looms for those who cannot find these basic needs.

Chapter 3: Character Analysis

David

What serves as the dramatic spine⁹ for David's character is his inability to commit to anyone emotionally. What contributes to this malfunction are his early childhood experiences, his relationship with Bernie and his unresolved attitudes about his own homosexuality.

Textual references to David's childhood are certainly vague and one can assume that

his early years were perhaps difficult. As a child actor we can also assume that his exposure to a family compact was minimal. This seems to play itself out in David's need for a family. Underscoring this fact is David's dependence on his childhood friends Bernie, Dana and Candy.

Bernie and David play out the central conflict in the play, which is a product of both character's denials and repressions of true feeling. David is blinded by his love for Bernie and this leads him to ignore obvious signs of Bernie's growing psychosis as well as the attraction Bernie has for him. Unable to recognize these truths, David relegates himself to innuendo that forces both of them to continue a maddening charade.

Bernie: You mean a lot to me David.

David: Bernie what a lovely thing to say. Want me to suck your cock.

Bernie: Ha ha goodnight David. (p.44)

With Candy, David has a form of marriage that seems to amuse and comfort them both. "Honey I'm homo"(p.32). The dependent nature of this relationship is never mentioned, however it is obvious that both need each other. The jealousy that Candy feels towards Bernie plays itself out around the story of Dana. Dana's pregnancy from Bernie and eventual suicide after his refusal to marry her seem to be the inciting incident that leads to the climactic moment of the play.

David's homosexuality and his lack of acceptance of this orientation seem to be driven by an original lack of acceptance in a home environment and a need to create his own family with Candy and Bernie, perhaps replacing father and mother. This is ironically underscored by Bernie the "Fag Hater". In general, David tends to deflate himself, jokingly preferring to mask his true feelings. "Got blown"(p.39), "Feel like I just fucked a football team"(p.33) and "I hear you're a lesbian I'm queer myself"(p.132) are a few examples that pepper the whole script.

In the end traumatic events must occur to effect positive change in David's life. Bernie's death free's David from the shackles of the past and afford him an opportunity to accept himself more honestly. Whether or not he will successfully proceed with the rest of his life is irrelevant. He has learned something and can apply it if he so chooses.

Candy

The female characters in this play are not as well drawn as the male characters. They lack the depth of interpretation that seems operative in most of their male counterparts. However the character of Candy is certainly the most visible of the three women in this play.

Candy, like David, has evolved from an early environment that seems to be modeled after sixties television families like Ozzie and Harriet and The Munster's (p.60). As she is a pre feminist woman she is incapable of loving herself because the self must be repressed in order to find a man. She needs to find a man who needs her, an environment where she can function rather than "be".

Candy finds people who need her from her friends. There is evidence of dependence in her relationship with the ill-fated Dana, "I hold her" (p.94). She most definitely fosters this situation with David in the domestic home environment she carefully manipulates. Her relationship with Bernie is also indicative of her need to nurture. This is underscored by her antagonism towards him because of her anger at his involvement in Dana's suicide.

Candy's search for "GA GA" love as she describes it (p.39), takes her to Robert, a bartender. Unable to satisfy herself intellectually she aggressively pursues him sexually, and as we might guess she substitutes sex for love. When she discovers his infidelity (with his own wife) she reacts violently and is repaid in kind. We can assume that this end is easier for Candy to deal with than a realization that this was never the man she really needed.

Jerri on the other hand has a great need for Candy and this in itself is terribly attractive to her. Candy's ability to mirror other people's feelings leads her to sleep with Jerri. This is not so much a physical attraction as it is a curiosity. Unable to be honest with herself Candy is unable to maturely address this with Jerri. This leads to an emotionally ugly confrontation that only serves to prove Candy's inadequacies to herself. Unable to love herself, how could she love someone else?

In the end Candy reverts to the relative security of caring for her friend David, who needs her. His emotional breakdown seems to give her renewed vigor. Unfortunately this will only last as long as David is incapacitated.

Kane

The spine of Kane's character is his struggle to recognize his own sexuality. This confusion can be traced to a dysfunctional family relationship, especially with his father. This problem is further enhanced by financial wealth. Subsequently Kane's relationship with David is the base around which this confusion revolves.

Although we know very little about Kane's parents we do know that they are upper class, which has afforded him many advantages. Benita also seems to indicate a certain father syndrome when she "reads" Kane.

Benita: Cars. Credit cards. Video. Pink and blue. Men and women. Men. A man. Older, Glasses, Moustache.(p.78)

This is further developed in relation to David which seems to indicate a substitution that Kane may be making.

Benita: Your face superimposed over the man's. Your voice, your hands. Loneliness. Fear.(p.78)

The absence of positive role models has forced Kane away from his dispassionate mother and father as he searches for himself in a world gone mad with position and wealth. This leads him to television (The great electronic sitter) which eventually delivers him to David the ex-television actor.

Kane's financial ease does not make his life easier. Wealth in fact has separated Kane from what he needs most, his family. His mother is in Hawaii because "she just likes to tan a lot"(p.64) his father is constantly at work and we can assume pays him little attention. As with many rich fathers, he makes up for this by providing Kane with a car and credit cards. This however is not the answer to Kane's problems.

Kane: I was given this car when I turned 16. I got a Visa card when I was 17. My dad owns a Mercedes and a '62 Corvette

convertible. We have a kidney shaped pool and a Winnebago. Sometimes I dream I have worms in my scrotum. (p. 58)

At the end of the play Kane seems a stronger, more confident person. He is still young and awkward but the fact that he is a waiter now and is confident enough to visit David at a very tough time is supportive of this idea. Fraser further seems to indicate a clearer sexual maturity in the character at the end when he kisses David squarely on the mouth. The future if perhaps ambiguous, nonetheless seems bright for our friend Kane.

Benita

Benita is a hard character to identify completely because she lacks the specificity that some of the more dominant characters possess. Her presence in the play is omniscient and she acts as a sort of interlocutor between the audience and the other characters. From Benita we learn certain secrets about the characters that would not necessarily be made obvious if she were not present. Does Benita really exist? The answer might be no, but she does make appearances in the narrative on some occasions and for that reason she must be included. The spine of her character is that she has the ability to rise above societal role models and see more clearly.

Benita only shares a relationship with David in this play. Kane and Bernie visit but only briefly and only at David's invitation. In both of these cases it is so that Benita can read their minds and perhaps help David make his up. David and Benita's relationship is not elaborated in the text therefore we can only guess at its nature and history. She calls him "Davey" which could indicate a certain intimacy in the friendship. She also cannot "read" David and perhaps this adds mystery to his appeal for her. One could also assume that they have a certain amount of history together based on the ease they have with each other, certainly not evident with anyone else. David's proclivity for the darker side of society might indicate the reason for their meeting at all. Her inability to read him might also be an attraction.

Benita's early childhood has led her to stand in the way of harm she feels might otherwise be visited on others less prepared than her. The brutality of her treatment at the hands of her father has molded Benita and forced her to stand on the fringes as perhaps the playwright himself might.

Benita: Just think Davey- if we hadn't been her to help him live out that fantasy he might've forced it on someone else- for free.

Candy: Fucked up.

David: He stared at me the entire time. He coulda been my father - your father.

