

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Worlds Collide: *Hello...Hello* from Page to Stage

by

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A THESIS

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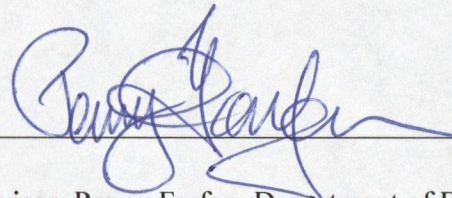
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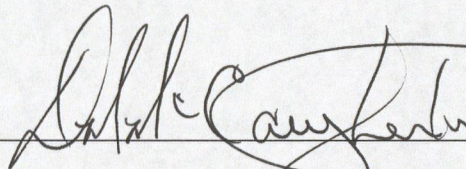
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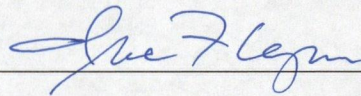
The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Worlds Collide: *Hello...Hello* from Page to Stage" submitted by Jamie Dunsdon in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts.



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ABSTRACT

Karen Hines calls her musical play *Hello...Hello* an allegorical romance with songs, a satirical examination of escapist culture, and even an ode to a tree frog. The show was produced at the University of Calgary from November 25 – December 6, 2008 in the Reeve Theatre, in what was the Western Canadian premiere and the first production of the show not starring Hines herself. As director of the University of Calgary production, I explore in this artist's statement – submitted in partial completion of my MFA in Directing – the text of *Hello...Hello* as fable and parody as well as the directorial process for the 2008 production.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The November 2008 production of *Hello...Hello* was the product of the endless dedication of more people than can be named. I would like to thank the cast – Tim Hamilton, Teddy Ivanova, Jared Knapp, and Jenny Kost – for bringing their beautiful voices and minds to this project. The production would not have sparkled without the vision and enthusiasm of Costume and Set Designer Julia Wasilewski, whose commitment to the project began before anyone else, and whose friendship and creativity will always be valued. Choreographer Glenda Stirling and Assistant Choreographer Jessica Nottell helped us find our feet, and Musical Director Tom Doyle gave us voices we didn't know we had. Lighting Designer Derek Paulich made it all shine, and I am forever thankful to the entire team of Stage Management – Marcia Liber (SM), Kira Sams (ASM), and Devon McCallion (ASM/Dance Captain) – for throwing their hearts on stage with us. I would be remiss not to show my appreciation for my dear friends Chris Scout and Jessica Robertshaw for renting out their shoulders to me.

Special thanks to my Advisor, Penny Farfan, whose support before, during, and after rehearsal helped this show, this document, and this director be the best they could be. Professors Brian Smith, Douglas McCullough, Barry Yzereef, Clem Martini, and Jim Dugan will forever have my gratitude for two years of putting up with my nonsense, and Dawn McCaugherty is owed my heartfelt thanks for helping me find the director I am and for never letting up on me.

Finally, I would like to thank Karen Hines for absolutely everything. In 2004, I was a young artist, confused as to whether there was a place for me in theatre. After seeing Karen perform one of her Pochsy plays, my world changed and I found my artistic

voice. Now, years later, I am so thankful to Karen not just for that performance, which has been such a strong influence on my artistic career to date, but for giving me such a beautiful play for my MFA Thesis. The countless meetings and conversations, late-night note sessions, artistic and moral support, and kind words will never be forgotten. The respect she showed me has been inspiring, and I am forever grateful to have had the opportunity to work with one of my heroes.

For Mom and Dad

Without whom I would be someone else entirely.

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INTRODUCTION

“Bend back its spine”

Flip open the yellow cover of my copy of *Hello...Hello* by Karen Hines and you will find not just the black typeface of the published document, but also pencil scratchings, notes, lines, squiggles, and a wealth of other words printed by my own hand. That is, except for the first page, where the actor playing the Female Chorus scrawled “Jenny Kost,” then crossed it out and replaced it with my name when she found her own copy. In fact, there are so many copies of the script with my name on the inside that it became necessary to start compiling all the little handwritten tidbits into one document, the product of which is this artist’s statement.

The Copyright on page 4 of the script is dated 2006, but flip a couple of pages to Hines’ introduction, and it is revealed that “*Hello...Hello* was written during the nineties” (8). Flip a few more pages, and you will discover that the play “was produced three times in Toronto between 1998 and 2003” (13) at The SPACE, the Factory Studio Theatre (presented by Pochsy Productions), and finally at the Tarragon Theatre in 2003. All three productions starred the playwright in the role of Cassandra and featured Steve Morel as the Male Chorus. What page 13 does not tell you, however, is that there are many more incarnations of the script than those three. In fact, a fifteen-minute play performed at the Tarragon Theatre in 1994 called *Telemarketing: The Musical* was the first incarnation, and though the characters are different, the piece does confront the suffocation of corporate life, using parody similar to that used in the Quicksilver offices

of *Hello...Hello*. An earlier version of “The Shiny Ball Song,” though without any reference to a shiny ball, is also a major musical number in the short play, composed by Greg Morrison and Karen Hines. The actor playing Troy in this short piece was also Steve Morel.

Flip to the back of the published script of *Hello...Hello* and you will find the Acknowledgements on page 172, where Hines discusses the next version of the script. She states, “From 1994 to 1996, Greg Morrison and I developed the piece as a full scale twelve-person musical called *La BOOM*,” which was abandoned in 1996 “with recognition that what I had been writing was a lavish production whose content would probably never warrant a lavish musical budget” (172). Still working with Greg Morrison, who was the musical director and composer at every stage of development, she set upon a creating a “radical revision of the text for an ensemble of four who would play a cast of thousands: *Hello...Hello*” (172). Under this title, Chris Earle has been the sole director for the project. That is, until me.

After discussing with Karen the history of the project, I learned that I would be the first director to tackle *Hello...Hello* without Morel, Morrison, Hines, or Earle on the production team, though Karen remained in close contact, visited rehearsals, gave notes, and attended the show. This would also be the first production to test out much of the material in Act Two, since the 2006 publication was significantly different from the 2003 production. Our rehearsals began in October, 2008. The show would open on November 25 and close on December 6, 2008 after a two-week run. There was much work to do.

The page-flipping began. Chapter One of this artist's statement discusses the textual analysis that went into staging the production, most of which happened months before rehearsal, but was greatly expanded with my team of actors, designers, musicians, and choreographers. It explores the play as a fable, a parody, an ode, but most of all, as a story about Cassandra, a girl who wants to die. Through examination of the tools of parody and fable, and with an in-depth analysis of plot and character, this chapter reveals the backbone of the play, the theme of "dualism" that later formed my director's matrix for the production: "Two worlds collide as a girl struggles to live." Chapter Two details how this matrix served the production. Examining the performance from the perspective of the audience, and analyzing which choices helped or hindered the storytelling, Chapter Two focuses on the choices I made and those made with other members of the creative team. Finally, Chapter Three is a reflection on the process and how it affected my understanding of directing. It is the chapter in which I flip through all of my notes once again, from page 1 through page 176, and consider what I have learned.

With all this page flipping, two copies of the published script lost their spines in the months before *Hello...Hello* was even cast. I destroyed the glue that held the pages together and literally deconstructed the published book, but in the process, I also deconstructed the dramatic and literary structures in Karen Hines' story, which provided an understanding of the narrative and metaphoric glue that holds the staged play together. This document is a tribute to the scripts that sacrificed their spines in the making of our production of *Hello...Hello*.

CHAPTER ONE

The Heart of the Story

Reviewer Kamal Al-Solaylee suggested that the 2003 Tarragon Theatre production of *Hello...Hello* was “symptomatic of a certain lack of focus.” With all the comments the play makes about commercialism, love, the environment, and art, not to mention the stylistic choices that make it ring, it is understandably easy to lose focus on what drives the play. Simply stated, it is the story of the death of a girl named Cassandra, and how a boy named Ben prevents it for a little while with a kind of love. It is the story of Cassandra’s suicide. At its core, *Hello...Hello* is allegorical, a fable about escape and love that is constructed with the same techniques used by Aesop and Brecht. This chapter will explore how Hines uses the techniques of parody, satire, and distancing to engage critical thought, and how it is carefully focused to serve Cassandra’s journey through love and toward death, the opposing forces that form the heart of the story.

Love-ly Things: Escapism

Hines calls *Hello...Hello* “an affectionate but unforgiving meditation on escapist consumer culture and on that most escapist of entertainments, the boy-meets-girl musical” (10), yet the discussion of escape is built much more intricately into the fabric of the play than just a critique of *Singin’ in the Rain*. The need for escape provides the frame for the world from which Cassandra’s suicide story is born. Hines creates not, as Al-Solaylee suggests, “a parallel universe” but the world of *our* future...and the prophesy is bleak. The world of *Hello...Hello* is filled with people who cannot face their own

existence in the present or the reality of their own lives and so distract themselves with escapist forms. The first scene, “Twilight in the Megalopolis,” paints the world of the play, a world in which citizens of the city gaze up, repeatedly exclaiming “Look at the sky!” (17). It is a world full of dreamers constantly looking away from the world they live in. It is not stated in the script whether “Look at the sky!” is part of the dream, suggesting that the citizens are enchanted by the colours in the sunset, or whether they are shocked by the sky, suggesting that they prefer to ignore the natural world. It could be both. Perhaps they are not looking at the sky at all, but at its reflection in the windows of the towers. After the sun has set, the citizens of the world dance into the streets, making their way to movie theatres and restaurants, anything to dull the pain of life. As the play progresses, Hines provides other examples of escapist culture. Written into nearly every line of the play, they include amusement parks, shopping at The Abyss, sex, vodka, plastic swans, babies, billboards, houses in Semi-Residentia, and shiny, silver balls. Dreaming of the past or of the future are common forms of escape, as suggested by the nostalgic dreams of a “horse’s neigh, a dog’s bark and the unmistakable sound of a pie sliding onto the windowsill” (22).

What the citizens are trying to escape is as complex as the means of accomplishing it. I have stated that the citizens cannot face their world, but what about the present is so unbearable? It becomes apparent through Cassandra’s story and through the laments of characters such as Skeet and Charlize that there is a simultaneous fear of and desire for “authentic” experience, often taking the form of human connection. Ben’s colleagues seek to understand what people want and need, but are afraid to look into

those same people's eyes. So they, and others like them, manufacture commercial goods and services that fill the void made by a world that lacks meaning and truth. Life becomes so saturated with escapist culture and inauthentic experiences that authentic connection becomes rare. This lack of connection means that more drastic methods of escape are required, eventually culminating in the greatest method of escape: suicide. Since Ben and his colleagues are able to market escape to a desperate populace in the form of shiny ball pendants filled with poison, Hines' association of commerce with escape becomes clear. Escapism is a form of suicide that can be sold. Unachievable and thus unrealistic dreams, such as the perfect-family-life-fantasy propagated by everyone from Betty Crocker to Martha Stewart, are as unattainable as the fantasies of tragic beauty found in Calvin Klein ads, and all are not just marketable, but created *to* be sold. Emotions are capitalized upon so that even those aspects of life that seem to be priceless – love, spirituality, nature, art – are within the reach of material interests. Perhaps true love cannot be sold, but the idea of it can be purchased for \$3.99 in the form of a heart-shaped box of chocolates. Jewelry commercials sell diamond rings by linking them to strong emotional experiences; a candlelit dinner, an expensive dress, a bouquet of roses, and the ring itself are all requirements for any romantic evening (but never mind romance itself). This is the world of *Hello...Hello* from which Cassandra's story emerges.

Such a Cryptic Girl: Working Through Plot and Character

In her first scene in the play, entitled "Snow," Cassandra seems to be the only one noticing the lack of stars in the sky. Simultaneously lamenting the absence of

starlight, celebrating the tragic beauty of the acid-snow, and foreshadowing the final scene, Cassandra sings, “Seems the sky has fallen down/ Stars have tumbled to the ground” (24). This scene takes place in the graveyard in which Cassandra’s dead fiancé, Bury, rests not necessarily in peace. She returns to the graveyard frequently in the play, indicating her attachment to Bury and her journey towards death. Perhaps she is even jealous of Bury. As she tries to bury herself – or at least her foot – in the ground with her deceased love, it is clear that Cassandra’s psyche is troubled. Perhaps she is psychotic, but perhaps she is just psychic like her ancient Greek namesake.

