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Une Salade

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Bard College

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UNE SALADE

A Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Arts of Bard College

by

Cora Katz

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
May 2018

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I. WHO THOUGHT THIS WAS A GOOD IDEA? (Original Plan/Role Division)

From the beginning, Catherine and I suffered from having a vast number of ideas, and no plan on how to whittle them down into a realistic project. In all honesty, for the most part, Catherine's brain was running about a hundred miles a minute, and I was happy to just go along for the ride. Creating our proposal was made especially difficult because I was studying abroad in London for the semester. I felt completely removed from the process, frustrated that I was unable to discuss my senior project with Catherine in person, or with anyone else that was planning their own. There was so much going on with me in London, as well, that I essentially shut down and decided to just let the project become whatever it was. This was an issue I frequently run into; if I'm unhappy with how something is going, I decide to not care about it. This was made easy for me with the proposal because I didn't even have to deal with it in person. As a result, our initial senior project proposal ended up being an idea that was a jumbled mish-mash of Catherine's desire for sketch comedy, and my desire for dark, politically charged theater.

What is most shocking to me is not the proposal itself, but our concept of role division. In my first proposal draft, I wrote that we were "both planning to act as writers, directors, and performers in this process." This is clearly both insane and impossible. My advisor at the time, Miriam Felton-Dansky, quickly stepped in with concern, and we revised our plan: Catherine and I would write the script and perform in the piece, but we would bring on a junior director, Imogen Thomas. This was a brilliant decision that I have to give Catherine full credit for. I had

never worked with Imogen as a director before, and I had no idea if it would work, but now I can say we could not have made a better choice.

Fast forward to May: our proposal was accepted, but our project advisor, Jorge Cortiñas, had many (justified) concerns. At the time, it felt like a constant battle, with Catherine and I trying desperately to cram in everything we'd ever wanted to do in a piece into twenty-five minutes. I felt like I was always failing, that I would bring in a new concept for Jorge and he would immediately give us back a list of issues with it. I didn't know what to do, but I didn't want to tear down everything we had already started building. So, at first, we didn't.

Catherine and I wrote draft after draft, sometime scrapping a new idea after only one page. At first, we wanted to focus on *Guys and Dolls*, a musical that both of us had been involved in in high school and which held many memories of us discovering our sexualities. It seemed perfect. We could write a farce about our past as musical theater geeks, and at the same time create a work that discussed the deep challenges of living as queer women. The only issue was, we still had so many different things we wanted to say, some of which clashed, and I was too afraid to cause any conflict, so I stayed silent. This proved to be disastrous in our meetings with Jorge. In one email to us, he even wrote, "the most pressing task is to figure out what your piece is about — and not having yet deciphered this means we are behind." This was bad. This was not the news I wanted to hear. Something needed to change drastically.

In the midst of all this, we had already completed our first auditions for the project. Fortunately, we hadn't gotten to callbacks yet. It was at one fateful meeting when we sat down with Jorge, having just sent him a new draft of our script (I believe we had written this over the course of one day, perhaps two). He finally told us what we need to hear: the script was bad.

Really bad. Somewhere deep down, I think we already knew that. We had been making huge revisions, writing entire scripts in a few hours. It was a mess. He presented us with a new idea: have somebody else take care of the playwriting, and focus on what we really wanted from the project. I'm primarily an actor, and though I love to write, I knew it wasn't going to be possible within the timeframe we had. I wasn't willing to give up performing in the piece, so I readily agreed. Jorge provided us with a list of playwrights and script titles that he felt aligned with our goals, and there was one title I instantly latched onto. It was a play by Sheila Callaghan, titled *Women Laughing Alone with Salad*. I didn't even need to read it (but I did. And I loved it).

This was where the contention between Catherine and I was revealed, and we were able to use Jorge as a mediator between our conflicting desires. It was important for Catherine to explore comedy and the experience of being a queer woman. At this point, I was comfortable explaining that I did not share her goals. I was happy to create a comedic piece, but I wasn't as thrilled with the explicit focus on queer issues. As a queer woman, those issues are central to my life, but it just wasn't a topic I felt strongly about putting into our senior project. I shared with Catherine and Jorge that I was more interested in the struggle of existing in a female body in a patriarchal society. We grappled a bit, but later agreed to use the text as our source, and incorporate some of our individual interests into it. The play itself is centered on three women: Meredith, Tori, and Sandy. Because the play had a lot of scenes that lent themselves to being presented nonlinearly, it was easy for us to pick and choose a few scenes that would fit together and hopefully create a coherent feminist perspective. I felt a wave of relief. This was finally starting to feel right.

We chose a selection of scenes from the first act. These included a dance sequence where Meredith, Sandy, and Tori joyously eat salad, two bar scenes between Meredith and Guy, where they flirt and fight, a scene in traffic where Sandy's uterus falls out, a scene set in an office where two men (Bruce and Joe) masturbate and discuss women's insecurities, and a final scene in the changing room of a clothing store, where Meredith, Sandy, and Tori all viciously insult each other, ending in a choreographed fight. At first, the scene selection was the only way we would alter the script.

