Static Evolution

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Static Evolution

A Thesis

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in partial fulfillment of the
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in
Film and Theatre
Theatre Design

By
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Abstract

In Justin Maxwell’s theatrical works, the stasis and stagnation of central characters are importantly made materially evident through costuming. For instance, in the play, *Marie Antoinette’s Head*, the stagnation of civilization and society is explored while time zigzags over two thousand years. The movement of time and epochs is told through a colorful array of costumes, also indicating the growth and evolution of characters in each period. The protagonist, Leonardo, however, remains stuck in 1793. In another of Maxwell’s works, the one-man, one-act play *Exhausted Paint*, the painter Vincent Van Gogh experiences a similar inert characterization. In both works, the costumes are essential to represent the static nature of the characters while also highlighting the change and comedy surrounding them.
Introduction

In Justin Maxwell’s short plays, *Marie Antoinette’s Head* and *Exhausted Paint*, the protagonists are fixed characters juxtaposed with societies regulating the ever-changing ethical codes. In *Marie Antoinette’s Head*, Leonardo is rendered a stagnant character, never changing appearance, even as he moves through different epochs. In *Exhausted Paint*, the constraints of art and beauty take their toll on one of the most influential artists in history, Vincent Van Gogh. Both plays ask the question, "Do we ever evolve?"

*Marie Antoinette’s Head*, is a contemporary absurdist play about fixed characters in a changing world who are trying to obtain things that have little meaning in life. The story takes the audience to certain eras in history that helped to shape western civilization.

The play’s protagonist, Leonardo, epitomizes this. As time changes and eras pass, his unchanging character becomes a representation of history repeating itself in each one of the three eras: the French Revolution, the controversial Corcoran prison, and Ancient Roman society (represented by Nero). Gluttony and the basic human condition are explored. In each act, the audience meets characters that have influenced western society.

There are five antagonists in the play. In each act, there is one character in the antagonist group who is influential in each societal epoch. In Act 1, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the Genevan philosopher, writer, and composer, appears fifteen years after his death during the Reign of Terror (Britannia). In Act 2, the character of Rousseau changes into Charles Darwin, an English naturalist, Geologist, and Biologist, and is the prompter for a game show inside a prison in 1994. In Act 3, the audience is looped back in time to the beginnings of western culture. The antagonist changes to Nero, the emperor of Rome in 64
C.E. He represents the ever-changing people who affect societies' values, morals, and ideals. This changing and ever-influential antagonist is compared with the other four antagonists, who are proletarians; a class of people who must accept the ideals of the influencers.

The proletariat antagonists in the play represent western society. In Act 1, the peasants act out against the ruling class. Enacting the central dynamic of Rousseau's *The Social Contract*. In that important historical text, peasants break the boundaries of the social contract and begin to make their own rules by squatting in a palace (Rousseau and H.). In Act 2, the prisoners and the guards represent the lower class. The prisons and the peasants of the 18th Century are related confined systems defined by the governing bodies. The guards and the prisoners all conform to the government's constraints.

The characters change one last time in Act 3. The last act loops back to the beginnings of western civilization with characters set in 64 C.E. at a Roman festival similar to Bacchanalia. Such rituals in the Roman Empire were an integral part of society. Bacchanalia, the most gluttonous of all the rites, was open to both women and men. The last act solidifies the themes of changing epochs that represent society and gluttony. They are compared with Leonardo, who does not change. The characters and costumes both play influential roles in the play. The characters inspire the theme of the play, while the costumes give the audience a sense of time, place, and status for each character.

The job of a costume designer is to highlight the characters' temperaments and create a look and character using history, socioeconomic status. The fixed and unchanging relationship of the main character, Leonardo, is represented in his garb. He is Marie's

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1 A political and philosophical book that "argued against the idea that the monarchs were divinely empowered to legislate. Rousseau asserts that only the people, who are sovereign, have that all-powerful right." Wikipedia
hairdresser and moves through the play in the same suit of the 1790s. He is the only character that does not change throughout the play. His fixed character is juxtaposed in three acts of changing eras, and the five characters in each of these acts change costume for each period of time they represent. But before costumes can be made, research into the epochs is needed to help create a sense of time and place.
Chapter One: Leonardo's Static Character Development in the Material World

In Marie Antoinette's Head, Leonardo is clothed in a men's suit called "the habit à la française" (Institute). This suit consists of a jacket, waistcoat, and breeches and is what nobles wore at court and parties. Leonardo's suit reflects his courtier status; he is not a noble but a hairdresser for women, creating elaborate, bouffant hairdressing common among the nobility in the late 1700s. His suit distinguished him; most middle-class people did not wear suits that were made with expensive embroidery or brocades (Figure 1). Using as reference surviving fashions from the late 18th Century documented in Fashion: A History from the 18th to the 20th Century guides the textile choices for Leonardo's suit. As this history shows, most men's suits of this social class and during this era were brocades, velvets, or embroidered (Batterberry and Batterberry 155 -156). The expense of dress in the Rococo period was extreme for the nobility, but the nobility was not taxed, so the extravagance could be maintained more easily (Batterberry and Batterberry 166 -168). The courtiers at Versailles, like the character of Leonardo, were expected to be dressed to impress, and so in staging Marie Antoinette's Head, to evoke this convention of the era, it is important that Leonardo's costume, hair, and makeup match that of the nobility. Most of the bourgeoisie would not have spent their fortunes on their extravagant clothing, but Leonardo is representative of the old regime of Louis XVI and the excesses of the court life in which he partook.

Most men's fashion did not change significantly during the 18th Century. The Collection of the Kyoto Costume Institute: A History from the 18th to the 20th
*Century* provides a record of clothing from the 18th Century and helped guide textile choices for the costumes. Men's suits were made of brocades, velvets, or satins (Institute). The velvets and satins were intricately embroidered, and the brocades were rich in designs and symbols. In our staging of the play, for Leonardo's costume, the choice of a rich brocade fabric was bought to expedite the process; a pre-made brocade fabric was the easier choice than embroidering a suit, given time restraints. There were considerations, however, the brocade had to be a certain color for the stage, and the design had to be small.

Contemporary brocades are primarily used for interior and exterior furnishings. Some of the brocades in the 1700s may be similarly large to the contemporary brocades, but only women's dresses used these patterns in the 1700s (Figure 2). Therefore, the diameter of the brocade was chosen to match a similar textile design to a brocade suit worn in 1765 (Figure 3). Leonardo's suit was a typical nobility suit with breeches, waistcoat, and fitted jacket, but under the jacket and the vest was a linen or cotton shirt.

The shirt worn under the suit is of a style that did not change from the 16th to mid-19th Century. This and all the shirts are worn for the production were made from rectangles and squares to give them a billowy look. The material was linen or cotton, which allows moisture to wick away from the skin (Banner). During the era, men's shirts were the same design for all classes of people, but the nobles' shirts had lace jabots and sleeves (Contini 186). The shirts sometimes also had a cravat around the neck. This accessory is not always worn, but the shirt used to costume the character of Leonardo was appropriate.

The suit consisted of an outer jacket, waistcoat, and breeches. The waistcoats, called "fracs," are sleeveless and are past the waistline, as this was the style until about the mid-
1700s (Contini 186). Around the 1780s, a waistcoat that stopped at the waist started to become popular. The sleeveless waistcoats were detailed with embroidery (flowers and scenery) or with rich brocades, or velvets, just like the jackets. The choice to have a contrasting vest reflects the period reference (Figure 4). In the 1790s, stripes became popular. The stripes and embroidery of the waistcoats complemented the jackets worn with the ensemble.

The outer coat called the "justaucorps" was stylistically adapted from a 17th-Century garment. This coat is collarless and tight around the body and flared at the waist to the knees. The sleeves are tight and have deep cuffs with detailed designs and matching buttons (Batterberry and Batterberry 155). The early 18th Century jacket styles had no collars and were always worn open (Contini 184). The outer coats have detailed embroidery that matched or complemented the waistcoat and breeches in pattern, textiles, and color (Figure 5). Later in the Century, the jackets changed in style and form. They still were made with expensive fabrics with intricate designs, but the shape had changed. In the late 1780s, brocades were replaced with stripes. In the latter half of the 18th Century, the justaucorps jacket was exchanged for the habit (Figure 6). The coat changed stylistically with the addition of a collar and a straight bottom. Leonardo's jacket was a justaucorps style.

The suit would not be complete without the breeches. Men in the time before the 18th Century (and into the 19th Century) wore a type of pants called (knee) breeches. The breeches with the upper classes and nobility matched the jacket and waistcoat. In the 18th Century, men's breeches were worn tight, having either a side opening with a front flap or just a side opening. Some breeches had embroidery around the bottom-hemmed cuff. The
fabric always was the same as used for the jacket. The knee-breeches gave a distinct period look but the accessories worn helped complete the look of a gentleman in the 18th Century.

The accessories for men in the 18th Century were quite different from contemporary society. Men wore wigs, silk stockings, lace jabots, small narrow shoes, and makeup. Most wigs were long and curly, with many tied in the back (Contini et al. 189). During the beginning of the 18th Century, men had large wigs of voluminous hair. As the Century moved on, men’s hair became shorter, tied back, or closer to the head (Contini 182-183). Leonardo’s wig and makeup needed to be styled to represent the style of a fashionable courtier (Figure 7). Since he was a hairdresser, his wig needed to have long, full, and curly hair. Although the wig was not powdered, it was long, curly, youthful, and full. Since Leonardo was from the middle class, the correct mode of wearing the wig would have the hair tied in a ponytail in the back (F193). The reason to put him in a wig different from his class was to highlight his fixed character’s absurdity. Leonardo's makeup was to be pale, and he wore patches on his face to cover blemishes (Batterberry and Batterberry 169). Patches were used to cover imperfections among the royalty. The accessories were the white silk stockings and small slip-on shoes (Contini 184), a needed component in completing the stylized look of an 18th Century courtier.
Rousseau, as central antagonist, needed to have an opposite look to that of Leonardo. Rousseau was not alive during the French Revolution and Reign of Terror, but his costume needed to reflect the change of fashion in 1793 (Stanford website). The French Revolution, also called the Revolution of 1789, the revolutionary movement that shook France between 1787 and 1799, brought about one of the most abrupt changes in fashion in history (Institute 150). I wanted the Enlightenment philosopher's costume to be markedly opposite of Leonardo's, as representative of the old regime. Yet, his suit should still be similar to those worn in the 18th Century. Rousseau was an educator, philosopher, and composer and was born to French parents in exile for being Huguenots. He was orphaned at an early age and moved to France at 18. Diderot and Rousseau became friends and started writing about Philosophy. Although most of Rousseau's life was under the patronage of nobles, his suit needed to reflect no influence of fashion and highlight his simple lifestyle (Figure 8).

Rousseau's costume was tricky because of the character changes in Acts 1-3. So, some of his costumes were not historically accurate. Rousseau's hair was natural and pulled back. The vest we used was not completely accurate to the time period. Most of the men's vests were long to mid or upper-thigh length. The vests were straight across at the waist and had a pointed front (Institute 120). The jacket reflected the late 1780-1790s tailoring. The flared bottom half of the jacket had been changed to a simple, almost straight cut with less material used (Figure 9). It still had the cuffs and was worn open. The color was brown with no embellishments since Rousseau was representing middle-class society.
We did not put Rousseau in breeches, which were commonly worn by the middle class and nobility. Instead, the choice was to put him in the Revolutionary-era pantaloons of those known as the "sans-culottes," which means "those who do not wear breeches" (Figure 10). Pants were only worn by the lower classes in France. The choice to put Darwin in pants helped with the character change from Rousseau to Darwin in the second act.

Darwin was born thirty-one years after Rousseau died. The western world had changed significantly because of the French Revolution of 1792. In 1830, France had their second Revolution, and in 1831 Darwin set off the HMS Beagle for South America. Darwin’s look came from the period between the 1850s and 1860s, during the period he wrote *Origin of Species*. Originally, he was going to be in safari wear, but that style was not working, so we went to a vest, top hat, and pants with a circus ringleader style. Since Act 2 had S&M themes with a game show in prison, Darwin would be the ringleader of the show and carry a crop (Figures 11, 12, 13).

There was not enough time for a big change in costumes between acts, so Rousseau had to become Darwin in a matter of a minute or two. Therefore, stylistic and period looks were forfeited in the look to be historically accurate. The vest had to be on through both acts, and in Act 2, the vest was the dominant costume piece. The vest was historically accurate for the mid to late 1900s (*Men’s Fashion* 68-70). Darwin’s lace ruffle shirt was actually a detachable ruffle to hide the costume for Act 3. The exaggerated ruffle is a type of jabot that is commonly found on tuxedo shirts (*Men’s Fashion* 70). By the 1850s, men’s suits had started to resemble contemporary suits of the last century. The colors had become plain and neutral; the striped fabric was used commonly as well. Top hats came into fashion in the late 1790s, first as day wear and then widely used in the 1830s as
sporting hats (Men’s Fashion 13 and 43). The top hat for Darwin was used to convey the ringleader/circus-game show feel of Act 2.

In the final act of Marie Antoinette’s Head, the actor who had been Rousseau in Act 1 and Darwin in Act 2 transformed into Nero Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus, the fifth Roman emperor and final emperor of the Julio-Claudian dynasty. Nero was born in 37 C.E. and died in 68 C.E. in Rome. The shirt that had been used in Acts 1 and 2 now became a tunic. Traditionally the upper class and nobility in Rome wore togas (Racinet and Miller 68). Tunics were worn but usually under the toga (Figure 14, 15). The last act was about an agnostic semen cult and its ritual indoctrination of members, including Nero. The research for the costumes for this scene came from a few sources, but the main idea was for Nero to wear a white tunic and take it off and be naked (in a body suit). The idea of a white tunic came from ancient Rome, and a few cult images were found online. The body suit that Nero wore was a representation of a nude body, and everyone was dressed the same. The other characters in the play had similar transformations.
In Act 1 of *Marie Antoinette's Head*, the palace of Versailles had four revelers in the palace eating cake. These revelers of 1793 represented the lower-class people of France. Two of the revelers were women, and two were men. By the 18th Century, the lower class wore used clothing, but around the 1700s, peasantry and city workers started to develop their own look. With linen and cotton becoming more available, the lower classes were able to have their own style (Batterberry and Batterberry 190). The women wore a jacket or stays with a petticoat or skirt. The jackets, stays, or jumps were tight-fitting and lightly boned or stitched with cording (Figure 16). Women wore corsets or stays under the jacket. Jumps were sleeveless and worn over the chemise. The jumps were a repose item of clothing for at-home use. A chemise was often made from linen or muslin. It was a loose-fitting shirt made from rectangles and squares, much like a men's shirt, but a was a long shirt or gown worn under the corset, jackets, stays, or jumps (Institute 90-91).

Reveler Two and Reveler Four in Act 1, set in 1793, were female. Their characters were working class and/or peasants. Reveler Two wore a stay and a chemise with a long skirt (Figure 17). Normally, a working-class women’s skirt would be ankle length, but this skirt needed to be full length to allow for costume changes (Institute 98). Reveler Four wore a jacket, scarf, and a long skirt (Contini 206). Her skirt needed to be long to hide costumes underneath. Most working-class women did not wear corsets, although most of the corsets in this time period were less constricting than the ones made one hundred years after (Figure 18). Corsets would have constricted most women from performing work if they were employed. The majority of women in the 18th Century did not work;
those who did had jobs as governesses or domestic workers. Most working women would have worn boots. The women did not wear shoes in Act 1, but Reveler One wore Marie Antoinette’s slippers.

Women in the nobility had shoes very different from those of the working class. One of these differences informs the play’s dialogue, as Madame Du Barry complains about her shoes breaking, and the cobbler replies:

"But Madame, you must have walked in them!" (Contini 202).

As this suggests, for the nobility, women’s shoes were to be seen but not walked in. Most had jewels and embroidery and were made of satins and velvets. They were much like slippers, and the shoes were "made with high heels and long points, slightly turned up" (Contini 204). All ladies’ shoes were covered in gems or designs, while some were flat and made of leather. In the book, *The Collection of the Kyoto Costume Institute: A History from the 18th to the 20th Century*, nearly all of the shoes, whether they be leather, satin, or velvet, were of the same look and slip-on type shoes that resemble contemporary oxford shoes. There were mule-type shoes that were worn in the home. The shoe Reveler Two wore was a satin gold mule that had an Orientale look. Reveler Two wore Marie’s slippers, but Reveler Four wore her "robe."

