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Auc Buile

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AUC BUILE

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my wife, Samantha Roberts, for her strength and remarkable insight.

ABSTRACT

The contents of this work include a script of the play *Auc Buile*, a description of the writing process, an analysis of the piece both as written text and as a performance, and a projection of what might be the next stages in its development. The play itself is a representation of the struggle to create. It allowed me the opportunity to put into practice much of what I learned during my time in the Masters of Fine Arts program.

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SCRIPT

Auc Buile
MFA Thesis Solo Show

Location: It is a room separated from the concourse of life.

Incidental sounds. The sounds of a paintbrush against canvas. Light bells. Plucked guitar.

It is dark. As if in the darkness of a sleeping house.

Slightly blue.

Moments pass.

A person enters stage right with a lamp as tall as they are.

They set it down.

They turn it on.

They are dressed in pajamas.

They look stage left into the dark.

Moments pass.

They exit stage right.

Moments pass.

They enter, walk to the lamp and turn it off.

They exit stage right.

Moments pass.

They enter stage right and turn on the lamp.

They exit stage right.

They enter stage right with a can and a paintbrush.

They walk to the center of the stage.

They pass from the light of the lamp into the blue light.

They set down the can and place the brush on top as if at the edge of a river.

They look into the darkness.

They exit stage right.

They enter with three letters and place them next to the lamp.

Taking one they open it. They look off stage right.

They come back to the lamp and read as if in the darkness of Christmas morning.

They

The words in parentheses are spoken or they are not spoken at the discretion of the actor.

(...as a lyrical dialectic, for the seizure and support of lands and subsequent lands hitherto owned and reported, in accordance, to all pertaining statutes, will all containing and henceforth pertaining supports of lands and subsequent lands be measured...)

June 7th

A letter to Mr. Peamonty

Your child has wandered again into my garden. There are reasons this may seem delightful of course, the word wandered is particularly unassuming; but of course, Mr. Peamonty, our immediate past entangles us in a way, such as it is, nominal phrases aside, that presses itself into both our gentler natures, some more than others, immediate or otherwise.

My Doris has recovered what verdure she could but much of her efforts remain impotent in the wake of what might easily have been avoided had your child taken heed of the countless impediments to his reckless employ.

Our seven foot high, stone wall is a prime example. I believe it was constructed during the war to prevent shrapnel and perhaps even tanks from entering the grounds. A solid foot of cement and stone for every year your offspring has graced this proud countryside with his immutable dynamism and irrepressible male vocabulary.

And yet, like the birds above, your child rides upon the secret magic of the wind and denies our cobbled monument its duty. And duty, a word terrifying in aspect, spears through my instruments like a poison and claims itself the object of my entreaty. Duty, every child's desire, and, speaking from experience, every father's private joy, will find each of us a very few times, but when this spectre rouses us, as my father was fond of saying, it rouses us with greed.

I hope you are not misled by the temperament or tone of my words. I do intend to protect my vegetables. Whether it be from the Krauts or from your slippery eel. I intend, as with all private citizens, to extend myself no further than is expected and to retreat no further than is required.

Your Neighbor,
Mr. Hanby

They place the letter back into the envelope and set it aside.

They face the darkness as if at the edge of a boat.

They walk center to the paint can. They pick up the brush and inspect it.

They dip the brush into the can.

They walk left of the can and pause as if to start painting. They back up.

They cross to the right of the can, step forward and pause as if to paint.

They inspect the brush.

*They move again to the left of the paint can and inspect the empty beginning.
They place the brush again on the can.
They return to the lamp and the envelopes. They open a second envelope.
They read as if they have already read it.*

They

June 11th

A Letter to Mr. Peamonty

Mr. Peamonty

Although I am forced to consider your last letter as an apology, I am not inclined to believe it was entirely sincere. Using a few tactical verbal maneuvers you have implied, quite preposterously, that the war is over. I grant you the cessation of troop movements and that a few lengthy gentlemen have signed the same piece of paper, yet I can't help noticing that the war's debris still freckles our streets. I know when something has truly ended Mr. Peamonty, and I know when people have begun telling themselves it has. This is the harvest time. From out of the toilings of our war we must begin to reap what is ours and leave what is not. Your tiny son may be asked to place his hands upon the plow one day. I do not know. What his purpose may be I do not know.