II. BOYS ARE GROSS (The Role of the Man)

Once we had decided on our text, we were able to hold our callbacks and make final casting decisions, which ended up being wonderfully easy. We chose to cast Francesca Keller and Seth Barrett. Franny was cast because of her undeniably strong stage presence, and her ability to unleash the rage we needed for her character (as well as showing us some truly captivating dance skills). Seth was cast because he was the only one who really captured the straight, college-bro tone that we were looking for. We actually didn't think that much about who we cast as the man, because at first, we only needed him to do a voiceover recording- he wouldn't even be in the actual piece. There was one concept from an earlier idea we had that we desperately wanted to keep, which was to have the only male character in the show be played by a cardboard cutout of Zac Efron. This was an ingenious idea that Catherine had randomly come up with during one of our meetings, and it felt natural to incorporate it into our new script.

We both felt strongly about incorporating it into *UNE SALADE*, not only because it has great comedic value, but also because it held symbolic power. Catherine and I both felt that we

were sick of seeing women used as props onstage, and it was time to turn the tables. We wanted the audience to automatically understand that the man in this piece was interchangeable with any of the horrible, sexist men that we interact with on an almost daily basis. It fit in perfectly with the text, as the character is named “Guy,” while all of the other characters have more individualized names. This is because Guy is a placeholder for an amalgamation of male stereotypes, while every other character is a representation of a more specific gender convention.

Having a male actor in the piece was something we wrestled with, as it became more and more clear that simply having a cutout onstage wasn’t working, mainly for practical reasons. How would we have Guy’s lines play over the speakers while we had music playing at the same time? How were we even going to find a recording booth? Who was going to move the cardboard cutout across the stage? We ran into problem after problem, and although we knew these could be solved, it started to feel like we were under-utilizing a great actor that we had at our disposal. We decided to try having Seth speak the lines live, with his voice being projected from an offstage microphone. This was what we ended up doing at our December showing of our project, and we noticed that the dynamic of having the audience be able to see the actor behind the cutout could actually be compelling.

After much discussion, we came up with a new plan that would allow us to simplify our technical needs, while also giving Seth the opportunity to perform and become a real part of our cast. The final decision was to have Seth be the operator of the cutout, and to have his body be shown behind Zac’s. We found that this deepened the point we were trying to make by demonstrating that maybe there could be a real person behind all of the terrible stereotypes that many straight men have become, but the female characters interacting with him just can’t see it.

III. THIS IS TOO MUCH WORK (The Rehearsal Process)

Our rehearsal process vastly changed after our December showing. Prior to that, we rehearsed about 2-3 times per week, and rehearsals were often informal and a bit disorganized. We would frequently rehearse in the lobby of the Fisher Center or in between classes, which didn't allow us to perform fully because we either needed to be quiet or rush to get anything accomplished. Because we were unsure of Seth's role in the show, we ended up barely rehearsing with him, and there was a palpable distance between us. Both Seth and Franny were being used more as props than collaborators, and I regret not taking full advantage of their talents earlier. I found myself growing frustrated with Franny at times, as she expressed confusion over her role.

Looking back, I was being hypocritical by expecting her to have a perfect understanding of her character, when I had no understanding of mine. I couldn't grasp who Meredith was at all, even though we talked about it many times. Early in the process we did a structured improv and I panicked. I had nothing to say. Because I didn't have a grasp on who my characters were, I wasn't able to give Franny an adequate explanation for who Tori was or what purpose she served. We didn't start having full cast rehearsals until the week before the showing. It was clear that we were extremely disjointed.

After the showing, we received important feedback, particularly from Jack Ferver, a professor with whom both Catherine and I have had many classes. He prompted us to consider what choices we were making that would cause the audience to lean out or lean in. Jack felt that the piece had great bones, but some of it wasn't saying anything new; there were moments where he felt we weren't presenting anything unexpected. This information really shook me. I realized I

had barely been considering the audience experience, which was an enormous flaw in my creation of the work. This was made especially apparent in the changing room scene. At that point, it was just a group of women insulting each other. We wanted to elevate the scene by ending it with a physical confrontation, but it was basic and uninteresting; Franny simply pushed me down and stood over me menacingly. It was comedic, yes, but we weren't communicating our intended social commentary.

Catherine and I came to the conclusion that we needed to find a fight choreographer for that scene (as well as the opening dance) if we wanted to really pack a punch (no pun intended). In addition to that, there was one element we were missing: blood. We knew this was what would allow us to actually show that we were satirizing stereotypical female behavior, and push it to the true extreme. It was perfect. It tied everything together. It let us do what we really wanted, which was to have women be completely, unabashedly disgusting onstage. Unfortunately, the semester was at its end, and we couldn't put it into action until the spring. The fall semester was essential in creating the foundation of *UNE SALADE*, but it wasn't until we returned from winter break that we began to truly dive in to the process.

IV. WHY IS THIS SO OUTDATED? (Adaptation)

Our character choices were constantly being revised and improved over the course of the three months that we rehearsed, and it wasn't until we came back in February that we had a firm grasp on who these characters were. This ended up being in conjunction with our adaptation of the text. One big change that we made at the beginning of the process was to separate the character Meredith into two characters: Joanna, for the bar scenes, and Meredith, for the

changing room scene. This was because we wanted to show more types of women in the piece, and because Catherine and I were both going to play Joanna, switching halfway through the scenes. We wanted to indicate the interchangeability of women in those situations, and we felt it would be too confusing to have us switch in the bar scenes, and then have only me playing the same character in the changing room.

