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# On Technically Love: Discovering My Voice, Defining a World, Delving in

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# *On Technically Love:* Discovering my voice, defining a world, delving in.

An Honors Project paper.

By Nathan L. Eckstein

As an artist, I strive to create work that inspires the artists, audience, and myself to think critically about the world in which we live. My hope is for those who see or read my work to walk away with a new perspective gained from the art they have experienced.

February 10, 2014.

I Hereby Reaffirm the Lawrence University Honor Code.

In this essay I hope to provide you, the reader, with a deeper understanding of my play *Technically Love; An Exploration of Love, Technology and Same-Sex Marriage*. This play was not easy to write, nor did it come into existence through any coincidence or a “stroke of luck.” *Technically Love* was the product of months of research, labor, and even love. In this essay, I will talk about the pre-cursory knowledge that led me to the tiny germ of the idea that was the starting point of the play, the origins of the story itself and the theatre tradition in which it is rooted. I will discuss the way it’s written and the process that produced the end product that is my play. Hopefully you will gain some insight about my characters Max, Danny, as well as myself, and how our stories are forever intertwined.

At its core, *Technically Love* is a play rooted in reality. The fact that you may know any of the characters is intentional and accented by my choice to base the play in the summer of 2013 and on real live people, experiences.

The creative process for this script is unlike any creative process I have ever embarked on before. While it has spanned just over seven months the bulk of the process occurred in a truncated and intensive month over the summer between July 1, and August 14, 2013. I wrote *Technically Love* in conjunction with Penumbra Theatre Company’s Summer Institute. The Institute like the play, is rooted in the tradition of Penumbra’s mission of “social activism theatre”- that is, theatre that produces “art for social change.” The aim of this kind of art is to address a social issue and start a conversation. The art should not simply provide mindless entertainment that gives the audience an escape. Penumbra’s Associate Artistic Director, Sarah Bellamy, heads the program and through her staff instills the idea that art is meant to challenge and engage the viewer in a dialogue. Sarah teaches Augusto Boal’s ideas of social action theatre from his book *Theatre of the Oppressed*. In his book Boal states “empathy is the most powerful connection a character can have with an audience.”<sup>1</sup> He points out that empathy is the result of ethos, or

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<sup>1</sup> Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, Theatre Communication Group (New York 1985), 103.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

ethical appeal and that learning is an emotional experience, and that those emotions shouldn't be avoided.”<sup>2</sup>

This, as well as Boal's idea that “all art, with an emphasis on theatre, is political and a strong vehicle for coercion<sup>3</sup> are driving forces both in Summer Institute's three year program and in *Technically Love*. In both the program and *Technically Love* the basis of the work is establishing an emotional connection with the audience and empathy for the topic at hand.

Ms. Bellamy's aim for us “Activist Artists” is encompassed in her 2005 essay *The Artistic Process*. The essay outlines how, as artists, we respond to what is happening around us. The essay then goes on to tell how the response serves as our commentary, which we “feed” to the audience. In turn, our commentary becomes action that allows us to create more art to respond with. It's a cycle based on dialogue.

When it came to deciding what I was going do for my project I knew there had to be a written component, but I had to decide if I was going to root my project in the written word, or dance. I chose to write a play. Initially, I tried to write a play that I had titled, *Bringing It Up at Brunch*. The premise was five gay friends gathering at the apartment of the only one who had managed to find a boyfriend. They were gathering for a revealing brunch in which emotions and love took the front seat. After a week of failed ideas I realized I was not “writing to task.” Writing to task is a concept introduced to me by Professor Timothy Troy here at Lawrence. It can best be described as knowing what about and to whom you are writing the play. An example, a ten-minute play for a college-aged audience about people and issues they can relate to. In my case it was a short form play addressing an issue I felt passionate about, the gay community. Keeping in mind the ideas of empathy, I refocused “*Brunch*.” Suddenly it became about the possibilities between the couple,

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<sup>3</sup> Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, Theatre Communication Group, (New York, 1985), 39.

not the brunch. But what was the problem? Why did the audience care? Where was the ethos?

