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His Royal Heinie

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Bard College

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His Royal Heinie
(The Laughter of the Other)

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Theater and Performance
of Bard College

by
Gideon Berger

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
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Sofia France

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Kate Gonzales

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Laughter and Political Theater

His Royal Heinie was a political piece. It was not about Donald Trump; it was about everyone affected and the way we see ourselves in the wake of his rise to power. In the aftermath of the 2016 presidential election, the urgency to create a political theater was dialed up in liberal artistic communities. While the need had been present and palpable long before Trump's election, 2017 ushered in a radical shift in mindset. Immediately facing white supremacist groups shouting "hail Trump," the potential annihilation of the NEA, cabinet appointments that included people who profited from the 2008 market crash, and the arrival of "alternative facts" and fake news, liberal communities faced a sense of panic and a call to resist, leaving no room to be apolitical. In my experience, I began to perceive the notion of "art for art's sake" to be a laughable and dangerous idea that threatened to undermine one of the key historical purposes of art in society, that being a response to and engagement with the world in which we live.

In my art-making, I began adopting Jack Ferver's dramaturgical mantra: "What are you saying, and why are you saying it?" This double question, for me, is one of accountability. It tackles the nature of vagueness in art, which, especially during a Trump presidency feels oppressive, elitist, and antithetical to a political movement that seeks to give voice to the oppressed and disenfranchised. The artist cannot exist in a bubble that excludes the outside world, particularly in a time when the outside world is so present and so public. "What are you saying" holds an artist in a political landscape, fostering thought that is firmly outside the head of the artist. "Why are you saying it" is a barometer of importance. Implicit in this question is, "does it matter?" In a time when performance space is limited and the cost of performance is so demanding, questions of importance are paramount, even without the political need for theater

that urgently has something to say. Furthermore, “why are you saying it” precludes the artist from merely depicting or recreating oppression in their work. For example, it is easy in political theater to declare that the “what” of the piece is, “racism exists and is bad” or “Trump is awful.” While both statements are accurate and important, they lack specificity, and so they get stumped by the “why” of the dramaturgical process. For the former, the easiest answer is at worst “because it is,” or at best, “because it needs to be said and repeated,” and for the latter, the answer would be, “because he’s done and said reprehensible things.” These statements do not express any reason why they should be made into a piece of art as opposed to an essay or a historical account. The “why” demands specificity and holds the artist accountable to prove the urgency of putting a specific piece on stage.

In determining the answers to these questions when making *His Royal Heinie*, we recognized that the *Ubu* structure vividly called Trump to mind. As a result, we sought to distance the character of the Jester from Trump as much as we could, knowing that the parallel would still exist. We realized that a show specifically about Trump’s rise to power was unnecessary. Our majority liberal audience would leave the theater, feeling comfortable in their recognition of Trump and their knowledge that he’s a “bad guy.” Political depiction without commentary usually does not answer the “why” of Jack Ferver’s question unless the answer involves, “because few people know about it.” When approaching a topic that the news has been covering daily for over a year, we felt that we could not simplify our show into a staging of Trump’s rise to power.

We decided to look to other techniques of political theater—namely internal commentary, disorientation, and laughter. Jen Kidwell’s *Underground Railroad Game* is a glorious example of these methods. The show follows two middle school teachers as they attempt to recreate the

underground railroad through a game that divides their students into Union and Confederate soldiers. The storyline divides into two as they begin dating, and the show depicts parallel trajectories, showing their flawed pedagogical practices, while simultaneously depicting an interracial relationship that devolves into racial fetishization. Towards the end of the show, the white teacher excoriates the classroom when he finds a piece of graffiti that says the N-word. Repeating the word over and over again in righteous indignation, while preventing the black teacher from talking, he becomes the archetypal “white savior,” paralleling and thus commenting on the narrative of the white saviors of the underground railroad. *Underground Railroad Game* exists in a space of contradiction and echo as it comments on the pedagogical emphasis of well-meaning white people during the time of slavery while avoiding the atrocities of the antebellum south. This political statement lies in sharp juxtaposition to an interracial relationship that becomes overtaken by its own fetishizations and sadomasochistic racial playacting. Demonstrating well-meaning attempts to underscore the heroism beneath times of unimaginable oppression, the show reveals the perverse underbelly of self-congratulation.