Later in the semester, we came to the conclusion that something still wasn't right with the text. I believe it was Imogen who made note that the script we were using wasn't aligning with what we were trying to communicate. Near the end of the semester, he sat down with Catherine and I, and told us that we needed to hash out exactly what our goals were. It was at this meeting that we discovered two essential points: one, that what we were overall interested in was female autonomy, and two, that we needed to rewrite the script significantly in order to have it align with our own experiences. This was a major problem that, truthfully, we didn't have the time to completely fix. If given the opportunity to continue this project, I would still make some fairly significant script revisions. Although Sheila Callaghan wrote an incredible text, the draft we were using was written in 2013, and it's already quite dated. The language was not at all reflective of the language we used in our daily lives, and we needed to make it more youthful and current. This was also the moment when we were able to solidify the stereotypes that we wanted the characters to embody.

We cut out large chunks of the bar scene to make it snappier and more engaging. Dialogue about women in Paris in the 20s was replaced with Guy detailing his passion for Instagram photography (sadly, this is based on many real-life men that we've had to have conversations with). Instead of Guy saying he wants to "fuck [Joanna] face down in [her] bad

little place,”¹ a line we could never make sense of, he says that he’s going to “put [his cock] in [her ass] when [he’s] done with [her] mouth.”² A shocking line, to say the least, but important to us because it’s not so far removed from things that actual men have said to us.

One of the more significant changes that we made to the script was the addition of an entire scene. In December, our piece was running at about seventeen minutes, and we saw this as a fantastic opportunity to incorporate Seth and Franny more into the show, as well as doing a deeper exploration of some of the characters Catherine and I were playing. This also proved to be a great way to use Seth and Franny’s improvisational skills, as we decided to create the scene through structured devising (I have to give Imogen much of the credit for this idea. Thank you, Imogen!). In rehearsal, Catherine, Imogen, and I discussed what situations created the most tension between men and women. What we landed on was being in an Uber with a male driver, because it gives the driver power over the passenger and allows him to control the conversation.

We played around with using different pre-existing characters in that setting, and found that what was most entertaining was watching Guy and Tori exist in that space with Bruce being their driver, as well as watching Meredith be a lone passenger. It worked out perfectly, because these were all characters that didn’t get to be seen as frequently, and particularly with Meredith and Tori, characters that didn’t yet have any defining traits. Now, we had the opportunity to carve out exactly who these people were. During our devising, we decided to make Tori more vapid, and show the toxic relationship between her and Guy (she is frequently ignored and dismissed in the scene, and shamed for eating a hamburger). Meredith, on the other hand, was altered to be geeky and anxious, with secret sexual desires that obviously would only ever happen inside her

¹ Sheila Callaghan, “Women Laughing Alone with Salad,” p. 7.

² The script is attached, beginning on page 18, if needed as a reference.

own head. It was extremely fortunate that we had the ability to incorporate this scene in to the piece, because we were able to put something in that actually reflected our lives in a way that the other scenes did not, because they were written by somebody from a different generation. I was tasked with writing the scene (again, thank you Imogen, for pushing me to do this), and to my surprise, found that it felt natural to be creating a comedic text that fit in with the other text we already had. This was such a freeing moment for me as a creator, as I had always believed that my only skill as a playwright was in dramatic, hyper-realistic pieces, but I had just proved myself completely wrong. And there it was: the script was finished. Hallelujah.

V. LOOKING GORGEOUS (Technical Elements)

The technical elements of *UNE SALADE* came easily to us. This I mean in terms of conception, not execution. The execution was a nightmare (doing a complete costume change between every scene is not an enjoyable task).

We chose to keep our costuming fairly realistic to what the characters might wear. We did decide, however, to have each of the female characters wear wigs that were emblematic of their personalities: Tori's was long and blonde, Meredith's was black and homely, Sandy's was a gray pixie cut, and Joanna's was a fashion-forward red bob. The wigs were used as a way to differentiate the characters (as Catherine and I both play multiple roles), and to emphasize that we were portraying caricatures; these were not real people. Transparency was a theme throughout the visual design of the piece. The only set pieces on stage were three black chairs that would be used whenever needed, rather than any sort of elaborate backdrop. Whenever a prop was used in a scene, it would be left there, and the stage slowly filled up with various items.

In my own work, I'm fascinated by transparency onstage in a sort of Brechtian sense. All of our design choices were made to make it clear that this was a performance. The point is not to create a suspension of disbelief, but rather to make it obvious that it's a farce, and hopefully to draw attention to the dialogue and the meaning behind the performance.

VI. FEMINISM? (The Meaning Behind the Play)

(At this moment, I would like to provide a disclaimer: the issues discussed in this play are coming from my and Catherine's own white, upper/middle class, cisgender perspective. This was a decision made consciously, as we did not want to try to cram intersectional feminism in a 25-minute piece, and we did not want to speak for those whose issues we have only a superficial understanding of. In future productions, I would love to bring in more people with much more varied and interesting perspectives than my own. This was a huge limit in this process, and I feel it's important to acknowledge where this piece is lacking.)