The term robe, in contemporary terms, is an item a person wears around the home. But, in 18th Century women’s fashion, it is a women’s court gown. The court gown for French women nobles had two different styles. The “robe à la polonaise” or “robe à l’anglaise” or the French style called “robe à la française,” were two of the main gowns worn in France. There was also “Watteau” robes or the “robe retroussé dans les poches.” The "Watteau "(also called the "Volante") robe was named after the French Rococo painter
Jean-Antoine Watteau. This gown gained prominence during the reign of Louis XIV. The word *volante* means flounce in French, and the back of the dress had a flounce from the shoulders to the floor (Institute 38). The "robe retroussé dans les poches" was the French version of the "robe à l’anglaise." Both "dresses" were above the ankle petticoats and made for walking outside. All of the robes developed from the Mantua gown from the 17th Century. The French and English robes were different because the English preferred the walking gowns and were more sensible at court. The French court gowns had panniers under them, creating a wide side to them (Institute 69). These robes were not exactly dressed by today’s standards because the robe had to be pinned or sewn to the robe onto the "stays" or the stomacher to attach it (Institute 42). The robe had a petticoat (skirt) under it and the "stays," which was exposed on top as well. Women’s casual style in bedroom wear was either jumps or the "pet-en-l’air." The jumps were worn over the chemise and were a corded or heavy sewn garment with quilted fabric and tied shut like a corset. The "pet-en-l’air" was similar to the robes but was short and not pinned or sewn into the stomacher. Like the men’s suits, these ensembles were made of rich velvets and satins and adorned with fine lace, trim, jewels, and embroidery. Some had real gold and silver sewn into them. The exquisite designs were costly and attributed to the downfall of the Bourbon dynasty. The robe in this play could have gone many ways, but in order to keep things simple, a contemporary look was chosen. The Reveler women had a working-class style look while the men’s look was of a laborer or peasant.

Reveler One and Reveler Three both represented the working lower class and were dressed to show their status. Men of the lower class had adopted their own style. By the start of the Revolution, men were wearing pants or breeches (Batterberry and Batterberry
The decision was to put them in working clothes to have them look more like beggars than the women. These men were of the freeloader school of thought, squatting in one of the most beautiful places ever made. Therefore, creating their look was a combination of beggar wear and a workingman's clothing. The workingman's attire was important to contrast with Rousseau and Leonardo in the first act. The latent men in Act 1 were the men who represented the Revolution as a whole (Figure 26). I chose to put both men in breeches and colored poet shirts (Figure 8). The colored shirts were not traditional (the shirts of this era would have been white) but were used to add color and a different style for each character. The breeches were used so the period could be set stylistically. Their breeches and shirts were torn so that their social status would be obvious to the audience (Figure 20).

Their disregard for propriety was a response to being ignored by the previous regime. The lower classes were having trouble putting food on the table due to rising costs and stagnant wages. It was important that the men's ensembles showed they were struggling economically, more so than the women revelers. It was Rousseau that brought about the ideals that every man should be able to express their will and participate in making the laws. The ideals expressed by Rousseau, combined with famine and low wages, were the catalysts for the Revolution. It is no wonder the lower-class people had indifference to the Queen and King. The Queen had been the fashion center for France with the help of Leonardo's high hairstyles and Rose Bertin's dressmaking (Batterberry and Batterberry 187). It was important to have a mix of middle and lower classes together in one area to show how everyone worked together to achieve freedom. This is why the men and the women looked different in Act 1. The men were laborers, and the women worked
in households in the frame of Act 1; the costumes were stylistically different to represent this range.

From Act 1 to Act 2, the scene and costumes needed to shift to reflect a more contemporary period. Act 2 was a quick switch, and all the actors on stage removed their costumes while the stage was changed. These quick and onstage costume changes are tricky and need to be simple with the layers. Act 2 is set inside a prison in Corcoran, California. Corcoran Prison has been controversial since the 1990s, with guards accused of forcing prisoners to take part in set-up gladiator-style fights (California State Prison, Corcoran). In Act 2, the game show host was Charles Darwin in prison. The game show had two prisoners and two guards, with Leonardo making his appearance. Most people assume prisoners wear orange jumpsuits all day, but orange jumpsuits are worn when a prisoner is being transported outside the prison. Inside, the prisoners were mostly wearing scrubs, which can be made inexpensively. They are usually made of poly-cotton poplin with elastic waistbands for the pants, while the shirts are pullovers. They are simply made and can withstand many washings. Most prisons have phased-out stripes for uniforms, and some prisons use smocks to signify the person’s status. As John Pratt writes in *Punishment and Civilization: Penal Tolerance and Intolerance in Modern Society*, quoting a 1904 New York state prison report: "Stripes had come to be looked upon as a badge of shame and were a constant humiliation and irritant to many prisoners" (Pratt 76).

The colors used for the scrubs change according to the status of the prisoner:

- **Red:** This usually means the prisoner is considered "high-risk." That is why it is usually worn by maximum-security inmates like terrorists and drug lords. But some jails also use red for "high-profile" inmates such as celebrities and other public figures.
- **Khaki or Yellow:** This signifies low risk. This is typically worn by inmates in GenPop or General Population.
- **White:** This signifies a segregation unit or, in specific cases, death row inmates.
- Green or Blue: This signifies low-risk inmates usually charged with a misdemeanor and other nonviolent crimes or inmates on work detail (e.g., kitchen, cleaning, laundry, mail, or other tasks).
- Orange: This is unspecific and commonly used for any status in prisons.
- Black/Orange and White stripes: This is unspecific and commonly used for any status in prisons.
- Pink: This is used for punishment in some prisons.

The prisoners in Act 2 were not being transported and were in a sort of work detail at the prison. Therefore, the choice was to put them in blue or green, with green chosen because the main character and guards were in blue. In this act, it was the only time in the play that shoes were worn (except for Marie's slippers). The shoes had to be slip-on because the prisoners could not have laces. Many prisons use sandals instead of closed-toe shoes.

While the prisoners had a normal prison look, the female prison guards did not wear standard attire. Prison guards have a uniform look of being polished and neutral. The correctional officers' clothing consists of a poly/cotton blend shirt and pants. They also wear a belt, name tag, and, depending on location, a tie, and a jacket. Their shoes are normally leather boots or leather lace-up shoes and are always black. Their shirts have an embroidered logo of the prison badge on the chest or on the sleeve. Most prisons supply uniforms. For the second act of Marie Antionette's Head, the prison guards were given a different look from the normal prison guard uniform. The entire act had an S & M theme, and the prison guards' costumes enforced this theme. The women's costumes were made out of spandex so they could be tight-fitting. The front was low, exposing cleavage, with no name tag or prison patch. Guard Two had a rifle, and Guard One had handcuffs. Act 2 reflects the real-life absurdity of the Corcoran prison during the early 1990s.
In Act 3 of *Marie Antoinette's Head*, the play turns back a few thousand years to Nero’s reign in Rome around 60 C.E. The majority of the research was geared toward contemporary cults. Rome was a polytheistic civilization (National Geographic). Everyone had their own gods they worshipped, and morality was not a judgment a God handed down to humans. There were several cults started by the Greeks, and, in turn, the Romans adopted them. The Cybele cult and the Phrygian Orgia were just two of many cults organized around drinking, sex, and castration in some instances (theoi.com). The cult most resembling the cult in the play was the Bacchanalia. Many of these Mystery Cults had similar components to the rituals, including nature, wine, orgies, phallic symbols, animal sacrifices, dances, and people of all backgrounds and sexes. The Gnostic Semen Cult was definitely a made-up cult in the time of Nero but not too far from the truth. But now, most contemporary societies’ cults revolve around a monotheistic converted and twisted ideal of Christianity.

These contemporary cults have quite different perspectives. Most cults today have a charismatic leader and have the same undertones of doomsday thoughts. Not all are based on Christian theology, and some also include Buddhism. Many of these cult participants dress similarly or identical to each other. The images of cults and their culture of apparel are unique to each society. The cults surrounding Christian interpretations focused on women wearing dresses, many of similar style and cut. They were often a cool color, long, and unshapely. The men often have a button-up shirt with pants. The Asian-inspired cults wear colorful tunics for both sexes, with some including scarves to cover the heads of both sexes. Then, there are the more obscure cults that are mainly in America. These cults have a wide range of styles. Some have a uniform white dress for women while others have a color
code, but styles are broad. Others take on colorful tunics with hairstyles similar to hippies, such as long hair or dreadlocks. The wide array of differing beliefs and looks in American cults are due to the fact that Americans have religious freedom. The cult styles from ancient Rome to contemporary society all influenced the choices for Act 3.

The laurels worn in Act 3 came from Roman symbolism, and the unitards were the contemporary styles from cults. In Roman culture, the floral wreaths held specific meaning for each plant used to make a floral crown. In ancient Rome, wreaths were used to honor men in battle, signify status, for rites, weddings, honors, and for the victory of the Olympians (Carruthers). Laurels held a significant role in the protection and purification of rituals (The American Journal of Philology 7). Laurel crowns are synonymous with Greek and Roman culture. Images of Julius Caesar wearing a laurel crown are embedded in Roman antiquities. But the Mediterranean Bay leaf plant had a significant role in all aspects of Roman culture. The most significant aspect of the crown or wreath (around the homes) was the belief that it protected people from evil. For Rome’s elite, laurels played a significant role in everyday rituals (Figure 21). The laurel crowns used in the play were not real but imitation gold. The crowns produced a look that resembled the time of the Roman Empire. The unitards used for the gnostic cult were contemporary and were not Roman.

All the actors of the first two acts, revelers, prisoners, and guards, had no names. In Act 3, each character took on a name and personality for the final act. They were all similar but different. The idea of the laurels derived from Rome, but the bodysuits gave the illusion they were naked while taking on the contemporary style as well.

Ted, the leader of the cult, had to be different but the same as the rest of the cult. His suit and color were adapted to make the actor feel comfortable. Ted’s red unitard signified
dominance, strength, and a focal point. Red is also a representation of fire, as the Romans believed the fire was a symbol of fertility and passion. In addition, the fire was crucial in Roman rituals (*Naked Power* 23). The other two priestesses, Lori and Luci, were originally going to wear white but instead wore silver unitards. White carries significance in many cults, projecting a sense of new beginnings and positivity. It signifies purity while also being illuminating and reflective, bouncing off negativity. The white suits would have created a sense of peace, but the act was not anything but peaceful.

In Act 3, Jimmy was to convert to the Gnostic cult. His costume was originally a "gimp" unitard. A gimp in S&M is a submissive role-play character. The costume chosen was an oversized phallus. In Roman Mystery Cults and everyday life in Roman society, phallic symbols were used as a sign of fertility and protection. The phallus intent was comedic.
Chapter 4: The Artist At Work

In the Victorian area, when Vincent Van Gogh was alive, industrialization was changing the direction of the world. Mass production of goods was beginning in many areas. The invention of the sewing machine changed clothing construction (Batterberry and Batterberry 228). Readymade wear was becoming more popular and available (Batterberry and Batterberry 228). Clothing became less expensive to make. In 1868 the first modern suit appeared (Batterberry and Batterberry 233). But men wore suits as daywear and not T-shirts and jeans. The material was natural wool or linen and weaved for cooler or warm climates. The styles for menswear day suits were boxy, with small lapels worn close to the neck. Waistcoats were still worn but were not always part of an everyday suit. For Vincent, the everyday suit was not the look I was trying to produce. Instead of regular suits every day, Vincent needed that bohemian look that was distinctive to the naturalist and realism artists living on the streets of Paris in the 1880s and 1890s (Figure 24). These people of the streets were often poor but educated and had talents that changed the world’s perception of the arts. Many had their own styles and did not follow the trends of fashion that still persist in the mainstream culture of the 21st Century. Consequently, a retrospective look at the artists of the late half of the 19th Century inspired the designs of the play, Exhausted Paint.

Van Gogh was not influenced by the trends of fashion. He was likely schizophrenic and hyper-focused on creating his art. He believed color was especially important to convey emotions. In most of his self-portraits, he is wearing dulled and neutral colors or different shades of bright blue (Figure 25). There is no doubt he had large mood swings and
was not the most agreeable of people. There are many instances that gave examples of unstable characters. When Van Gogh was studying to become an evangelist in Brussels, he had an argument with one of the teachers and left his studies. In 1888, Gauguin moved to Arles, where Van Gogh wanted to start an artist’s community, but the relationship lasted two months. In popular culture, the belief is Van Gogh cut his ear off, but the police records tell a different story. The records report that Gauguin cut Van Gogh’s ear off during a fight. The other clues about Van Gogh’s state of mind are his proficiency in which he created. In his ten years of artistry, he created nine hundred paintings.
Chapter 5: Characterization Within the Lines

In mid-December, the production meeting started for the Maxwell plays. The preliminary meetings were focused on three of the main aspects of the more tactile aspects of design: set, props, and costumes. The director R'Myni stated that the actors were not going to leave the stage to change or not have enough time in-between the acts to have big costume changes. This influenced the design choices. The early production meetings talked mainly about the sets; the costumes came much later. I had the first of many individual meetings with the director before Christmas break. It was important to get her vision and insight for the costumes. With the director's direction and thoughts, it was easier for me to pinpoint the research needed.

The production meetings picked up in January via Zoom. Unfortunately, Covid stopped in-person production meetings. The beginning production meetings help establish a theme and color palette. Color is one of the essential elements of a design for a costumer. The set designer was clear from the beginning that red was going to be predominating color though out Marie Antoinette's Head. She also used a lot of cool greys and golds on the set. Knowing the main color palette for the set helped me decide on my color palette.

Many of the costumes could be purchased, but before making purchases, I had to finalize most of the fabric. Most pieces in Leonardo and Rousseau's costumes had to be built. The first step was to find a pattern that was period-appropriate or could be adapted to be the style of the 19th Century habit, waistcoat, and breeches. Luckily, in the last 15 to 20 years, there has been a lot of research done on the history of fashion design. Therefore, patterns are now readily available online at certain websites for purchase. A pattern was
located, which was almost perfect for the period. It came in a PDF file through email, along with patterns for a couple of period-style shirts. Next was a huge undertaking; it took more than a day to put the pattern puzzle pieces together. The assembly of the pattern and the construction of the garment were complicated by a lack of instructions.

The patterns gave insights into how much fabric needed to be bought. However, living in New Orleans has a few negatives, and one of them is the availability of textiles. Many of the period textiles can be found in interior design fabric stores, but New Orleans lacks a store that sells interior textiles. The online store Spoonflower offers over eleven thousand textiles printed on twenty-four different types of fabric. Because the costume would have to be washed in case the cake dirtied the fabric, the choice was simplified. I chose cotton denim that would hold up during performances and washings. The fabric choice was easy, but the design of the textile was more complicated.

Considering my limited resources and the time restraints, making a suit that would be embroidered was not a possibility. Many of the suits had intricate embroidery that matched the waistcoat and breeches with the coat. Velvet would be difficult to keep clean, but brocade printed on the fabric would represent the period. In *The Collection of the Kyoto Costume Institute: A History from the 18th to the 20th Century*, two brocade suits from the late 18th Century survived (Figure 3). I used these two suits to guide my decisions for the textile print.

Men’s brocades on the suits were different in size of pattern compared to the Women's dresses of the 18th Century. In fashion, nothing is absolute but average. The diameter of a women’s textile pattern was much larger, and there was more room for larger patterns because of the yardage of fabric used for the dresses. A man’s suit had only
an excess of fabric on the habit, below the waistline. The process of finding brocade with an appropriate diameter was coupled with also finding the right color.

Color directly relates to the characters and the overall subtext of a play. I had to consider the colors used on stage. An actor is the main focus and should stand out while on stage. Choosing the wrong color could result in a hidden actor, cause a jarring look, or simultaneous contrast. I knew to stay away from reds, golds, and warm greys. I also knew from a color theory that green would cause an undesirable look because of its association with Christmas or simultaneous contrast. I also decided that pastels would not work because the curtains and walls were pastels. My color options, therefore, were limited. Yet, even with all the limitations, there remained about a thousand designs to choose from. The choice for Leonardo was a wide striped two-toned azurite color with about an inch and half gold medallion design on it. Once this choice was made, I could then decide on how to proceed with the other costumes in the play. Leonardo wore this costume throughout the entire play, even with the period changes.

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2 When opposite colors from the color wheel create a vibrant color and looks like it vibrates.

3 Azurite is a mineral mined in Lyon, France.
The process of building Leonardo’s suit was done in three fittings. I went to a rehearsal to get measurements and talk to each person about their characters and discuss my research about the periods. I knew that Leonardo’s suit would take time to cut, sew, and fit. The first fitting is always incomplete because there are no collars, cuffs, or any finishes added to the garment. The first fitting went well, and I could proceed with finishing the garments. I made a stylistic change while making the suit. I decided to make the waistcoat from another fabric that contrasted with the brocade. Stripes had made their way into fashion during the latter half of the 18th Century. The striped fabric helped break up the monotony of a suit made in all one fabric. I used a striped fabric from stock in the costume shop that matched the gold perfectly. The second fitting was the last fitting before cuffs and lining were sewn in. I used gold for the lining of the suit because it was a good match and would highlight the fabric choices (Figure 27).

