

Oran Sandel – 5/28/03

I talked last time about relating the actor's process, which is what I come from, to this process that we're looking at now. What are the correlations, what can we use from it and what, maybe, has no place.

What I want to do today is track the history of my association with Vikee and the exploration of creating the beginning of a new way to craft plays for visual theatre. Within that, this thing we just talked about of doing something out of obligation and holding back on your first impulse and having fear and conditioning close the gate of your genius. This is a central theme and it runs all through what I want to talk to you about. Last week when I presented at nine o'clock I wondered in that piece I wrote whether we should be coming here with scripts that already written. I put out the possibility of, the next time we do this, starting with an idea for a story. A story that wants to be told...I've been rethinking this. Because there has been a process of learning, discovery, and growth.

The hand-shape story came up four times in Vikee's script which was puzzling. Then we came to realize that Vikee struggles with this form personally, but loves seeing people who do it well. So, perhaps in the future, we will go to these mystery barriers first. It turns out that...I'll let Vikee explain this in her own words. Why, in your life, your coming to ASL and your schooling and being from a hearing family, there was something in your life that needed to find its way into the play.

Vikee:

When I think I feel like...I was born hearing and became deaf later. So I didn't understand either world 100%. This idea of finding a password through hand-shapes. That idea of hand-shape story, it didn't follow the letter. It is pure Deaf Culture.

Oran:

And the story that comes from the hand-shapes might not be a literal story. It's images, it's visual. So we're talking about...(Visual demonstration of PASSWORD). The point being, the hand-shape is what leads to the next hand-shape, and it is a visual conceptual, much more ASL thing. So there is a parallel here of Vikee's life to her Deaf identity as is symbolized by the hand-shape story. Perhaps the central characters...if he's presented with the challenge of understanding that and coming to grips with his own identity as a Deaf teenager, from the time that he is first presented the challenge to is "Ah hah" moment, that's our central little progression. So there are many ways he struggles back and forth on his way to that. That's the central goal progression of the characters emotional, spiritual and intellectual growth...his life. Then there is also the symbolic, which is very simple. This boy needs to find his way through the computer, to find a chat room and move his way through a chat room. He's actually being tried because he made the queen and he wants to delete him, right? Once he gets the password, he wakes up, because it has all been a dream. All of this also parallels *Alice in Wonderland*. So we have three story lines happening simultaneous.

How do we tell a story like this? Remember last week, at the end of that roll out game where people would see an activity and it would suggest a different activity and someone would step in, right? After that was finished I talked about three key ingredients, Who, What and Where. We have to play with those ingredients in a different way now because we've already talked a lot about who...Who is Alex? Alex is a thirteen year old and he does have all those characteristics of a thirteen year old. Am I an adult, am I a child. Struggles with his sister, struggles with his parents. But, Alex is also a Deaf teenager with hearing parents. Vikee's brother, her older brother, is hearing.

Vikee:

Younger brother.

Oran:

I'm sorry... Younger brother, who actually was her guide for the family. She made the choice for this story, to have an older sister, which is Alice, who is Deaf. So you have two deaf teenagers with hearing parents. That's part of the what. In visual theatre, the where becomes a playground. We can do anything we want to with the where. I have a surprise for Vikee when we start working at 10:30am because we have made some of the where for her to play with so she can look at some of the scenes. One of the things we are playing with is showing the where of Alex's real house where his parents are, and they eat dinner, and where his bedroom is, and where his sister watches her soap operas. We have chosen to make that reality projected onto a video screen. The only live action we ever see is inside the computer. For that we have images like...oh, I didn't print it. She made a circuit board in a Word document which has the circuit board in color.

Vikee:

Oh, Willy showed it yesterday.

Annie:

Oh...that was the circuit board.