Jen Kidwell’s involves the hilarious and the ridiculous. Finding humor in the darkest places, she manages to emphasize the absurdity of white saviordom, letting the audience’s laughter be their window into the horrors being depicted. As a result, the audience is made immediately complicit. Stripped of the comfort of viewing atrocities and having rote sympathy, the audience must bear witness to and *engage with* a commentary that leaves no room for passive observation. This is one of the powers of laughter: it forces the audience to participate in whatever is happening in front of them. There are few socially acceptable means by which an audience can publicly display participation. The days of shouting at characters, starting fights, getting drunk in the audience, and throwing tomatoes are long gone. I have had experiences in

shows that expect and encourage the audience to be on their feet, dancing to music with the performers in which the entirety of the audience stands stock still, rendered uncomfortable by being invited to engage. Laughter, however, is a means by which an audience can vocally and *publicly* express their engagement with a piece, often against their very will.

Laughing at Hitler

Mel Brooks claimed that, “you can laugh at Hitler because you can cut him down to size... We can try to rob [him] of his posthumous power and myths.”¹ In essence, Brooks is saying that we can cope with historical atrocities through laughter; the alternative is terror and paralysis.

Brooks’ *History of the World Part I* had an enormous influence on the dramaturgical foundation of *His Royal Heinie*. In fact, Amanda and I shared a memorable afternoon where, when we were creatively stuck and time was running out for us to finalize our script, we began drawing on a collective understanding of Jewish humor and farce, pulling from the methods of Brooks and Woody Allen. We realized we had a certain capability, based on our Jewish history and heritage to create genuine farcical dialogue, finding exactly what we needed to say. This occurred the day after I had watched *History of the World*, and it was this moment that I understood what our show was actually about. In *History of the World*, Brooks plants himself and other often dissonant or displaced characters in historical events and spaces, all of which are distinctly Goyish (not-Jewish). Brooks plays a Roman philosopher who frequently says “Oy vey,” the High Inquisitor of the Spanish Inquisition who does a Broadway number about torturing Jews, and King Louis XVI of France. His incongruity in each of these roles is inherently hilarious, and it serves to qualify each historical event or person in its absurdity. In this farcical vein, he uses heavily Jewish stereotypes and language to reinforce the ridiculousness. In so doing, he is also reclaiming a history of Goyish supremacy and persecution, daring the viewer to question his casting and belittling these historical events that are

¹ Beier, Lars-Olav. Interview with Mel Brooks. “With Comedy, We Can Rob Hitler of his Posthumous Power.” *Der Spiegel*. March 16, 2006

traditionally glorified, feared, and revered. The tactics of farce, subversion of identity, and incongruity were key elements of our piece, and I understand them to be echoes of the comedic coping mechanisms utilized by Brooks.

We sought to ensconce ourselves in a historical period (or, more accurately, *atmosphere*) and emphasize the most obtrusive aspects. Jen Kidwell once taught me an exercise in finding one's personal clown by walking around a space neutrally and slowly amplifying the presence of the part of one's body that is initiating or leading movement. For example, if someone tends to lead with her chest, she can puff it out and *really* lead with her chest. In simple terms, her clown can take on the personality that this walk suggests, most likely, toughness, brutishness, and boorishness. If someone leads with their pelvis, he can lean back and assert his hips and groin, suggesting someone who is relaxed and untrustworthy—probably a pervert. We sought to accomplish this exercise on a whole ethos. Taking the notion of a royal court, we drew from public consciousness, popular representation, and stereotype to emphasize snobbery, ridiculous procedure, and posh accents. We made sure that no one could ever mistake what we were pointing to and trying to evoke. We were ostentatious about it. Employing the Mel Brooks technique of historical incongruity, we filled the court with bodies that did not belong. The performers were either queer or people of color and many of the women played men's roles. Even the two white men, me and Simon Paris, are strange-looking Jews who would never be found in a royal court.

The Process

Amanda Houser and I began brainstorming in the spring of 2017. Our initial proposal involved tracing our own artistic lineages and exploring how we were able to individuate ourselves artistically and personally from the artistic influence of our families. Truthfully, I cannot trace the trajectory of this proposal through the finished project, save for a few glimpses. Our work over the summer in Tivoli was relaxed; we rehearsed infrequently and in the evening, often in my home or the basketball courts of the Bard College gym. Our rehearsals took the form of explorations through which we shared and discovered what interested the other, as well as became attuned to each other's impulses.