He moves in and out so quickly.

Our carrots being his most recent victims. We have our own theories, of course, the present one being a question of simple hunger. But as you can afford a certain width on your tires and as Doris has just pointed out the newest Confew Draperies, we have concluded the reason may not be so obvious.

A series of reasons, chemical rather than digestive perhaps.

Psychological, sociological, anatomical.

It is of almost no consequence to us of course. Our concern is not only for our work, our hope is that privacy should be measured, as our words and actions have been measured, along with our patience.

Your Neighbor,

Mr. Hanby

They replace the letter.

They walk again to the center and pick up the brush.

They back up and look forward. They inspect the brush and look forward again.

They walk slowly to the can and dip the brush in. They dip again.

As they dip the third time a light shines from inside the can up into their eyes.

Nothing has changed.

They back up and once again inspect the brush and look forward.

The light blinks out.

They walk forward and the light blinks on.

They look into the darkness, place the brush beside the can and walk back to the lamp.

They open a third envelope and read as if nothing has changed.

They light in the can blinks off.

They

June 17th

A Letter to Mr. Peamonty

I would like to discuss, Mr. Peamonty, the usage of the word ‘boundary,’ if I may. I hope to try, as unlikely as it seems, to rescue this term which has been torn from our tongues and flayed open. It is served, in specific instances, as a kind of delicacy, no doubt in the finest establishments, with other words, garnished well, like “fear” and “hypocrisy”, and although it has been ushered into the loftiest of places, the overtly superstitious and canonical halls of “good taste”, I would hope that soon it might be rescued and find its root back in the fallowed ground of the kind who speak the word without luxury. It will be the differences that prove the similarity, Mr. Peamonty, not, as you’ve suggested, “the forgetting of old ways.”

My garden is undoubtedly one of many, and it only spares a few edible moments, but it remains the muscle and sinew of my estate; and even if we were to “move”, as you say, “beyond our convention”, and open our intellectual life to the degree of dismissing “the angry noxious fumes of patriotism that begin with our own plots of land” we would return undoubtedly to this place soon enough.

Your boy, like the devil thrown from heaven, remains himself a child, however our poets may deny it, and I fear since the war of civility is over, as you say, we will once again be consumed in the war of negation. Where once we aspired to the heights, where once we let the structure of our bones, the limitation of our reality incite us to beg compassion and to see clearly when compassion was given and when it was denied, we shall muse upon the novel virtue of unending openness.

I imagine this law of supreme negation, the rule of the kind will only leave our melodies unfinished. And what is wrong, you might ask, at the end of a tedious day with memorized affectations and self-distracted leisure, what is wrong with an unfinished melody, what is wrong with a stolen carrot, a trampled flower, what is wrong with your children destroying the small joys of an ailing wife and her dutiful husband.

What is wrong...?

Nothing is wrong.

Nothing is quite emphatically wrong.

Your neighbor,

Mr. Hanby

They replace the envelope and return to the center.

The light blinks on.

They pick up the brush and stare into the light.

They stare past the lamp from where they came as if someone is calling.

They stare at the light in the can.

They place the brush again beside the can.

They walk to the lamp and turn it off.

They exit stage right.

DESCRIPTION

I started writing this play as an investigation into some of the themes I have encountered in the works of Samuel Beckett. After a few initial iterations I focused upon the idea of subtraction and this became a kind of method and mantra for me as I stumbled onto the slippery slope of writing. I would allow myself the freedom to create with little or no restrictions and then go about subtracting from it.

My process was not a kind of deconstruction, there was no analytic response to my work which guided my subtracting hand; I simply subtracted what could be subtracted. This led to a long series of completely dismantled plays, some of which I might have preferred, but not all of them are worth dissection.

I think it important to discuss two of these iterations because beyond this method of subtraction, one theme guided my pen more than any other, in fact, this theme became the entirety of the content of the final script. This theme was of creation. It was the leap from nothing to something, the chasm between the blank canvas and the first stroke of the brush, the space between the blinking cursor and the first word. I wanted to take that moment and flay it open.