The shirt patterns were also a reproduction of the time period. The patterns included the jabot, which is similar to an ascot. The men’s shirts proved to be a challenge because the reproduction patterns were not like contemporary men’s shirts. Men’s shirts and women’s chemises from about the 16th Century until the 19th Century did not change in construction. And these shirts and chemise cut and construction are arguably the same for several thousand years. These shirts are all rectangles and squares, and a 21st Century seamstress would have trouble with the patterns and sewing. I had to watch a video to understand how the shirts were put together. Since I had done all the layouts and cutting together, there were some issues with the pattern, and the fabric was not usable. I used the
muslin in the shop to make Leonardo’s shirt and did not use the patterns. The fabric for the men’s "poet" shirts was bought on the Spoonflower website. It was light cotton poplin but had the look of linen. But the patterns gave unclear instructions and the fabric was ruined when the pattern was used and the fabric cut.
Chapter 7: Men Dressed For Change

In Act 1, Rousseau’s costume needed to be built. I made the shirt/tunic for Rousseau out of fabric in the shop. Rousseau’s suit was also complicated due to missing parts of the pattern. The color choice for him was more neutral and more appropriate for his class. Nobles and the courtiers wore elaborate suits compared to the bourgeois and lower classes. The color and fabric were again chosen online to have optimal choices. The choice was brown (Figure 8). The pattern for the suit was in stock, so I did not have to adapt the suit from Leonardo’s pattern to fit the actor. Unfortunately, not all the pieces were in the pattern. Adjustments needed to be made when the suit was cut. I had to adapt a structured back piece from another pattern to fit the missing piece. Instead of making breeches and a waistcoat for the 18th Century suit, I used the pants pattern to help with a smoother transition in between the acts. The waistcoat used was not at all from the period; it was from the turn of the 19th Century and followed the late Victorian look (Figure 28). Since the transition went to Darwin, and the coat would cover most of the waistcoat, it was another adaptation for performance purposes. The pants were also another adjusted costume in the performance. Men in the lower and working classes had started their own styles more frequently wearing pants. Rousseau was not a noble but was from a Protestant middle-class family, enabling him to break barriers more easily. The transitions in the following acts made decisive choices that broke the period norms. Rousseau had to change from an 18th Century philosopher to a 19th Century explorer and Biologist.

4 Items stored in the costume shop.
The original idea for Darwin was for him to be shown as a young explorer. Most of the visual research was on early safari looks and of Darwin himself. The idea was to dress him in a crop, hat, breeches, and safari coat. The look was out of place, however, and adjustments were made after the first trial dress rehearsal. The idea quickly morphed into a circus ringleader (Figure 12). Since Charles was the game show prompter and the contestants were unruly, making him a ringleader in a sideshow would not be far from the play. Darwin's top hat, vest, pants, shirt, and colors matched what a late 19th Century man would wear (Figure 29). The one-piece that was not from the 19th Century was the jabot, which was used to cover the costume for Act 3.

In Act 3, Darwin became Nero and moved back in time to 60 A.D. The higher-class citizens of Rome wore togas, and some wore tunics underneath. It was not possible to put Nero in a toga. The best option was to put him in a caftan-tunic-type costume. This costume was worn from Act 1 as his shirt. It was adapted from the poet's shirt patterns. Under the tunic was the bodysuit used for the initiation into the gnostic cult. The unitard represented a naked body. Nero also wore a laurel in Act 3, and the crown was to signify his status and for the ritual rites. Nero's costume changes in the play were a challenge to make smooth and short during the act (Figure 30). There were also four other individuals in the play that needed smooth, quick changes.
Chapter 8: Flux and Flow of Stagnation

The lady’s stays in Act 1 had to be built, and I attempted to make the pattern but found a pattern that would speed up the process of fittings, designing, and sewing. By the 18th Century, the lower-class people of France had developed their own styles. Women, in particular, wore a few different types of tops over their chemise. Women wore a jacket or a stays, and both could be lightly boned for support. The stays often get confused with corsets but stays generally were worn as a top, and corsets were worn under the robe. Reveler Two and Reveler Four were both females in the 18th Century. The women represented the working class in France. I originally started draping the jacket and the stays (Pattern of Fashions 26-27). This process is a long, arduous process of draping muslin over a dress form and then creating the pattern from the draping. French curves are used to make the armholes (the chemises and men’s shirts do not have curves), and multiple fittings are required. Unfortunately, time was not on my side. I found a pattern that I could adapt to fit the actresses. I also found a jacket in stock that I had to put a gusset in so Revelers could move freely. The shirts and skirts also had to be easy to get in and out of since they were undressing on stage. Modern fasteners were used to make it simple for the costume change. The skirts were also pulled and used from stock. It was a fortunate advantage to find the right color and size for the female revelers. Reveler Two had a stay that was made with a cotton canvas and was blue in color. She wore a chemise-like shirt under it. I had muted (neutralized the tone) the color (it was turquoise) by dying it brown. The shirt became more compatible with the costume after the dying process. Reveler Four

5 A piece of material sewn into garment to strengthen or enlarge a part of it.
wore a satin jacket with a linen-like skirt. Reveler Four’s jacket had a scarf. This scarf was period-appropriate and covered the layers of costumes under it. The two female Revelers had to change their costumes on stage. The ladies and the men did not wear shoes. The slippers were the only shoes worn (Figure 31 and 32).

Revelers One and Three, both males, were costumes representing the peasant or lower class. They were beggars and barely worked. They represented the class of people who were a major part of the socioeconomic struggles happening in France before and during the Revolution. These men had no qualms about crashing the palace and making it their home. So, their costumes needed to represent the class they were in. The costumes were found in stock, and minor adjustments had to be made. Reveler One wore a linen look type fabric for the breeches and shirt (Figures 8 and 21). The shirt that the Reveler wore had to be darkened because it matched the gold on the stage. I dyed it a dark brown, and tea and coffee-stained the shirt a subtle shade. There was a particular look I was intent on achieving. I imagined the character to be a farmer. Reveler One’s wig shirt and pants were all chosen to reflect this. There was some color variation, but the form was directly from a peasant worker. Reveler Three was also a jobless and homeless person. His clothing needed to reflect his social status. His pants were worn, frayed, and ill-fitting, and his shirt was worn (Figure 31 and 32). Normally most men’s shirts of the period were white, but for convenience and budgetary reasons, I chose as much as I could from stock. In Act 1, all four of the characters had to change costumes on stage for Act 2. In Act 2, the play jumped from France in 1793 to 1994 in Corcoran California State Penitentiary.

The second act had two sets of prisoners and two sets of guards. The men played the prisoners, and the ladies were the guards. The director wanted an S&M to look for the
guards; the choice was not traditional poplin button-up shirts or work pants. The decision was to put them in a role-play guard costume made of spandex. The look had to be one of authority, but the costume also had to be a sexy S&M look. I had thought about using a more traditional look and styling the costume into a sexy dominatrix look, but the spandex suits worked better. The spandex costumes were also easier to hide under the costumes from Act 1. They both wore boots that were sexy and were not uniformly the same. The dark blue uniform worked great with the background (Figure 33). The men were the prisoners and wore scrubs. The color of a prisoner’s scrubs depends on many factors for a prisoner. The color choice of the prisoners in Act 2 did not match their offenses. There needed to be a different color choice other than blue. Pink was not an option because of the set colors, nor was white, and khaki was not chosen because of the close hue of the gold. Olive green was the best option for Act 2. The scrubs were generic but true to what most prisoners wear in contemporary prisons. The prisoners also wore slip-on shoes as tied shoes are not used in prisons. I did not like the idea of slip-on sandals because the prison was a federal prison and not a city jail (Figure 34).

In Act 3, time goes back to 64 C.E. when Rome ruled the Western world and Nero was emperor. The play starts off in a type of Roman mystery play. The notes for this play state they are all wearing white and are sexy. My original research for cults had women in white matronly dresses and tunics. The unitards came into the production talks as ideas were tossed around. The color combinations and styles changed as the first set of dress rehearsals started. In addition, we had to consider body shapes with the unitards. Laurel crowns were used since wreath crowns were often used in rituals. The look for Ted, the high priest, was to look different but still similar. Both the high priestesses, Lori and Lucy,
were the same. Jimmy, the convert, had to be different. Nero was white because he was the emperor. The first round of suits with hoods did not work, but the second purchase of unitards created a look of sexy (Figure 35).

For Ted, red was the color used. In most rituals in Roman times, a fire was an important aspect of rites. Red is a strong and dominant color, and for a high priest, it was suitable for the leader of the cult (Figure 35). The ladies’ costumes were a shade of white. Lori and Luci both wore silver suits to signify their status in the cult. Jimmy the convert needed to be different. Originally, he was going to wear a type of gimp costume. But the costume during the first dress rehearsal did not fit tightly and the hoods looked strange. The director and I had a conversation about changing the costume and what some ideas were. One of them was wearing a phallus. I remembered that there was a box in stock that had "Greek penis, breasts" written on it. The discovery of the giant phallus was perfect for the act and for Jimmy. He states many times that he is "afflicted." The phallus was a perfect find to the last act of the play (Figure 36).

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6 Sadomasochism, a sexual submissive dressed generally in a bondage suit.
Chapter 9: The Mania Of Artistic Brilliance

In the one-act play, *Exhausted Paint*, Vincent Van Gogh rifles through his life and heartbreaks in one hour of varied monologues. The play of a tortured artist gives his perception of his life through the letters he wrote to his brother. The time period consists of the last 15 to 20 years of his short but highly prolific career and life. I found the first few reads for this play difficult to grasp any design ideas. It was through the designer’s performance, visual research, and discussions with the actor that I was able to conceive ideas about the design.

My thoughts on Van Gogh’s temperament were that it was manic and disjointed. I felt as though his only solace in life was his ability to create art and to create peace. He was tortured mentally and had troubles with relationships. Many of his peers could not work with him. The reasons are little known, but schizophrenia is the suspected cause. It is extremely hard to reason with people with mental health issues such as his. Van Gogh’s manic moods extended to many aspects of his life. Shifts in his physical appearance were definitely reflected in these moods. His pictures always show a thin, suited, and stern face with glassy, glazed-over eyes. In an early picture of him (most likely in his teens), Van Gogh is well kept with plump cheeks. This early picture is a stark contrast to a later photo of a very underweight and solemn man, further reinforcing his manic and somber state.

Since Van Gogh was prolific with his painting in a very small window of time, his costume had to reflect the frantic, sleep-deprived artist who was in constant motion. As though the height of his mental illness occurred during the last two to five years of his life. His constant painting and the inability to keep up his appearances were the inspiration for
his costumes. Van Gogh’s pants were a bit too big, his smock was continually left on the floor, and he barely washed himself or his clothes. Traditionally, painters of the late-19th Century are portrayed wearing smocks. Van Gogh wore a shirt under his smock that was discolored from lack of laundering. I had originally wanted a blue fishing smock, which has been the chosen European style for one hundred years. I had two images of painters with smocks, including one from Paul Cézanne (Figure 24). The other includes three self-portraits painted by Van Gogh (Figure 25). The blue was vibrant comparable to a cerulean blue. The smock had to be ordered and did not fit into the timeline. The smock that was chosen was slight to large and more of a bluish Payne’s Gray. The dulled greys and blues still produced the desired effect of great sadness (Figure 37).
Chapter 10: Reconsideration of Modes

Retrospection is part of the process where designers reflect on what they had or had not done. Monetary and time constraints are limitations a designer must realize. In the play Marie Antoinette’s Head, the costumes were not only limited to preproduction but also the production itself. All the costumes had to be worn and taken off as the acts changed. Many of the costumes had to be adapted to the layering process of the ensembles. In addition, layered costumes were the hardest part to produce in the play. For the character Leonardo, who was the fixed character in time in the play, his costume was all about time.

Leonardo’s 18th Century costume never changed throughout the play. I chose the stylistic silhouettes of the 18th Century French regime even though he lived in France during the latter half of the Century when styles became more natural. I wanted to exaggerate the styles connected to the French Revolution.

In older periods, the building processes can be tedious and difficult because of patterns and clothing. During the building of the costumes, several limitations arose. There was no time to make patterns for the play, which required one to two months to develop. My skills at draping are limited, and I do not know how to draft a pattern. This required me to purchase and modify a historically accurate pattern. Making my own drafted patterns would have allowed me to make choices in the design process that would have fit the needs of the characters better. The historical pattern proved to be very accurate but lacked adequate instructions resulting in the need for several adjustments. The pattern came with very few instructions. Trying to build something historically accurate with barely any instructions is time-consuming. There were also many things not marked correctly, and the
final product did not have working pockets as a result. In addition, the sewing machines at University of New Orleans are light-duty and had difficulty sewing through the multiple layers of denim.

The machine issue was one of the most limiting aspects of the building process, including leading causes of mistakes and loss of time. For Leonardo and Rousseau, the machines would not sew through the layers causing the process to come to a halt at times. The machines were not narrow enough to sew the sleeves on the jackets or the cuffs. In the design and character style of Leonardo, I was very happy with the outcome on stage. I had made sure his style was flamboyant and representation of the extravagance of the Bourbon regimes in that Century. Leonardo's costume never changed, but it was the costumes of the antagonists that changed in each act that had many design issues.

The character of the influencer without the acts was the hardest design to solidify. The influencer starts off as Rousseau and changes into Darwin and goes back in time to Nero proved exceedingly difficult to design and build. The person who was cast for the character was also very small; subsequently, patterns and fittings were hard to modify. But the design silhouette changed during the first trial dress rehearsals. Rousseau's costume was the easiest to make and style since it was the first layer seen. Unfortunately, the material ordered was a printed fabric and rubbed off while it was sewn together, and the color was close to the gold used on stage. The wax marking used for putting the pieces together would not come off the fabric. The Dawn soap I used caused the color to flake and fade. This was extremely frustrating during the building process, but the fabric was used. In addition, the pattern used in the shop had many missing pieces, some of which were not
discovered until everything was cut out. Considering the challenging building process, I was happy with the design (excluding the color).

It was Darwin’s costume that failed in the beginning. Darwin’s costume was originally going to be an explorer/safari look. This original look included a crop, which was one of the only aspects of the costume that did not change. It was impossible to find a 19th Century safari look, and the time to build it was not an option. A safari jacket was ordered, while the safari look pants were found in the shop. Unfortunately, the jacket would have been noticeable under the Rousseau costume, and the overall style looked bad on stage. Ideally, this look should have been made in the shop. The change came from ideas the director and I produced while bouncing thoughts back and forth. This is how the prompter costume came about. The final look lacked a coat and tails. I wished that I could have made a red jacket with tails for Act 2. It was hard to convey that the character was Darwin. He became more of a sideshow barker than Darwin. The limitations of time and the layering caused this character to lack a look at Darwin. In Act 3, Darwin transformed into Nero, and this costume also was up against the restraints of layering.

Men in the Roman era wore togas. It was not possible to layer and use a toga under the other costumes. There was no time between acts for togas to be worn correctly. The best option was the tunic, which also had to be a shirt for acts one and two. The limitations of the shirt caused stylistic modifications. In addition to the style changes, the pattern purchased for the 19th Century men’s shirt was impossible to understand. The directions were not clear, it was not period correct, and I had never made a man’s period shirt before. This shirt took hours of time in preproduction. My contemporary mind could not understand the pattern of the hard shapes that no shirt made today has. I had to watch two
videos before I realized that the pattern that was bought was not needed and did not give directions in detail. After the videos, I was able to cut out the shirts needed (Rousseau's shirt had to have extra fabric for Nero's tunic). The tunic was built with sleeves because it had to be a shirt in the first two acts. The sleeves were not ideal, and I should have placed a shirt over the tunic so the costume looked of the period. It was difficult to create a period-appropriate costume because the periods did not have the same silhouettes. The other actors’ costumes also had inconsistencies in the style of the periods.

In Act 1, the Revelers who represented the proletarians’ costumes were pulled from stock with the exception of one piece. All of the male Reveler’s costumes for Act 1 were found in stock. There were only minor adjustments that had to be made. The men’s costumes reflected the poorest of France’s people. The costumes found were already distressed, but some were not the correct colors I would have preferred to use. Both shirts used were not the fabric or color I would have chosen. Most men’s shirts were white or off-white and made of linen. The colors on stage proved to be incorrect, and dying them was impossible. The shirts were both similar in color to the stage. The tan shirt was dyed many times without altering the color. If there had been ample time, a different shirt would have been made. The grey shirt was not altered because the stripping color can produce another color that could make it unusable. The shirt also did not have the appearance of most shirts in that period. The breeches were dyed to be darker because most lower-class males wore black pants. Before dying, they resembled the greys on the set, making it essential to dye them.

Luckily, we were able to pull the ladies’ costumes from the shop. Both of the women Revelers’ costumes were period accurate, but the jacket and the stays both lacked the
peplums used at the waist of these tops. The lack of peplums is a designer's flaw. Both tops should have been sewn into the garment. It was not done simply because of a lack of time. The tops lacked a certain silhouette for the 18th Century style. The jacket for Reveler Two was pulled from stock, and the additional fabric had to be used for the adjustments. Reveler Four had her stays built from a pattern. I was originally going to make the stay pattern by draping it, but I found a pattern identical to the one I was making. Draping needs several fittings to develop a pattern but finding a pattern cuts time in half. The colors of the tops were perfect, but the bottoms were pulled from stock. The brown color of the skirt was a good choice, but the fabric was heavy and did not have a right look. Most skirts were made of medium-weight cotton for working women. This cotton was heavy, and the weight of it was more for upholstery. The other striped skirt had a better weight and feel but, ideally, would have been dark in color. The dark satin jacket and light linen look skirt did not match.