Oran:

And in a production, I would put a plexi-glass floor down and put rope lights down under it and, in that way, as each scene changes, you can change the program so that a different circuit appears. That kind of thing. And we play a lot with lights. Light becomes a very important part of this. We're not inventing this from scratch...because all of these elements existed in Vikee's mind. The challenge becomes a production issue, so I've had to wear two hats. You have to balance the lights so you can see who is in the black lights, but have it be dim enough to cause the black lights to do their job. Now the trick in doing this is how you set all of this up as an exploration that the playwright can keep working with as opposed to a final end result, which is a production process. It has to remain fluid so it is process oriented. These are tools for development, not an end result. All of us work off of that, it's gotta be finished...ready for Friday, mentality. But if we go there then we lose two more days of exploration because we are working towards a product. I'm hoping that this scene can become a prototype way of working for the rest of the play for when she goes back to California and can continue playing in this way. I

want to show us, all of us, go back to that page where you were at before. Actually it was Tim who first saw this and said, “there’s your script” and Vikee started to cry. She said, this validates everything I have done my whole life creatively, but I was always told, wrong wrong wrong wrong wrong. This is a very dynamic process that is growing as we speak and that is very exciting. There is historical precedence for this. Leonardo Da Vinci. He wrote backwards. His mother and father were not married so he was not permitted to go to school. HE taught himself to read and write, but he was left-handed so he wrote from right to left across his body and it was a mirror image. If you can read Italian you have to put this up to a mirror to read it. Lots of parallels here. Ubu Roi, King Ubu...Alfred Jarry. I bring this up because there is historical precedence.

Vikee:

I have a question. I haven’t gone for any classes or courses or anything, so where did I get that idea.

Oran:

I don’t know. They say that great ideas happen simultaneously all over the world because there is this thing called the collective unconscious.

Vikee:

It was like yesterday, and we were talking about sign writing and it was all on the same plane.

Oran:

I think maybe the most important point with Leonardo, because he was not formally educated. He read voraciously. He probably had one of the most complete libraries of Renaissance Italy that he, himself, had collected. He read constantly, he had knowledge, but it hadn’t been presented with science separate from art. Or...drawing, separate from nature. They were all the same thing to him so that one thought could speak to the other without a wall between the thoughts. I know there were things being taught to me in my geometry class in ninth grade that I actually could be using now. Those things could be a part of my life had they been integrated into my life.

Vikee:

I remember now, geometry class. I would get the problem and then have the answer but I couldn’t figure out how I got to the answer. But I had the answer.

Oran:

Same thing happened to Albert Einstein, because he was a genius in those processes, he could see his way right through to the answer, and he was not able to do it the step by step way they were trying to teach him, he failed in school. At the very thing he became a world pioneer in, because he thought non-linearly...without those restrictions. I think that’s what we’re talking about here. Pioneering a way past those restrictions of what is being taught as theatre and what is being presented as produced, professional theatre which takes us all the way back to the first day when Tim was saying what he is dissatisfied with in regional theatre. The fact that it has become so narrowly focused.

Without wasting a lot of our energy...we still have to look at the environment to understand what we are presenting an alternative to. Just to be clear what we have come from so we know what will restrict us in our own consciousness. Finding the key, as an artist, that releases me from that, without hurting myself. That's very hard for me because injustice bothers me a lot. I constantly have to stop myself from being angry and get on with the business of doing it a new way, ya know. And knowing that you are Leonardo Da Vinci's, you are the pioneers of this new way. I think we all have to give ourselves credit, that the work that we're doing is cutting edge.

Annie:

Part of history.

Oran:

Yep. Now lets talk, because Annie's gotta go get her hearing aids fixed. So that's a lot. Response, feedback, dialogue?

Annie:

Your process, what's the word, putting down pictures and images. Mine is very word based, but I still want that non-linear aspect.

Vikee:

I write like I went through geometry, I have the question and the answer, but not the middle. It's just something internal. I've been on a personal quest for thirty years of analyzing, etc. You'll get there, you will.

Oran:

I want to be sure to emphasize that language is still a beautiful thing. There's nothing wrong with finding poetry in language. It is perfectly doable, feasible, we can take beautiful language and make it visual. Witness what Mark Jaster did. This is not the exclusion of wordy plays, at all.