My first script was of an older man. An image of someone alone. There were three stations and three rounds through each station. There was rest, represented by a bed; there was distraction, represented by a record player and a bottle of whiskey; and there was work, represented by a desk and a typewriter. Traveling through each of these

stations three times and once backwards the character wrestled physically with the act of creation.

As I began to subtract I realized that the struggle was really between only two of the stations: distraction and work. And so the bed disappeared. Then came the words. The physical separation on stage was enough to tell the story, so the words disappeared. I wrote a choreographed piece with the typewriter which would hang from the ceiling. This would represent the reality of our characters attempt at forced inspiration.

Finally I decided the struggle with the typewriter was enough and the station of distraction could also disappear. I was left with a hanging typewriter. This was how my first script ended. A dance with a hanging typewriter.

My second free writing experiment gave me a box. A closed box holds an inherent mystery and this mystery harmonized with my theme of creation. And so I wrote a short script of a figure fumbling with a box. The box became bigger and then smaller. It had a made up word written on one side of it. This script was rather simple to subtract, but it gave me a better way of seeing what my intentions for the final product really were. I was not primarily interested in the mysterious nature of creation, that is the unknown, but rather that space between the moments of creation; the leap itself, not the landing.

This distinction became important to me as I wrote my final draft. I was concerned with something concrete and not merely the potential of something concrete. In the moment of inspiration or creation something quite definable happens, something

ordinary. This moment would be the subject matter, not the act of creation. The hand clutching the pencil and not the writing.

My third and final script still underwent a series of subtractions. At first I retained the hanging object. I decided on a canvas. The canvas was my primary focus at the outset. I again choreographed a physical representation of the struggle of creation. Then I subtracted much of that.

Finally I realized that the canvas was the anchor that kept my play held fast to the idea of potentiality. If the blank object was present my theme would be obscured. I wanted the play to be about the moment of inspiration and nothing else. I did not want to write a play about possibilities, although possibilities would undoubtedly be read into the piece by the onlooker, my intention was still important.

The canvas disappeared, and I was left with nothing. As I wrote ideas I had about the boundaries and limitations of artistic creation, I happened upon an idea. I felt like a petulant child as I was writing my scripts. I wanted to become completely open in front of an audience in a moment of creation. I wanted to experience nothing else but the purity of the space of making and open it wider and wider and yet I wanted to hide, with metaphor and choreography.

And so I wrote three letters from my ideal self, to my growing up self, all about my younger self. It was after a war and a child was stealing vegetables from a neighbor's garden. The boundaries that were so important were overlooked and broken.

And so these letters, from the one who has been violated to the one in authority against the one who trespasses, became the spoken text of the script. I had not intended

to add spoken text back in to the play, but there it was. From these three letters I built the spaces in between.

First the space of preparation, second the space of patience, and finally the space of payment. There are three lights on stage, the lamp represents preparation, the blue represents patience, and the final bright light from the can is that of particularity and payment. These three concepts represented to me distinct sections in the moments before inspiration and creation, both as content and method.

As I constructed the rhythms of the first section I made two choices. I wanted to unfold a moment of preparation, and I wanted to give time for the actor to hear the resonance of the moment. This space in time for the performer was given throughout, but in the first section especially. This is seen most clearly when the actor looks for the first time into the darkness of stage left.

After our initial moments we are brought to the first spoken text. I decided to make the first short section optional for the actor. It is a sentence fragment which has been pulled from a larger section and it begins, “as a lyrical dialectic...” which is a reference to the subtitle of Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling*. The entire play and the spoken text in particular are a kind of conversation with Kierkegaard’s work. The act of creation is an act of faith in the sense that there is no clear path forward. There is a chasm between a person’s intention to create and creating, and an artist leaps from the edge without knowing if they will land. My hope was for us to stay in the leap for a time.

In the second letter we move to the section on patience in which we ruminate over the aftermath of that which has come before. If our painter has taken a leap of faith by

picking up the brush, then all his wars of the past will undoubtedly fill up his moment of patience whether he wants them to or not.