*Technically Love* was born out of my desire to discover. In May of 2013 I was approached by Penumbra to return to Summer Institute to participate in the inaugural year of the third and final track of the program. This was a track I had been building toward and dreaming of with Sarah Bellamy for about four years. I immediately accepted the invitation. Like all endeavors for the theatre, the first step in any creative undertaking is establishing a mission statement and often times a declaration of purpose. Taking into consideration my own core values and the purpose for the creation of the art I knew that I, as an activist artist, would need to write a play that was both political and relatable, while still maintaining a socially responsible entertainment value. I submitted my initial project proposal. It outlined my desire to “write a script and direct a staged reading about three characters who live in Minnesota in 2013, a gay couple, and their close heterosexual friend.” I closed my proposal by stating “it is my hope that this piece opens a new dialogue about the new frontier of gays here in Minnesota.” This proposed play was *Bringing It Up at Brunch*. On June 11, 2013, I wrote my vision statement. It reads:

“As an artist I strive to create work that inspires and causes the artists, audience and myself to think critically about the world in which we live. My hope is for those who see my work to walk away with a new perspective gained from the performance. Through the course of the six-week program I hope to craft an evening of theatre that exemplifies both the festivals’ goals of new work that will enlighten, challenge and inspire the audience and my own artistic goals.”

Looking back at the year leading up to the invitation to Penumbra, there were three major events that informed the creation of what would be the beginnings of *Technically Love*. During the winter term of 2013 in my History of American Dramatic Literature course with Professor Privatt I wrote a bibliographic essay titled “Gay Theatre: The Evolution of Gay Plays, and the Emergence of the Homosexual Character in American Theatre.” The essay provided invaluable research into the gay theatre cannon into which *Technically Love* would fit. The

second major event was my ethnographic research on the gay culture of London in the fall of 2012. For this project which I did while I was in London, I was given free reign to, in the safest way possible, discover and learn about the gay culture of London. I visited bars, clubs, community centers, and clinics and talked to over twenty men ranging in age from eighteen to their mid fifties. What I learned was no matter what their particular story was, they all shared the idea that being gay was just a facet of who they were and by no means defined them, or what they lived for. This became my underlying message as I began character creation for the play. The third was discovering two guys named Billy Nastyn and Pat Sendora. They post a weekly video blog, or “vlog” on YouTube about their wedding planning process as a way to document the year between their engagement, their ceremony and life after getting married.

YouTube is a popular site owned by Google. Established in 2006 the site allows anyone with a Google Plus account to upload videos to his or her channel, a sort of personal page within the site. One can “subscribe” to a channel and receive a notification each time someone they subscribe to uploads a video. Billy and Pat’s channel *BillyandPatVlog* is an example of such a channel.

In playwrighting there is always something that “makes that day different from any other day” and sets the play in motion. Having a couple make a video blog about their wedding was that something. Once I’d settled on this as a convention within the script I immediately reached out to Billy and Pat requesting to use their videos as inspiration. On June twenty-eighth they granted permission and thus began the process of turning their videos into the basis of a script.

First I drafted the whole show in a two-page outline. The outline is a common tool used by playwrights as a way to save time and energy when it comes to creating dialogue, and as a way to plan out what will happen in each scene. It’s like a written storyboard. From there you can write the story you have just laid out in a very efficient fashion. The outline is also a great place to put research and notes to remind you of action and details that you want to include. That initial outline became version one, and by the time the creation process began at Penumbra, I had

already outlined the whole show in ten scenes and was ahead of the Penumbra Schedule. I credit this move with the overall success of my time management.

During the third track of the Summer Institute we as students are given six weeks to fully devise and execute our artistic vision. This meant the whole process of writing, editing and putting together a full production of *Technically Love* would be condensed into a very short, nearly impossible time frame. Once the program began in earnest I spent the first week getting the dialogue written and adjusted for the scenes I had outlined. After some extensive research and personal discovery it was time that I sat down and wrote draft one of *Technically Love*. I wrote this first draft in one night, July 15, 2013.