Cathy informed me after one of our performances that there had been a girl in the audience who remarked that she disliked our piece because "women don't act like that." My first reaction to this was that, well, actually, we do. My second reaction was that this was not the point.

I struggled greatly with this piece because I had a sinking feeling, as I often do, that I'm accidentally making something grossly offensive. I worry that my work will be misread, or that I'm not intelligent enough to make a coherent point. When I heard about a few negative reactions to *UNE SALADE*, however, for the first time, I wasn't shaken by the critique. I knew I had created a work that aligned with my beliefs, and though it wasn't perfect, I trusted that we were

imparting an important message. I cannot control everyone's response to it, but given the overwhelming number of positive reactions I got, I am confident that the message was generally received as intended. I also came to the understanding that if every single audience member loved my work, I wasn't subverting anything. It no longer feels bad to me to be divisive. Callaghan puts it best herself: "If every single person is getting this joke, then it's not a very good joke."³

As previously mentioned, the central conceit of *UNE SALADE* is the struggle for feminine autonomy. This is a struggle that's rather difficult to capture onstage, as we are so entrenched in our patriarchal society that it's nearly impossible to imagine an existence without it. What we chose to show were a few snapshots of the world as we see it, in the form of satire. The women that we present are certainly not admirable, but they are exaggerated manifestations of very real gender roles. I understand the inclination to dislike a work that shows women at their worst, but our reason for doing this was to show the societal forces that have pushed women into those boxes. It's not always fun to see this presented in front of you. *UNE SALADE* was made to show that both men and women should be made aware of how they're pushing these roles. Callaghan's writing "blames all of us (not just men) for perpetuating the expectations that make the world so hard on women."⁴

The characters in this piece are all, in a way, the "woman laughing alone with salad." This woman is the feminine ideal, playing into exactly what your expectations are: she is thin, healthy, and ridiculously giddy about all of it. Tori, a skinny, bulimic yoga fanatic, is the closest parallel to the salad image itself, and the other women hate her for that. But Tori is just as jealous

³ Gelt, Jessica. "Sheila Callaghan Plays with Gender Identity in 'Women Laughing Alone With Salad'."

⁴ Gray, Margaret. "'Women Laughing Alone With Salad': A Playwright's Raucous Riff on Sexism and Body Shame."

of the others because they have what she lacks; Sandy is mature and powerful, Meredith is curvy and sweet, and Joanna is cool and sexy. In some way or another, all of these women are both achieving and failing at being the “ideal woman,” and can each serve as a representation, I think, of the conflicting desires of many women today. These women are all also pretty terrible, but I have thought all of the horrible words they say at least once in my life. These women are me. Both these characters and I, and many people, are trying to smash themselves into the miniscule box that society wants them to be placed in.

This is true, as well, for the male characters in the piece. We wanted to caricature the men in this piece the same way as the women. The character Guy is a representation of some of the men that Catherine, Imogen, and I have had romantic interactions with. He’s bold, and he thinks he’s much smoother and sexier than he actually is, yet he still manages to get women to sleep with him, simply because he holds social power over them. Most importantly, he treats women like dirt, but still believes that he’s a “good guy.” This is a problem that many men seem to have. Guy claims that even though he openly flirts with other women in front of his girlfriend, that “doesn’t mean [he doesn’t] respect her.”⁵ He does just enough to feel that he’s in the right, and holds himself at just the right distance so that he doesn’t have to confront his misogyny.

For this character, we chose to cast within traditional gender lines, because it felt like the best way to make an impact with the lines he was saying. I think it would have softened the effect to have Guy played by a woman, because it would have reduced the palpable tension and power that men have over women. This was one case where we wanted to show that particular dynamic, but it was the only character where we felt this was appropriate. If we had incorporated

⁵ Callaghan, Sheila. “Women Laughing Alone with Salad” p. 12.

more male-bodied actors into the piece, it would have diminished the power that we gave to Guy, so it didn't make sense. This didn't mean, however, that we weren't going to have any other male characters in the piece.

Our vision of creating a caricature of male gender expectations is further reflected in those other male characters in *UNE SALADE*, Bruce and Joe, whom Catherine and I played (respectively). The decision to have cross-gender casting for these characters was made partly because this is how it was performed in *Women Laughing Alone with Salad*, and for the practical reasoning that we didn't want to cast any more actors. Artistically, I feel that this was an important choice because placing women in the traditionally masculine role automatically draws attention to the ridiculousness of what we're saying. Although the scene is comedic regardless of who's in it, having men play those characters would be far less funny because it's too close to reality. This was probably my favorite scene in the entire piece, because it so clearly raises the question of "What does it really mean to be a 'man' or a 'woman?' What aspects of these identities are pure performance?"

Simone de Beauvoir wrote that "one is not born a woman, but, rather, becomes one."⁶ Our identities are not fixed. From the moment we are born, we're imposed with ideals of how we should behave based on our genitalia. This is so ingrained in Western society that it's near impossible to even separate what might be so-called natural inclinations, and what is being pushed onto us. This is a point that Judith Butler analyzes in response Beauvoir's ideas: the reason that one "becomes" a woman is not entirely born out of conscious choice. There is a strong "cultural compulsion to become one."⁷ One is not likely aware of the gender roles that

⁶ De Beauvoir, Simone. Parshley, E.M., translator. *The Second Sex*, p. 301.