The Act 1 issues stemmed from money and time challenges, but the Act 2 issues were reflective of poor choices in design. The second act involving the guards and prisoners had an S&M theme. The guards’ costumes needed to be sexy. I chose a Halloween costume purchased online that was a unitard suit. This unitard was dark blue in color and embellished with police patches. It was the sexy skintight suit that worked well with the layering. I was never happy with the design and really wanted to change it. It did work well with the layers needed for each act. The guards should have been in button-up shirts and modified to be very tight. They also should have worn miniskirts showing legs with thigh-thigh-high boots. This look would have looked better than the inexpensive unitards.
purchased. The prisoners had the correct costumes, and I felt as though they were better designed.

The last act of the play took the audience back to the Roman Empire during the reign of Nero. These costumes were difficult in the design process. The last layer of costumes used in Act 3 was a unitard. The playwright had specific notes stating that the costumes needed to be sexy. The natural choice was skintight unitards. The director also wanted style or color differences to show the status of characters in the cult scene. The original idea was to have them in hooded unitards with feet. But finding a color and design was difficult to find online. When the costumes arrived, the look and sizing were not correct. The colors were not right, and there was nothing sexy or appealing about the costumes. The colors needed to give an appearance of being naked, but there were not enough color options to have the right skin tones. The choices for the body suits changed to sleeveless suits that were silver and red because they were the only available colors, and red worked well for the High Priest. The costume for Jimmy was too large and did not look suitable for the actor. This costume was changed into a giant phallic penis, which was perfect. The Romans had a fascination with phallic symbols and used them for protection and comedic purposes. The last act finally came together during dress rehearsals.

After *Marie Antoinette’s Head* was Maxwell’s play, *Exhausted Paint*, in *Exhausted Paint*, the look of Vincent Van Gogh was to convey the character as manic. Since he was such a prolific painter for the final years of his short life, I wanted to portray Van Gogh in a working costume. Specifically, I wanted him in a smock. From the many paintings of artists from the period, nearly all artists wore smocks while painting. I wanted the smock a bright and vibrant blue. Finding the right size, color, and the price was impossible. The
fisherman’s smock I chose did not come in the size, color, or price combination. I found a good match, but the shipment would not have made it on time. Consequently, I choose a duller bluish-grey. This color worked well with the grey pants; however, there was too much black in the background for it to stand out fully. The original blue would have made the actor more noticeable. I also believe Van Gogh would have worn a brighter smock similar to the painting he has of himself. My overall feel for Van Gogh was that he was a disheveled man on the brink of ending his inner torment. He was experiencing a manic episode and was barely able to hold himself together. This suffering was not entirely in his look. I wonder if cotton pants and more wrinkles on his costume would have been better. The self-reflection of the design process is a good way for future processes in designs to grow.

I can say that I was really happy with some aspects of the design process in the Maxwell plays. But watching the show and looking back, there were definitely some much-needed adjustments to the costumes. When working within budgets, mistakes cannot be made without a high cost. Also, the limitations of the designer and their crew can cause other issues that limit creativity. In addition, there are limitations with layering costumes on a stage. The budget and limitations affect creativity for every play.
Conclusion

*Marie Antoinette’s Head* has thematic questions about stagnant human ecology. The playwright twists the themes into absurd historical facts and fiction, which are clouded by comedy. The costumes had to reflect a fixed character that moves through epochs and yet remains unchanging throughout the play. For each epoch, historically significant characters are placed in absurd versions of moments in history that are not completely accurate. With every change, the costumes had to represent the absurd nature of the human condition.

Leonardo, the main character, never changes his flamboyant costume. In Act 1, we see the contrast of his courtier life compared to those who have nothing. The characters do not care that the Queen is dead but instead indulge themselves with cake and sex. The next two acts are filled with sex, food, and a preoccupation with indifference. All the while, Leonardo stays in his 18th Century suit looking for the head of a dead queen. His fixed costume is a representation of the hold of the old regime in France. Rousseau plays the opposite role in the play, and his costume shifts to reflect his dynamism. Even though Rousseau died fifteen years before the Reign of Terror, his silhouette was the new mode of fashion. Both men were born in the same Century but held vastly different ideals of society. Leonardo was part of the court life and the politics it represented. Conversely, Rousseau believed that the ideals of the regime did not represent the masses that made up the population of France. He felt as though the king was suppressing the people of France and that the people had a right to rule the land on which they lived.

The other antagonists in the play, who were the working-class people, also fed into the gluttony of the regimes. They were sexualized throughout the play, partaking in feasts
of sex, cake, and stews. They were all controlled by the environments of the periods in which they were suppressed. In the first act, they were peasants; in the second act, they were prisoners, and in the final act, they were the cult followers (one was the leader). The four characters were laughably gluttonous and highlighted the faults of the three main epochs in the acts.

The five changing antagonists moved the play through the different epochs, creating a contrast to Leonardo’s unchanging character. Highlighting Leonardo’s character draws emphasis on how civilizations change, but do our morals and compassion for others change?

The static character portrayal is highlighted again in another Maxwell play, *Exhausted Paint*. Vincent Van Gogh is one of the most recognizable artists in the world, but when he was alive, he struggled every day to survive. His survival not only hinged on monetary needs, but he was also motivated to create his own version of beauty at the cost of his well-being. For the last ten years of his life, he obsessively focused on making art. This obsession was in the form of mania and led to his decline and suicide. He was much like Leonardo because both characters never change and try to obtain beauty while life changes around them.

The exploration of the human condition in both plays raises the question of whether or not society and people change independently. Both main characters focus on beauty and ignore the reality of the things around them. The attainment of this beauty can be obsessive to the point of mania. The search for objective beauty on which these two main characters focus on amplifies human ecology and a condition of change or stagnation within the societies’ culture.


Appendix

Figure 1


*Fashion From Ancient Egypt to The Present Day,* Pg. 193.

Figure 2

Robe à l’anglaise, c. 1785 (fabric 1760s)

*The collection of the Kyoto Costume Institute: Fashion,* Pg. 99

Figure 3

Man’s suit (coat, waistcoat, breeches)
c. 1765
French

Man’s suit (coat, waistcoat, breeches)
c. 1760

*The collection of the Kyoto Costume Institute: Fashion,* Pg. 52-53
Figure 4

Man’s Suit (Habit à la française)
c. 1770
French

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Figure 5

Man’s Suit (Man’s suit (coat, waistcoat, breeches))
c. 1790
French

*The Collection of the Kyoto Costume Institute: Fashion*, Pg. 119

Figure 6

Man’s Suit (Man’s suit (coat, waistcoat, breeches))
c. 1790
French

*The Collection of the Kyoto Costume Institute: Fashion*, Pg. 118
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“A Gentleman,” Jean-Antoine Watteau. c. 1710.

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Figure 8

Jean-Antoine Watteau *L’Enseigne de Gersaint*, 1720

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Figure 9

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Figure 10

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https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Compitalia_fresco.jpg
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Pattern template

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Jean-Baptiste Greuze, French, 1725-1805.

“La Simplicité,” 1759.

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Figure 21
Jean-Baptiste Greuze. The Drunken Cobbler. Late 1770.
Portland Art Museum, Portland, Oregon.

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Figure 22
“Peasant Boy.”
ca. 1794
Richard Westall RA (1765 - 1836)

https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/art-artists/work-of-art/a-peasant-boy
Figure 23

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Aldobrandini_wedding.JPG

Figure 24
Paul Cézanne, French, 1839-1906
Man in a Blue Smock,
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Vincent Van Gogh self-portraits.


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*French Revolution, 1795*, Jean-Pierre Granger
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Leonardo, Act 1  

Photo courtesy of  
Adachi Pimental
Figure 28
Rousseau, Act 1

Photo courtesy of Adachi Pimental

Figure 29
Darwin, Act 2

Photo courtesy of Adachi Pimental
Figure 30
Nero, Act 3

Photo courtesy of
Adachi Pimental

Figure 31
Revelers one and two,
Act 1

Photo courtesy of
Adachi Pimental
Figure 32
Reveler three and four, Act 1
Photo courtesy of Adachi Pimental

Figure 33
Prison Guards, Act 2
Photo courtesy of Adachi Pimental
Figure 34
Prisoners, Act 2
Photo courtesy of Adachi Pimental

Figure 35
Ted, Lori, and Luci, Act 3
Photo courtesy of Adachi Pimental
Figure 36
Ted, Act 3
Photo courtesy of Adachi Pimental

Figure 37
Vincent Van Gogh
Photo courtesy of Adachi Pimental
Marie Antoinette’s Head

A triptych in three pseudo-historicities

By
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“Is spurting a mode of sending or of giving?”

—Derrida, “To Unsense the Subjectile”
Characters:
Six actors, 3m, 3f.
This gender breakdown is only a suggestion. Feel free to get weird. If a different presentation of gender works better for a particular production, use it.

Leonardo—Marie Antoinette’s hair dresser, male, 40’s

Reveler #1—French peasant, male
Reveler #2—French peasant, female
Reveler #3—French peasant, male
Reveler #4—French peasant, female
Rousseau—Important philosopher, female

Prisoner #1—A convict in Corcoran Prison
Prisoner #2—A convict in Corcoran Prison
Guard #1—A guard in Corcoran Prison
Guard #2—A guard in Corcoran Prison
Darwin—Scientist

Ted—A Gnostic high priest
Lori—A Gnostic priestess
Luci—Another Gnostic priestess
Jimmy—A Gnostic convert
Nero—Roman emperor

The doubling breaks down like this:
Reveler #1/ Prisoner #1/ Ted
Reveler #2/ Guard #1/ Lori
Reveler #3/ Prisoner #2/ Jimmy
Reveler #4/ Guard #2/ Luci
Rousseau/ Darwin/ Nero

Running time:
50 minutes

Synopsis:
In this campy comedy we follow Marie Antoinette’s hair dresser, Leonardo, as he pursues Marie’s severed head across time and space. The first panel of the triptych takes Leonardo to the Palace of Versailles, just after the Queen’s execution, where drunken peasants are being harassed by Rousseau while partying with the head. Then the play shifts to California’s Corcoran Prison, in 1994, where the guards were staging gladiatorial combats between prisoners. Leonardo finds himself in the prison’s green room, with their combat becoming a game-show, hosted by Charles Darwin, and the head shamefully serving as the consolation prize. And finally Leonardo’s pursuit takes him to a Gnostic semen cult in 1st century Rome, on the day of the great fire. In the Roman catacombs, Nero spies on the cultists’ feast, while Leonardo gets caught swiping the head.
from their altar. Throughout it all the telephone keeps ringing. It’s Marie calling for Leonardo, and he always hangs up.

**Notes:**
The play explores how people embrace external stimuli to avoid their own internal world. This embrace of the external is reflected in the settings—times when cultures looked to a scapegoat and not at themselves. It looks at moments when a culture could change for the better, but chooses not to. Since *Marie Antoinette’s Head* looks at people’s unwillingness to explore their internal world, the play uses a flattened protagonist who, instead of following a traditional dramatic arc, becomes progressively more two dimensional over the course of the show, becoming irrelevant at the end. Dramatic tension is maintained over the course of the performance by the comedic events within each panel of the triptych. The show’s complex doubling, laid out on the character list, is intentionally designed to augment the shifting realities of the show and provide a warped, subliminal sense of character development. Consequently, settings, set pieces, props, costumes and effects all bleed together. The show is six bodies, three epochs, one stage, one dark joke.
First Panel
Syzygy

Dark theatre. A very sultry French woman’s voice says: “Let them eat cake.” The phrase is repeated again and again, each time it is faster and higher pitch. When the voice is an almost-unintelligible screech there is the woosh-thump sound of a guillotine. Then silence. Then the sound of hundreds of mouths munching contentedly.

We see the words: “Palace of Versailles, Wednesday, 16 October, 1793, early afternoon.”

The palace is revealed. It is filled with sleeping peasants, the REVELERS, slightly drunk, filthy, and dressed in random fragments of regal finery. They are flopped about randomly. REVELER #3 is lying on the floor and he stays there, disinterested in rising—a languid counterpoint to the mania of the other REVELERS. Marie Antoinette’s freshly severed head is amongst the garbage on the floor. There is a telephone on the stage, and there is a lot of cake about—a festive Sodom and Gomorrah feel pervades.

ROUSSEAU enters. He is some kind of linguistic carnival barker.

ROUSSEAU

Ladies and gentlemen—
we have syzygy!
Oops. It’s gone.
No. No, wait.
Wait.
Okay, it’s back.
No. Okay,
SYZYGY!

ROUSSEAU is surprised that this doesn’t produce a big reaction and just wanders off, as he exits, his speech awakens the REVELERS.

* Note: Obviously, eating a lot of dry, sweet food on stage is a terribly cruel thing to do to actors; it doesn’t hurt the play to have drinks available as part of the set.
REVELER #1

What?

REVELER #2

Who was that?

REVELER #3

I think that was Rousseau.

REVELER #4 crams a large piece of cake into REVELER #3’s mouth—the process is profoundly sexualized.

REVELER #2

Oh, thank Christ. There’s more cake.

REVELER #1

Who keeps bringing it?

REVELER #2

It’s not you?

REVELER #1

No. I thought it was her.

REVELER #4

(Still feeding cake to REVELER #3)

Not me.

REVELER #2

(To REVELER #3)

What about?

REVELER #4

No.

LEONARDO enters surreptitiously, trying to get to the head.

REVELER #1

Well then?

REVELER #2

I’m fine with mystery cake.
REVELER #4 feeds a ridiculously large piece of cake into REVELER #3’s mouth.

(to LEONARDO)

Excuse me?

Oh?
Sorry. I didn’t see you there.

We get that all the time.

Until recently.

Yes, well…. Sorry about that.
I’m just going to

LEONARDO reaches for the head. #1 stops him, kicks head away.

Oh no.

There’ll be no head for you, dearie.

Why should we give anything to you?

I spent my life with her.

(Kicking head away.)

Haven’t we all?

I meant literally.

Haven’t we all?
REVELER #4 climbs off REVELER #3 and approaches LEONARDO with a piece of cake held both flirtatiously and threateningly. REVELER #3 force feeds himself cake, complete with struggle and acquiescence.

LEONARDO

Look. I just want-

REVELER #2

Don’t we all.

REVELER #1

Everybody does.

REVELER #4 offers cake to LEONARDO.

LEONARDO

Not me!
I . . .
I.
That’s not my role.

REVELER #4

You’re one of those-

LEONARDO

I am the queen’s hairdresser.

REVELER #3

(Spitting cake casually)
Thank Christ. We’ve got no use for her tailor.

LEONARDO

Let me leave with her.

REVELER #1

Why?

LEONARDO
I make her hair perfect. She’s mine!

They are upon him, except of course REVELER #3.

Pin him down!

REVELER #2

Oh!
Oh.
Oh.
this isn’t so bad.

REVELER #4

Cake?

I really shouldn’t.

LEONARDO

It’s more fun than you’re thinking.

REVELER # 2

Maybe just a little.

LEONARDO

REVELER #4 climbs on top of him and lets him eat a piece of cake from her hand.

Not so bad?

REVELER #1

It’s not so bad.

LEONARDO

REVELERs #1 & #2 get off slowly.

Could I have some more?

LEONARDO

REVELER #4 reaches for more cake. As soon as she’s off balance LEONARDO bursts free. Everybody panics. The phone rings. All freeze. REVELER #1 answers.

REVELER #1

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Hello? (Sets down receiver)
It’s for you.

Who is it?

It’s Marie Antoinette.

LEONARDO takes the receiver and hangs up on her.

I don’t want any more cake.

REVELER #1 kicks the head away.

You would have been better off.

LEONARDO

I am better off!

REVELER #2

Still, no.

REVELER #4 shoves cake in LEONARDO’s mouth.

Why are you doing this?

Oh. That’s tasty. (Finishes chewing)
She is the oubliette of my happiness.

LEONARDO

The REVELERs look at each other.

None of us know what that is.

REVELER #2

I used to know.
But then I forgot.

REVELER #4
LEONARDO

Let me have her.

REVELEr #1, #2, and #4 circle around #3, who still refuses to get up. They debate.

REVELER #1

We have decided.

REVELER #3

After much consideration

REVELER #4

we’re going to say:

REVELER #1

No.

REVELER #3

Mostly because we feel like it.

LEONARDO

Please.

REVELER #3

No.

REVELER #2

He did say please.

REVELER #1

So’d she.

LEONARDO

Loot at what’s happening to France.

REVELER #3

We are happening to France.

REVELER #1

And we rather like us.

REVELER #2

Until there’s chafing;
then its time for a break.

REVELER #4 jams more cake into REVELER #3’s mouth.

REVELER #1

What would you do if we gave her to you?

LEONARDO

Leave.

REVELER #2

But we like your company.

REVELER #3

Maybe we want to keep you.

REVELER #4

Or maybe you’re just a one-afternoon stand.

REVELER #1

Whatever.

REVELER #2

You’ll get this exact same thing every time.

REVELER #4

Every time.

LEONARDO

(Freaking out)
You looters have no right to be here. You. You’re wearing part of her dress, and you’ve got her slippers, and, and someone stole all the Matchbox cars, and the ducks have vacated the duckery, and my toe hurts. And what the hell! Give her to me!