From the start, it was an uphill battle. There is nothing original about a gay couple that is struggling and surrounded by a group of supporters and haters alike; so, how was *Technically Love* going to be different, what was going to make it unique? I knew the videos would help but I couldn't just copy Billy and Pat. This is when I remembered all the gay men I had spoken with in London and how they were first and foremost people, - and then somewhere between worker, father and lover - they were gay. Each had their own story to tell, and that's when it hit me. Tell my story. Nothing is more original than my story. The only problem was that meant the project would become unavoidably personal. While Penumbra was quick to praise the idea and felt it was more in line with the vision they had for the evening, I was more hesitant. It was a big risk that would either make this process infinitely easier or unbearably harder. I took the risk and to this day I don't know if it was the correct one.

Max was the first character to "be born." He was the character who had always been floating around in my head. Max is a mix of Pat and I. Max is energetic, stubborn, publicly confident and above all a people pleaser. Max, like myself, represents the stereotype of the "fem gay," a gay man more effeminate in his performance of his gender and sexual identity. He is easy for the average person to point out, as clearly homosexual, based on society's definition of "gay." These qualities make him the perfect foil to Danny. Danny is a bit more complex. Danny is a mix of Billy, past boyfriends I've had, and the "ideal husband" for Max. Later, Danny

would take on qualities of my actors Nathan and Bryan. Danny is more closed and private than Max. He is more focused on controlling his image to be just the way he wants it to be seen.

With Danny I wanted to do two things: one, show the stereotype of the “manly gay” or someone whose performance of gender lines up more with society’s idea of masculinity; and two, show the sexual spectrum. I believe, as do many people, that sexuality is a spectrum; the Kinsey Scale<sup>4</sup> demonstrates this spectrum. Danny is a 5 on the Kinsey Scale. For Danny this means he is “predominantly homosexual, only incidentally heterosexual.”<sup>5</sup> With Danny I could explore ideas of “Heterosexual Benefit.” This is an idea Lisa Albrecht, an activist educator and founder of the School of social work’s undergraduate program in Social Justice at the University of Minnesota, established. She lays it out as a list of twelve things that heterosexual couples can do and benefit from that same-sex couples cannot. Some examples from her list are; public affection, job security, and many of the things the Defense Against Marriage Act enforced and still enforces. Danny’s gender expression allows him to be relatable to both the gay and straight audience member simultaneously at different parts of the show. Max and Danny allowed both me, and eventually the audience, to tease out and examine ideas of gender identity, sexuality and personal expression. I imbibed them with a mix of my personal experience, lessons learned in London, and just a bit of dreams.

Finally, Amanda, the best friend, is based on a compilation of my best friends and serves that role in the play as well. She asks the questions I imagine are on the audiences’ mind, and is the link between Max and Danny and the audience. She also represents the support that many of the men in London and myself feel and rely on.

The story of *Technically Love*, while based off of the video blogs and my own experience and people in my life, additionally hails from a dream I had during the initial brainstorming stage in early July of 2013. In the dream, I was sitting on an oversized couch with a man I knew to be my fiancé, we were discussing life, and

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<sup>4</sup> “The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Inc.” Accessed July 2013. <http://www.kinseyinstitute.org/research/ak-hhscale.html>

what it meant to be gay. From this dream the setting and initial idea for the show's message began to take form. Once I knew who Max and Danny were, it was easy to write them into various situations and debates, and let them inform the story line. My two requirements during the writing process were: one, we needed to cover the year leading up to the wedding in a way that communicated the passing of time; and two, no more than three characters could be on stage talking at once. This kept the writing to a level that I knew I could accomplish in the time given. In addition, this tactic kept the story focused and the characters clear. Each new character I brought into the mix needed to enhance the story and serve an unfulfilled purpose. For this reason, a scene I wrote with Danny's Dad, and a scene with Amanda's friend Sarah never made it past the rough outline.

Once draft one was completed I had what is called a "working script." Draft one was an 18-page, 11-scene story, was warm and cozy, and far from done. In version one Max and Danny are a problem-less couple being interviewed by a cheery reporter and are "proud to love" each other, they have no conflict or pushback. My script editor and playwriting professor at Penumbra, Carra Martinez, quickly pointed out there was no conflict or tension, that no one would care, and that the video blogs needed a re-write. During the peer evaluation session my peers said the same things and pointed out that Max and Danny needed to be people, not just ideal beings. By the end of week one, with my working draft in hand and a whole slew of ideas, I was able to turn my attention to the production and make the all-important decision about directing. I was the only one out of the nine of us students to completely relinquish directorial control of my art piece. This allowed me to focus solely on the writing of the script and the producing of the actual show. I would maintain creative control over the show in all departments except directing. At the start of week two we had our first production meeting. A production meeting consists of all of the creative and administrative parties involved in the show sitting down with the director and discussing the show's needs. In my case since I still maintained creative control, I was the one in the hot seat of the meeting. In all, 15 individuals including mentors, editors, designers, director, and program

administrative personnel attended the meeting. The meeting went well since I was able to present the working draft and my needs were clear and laid out in the script.