⁷ Butler, Judith. "Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire." *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, p. 8.

they are playing into as they develop into a fully formed person, rather, there is such a strong “compulsion” to play into them that it’s unavoidable.

Of course, this is no new concept; anyone who’s taken an intro to gender and sexuality course can tell you that. As Anne Emmanuelle Berger writes, “the claim that femininity is a construction has been repeated endlessly since the difference between the sexes began to attract interest as a social phenomenon.”⁸ In this piece, however, and, I would argue, in any piece where gender is deconstructed, there is something more complex going on. Most people - or most millennials, in any case, have at least a semblance of awareness that gender is a fabrication. What is more interesting for me is the rich and confusing history of gender presentation within theatrical performance. I felt that in *UNE SALADE*, our performances aligned in some (perhaps basic) ways to the description that Berger gives of drag:

... the drag queen illustrates the relation between theatricality and femininity by reenacting it: a historical relation, first of all, since from the start and for a long time playing a role in the theater in the West meant—for a man and for those men and women who watched “him”—being able (or being required) to play a woman. The drag queen also symbolizes this relation, for if the task of theater is to “produce” femininity, as if playing a role on stage—that is, playing at playing a role—were always, in a sense, playing at playing a woman, then “femininity” appears in exchange as a theatrical effect: an embodiment, or—in a reminder that a “person” is first of all a “mask”—an impersonation of a fantasy.⁹

Everyone in our piece was performing this “playing at playing at,” perhaps most especially when playing roles that aligned with their gender identity. The purpose of the piece is to make clear that all of the roles portrayed are at once, and in all of their contradictions, a parody, a

⁸ Berger, Anne Emmanuelle, and Catherine Porter. “QUEENS AND QUEERS: THE THEATER OF GENDER IN ‘AMERICA.’” *The Queer Turn in Feminism: Identities, Sexualities, and the Theater of Gender*, p. 11.

⁹ Berger, Anne Emmanuelle, and Catherine Porter. “QUEENS AND QUEERS: THE THEATER OF GENDER IN ‘AMERICA.’” *The Queer Turn in Feminism: Identities, Sexualities, and the Theater of Gender*, p. 22.

subversion, and a completely accurate portrayal of the gender roles that many embody in the “real world.” As Berger describes, the presentation of gender and sexuality in these cardboard-cutout characters (and I don’t only mean Zac Efron) strips down everything but the “mask” of who a person is, and that the mask itself is a fantasy that can never be achieved. The characters that we are presenting are the characters that everyone in our Western society have both created and embody, but can also never fully be. When the audience watches *UNE SALADE*, every moment and every character is an explicit visual reminder of the theatricality of femininity and masculinity. I think RuPaul herself (who else?) said it best: “We’re all born naked, and the rest is drag.”

VII. EPILOGUE

In *UNE SALADE*, we deconstructed the multifaceted gender roles that exist for both men and women, and acknowledged that none of these roles are even possible to be filled. Nobody can exist as the “ideal” form of the man or woman, yet this notion still persists. I hope, that if this piece is not a leap, it can at least be a step in breaking down those barriers. I do not know exactly what effect my senior project had on the audiences that experienced it, but it has been so rewarding to be surprised, again and again, to hear that it had an impact at all.

I am, admittedly, a very all-or-nothing type of person. Often, I feel a sense of responsibility to create works of theater that are explicitly political, challenging, and may be difficult to watch. I don’t believe that *UNE SALADE* is all of these things or that it’s none of them; it feels like it lies somewhere in the middle. Typically, I would feel guilty that I didn’t necessarily accomplish everything I set out to do, but I don’t feel that way about this. At the risk

of being way too self-aggrandizing, when I spoke to audience members about it, there was a sense that this was something that they were waiting to see on stage. What “this” is, I’m not sure. Even though I was confident in what we showed, before opening night, I was so anxious that we hadn’t done enough. I didn’t think that what Catherine and I were saying was anything brand-new and undiscovered, and I didn’t even think it would be that difficult for anyone with a basic understanding of gender theory to come up with something similar. Why is it then, I wonder, that this sort of work is not being shown more frequently at Bard? Why was the audience so hungry to see something like this? I really have no idea, but I’m grateful for the feeling that I was able to accomplish something, even if it is something small. In creating my own work, I’ve become almost obsessed with trying to make something that makes people question every action they take, makes them completely re-evaluate every decision they’re making. But maybe that’s not the point. I think that what we made gave people a chance to see a mirrored image of themselves, and not only make them cognizant of those behaviors, but just give them a chance to laugh at themselves. Or ourselves. I don’t know. Who cares. Maybe sometimes we just need to lighten up.

