

5-2012

A Marriage of Realism and Expressionism: Preparing and Performing the Role of Mrs. Zero in Elmer Rice's *The Adding Machine*

Rebecca Rivas

University of Arkansas, Fayetteville

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarworks.uark.edu/etd>



Part of the [Acting Commons](#), and the [Performance Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Rivas, Rebecca, "A Marriage of Realism and Expressionism: Preparing and Performing the Role of Mrs. Zero in Elmer Rice's *The Adding Machine*" (2012). *Theses and Dissertations*. 304.

<http://scholarworks.uark.edu/etd/304>

A MARRIAGE OF REALISM AND EXPRESSIONISM:
PREPARING AND PERFORMING THE ROLE OF MRS. ZERO IN ELMER RICE'S
THE ADDING MACHINE

**A MARRIAGE OF REALISM AND EXPRESSIONISM:
PREPARING AND PERFORMING THE ROLE OF MRS. ZERO IN ELMER RICE'S
THE ADDING MACHINE**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts in Drama

By

Rebecca Rivas
University of Texas at El Paso
Bachelor of Arts in Theatre Arts, 2004

May 2012
University of Arkansas

ABSTRACT

In Elmer Rice's expressionistic play, *The Adding Machine*, the character of Mrs. Zero is written to forego authenticity and highlight a husband's absurd perception of his wife. The elements of expressionism in the play paint Mrs. Zero as a caricature rather than a person. In order to effectively portray this caricature, role-preparation must be rooted in realism. It is by connecting organically with Mrs. Zero's underlying truth that the portrayal of this absurd character can be made effective. Here, I attempt to find a balance between realistic role-preparation and expressionistic style of performance. My efforts are documented through journal entries which span the audition, rehearsal, performance and post-performance processes.

This thesis is approved for recommendation
to the Graduate Council.

Thesis Director:

Mavourneen Dwyer, M.F.A.

Thesis Committee:

Kate Frank, M.F.A.

Gail Leftwich, B.S.E.

THESIS DUPLICATION RELEASE

I hereby authorize the University of Arkansas Libraries to duplicate this thesis when needed for research and/or scholarship.

Agreed

Rebecca Rivas

Refused

Rebecca Rivas

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A heart-felt thank you to all my teachers, most especially: Mavourneen Dwyer, Robert Ford, Kate Frank, Amy Herzberg, Gail Leftwich, Michael Landman and Joel Murray. Thank you for seeing the possibilities I failed to notice and teaching me to how find them for myself.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my parents Raúl and Annette Rivas, your faith and love has made this possible. Thank you for working so hard and teaching me to do the same; and to Zeque, for your good advice and for standing beside me from 900 miles away.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- I.** Auditioning
- II.** Pre-Rehearsal Preparation
- III.** Rehearsals
- IV.** Technical Rehearsals
- V.** Performance
- VI.** Post-performance Observation
- VII.** Bibliography

I. Auditioning

Tuesday, August 23, 2011

I first read *The Adding Machine* a few months ago in our Viewpoints class. When I finished Scene One, five pages filled margin to margin with Mrs. Zero's text, I felt sorry for the person who'd be playing her. Back then, it hadn't occurred to me I'd be in the running for the role.

I've revisited the play a few times more since my initial read. Each time I read it, that first monologue seems like an insurmountable task. I found the piece incredibly intimidating but also extremely tempting.

I'm surprised and excited to be called back for Mrs. Zero. I didn't think I would be a real candidate for the role but now that I am, I'm ready to try out some of the choices I imagined might be fun. I'm determined that when the director says "Thank you" at the end of my audition, I won't feel any regret. I don't want to make middle of the road character choices. If I do, I know I'll regret it as soon as the audition door closes behind me.

The callbacks are supposed to consist of cold readings from the opening monologue as well as from Scene Five. The text suggests to me that the character is stationary and the sound of her voice is her most effective weapon. I know the piece requires big stylistic choices, so I'm planning to do that vocally, using volume, dialect and tempo.

During the audition, I reminded myself about connecting to the character emotionally. I made that a primary concern. Mixing style and emotional connection has been a problem for me in the past and I did not want that to be the case with Mrs. Zero. So I found an objective close to my heart and committed to playing the character's eccentricities from this place. I knew it would be difficult to take my eyes off the page. So when rehearsing the opening monologue, I highlighted the different beats in different colors, in order that I might be able to look up more

often. At a quick glance I'd know where I was and be able to make the read smoother. It also helped me keep my action changes clear.

My first read went well. The director, Estéban Arévalo-Ibañez, gave me an adjustment. He asked me to try the monologue again but this time as though it was mere stream of consciousness. I made the adjustment by blurring the lines of my beat changes. I allowed one to bleed into the other. I imagined her thoughts were dominoes each propelling one into the next. I made the choice to abandon my action choices and see where the text would take me. The panel laughed and I took that as a good sign. I walked away pleased with the work and ready to tackle Scene Five, the jail scene.

By far, Scene Five is my favorite of Mrs. Zero's scenes. Originally, it was omitted from the play's first production but will be included here. My first read was with Liam Selvey and was probably the most fun I've had in an audition. He said he wanted to make Mr. Zero's cage incredibly small. I agreed, not really aware of what was in store for me. We walked on stage and Liam proceeded to construct a tiny cage out of chairs and blocks. When he finished, he crawled into it. His knees were almost touching his ears as he crouched beneath the structure. All I could see were his two eyes blinking out at me through a small sliver of space. I pulled up a chair and positioned it stage-right of his little cage and began the scene. Although the staging was ludicrous and the actions I'd planned to play went out the window, I told myself it was at least memorable.

I read again, this time with Maury Reed and because the last read was so wholly unconnected, I walked in, determined to give an honest read. This was the most heartfelt of all Mrs. Zero's scenes and I knew it would be important for the director to see my capacity to live with what she is living with. It was not a complete success. Although the read was closer to what

might occur in the final production or what would be considered “the right way”, the freedom I had when I played the scene “the wrong way” was gone. I need to find a way to do both.

During these reads, I made attempts to utilize the Haber Method of cold-reading. We'd been learning it in our Capstone Class with Amy Herzberg. I had small successes with the method but it added an extra layer of actor-awareness which did not foster the best results. Actor-awareness is a state in which the actor monitors his/her own performance as it happens onstage. For the sake of these auditions, I may abandon it.

Friday, August 26, 2011

The callback lists have begun to slim down, which made my mind begin to play a vicious game of what I call Auditioner's Chess. When played, the actor takes the part of a pawn and spends each moment wondering when they will be sacrificed for a more powerful piece. Silly, I know, but the audition process can make the most secure individual begin to question his or her worth. I have to put these thoughts out of my mind as I move forward. In order to secure the role, I need to focus on my process rather than elements of the audition process that are out of my hands.

I was excited to have been called back for Mrs. Zero again and spent my spare time preparing for the second round of callbacks. Most of my time went into solidifying a clear and well-connected objective for Scene One. It was difficult to pin down, especially since she and the play teeter between realism and expressionism. If this was a realistic piece, I would be using the speech to get something from my scene partner but this doesn't seem to happen. I am never given any sign that he is actually listening to me or that what I am doing is effective. Of course, his inaction can be interpreted as reaction but it continues for five pages. Why does she continue to speak?

I visualize her as a large mouth opening and closing, spewing thoughts and never truly desiring anything. She's like an adding machine, but instead of numbers, Mrs. Zero's output is words. The more I read the piece the more she seems to be a projection from Mr. Zero's mind. What the audience is meant to see is what Mr. Zero perceives her to be, not necessarily what she truly is.

However, in order for me to become this projection, I need to understand her in an honest way. I knew there needed to be an element of mechanical and unrealistic movement but first I would need to find out how her heart works. Otherwise the projection would be false and ineffective. She would need to live somewhere in between the mechanical and the natural. It is important to me that she not be perceived simply as a hateful and dissatisfied hag. I want her to be a character an audience would be able to sympathize with. I have to remind myself this would be achieved over the course of her three scenes and not in the first five pages. So I focused on the first scene and decided my objective would be: I want him to appreciate me.

During this round of auditions, a Mr. Zero was in the room. The last time I read the scene I was alone. Jared Hanlin and I went in first and the read went well. I was able to connect effectively. I felt as though I played action and incorporated the notes I had received from the last reading.

After the first time through, I was asked to do it again but to go further with my choices. We discussed the character a bit and agreed she was written to be more projection than true representation. I was asked if I could describe the scene in a metaphor. I confessed that our professor, Michael Landman, had used *The Adding Machine* as an example during a design lecture in our directing class. Jared and I already knew that the metaphor to be used for Mrs. Zero equated her with a housefly.

When I'd heard the example I thought it was perfect and it was difficult to break away from the idea once I'd heard it. I wanted to be fair so I offered up another scenario. I said it was as though Mr. Zero was inside a jar made of thick glass and I was outside it with a hammer attempting to break through. I was asked to express the metaphor physically. It was difficult to make the adjustment but I did my best to physicalize it.

I read again but this time with Maury. The read with Maury began with discussion about the characters, their relationships and objectives. Estéban asked us to have fun, to use the space and use the fly metaphor. We did just that and it went very well. We even ended up synchronizing movements and at the end of the scene, we lay down in bed simultaneously signaling the end of scene.

Wednesday, August 31, 2012

I was asked to come in and read the part of Mrs. Zero with Justin Walker, who'd been out of town and missed callbacks. It was made clear to me that in no way did this mean I'd won the role. I did my best not to count chickens but felt as though like it was a good sign. We were to meet in the Studio theatre and read Scene Five.

Before we began I asked if we could build the space, using cubes and chairs in the theatre. We decided to treat it like one of the jail scenes you see in the movies, each character sitting on the opposite side of a glass barrier. The staging worked well but the read itself was not great. I was not as "on-partner" as I could have been, meaning my focus was more on me than on my scene partner. This resulted in seemingly low stakes. I left feeling the extra read did more harm than good.

II. Pre-Rehearsal Preparation

Monday, September 12, 2011

Cast lists went up today. I found my name next to Mrs. Zero and am thrilled to work on the piece. I made time to read the play again. I looked for more clues to lead me toward more specific decisions about my character. I went through the script highlighting instances where my character was mentioned and anything pertaining to the timeline of the piece. I wrote down questions I had about the text. For instance, why have the Zeros never had children? Why did they marry in the first place? I jotted down possible answers to these questions in hopes of discussing them during table work.