The rest of week two was spent in class-like gatherings with the nine artists listening to various members of our team inform us how we could benefit from their expertise. With a looming casting deadline at the end of the week the next step in production was to find actors. Unlike my fellow artists I did not have a bevy of high school aged friends in town for the summer, so I was forced into a professional casting call. I got lucky twice in my casting call. First, one of my project advisors was, and still is, a professor at Hamline University where we were based. She recommended a student actor by the name of Nathan Gebhard. Once Nathan's name was on the table, it was quickly discovered he had worked in the box office and usher core for Penumbra in the past and was supposedly a good actor. My program coordinator, Claribel Gross, reached out to Nathan first and was met with enthusiasm. Upon reading the show's summary Nathan was hooked and agreed to audition. Nathan won me over in the first two minutes of his audition and I cast him on the spot.

With Nathan in place I needed to find a counterpart. Fortunately, Allen Weeks my technical director had access to the Penumbra actor database, and after searching through it, I found a handful of guys who I reached out to. Two quickly became front-runners - a man by the name of David and another student actor named Bryan Porter. After David had date conflicts with the performance it was Bryan or bust. Bryan auditioned for me and at first I wasn't sold, but after his audition he mentioned he knew Nathan and had heard of the project through some Hamline University friends in addition to the casting call. Knowing Bryan and Nathan were acquainted sealed the deal and I cast Bryan. The final role to fill was the female actress who would play both Max's Mom and the Reporter. I cast my fellow Penumbra Institute alumni and friend Lena Zinkl, and my cast was complete. With production taking my time it was hard to keep working on the script. During week two I worked tirelessly with my main script editor, Carra Martinez, revising version one into version two.

One of the first things to re-shape the story in a big way was my Internship at OutFront Minnesota, a local LGBTQ organization. Penumbra had partnered with OutFront to provide me both an internship experience in tandem with my project, but also a source of knowledge that could help me make my art current and responsive to an issue. Here is where I was able to draw on Boal and Bellamy's shared idea that art is political. OutFront had helped lead the crusade for marriage equality in Minnesota. With an insider's view into the fight for marriage equality I was able to make the vlogs the political piece of the show while still maintaining the artistic flow. Max and Danny would be getting married during the fight for marriage equality and the big question would be if their marriage would be legal or not. Suddenly my play had yet another point of conflict and like the ideas in draft one, I was writing to task.

The new version of the script introduced Max's mother, a staunchly conservative type who was openly unsupportive of Max. Max's Mother is based off real people in my friends' lives who have unsupportive families, as well as stories I heard in London. The unsupportive friend is not a new gay theatrical character, but her originality is based in her desire to understand. I wrote Max's Mother hoping that an audience member who relates to Max and his mother may see them and begin the dialogue with a loved one. In version six Ethan would be written from the same formula. In addition, with the new angle of marriage equality, I was able to introduce Alice, a reporter for the local newspaper, *The Star Tribune*. Alice was a convention first, and then a character. She is in the play to establish the time and place of the action. Later she would become the political hinge and the vlogs returned to being more informative than political. From my research at OutFront I learned that from May 2011 to May 2013 Minnesota waged a battle against marriage equality; I also learned that from September 2012 to August 2013 Minnesota went from the defeat of a constitutional amendment prohibiting same-sex marriage to the legalization of same sex marriage, and the marrying of the first same-sex couple in Minnesota. Alice's purpose quickly became someone who would connect the show to those events in her interviews and ties in the repeal of section three of DOMA as well. As a character she exemplifies public animosity and the

public's voice in the polarizing issue of same –sex marriage. In this draft Danny became more private while Max became more public, and the reporter took a more serious and questioning tone. The chronological order of the script was re-vamped. I made the whole show chronological except for the first video blog and tightened the existing dialogue.