Ben enters. “Hello,” he offers. She returns, “Hello...” (27). This little exchange of superficial pleasantries is enough to derail Cassandra’s already unstable train of thought and is the first in a series of connections, however weak, that the couple will make over the course of the play. Indeed, what seems to attract Cassandra to Ben is his ability to finish her sentences, and though the completed sentences are not really logical, it is unclear whether Cassandra notices or if her mind itself works so differently that they actually carry a logic for her. Maybe she does notice the disconnect, but chooses to pretend they are really connecting. The pair sings “The Shiny Ball Song” (31), which sets up the linchpin of Cassandra’s journey: her simultaneous desire for and fear of connection, a reason to stay alive, and her inability to achieve either. Like the rest of the citizens, Cassandra is a consumer of escape, though her heartache for Bury and psychic abilities amplify her yearning for any release. Ben and Cassandra’s lack of success in completing each other’s verses in “The Shiny Ball Song” foreshadows the lack of success they will have connecting in the future, but in the meantime, Cassandra’s depression is

matched only by her desperation to get rid of it. The repercussions of her encounter with Ben are seen immediately in the following scene.

When a clump of dirt from the grave drops from her shoe, Cassandra experiences the first of what I will hereafter refer to as “episodes.” These “episodes” are also one of the many allusions to the Cassandra of Greek mythology. As Hines’ Cassandra cries, “My eyes see both ways” (36), alluding to her gift – or curse – of foresight; she is connected heavily to the past and the future, and even has the ability to prophesize. The other citizens of the Megalopolis are oblivious to their oblivion, but Cassandra’s psychic abilities allow her to see everything, including the mass suicide the citizens are approaching and the impending death of the natural world. Like the mythological Cassandra, however, nobody believes or understands her warnings. If Cassandra has foresight, then the description of Ben as “short-sighted” (74) does not just describe his poor vision. Well-intentioned as he might be, all he can do to help Cassandra through her episodes is lie down on her so that she does not, as she fears, fly away. Despite this rather awkward first meeting, Ben and Cassandra decide to each make “a little psychic switcheroo” (39) and see each other again.

Perhaps it is Cassandra’s understanding of the past and future that allows her to understand the needs of the people in the present so well. In “The Abyss,” Cassandra is, as she describes herself, “a cipher” (47), an encoder of human wants, the very epitome of the patterns of human desire that Ben’s colleagues seek to understand. Always speaking on more than one level, however, she is also hinting at the derogatory sense of the word “cipher” when she describes herself: a nothing, a nobody, a nonentity. Her customers do

not seem to notice, however, and with almost religious or perhaps spiritual authority, Cassandra sings to the desperate patrons of The Abyss that “Love-ly things/ Can make this bleak life worth the grieving” (43), and proceeds to fill their emotional, spiritual, or existential voids with clothing. It is possible that Cassandra has bought into idea that “Jing-ly rings” can “Inspire the will to keep on breathing” (43), and though she certainly tries to tell Ben on their date in the following scene that she “just likes the clothes” (48), the play soon reveals that there is more to her. She understands customers of escape because she is one, and her desperation makes her especially skilled at making the escape appear to work. Unfortunately, the escapist solution is only for the short term.

During their date, Ben offers Cassandra a gift: the angel doll that is “like” art. This gesture is an important one for Cassandra, who so values the spiritual, the artistic, and the ephemeral – even if this value is hidden somewhere in her unconscious – that Ben becomes for her a substitute, a replacement for her late fiancé, Bury the artist. Ben’s fear of selling the angel dolls confuses Cassandra, who is so used to shopping her pain away that she instinctively suggests that he should have more confidence in himself. “There are a lot of very hopeless people out there” (50), and she is certainly one of them. On their way home, Cassandra experiences another episode, and in order to stop it, in order to keep her soul from flying away, she decides to fill the void with Ben. Arguably just another attempt at escape or distraction, or perhaps an attempt at experiencing something real and true, Cassandra makes love to Ben. Both keep their undergarments on; perhaps they find it more attractive that way, or perhaps they are just too afraid to actually make that kind of physical connection.

The next day in Ben's office at Quicksilver Incorporated, his colleagues "grapple with the riddles of humanity" (61) – whether or not to use pearl-grey or oyster-grey in their latest advertising promotion. The company name is a reference to mercury, drawing a correlation between corporate sales firms and poison. Whatever the effect of the previous night on Cassandra, Ben now seems transformed by the event as he answers his colleagues' problem with a philosophical hypothesis of how the truth of humanity lies in the spaces between products, alluding to those parts of life that have not yet been tainted by consumerism. He seems to have taken in only a part of Cassandra's psychic depth, however. Though he understands that they live "at a juncture in time," he argues that "The universe is offering itself up to us and we are harvesting" (64), foreshadowing his eventual fall to commerce. He sees the world through a consumer's eyes.

Cassandra and Ben go on another date, which is broken up into several scenes. During the first, Ben asks about Cassandra's late fiancé. She explains that he was an artist of sorts, but has difficulty explaining exactly what his art was. Ben also seems confused by her description of Bury's art, though the audience understands it to have been theatre. Cassandra's loving and precious description of it as a magical event evokes a kind of magic itself. Ben suggests that it sounds like the artist-audience relationship is the result of "a kind of chemistry" (67), and Cassandra agrees. Cassandra goes on to describe how Bury took his own life by drinking poison from a vial he wore around his neck. Ben becomes hoarse, which suggests that Quicksilver is likely the manufacturer of these poison necklaces. Cassandra continues, remembering that Bury's final words were either "There's no poetry in money" or "There's no money in poetry" (68). Her nostalgia

reveals that though she has difficulty naming it, Cassandra mourns the loss of that which is ephemeral, spiritual, and authentic. She longs for something that is not created solely for commercial value. Even art, however, is now entirely commercial.

In the second part of the date, Cassandra inquires about Ben's deceased girlfriend, and he describes in poetic, even romantic detail how she succumbed to a flu epidemic. If the previous scene was about art, then this scene is about how a sick earth, including all sick seas...or six seas, results in a sick population. It is clear that Ben is not as attached to his dead love as Cassandra is to hers. His loss may have been profound, but he chooses to live for the future rather than dwell in the past.

The date continues at an amusement park. Cassandra is asked the simple question, "What do you like?" Her inability to answer sets up an important thematic question for the audience: what do we want and what do we need in a world where everything is for sale? In "Doe a Deer," Cassandra has a near-episode and reveals, "There is a devouring blackness that has an irresistible hold on my imagination" (76). What Cassandra sees in these episodes is not explicitly stated, but it is possible that she sees the past and the future, an entire history of the deer or a zebra (as described by the Chorus) that begins and ends with nothingness. When Ben asks her about it, she covers with, "I said, 'There is a wee little sweet black dress that has a sheer invisible fold making dim fashion statements'" (76). Ben accepts the weak lie, something he does often in the play – another way of escaping truth, or perhaps he is just not psychically deep enough to understand it yet – and they make their way back to his place.

At Ben's house, they start to become intimate until she accidentally sits on something sharp in his bed, the second of the angel doll gifts which holds in its body an engagement ring. Ben proposes in song, and Cassandra accepts, she explains, in order "To keep a grip and save my soul/ From plunging in the wishing well" (80). Her language is cryptic, but it all suggests that she is buying into the relationship in order to retain her sanity, an attempt to quench the thirst that even she has difficulty describing. She loves Ben, and Ben certainly loves her, but the kind of love is yet to be revealed.

The focus of the scene is quickly switched over to the Chorus, who reveals an image on a billboard. Like all the billboards in the play, it is a black and white photograph advertising a shiny ball necklace filled with poison. The newlywed couple who have given up their wedding bands in the face of poverty gaze up at the image, and the newlywed wife cries, "Ooooooh! I want one!" (83), again confirming the high priority of fashion and more importantly, the desire for suicide plaguing the people of this world. This dreaming plagues not just those in poverty, such as the newlywed couple who cannot afford their fantasy, but also those of wealth, such as the bank manager who can afford it all, but works so much he cannot enjoy it.

In the following scene, Cassandra has a rather instant bout of morning sickness, suggesting she is pregnant. The physical illness, which may be psychosomatic in Cassandra's case, parallels the societal sickness associated with having babies. The most important piece of information here is that the start of this new life, the prenatal child, results in the sickness of the existing life, Cassandra. Childbirth itself is not necessarily the destructive factor; rather, all of the material garbage that is associated with it – plastic

toys, disposable diapers, etc. – is in fact creating an unsafe world for the very child it is created to help.

Determined to find out what is creeping in her veins, Cassandra goes out to buy a rabbit. By the time Ben arrives home from work, she is cradling the dying rabbit in her arms. Hines' footnote explains that there was once a common belief in the rabbit pregnancy test; a woman's urine is injected into a rabbit, and if she is pregnant, so the urban legend goes, the rabbit will die (174). In actuality, the rabbit would need to be killed anyway and then autopsied to reveal the result. Hines' point in the song, "When a Rabbit Dies," is to connect the birth of a child with the death of an animal. In the macrocosm, the child represents humanity and commercialism, while the rabbit represents nature and the environment; the former kills the latter. Hines points out that humans sacrifice nature not just symbolically with their very presence and earth-as-possession mentality, but also quite literally with all of the plastics and poisons associated with raising a baby. The song celebrates the joy of "a pile of diapers seventeen stories high," but prophesizes in chorus, "Doom doom doom./ Doo bee doo bee./ Doom doom doom./ Uh oh oh" (88). Cassandra, who was initially crushed by the idea of bringing a child into the world, appears now to buy into Ben's excitement, desperate for anything that can "inspire the will to keep on breathing" (43). She may not be entirely conscious of it, but having this baby is her last hope at escape or distraction from her depression.

At the start of Act Two, one trimester later, the employees of Quicksilver are in a frenzy, trying to keep up with the success of the now "Consolidated" company. This success is largely attributed to Ben and the "music of the spheres" that has been "spilling

from his lips” (90). It appears that Ben’s relationship with Cassandra has given him an ability to uncover the “anagrams of human desire” (92), and that this has resulted in great prosperity for the company and a job promotion for Ben. In the following scene, the first good look at Semi-Residentia, there is also a first good look at a more domestic part of the world of Act One. Cafés have taken over halves of houses from cash-strapped families on every block, bananas are extinct, and eight-limbed toddlers are as common as three-legged squirrels. These first two scenes serve to establish the world for Act Two and Cassandra’s place within that world.

In “If You Had to Pick One,” the first sign of marital trouble for Ben and Cassandra occurs as they play a game of the same title. Cassandra grows frustrated, unable to understand the idea of the game. Ben claims that his questions are “puzzling” in that they “present two realities that are not necessarily opposing, but are mutually exclusive” (100), but Cassandra finds the questions cruel because they ask for a choice when no choice is available in the real world. Cassandra resolves the tension by claiming to be tired, but then reveals that she has cold feet – “Two blocks of ice” (102) – about her pregnancy. For the first time, the couple acknowledges their inability to communicate.

A week later at The Abyss, Cassandra works as before, appearing not to have grown at all in her pregnancy. A deliveryman drops off a package at the store containing the newest in Abyss fashion: a delicate chain attached to a shiny ball. While Cassandra is transfixed by the little necklace, drawn to its potential to relieve her pain, the Female Chorus provides some very important information about the origin of this latest fad. She tells the Male Chorus about artists, now extinct, explaining how they filled sphere

pendants with fatal poisons and morphine “for the pain” (106). Meanwhile, at Quicksilver Consortium, Ben is being congratulated for his work. Though it is not specified what specific act has earned him accolades, I believe Ben has presented the Board with a prototype for his angel doll gift box, and they are impressed. Thus, Ben demonstrates how artistic works such as the shiny ball and the angel doll can be polluted simply by distribution and marketing, by putting a price on the priceless. The choice to sell his art supports his ascent of the corporate ladder and his descent of the moral one.

Having been so taken by the shiny ball, Cassandra finds herself drawn once again to the graveyard and thoughts of death and escape. As a result, she is three hours late for her dinner with Ben and lies to him about where she has been. Very little of this argument is actually spoken by Ben or Cassandra, indicating that there is a wider gap growing between the pair than can be explained with words. Instead, the Chorus speaks for them. Cassandra is distracted, even overwhelmed by shiny ball pendants hanging from the necks of teenagers, the lack of cod or sole at the restaurant, a starving man complaining about overpopulation, and a terrible version of “The Shiny Ball Song” played by the band at the restaurant. Her episodes are now happening more frequently – almost constantly – and so she asks Ben to dance with her. The episode builds until Cassandra finally collapses.

Cassandra is taken to the hospital where she is given a room only after Ben mentions how wealthy he is. Cassandra is in labour and finally gives birth to a one-and-a-half-inch-long baby that glows. The nurses, doctors, and Ben sing “Smaller and Stranger,” a soft jingle about the preciousness of a new baby; Cassandra does not join the

celebration. If anything, she appears to be horrified by the tiny child. Ben celebrates and Cassandra laments, “She’s exactly like us” (119). The size of the baby can be explained by the world in which it was conceived: the baby has not grown because it has not been given nourishment. After all, bananas are extinct and mercury is the trendy dessert dish of the day. Perhaps the baby glows due to nuclear radiation in the drinking water, or perhaps it is symbolically linked with the stars that no longer appear in the sky, both doomed to fall.