Our official rehearsals that summer consisted of games, exercises, small creations, and discussion. Some attempts of note included: Amanda doing a mime adaptation of *Rocky Raccoon* by The Beatles, me doing "ballet" in a trash bag, Amanda walking through an entire lifetime in three minutes while playing the violin, and me executing some of Amanda's signature choreography. Inspired by the image of me lying on the ground ensconced in trash bag, screaming "YES" and "NO" in triumph and anguish in turn, we settled on two concepts that we wanted to explore: power and fantasy. To this, our advisor, Gideon Lester, suggested we adapt Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi*. After reading the play, we were sold, and it became clear that Amanda should play the role of Ubu. Amanda's androgynous queer body and personhood echoed and complicated Ubu's existence as an outcast or stranger: someone who is fundamentally outside the boundaries of normalcy and decency. This is not to say that we necessarily saw something Ubuish in Amanda; rather, we found that Amanda's queerness qualified the character of Ubu. We began to discover his humanity; his need to be a part of his social world.

Earlier in the spring, Amanda and I had created a piece with Charlie Mai about an Italian family. We drew on cultural stereotypes, usually ones propagated by media such as *The Godfather* and *Goodfellas* as well as a collective understanding of the broad strokes that constitute a certain group that has been reified to the point of object-hood by culture. We decided that the royalty in *Ubu* would provide a perfect vehicle for this same form. We developed techniques and games to elicit a fractured and grotesquely generalized impression of “period” aristocracy, and used these techniques and texts to cast the piece. In our auditions, we tasked performers with inventing ways of “bowing to the queen,” “addressing one’s subjects,” and playing the Charles and Elizabeth game in which one of the auditors addresses the performer as Charles to which the performer responds, “Elizabeth?”

Our cast, in no specific order was as follows: Cluno Bruno, Sofia France, Simon Paris, Kate Gonzales, Bill Wang, Natalya Sands, Sarah Carlisi, Ella Gibney, and me, Amanda, and Charlie. We made the choice to cast without traditional regard to gender or race. Dramaturgically speaking, I say this because race and gender were important components to our piece. Our aim was to deneutralize the characters and corrupt the historical sanctity of a European royal court. Creating space for people of color and queer people to play nobility served to add a sense incongruity to the piece as well as destabilize roles and positions that traditionally went to white people and actors. We were creating a world that imitated stereotypes of European royalty, but we wanted people and bodies that were not representative of European ideals of wealth, class, and beauty. Through this casting, we sought to firmly establish a world that sits tangential to ours.

Our early rehearsals with the full cast were predominantly conducted without the text. Drawing from methods we learned from Geoff Sobelle, we sought to create a strong familiarity

among our cast through improvisations, devised pieces, and exercises. Amanda often led vocal training, exploring the range of words, sounds, and phrases of the nobility. Charlie led “manners class” in which he walked the cast through scenarios, reactions, and “proper” ways of behaving. I led them through movement technique, generating specificity, form, and the physical vocabulary of the nobility. These descriptions are inevitably broad strokes and examples that do not properly convey the way the three of us attempted to catalyze the world of the piece. There was a great deal more subtlety and less structure to the process, and each of us transitioned into the others’ roles fluidly.

These explorations led us to discover several key elements that would hold true throughout the process. The ultimate discovery was that we had to be exceedingly generous to the bodies, impulses, and personalities of the performers. Each performer was tasked with telling a story, regardless of the hierarchy of roles, and the story of the play was meant to serve the characters. As we began to incorporate the text, and primarily the story, we found ourselves drifting far from the original script. Replacing many of the characters with ones we felt better suited to our cast, we jettisoned names, locations, precise time periods, and structure. We were left with an extremely simple retelling of a common archetypal story of usurpation of power and downfall. We found that there was a stark delineation between the old regime and the new one. This transition went through iteration after iteration. Notable ones included absolute authoritarianism in which the old king was the conductor of an orchestra of bodies to absolute anarchy and from office space to orgy. Finding these proposals too heavy-handed, we settled on crafting a lousy and bureaucratic system of wealth that transitioned into the rapt attention of a royal court on a clueless demagogue. Borrowing little else, save Jarry’s vulgarity, we crafted a new story with the help of our cast. We found that the creation of the world that housed the

characters was heavily dependent on allowing for the pleasure of our performers. We challenged them to investigate their desires through the work, giving them agency to edit and create themselves. We would get in our own way when we stopped doing what we wanted. We succeeded when we existed in the pleasure and specificity of what we created.