As I locate possible markers for the timeline, I realize just how far from realism the piece is. The dates in this play are unclear. Important events go entirely unmentioned and the omissions seem to be blatant. However, I'm inclined to believe I've overlooked something. Of course, given the style of the piece there may be no way to link events in a chronological order that makes perfect sense. I feel it's too early to chalk up analysis difficulties to the style of expressionism. I will continue attempting to make sense out of the information I've found and bounce ideas off my director and fellow actors when rehearsal begins.

I realized there would probably come a time when I'd need to accept that connecting the dots would be impossible. I would have to reconcile myself to the anti-realism of the piece and patch together my character from there. In the meantime, I will continue to analyze the text using methods based wholly on Realism.

Saturday, September 17, 2011

I spent the afternoon scouring the script for details and clues to help me sculpt my character. I'm wondering about the main theme of the piece and how Mrs. Zero will fit into that.

In Phillip Moeller's Foreword to the script he states, "What he (Mr. Rice) has done and with withering insight is to expose the starved and bitter littleness and at the same time the huge universality of the Zero type, of the slave type, that from eternity to eternity expresses the futility and the tragedy of the mediocre spirit."

Is Mrs. Zero a slave as well? Does she suffer the same fate as Mr. Zero, as his marital counterpart? In marrying him, does she then assume his fate? It is interesting to note that the unmarried women in the play have full names, such as, Daisy Diana Dorothea Devore and Judy O'Grady. I take this to mean marriage sacrifices individuality. It stands to reason, that since Mr. Zero will never break free from his monotonous existence, neither will Mrs. Zero. The Zeros' fates are one in the same.

However, in Scene Five she does seem to break the mold. She rejects him. In her final moments on stage, just before storming offstage, she shouts, "I won't stand for it!" I take this rejection to mean she will change. This would go against the fatalistic ideals of the piece. I'll explore both sides during rehearsal and see what the director's take is.

Moving forward with analysis, I look to my character's given circumstances. For instance, what does a normal day look like for Mrs. Zero? She lives in a tiny, gray apartment with her husband. It is never directly referenced but the city they live in appears to be New York. I feel it is a claustrophobic place filled with huge buildings covering the sky, and apartments stacked one on top of the other. I imagine the climate would be muggy. The city is so polluted it is impossible to take in a deep breath of fresh air. To me, the world they live in is a monochromatic metropolis, timeless yet antiquated.

Most her days are filled with robotically cleaning the four-walled apartment. Even when she doesn't need to clean, she cleans, so much so that the paint on the tables is worn away from

daily scrubbing. Just as Mr. Zero adds mechanically, she cleans mechanically and as much as he hates his job, she hates hers.

She believes doing her job, which can be defined as being a “good wife”, will eventually pay off. If she scrubs the floors, and cooks the meals and washes Mr. Zero's dirty clothes, she will be rewarded with an equally “good husband”. This means Mr. Zero will be promoted; they will have nice things, maybe move to Brooklyn and live near her sisters and her niece. She expects a “good husband” to be faithful and if she does her best at her job, good things are sure to follow. However, more than anything, she does her job because the idea of not doing it is scary.

She is unhappy with Mr. Zero and chooses to ignore a wrong he's done her. It is only an intense fear of the unknown and moreover, the fear of being alone that keeps her with him. When the Judy O'Grady incident occurred, Mrs. Zero had a chance to leave but she didn't. She clung on to what was safe.

It is not impossible that a person in the world of the play would divorce. Mrs. Seven did it. Mrs. Seven was a friend of Mrs. Zero's. The Sevens have recently split up for reasons unspecified in the script. Madames Zero through Six gossip about it during Scene Three. To my imagination, there was an infidelity on the part of Mr. Seven and Mrs. Seven left him. Mrs. Zero could never leave her husband. She fears breaking the mold and is willing to suffer if it means nothing changes. Exactly what transpired the night she caught Mr. Zero is not clearly defined. I feel this is something I need to discuss with Maury and Estéban.

The movies are her escape. They are what she most enjoys in life. They offer her a chance to live vicariously through the pictures on screen. Also, she enjoys the Mr. and Mrs. parties but to a smaller degree because whether hosting or attending, they become more stressful than

pleasurable.

The films she enjoys most are the romances. She imagines herself having dangerous rendezvous moving through verdant gardens and involved in passionate love affairs. I can't decide whether or not these are movies she only attends with Mr. Zero or if she makes mid-week visits to the movie house on her own. When the Zeros do go to the movies together, I believe they see the movies Mr. Zero wants to see, westerns. For Mrs. Zero, westerns represent the very worst kind of men, independent and domineering. They also celebrate the worst kind of women, brazen, busty and unconventional saloon girls. She prefers "sweet and wholesome" stories. Westerns encourage men to roam free and break the industrial mold. Her husband doesn't need to see those cowboy types "ridin' around foolin' with them ropes".

Sunday, September 18, 2011

The following paragraph is imagination work written in the first person. It was written with the intent of "dropping-in" the beach incident discussed in Scene Five:

"We'd go to the beach on Sundays. I imagine we'd lie on blankets his mother made, horrible macramé creations. We'd eat ham and cheese sandwiches and stare out into the ocean. Sometimes I'd be brave and step into the cold water. My feet would sink into the sand as the waves drew me deeper into the sea. I never went any further than waist deep because that would be unsafe and I'd probably look silly. We made a habit of those visits until one day I fell asleep on the blanket and when I woke up he was gone. I looked all over the beach and couldn't find him. I decided to wait for him. I sat on our blanket, under our umbrella, waiting for hours. The sun began to set and I started to pack up our things, then he appeared. I asked him where he was and what had happened but he didn't say a word. I was so angry I yelled at him the whole way home."

When preparing a role, I try to speak in the first-person rather than the third. It helps to personalize the given circumstances and values of my character. Speaking in the first-person leads one toward ownership of the role and a deeper connection with the character. However, for clarity and the purposes of this thesis, I will proceed referring to Mrs. Zero in the third-person.

The incident at the beach was the beginning of Mr. Zero's silence and Mrs. Zero's unbridled frustration. Moving forward, I would usually discuss what transpired during the hours he “ducked” her with Maury and Estéban, but in this instance I prefer not to. I'd rather my character imagine an array of lecherous scenarios and be unsettled by the unknown. I think it will be the more maddening choice. Deciding on a concrete set of given circumstances with my scene partner and director would negate that and I don't think would be as effective.

Mrs. Zero's hospital stay is brought up a few times over the course of the play, once by Mr. Zero, once by Daisy and again in the fifth scene when Mrs. Zero brings up her near death battle with pneumonia. She says he brought her roses. This was one of the truly happy and romantic moments of their marriage. For Mrs. Zero, it was a testament to their mutual affection.

I imagine she was in the hospital for about a week. She probably passed out while doing housework and was found by her husband when he got home from work. In Mrs. Zero's mind, he rushed her to the hospital and sat worried in the waiting room for hours, until the doctor came to give him the news. She fantasizes he was overcome with relief, rather than grief, when he heard she was going to be alright. In her mind, his eyes were filled with tears of joy. Of course, this was not the case in the least; the two other times Mrs. Zero's brush with death is mentioned, both Zero and Daisy regret that she did not die.

It is important that she cling to her illusions. Mrs. Zero is devoted to keeping up appearances. This is most readily apparent in Scene Three. She is entirely preoccupied with

impressing couples One through Six. She seems to be a sort of de-glamourized Stepford wife, the type of woman who can smile through the worst kind of betrayals with a mechanized efficiency. Having said that, I want to ensure that underneath her mechanical facade is a human heart wanting appreciation and companionship. I feel as though I'm on the right track with regard to nailing down a possible super objective and objectives but they need to be more specific. As we begin rehearsals, I hope to flesh out more definite choices.

III. Rehearsals

Wednesday, September 21, 2011

This will be our first rehearsal. I'm excited to hear the play aloud for the first time. Oddly enough, my plan is to put as little thought as possible into this reading. I want to allow the words to lead me toward action. I want my character ideas to stay out of the way and let the text lead me towards new discoveries. I don't want to impose any of my ideas just yet. Additionally, I want to play off of what everyone else will be bringing to the table and have some fun.

After the read, our discussion revolved around determinism versus free will. I see the piece as deterministic but having heard arguments for the latter, I can see where it might be perceived as both. In Scene Seven, there are artists and poets who've broken away from a role as slave and will exist happily in the Elysian Fields as long as they'd like. However, by virtue of being artists and poets they were never fashioned with "mediocre spirits"; they do not find comfort in convention.

Mr. Zero will never break away and make that choice. Chances to break free present themselves but he never acts on them. Throughout the ages, he's been born over and over again, with the same values, with the same wiring. In fact, as Lieutenant Charles states, he's getting worse. Is the same true for Mrs. Zero? I'm inclined to think so. If she is her husband's

counterpart, certainly she will fall back into the same patterns after his death as before. Even after he is put to death in Scene Five, she will continue to clean and do her own dirty laundry, festering in discontent. I don't want to make a final decision since this will definitely color my choice of super objective.

We went on to talk about whether or not the world Mr. Rice has created is a godless one and if it was not, what kind of god or gods watch over them? Or do those gods leave them to their own devices? The relevance of a higher power in Mrs. Zero's world is questionable. I think she creates her own idols. The movies and social status become what she worships. She kneels to scrub floors, not to pray. To have faith in something from above would hold a comfort beyond her capacity.

We also discussed the subject of love within the play. Where is it? Do the Zeros love each other? Although it's undetectable at the beginning of the play, it is most certainly present in Scene Five. I believe Mrs. Zero must love her husband. I'm certain there was a courting period in their history and romantic love was present. They walked hand in hand down the street, which back then seemed more green than gray. Time went by and the love between the Zeros began to be overshadowed by failures, routine and complacency. Their relationship does not possess the idyllic love she looks for on the movie house screens. Nevertheless, hidden deep inside, laced with anger, suspicion and pretense is a bit of love for Mr. Zero.

I have to remind myself to resist the cerebral traps in this play. I'm predisposed to analyzing a piece in such a way as to stifle my emotional connection. I've not crossed that invisible line just yet. In fact, I was encouraged by the read-thru. I found connection during the read without acting on any of my decisions or even having specific objectives in mind. It is encouraging to know I can connect to the character easily. The trick will be to stay out of my

own way.

Although there were successes in the read-thru, I did feel as though some of my actions towards Mr. Zero were forced and disconnected. Moving forward, I must build in the values which no longer enable her to be kind to her husband. Her immediate response to his shortcomings must be frustration and anger. At one point, she was able to shrug past those failures, but that ability has deteriorated. As they come upon the 25th anniversary of Mr. Zero's employment, the bleak and boring nature of her life has begun to overshadow any hope of living life the way she once hoped to. She is at her lowest at the beginning of the play.