UNE SALADE

Adapted by Cora Katz and Catherine Bloom, from *Women Laughing Alone with Salad* by Sheila Callaghan

SCENE ONE

Lights up on three women of varying ages sitting in a park. They all have huge bowls of salad and forks. TORI, 20-25, wears a tank top and yoga pants, and carries a mat. SANDY, late 50s, wears a tastefully luxe ensemble. MEREDITH, 30-35, wears some sort of retro 50's outfit with postmodern touches. They eat their salad like it's the most delicious and hilarious thing ever. It goes on for a while. They eat, glance at each other in acknowledgement, laugh, eat, play with cherry tomatoes, etc. It is just so much frivolity. It goes on for a full three minutes. Seriously. Maybe longer. During the eating, the women eventually become skittish, suspicious, catty, possessive. You're looking at my salad? Don't covet my cucumber. That kind of thing. Meanwhile, a GUY walks by. A cardboard cutout of young Zac Efron. The second he stops before them, they all freeze, faces screeching in ecstasy, salad halfway to their mouths. Their eyes watch him. He exits. The women unfreeze. Glare at one another. Take a final few bites of salad. Then exit, carrying their precious salad bowls with them.

SCENE TWO

JOANNA walks over to the bar to get a drink. Notices GUY.

JOANNA

Ha! He's looking at me again. Saw me dancing downstairs. Six years of jazz, two months of ballet before the teacher told me I was too fat to be in the Christmas show. And gymnastics. I probably should lead with that, right?

GUY

Caught me staring again. Heh. Seems to like it. That's cool. Bet she took gymnastics as a kid. She's super flexible probably. Fun to fuck a chick with her knee behind her ear.

JOANNA

I don't want to be a slut and fuck you the second we go back to your place, but well I kind of do. I just don't want you to think it's my idea. Why isn't he moving? He could be a serial killer. Whatever, I'm in a dry spell.

JOANNA pulls a subtle, sexy dance move, seemingly aimed at GUY.

GUY

Whoa. You see that shit? Ha. That was for me. I see you. I see you. I bet you're a little slutty. I dig that-

JOANNA starts walking towards GUY.

GUY

Oh shit. Oh shit. Keep it together, man.

JOANNA is there.

GUY

Hi.

JOANNA

Hi.

GUY

I saw you dancing.

JOANNA

I saw you see me. One time I was at this big club in Berlin and this guy came over to me and told me he was a producer for a TV show and he asked if I would go on it.

GUY

Cool.

JOANNA

I'm a really good dancer. I took tap and ballet as a kid. I can put my knee behind my ear.

GUY

Yay.

JOANNA

What about you?

GUY

I've never been to Berlin.

JOANNA

Yeeaahhh.... Cool.

GUY

Are you drunk?

JOANNA

A little.

GUY

You seem fucked up.

JOANNA

I should have had more than just salad for lunch.

GUY

You're not a salad-eater.

JOANNA

You're right. I detest salad.

GUY

I like you. I like the way you talk. I like the way you dress. I like the way you smell.

JOANNA

I like the way you like that stuff about me. I also like the way you flirt.

GUY

I don't try to flirt. I just don't talk to girls I'm not interested in sleeping with.

JOANNA

This conversation just got 20 percent more interesting.

GUY

Only 20?

JOANNA

Needs room to rise. Like a cake.

GUY

You know, I'd love to shoot you sometime.

JOANNA

You're a photographer?

GUY

Yeah. I have over 11,000 Instagram followers, so it's pretty professional.

JOANNA

Wow.

GUY

Thanks. My stuff is pretty experimental-

JOANNA

Wait, are *you* drunk?

GUY

Yeah. I've been trying to get the courage to come talk to you.

JOANNA

I'm not that scary.

GUY

You're scarier than you think, Joanna.

Beat.

JOANNA

I didn't tell you my name.

GUY

You didn't have to.

JOANNA

Okay. Now what?

GUY

I wanna say some dirty dirty shit to you.

JOANNA

Okay.

GUY

Where should I start?

JOANNA

My mouth. Tell me what you think of it.

GUY

I picture it wrapped around my cock.

JOANNA

Wow. What about my ass.

GUY

I'll put it in there when I'm done with your mouth.

JOANNA

Oh. We got there fast.

SCENE THREE

SANDY appears in the Barbie car. She talks on her Blackberry.

SANDY

Hi Kristen it's Sandy, listen, I'm stuck in traffic and not gonna be able to make lunch with Barb so could you reschedule and maybe order me a salad from down the street, just some greens with red wine vinegar and some cranberries and celery and four black olives and some cucumber slices and a little cooked broccoli and some red onions. Oh and mushrooms. And a diet coke. And if they have sliced almonds that would be great, sometimes they don't have them. Okay. And could you make sure there's soy milk in the fridge, I checked this morning and there was only skim, okay? Oh, I forgot to ask if Jeremy from Singer Properties called. Great, what did he say. Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Great. Perfect.

As she listens, something wet, fleshy, blob-like and glistening with blood drops from between her legs and lands on the floor with a splat.

SANDY

Shoot.

SANDY regards it in horror, but not surprise— obviously this has happened before, more than once.

SANDY

Okay Kristen listen I'll have to call you back.

She hangs up. Regards the blob. Looks around to see if anyone saw. SANDY scoops the blob up and tucks it back between her legs. It stays. She looks vaguely relieved.

SCENE FOUR

The men start jerking themselves off casually. They find props around—porn mags, pillows, vacuum cleaner hose, ladies underwear, etc. They use these.