We needed to find in Amanda's character a motivation that extended through the play. Discovering that her character was the court jester, we found that her need to rule stemmed from her objectification through the laughter of others. We manifested this physically through her constipation which was only alleviated after she was the last person alive. Through the character of the jester, we discovered that our piece was at its most basic level about identity, particularly in terms of objectivity and subjectivity. Propelled by the notion that Amanda's androgynous queerness is a target of the objectifying eye of the Other, we found a parallel in the objectification of the clown. The queer body under the heteronormative gaze is continually reified as an impression of humanity. The same can be said about a clown. The heteronormative fear of queer sexuality and gender expression instigates a need to annihilate that which cannot be understood by the cis-straight world. The jester in our piece represented the body that evades understanding and simple projection. The scene in which the jester performs for the royal court while doubled over in pain is a perfect demonstration of this thesis. Not willing to acknowledge the pain of the clown in front of them and *unwilling to acknowledge the intensely human need to shit*, the royal court laughs, erasing the pain and the humanity of the jester. The jester becomes an object under their gaze, and he becomes their possession.

The Laugh of the Other

The child was playing in the kitchen. Suddenly he became aware of his solitude and was seized with anxiety, as usual. So he "absented" himself. Once again, he plunged into a kind of ecstasy. There is now no one in the room. An abandoned consciousness is reflecting utensils. A drawer is opening; a little hand moves forward. Caught in the act. Someone has entered and is watching him. Beneath this gaze the child comes to himself. He who was not yet anyone suddenly becomes Jean Genet. He feels that he is blinding, deafening; he is a beacon, an alarm that keeps ringing.

Who is Jean Genet? In a moment the whole village will know. . . . The child alone is in ignorance. In a state of fear and shame he continues his signal of distress. Suddenly ... a dizzying word. From the depths of the world abolishes the beautiful order. A voice declares publicly: "You're a thief." The child is ten years old. That was how it happened, in that or some other way. In all probability, there were offenses and then punishment, solemn oaths and relapses. It does not matter. The important thing is that Genet lived and has not stopped reliving this period of his life as if it had lasted only an instant. It is the moment of awakening. The sleep walking child opens his eyes and realizes he is stealing. It is revealed to him that he is a thief and he pleads guilty, crushed by a fallacy which he is unable to refute; he stole, he is therefore a thief. Can anything be more evident? Genet, thunderstruck, considers his act, looks at it from every angle. No doubt about it, it is a theft. And theft is an offense, a crime. What he wanted was to steal; what he did, a theft; what he was, a thief.²

In *Saint Genet*, Jean-Paul Sartre addresses the notion of bad faith. Sartre invokes the story of a young Jean Genet who, as a child, was caught stealing silverware from his neighbor. He becomes an object under his neighbor's gaze and is reified a thief. His actions, his complexity, and his humanity fade, to be replaced by a title or an essence. This is the fundamental action that *His Royal Heinie* explores. Sartre indicates the Look of the Other as a mode of interpersonal objectification. Under another person's gaze, one becomes an object in their world. This is a state sought after and rejected simultaneously. The longing for definition exists in opposition to a longing for freedom.

His Royal Heinie explores the Laugh of the Other. The jester, whose single role in life is to make people laugh, is objectified by laughter. He stands in front of the court as they define

² - SARTRE, JEAN-PAUL, and BERNARD FRECHTMAN. "A DIZZYING WORD." *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr*, NED - New edition ed., University of Minnesota Press, 1963, pp. 17–48. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctttsfbs.5.

him as “the funny man” through their laughter. He dances, he jokes, he doubles over with pain; all of it is funny to the court. Their sense of empathy is utterly eradicated by their unwillingness to acknowledge his subjectivity. By the actions of the court he is not a jester. He is The Jester, and he is an object in the palace the same way the toilet is an object. He’s not the only one. The Judge, The Cat, The Peasant, The King, The Queen, and everyone else are all objects, tied inextricably to their occupations or social status.

