

I have always been so captivated by the movies and shows I saw on screen. I would diligently wait for that perfect moment when two characters fall in love or when the protagonist finally reaches their goal. I think part of why I love movies so much is that I long for my life to be one. But why? Why is real life seemingly much worse than an illusion on a screen? My project explores the dynamics between the spectator and performer within theater, dance, television, movies, etc. There is an imbalance of power between the audience and performers as there is an exchange of information. I would like to play with the idea of switching this system by placing the viewers into a position of momentary discomfort. I am trying to uncover the ways in which our daily lives are tinted by the spectacle presented on screen and how we can become active participants rather than passive audience members.

Another thing that I have always loved is dancing. I feel that dancing is one of the most effective ways of storytelling in that it can translate the moments that words cannot describe. I choreographed a dance to a compilation of my favorite scenes from movies and TV shows. I wanted to have my movements mimic the rhythm and cadence of the character's voices. I chose to film my dance and display the ways in which the characters are reflected within myself through editing. My work is somewhat of a collage of film. I have always struggled to explain why film holds a special place in my heart and I think that dancing within a video made by me is the most accurate representation of my love for cinema.

Through this exploration of the societal impact of the spectacle, I aim to shift the viewer's perspective and spark an open dialogue internally as well as externally. Social media platforms inflict an enormous amount of pressure on our lives to reflect the model of the "ideal life" though we will never reach it. This teaches us to constantly survey and judge not only those around us but our own actions and decisions. We become the audience members of our own existence. Media forms have conditioned us to believe that without someone watching, our actions are not legitimate, which enforces a mindset of constant surveillance. We must always be watched by others and ourselves in order to ensure validation. But let's acknowledge it and understand that it can be managed. As we live in a consumerist society that is increasingly centered around showcasing your online altered reality, it is important to take a step back and remove the lense of judgment. It's alright to take a break from social media and be alone with yourself at times. Now more than ever, we are forced to exist alone and we can utilize this time for deeper introspection and self-care away from the eyes of others.

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# illusion translated

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SORAH GUTHRIE - THEATER

**THEATER**

written by

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## LIST OF CHARACTERS

SIMON - VERY NERDY AND INCREDIBLY SMART MAN IN HIS EARLY 20s. HE HAS AN EIDETIC MEMORY AND CAN READ MUCH FASTER THAN THE AVERAGE PERSON. HE PROVIDES ALL SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE AND THEORIES.

LUCIAN - HIS NAME MEANS LIGHT IN LATIN. THOUGH USUALLY GRUMPY AND DISHEVELED, HE ADDS SASS. HE IS IN HIS LATE 20s.

JEROME - HE IS OUR DANCER. A FREE-SPIRIT, JEROME OFFERS INSIGHT INTO CHOREOGRAPHIC INTENTIONS AND DANCE THEORY. HE IS A FIT ELDERLY MAN WITH SNOW WHITE HAIR.

MABEL - AN EARNEST GIRL SEARCHING FOR A DEEPER MEANING WITHIN HERSELF AND HOW SHE VIEWS OTHERS. SHE SEES THE WORLD THROUGH WIDE EYES AND FEELS READY. SHE IS SMARTER THAN OTHERS MAY THINK.

GREER - A CAREFUL WOMAN IN HER LATE 30s. SHE IS THE REFEREE. SHE SEES ALL AND KEEPS PEOPLE IN CHECK. SHE IS WEIGHED DOWN BY HER CONCEALED PAST. SHE IS BLONDE AND LIKES EMERALD GREEN.

TATE - OUR PHILOSOPHER. WISE AND ALL-KNOWING, HE PROVIDES THE GROUP WITH QUOTES AND FINDINGS FROM THE DEPTHS OF HIS MIND. HE SERVES AS THE SPOTLIGHT AT TIMES-HIGHLIGHTING WHAT IS NOT IMMEDIATELY REVEALED OR SEEN. HE IS THE QUIET BACKBONE OF THE WORK.

FADE IN

INT. THEATER - NIGHT

The shadow of a tall figure stands alone on a dimly lit stage. Red velvet curtains are drawn and the wood floorboards creak.

TATE slowly turns so that we can see a sliver of his face illuminated by a bright spotlight. The other half of him is in darkness.

TATE

Oscar Wilde once said, "I regard the theatre as the greatest of all art forms, the most immediate way in which a human being can share with another the sense of what it is to be a human being".

FADE OUT

Voices are heard arguing.

FADE IN

Suddenly the stage is filled with life. Six people sit at a wood table. Each has a water glass and various papers. There is a white board behind the table facing us.