Willy:

I agree I think it is very important because there is so little language from a deaf point of view, I think it is important to see that there are linear and non-linear ways of developing scripts, Aristotelian and non-Aristotelian ways. Both have their ways in theatre.

Give yourself permission. Where you feel comfortable. What you're used to. For me it is conceptual. It helps me come up with stuff faster.

Annie:

You might have drawing. I have videotape. I use videotape the most....I need to see it.

Vikee:

I haven't touched the videotape. That process is new to me. I have to catch up. I'm still, old school.

Annie:

Videotape, analyzing and improv. I'm not sure how to put it into moves, it is an interesting process.

Oran:

What are you doing with Eric?

Annie:

We've been focusing on. Last week we started with a concept of a play, a woman speaking with an arrogant stage manager and an incompetent stage manager. Where they start, where they end and what happens in the development. We were developing the linear parts. Then we're looking at the emotional representation...the abstract presentation through tableau's and lights. That's been our journey. Really, all play. And yesterday we had a new idea, and now we added three others to show the emotional tenor of the scene.

Oran:

That's great. Is the sharing of this process useful to you at all other than general information that you can put in the pot? Is any of this useable...do you see it being able to transfer over?

Annie:

I think so. I might have to explore why I wrote the script...my inner connection to the script. You're talking about your life story. I need to figure out what my initial motivation is for the script.

Willy:

You mentioned that each of your characters goes through a journey, have you visually mapped out that journey?

Annie:

Yea, we talked about three levels of emotion and where they go.

Vikee:

So your recurrent theme is pride.

Annie:

I sort of felt that I didn't know what deaf people were. Then I came her and I realized there was another way to be deaf. I experienced pride in being deaf when I came here.

Oran:

One of the things we used to do all the time in my company was flashbacks, since you're talking about insights into how each of the characters. How they got to be who they are. THE flashback is often a helpful tool in doing that. We used to do it improvisationally, so if I were talking to you as the father, for instance. I could through a transformation, same character...much younger. So that I realize something about myself, or there is

something that my son shows me that makes me realize something about myself. One of the things we realize when experiencing our lives, we don't reflect on our actions and we live in a country that does not reflect on its actions. We go make a mess in the world and just leave it there. We do it over and over again, so that dynamic is reflected in our own personal lives. Causality is a very big thing I like to play with in theatre. How did this come to be? What are the factors that brought it into being? Flashback is a very important instrument.

Willy:

So if I'm reading you correctly, it's your back-story. What Jane was talking about what happened before the curtain goes up.

Oran:

Right, right. Which can be shown once the curtain goes up, but in ritualistic non-linear ways. In dreams.

Annie:

I just realized that stuff with my upbringing...ohhhh. The parallel to the story.

Vikee:

One things I know about writing, whether they know it or not, has something in that.

Oran:

I'm still frustrated because I need to know Jane's comments on back-story. I need to be at all the sessions, watching everyone's work in order to know the whole of what everyone is doing. I know that's impossible, but that's what I need in order to integrate all of the different work that is going on to the most efficient use of the time that I have here. And I'll tell you the truth, I haven't had time to read all the attachments that Elana has sent me, let alone to be here for all of the sessions. So, here's the deal...next time we do this, we're all here all the time.

Willy:

We have to ask Tim if we can pay you more to be here.

Oran:

Your point being? I'm just kidding.

Vikee:

What's the common thread here?

Willy:

You're presenting something from a deaf point of view.

Oran:

I think some of this will emerge in reflection long after this is over. I think all of the so-called experts are presenting the same material in varied ways. I don't see any contradictions in what we're presenting.

Vikee:

Another thought...how would three writers look at the same idea? Like *Romeo and Juliet*, ok we have that concept, now how would we look at it, how would we choose what we choose. That would be interesting. Could find a common thread there too.

Oran:

Yea. Three treatments of the same story.

Thank you.

(END OF SESSION)