Week three at Penumbra was quite busy. On Wednesday July 24<sup>th</sup> I assembled the cast for the first read through of version two of the script. We all sat down and read through the show with Mr. Lou Bellamy the founder and artistic director of Penumbra, who was my director. It was with this read through I learned that sometimes what looks good on the page sounds terrible out loud. When Nathan, Lena and Bryan, read the script for the first time, I cringed at how cliché the whole thing sounded. With no prompting I went back to edits. By Friday I had version three of the script. All the corny and cliché lines were removed, flow was altered, Alice's role was solidified as a link to the politics of the real events, and the Hallmark-feeling final scene "proud to love" that closed the play, which up to this point was everyone's favorite, read horribly and was cut immediately. With that cut the play became less about YouTube and the videos, and more about Max and Danny's life behind the camera. Earlier in the week I was given time to assemble an initial technical needs analysis for the show, which dictated the technical needs as well as costume, light, sound, and scenic needs for the show. On Friday of week three the cast met for the second time for a four hour rehearsal that ended up re-shaping the show and establishing one of the closest casts I have ever encountered. During that rehearsal we had a stimulating conversation about sexuality and ones own identity and I realized I had miscast Bryan and Nathan. Nathan was set to play Danny and Bryan was set to play Max. I realized during that conversation that while Nathan was most like Danny in real life, Bryan as a strait man would be unable to make Max "real." He was tending toward a stereotypical portrayal and that is not what the show needed. It was with that switch I changed my show from a fiction to a reality, from a story of two gay guys to a story of two men who just happen to be gay.

By this time in the process Carra and I had a pattern; a new draft on Monday, re-working the script Tuesday to Thursday, and rehearsal with the director and the actors on Friday. Through the week I would make tweaks to the newest version and wait with bated breath to see how they sounded on Friday. Over the weekend, the week's revisions would become a new version. With Nathan and Bryan on board I was able to experience writing not only to task but also for an actor who was originating a character. As a playwright this is both thrilling and terrifying, since there is no buffer between your writing process and the actor and director's creation process. To add to the excitement I was writing in "live time." My last scene in the play takes place in August after couples could legally get married in Minnesota but in mid July I was writing the unknown, a situation very few playwrights ever face. This process continued through versions three and four without fail.

Week four brought version four of the script and also a whole host of problems. My 15-person production team was dropping like flies. My costume designer, videographer, props master and YouTube consultant all dropped the project for various reasons ranging from overloads on the other eight projects to lack of time. Suddenly, I was not only writing, but also costuming, filming the vlogs, and dressing the set all by myself. This was a challenge I had not anticipated. Fortunately I had secured a session with acting coach Tonia Jackson, a company member of 15+ years at Penumbra. In what came to be known as "that Friday," Nathan, Bryan, Lena and I pulled an eight hour rehearsal day and accomplished the following: filmed all of the video blogs for the show, took over 100 engagement photos of Max and Danny for the slideshow within the play, had a rehearsal with Mr. Bellamy, and the acting workshop with Tonia. In his actor feedback Nathan writes about this experience;

"The most meaningful session was the time spent with Penumbra Company member, Tonia Jackson. With her coaching, Bryan, Eckstein and I were able to dissect the most critical scene for Max and Danny and rebuilt the characters' objectives based on a holistic sense of how Bryan and I were beginning to understand our characters. As an actor, this was an incredibly

empowering process, which brought the character of Max to a much more real level for me.”

The scene Nathan is talking about is a scene in which Max and Danny have a fight about the videos and the public image they have garnered, and the risks making the videos carries. This scene became an exercise in improvisation where Bryan and Nathan went off book and improvised a scene in which Danny accused Max of loving the videos more than him. The culmination left tears in my eyes and like Nathan wrote, I knew who Max and Danny were. This scene has remained one of my favorites and was the scene I chose to re-work and present in my senior project here at Lawrence in the fall of 2013.