The following scene breaks convention for the first time since the beginning of Act One as all performers address the audience to tell about Cassandra’s inability to raise her child. Even Cassandra admits that she cannot hold the child because “It just feels awkward” (119). Cassandra becomes increasingly distant and lacks any feeling at all for her child. The baby itself does not seem to be Cassandra’s sole concern, however. Indeed, the baby is actually the catalyst for some larger plague on Cassandra’s soul. Ben finds her writing affirmations, sentences she constructs to “trick the mind out of its reason” (127). Cassandra allows the mask of happiness she wore for Act One to slip, and when Ben asks for her thoughts, she tells him once again, “There is a devouring blackness that has an irresistible hold on my imagination, and the pain of reflection is too much for my weak soul to bear” (129). Ben, of course, begs her pardon, but this time Cassandra repeats her statement with no attempt to cover it with a lie about “dim fashion statements” (76). Ben acknowledges, “That’s what I thought you said,” indicating this time that he understands that Cassandra really is “a deep and cryptic girl” (129).

The turning point comes when Cassandra indicates she is ready to die and Ben gives her the third angel doll, now somewhat grotesque, symbolizing how Ben's decision to market the dolls has corrupted their true beauty. The body of the doll has enclosed within it a shiny ball filled with poison. This gift allows her to calm her depression in the only way left, joining Bury in death. Cassandra accepts the gift, thanking Ben "For the time you bought me" (132). He has given her the gift of escape. Though this is one of the only acts of selfless love in the play, it reveals that Ben truly does love Cassandra.

Whether or not Cassandra truly loves Ben is more complicated. She states in an earlier argument with Ben, "I don't want to die alone" (101), suggesting that she carries some resentment for Bury, who died and left her without her permission. Perhaps Cassandra cannot bring herself to do the same thing without permission from the one who loves her most. If true love is defined by selflessness, Cassandra commits a selfless act by not giving into temptation of suicide earlier, but a selfish act by choosing to accept the gift of poison. Leaving her child could also be considered selfish, though it is also explained that the baby does not thrive with Cassandra, so her death could be considered a sacrifice for the sake of the baby.

It is important to note that although Cassandra's thoughts are on death from the first moment we meet her, she does undergo a change in the play. The love story, the relationship with Ben, and the resulting child are necessary in Cassandra's final acceptance of death. Though she is certainly depressed, perhaps lost, in the first "Snow Scene," Ben arrives and, as she says in the gift-giving scene, buys her time. More than that, he provides for her all the avenues of escape she might have tried. When all of these

escapist avenues – the perfume, the engagement ring, the marriage, the house in Semi-Residentia, the job, and most importantly the baby – fail to make Cassandra happy, she can accept that there is only one path of escape left: her own death. Thus, the love story is not a mere side-track or distraction from the journey Cassandra is on at the start of the play, but a necessary step in the story of her suicide. When Cassandra realizes that her baby, her last resort and the thing in her life she thinks should most have made her happy (or so the advertisements tell her) fails to do so, she realizes she cannot live in this world.

As Cassandra makes her way to the graveyard one last time, Ben faces the CEOs of Quicksilver. In his most eloquent speech of the play, he explains how it is time to sell “precious gifts” to “those who can’t get enough, and now, at last, for those who’ve had enough” (135). He reveals his latest creation, an angel doll gift box which holds a shiny ball of poison. Thus, Ben has also been changed by his time with Cassandra. Once unwilling to sell his angel dolls, fearing that people would not want “that which is ephemeral – *spiritual* – reduced to plaster and paint” (50), he now explains that “a lot of very hopeless people out there” (136) want exactly that. He does not view this change in perspective as selling out in any way, but, rather, as an act of “kindness, pity, mercy, love, and grace” (137). Cassandra corrects him, replacing “pity” with “sweetness,” again suggesting that she cherishes the gift.

The last scene of the play, “Pluto and the Moons of Mars,” might seem excessive, even redundant. After Cassandra drinks the poison, Ben pulls her out of the water and onto the roof of the tomb where they talk as she dies. The scene is a very long dénouement which makes clear that Cassandra is not alone in her suicide, but is joined by

many other desperate souls. After Cassandra dies, Ben goes on to raise their daughter as a perfect little commercialist slave-in-training and Quicksilver “grows into a chain that wraps right around the world and takes steady steps toward soothing the planet painless” (147), thus connecting the necklace chain with commercial interests. As Quicksilver slowly strangles the world with its chain of stores, the Chorus describes how an angelic Cassandra watches from above, until “the spinning blue globe in the midst of red Mars, lime-green Saturn and golden Pluto is rendered, at last, a shimmering, whirling, silvery shiny ball” (147), suggesting that Earth itself will one day become one big shiny ball of poison where all that is left of angels are the dolls that sing in a plastic three-part harmony.

A Parody (Of Sorts)

In her notes at the beginning of the published script, Hines states that *Hello...Hello* is only a musical “of sorts.” It is, rather, “a musical play that eschews the curiously sacred parameters of the Broadway-style musical, and instead uses music and parody in the pursuit of other, perhaps more contentious, aims” (11). Indeed, the parody in the score and the play itself is not so narrowly focused, as Hines pokes at all aspects of escapist culture, of which the boy-meets-girl musical is the epitome. Reviewer Al-Solaylee’s concern with a “lack of focus” culminated in the question, “Just who and what is Hines satirizing?” Is Hines really satirizing musical theatre? If so, what is her definition of satire? Of parody?

My instinct, when considering parody, is to think about a demonstration or repetition of style for the sake of comedy. Linda Hutcheon acknowledges that parody implies a repetition of a previous art, but goes on to qualify that comedy is not necessarily a requisite:

This parodic reprise of the past of art is not nostalgic; it is always critical.

It is also not ahistorical or de-historicizing; it does not wrest past art from its original historical context and reassemble it into some sort of presentist spectacle. Instead, through a double process of installing and ironizing, parody signals how present representations come from past ones and what ideological consequences derive from both continuity and difference. (93)

Using this definition, the parody in *Hello...Hello* is revealed as complex, layered, and often though not always comic. It is a tool of satirical writing, a way of gaining critical perspective of the art form it targets.

Interestingly, though *Hello...Hello* parodies musical theatre, very few of composer Greg Morrison's tunes appear to, in Hutcheon's apt words, "reprise" Broadway-style songs or use conventions of musical theatre in the scoring. The Male Chorus once acknowledges a musical convention, noting that when the wind dies down, "it is replaced by gentle, tinkly, happy music" (37), but most of the tunes are more reminiscent of other forms of song, including, as Hines points out in various stage directions, "a Disney lament" (24), "a peppy commercial jingle" (58), "a pop ballad" (80), and "a baby powder commercial" (115).

One song that resembles typical musical theatre form and structure is “The Shiny Ball Song” (30), in which Cassandra and Ben finish each other’s sentences in perfect call-and-response format: one character makes an offer, and the other accepts and completes the line. The parody in “The Shiny Ball Song,” however, lies in the inability to make successful, logical connections. Ben offers, “Deep in every kettle of fish there is a –,” which Cassandra completes with, “Pie!” (32). Though the connections are nonsensical, Ben and Cassandra are “thrilled and delighted” (31) each time, determined to make this little game succeed regardless of the meaning of the lines. Hines parodies the musical theatre convention of the spontaneous leap into song by demonstrating the ridiculousness of a world where people can finish each other’s sentences; one such effect is the absence of some expected rhyme, which, in line with the rest of the play, upsets the audience’s expectations for the musical number. The spontaneous leap into dance is also parodied in this number, when Ben and Cassandra perform a soft-shoe routine in mid-song. In this case, the parody comes from the dance number being performed on Cassandra’s late fiancé’s grave.

Since “The Shiny Ball Song” is one of the only tunes in the play which resembles the Broadway-style show in musical form or structure, it is useful next to examine another trait common to musical theatre genre, the boy-meets-girl love story. The parody of the love story lies closer to the surface in *Hello...Hello*, and so is easier to detect than the musical parody. As Cassandra kneels at the grave of her dead lover, snow falling about her, she presents a bouquet of sapphire-blue daisies. This could be the most beautiful moment of all time, until Cassandra points out the colour of the flowers: “I

don't think their colour is natural. I think it was done to them" (26). The audience is then called to realize how the flowers must have been artificially dyed to hold that kind of colour, and instantly some of the beauty or purity of the moment is twisted. The Chorus is usually more subtle at pointing out these impurities, often presenting them with their own romantic weight. The Female Chorus paints a romantic night, as "the lights in the towers go out one by one and as they do, the falling snowflakes glow a pale, acid yellow" (40). Through these two examples, Hines subtly points out how the artificial (flowers) and the polluted (snow) have become part of the fabric of the impulse behind the boy-meets-girl love story, and also how and why they are sold to hungry masses: a bright blue daisy is seemingly more romantic than a sickly-white, organic one.

Another aspect of parody in *Hello...Hello* is the re-creation of a typical romantic moment, straight out of an old black and white film but with a slight commercial twist. The classic moment in which the hands of two strangers meet is twisted in Hines' play by the fact that Ben is chasing after a hundred dollar bill at the time. Similarly, when Cassandra refuses Ben's offer of a martini on the night of their date, Hines slips in a little product placement when Ben reoffers with, "It's Unequivocal" (54). To this, Cassandra agrees. With slight twists and additions to otherwise romantic moments, Hines points out the essential commercialism underlying the love-story form. These romantic moments are not truly romantic unless they are accompanied by the perfect product (vodka, clothing, or shiny ball). These moments, as Hines points out, are created to be sold.

For *Hello...Hello*, the parody of musical theatre has more to do with how it epitomizes escapist culture than with the actual musical form itself. Broadway-style

musical theatre, like the boy-meets-girl love story, fashion culture, the Martha Stewart lifestyle parodied in the second half of the show in *Semi-Residentia*, shopping, and even the desire to have babies are all part of an escapist culture which is essentially commercial. They are all marketed and sold to a populace desperate for escape and/or distraction from the real world that is being destroyed by these very impulses. Hines and Morrison wrote their songs as advertising jingles because that is what much of Broadway-style musical theatre is – commercial. Further, she points out that these distractions and escapes are largely empty, artificial. The repeated line “in nothingness lies everything” (45) takes on many meanings. For Hines, perhaps it means that a de-commercialized world in which material possessions do not matter *is* the real world, the best world, the world where “everything” important truly exists: nothing. Simultaneously, the line also suggests that the “everything” Cassandra is speaking about, including fashion as well as musical theatre spectacle, is really nothing: trivial. For this reason, the play avoids spectacle, or at least the kind of spectacle commonly found in Broadway-style musicals (pyrotechnics, million-dollar sets, frequent scene changes). In the nothingness of the play (the absence of lavish stage effects) lies true meaning: everything. Hutcheon states, “postmodernist parody is a value-problematizing, de-naturalizing form of acknowledging the history (and through irony, the politics) of representations” (94). Using parody, Hines problematizes the culture that values superficial forms of escape like the Broadway-style musical, and finally, equates each act of escape with sipping a drop of poison.

Branding the Play: Exploring Labels of Genre

Why Hines uses parody to satirize escapist culture and the world at large becomes clearer with an understanding of the genre of *Hello...Hello*, a category not easily pinpointed. Hines herself has described the play as a “romantic satire,” a “romantic fable” (8), an “allegorical romance with songs” (8), a “black romantic tragi-comedy” (8), and even an “ode” to a tree frog (9). At its core, the play is a fable that uses parody, as described above, as well as techniques that are now considered Brechtian alienation devices, to critically engage the audience.

The term “fable” tends to imply allegory, and there is certainly an “allegorical” dimension to the script. In the final moments of the play, Cassandra is joined in suicide by many other citizens, suggesting that her struggle is not unique, yet her psychic abilities make her journey too inimitable to afford her an “Everyman” status, such as that of the morality play figure. Certainly the Male and Female Choruses embody a number of archetypal characters, but since these stereotypes are often twisted (the caring bank manager), and since Ben and Cassandra seem to transcend mere symbols in complexity (prototypes rather than stereotypes), I am hesitant to analyze the story much further as a classic example of allegory. When considering fable, I will therefore focus not on how any character is representative of a particular ideology, but on intention of teaching a lesson through story and example.