The Jester’s constipation is a physical manifestation of his objecthood on several levels. It is a denial of his humanity. Jesters exist to make the court laugh. They don’t shit. They don’t have sex. They don’t cry. What the court doesn’t see, they don’t know. It is incongruous for the Jester to assert his personhood because it would annihilate his title. For him to remain The Jester, his plurality must be denied and his singularity posited. His singularity inspires the constipation. He must be one contained unit. Nothing can be shed or evacuated or changed because it would prove his subjectivity. The idea that there can be many parts to him that exist simultaneously or in transition is extinguished by the laughter of the court. The act of shitting would divide the Jester, blurring the boundaries of his body. The singular nature of his reification is contingent upon boundaries and the discrete nature of his body from the rest of the world. Once the delineations of his body become more ambiguous, he becomes less definable. To acknowledge that he shits is to acknowledge that he changes and is ambiguous. This fact is something the court could not face.

His decision to kill the king and queen was the ultimate act subjectivity. He betrays the trust of the court that he will remain The Jester, and he acts for himself. It becomes impossible for the court to laugh, as he asserts his subjectivity. Their immediate response is to attack. They can’t tolerate his new and ambiguous position, so they look to annihilate him. My character, the

Visionary steps in at the last minute and reasserts the jester's objectivity. I proclaim him to be a Messiah who can lead us all to freedom. I give him a new title and shift the court's perspective. He merely is redefined as the Savior King. I go up to each member of the court and show them that they can be whoever they want.

As a result, the new king is still unable to shit. His redefinition is just another iteration of his singularity. As the rest of the court explores their new freedom to be plural, idiosyncratic individuals, the jester is stuck as the savior, reified into a new object. At the end of *No Exit*, Sartre says "Hell is other people." In his anger and frustration, the jester murders the entire court as I give a speech extolling his virtues. When I see what he's done, I objectify him one last time, saying that I thought he was "The One." I tell him that instead he's just a "funny man." He kills me with his own flatulence, a symbol of his multiplicity. I die unable to handle the destabilization of my definitions of him and he, alone, is finally able to shit. The price of his freedom is death, as he has no one left to reify him in his world.

The political and social implications of this process of objectification are vast. It is a process that engenders harsh and unyielding roles in identity, leading to violence, oppression, and subjugation. The act of stereotyping is an objectification. It is an allowance for the treatment of a person as subhuman. It allows homogeneity to take place in society, something that inevitably benefits those in power. It reinforces class and race distinctions, objectifying a poor neighborhood or a black neighborhood as a "bad neighborhood" and a white or upper class neighborhood as a "good neighborhood" (In our project we call the old king the bad king and the jester the good king). It allows for starkly binaristic gender roles in which there is no room for ambiguity between maleness and femaleness. The pursuit of ambiguity is anti-binary, anti-absolute, anti-patriarchy, and anti-capitalist.

Magic and the Creation of Worlds

In our discussions during and after the process, Amanda and I were able to analyze to a large extent the personal impact and impetus that *His Royal Heinie* had on her. It has been much harder for me to formulate my thoughts on what this project meant for me and what it gave to me. Particularly thinking about our work through the lens of identity and subjectivity, it is very easy for me to wonder what business I had being a white and ostensibly straight and cis-gendered man creating a show that centered so much on a queer and identity-driven story.

I felt as though I was co-opting something or being dishonest. I saw myself in the project but could not *intellectually* see myself in the project. I felt, as I was making it, as if I was viewing it from the outside. Like I was a spectator to something I had limited access to. But I identified so strongly with what we were making. It was dress-up, it was make-believe, it was imagination. It was queer, and I felt queer doing it. I was able to construct a world that was full of possibility and potential. When I was younger, I was obsessed with magic. With Harry Potter at the forefront, I devoured books that dealt with worlds that could be influenced by something unrecognizable and fundamentally unknowable. I tend to liken my love of magic to a juvenile form of sex drive because I remember my longing for these other worlds waning when I began to go through puberty. I would have magic wet dreams in which I performed the spells in Harry Potter, waking up with a feeling of intense disappointment and lingering belief, relishing in the specific power magic gave me. The magic was never a means of control for me; rather, it took the form of mundane yet extraordinary manipulations of nature, like conjuring water out of thin air. The possibility that something like that existed in the world propelled me throughout much of my childhood. My imagination was paramount in my life. After puberty, magic turned into sex. I was fascinated by sex, in awe of sex, and utterly bewildered by it. It became, especially

before I became sexually active, the other world that I longed for. It was another form of power, once again, not a power structure. I had no desire to dominate or control anyone or anything. It felt much more like conjuring water from air or bending and changing nature. It was something unexplored and uncharted.