BRUCE

I sent Caroline to the Starbucks this morning.

JOE

Not Dunkin'?

BRUCE

Nah.

JOE

But that's like, five extra blocks.

BRUCE

I know. I was in the mood to mess with her a little.

JOE

You're such a dick.

BRUCE

Look, no one told her to wear that tiny fucking skirt in the dead of winter. Serves her right for dressing inappropriately. I mean seriously.

JOE

Why do chicks do that to themselves?

BRUCE

Beats me.

JOE

Self-loathing, or—

BRUCE

Yeah. They're like, socialized to value appearance over comfort. Meanwhile who gives a Fuck?

JOE

Not me.

BRUCE

I mean come on. Wake up and smell the reverse-misogyny. It's modern times. No one needs to look at your tits. We've seen tits before. We need to look at your brains.

JOE

Seriously. I don't know one dude on this planet who'd kick a girl out of bed for not being a size zero, or not shaving her snatch, or not having perfectly plucked eyebrows.

BRUCE

It's so they can get naked in a dressing room and have the other girls hate on them.

JOE

I know, right? They're all starving for perfection and being total assholes to one another-

BRUCE

And, being assholes to themselves too! Which is the worst part. "I'm stupid, I'm fat, I'm gross." Shut the fuck up. I'm sick of it. Have some self-respect.

JOE

Exactly. For once I just want to be honest. "Yes, you look like a 45-year-old mother of three in those jeans. But it's okay! You're still a worthwhile human! Just lay off salty foods for a week."

BRUCE

"You're stuffing your face with Snackwells, which is like—"

JOE

I hate Snackwells—

BRUCE

Oh they're horrible. They taste like chocolate covered monkey dick. I'm like, don't eat seventeen low-fat cookies and then bitch about the size of your ass. Eat ONE cookie, and make it a good one, and feel okay about it after. For fuck's sake.

JOE

Seriously.

BRUCE

I mean...

JOE

Seriously.

They stop masturbating. Longish beat. BRUCE squirts some hand sanitizer into JOE's hands.

JOE

Thanks, bro.

BRUCE

Any time bro.

BRUCE squirts some into his own hand. They rub their hands together a while.

SCENE FIVE

GUY and JOANNA are back onstage, continuing as if their conversation had not been interrupted.

JOANNA

This night is great. This is a great night. Like the air is moist and heavy and filled with tension and I'm gonna grab a plastic knife and cut myself a slice.

GUY

Devil's food.

Beat.

JOANNA

Now.

GUY

Where.

JOANNA

Close.

GUY

Bathroom, alley, basement, sun.

JOANNA

Carpet.

GUY

Whose?

JOANNA

Yours.

GUY

Um fuck okay. I have to ask the girl I came with.

JOANNA

Oh. She's here?

GUY

Yeah.

JOANNA

Is she skinny?

GUY

Yeah.

JOANNA

Like how skinny?

GUY

Like so skinny people worry about her.

JOANNA

Is she so skinny I could shove her entire body up my ass without any lube?

GUY

You want to shove my date up your ass.

JOANNA

YES I DO, OKAY? Because I'm tired of pretending to be something I'm not. Civilized. I don't want to be your girlfriend. I want to fuck your girlfriend while you watch. I want to make her come harder and louder than you ever could. I want to lead with my mass, I want the gravity of my circumference to suck you and everyone you love into me, and I want you to stick there against my body like a suction cup.

GUY

Alright.

TORI appears. She sips a drink forlornly in the corner.

GUY

That's her.

JOANNA

Are you in love with her?

GUY

I don't know.

Beat.

There's something wrong with me.

JOANNA

Then why don't you just hang around with me. I'm a lot less work than some emaciated preemie poser.

GUY

Hey.

JOANNA

Don't act offended. You're the one who brought her here to watch you hit on another girl.

GUY

That doesn't mean I don't respect her.

JOANNA

I wonder if she'd agree with you on that. Should we ask her?

GUY

No.

JOANNA

The thing about dudes who go around with girls like that? They need pretty little trinkets to prove what MEN they are. When in actuality it's the total opposite. THEY ARE BABIES. Why don't you grow the fuck up and be a man.

SCENE SIX

BRUCE

Meredith?

MEREDITH

Oh, yeah.

BRUCE

Bruce.

MEREDITH

Hi.

BRUCE

Do you mind if I turn it up? I love this song.

MEREDITH

Oh, no, not at all. Go for it. Is this Katy Perry? I love her.

BRUCE

Yeah, I'm a huge KP fan! The thing I don't get about pop stars these days, though, is why do they all feel like they have to be naked onstage to look sexy? This is just me, but personally, I think a woman can look sexy and still have her clothes on. Like your outfit. You're modest, but you still look sexy.

MEREDITH

Oh.

Beat.

Yeah, I don't know. I just like the song.

BRUCE

Of course, my apologies. I just think about this sort of thing a lot. My mind gets a little too deep sometimes, you know?

MEREDITH

Yeah.

BRUCE

So, where ya headed? Boyfriend's house?

MEREDITH

Oh, no. I don't have a boyfriend. The closest thing I have to a boyfriend is watching Darren Criss on Glee.