REVELER #4

Say please.

LEONARDO
No. You’re thieves.
Killers.

Little deaths only.
REVELER #2

We are thieves though.
REVELER #3

Roast duck?
REVELER #2

Toe Balm?
REVELER #4

Monsters.
LEONARDO

Now, now. We learn by example.
REVELER #3

(Recognizes #3 and tries to build rapport)
Don’t you live near my shop in Paris?
LEONARDO

I did.
REVELER #3

Where exactly?
LEONARDO

(Serious-seeming)
Across the street, down the alley, there’s a tenement building.
REVELER #3

I took a wrong way once.
I’ve seen it.
You have my sympathies.
LEONARDO

I lived in the horse carcass next to the building.
REVELER #3

Don’t worry. We hosed him off before we let him put the queen’s panties on his head.
I thought he tasted familiar.

REVELER #4

REVELER #2 whinnies.

LEONARDO

Monsters.

REVELER #1

Why did you work for her?

LEONARDO

I made beauty like the sun makes life.

REVELER #2

Like frogs from a puddle.

LEONARDO

You’re all witches.

LEONARDO

(Singing)
I put a spell on you…

REVELER #4

(Singing)
because you’re mine.

REVELER #3

LEONARDO

I gave my life
to the pursuit of beauty;
we can all be pretty
on the outside.

LEONARDO

I’m pretty on the inside too.
Wanna see?

REVELER #2

How people look matters!

LEONARDO

We’ve figured that out.

REVELER #1

It’s a mark of . . .

LEONARDO
REVELER #2

Station?

REVELER #1

Fate?

REVELER #3

Beauty?

REVELER #4

Luck?

LEONARDO

. . . Grace.

REVELER #3 throws some cake at him.

LEONARDO

(Enraptured)

She was so beautiful in my hands. Saturday mornings she would sit in her private dressing chambers and after her tailor and her personal entourage finished washing her, checking to see if her period had started, dressing her, applying her makeup, lying about her gambling debts, informing her of the well-being of her children, and dictating a letter to the Empress of Austria, then I would be able to enter. And while the ladies with the Right of Access would drone on about miscellany, I would sculpt the queen’s hair.

LEONARDO looks at the head lovingly.

REVELER #4 brings Leonardo some cake which he eats nonchalantly while he talks.

LEONARDO (Cont’d)

It was perfect. She was like my own little puppy. We were so happy from eleven to two-fifteen on Saturday.

REVELER #1

Just Saturday?

LEONARDO

The other days basic hair maintenance was performed by my assistant, le beau Julian. Even queens have limited resources. But on Saturday we were oyster and pearl.

REVELER #2

I’m like that every day.

Wanna see?
LEONARDO
Marie Antoinette had 139,384 strands of hair on her head. I knew every one of them. They were my friends. My lovers. I was their great paramour. I am the follicle Don Juan of our time. She was born with each hair in place and a new one always grew in properly. They’re growing right now.

REVELER #4
Ew.

LEONARDO
I named each one. Number one thousand eleven hundred eighty-five was named Marie Antoinette. Number twenty-four thousand six hundred two was named Marie Antoinette. Number seventeen was named Trevor, but I don’t want to talk about that right now. Each time a hair fell out I’d keep it in my pocket next to my heart—I have them all here with me.

LEONARDO reaches into his shirt pocket and pulls out nothing; the pocket is empty. He searches his other pockets, producing bits of cake. REVELER #4 takes a bit from LEONARDO with a curtsy and feeds it to REVELER #3.

LEONARDO
Because I keep all her hairs safe, cosmic forces would not align against me. It worked perfectly until the moment it failed. . . .

The phone rings. Everybody freezes. REVELER #1 answers.

Hello?
It’s for you.

Who is it?

It’s Marie Antoinette.

LEONARDO takes the phone and hangs up. Each REVELER covers LEONARDO’s mouth and speaks the next piece of dialog for LEONARDO. They’re mocking his own voice, his identity. Someone covers LEONARDO’s mouth on REVELER #3’s behalf.

REVELER #1
So as I was saying

I really liked to do the queen’s hair.

All the way,

curlers and irons and

cake.

(Excited, forgetting to cover LEONARDO’s mouth)

And sponge baths!

(Cake in the tub)

Please.

I must have

REVELER #4 jams cake in LEONARDO’s mouth.

We all must.

That’s the problem.

It’s why people watch such terrible game shows.

And at the end of all this one of the only nobles to keep his head is the Marquis de Sade.

If he takes my parking space one more time ....

I haven’t done anything.

Please, just let me leave with her.

ROUSSEAU
(From off)
If then such that therefore and heretofore thusly!

REVELER #1

Shit!

REVELER #2

It’s Rousseau.

REVELER #3

Scatter.

All, but REVELER #3, hide in a pathetically obvious, though humorous, fashion. LEONARDO hides well.

ROUSSEAU enters, speaks to LEONARDO.

ROUSSEAU

You there.
Come out!

LEONARDO

I don’t think I’m the one you’re talking too.

ROUSSEAU

Perhaps not.
But if and only if I were talking to you, would you thusly come out then, heretofore?

LEONARDO

Probably?

ROUSSEAU

So if all the parameters have been fulfilled in this and all possible worlds would I have been talking to you however, therefore if and only if?

LEONARDO

Yes?

ROUSSEAU

So if I am talking to you it will fulfill all the basic parameters of quote-unquote conversation, so I shall be thusly talking to you.

LEONARDO
(Baffled)
Okay.

ROUSSEAU
Since this experience meets the basic tautological requirements for discussion to be taking place, we must be in a state that can be defined as “conversation.”

LEONARDO
You said the same thing again.

ROUSSEAU
If you can catch me repeating myself or enter into a state of being wherein you believe that I have repeated myself then you must be having a conversation with me!

LEONARDO stops hiding.

Okay.

ROUSSEAU
(Victorious)
Quod Erat Demonstrandum.

LEONARDO
What do you want?

ROUSSEAU
This then therefore.

LEONARDO
Monster.

ROUSSEAU
The last king called me, and I quote, “the ruin of France.”
(beat)
I guess he was right.

REVELERS all cheer, clap. ROUSSEAU looks around for them and they immediately return to “hiding.”

LEONARDO
I have no interest in the king’s head.

REVELER #4

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Who does?

Not Marie.

ROUSSEAU looks around furiously. The REVELENS “hide” intensely.

LEONARDO
I’m here for Marie Antoinette. Her beauty must be saved for the ages.

Just like mine. But icky.

ROUSSEAU catches REVELER #2, drags her out of “hiding.”

What now or a priori?

Well…

Thusly and or not however?

(Guessing)

If and only if?

Excellent.

What?

LEONARDO

I don’t know. But don’t make eye contact or he’ll turn you to stone.

Or a frog.

REVELER #1
Or both.

He did it to me twice.

Post hoc, ergo propter hoc!

They emerge.

Not or but?

Yes.

Obviously.

Please?

Incontrovertibly, ipso facto non cogito est quell cul t’as.

That means no.

Does it?

Totalagus a priori ad hominem non sequitur.

The REVELERs make the shump-thunp sound of the guillotine.

Monsieur Le Guillotine ad Reductio ad absurdium est.

ROUSSEAU kisses the head passionately.

(Desperate)

Please.
ROUSSEAU

I have the natural claim to her.

REVELER #4 climbs on top of REVELER #3 and begins feeding him cake again.

LEONARDO

I'll trade you.

ROUSSEAU glances at LEONARDO, doesn’t stop kissing.

LEONARDO

I’ve got
I’ve got

Cake.
Damn it!

(Beat)

ROUSSEAU refocusses on his smooching. Phone rings. REVELER #1 answers. REVELER #2 begins putting pieces of cake on herself very seductively.

LEONARDO

It’s for you.

ROUSSEAU

Who is it?

LEONARDO

It’s Marie Antoinette.

ROUSSEAU

(Screaming, almost hysterical, begging)

I love you!
Please leave me alone!

LEONARDO slams down the phone.

ROUSSEAU

I love you alone.

LEONARDO

Please, please me.

LEONARDO

alone me love
love me—you please I

I, I, I, I!

Please.

I, you leave alone.

love, love, love, love

I please, please

You.

I . . . Me . . . You.

(Sultry)

Please

(Stern)

Please.

(Needy)

Please.

(Generous)

Please

ROUSSEAU

(Snarky)

Please.

ROUSSEAU exits with the head.
LEONARDO

Please?

LEONARDO runs after him, fighting tears. The REVELERs converge on #2 for the cake feast. REVELER #3 moves now.

Dark. End of scene.
Second Panel

Phlogiston

A klaxon in the dark.

We see the words: “Corcoran Prison’s High Security Unit, Corcoran California, April 2nd, 1994, 8:48 am.”

The prison is revealed. The space should be a little claustrophobic, built inside the Versailles set. This is the set of a game show; it is all very The Price Is Right. There is a door to the prison yard; it has the word “THANATOS” written on it in frogs. The telephone is on stage somewhere.

We can hear the excited murmur of the audience.

An APPLAUSE sign illuminates. Applause follows.

Charles DARWIN enters. He looks like a game show host, complete with loud jacket, microphone, and practiced enthusiasm.

DARWIN

Good morning everyone. I’m Charles Darwin.

APPLAUSE. Applause.

DARWIN (Cont’d)

There are two important points before we get started:
First, we must consider the coelacanth. Evolution takes a really, really long time. The coelacanth was a creepy fish that died with the dinosaurs. Until in 1989, when a fisherman caught one. Imagine an Idaho farmer going out in the morning to feed the livestock only to discover a Tyrannosaurus Rex busily munching up the cattle. People believed that both the coelacanth and the T-Rex went extinct at the end of the Cretaceous Period, Wednesday Feb 9th, at 2:17 pm. The belief that the coelacanth was extinct shows our own belief in change. In reality, time is the same event again and again, and we can simply step from one moment to another.

(Beat)

Second, there are times when evolution could happen—but doesn’t. Thus I’m here today to host this game show because sometimes great events get no notice, and sometimes you burn down Rome only to build the same old vomitorium. So without further ado, let’s bring out our lucky contestants.

The crowd goes wild.
The PRISONERs jog in, ebullient, wearing prison uniforms made up to be trailer-park-tv-fabulous with oversized name tags. This is their chance to “Come on down!” They are followed by the GUARDs, in skimpy “guard uniform”—very much rubber S&M, quickly revealing this event is even darker than it seems. The GUARDs are way into this.

And, let’s reveal our fabulous prizes.

Marie Antoinette’s head is revealed in a fashion both cheesie and hyperbolic—very game show.

That’s right, today’s second place contestant will receive a night with the one, the only, the head of LEO. LEO screams from off stage while rushing on.

As LEO runs on one of the GUARDs lays him out. DARWIN glares at LEO and GUARDs, but the show must go on, so….

So let’s have our contestants introduce themselves. Prisoner Number 1 hails from Oakland.

(Points again)

And Prisoner Number 2?

I’m from Chicago originally, Chuck.
And why don’t you tell us a bit about yourselves. Whatcha in for?

PRISONER #1

Sixty-one counts of drug possession.

DARWIN

And?

PRISONER #1

Triple homicide.

DARWIN

And?

PRISONER #1

I’m a member of an association whose members adopt a group identity to create an atmosphere of fear or intimidation while using violence to further its criminal objectives.

DARWIN

And our other contestant?

PRISONER #2

Attempted murder of a federal agent. I’m a member of a different association whose members adopt a group identity to create an atmosphere of fear or intimidation while using violence to further its criminal objectives. And I’m a Leo who likes long walks on the beach.

LEONARDO

I should be allowed to compete for the head.

(Beat)

I hail from Paris.
And I’m a member of the Royal Cosmetologists Guild, in good standing.

GUARD #2

Only two contestants.

GUARD #1

It takes an entire village to make a game show contestant.

PRISONER #1

Just ‘cause you got tickets to the Super Bowl don’t mean you can quarterback a few plays. I’m here to win, Chuck!

LEONARDO

This is a game.
This whole thing is irrelevant.
In five years nobody will remember it.
Evolutionary opportunities often go unnoticed.

You said yourself that this isn’t a key moment.

I’m just the host.

Find a different second prize!

Our fabulous prizes are decided long in advance.

Follow me to our green room; you can watch from there. And help yourself to the salmon dip.

There aren’t even any TV cameras here.

Closed circuit security.

We just wanna play.
We’re in it for the game itself.

We’re purists.

None of this is about you.

Individuals are inconsequential to the group. You’re not passing on your genetic material today.

Not even if you ask nicely.

Fine!

(Beat)
But no one will remember this.
What does it matter to you,
if I have the head?

I just told you,
memory is evolutionarily irrelevant.

I don’t remember things every day.

I cry when I’m asleep.

She’s all I want to remember.
Give her to me.

The guards worked hard to make this game: security cameras, the necessary props, and poorly worded California state laws.

LEONARDO grabs the head and makes a break for it. He is knocked down by a GUARD who returns the head to its previous location with spokes model reverence.

I’m sorry folks, but I can’t work under these conditions.

DARWIN exits.

Audience hushes in worry. PRISONERs fret, begin to get angry.

I suppose we better-

Yeah.

The GUARDS exit. The PRISONERs approach LEONARDO.

You’ve got to help me.
PRISONER #1
We’re not sharing any of our fabulous prizes with you.

PRISONER #2
Look buddy, two contestants, two prizes.

PRISONER #1
You’re not invited.

LEONARDO
Maybe we can trade. Whoever gets second place, I’ll give you cigarettes for the head. How many do you want?

PRISONER #2
(Doing some quick math)
She’s worth forty-two thousand, five hundred ninety-one cigarettes, but

LEONARDO
But?

PRISONER #1
We aren’t allowed to smoke in prison.

PRISONER #2
It’s bad for us.

GUARD #1 enters with a craft/activity box.

GUARD #1
You two are on work detail until we can get Charles Darwin out of his dressing room.

The PRISONERs clap gleefully. They huddle around the head with coy devotion and begin their work.

PRISONER #1
I make greeting cards on the queen’s behalf.

PRISONER #2
I make odd scraps of expensive, antique cloth. She really likes them.

PRISONER #2 begins to make clothing scraps with bits from Syzygy.

LEONARDO
I’m leaving with Marie.

LEONARDO approaches the head and GUARD #1 hits him again, painfully. GUARDS exit.

Why are you two working?
We could grab the head and escape.

LEONARDO

You’d never share.

PRISONER #1

And one of us should get some quality time with . . . the consolation prize.

PRISONER #2

Consolation!
We would meet and she would turn to me, say “my hair always has been and always will be.”

Her wisdom was transcendent;
I never needed to hear more than that.
In the most perfect moments,
up on my step ladder, I’d lose myself. A mountain of silver-blue forever and me as the only explorer. To feel nothing, to stand on that vista and see outward, all directions spread away into the infinity of her dressing room. All that nothing above her summit. That’s the value of Marie Antoinette’s head. She offers phlogiston!
She will-

The phone rings.

PRISONER #1

(Answering)

Hello?
It’s for you.

LEONARDO

Who is it?
It’s Marie Antoinette.

What does she want?

It’s pretty complicated….

Leonardo walks over and hangs up the receiver without listening.

She hung up on me.

Guard #1 enters

Darwin’ll be ready soon.

Won’t you two help me?

I make greeting cards.

I make scraps of fabric.

Get well, or whatever.
Rest in our deepest sympathies.
With regrets for your time of happiness.
Hang in there, or don’t.
I love you like you were me.

Prisoner #2 begins holding up scraps of fabric that he has made; they are surprising.

Stop it. Stop it!

No shouting.
(To the head, tenderly)
I made you this.

LEONARDO produces a bizarre and incongruous thing.

LEONARDO (Cont’d)
If you like it I can make you more.
I . . .
For you.

(To PRISONER #1)
Do you think she likes it?

PRISONER #1
To my nephew on our wedding day.

PRISONER #2
What else can you do?

LEONARDO
I can make her beautiful.

(To the head)
I made you this. I think you’ll like it.

LEONARDO casually drops the previous object and presents a new gift—it is totally different from the last one but still completely incongruous.

LEONARDO
You’re the most beautiful girl in the world.

GUARD #1
And I have such good table manners.

LEONARDO
Not you! Her.

GUARD #1
No shouting.

LEONARDO
(Qieter)
Not you.

GUARD #1
No shouting!
LEONARDO

(Whisper)
Not you.

GUARD #1

(Shouting)
No shouting!

LEONARDO

(Almost inaudible)
Not you.

GUARD #1

NO SHOUTING!

LEONARDO mouths the words “not you.”

GUARD #1

(Screeching)
No shouting.

LEONARDO drops his last offering and silently presents a new one for the head.

A klaxon sounds. GUARD #2 enters.

GUARD #2

Work detail’s done. Darwin approaches.

(To LEONARDO)
And you better keep it down.

LEONARDO glares at her.

GUARD #2

I heard that.

PRISONER #1

I made you this
to give to her.

PRISONER #1 gives LEONARDO a breathtakingly fragile paper heart.

LEONARDO

I don’t think she’ll like it.
It’s not what I’d make for her.