Thursday, September 22, 2011

Today we watched the film *Metropolis*, an Expressionistic film from 1926. As we watched the film, we were asked to find parallels between it and *The Adding Machine*. The film was made years after the play was written and produced. According to Estéban, there is no evidence the play inspired the film in any way.

Metropolis has a rosier outlook than *The Adding Machine*. There is a compassion present in *Metropolis* that is wholly absent in *The Adding Machine*. In *Metropolis*, the main character, Freder, plays a true hero. Mr. Zero is an anti-hero, unwilling to do what is necessary to win the girl or fight for the greater good or even for the betterment of his own soul.

However, there are undeniable similarities in the two pieces. Most apparent is the identification of the individual as a cog of industry. The “worker city” in *Metropolis* is good match for *The Adding Machine's* claustrophobic world. Moreover, woman becomes the guiding force in both stories. For both Zero and Freder, women are a source of redemption and destruction. Infatuation with women (or one woman in *Metropolis*) is a driving force for both men. The parallel between Daisy in *The Adding Machine* and Maria in *Metropolis* is a clear. I'm

not sure where Mrs. Zero fits in.

Expressionists believed humanity was moving toward an unfeeling world and overwhelmed by industrialization. They favored a subjective depiction of the human experience rather than the representation of accepted truth or reality. Expressionism used exaggerated images, movement and voice to provoke the audience. When I think of expressionism, I always think of Edvard Munch's painting, *The Scream*. Coincidentally that painting is a good visual example of how Mrs. Zero feels.

Estéban suggested we think of expressionism as a mirror that's been twisted and bent. Expressionists thought a manipulated image would elicit more response than a perfect reflection might. Our goal as a cast will be “to hold a distorted mirror up to nature”. We'll do this by making bold and unusual physical and vocal choices. By combining those choices with honest inner-life work, we can begin to create *The Adding Machine's* world. Although it is important we make “big” choices it is equally important we make those choices specific and clear for our audience.

Friday, September 23, 2011

Today the design team came in to show us what our show is going to look like. Our design team is made up of talented fellow graduate students: Ashley Harman, our set designer; Kelly Henry, our costume designer; Diana Kaiser, our lighting designer; and Ashley Burns, our props designer.

I was especially excited to see my costumes. I knew they would be using the fly metaphor when creating the costume pieces, but I wasn't sure to what extent the metaphor would be used. I have to say I was surprised. The concept is extreme but considering the style of the play, I think it's perfect. It is disarming and bordering on the ridiculous.

As suggested by the text, the costume for Scene One is a shapeless night gown. My hair is pulled into two messy buns suggesting bug eyes. The Scene Three costume is a black and white dress, similar to dresses the other ladies' wear. Each of the couples are costumed almost exactly the same with small adjustments made to differentiate them. Attached to my dress is a giant bow. Kelly explained it represented Mrs. Zero's desire to be refined. Mrs. Zero wants to fit in so much and tries so hard, she ends up sabotaging herself. In addition to the giant bow, she wears a large hat with giant bug eyes affixed to it. Scene Five's costume is similar. Her bow is replaced with a small black cape. A widow's veil is attached to a hat similar to Scene Three's. Scene Five's costume is not as ridiculous as Scene Three's and is actually slightly elegant. It looks as if Mrs. Zero may have achieved a bit of refinement for herself. I asked Kelly if we would be using make up to add some age to the character. She said yes, which I was glad to hear.

The set is also surprising. It is a white box set. Squares are painted in decreasing sizes on each of the three walls to create a forced perspective. Some of the squares open like doors and square windows line the tops of the walls. Since the set is stark white we basically have a blank canvas to play with. The high walls and cage-like grid make sense for the piece but I did not expect the world to be as sterile and open as it is. This certainly gives me a different perspective to explore with regard to Mrs. Zero's attitude toward her surroundings.

After the design presentation, we had another read-thru. This time rather than sitting around the table, we were asked to utilize the space in any way we chose. Our movements didn't need to make sense. In fact, we were encouraged to make absolutely no sense. So I jumped on chairs and chased Maury around during Scene One. Scene Three was a little tamer. We sat at a makeshift table for the first part of the scene. When the couples began to enter the space, we split

into two groups on opposite sides of the room, women on one side and men on the other.

The read as a whole was fun but I was unsure of the choices I'd made. It troubled me to hear we would probably use some of the staging. So much of it was disconnected and felt like movement for the sake of movement. However, the unpredictability of movement did reveal some discoveries. For example in Scene One, I became very aware of the degree to which Mrs. Zero values her husband's fidelity. It is my guess that her preoccupation with infidelity drives the entirety of the scene because a sort of chase began to take place. This may be too broad a stroke but I have a hunch her constant yammering might be connected to the insecurity she feels.

No decision has been made regarding dialect. Estéban says he'd like to stay away from placing the world in New York. On the whole, it's been difficult to stay away from coloring the words with the dialect. The consensus within the cast is that it's been difficult to keep the dialect out of the lines. It definitely gives the words a different feel when speaking in strict Standard American, without any regionalism from New York.

Sunday, September 25, 2011

We rehearsed Scene One today. My goals were to begin defining the Zero's relationship and also to discuss the Judy O'Grady situation with my cast mate and director. Collectively, we decided that Judy was just about to get out of jail. My initial feeling had been that the discovery of Mr. Zero at the window looking at Judy had just happened, perhaps the night prior. I felt as though it could be identified as the Initial Event since it seemed to be what was of the most concern to the characters at the beginning of the play. Her lines at the end of Scene One seem to be coming from a place of newfound satisfaction. She speaks like a hero who's finally put her arch nemesis behind bars. Estéban felt differently. He thought the incident had occurred months earlier and that Judy was about to be released. He felt since we meet her so soon in the

graveyard scene, she'd have to have been in jail some months prior.

Since the timeline of the play is so vague, I feel as though we are able to take liberties with her release date. My gut tells me the discovery has just happened and it is bothering her more than anything else. However, Estéban suggested that what she was most concerned with was Zero's 25th employment anniversary and possible promotion. I definitely agree the promotion is high on her list of values but I feel like it is a close second to the infidelity. I may be mistaken. We agreed to leave the subject open for discussion as we start to work the scene. I will play with making the promotion her number one concern.

We did come to a consensus about how Mrs. Zero caught her husband. The play suggests routine plays a part in everything. We decided each night Mrs. Zero goes to the bathroom and while she is there, Mr. Zero peeks out the window at Judy. That night she stepped out of the restroom earlier than expected or perhaps Mr. Zero stayed staring a moment too long and she caught him. She went to the window to see what he was looking at. It was a woman wearing only her undershirt. Mrs. Zero exploded and demanded Mr. Zero call the police immediately. She must have lost her mind in those moments, completely caught off-guard by the infidelity and reeling from the betrayal. Her voice must have reached levels her husband never imagined possible. Mr. Zero dutifully called the police, Judy was hauled off to jail and Mrs. Zero was appeased, for the time being.

We also talked about the other sides of Mr. and Mrs. Zero's relationship. For instance, why have the Zeros never had children? Whose fault was it? Estéban suggested that Mr. Zero's name infers not only to his value as a human being but also perhaps to his impotence.

I feel as though that choice would definitely feed Mrs. Zero's frustration with her husband. One of her sisters has a daughter. Considering her desire for sameness, she would have

wanted to have kids of her own. I think she highly values family. I've decided she lost her mother a few years ago. She treats her niece, Beatrice Elizabeth as her own, wanting to leave the valuable scrapbook to her next of kin.

I wanted to confirm the idea that the Zero's no longer had a sexual relationship. We all agreed. I had toyed with the idea of using her sexuality as a way of getting what she wants in Scene One. However, I see now it is unlikely that there is any desire for sexual intimacy on either side of the relationship. Based on the text, he no longer desires her in any way and I don't think she's blind to his indifference. She's guarded enough not to put herself in the position of being rejected.

We ran through Scene One a few times, which was difficult to do script in hand. Being off book as soon as possible would be useful but I want to avoid memorization until my motivation is fully understood. I'm concerned about having little or no response from my scene partner. Essentially, I will be talking to myself through all five pages of text. I'll need to build in my own triggers to lead me to the next thought. In order to do this, I'll have to find the "right" triggers or rather the ones that work best.

Tuesday, September 27, 2011

Today we worked the part of Scene Three that takes place before the couples arrive. I went in wanting to explore Mrs. Zero's levels of malice, while maintaining her humanity. For me, this scene is the most difficult in which to create three-dimensionality. She berates Mr. Zero from the moment he enters until the Ones step through the door. After the first time through we discovered that perhaps she truly does hope the promotion has gone through. Despite all her cynicism, she wants to believe there is still a chance for success. This adds a nice layer to the scene. Instead of being sarcastic throughout, as the text seems to suggest, she genuinely asks her

husband about his raise.

Once again, my opinion about the given circumstances of the Scene Three differed with the director's. I'd decided that Mr. Zero was usually on time for dinner and his lateness that night was out of the ordinary. However, Estéban felt Mr. Zero's lateness was normal and part of our routine. He explained that the only thing that made tonight different from other nights was the promotion. I agreed. The promotion, as well as the fact that the Zero's are expecting company is more than enough to make this night different from others. Sometimes I look so hard for hidden answers in the scene; I don't see the simplest solutions.

Wednesday, September 28, 2011

Today I came in with a new objective for Scene One. I'd been playing with the idea that I want him to appreciate me, but tonight I'm going to try something new. Perhaps all she wants is someone to talk to. The new objective helped propel me into the scene but it didn't do much in terms of stakes. I talk and talk and talk in this scene, so if that's all I want then there's nothing to fight for. There needs to be big arcs in this scene, meaning the monologue should have high points filled with volume and speed, as well as low points in which Mrs. Zero slows her speech. It is imperative this speech have varying qualities otherwise it will become boring fast. Of course, these modulations and variations need to be motivated. Usually my speech would be led, in part, by my scene partner. His reactions would prompt my response. If I were truly in conversation, I would wait for a response. I can't do that here. It doesn't make sense to talk to him even though we are in the same space and the text suggests I'm addressing him. I have chosen clear actions. I can make him feel any number of things with the text but since he does not react, there is no way to tell if they are working. Since Mr. Zero is present physically but not mentally it's going to take a good amount of trial and error to find the best way to perform Mrs.