I was obsessed with and passionate about creating worlds and situating myself in them. Magic was a means by which I could enact this creation. Reading was and has been another. At this point it's hard to explain the source of this longing because I don't understand it. I have inklings that I don't at this moment have the language to articulate. What's more, I don't feel like I have the right to articulate it. This, ultimately, is what our piece was about for me. Our world calls to mind José Muñoz's queer utopia. Muñoz writes that "to live inside straight time and ask for, desire, and imagine another time and place is to represent and perform a desire that is both utopian and queer. To participate in such an endeavor is not to imagine an isolated future for the individual but instead to participate in a hermeneutic that wishes to describe a collective futurity..."³ Collectively, we sought to birth another world that critiqued our own. It was not necessarily a utopia, but it was a magical and bizarre alternative that situated us as agents in our own space.

I have never liked to be defined. I remember being fourteen years old and going through a bit of an identity crisis. For the first time, I began wearing clothes that I felt good in and acting the way I wanted to act, and I encountered a huge amount of resistance from my peers. I was often called pretentious and told that the way I was presenting myself and acting "wasn't me." The imperative phrase "be yourself" has dogged me throughout my life. I have no clue what that means. And furthermore, how can a fourteen-year-old be himself? It was incomprehensible

³ Muñoz, José Esteban. *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (pg.26). New York University, 2009.

to me at the time, and I developed a strong desire to be somewhere else. And sometime else. I longed to be Harry Potter or my father who lived in SoHo in the 70s and 80s. I longed to be Leonard Cohen or Amedeo Modigliani, two sad, small, extremely sexual Jews making art about their confusion. I wanted to be addicted to drugs or nailed to a cross or lose my mind in order to differentiate myself from the person my friends were trying to make me be. I romanticized endlessly. I longed for definition and hated it simultaneously.

I have a lot of anger that I think stems from this point in my life. I had a great deal of shame when I would disappoint my friends' attempts to reify me and define my existence. I wanted to please them, and when that made me unhappy, my life's purpose was to prove them wrong. I lost a lot of friends during that time, some of whom I have made up with and am close to now.

It is only recently that I have begun to understand how much my life has been a process of reification and performance of an identity that has been projected onto me. I was superficially comfortable in my assertions of my gender, my sexuality, and my place in the world, largely until the election of Donald Trump. I have a distinct memory of a serious physical upheaval occurring within me that winter of 2017. My body literally began to feel different from what I was used to, and I was gripped with a panic that I feel in phases to this day. Amanda suggested that it might have to do with the immediate uproar and vocality of certain underrepresented communities that I had had little experience with up until then. I think she's right, and I specifically think that I was and am responding to the sense of urgency that surrounds all of us. I was forced to confront these definitions of myself and understand that they were attempts to please others. Our piece was about objectification. It was about identity. It was about the longing

to be object and subject simultaneously. The need to be defined and reified and understood and articulable while feeling the necessity of freedom.

Our project was a means by which we could invent our own definitions. Each character had a title and a role that defined them, and yet every character betrayed the objecthood of their role. The judge wanted to cry, the cat spoke, the peasant and “the Winifred” fell in love, the minister of finance wanted to dance, and the jester did not want to be laughed at. Each character needed desperately to be free, and each character attempted to objectify the others through laughter, admonitions, and domination. My character, the visionary, objectified the jester even after the jester had wrested for himself a sense of subjectivity by reifying him as the savior. We created a world in which this could occur, and in so doing, we let ourselves be subjects. We rejected traditional casting and character for pleasure and strangeness.

There is no way to extricate queerness from our project. The utopia, the drag, the bodies, and the otherness were all a certain expression of queerness. This is where I find it exceedingly difficult to express my relationship to the project. I don't feel as though I have the right to claim this identity or claim access to it in an artistic sense. At the moment, I find it a seriously complicated landscape in which I am truly questioning my maleness and aspects of my sexuality while at the same time experiencing the privileges of my identity and presentation. I find in queer texts and queer performance another potential world, similar to the magical worlds I created when I was younger. I took so much pleasure in creating a space that was fundamentally different from the world I know, which is demystified and steeped in objectivity. Inherent in this sense of confusion is another longing for definition. This need for a name for how I feel or who I am is in a sense antithetical to the feeling. It is antithetical to the jester's final line where he says, “You can't tell me who I am!”