Aesop and his predecessors knew, as did Bertolt Brecht centuries later, that a key to didactic story-telling is distancing. In order to absorb the moral of the story, the audience must have a critical perspective. Aesop’s tool was the use of animal instead of

human characters. Brecht used such alienation techniques as direct audience address, projections, scene titles, song, and baring the theatrical device (exposing lighting instruments, technicians, and even audience). He also set his plays in other countries and/or at other times in history. The ways in which Hines uses alienation in her fable are similar, helping the audience gain the critical perspective to serve her parody.

The parody of the musical theatre genre is also served by these tools. An audience accustomed to traditional, Broadway-style musical theatre productions is carefully manipulated to notice the absence of lavish stage effects in *Hello...Hello*, and to ask “why?” The delivery of Hines’ stage descriptions, the verbal paintings of the world as delivered by the Male and Female Choruses contrast with what is actually seen on stage: usually nothing, or at least very little of what is described by the Chorus. This strategy is similar to Brecht’s technique of baring the device, exposing the deception of theatre. The audience is called to realize that they are being asked to use their imaginations for the visual descriptions and so to become conscious that there is very little set or props. Perhaps what the audience sees are the initial stages of a world where art is dying, or a world where stage effects are impossibly expensive. Another audience member might perceive the lack of scenic effects as a celebration of art that is unconcerned or polluted by materialism. Regardless, they are called to consider what they expect out of a musical and what the disruption of that expectation means.

In another instance of an alienation technique, the Male and Female Choruses – almost without exception – announce the setting at the beginning of each scene, not unlike Brecht’s scene titles that might have been projected on the set. However, Hines

refrains from stating in these “titles” what will happen in each scene, thus maintaining dramatic suspense; Brecht would have suggested that this dramatic suspense is de-alienating. In this case, suspense proves that theatre can still be exciting and valuable for its ability to entertain (reinforcing Hines’ message by example), and so is paramount to the need to critically distance. Other Brechtian techniques include the frequent use of direct audience address and historical distancing; that is, Hines sets the play in the future in order to discuss the present with a critical (and prophetic) eye.

Brecht also used song as a distancing technique. The songs in *Hello...Hello*, as described above, distance the audience by parodying commercial music, but also simply because spontaneous leaps into song are not part of everyday life. As well, the little musical twists – such as chord changes or unpredictable rhymes – in otherwise predictable tunes serve as distancing techniques since they are surprises to the ear. Further, like Brecht’s music, these advertising-style jingles are the music of the common people. It is simple music, but in this case there is a conscious effort to make it pretty – though not beautiful or lavishly decorated – to serve the parody of commercial art.

It is clear that fable is *how* Hines satirizes society. *Why* she satirizes has more to do with Hines’ tree frog. She states in her introduction:

The world has changed a lot since this play was begun, and it’s changing faster and faster. The belief I had just ten years ago in the power of art to change the world is being challenged by the probability that economic progress can change it faster and more ever-lastingly. But, as Kalle Lasn, founder of *Adbusters* magazine, says, ‘On the far side of cynicism lies

freedom.’ And I suppose, at its most basic level, this play is an ode to the pursuit of freedom. It is also an ode to art itself, which seems, increasingly, to be something akin to that tiny endangered frog we have all seen in *National Geographic* or *Scientific American*: the one that is tinier than a fingertip, exquisitely beautiful, morbidly fragile... This play is an ode to that frog. (8-9)

Though the term “ode” connotes a form of tribute, the above description paints the play as a eulogy to all the “frogs” that have succumbed or are succumbing to the economic interests of a society obsessed with commercial painkillers. These “frogs” include art, the environment, genuine love, human connection, authentic experience, and, of course, actual tree frogs. Cassandra’s speech about how theatre “was quite magical, really” (67) is both sad and celebratory. While celebrating in fond remembrance through her ode, Hines also issues a warning through her fable. She cautions that these “frogs” are vulnerable, fragile, and need to be defended, but also specifically and more urgently to artists, that their livelihood could easily be destroyed by a Darwinist notion of survival of the fittest. Sitting beside me in an interview for the *Calgary Herald*, she expressed her passion, saying that *Hello...Hello* is “my love letter to the world, born out of my concerns for people, animals and for the growth of the planet” (Clark, “Worlds Collide. Love, Art take on Economics”).

Hines, then, is a sort of George Orwell of this generation, and *Hello...Hello* is the *1984* of today. Or perhaps she is more like Oscar Wilde, who famously stated, “If you want to tell people the truth, make them laugh, otherwise they’ll kill you.” Since comedy

comes from the unexpected, it could be inferred that laughter is an alienation effect, the result of an audience being surprised or distanced. Hines uses fable and ode to tell a cautionary tale, but cleverly uses parody – a tool of satire – to encourage critical thought.

Simple as Two and Two: Dualism and Entropy

I will end the chapter by starting at the beginning, with the very title of the play itself. As *Hello...Hello* suggests, dualism is a key structural element that creates the conflict and the dialogue of the play. I discuss it here at the end of the chapter, because it is only with full understanding of the characters, the world of the play, and the literary structures that Hines deploys that this dualism can be understood. The story and language are so broken up into binary oppositions and opposing pairs that are, as Ben puts it, “not necessarily opposing, but are mutually exclusive” (100) that my central understanding of the play is based on the idea of two “worlds” colliding.

It is useful first to simply list these binary pairs to understand the conflicts that underscore the play. These include battles between: life/death, Ben/Bury, commerce/art, industry/nature, past/present, future/present, plastic/natural, inauthentic/authentic, and the idea of love/real love. There are also clues in the script to stylistic battles, such as grayscale/colour and classic/contemporary. These binary pairs can be aligned with each other, based on which half of the pair is “winning” the battle and which is not. The halves that appear to be winning, or are at least the most prominent in world of the play include: Ben, commerce, industry, past, future, plastic, inauthentic, the idea of love, grayscale, and classic. The halves that are losing, and thus can be considered the “tree

frogs” for which the play is written, include: Bury, art, nature, the present, natural, authentic, real love, colour, and contemporary. Note that though the past and the future may seem to oppose, they are aligned here with each other since they both oppose the present. As a general rule, Cassandra is found floating between categories, and her conflict is choosing which side she will align with.

The battle between life and death is more difficult to align. Bury is dead, but Ben’s company creates poison necklaces intended to assist suicide. This blurring is intentional and frequently addressed between other opposing pairs. Though they oppose, Hines also points out that one half of each pair does not just die out, but actually becomes part of the other half. Commerce and art are not just opposing, they are also melding. The natural environment has become industrial, since birds perch on buildings and the sky is bright pink due to pollutants. The “classics” of fashion seem to repeat themselves so frequently that they are both the past and the present, both the present and the future; vintage is “in.” Even true love becomes harder to define, as the people of the world become psychologically programmed to love the very falsities and inauthenticities that corrupt love, creating a “kind of love” or even a love of love itself. This entropy, the process of devolving into a state of uniformity, becomes particularly relevant, because one half of each pair is generally corrupted or polluted by the other. Thus, each of the battles described results in a collision of forces.

The title *Hello...Hello* is a perfect example of an exchange that is both pregnant with meaning but constructed of two superficial, quite meaningless words. The repetition of the words implies a call and a response from two separate forces, but the meaning of

the words implies a meeting, a joining of the two forces. The ellipsis between the two “Hello”s suggests a gap, a disconnect, and so implies a connection as well as an opposition. People simultaneously need and want both life and death, a reason to stay and a way to go when staying is no longer attractive: connection and escape. So indistinguishable are these pairs that they become programmed into our knowledge of the world. Does anybody know what the colour of the sky *should* be?

CHAPTER TWO

“A Kind of Chemistry”

Putting up a play is hardly scientific. It is often unpredictable, unrepeatable, and there is no control group. Yet as Ben guesses, there is a kind of chemistry to the process, a sort of math. A number of elements – props, costumes, music, actors, audience, lights, story – are all tossed into a common space, the emotional Bunsen burner is turned up, and the way in which the elements interact will determine the reaction, be it intellectual, emotional, psychological, physiological, or even just chemical. Thus, a director is like a scientist carefully manipulating these elements, measuring and editing to try to get the “kaboom” and puff of smoke she desires. It is fitting, then, that these kabooms – or collisions, as I prefer – dominated my approach to staging the play. I decided to support the thematic “collisions” mentioned in the final section of the previous chapter with my approach to the visual, aural, and performance choices. “Two worlds collide as a girl struggles to live” became my mantra, the director’s matrix that would serve as an umbrella for every choice made in the production. This chapter chronicles those choices and how they were realized on stage.

The Physiological Phenomenon

The doors to the Reeve Theatre are opened, and the experience begins. The sound of preshow music is the first thing the audience hears, and though it is just ambiance, background music over which the audience makes small talk, it sets the atmosphere from

which the play will spring thirty minutes later. It is the sound of old Broadway: tunes from stage musicals and musical films circa 1960 or earlier, including “Give My Regards to Broadway” sung by Judy Garland and “One [Singular Sensation]” from *A Chorus Line*. As they find their seats and read their programs, the audience will be comforted by the easily recognizable show tunes and even possibly drawn into a state of nostalgia by the soothing crooners and crackly recordings, reminiscing about each black and white film and stage musical the songs are from. For now, the desired response is a light-hearted comfort. It seems to work.

As ticketholders find their seats, they will notice there are three banks of seating, a large one to the left and two smaller banks to the right, creating a sort of alley-meets-thrust stage. An audience member with healthy knees may climb to the very top of one of the risers and notice that the configuration of the seating banks and set create the shape of a heart. This audience member might point it out to his or her date – who will no doubt reply with a cooing “Awwww!” – but both will forget once the show starts; it is not meant to be distracting. The configuration is actually designed for intimacy, with the goal of bringing the audience close to the action. Though set designer Julia Wasilewski and I had many ideas for the set and seating, it was always paramount that the space feel intimate. The performers should be able to whisper and be heard. In the months leading up to rehearsals, I expressed my desire to stage the show in a space the size of the Reeve Secondary Theatre, nearly a quarter the size of the Reeve Main. Julia and I even contemplated bringing in a false ceiling to compress the height of the Reeve Main.

Weeks after our designs were complete, we were informed of the minimum seat count expected for a University of Calgary mainstage show and that our proposed seat count was far too small. The minimum count of 184 seats was imposed upon the production, and in order to adhere to the regulation, the seating risers and set were expanded to accommodate another hundred seats, now taking up the entire Reeve Main and nearly spilling into the Secondary. A great deal of intimacy was lost in the process, arguably the biggest obstacle the show would face in rehearsal. Our audience does not know this, however, and in fact they will find that pathways have been created throughout the risers to allow scenes to take place among the audience, an attempt at remedying the lack of intimacy in the now-cavernous space. It is partially successful, though it makes blocking complicated. I still dream of setting the play in a much smaller space with no more than eighty seats.

The program is full of interesting information and advertisements for upcoming productions, but few audience members will read it as they wait for the show to begin. Most are making conversation about the set. Reflecting the colour palate for the entire show, the set is painted in tones of black, white, and grey, evoking a sense of uniformity. The structure itself is a series of blocks, ascending in height like a skewed, cubist, futuristic version of the staircases used in the Ziegfeld Follies of the 1920s. The dialogue between the past (black and white films, Ziegfeld Follies) and the future (the black and white advertisements of Calvin Klein, cubism) is built into the very structure of the set (Fig. 1), which I affectionately call “The Stairs.”

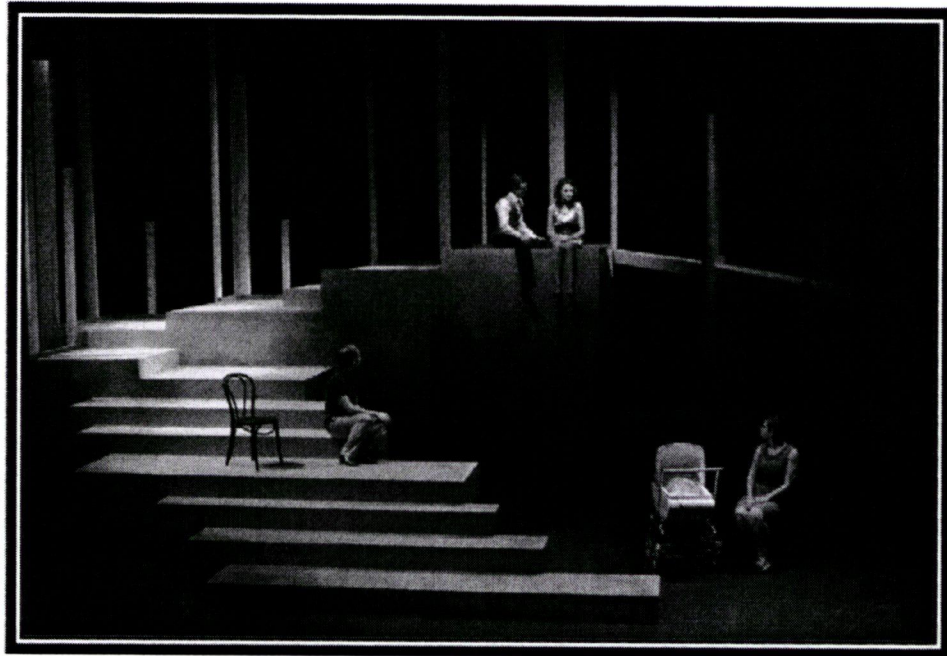


Fig. 1. *Hello...Hello Set*. University of Calgary, November 2008. (photo: Gavin Semple)

Behind the stairs are a number of very thin, very tall poles that suggest an urban setting for the play, since in partnership with The Stairs they create a silhouette of a city skyline. This was inspired by photographs of sets and backdrops from old Broadway productions. The tall poles wrapped around the theatre might even resemble a barcode as was intended, though the image is not as dominant as planned. Early in design discussions, I found great inspiration in an image of a barcode, which I suggested not only strengthened the commercial motifs in the script, but also adhered to the black and white colour palate. Julia too expressed interest in this image, and it was suggested that the poles that would eventually be placed around the space could be lit from behind to cast the shadow of a barcode onto the set or actors, which the audience *would* notice. Thus, the audience would become aware they were sitting and watching a play within a

sort of barcode prison. This image was very important to Julia and me, but required the proper lighting to make it work. Unfortunately, and I am still not sure why, the lighting was not rigged to cast this shadow. So, as the audience turns off their cellphones, they take in the urban setting suggested by the poles, unaware of what might have been.