Benita: My father was never that gentle

We could then surmise that Benita is Fraser's persona brought dramatically to light. Beaten himself as a child,¹⁰ Fraser may have used Benita as his way into the play. The notion of parental abuse as mentioned before is not new to Fraser's work. His newest play in fact deals with this subject exclusively.¹¹

In the end, Benita suffers Bernie's violent behavior to affirm his crimes for David and, as he recovers from the shocking events of Bernie's self destruction she is there also to say for him the words he cannot, " I love you." (p.194).

Bernie

Bernie is charming, intelligent and driven mad trying to maintain his credentials as a heterosexual. Bernie's dysfunctional sexual experiences have driven him into an uncontrollable rage against women who remind him of his constant inadequacy. Unable to achieve an erection in their presence he substitutes murder for copulation, perhaps achieving orgasm in this way. This sexual rage serves as the spine for his character. This begins early and can be traced through abusive attitudes towards his childhood friends. The anger he remembers towards Dana is a precursor to coming events.

Bernie: She deserved to die. I was glad she died. I should've killed her myself.

The history that David and Bernie share seems consistent with this theme of repressed feelings that haunts all the characters.

Through the choral text the story of "Dana" reverberates and the forbidden relationship that David and Bernie struggle with is clarified.

Bernie: I want to tell him to get into the sleeping bag with me.

Candy: I hold her.

David: I want to tell him.

Bernie: But I can't.

Candy: Her parents will kill her.

David: But I can't

Bernie: I hear him breathing in the dark.

Candy: She's scared.

Bernie: he's scared.

David: Bernie I think I'm queer.

Bernie: Ha ha.

David: I am.

Bernie: Go to sleep. (p.93-94)

Bernie chooses death over capture at the end and one may interpret this as a realization of his horrible crimes. He begs David to go away with him finally perhaps accepting his love for him. In my interpretation his suicide is the only thing that makes us feel for a character who is otherwise despicable albeit charming to the end. By having Bernie kill himself Fraser gives the audience the opportunity to feel sorry for this man and perhaps understand the psychosis which has brought him to this end.

Robert

Robert is in most ways a stereotypical male. Lacking confidence in himself and the image he portrays his actions are most often influenced by a need for attention "What about my prick?" (p.112). The spine of Robert's character is his complete slavery to a male role that is no longer appropriate to the world he inhabits. When this stereotype is challenged, Robert becomes a macho bully.

Robert is probably most at ease when he feels in control of a relationship. This is most apparent with women. Robert's need for attention is too large for one relationship therefore he is continuously looking for the next conquest. This would most assuredly be the reason for his estrangement from his wife. He can be very charming when he needs to be and demonstrates a very "manly" outward demeanor calling women "Babe" and "gorgeous". This also makes the effort of remembering all their individual names unnecessary.

Robert's basic conflict within this play is with Candy. Their relationship, if one could call it that, is based strictly on sexual attraction, even if they would like to call it otherwise. Neither person is able to deal maturely in an intimate situation, preferring instead the safety of overt sexual encounter.

Candy: Suzy?

Robert: Coupla friends from Winnipeg.

Candy: Good friends?

Robert: Who fuckin cares.

Candy: I love it when you talk dirty. (p. 106)

Robert's journey is essentially unimportant to the plot of the play and therefore Fraser seems unconcerned with it. After hitting Candy when she becomes uncooperative, he makes the decision to return to his wife and try that relationship again. If the character has learned anything it is not apparent to this director. He does make a half-hearted attempt to apologize but this is probably for his own benefit rather than Candy's. Robert's most important role in this play is as contrast for Candy's lesbian relationship and as a decoy for Bernie the killer. This seems operative in his longest choral line.

Robert: It's like this white ball of flame that starts building at the back of your head. It's hot and it makes this kind of vibration, like someone screaming - but there's no sound. (p.48)

Jerri

We have very little to work with when analyzing the character of Jerri. She is underdeveloped: Her intentions seem clear enough, but her motivations are vague at best. She is a divorced school teacher with an obsession for Candy, "I don't even know her and I can't stop thinking about her" (p.39). She pursues Candy relentlessly and seems bent on an instant relationship, "Something went off in my head and I wanted to be with you - all the time" (p.89).

Her relentless pursuit could indicate a sexual insecurity she will not outwardly admit. In being so insistent with Candy perhaps Jerri is trying to substantiate her own sexual orientation. From this pursuit arises the conflict in Jerri's whole existence in the play. Candy's inability to commit coupled with her sexual immaturity combine to thwart Jerri's idealistic intentions at every turn. This situation overflows in a confrontation at the end of act one that is witnessed by both Robert and David.

Jerri: We slept together!!

Candy: Robert don't listen to her.

Jerri: I love you.

Candy: You do not.

Jerri: I think about you all the time. I don't know how to stop...!

Candy: You're crazy! (p.131)

However Jerri does seem to come to terms with her feelings in her last meeting with Candy. She even succeeds at getting Candy to perhaps see the truth.

Jerri: It's not me is it... I thought it was something I was doing. Is there anyone you can love?

Candy: David. Maybe. (p.176)

In the final scene between them she may come to understand that Candy is flawed in some very important ways, but she still clings to the image she has, "I think you're the most beautiful woman I've ever seen. I always have. (p.176). Many questions remain unanswered with this woefully underwritten character, but she does serve as a juxtaposition of sorts for both David and Candy.

Chapter 4: Casting

My main objective in auditioning actors for this show was to give everybody a fair

opportunity to show me what they could do while maintaining a safe environment for the actors to be as relaxed as they could be during the stressful experience of auditioning. The only person present in the room was myself and the specific actors auditioning. I hoped that by doing this I would foster a comfortable, nurturing environment in which they could be creative.

We started by having all the actors fill out simple audition forms in the lobby of the acting studio and, as they finished Gary Brown (my stage manager) would usher them in to me one by one. During this one on one, I discussed the subject matter of the play and told all of the auditioners that they would have to be comfortable with the fact that the script called for them to be in some form of undress in certain scenes of the play. I chose to do this after discussion with my supervisor, Sandra Hardy, when she suggested I be open about the play's themes to avoid any unfortunate situations after casting had been done. Surprisingly, all auditioners but one chose to stay and we proceeded as planned.

I had selected several different cuttings of the play which I gave to Gary along with a list of people I wanted to see in these scenes. We gave everyone a chance to review each scene before they came in to read for me. This gave them all a fair opportunity to be at ease whether they had read the play or not. As the auditions progressed I gave everyone the opportunity to read for whatever character they wanted and Gary and I would consult between each audition so as to keep people occupied working on their next selection. I urged all participants to make large choices and was pleasantly surprised by the variety and creativity that was demonstrated by all. In almost every case I gave some small directions to each person and had them do scenes again to see how well they took direction. By trying various pairings in different scenes I was able to see how the actors looked together and how well they worked with each other. This in and of itself was a very useful tool for my final decisions. In all, twenty-three people auditioned and the decisions were not all obvious ones.

I balanced three objectives in casting the play. First and foremost, I examined the demands of each character, and how each actor could bring out most basic elements of the character. I examined not only what an actor did with a role in audition, but also what other aspects of the character I felt the actor could reach, based on my knowledge of their previous work as well as in consultation with Sandra Hardy, their acting teacher.

As well I was concerned with making choices that were not necessarily obvious wherein the same individuals are cast in all of the shows. Clearly this is not always possible, as the most skilled actors are usually the ones to get cast. But my theory was that many heretofore unknown commodities could blossom given an opportunity such as this one. In the final analysis I hoped a good balance of experienced and inexperienced actors would work well.