Week five was a juggling act and actually quite tricky. With the videos already filmed, I had to edit version five of the script around the videos. This was trickier than I had imagined because the dialogue had to change, but the dialogue still had to lead seamlessly into the videos. Also Bryan and Nathan had to be conscious of what they did in the videos so the Max and Danny on stage didn't contradict the Max and Danny in the videos. With the creative process on the way to completion I had to turn my attention to administrative matters. Press was going out and tickets to the event were beginning to sell. Suddenly it all became very real. People were going to see my play and it had to be good. I was to open my evening of the three-day ALOUD festival at Penumbra and, with the founder and artistic director at Penumbra, Mr. Bellamy's name attached to my show, the pressure was on. Keeping myself calm and “in the zone” became a daily struggle as I juggled all my hats. To add to the stress my video editor dropped, out so I was also editing the more than two hours of video blog footage and making the slideshow. With version five safely in the can for Friday's final rehearsal in the studio, I thought nothing else could go wrong. I was wrong. On Friday afternoon after Lena, Bryan and Nathan's first run of the show, Mr. Bellamy pulled me aside and told me he was cutting Lena from the role of the Mother and Alice. I needed two new actresses by Monday. With a week to the premier, I politely told Mr. Bellamy I would do so despite my inner feelings. Once we were done I promptly left the rehearsal hall and went about solving the problem immediately. My colleague BriAnna McCurry, who was

instrumental in the idea to include Max's mother in the show during a workshop in week one, volunteered to read for the character. Despite the strict rule against each other being in the others' performances, Claribel allowed BriAnna to join in as the Mother. After a cast wide brainstorm with our stage manager, Mackenzie, we settled on Natalia Gaston to play Alice. Natalia, a professional actress Mackenzie and BriAnna knew, was already working with my colleague on her show but was more than pleased to help. Crisis averted until Monday.

Version five I referred to as the freeze version. It came out on August 10, 2013 four days before the premier performance. We had already filmed the video blogs so those parts of the script couldn't be edited; I only adjusted dialogue that was going to be performed live. In this version four big things happened. First we solidified the scene order. After filming we realized that two of the videos would make great costume change covers so we arranged the show to allow Bryan and Nathan to get off stage twice each, without stopping the flow of the show. Secondly, I decided to end the show with a video. Third, Max's Mother and Alice became outright conservative. Fourth, I wrote the final live scene of the show, a scene that to this day is one of my best examples of writing to task. It truly encompasses both the theme of the play and the emotion that Max and Danny had been building to and was resolved in a balanced way.

Week six, also known, as tech week, in my experience it is notoriously stressful, and anxiety inducing. It is the week where your director and technical crew have a week to put your show on stage and add all the lights, sounds, costumes, props and pizzazz that make it a show. Unfortunately we had nine shows to tech in three days. On Monday, Nathan, Bryan, and I filmed a promotional video for the show and ran through the show for the first time with Lena, BriAnna, and Natalia. On Tuesday we had our three- hour tech of the show. The show looked amazing except for one thing. Nathan, Bryan, and the cast were set to carry their scripts on stage like a staged reading, but after tech they looked weird and Mr. Bellamy said he would think about what to do. What he did was unprecedented. He strolled into the rehearsal room on Wednesday morning and announced that Lena, Nathan and Bryan were to be off book. No scripts allowed. With forty-eight hours to

curtain we were in a crunch. The next day was my 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday and we were all scheduled to have the day off; the following day was the show with only one dress rehearsal in the morning. I canceled my birthday, and Nathan, Bryan, and I worked to get them off book. Our efforts paid off and Mr. Bellamy was very happy with the result. The final addition to the show was the kiss, added in the heat of the moment by Bryan and Nathan on the last day of rehearsal; it turned out to be quite controversial.

The show premiered on August 16, 2013. Between the three artists that shared the second night of the ALOUD festival we sold out and wowed the crowd. Unlike most opening nights, my opening night was not where my creative process ended. In fact it's only the beginning. At the show, Penumbra collected audience feedback and I also solicited response from patrons who I knew had attended the show. I did this to collect ideas, reactions, and insights into how my audience experienced and connected with the show, if at all. The response was overwhelming. Thirty-two individuals and countless anonymous comments on the Penumbra feedback cards provided over fifteen pages of feedback on the show; the surprising part to me was that it was mostly positive. People connected to Max and Danny in such personal ways and shared stories with me about their own difficulties with their families and loved ones. They shared themselves so candidly that I knew I had to continue the work on the play. The three biggest critiques were that Amanda needed to be more present, Alice needed to be defined, and that people wanted more of Max and Danny's life and friends off camera. While I was ecstatic, I also needed a break. I put the live footage of the show on YouTube as "Technically Love Live."