JEROME

(shouting)

How do you expect me to agree with you when you haven't danced a day in your life?

LUCIAN

I don't need to have danced to understand that choreography is nothing more than a few steps strung together.

JEROME

But it's so much more than that, to dance is to be free, to explore the limitations of space and our physical bodies.

GREER

(sarcastically)

Ok we get it, dance is your passion and every human on this earth deserves to feel light and free.

JEROME slumps in his chair, too annoyed to say anything.

SIMON

You know, it's actually scientifically proven that dancing can improve the condition of your heart and lungs as well as increasing your confidence and psychological well being.

JEROME

It's ok kid, I don't need you to defend me. They don't understand.

MABEL

(quietly)

I love to dance.

LUCIAN

Good for you.

GREER

Maybe it's not about the choreography or the medical benefits but the way you feel when you dance.

TATE

Yes, the feeling of being connected to the music, the other dancers around you, and the audience.

LUCIAN

It's not that deep.

JEROME

No they're right, dancing is showing emotion. It is finding a way to represent what it's like to be human.

MABEL

All performance tries to uncover and display truths about humanity that no one had thought to look at.

LUCIAN

Aren't those truths better left hidden?

SIMON

Well they aren't exactly truths. What Mabel and Jerome are referring to is the altered reality created by playwrights, choreographers, directors etcetera.

GREER

Altered reality?

SIMON

I mean, what you see on the stage isn't real. Most often it's a romanticized or dramatized version of life in order to provoke a response from the audience. Even in literature it is common for authors to write just for a response. They aren't looking for approval.

GREER

So everything we see on stage is just a representation of reality but not the real thing. An illusion.

LUCIAN

So performance is really the exact opposite of life.

SIMON

(stammering as if he is on the brink of a huge discovery)

Yes, the spectacle or illusion falsifies what is real while simultaneously being a product of the same reality. And erm-I mean this illusion doesn't just exist on the stage. It is ever present

within social media, television, literature and mostly all forms of communication.

GREER

Can we ever escape this altered reality?

TATE

“‘Good’ theater is one that uses its separated reality in order to abolish it”

MABEL

How can you use something that you’ve created to destroy the same thing?

SIMON

A paradox.

LUCIAN

I’m lost.

FADE OUT

FADE IN

INT. THEATER - NIGHT

The water glasses are empty now. The table is a mess of papers and pens.

IGNORANCE:

TATE

Do you choose to remain in the realm of knowing or the realm of ignorance?

GREER

Are you saying that being ignorant is choosing to stay home instead of watching a play? Because let me tell you we all can’t afford to see a play every night.

TATE

To be ignorant is to refuse knowledge. To be unaware there is an inequality of knowledge. All audience members are ignorant unless they are prompted to seek knowledge and combat their state.

JEROME

So how do you make the audience realize their ignorance?

LUCIAN

By telling them.

He laughs. JEROME scowls.

SIMON

You have to find a way for the audience to acknowledge their own presence first.

TATE

Yes, their existence as a community all bonded by the common position of unknowing.

GREER

Yeah, they see their collective ignorance by first seeing that they are united by occupying time and space together.

MABEL

So people in an audience feel close to each other because they are separate from what's happening on stage together?

\*SIMON nods.\*

SIMON

Theater can be seen as a ceremony of community.

JEROME

And we see this in dance too! The choreographic community moves and breathes together as one unit. They are both the spectators and the participants.

TATE

How can you maintain the position of both the spectator and performer?

MABEL

Distance and closeness simultaneously.

GREER

Yeah, performance is full of tensions; the audience vs. performer, activity vs. passivity, an image vs. living reality.

SIMON

Most everything has two opposing poles but in this case, it's specifically about the contrast between detached investigation and essential participation.

TATE

Participation. Should the spectator improve their gaze or destroy the very position they take all together?

LUCIAN

Well if they remove themselves from the equation there is no performance.

SIMON

Lucian's right. Without a spectator or uhm audience, theater doesn't exist. Performance is defined by the people watching it.

GREER

Which is why those people can't be passive.

MABEL

Things don't feel legitimate unless someone is watching.

\*They all slowly turn and look at us.\*

TATE

The audience is more important than we thought. They are the heart of performance.

JEROME

So when they say, "Dance like nobody's watching"... that's impossible! Someone is always watching, even if it's yourself.

SIMON

You can be your own spectator. In fact, we survey ourselves all the time. When we look in the mirror, we are determining what we like and dislike about ourselves. We make snap judgements by looking through lenses given to us by media, glances, the words on shampoo bottles.