BRUCE

Love Darren Criss. He is a fine actor.

MEREDITH

He's amazing. I wish I could find someone like him. God, I would just love to meet him so much, and like to be with him would be incredible, like I would totally just close my eyes and lie there and let him do whatever he wanted to me. But it would be really special.

BRUCE

He really is a fine actor. I'm not gay, but his performance is very moving. Don't get me wrong, I'm a huge supporter of the LBGTQIA movement. I'm not gay, though.

MEREDITH

Okay.

BRUCE

I did do my share of experimenting in college, of course. I even touched my buddy's you-know-what one time. Under the pants. You ever do any experimenting in college?

MEREDITH

Um, this is my stop, actually. But it was really great meeting you...

BRUCE

Hey, five stars, right?

MEREDITH makes some sort of noncommittal gesture and exits the car. TORI and GUY enter. TORI waits for GUY to open the door. He doesn't get it.

TORI

Open my door, babe.

GUY

Babe, you should feel empowered to open your own door.

TORI

You're right, babe.

TORI and GUY enter the car. TORI sits in the middle seat so she can be next to GUY.

BRUCE

Guy?

GUY

That's me. How's it goin', bro?

BRUCE

Pretty chill day, bro. You catch that game last night?

GUY

Oh, the Sox game? Abso-fucking-lutely I caught that game. That shit was not to be missed.

BRUCE

You got that right. Unbelievable. That home run in the eighth inning? I almost teared up, dude.

GUY

Same, dude. Indescribable.

TORI

Babe, I feel sort of sick.

GUY

You're fine, babe.

TORI

No, babe, I really don't feel good.

GUY

Maybe it was that burger you ate earlier?

TORI stares at guy. She can't believe he just said that. He doesn't get it.

GUY

I'm just trying to look out for you, babe.

BRUCE

Here, I'll crack a window for her.

GUY

Don't worry about it, she's fine.

TORI

No, please open it.

BRUCE

The lady's wish is my command.

Awkward beat while TORI is nauseous, GUY is embarrassed at her behaviour.

BRUCE

You guys make a great couple. The way you communicate is very cool. Communication is so important in a relationship.

GUY

Thank you.

TORI

Thanks.

Beat.

Wait, babe, do we have to tip in an Uber?

SCENE SEVEN

Changing room. MEREDITH enters with a stack of shapewear and some retro dresses. Relieved no one is there. Takes off her clothes and begins uncomfortably packing herself into some waaaaay too small spandex shapers. Goes on a while. Looks tortuous and comical. Finally, SANDY enters with a pile of pretty flowered dresses. She strips down and changes. They smile politely at one another. We hear their thoughts, or see them projected.

MEREDITH

She's had some work done. Cheaply.

SANDY

One size up, Chubby. You're fooling no one.

SANDY's uterus falls out again.

MEREDITH

Gross. God it sucks to be old.

SANDY

Stop looking at my guts you little tub of shit. You don't see me staring at your giant sloppy rack.

SANDY jams her uterus into her purse. TORI enters. She's loaded down with yoga clothes.

SANDY

Ugh. Yoga bitch.

MEREDITH

Bulimic.

TORI

Oh awesome. A cake eater and a granny. People I look hot next to when I'm naked.

TORI strips down to her underwear. The other women struggle with their garments. The women watch her from the corners of their eyes.

SANDY

Psycho.

MEREDITH

Butt plug.

SANDY

Anorexic.

MEREDITH

'Ho.

SANDY

Ferret.

MEREDITH

Drug addict.

TORI turns to them in her new yoga ensemble.

TORI

(to the women)

Sorry, have to ask... Does this make me look fat?

SANDY

Oh God no--

MEREDITH

You're so tiny--

SANDY

You're a pin--

MEREDITH

You look fab!

SANDY

Are you a model?

TORI

Ha! No. I'm so bloated. I just ate a HUGE breakfast. A whole grape.

MEREDITH

You can't tell--

SANDY

Not at all—

MEREDITH

You're made of air--

SANDY

You're invisible.

TORI

Thank you SO much. SO sweet.

Beat. To SANDY.

Go find a grave to crawl into, you wrinkly old bitch.

SANDY exits with her clothes. TORI and MEREDITH eye each other.

TORI

Slut--

MEREDITH

Bitch--

TORI

Cunt--

MEREDITH

Whore--

TORI

Cow--

MEREDITH

Slag--

TORI
Skank--

MEREDITH
Dog—

TORI
Tart--

MEREDITH
Hag—

TORI
Shrew--

MEREDITH
Succubus—

TORI
Cum-dump. CUM-DUMP. FISH-LIPS. WHALE COCK. STEAMING DICK-TURD.
PUSS-BAG. PORK-GUT.
That dress looks awesome on you.

MEREDITH
Yeah?

TORI
So pretty.

MEREDITH
Thanks. I'm gonna wear it tonight when I fuck your husband. In your bed. While
you watch.

TORI
Cool.

MEREDITH
Take care.

MEREDITH exits with her clothes. TORI immediately poses in her yoga gear like the laughing salad ladies we've seen in all the advertisements. She stays eerily frozen. Lights and music screech around her, but she stays frozen in mid-laugh.

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