During the next few weeks I wrote a few scenes for *Technically Love*. One was about Danny coming out to his dad. I also wrote Amanda a new scene with Max. These scenes were of quality but nothing brilliant. From there three months passed. In that time I began my senior year of university and was writing version six at a leisurely pace for Professor Troy to get at the end of the ten-week term. The first few weeks I made little progress, then it happened - lighting stuck again. On October 9<sup>th</sup> 2013 Billy and Pat made a vlog acknowledging and promoting the show. Within a

day over a thousand people had seen the play and requests were pouring in all over the globe to make the video internationally viewable. I was happy and scared all at the same time! To date over 3,500 people have seen the show in all 50 states and 77 countries internationally. With this as my motivation I quickly set about finishing version six.

Version six reflected all the feedback I had received. Amanda was expanded from her one scene insert to play a more crucial role. She also became Max's best friend so Max had someone in his camp who was supportive. The reporter, who was criticized for being too political and harsh was pared down and became a mere unbiased sounding board for the boys in a one off scene that resembled her character in version one. In September, I wrote and tested a new scene during my senior project based off the scene Tonia Jackson and the boys worked through during week four at Penumbra, where Max and Danny have a fight over the video blogs and Max's willingness to be so public. This scene gives the boys visible conflict, something the feedback said was missing.

The first new scene that I wrote was about Ethan, Danny's friend, who shows up, and gives us someone from Danny's past along with more complicated conflict that didn't revolve around the blogs. Ethan is based off a conglomeration of some of my best straight friends and gave me the opportunity to explore what it would be like if they were intolerant. I used the Max's Mother formula to make sure we still can experience empathy via ethos with Ethan. The second new scene saw Danny become bisexual. I wrote the scene after a conversation I had with a dear friend about his own fluid sexuality and ambiguity. The conversation inspired me so much and was so eloquent in nature; it didn't take much to put it into Danny's voice. Upon completion, this new scene added a new depth to the script and made Amanda the living and breathing character she needed to be instead of the one that was so harshly critiqued after the August show. This draft was clearly a stepping-stone on the way to the next performable version of the show. It had tons of new ideas, but was most useful to me because it brought me back into the world I had left and re-introduced me to these characters whom I consider some of my closest acquaintances. I turned in version six at the end of November.

After the December break Professor Troy gave me version six back with notes. This was the first version with no input from Carra or the Penumbra crew. The edit came back with positive feedback on the new material. Tim had cut out the extra talking and narrowed it down to the essence of each line. Even with the positive and minimal required changes I knew something was missing. In cutting out the old reporter scenes and condensing the material into an unbiased report, I had lost the essence of the piece as well as all the content that had made it political and relevant. Over coffee with Nathan, I told him what I had done to the reporter. He was confused, noting the fact that the reporter not only established time and place but was the political backbone to the play. Without her, he pointed out the play lacked intent. He told me to “stick to my druthers,” so I did; in the edits leading up to version seven I re-added the reporter scenes that were in version five from the Penumbra show.

It is through this long process I have arrived here at version seven of *Technically Love*. Version seven of the script came about in a much more familiar fashion than version six did. It was written and edited in the span of about four weeks in January 2014. Once I got back to Lawrence, it was game on. With the reading less than a month away I needed to work fast. With version seven I had doubled the length of the script from this past summer. The script was now borderline full length at about forty pages. Ethan’s storyline was resolved and the show had a dramatic dip in the falling action. Additionally I had added a new video blog, a one-off by Danny about Max’s ring that shows us the softer side of Danny and brings us back from the fight. These additions give Danny more direct conflict like what Max experiences, which people had suggested in the feedback. Subscriber counts were fixed and the general story solidified.