The house lights fade as the last few bars of “Dancing Cheek to Cheek” sung by Fred Astaire are slowly taken over by a warbling tone emanating from the speakers. The sound is electronic, loud, a complete shift from the preshow music, and played by musical director Tom Doyle on a keyboard on one of the risers. Given the task of finding a “futuristic, psychic wind,” Tom plays a very loud, ominous sound that recurs later in the play, nearly every time Cassandra has psychic episodes, which, according to the script, are accompanied by a wind. This gust is not necessarily a wind in the meteorological sense, but, rather, a product of Cassandra’s mind, the factor that makes her feel as though she is flying away. Since Cassandra’s episodes are moments of “collision” in the play, the electronic wind sound collides with an acoustic wind sound, created by the percussionist sitting next to Tom on chimes or cymbal during each of the episodes. But at the start of the show, now in darkness, the electronic wind alone roars to a climax.

A cool white spot light appears downstage. Silence. The light is not pointed at anyone or anything in particular at first, but the sound of clicking heels pierces the quiet and brings the exquisite Female Chorus confidently into the center of the pool of light. This same white light is used frequently throughout the show, since it is both harsh and beautiful, creating deep shadows. The lighting for the show also conforms to my “two

world collide” matrix statement and black/white palate. The lights are often white, but Cassandra’s episodes are punctuated with flashes of colour. Even the lighting in the first scene, which vividly describes the colour of the sky, is all painted in a cold white wash. More than anything, the lighting shifts are used to direct focus in the giant space. Follow spots, isolated areas, gobo patterns, and shuttered lights demonstrate for the audience changes in time, place, or psyche.

The Female Chorus stands in her light for a time, looks to her left and right, and enjoys being watched for the moment. She is a beautiful creature. Taking inspiration from a line in the script describing the Female Chorus as “an angel in Calvin Klein” (15), the actor and I decided that the character was a celestial, possibly spiritual being. The Male Chorus evolved the same way. They have an awareness of the world and an understanding of the psyches of both Ben and Cassandra. The cast understood the Chorus to have dramatic influence on three levels. The first is that of the psyche, the level in which the Chorus can speak for Ben or Cassandra, reading their thoughts aloud for the audience and even influencing how Ben and Cassandra think. The second level is of the “world” of reality. In this level, the Choruses are performers, playing mortal humans such as Skeet, Charlize, the bank manager, or a patron at the Abyss. The audience may notice that it is not the actor – Jenny Kost or Jared Knapp – changing characters, but the Female and Male Choruses themselves who are conscious performers. The third level is of the celestial, the level in which the Choruses are narrators, angels, and possibly even ghosts of Bury and Forget-me-not as suggested in stage directions in the script. On this level, they have a distance from Ben and Cassandra’s story, since as

angels they are above the petty affairs of mortal humans, but as former lovers of Ben and Cassandra, they have a care for their wellbeing. They are not invested in the action on a human level (the Male Chorus is not jealous of Ben because of the parallel with Bury), but, rather, exist as observers who have a deeper concern in the psychic action.

This celestial presence should be apparent to the audience fairly quickly for a number of reasons. The Female Chorus, as she stands in her white light, radiates a peacefulness in body and voice. She is costumed in high fashion, like an angel in Calvin Klein, with very tailored, very flattering attire (Fig. 2). The colours for her costume fit within the grayscale palette, and her Act One costume has an urban look to it, with sharp lines and tall heels that one might find on a model. Her make-up and hair are also straight out of fashion magazines, but look a great deal like photographs of Liza Minnelli.

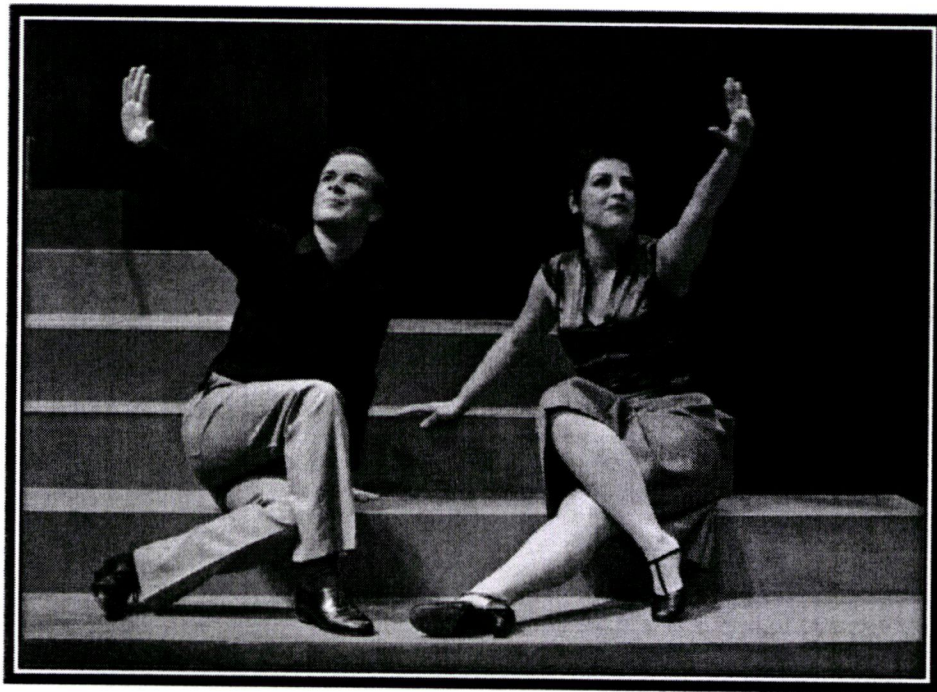


Fig. 2. *Chorus in Act One*. University of Calgary, November 2008. (photo: Tony Field)

It helps that Jenny Kost, the actor playing the Female Chorus, has chosen some very particular images and rules for the way in which her character moves inside her costume. In the first week of rehearsal, our choreographer, Glenda Stirling, conducted a gesture workshop with the cast to help them understand one of my key goals for the play in general and the movement work in particular. The concept of “suggestion” rather than “demonstration” was vital for producing the show and communicating the theme of “in nothingness lies everything.” Since the Male and Female Choruses play over forty characters each, and since the play takes place in many different settings, it would be impossible to demonstrate everything, so instead we would rely on the descriptions made by the Chorus and the imaginations of the audience to do the work. This was equally the case in our approach to gesture.

The concept of shadow gesture, introduced to the cast by Glenda, provided an excellent starting point for the Female Chorus. We understood shadow gestures as the small movements people make that are unconscious reactions to emotional situations, often taking the form of scratches, adjustments, twitches, or shifts. Since we understood the Choruses to be celestial, “perfect” beings, those performers have no shadow gesture, no wasted movement unless it can be revealed as a conscious movement for the sake of irony, comment, character, or comedy. The Female Chorus uses gesture sparingly, keeping her arms still and calm as she crosses the stage in her first line of the play. Later in the play, she employs gesture to indicate a change in character, such as the bank manager’s wife who eternally stirs a bowl of batter, a sort of robotic Betty Crocker dream-come-true.

For this reason, gestic movement became important in our process. I had previously directed projects with an understanding of symbolic or metaphoric movement, but after the concept was reintroduced to me in the form of Brecht's gestic movement, I found a new appreciation and understanding of the power of melding movement with metaphor. The gest – the essence of a moment or social relationship – is presented physically in a carefully refined gesture or piece of blocking. In the end, the performance is rich with meaningful gesture and movement that serves both the actors' emotional work and the metaphorical language of the play. The Female Chorus, in her presentation of the newlywed wife, employs gestic gesture by never making eye-contact with her husband but instead gazing off into the distance, reaching out with one hand to an impossible dream somewhere in the sky. This is the gest, the very essence of that character.

The Female Chorus delivers her first line with the voice of an angel: beautiful, peaceful, and expressive, as if speaking to a child. She later distorts her voice to play various characters, often using harsher sounds or colloquial lilts to suggest a change in speaker. She speaks directly to the audience, making eye contact and neither afraid of nor distracted by those she speaks to. She is aware as narrator of what the rest of the story will be and sometimes exchanges knowing glances with the Male Chorus, foreshadowing an event to come.

At the end of her line, a light comes up on the Male Chorus. He watches her finish and, like the Female Chorus, enjoys being in the spotlight as he speaks. Developed in almost an identical manner to the Female Chorus, with an understanding of the three

levels of “being,” mentioned above, the Male Chorus has the added benefit of more material in the script. Since he is paralleled with Bury, and since the script reveals more about Bury than Forget-me-not, the actor playing the Male Chorus had more history with which to work. As he watches Ben and Cassandra develop a relationship, he often cocks his head or makes other physical clues that help the audience understand he is somehow paralleled with Bury, or at least connected with Cassandra. This becomes most clear in the Second Act, when Cassandra is freer to interact with the Choruses as their celestial, narrating forms and when she kisses the poster that she believes is of Bury at the bus shelter, a kiss performed with the Male Chorus.

Physically, the Male Chorus is very similar to the Female Chorus. He uses very little shadow movement, and while the Female Chorus has a gestic gesture for the bank manager’s wife, the Male Chorus has a similar gesture for the bank manager himself: one finger always at his ear suggesting a cell phone earpiece, but also metaphorically plugging his ear to the world. Together, there is a spatial relationship (gestic blocking, perhaps) between the two Chorus performers. Though the bank manager and his wife speak to each other several times throughout the play, they never face each other and never make eye contact. Similarly, the newlywed husband tries desperately to make eye contact with his wife, who (as mentioned above) gazes off into the distance. When not playing a character, the Male Chorus – like the Female Chorus – is physically at peace. The actor describes it as being pulled lightly but equally in all directions, as if not influenced by gravity. The Male Chorus is costumed in a similar way to his female counterpart. He too is dressed beautifully, with carefully tailored slacks and shirt, ideas

taken from fashion magazines. All of these pieces, of course, are in blacks, whites, and greys. His hair is slicked to the side neatly, in a style the audience may have seen on Gene Kelly or Fred Astaire (Fig. 2).

Shortly after the Male and Female Choruses are introduced in their dashing ensembles and beautiful pools of white light, the focus shifts and the lights come up on Tim Hamilton and Teddy Ivanova, the actors playing Ben and Cassandra. In this first scene, however, they function like Chorus members, easily shifting from character to character, and neither are assumed at this point to be anything other than Chorus members. Hines states in her script that this first scene of the play should be performed “in the manner of *Teatro en Atril*” (16), which is essentially just a line of four actors across the stage, much like in a staged reading or reader’s theatre. The audience watching the University of Calgary production, however, does not see this choice since the stage direction is honored more in process than in product. That is, blocking this scene in rehearsal revealed the challenges posed by the unconventional seating arrangement; a simple, four-person line could not serve all sightlines and because the audience surrounds the action, the performers are unable to look at the entire audience at any point. This became the biggest obstacle in staging the entire play and the factor I would most reconsider if I ever had the opportunity to work on it again. The ability to look at the entire audience at once and to have only one fourth-wall to break makes the narration built into the play easier to stage and the spectators’ focus easier to direct. With only one fourth-wall, the Chorus could look out at the audience for narration or a gag, then quickly face upstage toward Cassandra and Ben, prompting the audience to do the

same. If I had considered this before deciding on the seating configuration, I would likely have saved myself a great deal of time and energy in the blocking process.

