

Reflection Statement

Whilst on a family trip to America in October 2015, I was captivated by the Guggenheim Museum and the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The buildings were just as fascinating as the art within them. The range of people walking through the galleries exposed me to the tension between the public and private. This tension was fertile ground for dramatic exploration, and I wanted to instill that tension in my work. The city also provided me with inspiration, overhearing conversations on the subway and in all other public spaces. It seemed to me that people were not afraid of their conversations being heard by anyone who knew them and had no problems with strangers knowing the intimate details of their lives as it was highly unlikely they would ever see them again. These exchanges made me think of how private these public spaces can be, and the freedom that large cities allow their inhabitants and visitors.

One particular painting took my interest, ‘Mme Kupka Among The Verticals’ by Frantisek Kupka, with its striking colour and enigmatic subject. The mystery and intrigue of this painting captured my imagination. This leading me to create a character around her; an older man, who visits the same painting every day and believes they share a special bond, possibly romantic. I wanted to explore how relationships between strangers were built in such a place, while considering the freedom of anonymity they were entitled to by the big city. I was also interested in the “*Look, don’t touch*” policy of museums and how this extends to interpersonal relationships. I wanted to explore the ways that physical boundaries, both implicit and explicit, dictate our relationship to both shared physical environments and interpersonal relationships.

When I began creating the story in my head, I saw it on a stage. This is essentially why I chose ‘Script for Theatre’. My background in live theatre also swayed me, as I hoped a familiarity with theatre script conventions and performance would help me create a piece of writing that belonged on stage. I helped develop an original play last year with a regional theatre group and have spent a lot of time doing

other community and school theatre performances. The audience I wanted to write for was broad, in an attempt to reflect the intention of my work and bring people of all backgrounds to share in a common experience in a public space.

As I began writing, I found it hard to create voices for characters separate to my own voice. When I attempted to write a monologue for the GUARD I found myself writing critically rather than in a character's personal voice. I struggled to give voice to a demographic I had little experience with. I could not write about a young, black, male security guard because I was not connected or exposed to that culture. Reading what I had written aloud, I realised that I did not feel comfortable giving such strongly colloquial language to the character. I rewrote the character with suggestions to race rather than explicit references.

Each character I created started off as a role; HIM, SKETCHER, WATCHER and GUARD. I then wrote scenes between the characters to see how they would develop before properly deciding their age, gender and background with the exception of HIM. I decided to keep these initial labels as they represented the anonymity of the city that I wanted to include from the very beginning. None of the characters mention their own names or ask for each other's which unveils how temporary these connections are, discreet moments with a billion others like it all over the city. Omitting the names illustrates that neither party intends to meet with the other again; returning to the idea of the freedom of anonymity.

Originally, I wanted to have the play set across the space of about four or five days with HIM being a constant while other characters came and went, having moments with HIM or each other around HIM. In this case, HE would be the complete focus as in Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story*, where Jerry holds the focus the whole time and Peter is rendered peripheral. I found that showing HIM there day after day was too obvious. Instead, I decided to suggest it. The exchange in which HE dismisses the

GUARD lets the audience know that “*this is not the first time he has faced rejection at the hands of HIM*”.

The stage directions in my play were heavily inspired by those of Tennessee Williams. Williams’ stage directions are very specific and evoke a vivid, emotional sense of space and characters for the reader. The opening stage directions of *The Glass Menagerie* address what will be on stage (an apartment building), as well as the cultural connotations of the set. Williams also includes incredibly detailed descriptions of the set and creates ‘Tom’ as a character with the agency to take, “*whatever licence with dramatic convention is convenient*” to retell this memory play. I have written the stage directions to create a richer and more stimulating sense of place and character.

Neil Labute’s play, *The Shape of Things*, begins with a duologue between a male guard and a female patron in a museum. At this stage, I was unsure of characters and storyline so it was helpful to read how a conversation between two strangers could play out in a public space. Their relationship becomes increasingly romantic as the play progresses, so seeing the initial chemistry and banter they shared helped me write the first stages of GUARD and SKETCHER’s relationship. Labute utilises interruptions, overlapping and lost trains of thought expressed through punctuation. This shows a quite fast paced rhythm of conversation which suggests a natural chemistry between the two characters. I have tried to emulate this in the ‘GUARD/SKETCHER’ scene:

WATCHER: /There was a human clearance of about 6 feet around me until you /came along.

GUARD: /I can see/ that.

WATCHER: /I’m not disturbing anyone.

In the exchange between SKETCHER and HIM, the inclusion of the poem follows Petrarchan sonnet structure and compares HIS love for HER to that of a Petrarchan lover; pining for something that can never be reached, an unrequited love, idealising an image of perfection, and worshipping the object

of his affection. I had prior knowledge of Petrarchan techniques and tropes due to my studies of his work in the 2014 English Extension 1 course.

Studying ‘Language and Gender’ in Extension English 1, spurred me to include explicit and implicit explorations and representations of gender. The most obvious inclusion of gender discussion is the conversation between SKETCHER and HIM about the gender of certain paintings. I wanted to highlight how natural it is for people to define things as gendered despite the pointlessness of this activity. HER not having a voice until the very end of the play is a statement on the silencing of women and the problems of women being put on a pedestal, admired for their perfection. This explains how the rendering of women as objects of desire removes their agency, regardless of how adoring that rendering may be. The denial of flaws is the denial of humanity. SKETCHER’s final monologue is a stream of consciousness as she attempts to understand who Madame Kupka really is. I included a quote by Barbara Kruger, a feminist artist most popular in the 1980s, to link this dialogue back to Laura Mulvey’s theory of the male gaze, as explored in my studies of ‘Language and Gender’. The painting itself is from a male’s perspective. We see the painting as an object of desire not only through Kupka’s eyes, but reiterated through HIS as well.

I had the opportunity to workshop my scenes with younger drama students from my school in order to see what I had written would look like when performed. I received feedback on how to adapt lines that proved awkward or ill-expressed, how to make directions more specific to what I wanted to see and what intentions each character needed to have in each scene. I began writing more specific stage directions and performance directions to ensure that what I saw in my head would be translated onto the stage. I originally had the GUARD doing one impersonation of a ‘secret photo taker’, but after seeing how many options of movement the students in the workshop provided I created multiple “character types” for the GUARD to impersonate.

As this play stemmed from personal experience, there is a lot of myself in the script. The time my brother caught a pigeon in Rockefeller Square and I got in trouble from a security guard for sitting on the floor of MoMA. My perspectives and opinions on art and life are littered throughout. What I created is highly personalised and has been a labour of love, testing my limits of creativity and challenging my commitment to write and complete a script for the theatre.