I struggled writing the moments in between the letters. They were written before the letters, but they weren't in sections. Finding the moments that filled the space was a process. It was important for me to have the light in the can come on before the final letter. This was another subtraction. I had written a few climactic moments which expressed a more solid narrative, but in the end I let them all go and kept only a light. A light comes on from inside the paint can and nothing changes. Even if the light is seen as a moment of inspiration it still does not culminate in action; we still hover in the leap.

The final spoken words in the script are my attempt to say something beyond the scope of the play. To take one step past the experiment of the moment. "Nothing is quite emphatically wrong," is a reference to both the lack of boundaries the writer of the letter is clearly referring to and the inaction of the painter center stage.

ANALYSIS

There are three aspects of this play which I think worthy of further thought. First, this missing-ness, which comes from the darkness, does not find a completion or definitive expression, something the theatre arts may be demanding. Second, because of the darkness, we search as readers or watchers for the resonance beyond the display and we are left without it. Last, the text and performance were attempts to explore the nature of important elements in the theatrical experience: the artist's confrontation and engagement with the watcher and the hearer, the displacement of imagination, and performance as a question instead of an answer, a secret instead of a revelation, listening instead of saying.

The dark demands something of us. In the darkness we might learn to see, or at least listen, but the darkness here is not the darkness of the deep but of the missing. In this play the darkness could stand as strong as any character might, and yet it is not made clear and the darkness is lost. It becomes the atmosphere and not the antagonist. This is primarily due to the nature of the method with which I constructed the piece. As I have stated, subtraction was my method, and so the darkness appeared out of a missing piece, a missing light, rather than out of the creation of something. This gave the darkness mystery and nothing more. The play gives us a vapid darkness, an empty darkness, when it might have been full. Analyzing both the script and the performance leads to the realization that something beyond the darkness is implicitly promised and not delivered. If the piece were to continue to grow, deciding how to subtract the promise would be a

necessary step. If the promise made by the appearance of the darkness could be subtracted, then perhaps we would find the resonance before the interpretation.

There are moments when the darkness does change. The most distinct moment is when the actor who is center stage retreats behind the darkness when the light from the can has entered the scene. The light appears, and the actor, rather awkwardly retreats. But this is not clear for two reasons: the character of the darkness has not been expressed or defined properly, and the light of the can pulls at our attention so that any possible recognition of the darkness as a prominent player in the piece disappears.

Beyond this exploration of darkness, one of my intentions was to explore the world of resonance in a theatrical setting and to offer some experience of expression without meaning. What a drum says to us is only what we have for it to say. We fill the drum ourselves as it is struck. Built inside the structure of this play are moments of mere resonance. The intention was to allow for this experience, if not for the audience, then at least for the actor. The play itself pauses and the echo of something struck hangs in the air.

On the surface our character is caught by indecision. Because of the obvious appearance of intention on the part of the character, just like the darkness, the resonance is lost. It is not clearly expressed and the actor and the audience may only just miss it. The idea of resonance without meaning played an important role in many decisions I made while performing the piece, but I struggled to find the right expression and the right timing.

Although the darkness was lost to the light and the resonance stunted by meaning, my attempt to build an apparatus of personal exploration was quite fruitful. Primarily, I

wished to receive direction in the moment from the audience. The play served me well in this for it gave me space to listen. I listened in a way that had always eluded me. I believed as I wrote the play and still believe that there is something different within the theatre, something that a recording cannot do, something we need. I wanted to have space to listen, and not just as an inconvenient byproduct of proximity, but on purpose. This exercise in listening also placed something painful in the performing. As an actor, I am striving always to find roots. To root myself inside the world of the play, the character, and the unfolding story. When I asked myself as an actor to listen, when I gave myself space to be influenced by the onlookers, however that happened, it was painful.

In any live performance the performer will undoubtedly have some connection to the audience, but my hope was to allow space for direct confrontation without aggression; to experience what that confrontation might be with no limitation of story. Again, I can see how the implied story, the text, the props, and the lights played a role in building more space for interpretation and came to buffet the attempts, but the starting of a space was created and that was my intention.

There was a second ongoing exploration for me. In my notes I referred to it as a displacement of imagination. Another implied promise of a theatrical performance is an activating of our imagination, but I constructed the play so that the imaginative moments, perhaps for the audience but certainly for the actor, would become dead ends. When the paintbrush did not paint, how did our imaginations respond? What part of us took over and displaced it? The letters took our imaginations elsewhere, they had a point of view and a clear environment. But then they were over and we were back with the painter.