GREER

So that must mean being a spectator is inherently bad because it is founded on judgement.

JEROME

Judgement is necessary!

LUCIAN

Nah she's right, judgy people are the worst. Someone change my mind.

The room falls silent.

TATE

"I love America more than any other country in the world and, exactly for this reason, I insist on the right to criticize her perpetually",  
James Baldwin.

MABEL

To criticize is to love.

FADE OUT

FADE IN

INT. THEATER - NIGHT

LUCIAN slouches in his chair as TATE paces around the room. SIMON studies papers and the others try to stay awake.

COMPARISON:

LUCIAN

Don't get me wrong, I'm totally picking up what you're putting down but don't you guys just want to sit on the couch after a long day and watch some TV?

TATE

Well why do you watch it?

LUCIAN

What?

TATE

Why do you watch Television?

LUCIAN

I don't know...to take my mind off things.

SIMON

To escape reality.

LUCIAN

I mean when you put it that way-

SIMON

(cutting LUCIAN off)

People watch Live TV to feel connected to the wider world even though they are watching alone. We value a shared viewing experience as individuals. But in contrast, we choose to watch shows or movies on streaming platforms such as Netflix in order to escape.

MABEL

That's sad.

GREER

No, sometimes you just need a break from the world.

MABEL

But isn't that depressing? Our world is so horrible that we have to find any way to escape it? We enter another world just to get away from our own...

LUCIAN

Another world? That sounds too sci-fi for me.

GREER

When you escape something do you ever fully leave that something behind?

TATE

Is anything ever lost within us? Or do fragments and crumbs of every experience we have stay in us even though they may be hidden?

JEROME

You have to remember some parts of your past so that you can compare it to the new world you are entering...

SIMON nods and rushes to the white board.

SIMON

Social Comparison Theory developed in 1954 by Leon Festinger is the idea that we determine our self worth based on how we are compared to others. Often seen through common forms of media, this mindset promotes judgement and criticism.

MABEL

Wait so how does that relate to TV?

SIMON

It's the very essence of television. The characters we see on the screen are supposed to be role models or people we can relate to. In fact, relatability is the most valuable quality in a work as it draws viewers in. We are meant to see ourselves reflected in characters.

MABEL

So we learn what we like and dislike about ourselves by seeing characters on a screen?

SIMON

Maybe...

GREER

Humans learn by comparing.

TATE

The labour of translation.

LUCIAN

What the fuck.

GREER

No, think about it! When you were a little kid you learned to read by comparing the words you already knew to the new words. Discovering the unknown by using the known.

JEROME

And that's what dance is all about. Using an alphabet of steps to create something completely new.

LUCIAN

I guess life is about figuring out stuff with what you already know.

TATE

"I think the beauty of growing up is not really knowing and figuring it out for yourself", Khloe Kardashian.

GREER

Oh my god you did not just quote Khloe Kardasian.

SIMON

No, he definitely did.

LUCIAN

Oh god...

MABEL

What's so bad about the Kardashians? They built an empire driven by the sole force of womanpower.

\*GREER laughs\*

JEROME

Why did people watch them anyway?

LUCIAN

Lemme guess, to escape?

SIMON

Yes, but I think it was a bit deeper than that.

TATE

What makes characters appealing? Is there some recipe for relatability?

MABEL

Maybe it goes back to the whole thing about altered reality. Maybe the closer a character is to being "real" the more they are liked.

GREER

But what determines what is "real"?

SIMON

Showing human emotions. (pause) Think about it, when you watch a show it isn't the pure goodness of characters that you like, but their flaws. The little things that make them human. That make them like you.

TATE

There's some tension between perfection and flaws that allows a character to reflect our inner self.

MABEL

The "perfect" character is flawed.

FADE OUT

FADE IN

INT. THEATER - NIGHT

A moment of stillness. Though brief, there is a feeling of finality, of peace. Amidst the chaos of jumbled papers and thoughts our cast has found an ending.

GREER

We are the characters that we see on screen.

LUCIAN

Though they are complicated and sometimes mean.

MABEL

We know how they think and how their hearts work.

JEROME

We know that life hits them hard and it can hurt.

SIMON

They are a compilation of pixels on a screen.

TATE

But why is it that they are much more than they seem?

JEROME

The world is a stage and you are the performer.

GREER

You can try to escape and become an explorer.

LUCIAN

But it won't last long, for you are stuck on the screen.

SIMON

And the screen is in you, can you see it gleam?

MABEL

And though it feels like you are caught in between,

TATE

Between is where you need to be.

FADE OUT

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