Zero's long-winded tirade.

Thursday, September 29, 2011

In the first part of today's rehearsal, I came in with the idea that I would play Scene Three using positive actions. It was not effective. In trying to create a well-rounded character, I will sometimes go against their values and then make moderate choices. It doesn't make sense for a character who is so bitter and frustrated with her situation to be kind or understanding. Mrs. Zero is a harridan and to apologize for that does not serve the play. I have to come to terms with her antagonistic role. I have to trust that she is a good person in a bad situation and reacts the way most people would, whether they want to admit it or not.

The second part of rehearsal focused on the second part of Scene Three. The couples have been playing with different shapes and games for their characters. We were given a few moments to come up with some movements which might help tell the story. The women all had great ideas and I followed their lead. The men didn't do as well with the activity and ended up incorporating many of the women's ideas. It gave a nice mirroring effect to the scene as a whole. The movements were sharp turns of the head and crossing of the legs. I have a feeling we will be going further with these types of movements.

As we went through the scene, I made some useful discoveries. Mrs. Zero almost always speaks last in the group of women. Their conversations amount to a big competition between all seven of them. Each woman rattles off what she feels will top another's response to the subject. Since she's just received news of her husband's failure, Mrs. Zero plays this game but she's in no condition to play it well. I'm looking forward to exploring her inner-life in future rehearsals.

Friday, September 30, 2011

Today we worked on Scene Five. I've decided that instead of treating this as an out of the

ordinary visit, I'm going to make it a weekly occurrence. Mrs. Zero goes to visit Mr. Zero and they end up fighting about some minor thing, she storms off and says she'll never go see him again. What makes today different is that today he's going to be executed and she is here for a last goodbye. She sees this as an opportunity to live out the scene in a movie. This worked and I focused on testing the actions I'd chosen and deepening my connection to the given circumstances. This went well.

Monday, October 3, 2011

We worked Scene Three today. I incorporated inner-life and actions successfully. I started dropping in the positive needs she has rather than playing positive actions. She hopes to be happy one day but when those hopes begin to deteriorate, so too does her ability to be civil. She filters her desire for good through her negativity. She veils her deepest desires through sarcasm.

Group work continues to go well with the ensemble. The stylized movements the women have created really help fuel my character's journey in the scene. Each head turning toward the person speaking physicalizes the pressure these middle class couples are under. Mrs. Zero feels the need to overcompensate because of what she's learned about her husband's gross failure. Since she is always the last to speak in these exchanges, the momentum is at its greatest when it comes to her line. Every time she speaks, it is her chance to impress. The further I am able to drop-in the given circumstances at the top of the scene, the more difficult Mrs. Zero's attempt to keep up appearances will be. I'm excited to see how far I can push this the next time we touch on Scene Three.

Wednesday, October 5, 2011

Today, I came to rehearsal off book for the first half of Mrs. Zero's monologue. However, I can feel myself falling into a pattern of speech. When I deviate from a usual reading of the line,

I'm thrown off track. I will have to be conscious of that habit as I finish learning the lines.

Usually this is helped by allowing your lines to be colored by whatever your scene partner has just said to you. That's not the case here. I have to make it clear and self-motivate organic readings of the lines.

I continue struggling to balance speaking directly to Mr. Zero, while at the same time ignoring his non-reaction. I keep addressing Maury which, in most instances, should not be the case. When I do address him, I can't wait for a response. It feels awkward to wait because I don't receive one. It kills the momentum. Basically, I have stopped caring about my partner's response which is difficult since it goes against my training and how I'm used to playing a scene. I have to find a way to adjust to the style of the play.

We chose specific moments in which Mr. Zero will have a slight response to my character through movement. It's useful having Mr. Zero respond even in the most minimal of ways, even if these reactions are not entirely in response to what I've just said. They don't necessarily help my character move forward. For instance, during the movie section of the monologue, Mr. Zero collapses onto the bed. If Mrs. Zero truly saw her husband respond to something she'd said in that way, I'm certain she'd do something about it, but she doesn't. Despite his movements, she continues to rattle away; her train of thought goes on, undaunted. Technically, I know I have a partner in this scene. However, because Mr. Zero is present physically but certainly not mentally, the line between monologue and soliloquy is blurred.

The more I work on the monologue, the more I find it helps to think of it like a song. In our Acting for Musical Theatre course, when our character sings alone on stage, we substitute our partner with detailed images or a projection of ourselves. For instance, when Mrs. Zero begins to talk about the movies, she begins to see herself in them. She almost lives out the scenes

she speaks of. Instead of seeing Grace Darling's mother staring down at her in the garden, Mrs. Zero sees her own. Also, the subject changes feel like the movements in a song or aria. The text swells and feels staccato in parts and legato in others. The next time we touch on Scene One, I will try treating it like a soliloquy.

Thursday, October 6, 2011

I went into rehearsal wanting to lay in the given circumstances and stakes that Mrs. Zero is living with at the beginning of Scene Three. I imagined she'd been cleaning all day, wanting the apartment to be spotless for their company. She also cooked his favorite meal hoping there'd be reason to celebrate. She has a very specific idea of how the night will go if he got the raise. I think she's allowed herself to hope as she's never hoped before. If he doesn't get a raise today, he'll never get one and their situation in life will remain the same for the rest of their lives.

The top of Scene Three is in many ways like Scene One; Mr. Zero is there and at the same time not there. However, without question, I'm speaking directly to him and his non-responsiveness speaks to his failure. When he walks in looking so defeated, it's difficult to continue to hope but I think it's the right choice. It gives the scene somewhere to go and will hopefully give my character a full inner-life.

We only worked this section a couple of times before moving on to the second section of the scene with the couples. We have started to play with more stylistic elements at the top of the scene. This section of the scene still has naturalistic movements, so we need to start layering in mechanical movements in order to link it with the second half.

I'm glad we've chosen to work this way. It's been helpful to build in the realistic and emotional work prior to the stylizing of the characters. I feel as though layering in the style will be difficult but motivating those movements will come easier.

Monday, October 10, 2011

Today was our first day in the University Theatre. We worked on Scene One and it did not go too well. We're not supposed to be off book but I wanted to get the script out of my hands as soon as possible; that way I would be able to work more freely with movement. Tonight, I tried out something I learned in our Movement class with Kate Frank. Kate has been guiding us through Michael Chekhov's techniques and we'd been discussing character archetypes. Kate explained each character we play can be thought of as an archetype, such as "the hero", "the queen" or "the whore". These archetypes might speak to specific qualities of the characters we play and may influence movement. For example, if choose the archetype of "the queen" for Mrs. Zero that would greatly change the way she speaks and moves.

However, I chose a very different archetype. Mrs. Zero refers to herself as a slave or servant in both Scene One and Three. I decided I'd play with "the slave" archetype and stylize my movement based on those associated with that stock character. I tried moving as though my ankles and shoulders were weighted. I began to struggle midway through the monologue. I was so focused on my movement, I lost sight of my actions, which then made me lose my train of thought and my lines went out the window. I kept talking to Maury and expecting an answer and I wanted to avoid that above all else. I felt Estéban was becoming a bit frustrated; so I decided to pick the book back up and drop the movement exploration.

I shifted my focus from movement to motivating my changes in subject and allowing the speech to reach its height during the window section. The window section is the moment in which Maury goes to the window to look for Judy. The Judy situation is not being played with enough stakes. I realize this moment is important. Infidelity is what she fears most. She detests having caught her husband staring out at another woman.

Since, I am ranting and raving in previous sections, I felt the window section was a graver and more serious moment. She truly means what she is saying and the fact that she expresses herself with greater control speaks to the intensity of her feeling. However, Estéban feels this should be the point at which Mrs. Zero is at her loudest and most emphatic. I changed the action and realize I will have to adjust my previous actions in order to make this last moment the loudest and most bombastic. I will have to go back and build in that set of values.

Our work on Scene Three went much better. Maury and I worked on stylizing our movements. We worked most with tempo, moving our forks slowly and at the same time. We also tried moving at opposite tempos, his tempo would remain slow, while mine sped up. Also, we used some of the Michael Chekhov work, expanding as he is about to tell me about the raise and contracting at the realization he's failed. This worked well and I think we'll keep it. We also worked out some of the blocking for this scene. Again, we didn't spend too much time on the top section of Scene Three and focused mostly on the choreography of the couples' movements.

Tuesday, October 11, 2011

We worked the second part of Scene Three with props today. I had a box of heart-shaped candy to play with, which turned out to be lots of fun. During the racist singing of *America the Beautiful*, I decided to make the candy box represent an actual heart and placed my hand over it. I also wanted to work on her gradual change in physicality from Scene One to Scene Five. I still like the idea of using the slave archetype in Scene One and slowly straightening her spine through Scene Three into a confident, free and fully upright woman in Scene Five.

As we worked Scene Three, I noted which of the women I would most like to emulate. I had already made decisions about her relationships with each of the women. Mrs. One is nice enough but she's very private. She's the subject of much discussion as the women frequently

venture guesses as to what the Ones' secrets are. Mrs. Two is very sweet. You can walk all over her if need be. She rarely says anything bad about anyone, which Mrs. Zero considers to be unfortunate. Mrs. Three is a bit of snob and Mrs. Zero feels as though she's constantly being judged whenever she's around. Although I made the choice to hate Mrs. Four, I believe Mrs. Zero wants to be like her. Mrs. Four appears to be confident and chic. Mrs. Five is incredibly sweet, too sweet. Mrs. Zero suspects her positivity is not entirely genuine. Mrs. Six however seems to be the best of them all. She is confident, strong and pulls it all off gracefully. Also, she is always in the know about the latest gossip. Mrs. Zero admires Mrs. Four's bravado but is in awe of Mrs. Six. By the time the audience meets Mrs. Zero in Scene Five, I'd like her to be as close to embodying Mesdames Four and Six as she possible can.

Wednesday, October 12, 2011

Today was the second time we've rehearsed Scene Five. It seems like ages since we've worked on it. Since then, I've come up with a solid objective. Mrs. Zero wants to live out a real scene from the movies. She wants to leave her husband's jail cell with a happy memory, something she can hold onto as proof of her good marriage. The objective proved to be effective and is leading me toward a possible super objective which involves Mrs. Zero's desire for something better. She wants her husband to appreciate her or to prove he loves her.

After having worked on the monologue-heavy Scenes One and Three, it is nice to be able to work on a scene with an actual partner. I'm finally able to have an honest exchange and allow what I say to be motivated by what someone's just said to me. It's nearly realism. I'll have to enjoy it while I can because I know it won't last long. We'll start stylizing movement soon.