The first scene of the University of Calgary production, then, is not the *Teatro en Atril* experience that the script suggests, but it has its own benefits. By surrounding the stage with seating, some of the two-dimensionality the play demands is lost, but the production becomes more visually dynamic. Stage use and depth in blocking become more apparent, as with most plays set in the round or thrust. The scene still effectively sets up the conventions of character-switching and of “suggestion” rather than “demonstration,” but in a more visual way than the *Teatro en Atril* method. At the end of the first scene, the Chorus steps back and introduces Cassandra.

On opening night, I sit in front of a young woman who, at Cassandra’s introduction, loudly whispers to her boyfriend, “That’s the Karen Hines part.” She is rude, but she is right. This young woman is, like many young women who come to see *Hello...Hello* at the University of Calgary, a Karen Hines fan. As such, she is likely very curious at this moment about how Teddy Ivanova will play the part of Cassandra, a part that has only ever been played by playwright herself before this night. Further, Hines is most popular for her pseudo-Bouffon clown, Pochsy, and a great deal of Pochsy (or perhaps just Karen) can be found in the writing of Cassandra. “How, then, will Teddy approach the part?” the young woman behind me must be wondering. “Will she try to do Pochsy?”

The traditional Bouffon clown, as taught by Philippe Gaulier, is “precisely the opposite of Greek Tragedy,” usually “a crippled outcast, a lame person, a legless or one-

armed cripple, a dwarf, a midget, a whore, a homosexual, a witch, a heretical priest, a madman. He has not been chosen by the gods” (“Bouffon”). The Bouffon is usually detached from society, giving her critical perspective that allows her to make fun of the mainstream, often with malice, spite, and a great deal of enjoyment; the Bouffon delights in being a freak. Though Hines’ Pochsy clown already breaks from traditional Bouffon conventions in many ways, she does have a madness explained as a product of mercury poisoning. Like the traditional Bouffon, she is very aware of the audience and, since she enjoys being watched, is arguably always performing. She is also an outsider looking in, perhaps trying to fit in, giving her a malicious, bitter, even evil flare at times. In these ways, perhaps it is obvious that Cassandra is just another face of the clown persona from which Pochsy was also born. Cassandra too has a madness – her psychic abilities – and Hines even pays homage to Pochsy in *Hello...Hello* by weaving in references to mercury. It is possible that Cassandra also has mercury poisoning from her meal at the restaurant. Because of her mental unrest, and also because of the importance of fashion in this future, Cassandra too is always performing, always conscious of being looked at. The greatest difference between Cassandra and Pochsy is that Cassandra is not a freak in this world, but is in fact looked up to. She is not written in the present as Pochsy is, but in the future where the world is full of people just like her. Thus her “performance” of perfection is obligatory, not enjoyed. Unlike a traditional Bouffon clown, Cassandra can serve as an allegorical figure, a hero in the “Greek tragedy” that Gaulier rejects. Regardless, her hidden resentment of the world reveals the same dark flare we see in Pochsy, such as when Cassandra orders Ben, “Trust me; doubt yourself” (124).

Since clown creation is a difficult process and impossible to replicate, I chose not to ask Teddy to channel the Pochsy style in her performance of Cassandra. Instead, I decided to focus on the story and characters, hoping that I would be able to find other means of bringing out the clown in Cassandra (and the Chorus), such as emphasizing the importance of fashion in this world to create a sense of always performing. The heart of the story and characters would propel this production, and I knew that it was even possible to do the show without any clown at all.

So, as Cassandra moves through her first scene, the young woman behind me may notice Pochsy in Teddy's portrayal, but it is likely a product of the text, not the acting. Teddy's Cassandra has clown-like qualities, but these are products of a different process. Her voice, for instance, has a deliberate quality, each word carefully chosen and performed. A similar quality is found in Pochsy, but Teddy's voice work comes from an understanding of the world of the play, not Bouffon. This world is driven by fashion, so it seemed appropriate in rehearsal to assume the same would be true in voice. The people of this world want not just to look angelic, but sound angelic as well. I gave Teddy the direction, "Enjoy the sound of your own voice." But what is the sound of perfection? As a reference point, the cast were treated early in rehearsals to a movie night in which we watched the 1935 film *Top Hat* (which is also the film the song "Dancing Queen" is from) in order to understand the mid-Atlantic dialect used in films of the era. In rehearsal, I often asked the actors to deliver lines with this dialect, and eventually stripped it away to leave only a slight hint of the lilt or cadence.

Interestingly, the characterization of Cassandra in her first scene is different from much of the rest of the play. Alone, and on her way to the graveyard, she is at her most vulnerable. Ben's entrance quickly changes that. Cassandra immediately starts performing, and this exterior only cracks occasionally throughout the rest of the play to reveal the true Cassandra. The performance is familiar, since the exterior Cassandra wishes to present is much like the natural perfection of the Chorus. She tries to be beautiful and poses her body a little more deliberately than is natural. Her mid-Atlantic dialect becomes a little stronger, though it is completely lost during her psychic episodes and near the end of the play. If the Chorus is physically immune to gravity, then Cassandra tries to make it look like she is too, though she is not always successful. When Ben walks her home, she has an episode in which she feels as though she is going to fly away, torn between the earth and the sky (another battle). Her physical realization of this includes a great deal of hand work, such as clenching or grasping for something to keep her from flying away. Even when she is not having an episode, Cassandra has a great deal of the shadow gesture missing from the physical vocabulary of the Chorus, and these slight twitches and eye movements reveal the struggle in her soul.

Part of Cassandra's performance includes an attempt to be just like everybody else, and since she is something of an expert on the topic of fashion, she is also dressed to the nines (Fig. 3). Her hair is permanently in beautiful curls, and her make-up includes red lips and soft, dark eyes. She is also dressed in whites and blacks, though there is a splash of colour in the lining of her jacket. A wise student of semiotics in the third row

might wonder if this hint of colour represents a collision of worlds within Cassandra herself, but like the heart-shaped set, it is not intended to pull focus.



Fig. 3. *Cassandra, Act One*. University of Calgary, November 2008. (photo: Gavin Semple)

Ben is more comfortable as an earth-bound individual than Cassandra is. Even during her episodes, Ben maintains a physical composure that has a beauty of its own. Like the Chorus, there is very little shadow gesture in Ben's physical work, although like

Cassandra, Ben is “performing” himself for the world; he is just much better at it. In fact, it should seem in Act One that Ben is a largely two-dimensional character and that his performance of himself is the only version that exists. His relationship with Cassandra will alter that perception in Act Two, but for now, Ben is a sort of male ingénue: smart and caring, but with the emotional depth of a popsicle (or so it seems).

Despite this shallow exterior, Tim Hamilton’s understanding of Ben allows a subtle physical language to bleed through. As he helps Cassandra recover from her episode on the stairs to her apartment, he is spellbound, causing a few little shadow gestures to slip out. He regains his composure, and after Cassandra agrees to see him again, does a grand twirl to launch himself into the song, “More Snow.” This is a more noticeable movement that communicates his crush in the style of the black and white film. Perhaps it is Tim’s understanding of gest that makes his performance so precise. He applied the concept easily and frequently, so I could ask him for a gestic gesture in a pivotal moment and did not need to spend time editing his choices; he knew it better than I did, the ideal director-actor relationship. When it came time to decide if or how we would use Ben’s glasses for thematic punctuation, I left the decision to Tim. On his first date with Cassandra, Ben might remove his glasses, choosing when and when not the character “sees” the world clearly.

Ben’s glasses were my main requirement in costuming the character. In response to a line in the script about his poor eyesight (74), and with a very futuristic pair of glasses in mind, I hoped they would be a useful tool for the actor and provide a wealth of opportunities to communicate theme in a play about people who can and cannot “see” the

world in front of them. The rest of Ben's costume came easily. Using the black and white colour palate, Julia provided a well-tailored suit for the Head of Creative at Quicksilver, with layers that are stripped off throughout the play (Fig. 4). His hair is slicked back like many of the photos of a young Gene Kelly that now provide the screensaver for my laptop.

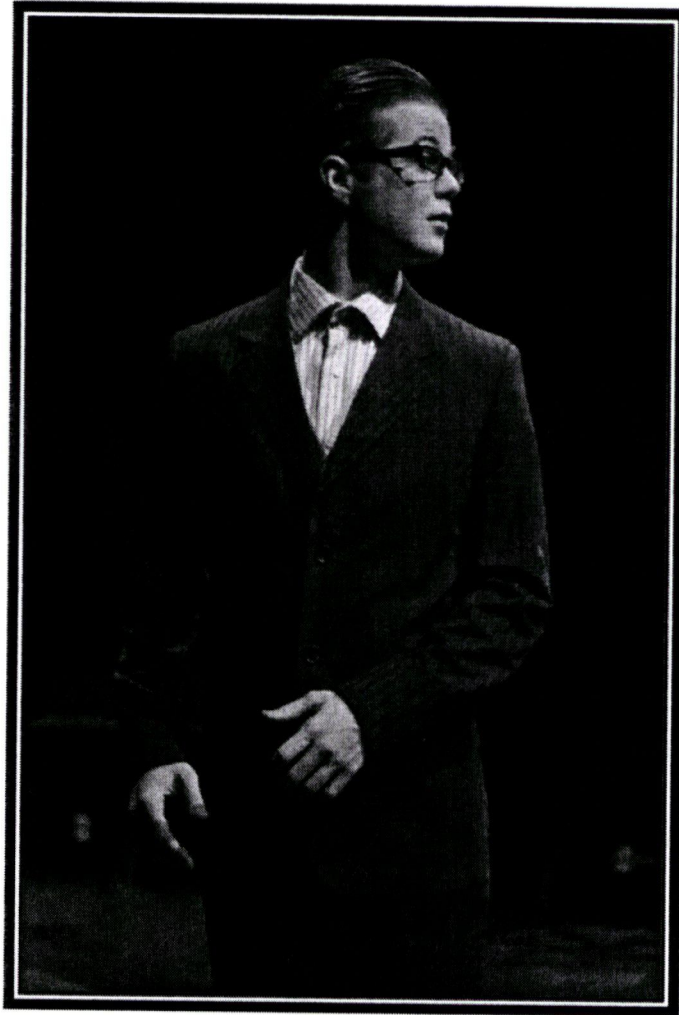


Fig. 4. *Ben Cordair in Act One*. University of Calgary, November 2008.
(photo: Tony Field)



Fig. 5. *Angel Doll*. University of Calgary, November 2008. (photo: Tony Field)

By Cassandra and Ben's date at the restaurant, the audience will have noticed that there are no props in the production. In fact, the restaurant scene is the first to make use of the black café-style chairs that have been resting on the set, and are used sparingly in the show. In hindsight, I could probably have cut them entirely. In line with my "suggestion" rather than "demonstration" mantra, the cutlery, menus, and plates of dinner are mimed, as is the gift box Ben presents Cassandra with. Inside the box, however, is one of my favorite gestures in the play. Since the angel doll gifts reappear in the play several times, I felt it was important to have something for the audience to look at. Before rehearsals began, I conceived a gesture I called the "angel hand-puppet," a simple gesture that I felt could be manipulated to take the place of an angel doll prop. As Figure

5 (above) suggests, the gesture is created by locking two hands together at the thumb, which are folded down to remove the head of the angel. The prop is “passed” back and forth by the performers easily by simply taking on or dropping the gesture. Symbolically, the angel becomes a product of two hands connecting. Since there are several references in the play to “hands,” and since it is a play about connection, I even considered asking that the angel doll hand puppet become the poster image for the show. The audience should be able to see this gesture clearly enough to make an impact, but once again, a smaller performance space might have made it more perceptible.

Though gestural vocabulary often takes the place of dance in this production, several numbers are formally choreographed, such as in the song “Consummation.” The accompanying dance was created by the choreographer with the Chorus, and it resembles a Britney Spears music video, intentionally pairing sex with commerce, supporting Ben’s push to get Cassandra to drink the brand name vodka. Though I was involved in all choreography on a conceptual level, there were several dance numbers that I gave completely to Glenda and her assistant. The first dance number of the play is a soft-shoe routine, intended to parody similar routines in old musicals, while the dance in “The Abyss” is based on pedestrian gestures – such as folding a shirt or picking up a shopping bag – but with a Broadway flare. Later, Ben proposes to Cassandra in song, during which there is almost no choreography. Since Glenda was only available as a part-time choreographer, “When a Rabbit Dies” was choreographed by me, and with little knowledge of dance, I took inspiration from the popular hand-choreography of the children’s songs “Little Bunny Foo Foo” and “Skinamarink” to create a comic piece

about rabbits dying. The choreography in the play was largely successful, and I learned a great deal from Glenda and her assistant, but I had not anticipated how much a choreographer was necessary. In hindsight, having a full-time choreographer working on the piece might have made a bigger difference than I understood at the time. “When a Rabbit Dies” proves successful, however, ending the act with laughter to bring the audience back after intermission. Though it is a largely positive ending to the act, there have been enough cracks in Cassandra’s façade – not to mention her increasingly frequent episodes – to foreshadow more conflict in the second half of the play.