PRISONER #2

So?

LEONARDO

I know about beauty,
about queenliness.
I made her and when I was done she could carry the world.

GUARD #2

She ended up with enough extra room on her shoulders.

LEONARDO

You take that back.

GUARD #2

No.

LEONARDO

Take it back!

GUARD #1

Shut up.
You get no demands!

LEONARDO

I’ll demand whatever I
want. I demand she be
*made* to take that back!
I demand that Marie Antoinette’s head be given
to me.
And I demand that it be
given the basic dignity of first prize.

DARWIN enters. APPLAUSE, applause.

DARWIN

Unfortunately sir, you’re not one of our contestants today. We can only do two contestants at a
time because California state law clearly indicates that-

LEONARDO

I don’t care about
California law!
What could be more-
Phone rings. GUARD #2 answers it.

GUARD #2

Hello, Corcoran Prison.
Oh. Hello your Highness.
It’s April 2
nd,

(Beat)
1994.
Yes, quite a long time.
No.
Yes. He’s here.

(Covers receiver)
There’s some crazy lady on the phone that wants to speak to you.

PRISONER #2

Thank God it’s not the Governor.

GUARD #1

Never is.

LEONARDO takes the phone, slams it down.

GUARD #2 exits

LEONARDO

She should know better.

DARWIN

(Letting a little ROUSSEAU come through)
Just because everyone in this room knows better doesn’t mean that everyone prima faci knows better—in fact our knowing better implies that there must be some people who don’t know better.

Applause.

GUARD #2 enters with a rifle.

DARWIN

It’s time for someone to win our big prize and the other to go away with our fabulous consolation prize.

LEONARDO

Never.
LEONARDO grabs the head and makes a break for it. PRISONER #1 jumps on LEONARDO and wrestles the head away from him. He hands it to GUARD #1 who looks at it lasciviously then returns it to its original position.

PRISONER #1
Listen man. Only the most violent criminals in California get to come to Corcoran, and only the most violent inmates in here get to compete.

DARWIN
They understand the difference between success and survival.

LEONARDO
What the hell do you mean by
(Beat. Down. He sits)
Oh.
Okay.
She’s not second place for me.

GUARD #2 gives rifle to GUARD #1, then exits.

GUARD #1
None of us care.

LEONARDO
I keep all her old hair here in my pocket.
(LEONARDO takes out a handful of nothing)
It’s so lovely.
I must keep her perfect hair perfect.

GUARD #1
You boys ready?

PRISONER #1 and #2 (Simul)
(Happy)
Sir, yes sir.

APPLAUSE. The crowd goes wild.

DARWIN
In accordance with California law convicts from different groups must be integrated to give a feeling of diversity and multiculturalism to the prisoners, so that they can learn to love one another and appreciate rainbows and bunnies.

PRISONER #1 and #2 (Simul)
We would like to appreciate rainbows and bunnies.

GUARD #1
In accordance with California state law prisoners are to be told to stop fighting. If they do not comply, one warning shot must be fired. If the fighting does not stop immediately, guards are to shoot one of the combatants.

GUARD #2 enters with two bullets.

PRISONER #1 and #2 (Simul)
We will help you to accord to California law.

GUARD #1 loads rifle and prepares. PRISONER #1 and #2 go through the door.

The phone rings.

GUARD #2
It’s for you.

LEONARDO
Who is it?

GUARD #2
It’s Marie Antoinette.

LEONARDO takes receiver and hangs up. Lights down. There’s a gunshot in the darkness.

A second shot.

End of scene.
Third Panel
Urborous

Fiddle music and crazy chanting in the dark.

We see the words: “Catacombs beneath Rome, 64 CE, July 19th.”

The sepulcher of a Gnostic semen cult is revealed. The phone is on the altar, which is made from the tables of the previous Panel. This set incorporates the prison set, which still incorporates the Versailles set, so things should be getting messy.

LEONARDO hides, actually unseen, behind the altar.

NERO enters, carrying a fiddle and a Zippo lighter.

NERO
(With a hint of tent revival)
Again, again!
Seven nude hills
and me, and me, and me forever
the gods
wolf-milk
eternity, damnation, urborous!

NERO hides very poorly. We hear more crazy chanting from off-stage. The procession of priests enter; TED, LORI, LUCI are Gnostic priests wearing white outfits, and carrying candles. They are seriously sexy.

TED
We begin the service with a welcoming of the faithful.

You’re in it now.

LORI and LUCI (Simul)
The three face the audience and bow lasciviously.

TED and LUCI (Simul)
Welcome high priest Lori.

TED and LORI (Simul)
Welcome equally high but of slightly different rank priest Luci.

Welcome very high priest Ted. LORI and LUCI (Simul)

Welcome Emperor Nero. TED, LORI, and LUCI (Simul)

Fuck you. I’m hiding. NERO

We shall begin with a demonstration of the strength of God. TED

Strength of God. LORI

LEONARDO pops his head up from behind the altar, assesses the situation, pines for the head, and withdraws.

Hallelujah. LUCI

Bring out The Afflicted. LORI

All behold The Afflicted. LUCI

JIMMY THE AFFLICTED is shoved onto the stage. He’s startled but quickly decides that this will be fun.

As Gnostic Christians, we know that each of us contains a pure, white spark of life, the remnants of the great god, petered out across the cosmos. It is the antidote to the world of flesh and sin made by the Demiurge.

TED, LORI and LUCI make dramatic sound effect, startling NERO.

TED By knowing the secrets of arcane lore we gain the keys to bypass the archons and return as one to the one god on high: Christ. We consume Christ’s holy spark in all that is white. It gives us
divinity. With it we heal the afflicted, so they may join us on the path to Reunion. To demonstrate our power and knowledge we will heal The Afflicted. Jimmy, The Afflicted.

But…

JIMMY

LORI and LUCI move towards him in a very friendly manner.

LUCI and LORI (Simul)

(Sexy.)

Tell us your affliction.

JIMMY slaps his hand over his eyes.

JIMMY

I’m blind!

LUCI and LORI (Simul)

Let the whiteness of God cure your blindness.

LUCI grabs JIMMY, who loves this, while LORI pries his hand from his eyes, which JIMMY then shuts tightly.

JIMMY

I’m still blind!

LORI gently caresses his eyes open.

JIMMY

I’m cured!

TED

What else afflicts you?

JIMMY

I suffer greatly from…

JIMMY scrambles to think of something. LEONARDO reaches from behind the altar, swipes the head.

JIMMY (Cont’d)

from sexual frustration.
God can heal you from this.
To bring more spark into the world, more white, more seed is our holy mission.

I, I believe!

LUCI and LORI jump on him.

TED turns toward the altar.

TED

Oh God who is deep in our (Realizes the head is missing)
Oh God!

Oh God.

Oh God.

The head.

It’s gone.

No it’s not. (Realizes. Down)

Oh. Crap.

Where is it?

I suffer greatly from my . . . affliction.

TED reveals LEONARDO.

TED Well?
LEONARDO is doing the head’s hair. This is touching, if slightly unpleasant.

LEONARDO

Yes?
Can I help you?

LORI

Are you afflicted?

LUCI

Shhh. No.

TED

Tresspasser.

LEONARDO

But he’s the emperor.

TED

Not him.

LEONARDO

Well then maybe you should leave the blind guy alone. He’s got enough trouble.

TED

You.

LEONARDO

Me?

TED

Yes.

LEONARDO

Can I help you?

TED

I demand you tell us what you are doing with the as-yet-unborn queen’s severed head, and... does this outfit match my eyes?

Really.

You can be honest.

I can take it, about the outfit.

LEONARDO

I see you as more of an autumn.
I understand.  
(Serious)
We must kill the interloper.

Just because he’s blind?

You.

Oh.

Maybe he wants to be initiated?

No initiation for me, thanks.

But I still…
suffer
from my . . .
affliction.

I’ve been on my way out since fifteen hundred years from now.

That’s a long time. You could let our faith sustain you.

We’re not concierge service.

That’s for sure.

She’s mine. We’re leaving.

No.
When the peasants will begin the French Revolution, I’ll end up way too involved.

You get to riot!

LORI

NERO plays with his lighter.

LEONARDO

After the revolution the world will be exactly the same.

NERO

Thank God.

The priests glares at him.

LEONARDO

The Royal Family tries to escape Paris. And in the chaos I end up with a baton of a Marshal of France, which I’m supposed to sneak to the Marquis de Bouillé, who was in Montmédy.

JIMMY

I did that once…when I could still see.

LEONARDO

And I had a big box of the queen’s jewels. (To Lori and Luci)

Not like that.

LUCI and LORI pout.

LEONARDO (Cont’d)

I found myself looking fabulas and on a secret mission. By the time it was done, the mob was angrier the Royal Family was back in Paris and the Queen’s hair looked terrible.

(Beat)

When I suggested we step aside and I give it a little… She jumped at the chance. When we were alone she started to cry, so I knew that meant no hot rollers. But then it got worse.
She started to talk. Not about the Royal Coiffure but about her . . . well, her life.

Maybe she wanted a neck massage?

*Maybe* she continued to be afflicted?

She just wanted to talk about her life. My God! She might have been telling me things for 15 years.

Did she ever say you were a good listener?

Every week. I thought it was code for something. Never for a moment of time have I wanted Marie Antoinette’s mind. (Beat) I don’t want to know her feelings. I just want to be up on my step ladder.

Well, my feelings are simple: Afflicted.

We can help with that.

Not now.

It better be soon, or I’m gonna become afflicted too.

As soon as TED looks away LEONARDO returns to what he was previously doing with the head.

(To LUCI) You know the drill.
Homily

TED

Feast.

NERO

Shocking discovery of the Emperor.

The phone rings.

LORI

Maybe it’s Jesus.

LUCI

Pssh.
He never replies to my voicemails.

TED

Hello?
It’s for you.

LEONARDO

Who is it?

TED

Marie Antoinette.

LEONARDO stops futzing with the head, and he hangs up the phone.

TED

We will begin our service with the homily.

LUCI and LORI adopt worshipful poses. LORI pulls JIMMY down like them; they end up very close together.

LEONARDO

How about I just….

TED

No.
Homily.

TED takes the head and moves it away from LEONARDO.
NERO
They don’t notice you if you don’t talk too much.

TED
Yes we do.

LORI
We’re just too polite to bring it up.

LUCI
Social graces are very important.

NERO
Fortunately, culture defines itself by me.

NERO fidgets with his Zippo.

TED
Our path back to Christ will free us of Roman occupation.

NERO
Nope. We’re eternal.

TED
Only Christ-

NERO
Nope.  (To LEONARDO)
How long does that head keep?

LEONARDO
Well, I-

NERO
Exactly.  The Roman Empire is as old as the severed head of the queen of France.

JIMMY
We must get back to the . . . service.
LEONARDO

Maybe if
she and I . . . .
Then you guys could
resolve this on your own.

NERO

Won’t happen.
Look at how hard
they work at ignoring me,
just so I’ll come back next week.

LUCI

It’s more fun if you’re a member.

TED

Are you going to convert or not?

NERO

I convert every week.
Then I get dressed
go home . . .
and convert back.

LORI

I’m getting a leg cramp down here.

(To TED)
Good time for a reading.

TED knows that it is in fact time for a reading
(maybe looks at his watch or something) and
angrily returns to ignoring NERO.

TED

A reading from the Nag Hammadi Codex, The Thunder: Perfect Mind, Chapter 15, verses 18 and 19.

TED points to LUCI, who panics slightly then
remembers the verse. LUCI stands, recites.

LUCI

Do not hate my obedience.
Do not love my self control.
LEONARDO moves closer to the head; this is both surreptitious and exaggerated.

TED
We are to be obedient to the Lord, the spark within us. We are to follow its dictates even when we aren’t particularly hungry, or . . . afflicted feeling.

JIMMY begins to cozy up to LORI.

TED (Cont’d)
We are to stay in control and pay homage to the Archon Saclas, for we are to eat of the body of Christ and this is the Pasch for which our bodies suffer and are forced to confess the passion of Christ.

LEONARDO moves closer to the head.

TED (Cont’d)
Though we are persecuted by Epiphanius the Bishop of Salamis, and Irenaeus, and Hippolytus, and Tertullian, and Larry my jerk landlord, and Umbilicas the janitor who really slacks on catacomb upkeep, we will stay the course. Our knowledge shall prevail.

LORI stands and TED takes her place, which JIMMY is unhappy about.

LORI
We know the great secrets—how to placate the Archons, how to return to the great light beyond space. How to worship.

LORI takes JIMMY behind the altar. LUCI stands.

LUCI
We speak: Kabba!
The ancient and powerful word.

LORI
(Yelling from behind altar)
It means fornication in Syriac.

TED
And murder in Hebrew.

LUCI joins the others behind the altar. They fuck acrobatically.

LEONARDO grabs the head.
Finally!

LEONARDO

LEONARDO gets distracted by what’s going on behind the altar.

TED

Marie Antoinette’s head can’t help you. Our way is the only way.

NERO

If you did your service in reverse order, no one would come.

LORI

(Yelling from behind altar)

I would!

TED

(To NERO)

Go hide.

NERO

The fiddle works for me, but of course I am the greatest artist of all time got any matches on you?

LEONARDO

No.

NERO

Slacker.

TED

You should join us.

LEONARDO

No thanks.

JIMMY

(Steps out, disheveled)

I’m not afflicted anymore.

LUCI and LORI step out wearing each other’s costumes.

LUCI and LORI (Simul)

We converted him.
JIMMY

Hallelujah.

TED, LORI, and LUCI (Simul)

The feast, wherein we eat the body of Christ, the spark of life, and prepare ourselves for the trials of the Archons as we leave the world of flesh...

TED

that the light of Christ shall fill us in our sacred feast.

LUCI

(To JIMMY)
Say: that we may all be as one.

JIMMY

That we may all be as one.

LORI

On the prayerful quest for knowledge . . .

LUCI

For anointment . . .

NERO jumps out from hiding, fiddle in one hand, Zippo lighter in the other. Smoking.

NERO

(Very tent revival)
But I have sinned!
I am a heretic.
I have desires.
I have done terrible and delightful things to a wide variety of mammals, and possibly fishes if the stories are to be believed.

LORI

We can cure your affliction.

NERO

Praise Jesus!
This is why I come back every week.

LUCI

We must partake of the feast.

NERO begins to play his fiddle softly.
What’s the feast?

This week? Camel semen stew with bay scallops.

(Whispers to JIMMY)
You’re in luck, last week it was dog.

Actually, it was mine.
The dog ran away.

Fido’s gone?

(To LEONARDO)
Gnostic semen cults take the body of Christ very seriously.

They can have it.

I felt that way before I became emperor.

You should try religion. I’m a leader.

You should try giving. Or taking.
Or sharing. I’m into change.

You should try offering yourself. I’m a giver.
JIMMY
You should try need. Others can bring fulfillment to you.
(beat)
Sometimes you don’t even have to stand up.

JIMMY exits.

NERO
Whether you’re the greatest scientist in the world, or an important philosopher, too alive is too much. Even the threat of it can turn you to game shows.

The Gnostics reenter with the feast, each wearing bits of their previous costumes. They augment NERO with some of his.

LEONARDO
So should I . . .

NERO
No. Never answer the phone.
I never did.
And I get remembered forever.

Violin increases. The cultists begin to feast. This builds to orgy-like intensity. Smoke, from a burning Rome, begins to roil on stage. The prison klaxon sounds. The guillotine falls. The mouths chew.

The phone rings—everything freezes, silence.

LEONARDO
Don’t bother.

LEONARDO lifts and returns the receiver in one motion.

The feasting resumes, loud as ever, building to a terrible intensity, all the elect feed one another.

LEONARDO very casually takes the head and exits.

The feast continues until the Gnostics realize that LEONARDO has absconded with the head. Sudden silence, stillness.
Damn it. Now we have to get another.

TED

NERO produces an identical head. The feast resumes unabated. Lights fade.

END OF PLAY
Exhausted Paint: the Death of Van Gogh

by
Justin Maxwell
Set: one  
Cast: 1m, mid-30’s  
Run time: 50 min

The show is built around ideas of disorientation and struggle. These are exemplified by a single set piece. The piece is a wheel that is horizontal on a post and parallel to the stage, mounted on an axel so that it can be spun by an actor. From the rim of the wheel hang a series of objects (mobile like), each of which represents something from Van Gogh’s life and a scene of the play. After the initial scene, the actor will spin the wheel and perform the scene appropriate to that object. Consequently, the play doesn’t have a set internal structure, only the introduction and finale are set. The other scenes can happen in any order.

Also, there should be some wine available for the performer. He’ll need a glass of it for “Scene: Rag” and with all the talking the poor actor has to do, something to drink is a good idea. Water works too, as does bringing enough wine for the whole audience. As a side note, grape juice tends to make a terrible substitute.

The date listed in the first line of “Scene: Introduction” (September 1st 2010) is a place holder and should be replaced by the date of the current production. Similarly, the name Shawn, in “Scene: Light,” is a placeholder for Shawn Boyd, the actor who first performed the role. His name should be replaced by the name of whoever is performing the show.