Maury and I were able to navigate the scene well. The actions and beat changes seemed to flow nicely. Of course, I feel as though we still have a way to go. My actions definitely need

to be more specific. I realized that perhaps Mrs. Zero is not even aware of the sadness she feels. Perhaps her husband's absence has not truly hit her until she begins to discuss it with him. I will try and push this further the next time we work the scene. We need to marry this scene to the rest of the play stylistically. As I said earlier, this scene makes it easy to slip into realism. I will try out more specific movement choices during tomorrow's run-thru.

Friday, October 14, 2011 Run-thru

I tested my super objective and played with specific movement choices. The super objective felt good. I believe what Mrs. Zero wants throughout the play is a better life. More specifically she wants her husband to appreciate her. If she had her husband's love, which for her means he'd succeed at work, be faithful and pay attention to her, she would be happy. Mrs. Zero's financial and social status is totally dependent on her husband's actions.

Although we've chosen to make this a timeless play, the characters seem to maintain 1920's social standards. The women in *The Adding Machine* hold the same ideals as women would have had at the time the play was written. They gladly give up independence for the comfort of conventional standards. Being married, like everyone else, is regarded as a source of success. Daisy affirms this idealism in Scene Two, when she says, "Maybe you could marry me...then I could quit workin'."

The characters cling to this bourgeois point of view and see happiness as something only to be found through marriage and financial success. Conformity is essential. Aspiring to a broader sense of fulfillment is scary to these women and men. They view the road taken by the newly divorced Mrs. Seven as threatening and shameful, although I believe in the backs of their minds, they find her newfound freedom alluring.

It is only through working hard at one's job, whether in the home or office, that the well-

oiled machine of marriage can begin to produce success. This success can only be measured by a constant growth in wealth, social status and the upkeep of a seemingly happy marriage. Mrs. Zero does her best to maintain a “healthy” marriage with her husband but she feels he is not putting forth the same effort. Over the course of the play, I feel she continues to push him towards bourgeois success. She wants very much for her husband to help her produce happiness.

Striving for this partnership was effective during the run-thru. The first scene was successful. I feel as though I was able to crescendo during the Judy section, as Estéban had prescribed. I ended up becoming much freer with my movements during the run of Scene One. Again, I think it was due to the fact that I was not guiding myself. The freedom in movement isn't necessarily a good thing; I need to be more specific. I liked the child-like temper tantrum I threw at the end, perhaps I'll keep that.

Scene Three feels as though I have much further to go in terms of inner-life and stakes. It did not read quite right. In general, I think I need to plant my character's given circumstances deeper. I found myself indicating emotion at the top of the scene which felt awful. Indicating emotion is the outward expression of emotion without actual connection to one's heart. For example an actor might yell loudly and pound his or her fists against a table but feel utterly calm inside. Depending on the skill level of the performer the audience may never know what they are watching is disconnected. However, the performer always knows whether the night's performance was honest. I believe a connected performance moves an audience far more than an indicated one. Without intense imagination work and rehearsal the personal connection can't be achieved. It will take a lot of hard work to make this character an honest one.

Scene Five was probably the closest I came during the run-thru to an honest portrayal of Mrs. Zero. The partner work was definitely working. As we move forward I'm sure what stylistic

changes will need to be added. Perhaps I can use similar movement choices I've made in Scene Three. I don't want her to have the weighed-down quality of movement she has in Scene One. I feel at this point she's taller and more self-assured than in either of the previous scenes. Her topography, or walking pattern, may remain the same as in Scene Three, though with less tension. Scene Five should be as close as she can possibly come to emulating the movie star, Grace Darling. In fact, with all of the media attention the trial has given her, she feels just as famous as a movie star.

I played with the idea that although she wants this last meeting to be a good one, she still resents her husband. She isn't quite able to be as benevolent as she planned to be. I feel as though these values were dropped-in and the scene went well because of it. I need to ensure this happens in all three of my scenes. Finding effective catalysts is key.

Saturday, October 15, 2011

A much needed fall break is taking place and I'm heading home for the weekend. Before leaving, I watched the movie *Brief Encounters*. While studying the British Received Pronunciation in my dialect course with Mavourneen Dwyer, she suggested we watch the film. The plot circles around a housewife who finds herself in a passionate love affair with a married man.

As I watched the film, it reminded me of the type of movie Mrs. Zero would absolutely adore. Outwardly, she'd admonish the film for its celebration of adulterous behavior but inside she'd be riveted. The film also helped me understand some of my character's given circumstances with regard to fidelity and the frequency with which she might attend the movies. The principle female character makes trips to the movies on her own and during the week. Nowadays, going to the movie theatre without someone else seems out of the ordinary. However, in the film it

seems quite normal that a woman would spend a day in the city, on her own and at the movies. While I don't think the Zeros have the financial luxury of making multiple trips to the movie house each week, I do think Mrs. Zero makes it a point to go to the movies on her own at least twice a month. It keeps her sane. It allows her to escape “those same four walls” she talks about in Scene One.

During one of our Alexander Lessons, Kate Frank had suggested using the “shut-in” as an archetype for Mrs. Zero. The image of a woman caged in by the walls of her own home is helpful when thinking of movement possibilities. Certainly there are sections of Scene One in which a quality of restraint is useful and others in which there is release. For instance, whenever she talks about cooking and cleaning, she can begin to feel the four walls closing in. Then as she begins to talk about the movies, she can break free from constrained movement into physical ease and release.

Tuesday, October 18, 2011

Fall-break is over and I'm headed back to Fayetteville. I was almost off book before the break so it wasn't too difficult to finish the job over vacation. Scene One is still difficult, just because she seems to repeat herself and sometimes my train of thought jumps track and skips a section or double backs to a previous one. I have to be very precise about finding the triggers I've laid down in my memory. We'll see how it goes in the run-thru tomorrow. Learning lines at home and then taking them into rehearsal is always rough, especially when you're trying new things and a director is present.

While waiting for my connection at the Dallas-Fort Worth airport, I was fortunate to sit next to a married couple whose relationship was extremely reminiscent of the Zeros. The husband was quiet and reading a book, while his wife sat looking around for things to complain

about. She took issue with all sorts of things. She talked about the flight they'd just been on, how the soda she was served was flat, about how the airline no longer served in-flight snacks, the smell in the waiting area, how uncomfortable the chairs we were sitting on were, the accent of the flight attendant making the announcement. The list goes on. I had to remind myself not to stare too long; I didn't want her to catch me and begin to complain about me.

Then I thought, perhaps I'm projecting on to this poor woman. Maybe I'm inclined to think this about her because my mind is so focused on Mrs. Zero and her neuroses. However, there was something about her husband's unresponsiveness that told me I was right. What I found most interesting and most useful was that it seemed as though she couldn't stop herself from saying these things. Her mouth seemed possessed by her thoughts. It was as though over the course of her life, she'd trained herself to be this way. Her reflexive response to everything around her was negative; perhaps Mrs. Zero shares this woman's fate.

Wednesday, October 19, 2011

Tonight, I realized my character is not very good at being classy or “refined”. The choice to make Mrs. Zero awkward seems obvious now that I recognize it, but in all honesty, it was not something I'd considered until this evening. Of course, I don't think it would be wise to “play” awkward but I do think I'd like to take it a little further in the second part of Scene Three and Scene Five. Certainly, in Scene One she is her furthest from grace.

A part of Scene One that continues to be a problem moment is an exclamation she makes during the movie section of the monologue. When talking about the various movie theater choices with her husband, she suddenly utters the word “Nit!”. I researched it even before the audition process had begun and hadn't found anything concrete. No clear definition of the word, in this context, was available. I checked the dictionary which defined it as “the egg of a parasitic

insect, especially of a louse, often attached to a hair or a fiber of clothing. Or the young of such an insect.” I tried pretending to see and squash a tiny insect at that exact moment but the choice felt odd, so I dropped it. Another option was to play it as a shortening of the word “nitwit”. According to the dictionary, using the abbreviation is “Chiefly British” but seems to make more sense. I asked around to see if anyone had heard it used in that context but no one had.

I decided this moment would be one in which she reveals her true frustration with her husband. She's able to recover quickly but at that moment is unable to contain her resentment. More than the definition of the word, I think the trouble is my connection to the given circumstances. The struggle with the line is just an indication that I'm still unable to live within Mrs. Zero's given circumstances.

Today Estéban decided he wanted to move forward with a Standard American Working Class dialect. Ultimately, he wanted the world of the play to be stock. He wanted the audience to see themselves as the characters onstage and felt a dialect would hinder that. Earlier in the rehearsal process, Estéban asked what Maury and I thought about the geographic location of the play. We told him we felt like enough references were made to New York to place it there.

The subway is referenced a few times, as well as the Strand movie theatre and Peter Stuyvesant. Peter Stuyvesant was the Dutch colonial governor of New Amsterdam in 1645. He lost it to the British in 1664 and it became New York City. The Strand Theatre opened in 1914 and is a famous movie house located in New York.

We had suggested he speak with Mavourneen to see what she thought. In the meantime, we continued to use a New York dialect during the rehearsal process. Because we have been using the New York until this point, switching to the Standard American dialect is going to prove to be difficult.

Thursday, October 20, 2011

This afternoon, I asked Mavourneen about how to handle the dialect. She said it would be fine if we colored the Working Class Standard American with New York subtleties. During tonight's run I tried to lighten the dialect, which I find is working out nicely. I tried to incorporate the notes from last night, adding text at the tail end of Scene One to create the illusion that I continue to speak as the lights go down. The window portion of the monologue is still bothering me. The blocking there seems forced and totally unmotivated. I'm not sure how to fix it.

Scene Three's opening moments were unclear yesterday. I think it has to do with my desire to know what happened with the raise. It's going to be a matter of feeling it out during rehearsal. I tried cutting out the air time between the moment he enters and when I begin to speak. I'm not sure if it was effective. My stakes should be higher.

According to last night's notes, Scene Five went well yesterday because I did not play the end of the scene at the beginning. So my goal in this scene was to try and do it again. I went in with the same objective and tried to stay on partner.

Saturday, October 22, 2011

I tend to rely on my face to express what's going on inside my character which is a bad habit. What I should do is trust that what I'm feeling will be communicated naturally. Extra effort on my part creates tension and an audience will read it as false. Mask work has helped me break this habit.