Version seven felt like version five all over again. It was performable and only needed tiny tweaks. It had fully formed characters, great flow, and really felt like a complete show from start to finish. As I headed into performance I couldn’t help but think about those last few days last summer when the magic happened. With the show cast for the live recording of the reading all that was left to do was have a dry read of version seven to sort out any kinks. Daniel Vinitsky, my new Danny, brought

a new take to the character at the read that was surprisingly refreshing. Daniel imbibed Danny with a new softer quality that had been lacking when Bryan performed in August. After the dry read both of the Ethan scenes needed re-working. They were too cliché and Ethan's vernacular needed some work to bring it back from a comical edge. With a few edits Professor Troy assured me the Ethan scenes would be fine and the script was ready to go. It was decided that this was where we would hold. The reading on February first would be of version seven.

Prior to the reading I tweaked version seven into a "Lawrence Reading Edition" that added a narrator reading stage directions and actions. Sound effects were written into the edition and the script was made reading ready. During the rehearsal for the reading the cast pointed out places that if a word were changed or a line was eliminated it would make more sense. For the reading at Lawrence Nathan again read Max and was very useful in providing last minute editing notes on the script. Since Nathan and I have worked and lived in the world of the play longer than anyone else, we share an understanding of who Max and Danny are that goes beyond the knowledge that can be garnered from simply watching the show. Version seven of the script reflects those changes but does not have the narrator.

While the script has gone through seven months of edits, one thing I have maintained is creative control. I have done this by following Liz Lerman's 1993 guide to critical response. In this guide she outlines the five-step process to receiving feedback.

1. Affirmation: Allow yourself and your work to be appreciated.
2. Artist as Questioner: I ask questions of my work. In this step I used a checklist that aided in the basic structure of the script. Such things as character consistency, dialogue and plot cohesion were constantly monitored and tweaked.
3. Responder asks questions: Here my editors, actors and peers would ask me questions, and make edits to the script, usually in a neutral way.
- 4 Opinion Time: Here opinions are given. This time is for more personal critiques of the work. It does not have to be based in fact or contingent on steps one, two, or three.

5. Subject Matter Discussion: This was a time for the content to be evaluated on a basis that encompassed more than the writing. The main focus was usually on the personal vs. political aspects of the script.

After this process I had to sort through the script and make the changes that best served the story I was telling. The hard part of this is you can't roll over and just make changes; you must carefully think about each one. More than once someone has wanted me to make a change that I felt compromised a character or the script. For example, some people have wanted to eliminate Amanda while others have questioned the content of the "haters" vlog. I have to take into consideration how things have tested. Sometimes a line will read badly, but when spoken is brilliant, and vice versa. I had to be aware of those instances and edit accordingly. For example the line: "We're gay...obviously" tested well in the September showing so I kept it despite questions from Professor Troy about if it was actually funny or not.

The other theological and pedagogical pillar of Summer Institute that, until the end of this process I have never been able to fully grasp are the teachings of Paulo Freire and his ideas addressed in his book *Pedagogies of the Oppressed*. In Chapter Two he addresses the student/teacher relationship and points out "it is narrative. Much like theatre one party is listening while another tells a story to get the point, or lesson across." <sup>6</sup> He also introduces the idea that "the oppressed are not 'marginal's,' they are not people living 'outside' society. They have always been 'inside' – inside the structure, which made them 'beings for others'"<sup>7</sup>. I was introduced to this idea and quote my first year in Summer Institute (2008). Now, I understand the power of this observation and why Sarah instills these lessons in us as students from the beginning.

To say that *Technically Love* is my fantasy would be a lie, but to say that it is not deeply personal would also be a lie. I have written into the story my own opinions on marriage, equal rights, relationships, and love. I have also based all my characters on real people who really do believe and say the things that each

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<sup>6</sup> Paulo Freire *Pedagogies of the Oppressed; 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition* Continuum (New York, 200) 71.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid 74.

character says. They are the people on the inside. As I finish this paper on February 10, 2014, I am certain this story is not over. There is still more story to tell and more people to share it with. I hope to be able to not only leave a piece of myself on every stage that this story touches, but also, hold a mirror up to the audience. If one-person leaves the show challenged or inspired, or feels touched in some way by this story, Max, Danny, and I have done our job successfully.