Finally, and most importantly, I wanted a group of people that would blend well together into a strong ensemble. My previous theatre experiences taught me long ago that the most satisfying and successful plays feature a group of people who have subjugated their personalities and prejudices to the reaching of a common goal. I was most interested in casting people who would give of themselves willingly for the good of the

show. Based on this criteria and with the help and sound advice of Sandra Hardy I made my choices. Some of them were more obvious than others but all things considered, I stand by them confident that they were the best choices I could make. Some more experienced actors did not audition and I could have possibly convinced them to work with me but, discussing this possibility with some of the cast I have come to understand that some of these people would have brought personalities to the show that would have been disruptive. Our ensemble was the greatest asset we had and for this reason this cast was the right mix.

David - Andrew Lyons

Although *Human Remains* is truly an ensemble piece the character of David figures largely and it is imperative that he be played with wit, maturity and strength. Andrew Lyons is a mature student with a certain amount of understanding about the period and the problems faced by David. In discussions with him, it was clear that we were in agreement about many of the themes in the play. I needed David to appear older and a little bit more worldly than the other cast members and Andrew fit this bill excellently. Although Andrew was too sick to audition he had showed interest in the role and had even called Gary Brown to tell us he was unable to come but was interested. After the auditions, I was able to speak to him and his ideas for the role seemed right and he fit the picture as far as the other choices I had in mind. The last element that cemented my selection was Andrew's previous work, which showed great potential as well as his ability to work well within the group I had chosen. This choice was by far the most crucial and I was ecstatic to have Andrew on board. As it turned out Andrew delivered one of his strongest performances here. I needed to force Andy to do his homework because he is a lazy actor who requires constant prodding, given this however he is an incredibly creative and well read actor.

Candy - Kelly Sanders

Candy is a very complex character exhibiting behaviors and inconsistencies that make her a challenge for the most experienced actor. I was looking for someone who was mature enough to handle the sexually explicit material as well as the psychology of the character. Kelly was one of my most eager auditioners and she showed great interest in the role of Candy. She had some very good ideas about the character and seemed very in touch with the mindset required for the role. She had a strong audition and most resembled what I was seeking.

The final choice to cast her was easy because she really had a strong relationship with Andrew and this would greatly help the process. Her relationship to Chris Ashmore at the time was tenuous but they both assured me of, and I believed in, their ability to work well together and trust each other. It was clear as we began rehearsals that this was not going to be a problem. She lacked some of the specificity in her actions and was an actress that required a great deal of managing. She also had a habit of coaching the other less experienced actors that I had to keep in check. However Kelly was the best choice I could make and she showed emotional availability, commitment and focus that went beyond my expectations.

Bernie - Chris Ashmore

Bernie is another emotionally complex character that required sensitivity, strength, presence and charm. The journey of this character and the scenes of emotional turmoil and veiled psychosis were going to be demanding for even the most advanced actor. Chris Ashmore has poise, strong stage presence and a generosity of self that make him an excellent choice for this role. The trust that Chris was able to develop with the rest of the cast was key to the success of some of the most violent and scary stage scenes required of them. The subtleties that Chris brought to the character were excellent and his natural inquisitiveness and commitment were what made him a joy to work with. When Chris auditioned for me he very nicely told me that he would accept no role other than Bernie. His presence was magnetic and although he constantly challenged me with his need for continual feedback his performance and leadership were a constant joy.

Kane - Tim Simons

Kane is a sexually confused young man in his late teens with an affinity for T.V. characters. Tim Simons is this person, with the possible exception of the sexual confusion. I had previously directed Tim in an another project and had found him to be a joy to work with and considered him the unfound jewel of the department. Tim had read the play the previous year and had immediately shown keen interest in the project.

At auditions Tim showed wonderful honesty and directability and impressed everyone with his interpretive ability. Tim also showed great instinctive comedic timing which was essential to the character of Kane. Physically Tim also made a great contrast with Andrew and his exuberant energy would make up for any shortcomings he might have had. As it turned out, Tim was a favorite to all who saw the show and fit into the cast so enormously well that I cannot think of anyone else who could have done this role better than he. The child in the cast, Tim listened to everyone attentively and his growth in confidence was measurable. Tim succeeded best at creating a subtext that was clearly understood by all who watched him while maintaining the playwright's intention and supporting the story of the play.

Robert - David Currier

The Character of Robert is not an easy one because he has many errant lines. The character is not as finely drawn as the others seem to be. Robert does however carry considerable weight in the world of the play and serves as a deception of sorts in the murderer plot line. At the auditions I saw three actors whom I felt could carry out the role. David Currier was one of them and ended up being my final choice. I was in a class with David the previous year and was familiar with him and felt he was interesting because of his Army background. David would also be someone who would benefit greatly from this experience and this was, I felt a strong consideration. Lastly David has a restrained fury about him that would really help him realize the role. I was happy with his work on the show and really was pleased with his growth throughout the process. He had some very tough and violent scenes to do with Kelly and although these never reached the apex required he worked hard and came a long way. What has been most enjoyable is seeing his confidence grow and his ability to take chances become greater.

Jerri - Wanda Perry

This is a part I had actually actively sought to cast because I felt the availability of suitable candidates was minimal. Janet Warner Ashley refused my proposal for her to play the part based on the content in the play and her position in her community. However, Janet did urge a student of hers to audition and as it turns out this student was my final choice. Jerri is a complex character representing the lesbian aspects of Candy's search for meaningful partnership. She is complex because, as with Robert, the script is lacking a lot of biographical information that would be helpful in creating a rounded characterization.

When I first saw the group of female auditioners I felt very unsure about anyone being able to carry out this particular role. As auditions progressed my uneasiness became greater until suddenly Wanda Perry appeared. She had the poise and physical appearance that I was looking for and she was also more mature than the average auditioner. My mind was made up almost immediately and I cast her. As it turned out, Wanda was my biggest challenge as a director. She was often unprepared for rehearsals, lacked any emotional availability and required too much of my time. I was never happy with her performance, especially in the crucial date scene and found myself blocking around her rather than with her. My mistake was in casting on appearance rather than ability. I must say that she did work hard and her performance came a long way. Given the opportunity again with the same auditioners I am sure I would cast her again. She worked well with the others and this in itself was valuable.

Benita - Victoria Herrick

It is fitting that I keep my hardest casting decision for last as this was most certainly the toughest decision I had to make. Benita is the raconteuse of the play and acts somewhat as the ever present interlocutor overseeing everything that happens. She is wise beyond her years and has a certain magical childlike quality all the same. I felt three women were equal in their abilities to play the role but none stood out above the rest. One candidate certainly looked more the part than anyone else but her physical reluctance scared me. Another auditioner had the tough quality that might have worked but her lack of femininity also made me doubtful. Finally Victoria Herrick had a good audition, She was not the obvious physical choice but she was very comfortable with her body and took my directions very well. She was also the only auditioner to truly explore the character's sensuality. Also Victoria showed an eagerness for the part that was encouraging. After discussion with Sandra Hardy I made Victoria my final choice. We both agreed that Benita's sexuality was the key and also that this was a propitious time in Victoria's education for her to have this opportunity over the others. Victoria required a lot of my personal attention but in the end she delivered a very credible characterization of Benita and had us all cheering for her. Victoria faced a lot of personal adversity throughout this period but she was always dependable and her brave performances were a credit both to herself and to the cast. The trust that Victoria put in Chris was a key to all of our successes as an ensemble and her quiet work ethic prompted everyone to marvel at her achievement. A tough role, a tough actor.

My objectives when approaching the design of the show were very simple: I wanted the sound, lights, set and costumes to work hand in hand to support not only each other but the script and my directorial vision. All in the hopes of producing a unified presentation of the play and its themes. I began by meeting the designers one by one and speaking with them (in general terms) about each of their respective design areas and what I was looking for thematically. Once they were all chosen I gathered the designers together and scheduled a regular weekly design meeting that they, myself and Gary (Stage Manager) would attend. By doing this I hoped to create a unified cooperative design team that worked together and not in a creative void. I also scheduled weekly meetings with each individual designer so that we could discuss and develop a thematic concept for each area. Giving both individual and team emphasis to all of the designers would develop a freely creative and nurturing environment for them while keeping me as up to date as possible on these elements so that I could share them with the cast.

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Set: James Beer

The multi-locational nature of this script called for great ingenuity and creativity with careful emphasis on the use of an unusual space like the Pavilion. James Beer had designed *Pump Boys and Dinettes* the previous year, as well as the spring dance show, which truly inspired me to seek him out because of the very urban metallic look this latter production featured. James is, simply put, a brilliant designer with creative energy and knowledge to spare. He seemed unsure about the production at first but after reading it he was as enthusiastic as me about its possibilities and eagerly came on board.

In our preliminary meetings our discussions were focused on the feel and themes of the show rather than on specifics. I told James that I was not seeking realism but rather expressionism in his work and this seemed to excite him. We talked about the show having an urban feel, being eerie, bloody and staccato. We discussed certain images we saw such as yellow police tape, a sword, a broken shoe, ripped clothing, street lights and neon. We also discussed the collage-like nature of the script and the staccato snapshots it seemed to present. Thematically I discussed the loneliness of the characters and the search for sense in a world that has none. We also discussed the caged animals the characters seemed to be and how that played itself out whenever they ventured out. One of the advantages I quickly discovered in working with James is that like myself he thinks in images and so our conversations were very fruitful and clarifying for both of us. We also talked at length about color and the themes this would support.

As our talks continued in the first couple of meetings James and I almost simultaneously came to one idea that would influence everything else to come. Having recently taken a trip to New York, I mentioned to him the huge presence of scaffolding in this city, we instantly knew we had something. We researched the rental of these units and James developed his final design around this very scaffolding. This we both agreed would achieve the caged feel we wanted and give us the levels that would separate the lonely characters trying to reach out. The last thing we were able to do is eliminate spaces that

we were both able to see as unnecessary to the flow of the script. Candy and David's bedroom became extinct as did the second bar; we both felt we could use the same bar for all of the scenes. We also agreed that Candy and David's apartment was the central focus with Bernie's space being in close proximity to this. What James came up with in the end was a phenomenal metallic, dark urban setting that used the space afforded to the maximum. What it also succeeded in doing was giving the show a flow, because all the spaces were strongly delineated from each other while maintaining a structural connection. This enabled the actors to move from one space to another from wherever they were with minimal movement; Separated yet connected like the characters themselves.

The set design in this production was a great success. Perhaps its greatest element was the roof section which towered over the stage at the apex of the roofline and created the tension necessary for the scenes that were played there. Thematically I believe this roof area also served the dangerous tensions the characters were feeling. Audiences were also amazed at its structural integrity, which was tested nightly by Chris Ashmore's weighty presence. The theme of urban animals caged by their society was also hinted at in the design's incorporation of steel and scaffolding. I also felt the accessibility of the set for all of the actors made the omniscient character of Benita easier to establish. She was able to be anywhere above all things on the set and this established her presence in all the scenes. Most importantly the actors felt safe on this structure which featured four elevated sections, four staircases, two elevated ramps and seven full scaffold sections.

If I had any frustrations in this process it would have to be with the lateness of its arrival and the lack of information I had about it prior to the rehearsal process. Many scenes were blocked with only a very basic knowledge of what the space would actually be in the end. This was both frustrating to myself and the actors as we were forced to change blocking constantly to accommodate the evolving design. Another frustrating fact of life which both James and I faced in the process was the lack of help we received in building the set. Most often it was only he and I building and I became exhausted with the double duty I was having to put in. The final product worked well, supporting the themes and the action but the lack of knowledge about how it would eventually look was frustrating.

Lights, Jeremy Leclerc

Jeremy Leclerc was a very enthusiastic designer who sought me out persistently for the opportunity to design the lights for the show. There were probably more experienced designers in the department that would or could have done the job but in keeping with the principles I developed in casting the show I believed that Jeremy would do a fine job and that he needed the opportunity to show it. Jeremy was also doing this for an independent study course he was taking with Wayne Merritt so I knew he was highly motivated to see it succeed. My first meetings with Jeremy consisted of discussion about the flavor and themes of the show much like the conversations I had with James. Jeremy was full of ideas about strobe lights, fog and special effects and for the most part I encouraged him in these directions. I did not want to deny him any creative input at this point in the process and so I found myself saying yes to almost everything he

suggested. This may have been my first mistake. As the process developed two things became apparent to me when dealing with Jeremy. First, he would be challenged by the lateness of the set design and by the size of it. Many of the traditional lighting positions would be removed or handicapped by the set's invasive existence within the relatively small Pavilion space. Second, I would have to communicate clearly to Jeremy what the themes in the play were and what this meant to his design so that we could achieve a unified product. It was very hard trying to discuss theme with Jeremy because he had very little concept of what I meant when I discussed thematic ideas with him. Violence, parental abuse, loneliness and fear were lost on him and he could not translate these ideas to the lighting design. Often Jeremy's mind worked in very practical ways without pausing to consider dramatic or thematic import. I would have to guide Jeremy's design efforts in these directions. In this I believe I failed.

The largest part of our work together came one week before tech weekend when Jeremy and I got together to finalize the lighting design. When we originally sat down, Jeremy had twenty-six lights on his plot. He was unprepared to discuss theme and his design was only about light, not about the story of the play. Jeremy was largely unprepared and I was forced to go over every beat of the play with him one by one. I engaged him in conversation about what the scenes meant and his blank looks motivated me to bluntly tell him what I wanted. Correspondingly with music he was unable to translate his lighting thematically to the music we had chosen.

Forced to tell him what to do I made my own mistakes, and these were glaringly apparent in the final product. The staccato cues I had wanted for the choral lines were unmanageable and more disruptive than thematically supportive. The cues on the whole were too abrupt and lacked cohesiveness with the other design elements, especially the sound. My mistake with Jeremy was not to have identified his weaknesses earlier in order to address them more organically and systematically. I did not meet with Jeremy productively enough to guide him properly and therefore we never had an opportunity to make all the changes we needed to make his design cohesive. Jeremy's lack of experience and my lack of attention to his work combined to produce a very mediocre lighting design. My primary misunderstanding of Jeremy's skills at the outset are primarily responsible for all of these shortcomings. I should have found a way of working with him that accentuated his skills and did not overexpose his shortcomings.

Sound: Elizabeth Moulton

Sound designers are hard to find at the University of Maine. Qualified sound people get even harder to find, so I felt very lucky to have Elizabeth on the team. Elizabeth is a music/theatre major who has a large and extensive knowledge of music of all sorts, from classical to popular music. Her knowledge of recording equipment and the more technical areas of sound design are minimal but I felt that Gary could compensate for her in this area and that her musical experience and background was too valuable to exclude her. She was the best choice. Most of the work we did consisted of listening to different types of music and fitting them into different places we had previously identified within the script that we either wanted to score or that called for specific sound or music. Our primary focus thematically was related to the period of the play (mid-eighties) and the aspects of dread and danger that were inherent to the script. Elizabeth brought very

good suggestions to the process and was extremely receptive to any suggestions I or the cast brought to her. Her attention to the themes in the play was especially crucial and she clarified many moments with the music she brought me.

Overall, I feel the sound design for *Human Remains* was very successful. Some of my favorite moments include the first cue at the top of the show which featured an instrumental from Love Spit Love, the Peter Gabriel song *Mercy Street* used in the David monologue in the park, and the final scene between David and Bernie in which we used a haunting instrumental from Philip Glass. The only area in which I feel we were not as successful was in dealing with Elizabeth's lack of technical expertise. In the end it caused a lot of unnecessary stress for Gary. If I were to do this again I would urge Elizabeth to learn how to use the equipment.

Costumes: Jim Day

Jim was essentially given the opportunity to design this show by virtue of his position as the graduate assistant, in costumes for the department. He also loved the play and was excited about doing it. This was a good thing for all of us. Jim brought little experience in costume design to this show (his first design opportunity). He did, however, bring an informed sensitivity to the subject matter and great skill at making much out of little.

The process we followed started with a costume flow chart that Jim put together. From this preliminary work we were able to discuss specifics (thematic and practical) of each character as they moved through the play. We discussed the themes in the play and where each character fit into these. Jim's biggest challenge was trying to fit each character with a costume plot that would work considering the small amount of time they were to spend off stage. The fact that all the characters were required to stay on stage for the whole show, and had choral dialogue during apparent down times did not make his job easier. He did however, through trial and error succeed in developing costumes which worked for the characters and were easily transitioned into from scene to scene.

Our only real problem was with the cowboy outfit that David wears in act one. Originally this was to include chaps and boots but we soon discovered that this was impossible due to the small amount of time he had to go from this costume to a completely different waiter's outfit. Eventually we modified the cowboy outfit down to much more basic items that told the same story and still got a good laugh from the audience.

Jim also worked well with the rest of the designer's often calling on them for help or advice. A good example of this cooperative spirit was exemplified by Elizabeth and Jim's work on transition music for heavy changes which made them appear seamless to the audience because of the pertinence of the music to the moment. A good example of this would be the *Macho Man* Village People transition into the cowboy outfit scene which both Benita and David had to change for. Benita changed in character to the music a vista while David was able to change in the wings for his entrance which opens the scene.

I was very satisfied with what Jim gave us for costumes in this show. Considering the budget he had (\$100) he did a tremendous job. Given more resources and time; two

areas spring to mind that I was never satisfied with completely. Robert's date costume was too big and did not fit the vanity of the character that we were working towards. The decision to go along with it came from the actor's desire for it and a lack of better options. The other area I would have liked to work on was the gym clothes both Jerri and Candy were wearing. These did not agree with their characters and were ill fitting; again time, budget and actor preferences seemed our biggest enemies here.

In the overall picture I believe that given the time and resources we had, our design team performed as well as it could. My greatest failure in this area was in not recognizing the different levels of talent each designer had to offer. That two of them were selected for regional awards in costume and set design is testimony to our hard work. Again the success of this project was measured by the ensemble work that was operative throughout. Obviously some elements were more successful than others, but we all learned a great deal and this after all was the ultimate goal for everyone.

Chapter 6: Rehearsal

The rehearsal process for *Human Remains* spanned seven weeks beginning on September 22, one of which was a school break that everyone was away for. Essentially this gave us six weeks of rehearsal time at six days a week. We would generally rehearse from 6:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. weekdays and from 1 p.m. to 4p.m. on Saturdays. This provided us with exactly thirty two days of rehearsal or ninety-six hours. I felt that this was enough time to get the show ready but I also understood that we had very little in the way of extra time so we needed to be organized.

I spent a significant amount of time with Gary organizing a schedule that was easy to understand for everybody and would not require anyone to be idle for significant periods. I also let the cast know that I was flexible with changes as long as we could all agree on make up times. This way I felt that the message was clear that rehearsal was to be respected.

My plan for rehearsals consisted of a careful planned route to achieving all the essentials the play required of us: comprehension, fluidity, character, thematic impact and narrative. The first three rehearsals consisted of reading the script sitting down. In this way I believed the actors could really start to ask the questions they needed to answer without concern for "acting". I really wanted this to be an area of discovery for all of us. I proceeded by blocking the play. Even if I did not have a final floor plan getting the actors on their feet and thinking about specific scenes in small chunks would get the creative ball rolling. Once the basic blocking was complete we ran Act one proceeded to blocking Act two and then ran it as well At this point we ran the whole show and were able to see what we had.

The next step consisted of focused work on specific scenes one after the other until the whole play had been rehearsed in this very concentrated way. Then we went away for a week knowing we had to be off book on our return. This period was very beneficial I think in letting our hard work stew a little and take hold.

The off book period was the hardest and most frustrating. We started by working on act

one for two days then Act two for two days then the show for two days. By the end of this period we were solidly off book and our greatest work was set to begin. What followed was a series of stop and start rehearsals in which scenes were more specifically developed. Next came the technical rehearsals incorporating all the design aspects of the show and putting the finished product together piece by piece.

This is a somewhat simplified recounting of the rehearsal process but the following week by week account will make more sense as a result.

Week One

The first part of this week was used to do table work on the play. I have found it very useful in the past to spend some time sitting around a table with the play, reading it and making as many discoveries as possible in this fashion. Without the need for performance or action actors can be free to really explore the play and more specifically their characters. I also find this type of work useful for developing a mutual love of the material, an invitation to a shared obsession if you will.¹⁴ As a director I spend a great deal of time doing research before I ever begin the rehearsal process. I watch films, listen to music, look at pictures and generally immerse myself in the world of the play. Table work is an invitation for the collaborators to fill up with their own knowledge, interests, ideas, reactions and obsession for the play. As a director I have caught a disease and it is now my responsibility to make it contagious. The energy developed in these few short moments of table work can be the most inspirational to all members of the company and the discoveries made here will strongly influence the process throughout.

The first three days were spent at the table reading the play with both cast and designers in attendance. We read Act one twice the first day with discussion after each reading. We discovered that this act was most certainly the longest running at approximately fifty one minutes. More importantly I think, the cast discovered the comedy in the play. Many moments of pure laughter were discovered with the whole cast joining in the mirth. I had asked all of them to simply read the play for understanding and not to act. In doing this the actors were able to really focus on the play and what was happening.

After the first reading I asked the actor's several questions relevant to their specific characters and told them to simply consider these for the time being. Giving them time to ponder these would effectively engage their minds in the process and get them started. After the second reading we simply discussed the play further and I asked more questions about specific moments, relationships, action and implications in the script. What I found most heartening at this first reading was the overall energy that our work was creating, we all knew we had something special here. The second day was devoted to Act two and we repeated the same process as the previous day. This act was certainly shorter running at about twenty five minutes. This knowledge however was tempered by the gritty and rapid fire emotionalism that permeated the whole of the act. The actors quickly realized that this play was going to exact a physical as well as emotional price. We were all surprised I think, at how fast everything goes wrong at the end and what this would take for us to pull off. Most disturbed was Chris Ashmore, I got

the feeling that he had not read the play in its entirety by his tearful reaction to what the play was going to require of him. As in the previous reading I asked many questions regarding character and plot aspects of the play.

The final day of table work included a reading of the entire play. We invited Sandra Caron to sit in with us and she had some excellent observations to make regarding some of the relationships in the play including Candy/David, David/Kane, David/Bernie and Candy/Jerri. One interesting thing that came out of Sandra's observations was the perceived threatening character of Jerri which she claimed changed after hearing the play read. I never saw Jerri as a threatening character but it was valuable to realize that the character had that potential.

We were also able to discuss each character in more detail after this reading; especially their interrelationships and their histories. The most encouraging and gratifying part of this reading process was the anticipation it created in all of us. By the time the last reading was done the cast and crew were chomping on the bit to get on with the process. I was very satisfied with the results this table work produced.

Once the table work was completed we were able to proceed with blocking the play, loosely. I say loosely because at this point in the process we did not have a complete or very accurate floor plan. James gave me a guess at each space and the size he felt they would be. These dimensions changed with the process, some got bigger others got smaller depending on our needs.

Previous to rehearsals I broke the play down into twelve workable sections that we could easily rehearse and block inside of about an hour. This helped us greatly. By breaking the play down into workable sections we were then able to identify them all individually, and it continued throughout the process to serve as a point of reference for us.

The rest of the week went extremely well. We blocked six of the twelve scenes and on Saturday we were able to run all of our work twice, up to and including Scene six. The process of working and reviewing gave the cast a great sense of accomplishment. I also believe that if I continued to give them the opportunity to run the work they had done uninterrupted every night and subsequently do the same every Saturday for all of our weeks work the play's shape would become clear to us all more quickly. The actors were obviously appreciative of this method and I feel good about the results it brought.

Lots of really emotional work was done in this week and the cast seemed to be having a hard time recovering from these strong moments. We discussed the need to find a way in and out of these moments so that they did not bleed into other scenes. Also Victoria came face to face with some of her most explicitly sexual scenes for the first time and did admirably well. We blocked the "blowjob" scene with Tim and they were both very professional. The rest of the cast was very helpful by injecting a little humor into it and making it easier for all concerned. I was very happy with the cast's progress thus far.

Week Two

Week two was very much the same as week one. We continued to block the rest of the

play right up to the end. Some of the problems we faced were specific to scenes in the play we knew would be a challenge. The "infamous date scene" as we liked to call it reared its ugly head for the first time and we worked very hard to put it together. This is the emotional confrontation between Candy and Jerri, in which Jerri expresses her love for Candy with both David and Robert present. As the week progressed we ended up putting the scene together well enough physically, but emotionally it never worked. This was frustrating for all of us and I spent a great deal of time encouraging everyone to keep working and it would come. The cast was very hard on themselves but I reminded them that we were still on book and that we had time to address these problem areas. Andrew was a very calming presence during this period.

On the good side the scenes between Chris and Andrew really came together well during this week. Of special interest were the rooftop scenes which the two actors were really able to explore completely. These two were really the anchor of the cast and were always there with a laugh and positive comment to get everyone going. Tim also had a great week and really developed some nice stuff with his character. He really listens well and when asked to do something, he delivers every time.

As scheduled we completed blocking the play by Thursday and spent Friday reviewing our week's work. Saturday I used to have one on one conversations with each actor about their character. I had asked everyone to come up with an image for their character, either a picture or drawing; anything visual was acceptable. Our conversations started with these images and I talked to all of them about their work thus far and what we needed to see from them next. This was also a good time for me to check in with everybody about my process and ask if they needed anything from me. All of them were very constructive and positive and for the most part just had some questions about their characters and areas for which they needed clarification.

Overall this two week time period we spent working and blocking the play was a very useful ensemble builder. I had most definitely achieved my biggest objective thus far. We had a family now and we were equally obsessed with this play. I was developing a very close bond to my cast and it was during this second week that I realized the problems this might cause. My close relationship to the cast was making it increasingly harder to be the leader I needed to be. In retrospect I have come to the conclusion that I was never as hard on them as I probably needed to be at times. What this did was make it hard for me to make unpopular decisions and therefore weakened me as a director.

Week Three

This was our last week before October break and my objectives here were to get the cast habituated to the flow of the show so that we were all clear about the order of each scene and how they all melded together to make the show complete. We dissected certain scenes that are broken up with other scenes like the Candy/Robert and Bernie/David lovemaking and rooftop scenes which are spliced together (p.106-110). By playing the scenes through individually we were able to focus on the journeys more clearly. When we then put them back together they were much more focused and coherent both from my standpoint and the actors. We also dissected all the choral

sections and tried to decide how they worked within the context of the script. I asked the actors to write down all their choral lines and look at the story they told. Connecting this choral dialogue would prove one of our biggest challenges and I spent a lot of time asking the actors questions about how these fit into the play's story line and their individual character development.

This was a short week due to break so we ran Act one twice the first night (about 74 minutes). Some of the choral stuff was really off so after break I asked the actors some specific questions about each of the choral lines I had noted were unmotivated. This seemed to indicate that they were not doing their homework, so at the end of rehearsal I asked them all again to look at these lines. The second night was used to run Act two twice and this went quite well. The actors seemed rejuvenated and the runs went very well (45 minutes).

Of particular interest was Victoria Herrick's development in these few days. She really showed me some new ideas we had worked on and diligently incorporated them into her performance. The childlike aspects of the character have really come forward and were working well. The introduction of a rag doll supplied (and built) by Jim helped her a lot and really worked for me visually. Her monologic moments at this point were the weakest but I felt sure these would develop nicely.

Our last two days of rehearsal were used to run the show in its entirety. We were able to invite thesis committee member Jane Snider to view our progress and her input led us to several important ideas. Jane's feedback was especially useful in two areas. From Jane's perspective the relationship between Candy and Jerri was not well developed enough and their fight scene was too shrill and unmotivated. She also felt that the character of Bernie was too obviously the killer according to our interpretation. This feedback led us to some changes in the development of these characters as well as others and was truly helpful to the final product.

Week Four

We went about getting ourselves off book this week (a short week) and by the time the week was over I felt this had been well accomplished , and that we were ready to proceed with the more technical and specific aspects of completing the process.

We began on Wednesday by running Act one twice and repeating that process Thursday. This methodology provided me with the first opportunity to give really specific character notes to the actors who were now delivering the text with much more confidence. Chris Ashmore was developing the charming side of his character nicely after receiving the feedback Jane had given us in the previous week. I was also able to help David Currier create a more angry side to his character, helping to diffuse the doubt away from Chris's Bernie. The scenes between Andrew and Chris were also starting to work very well and Victoria was coming along nicely with her monologues. Our only real area of concern in this act was still the "date scene" and I made a note for myself that I needed to address this soon. I was getting frustrated and running out of ideas.

Act two was given the same two day treatment and although it is a much shorter act, the amount of action involved and character work it needed necessitated these two days. We struggled with finding just the right place for Bernie to become the killer outwardly, being specific about David's realizations and growth and bringing all the characters to a logical end. It was also here that I realized a mistake I was making in directing this group. Often when they had been dragging their feet I urged them to pick up the pace and was getting frustrated when they would not respond to my request.

After the first run of act two during the final rehearsal of the week I asked if there was a problem and got a bunch of blank stares. Frustrated, I called for a break. During this break several of the actors came to me and expressed confusion about motivation in some of the scenes. After dealing with these it dawned on me that I had been asking for pace when I should have been asking them what they were doing and what their motivations were. I apologized to the group for my error and we discussed at length the areas I felt were troublesome. The result demonstrated in the final run opened my mind to this mistake and we never addressed pace the same way again.

Week Five

This was a long hard week. Most of the set was erected during this week and we spent a great deal of time adapting to the spaces in each scene, which we realized were a lot smaller than we had all anticipated. This is mostly my fault for not pressing James for a specific floor plan prior to rehearsals. Our schedule was so tight that he did not really have enough time to provide accurate information in this area. While rehearsals were going on we were still refining most of the set design, so this made the transition to the actual set difficult and frustrating.

I had an incredibly tough time keeping the group on task and focused during this week. Having the opportunity to do it again I would certainly make some changes to my approach. To begin with, I was too close to the group to be as effective a leader as I would have liked to be. Although we had a good ensemble I felt we lacked discipline sometimes due to my timidity about being the tough guy. I should also have been more demanding of James in relation to his design. Because he was so busy and because he was endeavoring to build a large set with slim resources I gave him a lot of leeway. This allowed him to develop an excellent product. I was however kept largely ignorant of the final design until I saw it.

At the end of this week I sat down with the actors and addressed several concerns I had about their behavior in rehearsal. This was very hard to do and I know I ruffled some feathers but these things needed to be said. Almost everything I discussed had to do with starting on time, warming up, projecting vocally and focusing on the work. Although the cast was surprised at the urgency in my voice they all admitted to the necessity for all the things I was asking them to do. I finished the discussion by telling them all that we were at the door of transition with this play and all of our energy was needed to cross the threshold successfully. It was at this point that I also gave them some specific character notes to consider during the next week of rehearsal.

Andrew was coming along nicely but he needed to be more overtly gay than he was

being in certain scenes. Andrew admitted to being a little hesitant in this area and I urged him to make a larger choice here. Also I was concerned with his energy level in act two. He seemed to be running out of steam for the end of the play and I asked him to work on pacing himself properly so not to fizzle out during the crucial last moments of the play.

Chris was also coming along well, What I felt we needed to work on most with him was the charming aspects of the character at the beginning of the play. I also felt that Chris was making safe choices with the ending and urged him to go further with this. I believed that Bernie really had to be in a killing frenzy at the end, typical of the serial murderer. This was a scary place for Chris to visit and he was concerned that the audience would really dislike the character. I addressed this concern by telling him that if we played the ending moment with David correctly he would read as a troubled character the audience might feel sorry for.

Kelly was getting lost amongst the other characters and had to concentrate on playing her intentions more clearly. The scenes she was playing with Wanda required a softer touch. Candy could not be just a sex object. Also the journey of the character was not delineated clearly enough so we needed to work on developing a stronger throughline.

Wanda by far was my greatest challenge. I could not get her to open up emotionally. As a consequence she was not going after her objectives as well as she should. I shared these concerns with her as kindly as I could and her reaction was that she knew it but wasn't sure she could overcome it. I was very unsure about how to deal with her and get what was needed out of her. I was sure however that pushing her too hard was not the answer.

Victoria's character is omnipresent and all knowing in some strange way. I told her that in her performance at this point what was missing was presence. Benita is the vessel from which the moral of the play emerges. Her monologues need to be clear and she needs to have a reason to tell us each of them.

David was also playing everything a little safely and had to make bigger choices. The nature of his character was hard to read thus far and I urged him to try and figure out his purpose for being in the play. The scenes with Candy were very mechanical and he needed to relax more and appear to be the player the script seemed to indicate. David was also very hesitant with the violence and I asked him, Kelly and Wanda to invest more in these areas and trust each other.

Tim was developing a nice character. What I urged him to work on was the boyishness of Kane at the beginning and the growth he goes through. I also asked him to figure out whether or not Kane was gay. What does Kane decide about himself at the end? What are his self-realizations?

We were now nine rehearsals away from opening. Sandra was coming on Monday and I felt that if the actors could gather themselves together and focus we had a show.

Week Six

The week began with Sandra viewing the show for the first time and offering feedback. For the most part I felt good about what she had to say and also agreed with her that we were in a good place for how much time we had remaining. Most of her notes related to the journey of the characters relative to them making stronger, more interesting choices with regard to the action of the play. She also mentioned the fact that energy at the end of the show seemed a problem and reminded everyone to keep the energy up. Her largest area of concern was with the choral lines which she felt were not connecting with the rest of the play and were not motivated strongly enough by the actors. She suggested everyone go back to these and identify the reasons they were being said.

We spent some time reblocking certain choral sequences which I hoped would help the actors motivationally. This seemed to help, aside from the Dana suicide sequence which we worked out separately. My biggest concern at this point was still the "date scene" and I was at my wit's end trying to figure it out. The actors were losing patience and Wanda was not responding to anything I asked of her. I resolved that I was too close to it to be objective so I asked Sandra to come see if she could help. Although this was a scary thing for me to do I felt confident in giving my cast over to Sandra and knew that a new perspective is what we needed. With Sandra's help the scene became much better but still never reached the emotional apex I felt it required. I'm still unsure about what I could have done about it. I am convinced however that I pushed Wanda as far as I could. On many nights she was so near the breaking point that I felt sure she would quit completely. To her credit she stayed with it.

Week Seven

This was the last week before we opened. It is during this week that we all realized the huge technical push the show was going to need. The set was still being completed, lights were only just getting hung and the myriad sound cues, including three answering machines, were also being finalized. Work went on in the Pavilion from morning until night during this crucial last week.

The first day of this long week was dedicated to costumes. We had a short photo call followed by a costume parade where I was able to view all the costumes in the show. Jim and I dealt with any problems as they arose and some changes did occur from his original design.

Our rehearsal this night also addressed the changes the actors would need to make and this in itself eliminated costumes that no time allowed. David's costumes were especially affected by this and were simplified dramatically. Focus was getting better here and we had a good run this night. We were also starting to use music and recorded phone messages which really gave the actors a boost motivationally. When Chris Ashmore heard the music we would use during Bernie's scenes his demeanor changed immediately and we were all scared to see the Bernie that evolved from it.

In the runs preceding tech weekend we worked hard on continuity and journey of character. The actors seemed to be finding new things every day and I had to be very diligent and attentive to these efforts so that they were getting my constant feedback on any new things they were trying. I encouraged them all to try new things while

cementing the areas that we were confident worked. Consistency was the byword of the week and with only a few exceptions this seemed to be working.

Dry tech took place on Friday and mostly involved Gary, Jeremy, Wayne, myself and the operators. It was here that Jeremy's inexperience first appeared most obvious to me. This process took about five hours and was painstaking and frustrating. My challenge here was to keep everyone upbeat and on task. We needed all the positive energy we could muster to get through the coming days. Saturday we did a cue to cue which took over six hours and tested everyone's patience. The equipment in the Pavilion is old and many times we had to wait while a glitch was being remedied. It took over ten tries for the operators to finally nail the sequence of cues at the beginning of the show.

I knew that their chance of success with the staccato lights throughout the show was minimal but I was weak willed and continued to let Jeremy convince me to let them continue. Only when Sandra Hardy came to see the show and urged me to change them was I able to make this happen. In retrospect I should have done this earlier. Had I done this perhaps some of the other lighting deficiencies could have been addressed. As it was, my lateness in making a decision made our efforts reactionary as opposed to creative. Once the changes were made to the lighting scheme the actors were also able to rediscover the rhythm of the show they had lost during the technical runs.