After the intermission, the audience returns to the theatre, which looks a lot like it did in Act One, with the exception of the placement of the chairs. When the lights come up to happy, peppy music, however, it is clear that some time has passed since Act One and the atmosphere is now more suburban. The new costumes of the Chorus have a great deal to do with this (Fig 6). Though they are made with the same fabrics as the Act One costumes, the style and cut have a more domestic flare. If the citizens of Act One are escaping to the future, then the citizens of Act Two are escaping to the past. Nobody lives in the present. The Female Chorus now wears a one-piece dress that resembles something out of a 1960s Sears catalogue, or perhaps something worn by Mary Tyler Moore, while the Male Chorus has a short-sleeved shirt and sweater-vest, like something from *Leave it to Beaver*. Despite this nostalgic costuming, both outfits are hip, still something that might be seen in a GAP – or Abyss – store today. Retro is “in.”

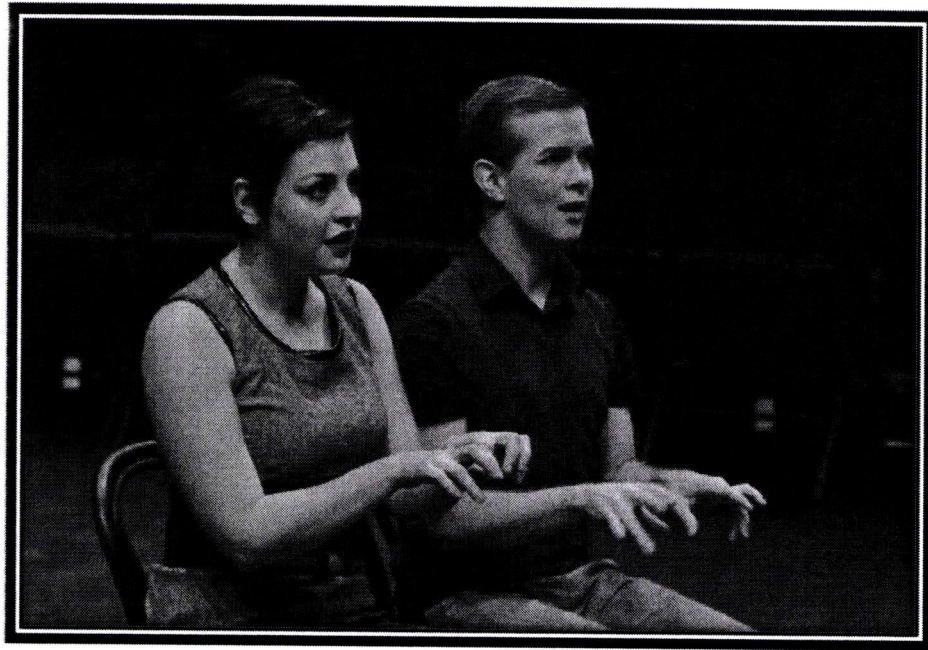


Fig. 6. *Chorus in Act Two*. University of Calgary, November 2008. (photo: Gavin Semple)



Fig. 7. *Ben Cordair in Act Two*. University of Calgary, November 2008. (photo: Gavin Semple)



Fig. 8. *Cassandra in Act Two*. University of Calgary, November 2008. (photo: Gavin Semple)

Ben is moving up in the ranks of Quicksilver, so his costume is also slightly different. No longer wearing his jacket, his silver vest gives a sparkle to his presence not seen in Act One (Fig. 7). Straight from his honeymoon with Cassandra and glowing with love, Ben stands with greater confidence and strength in this act. Cassandra has also removed layers since her appearance in Act One (Fig. 8). She stopped wearing her jacket

in the middle of the first act, and now wears her white slip dress with a large black belt. It is a softer look than her first costume, again supporting the suburban focus of the act.

Yet Cassandra grows more and more distracted as the act progresses. Ben tries to sell her on their new neighborhood in Semi-Residentia, but Cassandra's focus is on the three-legged squirrels, eight-limbed toddlers, and gossamer diapers that accompany this new lifestyle. Cassandra's mask of perfection begins to slip, and she worries less and less about putting it back on. Her episodes become more frequent, and she begins to settle into them, almost always living in them by the end of the play. Ben and Cassandra become more distant and even begin to fight, and the blocking of "Flounder" demonstrates the distance between them. The scene takes place in a restaurant, and it is suggested that they are sitting beside each other at a table. In our production, Ben and Cassandra sit several meters apart, making it impossible for Ben to reach out to Cassandra. The Male and Female Choruses stand behind Ben and Cassandra, having much of their argument for them. Eager to change the topic, Cassandra begs Ben to dance. They meet at center stage, now lit by the same spot light that is used for Bury's burial plot, effectively dancing on his grave. Cassandra screams and goes into labour.

The birth of the baby requires the addition of two of the only props in the play: the baby Surely/Shirley herself, played by a small LED light, and the baby carriage. Keeping with the colour palate of the play, the carriage is painted a beautiful shimmery white. Since the baby is one of the greatest "collisions" in the play, the light that surrounds her is bright pink, standing out from everything else in the world. In the hospital, a stage direction in the script suggests that "Cassandra leaves her body and

wanders through the room” (115). Liking this stage direction, but unsure how it might read, Teddy and I focused on just getting Cassandra away from the baby toward whom she feels so alienated. She climbs to the top of the stairs, and gives a silent scream before returning to her bed.

Meanwhile, the Chorus and Ben sing “Smaller and Stranger.” As musical director, Tom found creative ways to bring out the thematic conversations in each song, often paralleling a number in the show to a song from a television show, movie, or musical. While “The Abyss” resembled “Be Our Guest” from Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast*, and “Quicksilver” had hints of advertising jingles built into the synthesized sound and the vocal approach, “Smaller and Stranger” was to sound like a “baby-powder commercial” (115). Tom often used these tools as ways to bring the performers into their voices for each song. Because I am not confident that the songs themselves are written with such clear parallels to particular musical styles, the audience may not necessarily understand the reference each song makes. For example, I mentioned above that our choreography of “Consummation” was meant to allude to the Britney Spears style of pop music, but the suggested tempo of the score suggested a much slower approach, supposedly to punctuate the references to death in the lyrics. Because I felt that the music itself was not written in any way like a song about death – certainly not a funeral march – I instead pushed the song in the pop music direction to make a point about manufactured music. “Smaller and Stranger,” however, was a little more successful at evoking the intended baby-powder commercial sound and I wish I had pushed it even further in that direction.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the arrival of the baby is Cassandra's last hope, and it fails. Since she is unable to connect with the baby, there is nothing left for her in life. Teddy and I decided, however, that Cassandra is unwilling to kill herself and leave Ben alone the way Bury left her. She needs permission from Ben to die, and when Ben sees that she is unhappy, he gives her the only gift he understands, one of escape. This time, though, he is fully aware what his gift means. He presents Cassandra with another angel doll, which is described as "a bit wonkier than the others" (130), and so the gesture used to demonstrate it is also a bit skewed.

Inside this angel is the last prop in the play, a shiny ball pendant. Since the pendant is mentioned so frequently in the play, I had toyed with the idea of giving each of the performers a shiny ball for the full two acts, but feared it might confuse the audience since Cassandra does not receive her shiny ball until the end of the play. In conversation with Karen Hines, I expressed my thoughts to her, and she mentioned that she too had tried to incorporate the prop into a previous production with little success, and so had mimed it in all three previous shows. She encouraged me to try to find a way, if I so desired, but warned that the description of the prop is so vague in the script that an attempt to realize it might destroy the image some audience members would have already created. Eventually, I decided to use only one shiny ball, the one Ben gives Cassandra. As one of only three props in the play, it serves to punctuate the importance of the moment and gives the audience something concrete to look at when Cassandra finally drinks it. Since it is a simple black ball, it also allows the audience to imagine what it inside.

Locating the climax of the play – or at least the turning point of the characters – at this place in the story was a difficult decision, since it means that the fifteen pages of dialogue that follow it serve as a very long *dénouement*. Ben's gift is, however, a very powerful turning point for both Ben and Cassandra, as described in the previous chapter. One of the major ways this shift is demonstrated is that Ben begins "performing" and Cassandra stops. Likely disturbed by what he has done – both allowing his wife to kill herself and agreeing to sell his angel dolls – Ben begins spouting his own affirmations in his speech to the CEOs of Quicksilver. Though he is selling his angel gift boxes to the CEOs, he is also selling the idea to himself, trying to assure himself of his new job in life, to sell the people of the world that which they crave most: escape, especially to the spiritual. This speech is pushed, unlike the previous speeches that seemed to simply flow from his mouth, and Ben looks physically tense, now fighting to control the little shadow gestures that reveal his heart. There are also cracks in Ben's performance of this speech, moments where the mask slips off to show a hint of remorse or doubt, the first signs of his very own "psychic episodes." Inspired by Barack Obama's November 4, 2008 victory speech, Tim delivers the sales pitch with a forced, religious fervor not unlike a Baptist minister, further paralleling consumerism with spirituality. The Choruses sing their haunting chorus with arms out like angels, their vocal style almost hymn-like. Cassandra, however, relaxes. Given permission to drop her mask, she does, and she makes her way to the graveyard with a light heart. Physically peaceful, she is virtually free of shadow gesture or any extraneous movement. She drinks the poison, and as the company sings a reprise of "Insane Song," Cassandra happily floats on top of Bury's grave.

One of the side effects of locating the play's climax at Ben's gift of suicide is that the play appears to have several endings. It could end once Cassandra has taken the poison, but another scene remains in which Ben holds Cassandra as she dies. It is a beautifully written scene, but in my analysis, is extraneous to story and could probably be cut entirely. In order to keep the audience invested through to the end, we tried to keep the scene as simple as possible. Stylistically, I approached the last scene as if it were a cinematic long fade-out; the lights grow darker, the music is first removed completely, then creeps back in, and the physical work of the actors is kept still and precise. The intensity builds until the last line of the play, when all but the back-lighting snaps out as the actors exclaim, "Look at the sky!" The audience is left with the powerful image of the four silhouetted actors against the colourful light. Because the audience cannot see what the four actors are looking at, they are left to interpret the final line of the play as they choose.

If We Could But Transform Them

As the audience leaves any theatre presentation, the director hopes they will have something interesting to talk about on the car ride home. The director hopes they will talk about the story or the ideas expressed in the text by the production. The director also knows that they will no doubt talk about how the production itself worked.

I knew from the start that our production of *Hello...Hello* would be different. It would be different from the previous productions in which Karen was not just involved, but starred. I knew that the Pochsy element of Hines' performance could not be

replicated, and so our production would focus on the heart of the story and allow the clown to fall into place if it could. I knew that I was interested in performing the play in a small, intimate space unlike the larger proscenium spaces in which it had previously been staged. I knew that the ending of the play – much of the second act – had never been tested on an audience and so would pose challenges. Now, with the benefit of a degree of objectivity afforded by the time that has passed since our production closed, I am able to reflect back on the production with a kind of detachment. Did the play do what I hoped it would? Were my choices successful?

I have stated that my objective in staging this play was to communicate the heart of the story, the emotional and psychological journeys of the characters. In particular, I was interested in telling the story of Cassandra's suicide. I feel the University of Calgary production did this very effectively – or affectively. Based on my perception of audience reaction, I suspect that the investment in Cassandra's journey and the stakes of each of her choices was high. The gasps and tears fell in many of the expected places, and the tension was palpable. I give great credit to the performers, whose understanding of their characters was complex and whose performances were nuanced. Much of this nuance was revealed, in part, by the precise and carefully designed stylistic work. The movement and gestural concepts described earlier in this chapter meant that all physical choices were illustrative of an emotional or psychological state while also communicating metaphorical meaning. Because shadow gesture was largely eliminated from the physical vocabularies of the Chorus performers, all of their gestures pulled greater focus and took on deeper meaning. In addition, the gestures became so deliberate

for all characters that it became part of a larger style for the piece. The vocal work was equally deliberate and stylized, and together with gesture, dance, song, and visual design, created a “world” for the audience out of which the main story could be born. In the end, these choices served many of the functions that I suspect Hines’ Bouffon training served in earlier productions.