This was an important aspect to me, but a difficult process to define. I had no goal in mind, nor did I have a clear course of action. It was merely a small investigation into what our imagination does with the information we are given. I wrote at great length about it during the process, but I see now how impossible it would be to measure the effects of any part of the play on the audience's imagination.

As I constructed the pieces of the play I focused on those moments which seemed to have natural connections to the imagination. These moments were, as the word implies, strong and deep with image. Keeping to my method of subtraction I aimed myself toward these moments and would either build in a space or a change of intention. The first of these moments is when the lamp is turned on initially. The actor turns and looks into the darkness. This is a striking image and the actor immediately turns off the lamp and leaves. My intent was to cut our imaginative experience short.

Another strong image was when the light in the paint can comes on. The actor retreats behind into the darkness and the image fades. We revisit the image, but with less strength after the initial moment. Our imagination connects to the light coming on and the shock of this dawning on the painter, but then it is cut short. This is normally a moment in the theatre of failure, a place where the narrative falters, but in this case the displacement was the plan.

Finally, my method of subtraction was aimed at what I was going to say with this play. Having a voice and a point of view, these are important aspects of a well-crafted play. What does it mean to say something with your art? What might it look like to aim at something different? If 'saying' something was one of the primary elements of an

artistic endeavor then as much as possible I wanted to achieve the opposite. I wanted the play to listen.

It is important to distinguish what I mean by listen. I had no desire for a responsive play or a play whose focus was for the actor to be responsive to the audience as with an improv performance. It was about opening the action of the play for space to hear. A connection to the audience could appear in this space, not the connection of speaking but of hearing. The giving would halt and the receiving would become possible.

How can a play listen? I do not know, and this experience has only been the first step in finding out. Perhaps I will travel down this road further and discover that the question doesn't make sense, but I enjoy the pursuit. During the few performances I allowed space for listening. I took the 'being said' out and was left with space to hear.

PROJECTION

This play was, for me, one of first steps. After performing in numerous pieces that shed light, I wished to play in the dark; after speaking often I wished to listen. I see now how the play does not reach very far in the direction it proposes to go, but I think this is because I attempted too many roads at once. Clarity was elusive because of my multitude of intentions.

As a performer I hope to revisit many of the themes and ideas I began to wrestle with in this piece, but more importantly as a creator of work. I hope that some of what I stepped toward I can continue to explore. My project and plan for this play is to break it down into its parts and rebuild upon each distinct idea rather than keeping them side by side.

I have decided on three pieces to build upon: resonance, patience, and displacement of imagination. Taking them as starting points I have outlined elsewhere my intention to turn this play into three identical plays each concerned with the three ideas I've stated. The three plays would then be performed together each with its own actor and director. My hope is the experiments would each be made clearer this way.

The experiment in resonance is one of particular interest to me. There are several options to consider. It could be purely about sound. The resonance experiment could be about the soundscape of the play and nothing more. This would certainly be an interesting project, but it isn't quite what I am referring to when I talk about resonance. I would hope the experiment would focus more on the difference between the meanings

and interpretations, or at least those that are consciously thought and experienced, of a particular moment in the play and what is resonating there. Again we run into difficulty because of the word resonance. Often it is used in these cases to define the opposite of what I'm referring. We say, "That resonated with me," by which we mean that it meant something. The meaning of this or that moment struck us with some deep meaning. While 'struck' is the right word, 'meaning' is not.

Patience is another small aspect of the play which I hope to develop further. The idea of patience in this play most clearly identifies the moment before creation I wished to unpack. But because having patience is a kind of act, it proves difficult. It is not the virtue I wish to explore exactly but the place of the virtue. Where it resides, not its action.

Finally, as I pursue this into the future I hope to develop further the idea of displacing the imagination. As vital as imagination is to the theatrical experience I wish to explore its boundaries and inner vocabulary. I am not sure how it works, but I want to place it at the forefront of an exploration and discover where it might go. I am hoping the darkness will teach me to see.

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