The play happens in a single spotlight, which has the axel of the wheel at its center point.
Scene: Introduction

Spotlight up to reveal the wheel. VAN GOGH enters, slight bump in houselights so the actor can see the audience, a bit.

VAN GOGH
It's September 1\textsuperscript{st} two-thousand and ten, and I'm more popular than ever. Because I am dead you can do whatever you want with me and I can't object. You might as well, you did the same thing when I was alive. Thousands of people visit my home every year. Millions buy reproductions of my work and year after the originals. Billions of people recognize my canvases. And I need to say to you all:

   Fuck off.

Where were you when I was making three paintings a day? Where were you when I went crazy? Where were you when I was sick? Had you come through for me when I needed you, I would have made the world a richer place. You never had a chance to know Vincent Van Gogh, and you don't have one now. Van Gogh the painter is just a contrivance for a different artist to make a piece of art—repurposing me is a long tradition that includes Antonin Artaud and Martin Heidegger. Now I'm just a character in a play. Again. At least this actor looks like me. Kinda. But his French is fucking terrible. And his Dutch is worse.

VAN GOGH goes to the mobile. On it, front and center to the audience, is a black square, which he removes. The expectation is that he'll reveal what's on the other side of the square.

I could say, let me paint you a picture. But I won't. I live before irony and you live after it. So, clearly, I'm having some identity issues. Some people look at my work and think I'm crazy. Or that I'm an artistic genius and that we're all like this. Others read my letters and think I'm depressed, or manic, or an alcoholic, or that I've got O.C.D. Others hypothesize that I've got an inner ear disorder. No shit. Inner-ear. They think I'm just a guy who wanted to paint and that had a screwed up cochlea. Their theory is my favorite. When I was at the asylum at Saint Remy, they didn't look at my ears once. So, here's the question:

What happens when you reach for the brass ring and miss?

   (This is building to a reveal....)
At the end of my life, there are about ten people who are impressed by my art. In hindsight, they really came through for me. In the moment, not so much. There’s an anecdote that says I only sold one painting in my whole life. It’s good for an anecdote. But. They never seemed to understand my works are very ordered, very consciously created. I could explain every brushstroke on every canvas, every lively daub of paint had intention. Art I could control, success I could not. So, I need to tell you the story of my failure. All the times I reached and missed, reached and missed. I need to show you something about disorder.

VAN GOGH turns over the black square to reveal: nothing. It is black on the other side too! He places it on the ground. He spins the wheel. Whichever scene-object stops towards the audience is the scene that’s performed next.
Scene: Gun

The gun has come up on the wheel. VAN GOGH removes it, careful not to hold it as a weapon.

VAN GOGH

Since you have the wherewithal to be in a theater today—good choice by the way—you probably know the rule: If there’s a gun on stage in act one it better go off by act three. I think this comes from Chekhov, but I don’t really keep up on such things. Or guns in general, really. In nearly a thousand letters I never mention guns. Not once. And I do some high-risk stuff in my private life.... I drink, a lot. Absinthe. I drink turpentine on one occasion. I smoke. Not American-trying-to-quite, smoke. I mean 19th Century, European, artist smoke. I have unprotected sex with prostitutes. Often. I spend a lot of time outside in burning sun and freezing rain. I spend time inside in poorly heated apartments. I’m poor. All the high-risk stuff. Oh, and those apartments are poorly ventilated and filled with the fumes of dozens of square yards of curing oil paint—of all the theories for my “condition,” nobody has mentioned huffing, yet.

(To an audience member.)
You, you know what I mean.
I mention these things in my letters. Hell, I advocate these things in my letters. Well, not the turpentine. That was a terrible decision. But every other self-destructive thing. All that and I never mention guns. Or suicide. Fortunately, this is a one-act; it’s short. No third act. No inevitable gun play.

(to same audience member.)
Relieved? Good.
Just to be safe, I want you to hold this for me.

VAN GOGH gives gun to same audience member.
He spins the wheel.
Scene: Potato

The potato has come up on the wheel. VAN GOGH removes it and takes a little nibble of the raw potato. Yes, it’s fine to eat them like that. As this scene goes on Van Gogh takes progressively more dramatic bites from the potato, wolfing it down by the end.

VAN GOGH

So, as an adolescent, I started fooling with painting for all the bullshit, romantic reasons that a boy goes in for art: vanity, laziness, selfishness, the hope that chicks will dig it. They don't by the way. But some really go for vanity and laziness and selfishness. So, when painting started to get...hard, when I hit that point where I was going to have to give some serious suffering to it, I became a priest instead. Kinda. It’s a moment some of you musicians have experienced, when, seemingly at random, or just when you were sure you were going to make it your bassist, or drummer, or whomever quits the band to go back to community college. You’ve been there. Me, I read the Bible. I mean, read it a lot.

(Suddenly tent revival preacher, just while eating a potato.)

Brothers and sisters—
Can I get an Amen?
(If no one does.)
I said: Can I get an amen, motherfuckers?
(If/when they do.)
I read from the Bible.
I read Corinthians.
I read Matthew.
I read Revelations.
I read the whole black-bound thing.
And I was filled with the good news.
Filled with the light and
filled with the life of
Jesus H. Christ Almighty himself.
And I heard my calling. I would take the good word to the people.
I read them the sermon on the mount;
I knew the meek had a big inheritance coming.
Had I been an American, I’d have toured the Middle West in a tent and made some serious money.
(Down. Out of preacher character.)
But, I’m Dutch.
We don’t tour.
No chance to fingerbang buxom, corn-fed girls behind the tents at the county fair.
My people were peasants. Old school, Euro-peasants.
Folks who harvested barley with hand scythes, and who had been doing so for a thousand years. American farmers work on the very top of the earth. Peasants are the earth, buried deep in the soil. Generations scythed away as oak tress grew up, withered, died, and grew
again. Those peasants were buried in the dirt of their farms for so long they are its dirt, and its produce, and its workers, and its dirt, ad infinitum. And I love them. So I needed to tell them about the Bible. I mean they already knew everything they needed to know, and everything they wanted to know. But I...

(beat.)
I needed to tell them.
I got a few gigs as an assistant pastor.
I gave a few sermons.
And I was doing important work.
Work that could have kept me close to the peasants I claim to cherish so.
But it didn’t sustain me.
So a sketch here and there, a family, an idea for a painting, a sketch, a nude or two,
and suddenly the peasants didn’t want me around. And the Catholic priests told people to avoid me.
(Offers bite of potato to audience member.)
So I went off to learn painting at the foot of a Dutch master.
I tucked my evangelical tail between my legs and . . . hell.
I cut that tail clean off.

VAN GOGH spins the wheel.
Scene: Rag

The rag has come up on the wheel. VAN GOGH looks at it—a quiet trauma.

VAN GOGH

So I fail in Paris. A combination of poverty, cold, heat, and expensive hookers exhausts me. I get a great fatigue. Or maybe depression. Or syphilis. Or, maybe, artistic temperament of some kind. It will come back to haunt me.

VAN GOGH waggles his ear; then he takes the rag from the wheel and snaps it taunt.

I move to Arles in Southern France, for the light. And the warmth. And I try to bring the other Impressionists with me. You’d call it an artist’s colony nowadays. I just called it survival.

(Beat.)

Fuck.
It’s never been about survival. If I wanted an artist’s colony I’d have been an organizer, but I’m not an organizer. Or at least not a good one. I’m a painter. My brother loves art like I do. But he gets survival. Although, ironically, he also gets what the doctors call neurosyphilis and dies a year after me. But, before his whole death thing, he was about survival. He did well enough as an art dealer to support a family, and even before that he did well enough to support me. I’d have painted and starved and vanished from the world in sixty days if it wasn’t for him. By the time I’d get around to thinking about survival, I’d, hell.... my last thought probably would have been:
How long have I been this hungry? Before collapsing on my easel.

(Wrings rag, stressed.)

My brother sends me money every month.
I fantasize about that.
I perseverate about it.
I worm and twitch from it.
Each franc is given with love and heavy with guilt.
Each tube of paint he sent, each brush, each letter—
he loved me in a way I can’t understand. We were an odd little threesome. He loved me, I loved painting; we both loved art, which didn’t care a whit.
And I ...I can’t make the world work.
Eventually, I get Gauguin to come and live with me, in my two bedroom “artist’s colony.” We have great talks about art.
I say things like: “The peculiar effects of perspective intrigue me more than human intrigues.”
And he says “blah blah, blah blah, naked Tahitians.”
I say: “Cobalt—is a divine colour and there is nothing as fine for putting atmosphere around things. Carmine is the red of wine and is warm and lively like wine. The same goes for emerald green too. It’s false economy to dispense with them, with those colours. Cadmium as well.”
Then I say: “For instead of trying to reproduce exactly what I see before me, I make more arbitrary use of colour to express myself more forcefully.”

Then I get carried away. Soliloquy carried away:

(A parody of himself.)

“I shall be an obstinate colourist. I shall exaggerate the fairness of the hair, arrive at tones of orange, chrome, pale yellow. Behind the head—instead of painting an ordinary wall of the shabby apartment, I shall paint infinity, I shall do a simple background of the richest, most intense blue that I can contrive, and by this simple combination, the shining fair head against this rich blue background, I shall obtain a mysterious effect, like a star in the deep blue sky.”

Then Gauguin says: “I should like to do portraits which will appear as revelations to people in a hundred years’ time.”

Well, okay, I said that last one too. He really said “blah, blah, blah, blah, nearby brothel, good wine.” After all, he was one of the great geniuses of his generation.

In general, that’s an exact transcription of all our conversations. Except I made up Gauguin’s part. And my parts are actually excerpts from my letters to my brother. And it was all done in Dutch. And translated by Arnold Pomerans. And misappropriated by Justin Maxwell. But other than that, flawlessly accurate.

This completes the colony. One Gauguin, one me. Our discussions became fights, since I couldn’t ever get his “point of view,” even though I listened carefully to each blah he blah-blahhed. And he was one of my closest friends. And I did admire him so. And I

(Angry.)

I needed him to see my ideas about art were RIGHT. Just, right. His were good. His were genius even. Mine were right. Eventually, everything became ritual.

He drops the rag. Sits crossed legged. Picks up the rag. Drops it again. His actions are like a Zen tea ceremony.

I had a point to make.

He takes the rag. Twirls it taut. Bends it in half. Dips middle into wine. Sits calmly while the wine is absorbed. Removes. Wrings out excess. Puts the rag around his head like a bandage; the wine is blood over the ear. It stays there for the remainder of the play.

He is then out of the ceremonial tone.

When I gave me ear to my favorite whore, she was nonplussed. Called a doctor. Later I apologized. She simply said that such things happen all the time in her world. She understands men who don’t understand survival.

VAN GOGH spins the wheel.
Scene: Crows

The bird has come up on the wheel. VAN GOGH goes to the wheel and removes it. This scene is whispered to the bird, a talismanic confidant.

VAN GOGH

After I fail as a Parisian, and after I fail as an arts colony administrator slash roommate, and after I fail as a man with, 
(He tries to look and see his own ear.)
well, let’s call it stereophonic hearing, 
I start to fail as a mental patient. This is when my success starts to take off.
(Makes a strange motion with the bird.)
Take a moment, think Van Gogh painting. That image in your head, I made it during this period.
I start to do ... things, with colors and textures that art critics will fall in love with—after I die. If you go online to the Vincent Van Gogh museum’s web page
(He stops. Realizing what he just said. Sits.)
The Vincent Van Gogh museum. Had you asked me in life and gotten an honest answer from me, I’d have told you it was a historical inevitability. The museum, not the web page. Or, I’d have told you it didn’t matter a bit. Both are true.
(To crow.)
But you already know that.
(To audience.)
It’s no secret that crows know secret things.
That’s why they hoard and steal.
They’re storing up spell components.
Their feathers are made of alchemy. Look closely at a crow. It’s the color of transmogrification. It isn’t really black. It’s a past-blue. Or near-purple. It’s a midnight vermillion. It’s a secret color that only the crows have a name for.
I painted portraits more accurate than photographs.
I painted self-portraits with more shame and honesty than a confessional.
I painted landscape upon landscape—light and time.
I painted still-lifes that grow and move. I painted the incomprehensible finger print of God in each star.
I painted flowers that soften life and death.
I only painted crows once.
Even I have my limits. Some artists love crows like Mormons love seagulls. There’s even a crow at the heart of the old Norse religion, so I know how dangerous they can be, in an ancestral way.
Sometimes, I suspect crows don’t move.
Instead, they flap their wings and the universe moves around them. In my painting you can see the wheat field falling away from the crows.

The actor’s attention focuses on the bird, not the audience. The crow becomes the center of the
show, of our attention. It and VAN GOGH are in a private conversation.

You did your terrible things in there. Your secret things. And I painted my secret paintings. I won’t tell. I know you won’t.
I don’t know why you love me.
I don’t know why you didn’t stop it.
I could hear you deep inside the wheat when I started painting.
Could you hear my brushstrokes?
I could hear the measured, pearlescent blink of your eyes. The inaudible slink-slink of your feathers preparing for flight.
Your cacophony of calls soaked me like the just-past rain.
Then the wheat fell away.
The reaper in his lavender shirt, from another day, saw his crop ascend like the damned.
His ancestors in the dirt, the dirt in the wheat, the wheat in you. You in the sky. You absorbing all the light. The drinker-in of the world. Absorbing the seeds of my attention. Hovering on the canvass forever. For me. The peasant betrayed by God’s grand design, again.
I just want to say thank you for keeping my secrets. I don’t want to tell them everything.

He gives the crow an old kiss. And spins the wheel.
Scene: Fucking

The condom has come up on the wheel.

VAN GOGH

I could have used these—especially if the people why claim I had syphilis were right. I obsess about religion. I obsess about money. I obsess about success. And, like one or two other artists you might know, I obsess about women. Especially the ones that are really bad for me. Then I fall in love.

It starts innocently enough: I perform the cultural equivalent of standing up at the Thanksgiving dinner table and announcing to everyone that I want to have sex with my hot cousin. But, I’m Dutch, so I merely propose marriage to her. For some reason she doesn’t want me. I blame her father, and she turns to her fiancée for moral support. I, of course, don’t quit very easily. To save you time: I piss off everybody. She avoids me for the rest of my life. Her father threatens me. My father considers trying to have me institutionalized, again. My brother gets on my case. And he’s paying the bills, so he gets his way. Eventually, my father and uncle grudgingly forgive me, but they have to. They’re Dutch. Then I fall in love. With a pregnant woman. Who is unmarried. And a hooker. I very much want to be a man of the people. But her mom is a bitch. Things go exactly how you’d expect. I get her some medical care. The kid comes along. We’re inseparable for about a year. Everything goes to shit. My brother gets on my case, and he’s paying the bills. . . . Then I fall in love.

He spins the wheel.
Scene: Envelope

The envelope has come up on the wheel. VAN GOGH takes it down and looks inside of it.

Van Gogh

My life is an envelope.
My brother Theo was my closest friend.
My brother Theo was my sole benefactor.
My brother Theo was my enemy.

(Beat.)
My brother Theo saved all nine-hundred letters that I sent him. Of his letters to me only two or three survive; although, he clearly wrote more than I did. His librarian tendencies, after both our deaths, help establish me as a writer who was nearly as good as he was a painter.

(He holds open the envelope to the audience.)
Can you see all that in there?
His letters saved my life every week, in every way you can think of.
An envelope is a surprising life raft.
The world shifts out from under us.
But an envelope?
Crisp, clean, square corners.
Life’s a safe when it has square corners.
And the origami of its folds provide a kind of cosmic stillness.

(Beat.)
All right. I know envelopes aren’t origami; they’re cut and glued. I know. But I can imagine cosmic stillness. I can imagine. Sometimes.
My life comes and goes in envelopes.
Checks from my brother, my brother the art dealer.
When the lights are gone for the day and the canvasses are stacked color becomes language and I swirl myself into letters and skitter off to my brother, my sister, and Gauguin, Seurat, Pissaro, and a Christie’s auction worth of friends. All of whom are in . . . need. We love each other in our poor way. We love our canvasses in our rich way. We are loved. But not in life so much. Just in envelopes.

He spins the wheel.
Scene: Rebar

The iron bar has come up on the wheel. VAN GOGH takes it and holds it in front of him like a prison bar; it holds the whole world of incarceration.

Van Gogh

I fail as a mental patient.
But I rather enjoy the experience.
The food isn’t great, but it’s free.
The room isn’t great, but it’s free.
Really, I’m better off in the asylum at Saint Remy than at any other time in my life.
Bars don’t block the wind.
Tendrils of breeze curl right around them.
I start painting roots,
twisting like serpents,
and my colors start to twist together
and I get all wrapped up with . . . everything.
My belly is full of stars.
You can touch them if you want.
After the episode ...