We created a world, and we created ourselves in our world. It was political in our assertion of subjectivity and personal in our adherence to specificity. It was utopic; it was queer; it was magic.

APPENDIX A

Final Script:

HIS ROYAL HEINIE
BY AMANDA HOUSER AND GIDEON BERGER

Lights up
JESTER on stage playing violin for the audience
JESTER's constipation builds

JESTER: Shit! I have to poop!
JESTER gets a hold of himself
Oh...oh. I'm okay

Pain jolts him
Help! Help!

LADY JESTER runs on

LADY JESTER: What is it? What's going on?

JESTER: Oh!
My delicate fart
My yogurt parfait
My wife! Help! I have a poop stuck, help me get it out!

LADY JESTER: Oh no! Ok let me take a look.

JESTER: Okay.

JESTER goes on all fours
LADY JESTER takes a look inside
LADY JESTER: Oh I see it! Yes there is a lot of it! It's really up there!
She juggles him back and forth

JESTER: It really hurts!
LADY JESTER: Just push!!!! Are you pushing?
JESTER: I am pushing!
LADY JESTER: I don't think you're pushing.
JESTER: I'm pushing very hard.

FREEZE

FATHER (voiceover): My son.
JESTER: Father?

FATHER: You're all blocked up because everyone is always laughing at you. You were never destined to be a fool you were made to be respected. Take your place on the throne and the shit will flow out of your ass like a river.

JESTER: BUT HOW?!

LADY JESTER takes dagger out and they hold each other's heads and laugh
THE JESTERS RUN OFF SCREAMING WITH LAUGHTER

THE CURTAIN COMES UP

Baroque music plays

THE ROYAL BATHROOM COURT ON
THEY ARE LAUGHING and CLAPPING

THE VISIONARY: General, don't you think the toilet paper is rather marvelous?

THE GENERAL: It's divine.

THE ROYAL COURT LAUGHS

THE JUDGE: Well I think it's a little rough on the bum.

THE ROYAL COURT IS IN DISDAIN

MINISTER OF FINANCE: Only if you have a rough bum to begin with.

THE ROYAL COURT AGREES

THE JUDGE: Wait, you're right. I concur!

THE KING: SILENCE.

THE ROYAL COURT: Your majesty!

THE KING: He steps off

THE ROYAL COURT GASPS

THE KING MANEUVERS AROUND THE COURT AND SNIFFS EACH OF THEM ONE
BY ONE

THE KING: Something smells...

THE KING CROSSES TO THE GENERAL

THE KING: I'm not saying it's you. But...

ENTER THE JESTER

THE JESTER (aside): Yeah. Something does smell--smells like a rotten

stinky cheesy fart. And, it's these people. They think I'm stupid, they laugh in my face. I'll show them. I'll make them all mine.

THE QUEEN: EVERYONE SHUT UP. WE HAVE A REAL LIVE PEASANT AND WE ARE GOING TO LISTEN TO WHAT SHE HAS TO SAY.

THE QUEEN LAUGHS
THE ROYAL COURT LAUGHS

THE QUEEN: COME INNNN (SING SONG)

THE PEASANT ENTERS CRAWLING

THE MINISTER: REVOLTING

Laughter

THE GENERAL: Oh, what is that waft?

Laughter

THE JUDGE: Ah it is a pity!

Laughter

THE VISIONARY: Someone give her a bath! Don't forget to wear gloves!

Laughter

WINIFRED: Aw, she's quite precious though.

ALL: Shut up Winifred!

Laughter

QUEEN: Silence everyone! Let's hear what she has to say.

PEASANT: Greetings. I've walked many a mile to get to this royal court. My family has no food. No bread. No fruits. No vegetables. I am dying of leprosy of the ass. See? My only consolation is that when my ass finally rots off, my family will be able to eat it to stave off hunger. I come to this court with a plea. Give us food! Cure my disease! Save my ass!

THE PALACE CAT: Wow, great. Could you give us a moment?

Talking

THE JUDGE: Order! The minister of finance?

THE MINISTER: I'm sorry, it's just not in the budget.

THE GENERAL: Why would we give fruits and vegetables to the peasantry when we could be giving them to the military?! Who's country!