We took a course focused on mask work last semester and it was incredible to see how much an unmoving mask can express. The audience will naturally project emotion onto a still expression. Looking angry is unnecessary if you truly are angry. The audience will feel that and

read it from the entire body, not only the face.

I can feel myself falling into old facial habits in Scene One. So today I decided do some mask work on my own. I went through the monologue using a neutral mask. Covering up my face allowed me to filter the extra effort into my voice and body. I have to remember this feeling and make sure I rely on my whole self. My actor's instrument is from head to toe, not neck up.

Monday, October 24, 2011

Today we're taking the stylized movement in Scene One to a whole new level. I had been playing with sharper movements as well as the idea of giving her a hunched-over shape, which I thought would be enough. I had understood from previous discussions that expressionistic style in this particular scene would come from my vocal patterns and volume as well as the duration of the speech. The text itself would provide the expressionism rather than the movements. I wasn't prepared for this. So when Estéban asked me for my ideas on business my character might have as she prepares for bed, I had to brainstorm quickly. I had already been playing with taking down my hair and brushing it, as well as taking off my slippers and hurling them at Maury. I suggested tweezing my eyebrows and mustache. We agreed that her movements should be grotesque and not alluring in anyway.

We only ran the top of Scene Three once to get us to the entrance of the couples. Again, we were taking our movement choices up a notch. I had already been playing with larger movement choices, so development of the Scene Three physicality came easily.

During a break, Estéban asked me why the adjustments came so easily in this scene and not in Scene One. I assured him the next time we touched Scene One, I would be better prepared. I explained that since we'd already been working on developing specific movements in Scene Three, I was able to build upon work I'd already done where as in Scene One, we hadn't played

with those ideas. I will definitely come in ready to make big choices next time.

Friday, October 28, 2011

My goal coming into rehearsal today was not to play the end of Scene Five at the beginning of Scene Five. What was the first thing I did? I played the end of Scene Five at the beginning of Scene Five. Why did I do this? Because I chose to play my inner-life rather than my objective.

I also neglected a crucial given circumstance in the scene. A couple of rehearsals ago, I had decided this was not the first time Mrs. Zero was visiting her husband. In fact, she probably came to see him pretty regularly and each time they saw one another it ended in a fight. Had I remembered this crucial bit of character work, the first run of the scene would have gone great. Unfortunately, I did not.

I tried it again and it went better. I reminded myself that although Mrs. Zero wants to have a good last moment with her husband, she also dislikes him a great deal. Walking in with this in mind helps create much more tension and is much more effective playing the scene as a whole.

The trap for me in the preparation of these scenes has been in trying to identify what makes these nights different from others. There is none. *The Adding Machine* is about routine and repetition. These days are no different from the last. What transpires in my scenes is what always transpires between these characters. Mrs. Zero hopes things will change but they have not and most likely will not.

No change of relationship occurs in Scene One, she gains nothing. She loses her husband in Scene Three and Five but their relationship remains as it was. As an actor, my mistake was to force change into a scene in which it was purposefully left out. As always, the actor must

concern his or herself with their job alone and be careful that taking responsibilities which belong to the playwright are not being assumed.

Sunday, October 30, 2011

I came in with the new activities I'd been working out. I bought some cold cream, brought tweezers and a brush to work with. I had decided I would work through these activities in the scene. First I would tweeze my eyebrows, then my upper lip and finally my chin. After that I'd take off my makeup using a wet cloth. I planned to wear a good amount of black eyeliner so that the wet cloth would darken my eyes and leave large streaks of black across my cheeks. After I removed the black, I would open the cold cream and rub it onto my face, wipe that off and start to take down my tangled hair and brush it. I hoped these activities would help the scene.

After going through it once, Estéban asked me to make the movements much more exaggerated. So instead of plucking my eyebrows as I normally would, the gesture would be bigger and broader. My arm would stretch out completely once I'd plucked one hair. My body should resemble a machine as much as possible. All of my movements needed to be exaggerated. I modified the large brush strokes to include small jerky movements that indicated her hair was full of knots.

The rhythm of the movements created an obstacle for me. It was difficult to speak the speech without allowing my pattern of movement to influence my delivery. The goal was to have my voice work independently from my body. This is going to take a good amount of outside rehearsal. I'll have to treat it like a dance.

Before setting a dance to music, you learn it with counts. It will be important for me to get the movements in my bones, so that they become second nature. Ideally, my body will know where and when to move and I'll be able to say my lines and play action without having to worry

about the movements.

I don't know whether my actions will be allowed to be influenced by the inner-life of the character. I imagine on some level they must be. The monologue has to be authentic despite the use of the automatic movements. It will be difficult to make these extremely mechanical movements organic.

The new stylization also includes ignoring Mr. Zero almost completely. The few realistic choices we'd made are almost completely gone. I have to admit, it seems as if it would be much easier to drop the principals I base my work off of and commit to playing the style of the scene rather than the truth in it. However, I have to believe that if I can connect to Mrs. Zero's objective on the most basic level, it will shine through even the most emotionless behavior.

Working through Scene Three was useful; we cleared up confusion about what is happening at the top of the scene. I was able to make specific choices about when I start to speak. We kept the movements we'd been working out. I still feel as though my action changes during the beginning monologue are not as varied as they could be. The tonality is the same throughout the speech. Yelling leads to slightly louder yelling and everything ends up sounding the same to me. I'm at the point where I feel as though I don't want to think about it too much and just go ahead and be mean to him in different ways. Maybe I'll try that during tomorrow's run.

As always, Scene Five was fun to work on. We all decided it was like two old enemies meeting up for the last time. The callous nature of the relationship makes the scene very funny. Capitalizing on the distaste they have for each other makes much more sense. The tiny speck of love between them is actually very sweet if it isn't realized until absolutely necessary.

Something about the money-spending portion of the scene is never quite right for Estéban. I'm not sure what he's wanting. Maury and I have tried it several different ways and it

still doesn't seem to be what he's going for. To tell the truth, I myself no longer know what I'm going for.

Initially, I had decided she was making him feel like it was her money and he couldn't do anything about it. Then we changed it and I started saying it as though I didn't want him to be upset. Now I'm saying it as though I'm really excited about spending that much money on a dress. I think the last option has been the most effective. For my own part, I think I'll stick with it. We'll see how it plays out.

Monday, October 31, 2011

This was a disaster, most especially Scene One. This was our first Tech Watch. Having just implemented the new exaggerated activities yesterday, the scene was extremely shaky. I had a hard time juggling the activities, not saying the lines in time with the movements, as well as the fact that I was now unable to speak to Mr. Zero. I felt overwhelmed and decided I would just do my best to get through the scene, focusing on the movements and the lines. I focused only on the technical execution of the scene. Connection would just have to be thrown into the mix later. Also, the window portion still does not work.

Scene Three went better. I think since Scene One was such a mess, I decided to just go on stage and have fun. Scene Five was much the same; I tried not to think about doing exactly what the director wanted and just played the scene. I felt good about how the scene went but I'm not sure what the notes will say tomorrow.

Tuesday, November 1, 2011

We restaged the couples portion of Scene Three today. We needed to find more levels and make the couples' entrances clearer. We had to get rid of some of the chairs and needed to find a way to get the chairs we do need onstage. We decided to put the chairs along the walls and

as each couple entered the scene, they would split, men crossing downstage right and women downstage left. They'd huddle together, mingling quietly until the last couple had joined them. At that moment, Mrs. Zero would signal the group to begin the party and the couples would begin to set the chairs. Each character would walk as if placed on grid, meaning all crosses would be made in straight lines. The length of the crosses could be short or long but everyone's goal would be to arrive on the grid, at their final place at relatively the same moment.

I had decided to make Mrs. Zero's gestures, in this scene, reflect those of a fly. Whenever possible I'd flap my hands like little wings. I didn't choose the motion only to reinforce the design choice but because I felt it reflected her nervous energy at this point in the scene. Another choice I've made in this scene is to drop her dialect. When the women begin to enter the scene, Mrs. Zero does everything in her power to assimilate. To me this meant she would lose any hint of regionalism. So I begin to speak the strictest form of Standard American. However, I do allow it to bleed in just a bit at the end of the scene, when her husband is arrested. I don't think she'd be able to help herself at that moment. I'm not sure if what I'm doing matters much or if it's noticeable, but I feel that it's a fun choice to make. Unless the director says otherwise, I intend to keep it.

Wednesday, November 2, 2011

We didn't receive the notes from October 31st until just before the run today. Luckily I was able to download them onto my phone. I tried to integrate them as best I could. As I expected, Scene One had not been well received. Most of the notes, I knew, were due to my juggling of the activities. For instance, I had totally run over the pauses in which Maury makes his movements. I received a note concerning Mr. Zero's cross to the window. Apparently I was too slow to wake up.

I'm supposed to fall asleep. When I do, he makes his cross to the window. When he gets to the window, I wake up and finish my monologue. This makes very little sense to me. I don't see why if I'm so sensitive to the Judy situation I would not immediately stop him from getting out of bed in the first place or why I go to sleep at all. If this is our routine and that routine includes a nightly trip to the window, why would I feel the need to inform him she's not there? He would know she's not there. I didn't have a chance to address this with Estéban since we received the notes so late. Hopefully we can work on this soon.

As for tonight, I picked up the cue and tried my best to motivate it. According to the notes, Scenes Three and Five worked well, which is great. Once again, when I let go and have fun on stage, the scene works. I need to bring that kind of attitude to Scene One.

Thursday, November 3, 2011

Brandi, Maury and I were called in for voice work with Mavourneen. We ran scenes Scenes One and Two and she took notes. I'm not sure how clear my articulation was. I'm curious to see if she thinks the New York dialect is too heavy and whether I can be understood. I felt as though I may have pushed a bit.

Estéban did not arrive until later. We went back and worked the scenes. After talking with Michael Landman, he'd decided it would be best to take the exaggerated movements out of Scene One. Although, it'd been difficult to work the unnatural movements into the speech, I thought it was working out. I have to admit I'm a little disappointed. Michael Landman advised that the movements might be too much for the audience to take in at the top of the show and we should rely on the bulk of the text to represent the expressionism in the scene.

Taking the movements out was easy enough. We worked out the window scene a bit more. Estéban seems bound and determined to keep the blocking, probably because our tech

rehearsal is tomorrow. I told him that I didn't see how it made sense to wait to react to Zero's cross. Also, I felt trapped on the bed. I'm so free with my movement during the rest of the speech that to stay in bed seems contrary to the action I'm playing and the build he wants from me in this moment. He suggested I stop him vocally, once he arrived at the window. Basically, I needed to find a way to motivate it. I wish we could try it as it was originally staged. In the stage directions, it is Mrs. Zero who crosses to the window, not her husband.

I find that to be more in line with her train of thought. If Judy has been in jail or is about to get out of jail, it would make sense that it has become part of Mrs. Zero's routine to check the window. It's hard for me to believe in what we are doing in this particular moment. I will ask to try the cross during tomorrow's run, if only to get the thought out of my system.

Friday, November 4, 2011

I spoke to Estéban before the run and asked to try the cross to the window. I knew he'd probably say no and that is pretty much what happened. Essentially he said, "Sure we can try that, but what if we try this instead." The "this", of course, was the way we'd been doing it. I acquiesced and resigned myself to doing the scene the way we'd been doing it all along. I regret not bringing it up sooner. I would have liked to explore it.

We received Mavourneen's notes which were very helpful. She said I was going too fast and the speech was all one level. I'd felt a responsibility in Scene One to maintain momentum and it was good to know I actually needed to slow down. Slowing down will help me take time and be more clear in my action changes, which will also serve to vary my vocal choices.

Scene Three and Scene Five went well. I feel like I've got a good hold on where the scene needs to start, where it should go and how I can get there. Getting there has started to be more and more fun and much freer.

IV. Technical Rehearsals

Saturday & Sunday, November 5 & 6, 2011

Cue to Cue was a breeze, very efficient. We weren't able to run the show until Sunday and even though we stopped a bit, it was still useful. Having the lights, sets and props is really helping. The world being created is fantastic and I can't wait to see it with costumes. I was able to make the adjustments included in the notes from our last run-thru. According to the notes, Scene Three and Five are coming along nicely. Scene One is better but still clunky at points.

We tried speeding up the window sequence. I started speaking as soon as he got up from the bed. This definitely helps. I may have been too quick to wake up but it felt better to jump on the cue, rather than wait. We can finesse it during the runs.

I am feeling much better about the scenes as a whole. Running them one after the other has been helpful. I'm looking forward to the runs this week and to finding the rhythm of the show. Linking the scenes will give me a chance to make sure the character's arc is clear.

Monday, November 7, 2011

We worked out the timing at the end of Scene Three. We're polishing what we've got now. A problem section for me in this scene has been just before the Policeman's entrance. I shush the group and then my line is, "The doorbell!" It's always felt odd and probably would always feel that way but at this point it's about committing to whatever decisions we've made, whether right or wrong. It may not make sense that my character is alarmed by the ringing of the doorbell but maybe it doesn't need to make sense. Sometimes I feel as though we over-think every little bit of the script.

I'm resigning myself to whatever choices we've made. I'm chalking up any awkwardness I may feel to my preoccupation with "getting it right". Committing to the wrong choice fully is

better than performing a moment halfheartedly because you're afraid it's not right. Above all else, doing that would be the wrong choice.

Tuesday, November 8, 2011

Today was first dress. I was excited to use the costumes and make-up. They're always so helpful when bridging the gap between myself and the character, especially Mrs. Zero. It's like putting the mask on. It takes away some of the responsibility that I feel for communicating the absurdity of the character to the audience.

In comparison with the other costumes in the show, Mrs. Zero's seem to be the furthest from realism. It will probably be difficult for an audience to identify with my character or take her seriously. In fact, my own cast mates could barely keep it together. In Scene Five, my entrance nearly caused Maury to break character. Of the three costumes I wear, the black veil used in the jail scene is the most literal manifestation of the fly metaphor. He wasn't expecting to see a giant housefly walking toward him and did his best not to laugh. However, when we arrived at the part of the scene where Mrs. Zero comes on to her husband, we both had to laugh.

The larger than life costumes were a happy challenge during Scene Three. Putting on the giant hat and bow, taking off the apron and bringing on the boxes of chocolates and cigars turned into quite the juggling act, which is great. It helps build Mrs. Zero's frustration which she can then take out on her husband.

We added a perfunctory kiss to the cheek at the end of Scene One which has got some laughs and Scene Five has our designers laughing pretty consistently. The new final moment in Scene Three received a big laugh as well. I forget Mrs. Zero is a big source of comedy. Sometimes, when I'm trying to find the heart of the character, I lose the humor.

Scene One has been feeling better and better. Some moments are more connected than

others. The movie section has really been working well. We had originally blocked it with me climbing onto the table but we cut that along with the larger movements. Instead, I remain seated. I find that having rehearsed it that way for so long has helped me keep my stakes up. The sense of rising and climbing has been built in, so when we dropped them, the stakes inherent in such dramatic movements carry over into my performance. The further I go with the expressionistic style of the piece, the more freedom I'm finding. I can't believe we only have two more runs before we open. I wish we had more time.

Wednesday, November 9, 2011

We didn't receive our notes until just before tonight's run, so I tried to make the adjustments suggested as best I could. According to the notes, Scene One is finally working, except of course for the window section. Now, I'm taking too long to start my lines. I picked up the cue tonight, but it didn't feel quite right. Honestly, I have no idea what will work at this point. Tomorrow is our last run, so I hope I can make it work.

I was surprised by a note we received from Estéban in Scene Five. The note said the blocking seemed to be stagnant in the middle of the scene and that we should try something new. This hadn't been a problem before but I suppose we've not worked this scene as consistently as the others. It's always difficult when you feel secure in a scene and suddenly the director decides it's not working. I didn't feel the need to cross tonight but went ahead and tried a cross anyway. I wish I'd received the notes earlier; I might have been able to come up with a better solution. I'm not sure how it looked but usually crossing for crossing's sake never reads very well.

I was given a line reading for Scene Three. When I list the couples, I should increase emphasis, crescendoing until I reach the Sixes. I had laid in very specific given circumstances for each of the couples. In realism as long as I deliver the line organically it is effective; I had

developed these “backstories” offstage and left them there and to be delivered naturally. I hadn't been thinking about this type of delivery.

This is a good example of how realistic preparation needs to blend with the expressionistic style of performance. I need to alter the details I've created for each couple in order to deliver the line in a more stylistic way. I had already made Mr. and Mrs. Six the most important. So now it's just a matter of reducing the importance or the emphasis of some of the other couples.

Tomorrow is our last run-thru. At this point, the performance is going to be what it is. I think I've made good choices and I have to trust that whatever realistic preparation I've done will shine through the larger-than-life choices we've been making. In fact, I have faith that the naturalistic inner-life I've created should enhance the theatrical choices we've made.

Thursday, November 10, 2011

I received the notes from yesterday's run and the window section is still not working. Now I'm starting my lines too early. Estéban wants me to wait until Zero crosses to the window, which is what we were doing before. Tonight, I decided to blend the two. I tried getting up shortly after he awoke and silently watching him cross to the window. When he stopped to look out the window, I started my lines. I don't know if this is what the director wants this moment to look like, but at this point, I think we're all going to have to live with whatever we've got. I feel what I did today works. It makes sense that she'd enjoy watching him suffer a bit. We'll see what he says.

I'd spoken with him about the cross during Scene Five and he said it just needed to be something subtle. According to his notes, Scene Five went horribly wrong yesterday. I think tonight went better. Maury and I picked up cues; I made sure I wasn't playing the end of the

scene at the beginning and was careful to open up to the audience. I think what happened is that I became too comfortable in the scene. It's funny how the scene that was the easiest at the beginning is now the trouble spot at the end.

Tomorrow is opening night! I feel good about it. I think the balance between realism and expressionism is there. The choices I've made are based on both ideals. It will be interesting to see how it is received by an audience.

V. Performance

Friday, November 11, 2011

Warming-up has been a huge part of my preparation for this play. To make it through that opening monologue, my articulation and breath support have had to be in good shape. So getting in a good warm-up beforehand has been essential. I make sure to stand at the downstage end of the stage and over articulate any lines that give me trouble.

The Alexander Technique is always a big part of my work just before performance. I say my directions, "I want to allow my neck to be free, my head to move forward and up, my back to lengthen and widen and my knees to move forward and away," in order to come to a neutral place internally. Once I feel that ease, I begin to drop-in my given circumstances and the moments before. For instance in Scene One, I recall the hours spent cleaning and cooking. I've dropped in specific details such as scraping dried food off a pan, or unclogging a drain full of soggy bread with my bare hands. I use memories or imagine things that elicit a visceral response. Then I combine it with the important circumstances in the play, such as the fact that tonight is the eve of Zero's 25th anniversary on the job.

It's been difficult to be incredibly specific about the "moment before" at the beginning of the scene. It isn't an event or anything truly concrete. I go through an inner-monologue that will

propel me into the actual one. I imagine she'd been talking for a good, long while. I'm not entirely sure what started it or if it's really important. I imagine it to be a conversation she's had with Mrs. Eleven about how she'd been to the movies. Then I begin to talk about the movies I'd like to see and eventually, the movies I don't want to see, the Westerns.

I was unprepared for the audience reactions. I didn't realize how funny they'd find Scene One. It threw me off a bit and I dropped a section, which threw off the choreography between Maury and me. I'll have to fix that tomorrow night.

My moment-before work for Scene Three is much easier. I feel as though the catalyst is more concrete and easily accessible. In my imagination work, Mrs. Zero has made Mr. Zero's favorite meal which is now cold because he's come home late. She has a sinking feeling that he did not receive a raise and her guests will be arriving at any moment. These given circumstances in addition to connecting in my own way to Mrs. Zero's desire for success propel me into the scene. Again, I was surprised at how funny the audience found Mrs. Zero, most especially when she puts on the giant bow and feathered hat.

Connecting to Scene Five's moment-before work has been working well. Mixing a longing for romance with a deep-seated disdain for her husband always seems to produce effective moments on stage. Since Scenes Three and Five have slight touches of realism, finding effective catalysts within myself is easier. I've found that my need for appreciation is the easiest gateway into her heart. I think of tiny personal details I associate with that sensation and mix it with the specific elements of the scene. Spending those moments offstage, immersing myself in these imaginary circumstances provides a good foothold when I walk into her world.

All of this worked reasonably well tonight, even though the audience reaction really threw me. Now that I have a good idea of what to expect, I'll be able to use it rather than allow it

to trip me up. Of course no audience is the same and I'll always be adjusting but now I have a good idea of where the laughs will be and I can start to find a rhythm in performance.

November 12, 2011

I received some good feedback from yesterday's show which is always encouraging. Tonight, I really wanted to give in to the motion of the scenes and I think I achieved that. It's difficult for me to let go of monitoring my performance. So tonight I came in, did pre-show warm-ups and that was as far as I allowed myself to be concerned with my work. This may seem odd but sometimes I think I care too much. I worry so much about creating a perfect performance that I erase the ease in my work. Tonight's show was not perfect but I'm certain good things were happening on stage.

November 13, 2011

The first Sunday matinees are always tough. Energy is always low because you've been doing the show for more than a week straight and it's the middle of the day. Warm-ups were especially important today. Getting through that first monologue takes some endurance and if I'm not fully energized, I start to peter out towards the end. Offstage before the show is spent shaking out and jumping up and down, almost as if I was about to start a race. I do this in addition to taking the time to live with what my character is living with before the show begins. But in this case the energy takes precedence.

Mrs. Zero's physical movements in the beginning moments of the show are seemingly lethargic, controlled and weighed-down. Instead of giving into this sluggish movement and working from a place of exhaustion, I work against it. If I give in to the lethargy of her circumstances both emotionally and physically, it becomes difficult to manifest that energy mid-scene and feels as though she has nothing to fight for.

The disintegration of this facade has been meticulously choreographed so making the process feel and appear organic has been difficult. Walking onstage with explosive energy and inner-life while trying to contain it with stylized movement has been key. It is as if a dam has sprung a leak, the tiny hole gushes a small amount of water but as the pressure builds, the hole becomes a crack, which leads to more cracks and finally an explosion. Today's run went well but I'm looking forward to a break. Rest will help replenish my energy.

November 15, 2011

Tonight we had a pick-up rehearsal. We did a speed-thru of the play. To be honest, I rarely find these to be useful. Tonight's was useful for one reason. It solidified my confidence in my lines. I was able to go through the lines in my Scene One monologue without much thought about what came next. Since learning the lines, not a day's gone by that I don't run the speech a few times throughout the day. Yesterday I gave myself the day off. It is good to know I've drilled the lines and understand the triggers so well, that they are now second-nature. I can perform the monologue with more freedom, which means I can go further with connection through stylization.

November 16, 2011

I had my first confirmation that the realistic connection work I've done is working. Up to this point, I knew my character work was working on a comedic level. However, I wasn't sure I had been successful in my attempt to make Mrs. Zero any more than what she was originally intended to be, a mere projection of a nagging wife. I had wanted the audience to believe she was living breathing woman, someone they could identify with and perhaps even find sympathetic.

Maury told me his wife, Bethany, had enjoyed my performance. She said she understood how Mrs. Zero feels and thought it was an honest representation of a woman in that position. For

me, this is the greatest type of feedback and it feels good to know that I'm affecting the audience on more than a superficial level.

In my personalization of the role, I thought of moments in which I'd felt lonely and when I finally had someone to talk to, would rattle-away the most inane thoughts just to be heard and feel a connection. In realistic preparation, this is the most essential of steps, to find a genuine connection to your character. I'm glad that element has not been lost in the expressionism of the piece.

In this last week of performance, I want to continue bringing myself to the work. I want to personalize offstage and live fully in the world of the play when on stage. I think that's the key. If I continue to deepen my connection to Mrs. Zero, I really feel as though I will have succeeded in making her a three-dimensional character rather than the two-dimensional projection she was meant to be.

November 17, 2011

Today has been a long day. I was definitely drained walking into performance. We'd been taking part in a workshop with Moisés Kaufman all day. Again, energizing at the top of the show became my concern. Also, I think I had a little too much confidence in my grip of the lines. I dropped some lines yesterday and even became tongue-tied. I focused on warming-up vocally, especially my articulators. For a little, extra confidence I speeded-thru the entirety of Scene One during warm-ups. This play has certainly pushed my vocal endurance and I've had to be diligent about maintaining my instrument. There is nothing more frustrating than losing lines because I couldn't sustain breath or had sloppy diction.

The more we do the show, the more I am able to connect and live through the expressionistic style. Despite a few minor mistakes yesterday's show was a good one and I feel

like today went just as well. I have three more shows to play with and what I'd most like to do is find ease in performance.

November 18, 2011

Moisés Kaufman came to see the show today. He'd told Estéban if he was able to, he would stay for the first two scenes. I would have rather gone about the show thinking he was unable to come, but unfortunately I was told that he had indeed shown up. I tried not to think about the famous director and playwright sitting in the back row and concentrated on continuing to find ease. It actually wasn't too difficult. I remember the beginning was a bit strained but then I forgot about it and rolled with the scene. I had fun.

Mrs. Zero is truly one of the most fun characters I've ever had the chance to play. Yes, she is a sad, disgruntled woman and living with that anger and frustration is difficult. Despite that, when I'm onstage plucking my mustache, dressed as a house-fly and talking incessantly, I have fun.

I have two more performances and I'm fighting the urge to make these last two shows "perfect". Usually, that's what I would preoccupy myself with. It is my initial inclination but I intend to work against it as I go in to our final weekend of performance.

November 19, 2011

I focused on connection during tonight's performance, most especially in Scene Five where I feel Mrs. Zero arrives at a whole new outlook. In those last moments, she is finally able to break free from her usual submission to the role of wife. In order to live fully in these circumstances, I have to own what she's going through. I think the personalization work I've been doing up to now has been successful but I wanted to push it just a bit further.

The result was not a good one. It put me back in my head, which was frustrating. Rather

than focusing on the moment before, I turned my attention to my stakes. At least now I know that was a mistake. Stakes are important and need to be built into inner life but focusing on that before my entrance was not effective. The scene didn't go horribly wrong. Most likely, the only person aware of the lack of connection was probably Maury. I'm just disappointed with myself for dropping the ball. I got greedy. For the last performance, I will go back to focusing on my moment before work since that's what has been working.

November 20, 2011

We closed the show today. I'm sorry it's over. It was a good last show. My goal had been to stay true to what I've been doing. I didn't want to push. I wanted to live freely and have fun this last time through. I was definitely successful in having fun on stage but I did feel my monitor switch on a bit in Scene Five. Ultimately, I had a good time on stage. It wasn't a perfect performance but that's ok. Who knows what "perfect" is anyway? I don't, and shouldn't be thinking about it when I'm on stage. This whole process has really been a lesson in trusting my instincts and pushing the boundaries of what I feel I'm capable of as an actor. Today, I feel as though I achieved that.

During the second act, I watched from the booth and thought about how far we'd come as a company. This is such a strange little play and so different from what we are used to doing. I'm so accustomed to working within the context of realism. I've done other stylized shows at the University. Molière's *The Learned Ladies* as well as Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia* were period pieces which required me to learn different qualities of movement. However, *The Adding Machine* was not the same. In period pieces, the movement is formalized and yet natural. It is easily connected to the characters and accentuates their inner life. In *The Adding Machine*, many times the two remained separate, one working independently of the other. I think I was successful at juggling

the two when I needed to. I wish I had had more time to explore it but ultimately, I'm happy with the balance I was able to achieve.

VI. Post-performance Observation

It's been about a week since we closed the show. I've received feedback from a number of people, a few of whom echoed Bethany's earlier comments about being able to identify with Mrs. Zero and even sympathize. Conversely, Bob Hart, a fellow graduate student shared a comment made by one of his students. His student said my voice drove him crazy and that he absolutely hated my character. After the show had closed, Estéban shared some feedback he'd received from Moisés Kaufman, regarding the stylization in Scene One. Essentially, he felt as though we could have gone farther with her movements and made them more exaggerated. Hearing that last comment stung a bit, since we'd initially planned to go further but had chosen to play it safe.

All in all, I was glad to hear both the negative and the positive feedback. I'd love for each audience member to see, understand and agree with every single choice we made. Realistically, appeasing and impressing every audience member is impossible. When it comes down to it, I made the choices I made for the character and sometimes they worked and sometimes they didn't, depending on the person watching. There's not much I can do about it. If *The Adding Machine* teaches us anything, it is that in the grand scheme of things, we are powerless.

Over my three years at the University of Arkansas, I've played some unsavory, even villainous characters. (Abigail Williams in the *The Crucible*, Armande in *The Learned Ladies*) I've always felt the responsibility to make them likeable. I have little power over what the audience or even director will take away from my performance. I can do my best to transform Mrs. Zero into a sympathetic three-dimensional character behind the scenes. I can create all sorts of backstories and specific imaginary details but it is only the subjective response of each

audience member that defines who she is and I have no power over that. My objective in the scene cannot be to change the way the audience feels about my character. It must be about my scene partner.

I think of it in terms of a painter and the painting. When I'm onstage, I am the painting and offstage I am the painter. Offstage, I can decide what colors to use and how to use them but once I've done my work and display it, I have no control over how the public will react. The artist has to give into interpretation. Playing Mrs. Zero has helped me accept this fact. I realize the more I accept it, the more relevant my work will become.

Looking back, there are moments I wish I could play over but I'm happy with the character I brought to life. Bridging the gap between me and Mrs. Zero was difficult. Her circumstances were so different from my own. It took much self-reflection and imagination, especially because the world of the play deviated so drastically from this one. My realistic process seemed to be negated by the expressionism of *The Adding Machine*, but it was not. I learned the movements and style necessary to emphatically express and comment on the outside forces at play. Since those movements did not coincide with my inner life, it became essential that I understand my character on a visceral level. Through repetition and the planting of specific triggers, I was able to bring my heart to the most unnatural of movements. What was unnatural eventually became organic. It was not always perfect but it was successful.

VII. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Brief Encounters. Dir. David Lean. Perf. Celia Johnson, Trevor Howard. CineGuild, 1945. Streamed Online.

Metropolis. Dir. Fritz Lang. Perf. Alfred Abel and Bridget Helm. UFA, 1926. DVD.

Munch, Edvard. *The Scream*. 1893. National Oslo Gallery. *WebMuseum: Munch, Edvard*. Web. 22 Sept. 2011. <<http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/munch/>>.

"Peter Stuyvesant Biography." *Bio.com*. A&E Networks Television. Web. 16 Oct. 2011. <<http://www.biography.com/people/peter-stuyvesant-9498392>>.

Rice, Elmer. "Foreward by Phillip Moeller." *The Adding Machine: A Play in Seven Scenes*. New York, Hollywood, Calif.: S. French, 1956. Print.

Rice, Elmer. *The Adding Machine: A Play in Seven Scenes*. New York, Hollywood, Calif.: S. French, 1956. Print.

Rice, Elmer. "The Adding Machine, Scene V." *Three Plays*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1965. Print.

"Strand Theatre." *Strand Theatre in New York, NY*. Web. 16 Oct. 2011. <<http://cinematreasures.org/theaters/2975>>.