(Waggles ear.)
I end up at the hospital at Arles.
then, later at the hospital at Avers-sur-Oise.
The ... curator at the asylum is also an aspiring painter. So once I get a little clear headed, he lets me paint on the grounds.
I make Tree Roots and Trunks, Marguerite Gachet at the Piano, and Still Life: Vase with Flower and Thistle.
I spend twenty-seven dollars and fifty-four cents on paint and canvas.
I give one panting to the curator
and never sell the rest.
They’re currently valued at sixty-seven-point-two, one hundred-eleven, and ninety-three million dollars respectively.
As I

(Sarcastically.)
get better
they start to let me out of the asylum for painting excursions.
But when I get back,
my room is worse
the breeze is colder
the food is blander.
I want to move on; I make Thatched Cottage by a Hill, Wheat Stacks with Reaper, and the one you all know: Wheat Field with Crows.
And I spend thirty-two dollars even on paint and canvas.
Those three paintings are currently valued at ninety-two-point-four, one-hundred-one, and one hundred thirty-nine million respectively.
I lost three hundred thirty-two million, three hundred ninety-nine thousand, nine hundred, sixty-eight dollars on the exchange.
But it’s art. So money doesn’t matter.

He spins the wheel.
Scene: Light

The flashlight has come up on the wheel. VAN GOGH removes it. He shines it on audience members, searching....

VAN GOGH

(Lovingly.)
The light in my eyes in my self portrait, is the light in your eyes of my painting. Books and books and books have been written about light. About the light in southern France. About the light in my painting. And light becomes its own tautology of painterly proof. Hold me there. Inside you. Inside your eyes. Inside your body. Inside you head. The light holds us together.

The light finds the woman it’s looking for. VAN GOGH goes to her.

Just you and I, darling. None of that collective, audience. No forth wall. Just us. Just us and all this light. It sheds out of the lights in the grid, and it scatters—diffuses, bounces off the floor, flickers off dust motes, off that lovely, threatening prop, objects scatter light everywhere while my voice directs your vision. But, now I want it here on me. The light bounces off me, rolls out from my costume, my hair, my sweat, my body. All of it light, rolling in bits, particle-waves breaking over your soft cornea and into the back of your eye, into your brain, your body, your corneal soul and the synaptic electricity of consciousness. This light is the titanium white on my canvasses. The color I ran out of most often. This is my gift to me of you; it is light off your face [describe briefly] into my eye. Carried in Shawn’s memory. But it is this light roiling back and forth, living in a canvas that holds love. Our love. You. I. The dust motes. And all these shadowy witnesses. Please love me.

VAN GOGH turns the light out suddenly. He’s out of the moment, drops his light, spins the wheel.
Scene: Tree Root

The root has come up on the wheel. VAN GOGH removes it. He tires to break it repeatedly during this scene, always failing.

VAN GOGH
If you’re not careful, a tree root can grow out of the ground, up around your aquifer ankle and draw you down, into the earth.
It is very alarming to be under the earth.
There’s very little light and everything has a bluish tint, like feldspar.
Both the mineral and the tree roots are faster than you think.
Or maybe I’m just too slow.
But all painters are slow men.
That’s why so many of them work in studios.
The roots don’t grow though the wooden floor.
The roots see the wooden floor and they think: No, that’s a friend of mine, better not. Or, they think: Shit! Look at what happened to that guy. And they stay away. Or, perhaps, they prefer to avoid cannibalism and don’t eat their wooden brothers. I’ve no idea the thoughts of roots.
But they move with intention and they move with randomness.
I hate the randomness and the intention. The intention of a world made by an all knowing God is terrifying, embittering, and leaves me powerless to shape what I see. The randomness of roots, how they just lurk about in the darkness, spreading and growing into the unseen, un-tasted damp. It smacks of malice. I understand roots like the veins and arteries of my own body. My own intention.
Roots can twist into any metaphor they want.

VAN GOGH stops trying to break the root. It begins its scary root dance.

You might understand roots as a metaphor of:
the psyche
human history
depth
time
sturdiness
tradition
inbreeding
love
machinations
All these are wrong.
Because I spend a lot of time outside, I’ve had the roots drag me down.
The roots mean whatever they want to mean,
and they do so
with a blue, feldspar certainty.
I am a peasant at my canvases,
swinging away
at the mercy of grand forces
I can not stop or start of my own volition.
And the roots continue to grow.

The dance ends and VAN GOGH spins the wheel.
Scene: Chairs

The tiny chair has come up on the wheel. He removes it and spends the scene trying to sit on it. This is heartbreaking, instead of slapstick.

VAN GOGH

It is good to build a room of blue, and people it with wicker chairs. The Bedroom is my best self portrait; it has no eyes. The bedroom is inside the yellow house, now famous. It has:
A warm bed, a green window, and two chairs.
Chairs are important:
God’s sun burns down on us; the sky lazes on forever; the earth is eating upwards to reclaim her stolen nutrients; but a good wicker chair will always come through for you.
Gauguin’s chair was upholstered, but he meant well.
My sister enjoyed overstuffed.
My brother liked solid wood.
My father preferred to stand.
I never had the heart to sit in Gauguin’s chair.
I painted it in shadow.
Lit from behind it is redbluegreen, against a chaotic carpet and two light sources—both burning. It’s my only portrait of us.
Gertrude Stein will say that an artist always appears with their mouth firmly shut, and my self-portraits clearly show that I agree with her. But my chairs show that I can scream too. I wonder what kind of chairs Stein owned.

VAN GOGH abandons the chair like a question, and he spins the wheel.
Scene: Cardboard Tube

The cardboard tube has come up on the wheel.

VAN GOGH

(Sincere, maybe a little desperate.)
Never keep a star inside your eye.
That’s my advice to you.
I found Galileo’s old telescope,
and I put it inside my brain.
It pulled the stars into my eyes.
I couldn’t escape them.
Stars aren’t pretty twinklings in the cool night sky.
Stars are roiling energy.
Stars are so big they move time around them.
The star in my eye spread through my body like a virus. Like the syphilis that killed my brother.
It spread and it filled up my heart. Its energy coursing through my veins, radiating into canvas.

(Building mania.)
I painted two or three paintings a day with this solar infection. I painted a Louvre gallery in a month. In some weeks, I produced more masterpieces than most masters do in their careers.

(Down.)
I drank paint thinner.
It seemed like a good idea at the time.
I thought it might . . . clean the lens of the telescope, so to speak.
They put me on restriction at the asylum. I needed the rest. And the shade.
But it started out innocently enough. I was just a guy with a telescope in his brain, a young man in Paris, in the spring, and I wanted to paint a café. It’s now called Café Van Gogh, by the way. I wanted normal things, you know, have a drink, impress a girl with some sketches. Maybe work on a pick up line: “Hey, baby, in 2007 they’ll name this place after me.” But instead, the nuclear chain reaction started. So I paint the café and it’s all . . . masterpiece. Then I go to put the stars in the sky. I mix, and dab a modicum of light onto the canvas. And it’s wrong. And I think: How do you paint twinkling? Someday, I’ll look at wheat and think: How do you paint heat? But my real thought will be: How do you paint twinkling? And the telescope will show me too much. And my blood will trundle through my body. And the stars will grow. And

(Beat.)
It just stops.
I painted stars.
My painting of humans at a café almost became a painting of stars. But I stopped it in the nick of time. But it would happen....

(He sings from the Don McLean song.)
Starry, starry night.
Paint your palette blue and gray.
I freaking hate that Don McLean song.
Blue and gray—like I’m painting with the fucking Crayola eight box. Idiot.
Don’t get me wrong. I love the attention.
But the song makes my work seem quaint. Like a print.
Something you could hang on your bathroom wall to look at while you shit. Or, worse, to
impress your guests.
I PAINTED THE SOULS OF STARS!
Stars are the engines God uses to make everything.
Everything that isn’t a molecule of helium or a molecule of hydrogen is the remnant of an
exploded star.
Really. Google it.
I tried to paint the whole void of the sky, on one clear night.
And I failed.
The stars took over.
I wanted the void, the quiet,
with just one spire reaching up into the nothingness, reaching for calm.
But the pulsing, plasma stars took over.
The stars knew my brain, knew what I could see.
And they showed me how to paint the spiraling cosmos, about chaos, about wheels and the
random order of inevitable destruction.
That’s what I saw with the telescope when I went searching for calm.
At a certain point, the fire of liquor is soothing, the ichor of tobacco is fluid, and turpentine
is sweet.

He spins the wheel.
Scene: Iris

The iris has come up on the wheel.

VAN GOGH

I paint some irises, and my sister-in-law is amazed. She says that the eyes I paint hold the whole complexity of the human soul.
But she says it in French, so it’s sexier.

I also paint flowers.

I hide people’s souls in a little orb of color. Well, two orbs, so that you don’t miss it. Frida Kahlo, God bless her, will need a whole canvass to paint her soul. I only need an orb. Need an iris. Need a palette of blue. And my paintings can go up in your living room, had any of you had the sense to buy when I was alive.

If she wasn’t famous, how many of you would really hang a Kahlo in your living room? None. Exactly. But when I paint irises, it’s a still life and a landscape at the same time. You can look at those flowers all day, because I’ve painted your own soul there. You may not know your soul is sweet blue, and brittle lavender, and sharp white, but that’s okay. It is anyway. And if you live right, you’ve got a soft stem so blue it’s green and so green it’s blue. I love you so much.

(Beat.)

Blue or green?
What color is my stem?
That’s the question to guide you through life!
And look for the painterly answer.
Think about motion, and about shape;
think of colors next to one another; remember color is a neighborly thing.
Never answer: Beige.

Beige is the color of suicide. No one has ever committed suicide in a green room.

Yes, I know: Vinnie, you shoot yourself outside. And outside is just chock full of green.

But in my defense, it was a particularly beige day. Plus, a dirt road, a parched wheat field rolling up a hillside, and a sky of Bethlehem brown that calls you up to the bottom of God’s filthy foot. And in a beige box like that, all you can do is shoot yourself and die in your brother’s arms. It was a bonding experience for us, our two green stems alone in a vase with a lovely room around us. A few fallen petals on the table top. And me moaning in agony for a few days while I slowly died of pain. It was like Mantegna’s St. Sebastian with all those arrows, but less phallic. And done by me instead. It was like how your back would feel if you stood motionless on a gallery floor for three days looking at Mantegna’s painting. Terribly painful. Terribly boring. But less phallic.

A patch of irises can hold your soul; look in the mirror after the show. Look closely. And if that doesn’t work for you. Try it at night with a blue eyed girl. You’ll see it’s true.

He gives the flower to an audience member and spins the wheel.
Scene: Nephew

The sheaf of paper/notebook comes up on the wheel. Throughout this scene VAN GOGH does not actually write on the pages, or make a pretense of doing so. He directly addresses the audience.

VAN GOGH

Thirty-one January, eighteen-ninety.
To my dear nephew,
I write this letter to you, on the day of your birth, to welcome you into the world with a heart full of love.

(He tears out the page. Crumples it up. Throws it into the audience.)

Bull shit.

Thirty-one January, eighteen-ninety.
Bon soi, my lovely nephew,
Your parents have named you after me and I am writing to greet you at the start of a good life of warm winters, and cool summers, and a lush palette.

(He tears out the page. Crumples it up. Throws it into the audience.)

Fuck no. Lush palette. Goddamn.

Thirty January, eighteen-ninety.
Tomorrow you shall be born, my Vincent.
Dear God! What a day it shall be.
Dear God. Say it like a prayer.
Dear God. Say it like a curse.
For you, my new nephew. First. Last. Only. Nephew. For you, blessed namesake. Cursed namesake. I make a present. A new noun: Happy-sad. Connected with a hyphen. A compound noun. Two words become one. Your parents come together. You and world connected. I and my loneliness, connected. You and I. The world will make you happy. The world will make you sad. It will be wonderful. It will be terrible. You will never know me. You will carry me forward into every introduction. You and your mother will carry on my brother’s great work—caring for me. Carrying my work into the world, into the future. I will be warmly in the happy-sad dirt, friends with the maggots that eat my eyes.

(He tears out the page. Crumples it up. Throws it into the audience.)

Thirty-two January, eighteen-ninety.
(whispering)
Welcome to our secret day. This is the lonely-love day. Another hyphen for our secret, new world. Don’t tell your father. This day is a holiday—a break away from the ones forced to show up on the calendar. A day so all alone even the other days don’t know about it. Really. Ask December 6th, ask May 1st, ask September 11th, ask December 25th, ask July 4th. None of them know about this day, all by itself, off playing in a meadow. It is the best day. All your loves are on this day. All the births. All the fortune. This is the day the tobacco is moist and the water is crisp. It’s like your favorite brothel, right after bath day. And I’m sharing it with you because....
He very suddenly crumples up the paper. Then un-crumples and tears it into confetti very quickly. Then he picks up the scraps and puts them in his pocket.

Thirty-one January, eighteen-ninety.
To my nephew.
Dear sir. I am afraid to say, you are fucked. Just by being born. Too late for you dude. And too late for me. My brother loves me more. Buys my paint, pays my bills. Loves me. And he loves you too. But how much love will be left over for you? You will be alone. Like me. You will be poor like me. You will be unloved...also like me.

(He tears out the page. Crumples it up. Throws it into the audience.)
Thirty-one January, eighteen-ninety.
To my Dear Nephew.
I write this letter to you, on the day of your birth, to welcome you into the world with a heart full of love.
Etcetera, etcetera, etcetera.
You uncle,
Vincent.

He spins the wheel.
Scene: Diamonds

The lump of coal has come up on the wheel. VAN GOGH puts on gloves and removes it. Over the course of the next scene he will slowly crumple it apart in his hands, as though he’s searching for something.

VAN GOGH

Diamonds reveal the kaleidoscopic heart of light.
They are perfect, as far as I know.
Diamonds are an allotrope of carbon,
made up of a rigid lattice formed from covalent tetrahedral bonding. I know because I’m a painter, and we painters know such things.
Wikipedia will never tell you the first diamond was discovered in India on December 28th, two thousand seven hundred eighteen, BCE, along the South bank of the Godavari River in India. The discoverer had no idea that the next closest thing to diamond is graphite, which is used to cool and control the thermonuclear reactions in power plants, and in pencils. But they knew the find was important. Diamonds quickly became objects of great value—had they known what British colonialism would do to them, I suspect they’d have put the diamonds back. Look at what diamonds have done to Angola, Sierra Leone. Look at what the diamonds have done to Amsterdam. Look at what light has done to me.
I learned to disassemble diamonds.
That’s valuable because inside of a diamond is light.
Perfect light.
Mutable, shifting light.
Light one can lay in a painting.
Light one can excite their paint with.
Light I can make waltz on a canvas.
It is perfect.
And perfection is important.
It is also obtainable.
You just have to work harder.
I just have to work harder.
Each painting is perfect because I make the light move. And light is perfect. And I put it in my paint, like God put it in the world.
I get a little carried away sometimes.
But if you’re going to take on the pressure of being an artist,
you should know its going to crush you down into diamond.

VAN GOGH shows the coal in his hands as though he’s going to reveal a gem, but no gem. Just coal.
He takes off the gloves and spins the wheel.
Scene: Conclusion

The wheel is empty. VAN GOGH picks up the black square and re-attaches it to the wheel, front and center.

VAN GOGH
At the end, I am crushed by light. Exhausted.
Between this stage
and the colorless void of space
there is a kaleidoscope of atmospheres that translates light into something usable.
Because we’ve evolved to live in the atmosphere, we forget that it is crushing, and we call it one atmosphere of pressure.
The light sinks down on us, and we are at the bottom of a great ocean of visible light.
Between this stage and the void is fifty-four thousand five hundred sixty fathoms of atmosphere.
I paint outside.
I carry all that weight right, balanced, on the crown of my head.
I first noticed it at the asylum, which had a thick stone roof, and small windows. Little light got in. The asylum held up the unfathomable atmosphere, so I could get better, go outside. Paint. Collapse back to the asylum. Outside. Paint. Collapse. Asylum again. Nephew gets born. Paint. Collapse. New Asylum. You get the timeline. The facts don’t matter, and at the end, they mean even less than ever before. One day, I decide to drink turpentine again. So clear. So sweet that it can wipe away all the colors. All of them. But I was out of turpentine that day.
So I shot myself.
I wanted to let the light trickle in.
To rivulet in.
To stream in.
To flow.
To spray.
To glug.
To fill up the ship.
It takes a long time for the thick paint to dry, to exhaust its camphors and its spirits.
You can see them departing the body of the composition, if you look closely enough.
I have failed.
I reached for the brass ring.
And I missed.
And I learned what happens when someone like me misses.
We reach again.
And then we miss.
We reach again.
The cycle repeats itself.
Some of my peers catch the ring.
I do not.
The spirits leave the paint dry,
denuded and ready for the ages,
for art critics, curators, collectors,
all of you,
the merchandise buying public.
I am well-remembered.
I would have rather been well-known.
All the symptoms that I display
that history uses to explore the
whatever-I-was
are all symptoms of pressure.
We reach for the ring,
reach again.
On July 27th, in the open air, near Auvers-sur-Oise, France, I go out for a day of frantic reaching.
And on that day...
BAM!
I crushed me.
(To audience member.)
Give me my gun back.

Dark. End of play.
Vita

The Author obtained her Bachelor of Arts in Drama and Communication from the University of New Orleans in 2005. She joined the University of New Orleans Theatre Graduate Program to pursue a Master of Fine Arts in Theatre Design with an Emphasis in Costume Design.