I would argue that the style of our show did include an element of parody, but perhaps more of classic film than of musical theatre. The parody of musical theatre, for this production, was evident more in the text than in the style of performance. The largest reason the musical theatre parody was lost in our production was the choice of staging and seating configuration. Because the audience surrounded the action, and because the actors frequently entered the audience space, the play had an added layer of intimacy; at least that was the plan. Admittedly the scale of our set and seating was too large to really capitalize on the intimacy the design intended to achieve. I did not anticipate how much this restriction would affect how the script functions, but discovered it quickly as soon as we started rehearsals on our feet, by which point it was too late to make changes. The play needed an interesting mix of two-dimensionality and intimacy, and both suffered due to the size of the performance space. The University of Calgary production worked with the seating configuration we were given, but it was not ideal and meant that some of the blocking was at times a bit awkward, and at other times, stunning. In hindsight, I think that if we had used the set that was provided with a proscenium-style seating configuration, the blocking would have taken less time and provided more opportunities to parody the two-dimensionality of musical theatre acting.

The soundscape – the music that had not been composed by Morrison – was largely effective, and I think it heightened emotional response from the audience, especially in the second act in the climactic moments of the play. The percussion was added so late in the process that it was, at times, unpredictable. That is, it changed slightly every night, but for the most part it added a volume and echo that the synthesized keyboard could not. The instrumentation Tom chose for the scored songs was also appropriate. There were not any vocal volume issues that I was aware of in performance, though it took a lot of work in rehearsal to make sure the actors could compete with the chasmic height of the Reeve Theatre.

The set and costume designs were beautiful and largely served the functions we aimed for, as described earlier. The visual and aural design choices created a world for the play to emerge from, but in truth, the play asks that audience create the world. Hine's text evokes an imaginative response, but it is because the performers react to their own descriptions of the world in very particular ways that the audience is able to join in on the journey. I feel strongly that audience experienced the magic that Cassandra speaks of when describing theatre, and I think the response was both emotional and intellectual. They cared about Cassandra's and Ben's journeys, but were still susceptible to the distancing techniques built into the performances of the Chorus. Though some of the parody of musical theatre may have been lost in staging, the fable aspect of the show was able to communicate its message.

It All Adds Up

I began this chapter by likening directing to chemistry. Certainly there is a sense of experimentation that goes into the process, and I went into this show wanting to take a number of risks, make big decisions and just see how they would work out. I was not unbiased, however. I had goals for the production, a desired outcome. Using my matrix, “Two worlds collide as a girl struggles to live” as an umbrella for all of my choices, and “suggestion” rather than “demonstration” as my first commandment, I set out to tell a story that an audience would want to hear. I needed them to connect with the heart of Cassandra and Ben’s story, and so every choice from character development to lighting instruments to the colour of eyeliner had to serve that primary goal. Everything had to serve that heart, and I believe it did.

CHAPTER THREE

Channeling My Energies

I have always had difficulty articulating a “type” of theatre I am drawn to or what my artistic taste might be. Similarly, I have difficulty finding a common style to the work I direct, or a particular artistic flavor I give to the work I direct that could be identified as part of the “Dunsdon form” of directing. I would be shocked if an audience could recognize an anonymously directed show as a Jamie Dunsdon production just from watching it, yet I see common styles, interpretations, and approaches in the works of other directors; that is, I see their artistic footprint. For this reason, one of my favorite experiences in working on *Hello...Hello* has been a growth in the understanding of my own approach. I now have a greater awareness of the tools and methods I use, and so can build on them and use them to my advantage. Also, I am now more aware of my biases, the things I prefer to see in a play, and this heightened awareness will allow me to continue to approach each work individually and illuminate areas in which I can continue to grow and learn. This chapter will discuss how *Hello...Hello* contributed to my growth as a director and artist.

I have been aware for some time that I direct with an academic eye; that is, I am very interested in theory and textual analysis, and while telling the story of the characters is my primary goal, I truly enjoy infusing story with metaphor as much as possible. I am aware that I enjoy seeing this in other productions, and also that any given audience member might only detect a fraction of the metaphoric language – visual or aural – I use

in a show. I take every choice very seriously and I consider it my job to make sure each choice is in harmony – or disharmony, if necessary – with the others in the show.

Working on *Hello...Hello* has demonstrated for me how useful my analytical skills are, but also how they can get out of control.

An understanding of the literary and theatrical techniques at play, material covered in Chapter One, helped me develop a very complete understanding of the script. The crystallization of my own interpretation of the script helped me enter discussions with actors and designers with an open mind but a very clear focus. I felt very equipped to serve as an editor of the individual choices made by any member of the creative team. A perfect example of my enjoyment of applying theory in rehearsal is my approach to gesture. I knew before approaching the play that metaphoric movement could be very powerful, and I usually prefer to help the actors find such movement through their own character work rather than ask them to find a gesture that could communicate the idea, symbol, metaphor, or relationship I was interested in at that moment. For the most part, this strategy has proved very successful in past projects. As I tackled *Hello...Hello*, the notion of “gestic” movement or gesture was reintroduced to me and I was, at first, very hesitant about employing the Brechtian technique or even the term in rehearsal. I feared that it would make the actors think first and react second and that I would lose spontaneity and impulse. Only a couple of weeks into rehearsal, however, I was struggling to get a performer to bring choices into the hall, and decided to approach the problem from the angle of gestic staging. I asked the performer to consider the relationship with the other character and then demonstrate the relationship without words

as simply as possible. The moment was instantly blocked, and I reused the tool frequently from then on. I suspect I will continue to explore the tool and associated terminology, though I will continue to apply it judiciously as it certainly is not for every play or every actor.

It is worth pointing out that I also learned how my analytical skills could perhaps dominate my thinking too much during the process. Though I approached each choice with as open a mind as I could manage, I found my deep understanding of the complexities of the play could often make me very picky. One such example is of the costume design process. Julia Wasilewski and I were very much on the same page about the color palate and how it worked metaphorically. The grayscale was justified textually and built into the understanding of the rest of the design (light, set, sound, make-up). Julia and I also agreed that flashes of colour in the costume would parallel the choices we were making with everything from the lighting during Cassandra's episodes to the actual performance of those episodes. In the final costumes, however, the splashes of colour that had been conceptualized were omitted from the costumes, and I found myself stressing a great deal over how this would break the unity of the show. In hindsight, I realize that the audience would likely never have noticed the tiny amount of colour originally planned, and even if they had, would likely not have recognized it as part of a motif. I found myself becoming equally obsessive over blocking as we struggled with the unconventional seating configuration. I lost a great deal of sleep over this but eventually discovered that I needed to relax and understand that most of what I was worrying about would never be registered by an audience anyway. I started to relax a

little more towards the end of the rehearsal process. When it came to the decision of how to use Ben's glasses, for example, I am pleased that I decided to give the task to the actor and not personally help him find each individual time he chose to put them on or take them off for the sake of metaphor and/or character.

I am beginning to understand that one of the strengths but also potential sites of conflict in my process is my need for discussion and exploration. I have always found it most helpful to view the job of the director as that of editor; I can guide each member of the team creatively and edit the choices they bring to the table to ensure a unified production, but I prefer to stay out of the individual's way as they prepare those choices. I have found that this strategy ensures that each artist can claim ownership over his or her work. I personally find this process more fulfilling, less exhausting, and more fun; it means, however, that I expect a great deal from my creative team. I expect performers to enter the rehearsal hall with choices to explore, having done much of their analysis on their own time. I feel that the rehearsal hall is a place to test these choices, and a place to find the intricacies of how each performer's choices and interpretations will affect the others in the hall. I try to make my expectations as clear as possible before rehearsal, and I try to cast actors I know are capable of the work. I am learning, however, that these expectations may be fair but not always realistic and that they may generate stress in rehearsals. Instead, I have learned that I need to find effective tools for inspiring those on my creative team—performers, designers, choreographers, and/or musicians—to bring their own choices when they do not.

Of course there are other biases that I will continue to monitor and, whenever possible, exploit. I have discovered my enjoyment of stylized movement, and so will continue to explore other forms of movement so that I have many tools available to me. Fortunately, I feel my enjoyment of stylized movement was beneficial on this project, and working with a choreographer was an education in itself. Also, I have learned that I have a tendency to use unconventional seating configurations. Whenever possible, I prefer to avoid proscenium staging, though I now have growing appreciation for the convention. As I mentioned in the preceding chapter, I discovered early on that our seating choice limited blocking possibilities rather than creating them, and that the addition of nearly one hundred seats to the risers to meet the Department of Drama's minimum seating requirement was the greatest obstacle in our production. Had this quota not existed, the playing space and overall size of the theatre space would have been much smaller, and the audience much closer to the action. Our unconventional seating configuration as originally planned would have been compressed enough that an actor could speak out and, by nature of the size of the space, still address all audience members at once. Arguably, the configuration we used – in combination with the size of the space and number of seats – created the worst of all possibilities, a sort of stadium set-up, the hockey arena of theatres. Coping with this meant I had to learn more about blocking for large spaces, one positive result of the complication.

One of the most exciting realizations I have had while working on this project is the understanding of how I read plays. Though I know I direct with an eye for theory and metaphor, and am drawn to scripts that have strong human connections, I have also

discovered that I read plays with a nuanced understanding of atmosphere. Specifically, I read with an understanding of light. I do not design the lighting of the show as I read it, but I do have a strong sense of how light functions on stage, and I am interested in learning to communicate this as accurately as possible to help my process with lighting designers. I am also interested in learning to actually design the lighting myself whenever possible. I can see the possibility of a directing career in which the design of my own lighting is as vital to my directing process as building a collage. In the meantime, I hope to become clearer in my discussions with designers about images that motivate my understanding of a script so that they do not get lost in the process, as in the case of the barcode, mentioned earlier.

Of course, one of the biggest personal challenges of working on the play was what I will here call the “Hines Factor.” We were fortunate to have Karen available to us, attending rehearsals and giving notes, but the knowledge that she was not just the playwright but also the original Cassandra proved frightening, making us feel oddly accountable for every choice, afraid she might disapprove. Because Karen was an inspiration to me long before I ever read *Hello...Hello*, I also experienced the frightening cocktail of emotions that comes from working with a hero. While the Hines Factor likely affected me more than I am willing to recognize, I must admit I am fairly pleased with the way the cast and I approached it. To deal with the challenge of being the first cast to stage the play without Hines as Cassandra, we decided to work from the text first. We developed a character from our understanding of the story in the text and the world of the play, and layered on the clown only after the character work was solid. I cannot claim

that my direction of Teddy as Cassandra was not affected by my conversations with Karen, but I will profess to having been open to a new interpretation of the role. We were all very aware that this could and would not be the same as the previous productions, and so did try to make this happen. Karen once offered me a filmed recording of an earlier production, and I happily rejected the offer, hoping to make our production its own creation. Looking back now, I am pleased with how we found our own Cassandra while still channeling the spirit of a Karen Hines performance. I am also pleased with how we managed to use Karen in the rehearsal room. Though I had extensive conversations with her before and during rehearsals, Karen did not make a visit until the last week of rehearsal, after which she offered notes to me privately on three separate evenings. I was happy to consider each note carefully, and actually implemented most of them. These were very encouraging sessions, and helped me feel confident about many of my own choices. In fact, I think we make quite a few daring choices in the rehearsal of this show and I am proud of many of the risks we took.

Though it May Seem a Bit Insane

I am reminded that *Hello...Hello* came to be my thesis production after an unusually extended selection process. It was not the production selected by Graduate Committee in the spring of 2008, nor was it the second choice when the rights for that first production were discovered to be unavailable. In fact, it was not even one of the original five projects submitted to the committee in late 2007. Given the task of submitting at least two more proposals in May 2008, I began the arduous process of

sorting through my long list of “must-direct-before-I-die” scripts to see which, if any, were suitable for the university, for the students, for the time-slot in which my thesis was now to be scheduled, and of course for me at this place in my artistic career.

Hello...Hello had been on my shelf for only a couple of years, and admittedly, was not on the “before-I-die” list. Aside from being a rather difficult first read, it was a musical, not a genre I had much experience with. It was obviously profoundly thoughtful, highly stylized, and, I felt, perhaps a bit too large a challenge for me. So it was not that I disliked the play. I was frightened by it. However, I also knew there was something about the script that fascinated me. Like an unfinished puzzle, I found the individual pieces mesmerizing, but had very little idea as to what the big picture would be. In the end I knew I wanted a challenge and so submitted *Hello...Hello* as my seventh choice in the thesis selection process. Though I was at the time terrified to hear it was selected, I am immensely grateful for the opportunity to have worked on this project. I have discovered a great deal about my own directorial process, as well as ways in which I can work and communicate with other artists, and finally had a chance to face a number of artistic fears and goals all at the same time.

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