Our last rehearsal was a preview with approximately eighty Residence Life staff in attendance. The run went very well until the end; when Chris Ashmore spilled a bottle onto the floor of his space directly above the Candy/David apartment. Just as Andrew sat down on the couch for his emotional last scene the water from the bottle hit him squarely on top of the head. He made a brave effort to keep focus and although the audience laughed they appreciated the effort Andy made. The audience response after this show was exactly what the actors needed before the opening. We all knew we had a show, and that people really were going to laugh and gasp.

Charter 7: Evaluation

Evaluating this production honestly is hard to do for me. I have become so close to the people involved, and the popularity this show experienced had in many ways clouded my judgement. From the first performance to the last we turned away as many as seventy people, and on every night the audience felt compelled to give the actors standing ovations. Whether this popularity can be attributed solely to the performances, or perhaps the subject matter and content of the play is not clear to me. What is clear is that *Human Remains* has left a mark on the people who saw it and on the people who worked so hard to realize it. For this I am proud to have been a part of it. This little bit of personal backslapping out of the way, I can proceed with a more critical view of the production.

As this thesis has forced me to be critical I have been able to realize areas of directing that I need to pay closer attention to in the future. I have learned that I need to spend more time with my analysis of the play, that my work with designers needs to be more individually and thematically focused. In addition I need to be more attentive to the

play's structure and how this impacts actors performances. All of these areas will feed into the director's major task, which is to create unified clarity of theme that an audience can understand. David Mamet might just call it telling the story as it was written¹².

It has become clear to me that although I spent a great deal of time studying this script I not only did not have proper structure I also did not address the issue of the plays structure and how it impacted the successful presentation of the play. Additionally I did not look at the characters individually enough to make the right choices for them every time. A case in point would be my interpretation for Benita. As the interlocutor I may have involved her in the action of the play too heavily to make this omniscience read to the audience. I also made up my mind about her appearance much too quickly to give the character more dimensionality. Although I still believe that she should be young and mysterious I gave no thought to other possibilities that may have also given me greater flexibility in casting choice.

My treatment of the choral aspects of the script was also lacking and more emphasis here directorially would have made clarified theme for the audience. I told my cast to write these choral lines down by themselves to see the story they told and then didn't do it myself. Although some of the choral text worked, a lot of it was made redundant by lack of intent and motivation by the actors. Most all of these areas could have been remedied by a more organized and focused analysis of the play.

My work with the designers it seems was more about "what can we do" rather than "What will it mean if we do this". Not enough time, a small budget and my inexperience all contributed to a design that was weak on thematic impact if strong on visual affect. I did not use my time with the designers well enough to unify their thematic thinking. Although I felt that James Beer's set design was impressive and for the most part thematically accurate I was unable to bring Jeremy Leclerc aboard until it was too late. Elizabeth Moulton provided us with an impressive soundscape that worked well with mood and emotion, but how successfully it imparted theme is questionable and I am still unsure about this.

An area I wish I had to do over would have been my approach to the performance period. My attitude after rehearsals were done was that the show should then be turned over to the cast. I still believe their should be a time of separation for the director, but in this short run and with student actors, perhaps treating performance like a preview is a better way to go. The best show for me was the opening night; after that little inconsistencies showed up and I should have addressed them.

My successes with this show are all in the area of human relations. What I will remember most is the ensemble and I hope to apply this success to my future work. Without ensemble you have no true success and no real feeling on stage. This ensemble was able to achieve its surprising success because of their trust in each other. The actors involved all have grown better because of this experience. In most cases I would suggest that confidence has been the major area they have grown, providing them with the ability to learn faster. The acting for what it may have lacked was genuine and the emotional availability demonstrated by everyone was evident every night. Personally I feel very gratified by this project because of its success. Many

people were doubtful and leery of this project. Several people did not audition simply because of these doubts. Perhaps the logistical and pragmatic challenges this play presented us with motivated all of us to try that much harder. David Mamet I think says it best:

"Your attempts to answer the question, "what must I do?" may lead you to embrace and study both philosophy and technique; to learn to meditate and to learn to act and direct, so that your personality and your work become one, and you fulfil your true purpose, as a member of the theatre. And that purpose is this and has always been this: To represent culture's need to address the question, How can I live in a world in which I am doomed to die?"¹³

In the end this is all history but certainly if I were to choose one word to describe this experience it would have to be, vindicated. Happily and without reproach.

Endnotes

¹ In his book, [A Sense of Direction](#) William Ball discusses the need for a director's to find passion for any play they direct. Finding the general beauty, he says, is imperative to a successful show. If one cannot find something to be excited about in a script they shouldn't direct it, states Ball.

² Ball goes on to elaborate on establishing a measure of success so that a cast can be working towards something definable that is not associated with reviews or audiences. Finding success in a group environment is sometimes the key to critical approval.

³ Developing a trusting and supportive group environment is the key to eliminating the fears which stand in the way of truly great theatrical expression. Creating this fearless creative environment is the director's job says William Ball.

⁴ John Coulborn in a [Toronto Sun](#) article explained the phenomenal attraction Fraser's plays have for a new theatre audience that was suddenly developing. His article went on to chastise mainstream theatre and lord Fraser's work as "just what we need".

⁵ Sharon Pollock is a Canadian native playwright from Calgary Alberta. She is one of Canada's premiere playwrights in the area of historical drama. She is a resident playwright at the Banff Center and has won several Canadian theatrical awards such as the Dora (2) for playwrighting excellence.

⁶ Often considered too honest and too scathing in his comments, as well as his playwrighting, Fraser was called Canada's theatrical bad boy for the first time in a 1989 [Edmonton Journal](#) article by Liz Nicholls. The name has stuck.

⁷ According to the playwright's forward to the play it has been produced in over thirty countries and continues to attract international attention.

⁸ In his forward to the play, Playwright Brad Fraser discusses possible titles that the play may have had. The idea for the eventual title came from a police poster describing two

nameless cadavers that had been found.

⁹ Notes from Elia Kazan's direction of A Streetcar Named Desire by Tennessee Williams Found in the book Directors on Directing (pp. 364-379) defines (perhaps for the first time) the Spine of a character. According to Kazan this is a Characters definitive flaw or characteristic that motivates all of the characters actions through the play.

¹⁰ Playwright Fraser has always been open to his violent childhood upbringing which eventually landed him in an orphanage for some time. This information is found in a biography about the author in the play, Unidentified Human Remains and the True Nature of Love.

¹¹ The new play was recently announced in the Toronto Sun and will appear at the Taragon theatre the summer of 1998

¹² David Mamet in his book, Directing Film talks at length about a directors job being simply to tell the story in uninflected images and let the audience fill in the rest.

¹³ Quote from Mamet's book, Writing In Restaurants (p.117).

¹⁴ Anne Bogart refers to this obsession in her conversations with Jon Jory. From his book, Anne Bogart, Viewpoints.

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Appendix A

Cast List

Appendix B

Press Release

Appendix C

Audition Announcement and Rehearsal Schedule

Appendix D

Program, Flyer and Poster

Appendix E

Reviews

Biography

Claude Andre Giroux was born in Paris France, He is a Canadian citizen and graduated from Pitt Meadows High School in British Columbia Canada, in 1983. Claude received his Bachelors degree in Theatre arts from the University of Victoria in 1996. Claude has been the Artistic Director of Theatre North in Yellowknife for the past three summer seasons and will be doing an internship at the Seattle repertory Theatre in August of 1998. He is a candidate for the Master of Arts degree in Theatre from the University of Maine in May, 1998.