ALL: Our Country!
GENERAL: Who's country!
ALL: Our country
GENERAL: Hear hear!

VISIONARY: WAIT! What if instead of taking everything from this peasant we shared our world with this peasant. And we can just hold hands and breath together.

WINIFRED SHRIEKS

WINIFRED: Well, I just think he has a point...

QUEEN: Shut up Winifred.
ALL: Yes, shut up Winifred.

QUEEN: Well, I wish we could help you but we cant'. We can. not. we cant. as you were.

THE KING: It's time for tea.

(baroque music)

Each pair has their teatime moment. Minister and general, Palace cat, Gideon, and Judge, and Winifred and Peasant all downstage consecutively in that order. Rest of the cast is frozen in tableau. Followed by King and queen on throne w/ a duo moment

KING: I'm so bored. Bring in the jesters!!

EVERYONE BACK TO THEIR POSITIONS

(Sabre Dance comes on)

THE JESTERS enter

They do their supreme wedgie act

THE JESTER whips out his violin as LADY JESTER sings the strings THE ROYAL COURT loves this

THE ROYAL COURT IS LAUGHING as THE JESTER plays

THE ROYAL COURT FREEZES WHENEVER HE TURNS TO LOOK A THEM THEN RESUMES

PLAYING AND THEY UNFREEZE

THE JESTER ASIDE

THE JESTER: This shit hurts so bad. I'm gonna burst!!! I can't take it

anymore. I need an incision or something. I can't take it. do you see them laughing behind my back? laughing in my face? I CAN'T TAKE IT.

THE JESTER goes down because of his constipation and they're still laughing

THE JESTER: DO IT NOW MY PRUNE!

LADY JESTER: Now?

THE JESTER: YES NOW!!

LADY JESTER takes the dagger out and goes to kill the king he screams "OH!" the queen screams "NO!" LADY JESTER stabs her. They stagger over and fall to the floor

LADY JESTER picks up the crown and places it on his head—they have a moment of pride together and then they walk to the throne and THE JESTER lowers his pants.

THE ROYAL COURT begins to draw their swords

VISIONARY: Wait! Don't you see? This is what we've been waiting for! This is the revolution! General, wouldn't you rather put down that sword and instead weird a vase of petunias? Winifred, don't you wish everyone would— like you? First minister of finance, don't you want to give up math and follow your true passion of yodeling? Judge, you can have what ever thing you want! And cat did you talk before? Bow down to the new regime!

THE JESTER is trying to poop, he umfs and oohs.

Looking up sees the ROYAL COURT looking at him. THE LADY JESTER nudges him with a microphone.

THE JESTER: Right. A speech for you all. Him, the old king. me, the new king. Him the bad king. me the good king. All together now. HIM THE OLD KING. ME THE NEW KING. HIM THE BAD KING. ME THE GOOD KING. This form of call and response goes on and can be improvised.

THE JESTERS manipulate THE KING AND THE QUEEN like puppets

THE JUDGE and THE PALACE CAT have a duo moment center stage

JUDGE: You're the only one that understands me...etc. I wish you could eat me up and shit me out into a nice scratchy litter box.

then

THE PEASANT and WINIFRED have a duo moment center stage (pouring hot tea on one another. Finish with "Let's take a nice round dump together!")

GIDEON DOES SPEECH

THE ROYAL COURT BATHROOM needs to poop. They line up next to the throne.
THEY HOLD

MEMBERS OF THE ROYAL BATHROOM COURT

“Please your majesty I need to poop!” “You’re taking so long!” “You promised we could use the toilet!”

THE JESTER: OH shut up! Give me five more minutes!!!

Jester runs down the line clonking each character over the head. Goes back to toilet and kills the lady jester

THE JESTER: My poopy is still stuck in there. I thought now that I’m king it’d come out. Ow! It hurts so much! Nobody look at me! Push push it out!

GIDEON (unfreezes): What have you done? You killed them all? I thought it was gonna be different.

(GIDEON grabs THE JESTER) You were supposed to be the one, you were the messiah, but you’re just a funny man, a fool, and an imbecile.

THE JESTER (EVIL!!!!) You can’t tell me who I am.

(His fart erupts out of his butt and kills both GIDEON. Gideon staggers upstage and die by the toilet)

THE JESTER looks at the audience, it’s wonderful, he staggers to the toilet and shits himself to death

THE END

APPENDIX B

Documentation:





