

(Courtesy of Youngsun Cho. Used with permission.)

Youngsun Cho

Response for OCW in reference to The Internationalist

I loved working on the text of this play and with the people involved in the production. When I first read the play I was quite confused, and later I came to realize that there were a lot of silences and activities not indicated within the text. For me, this made rehearsing and exploring the first and final scene, especially, both difficult and rewarding. Both of these scenes were rehearsed while verbalizing our inner texts, and I think this helped me define the situation and the moments within the situation much more clearly. Sometimes the moments were so surprising or ephemeral that I worried that Adam and I would never be able to find our way the next time we had to rehearse the scene. It would be hard to find our place all over again, even though we had just found it! The most important direction Janet gave every single day was, “Put your attention on the other person.” From the read-through, she emphasized allowing the other person to make you speak. Because the situation at the opening of the play is a bit bizarre and not clearly explained, tiny cracks in focus or listening could really sink that first scene and make the audience lose interest. We realized that we had to rehearse that scene and do intimacy exercises before every performance, and during those rehearsals we still found new moments.

The most absurd and wonderful requests Janet made early on were to memorize the foreign language over winter break and (for the women) to wear high heels during rehearsals. The foreign language was a bear to memorize without attaching any meaning to the syllables, but saved a lot of time over IAP, and put the focus on the rehearsal process. I was able to go back and change Sara’s final monologue more easily because the bare text had been memorized. Wearing the proper shoes during rehearsals helped me find Sara’s situation better, particularly her anxiousness in the first scene, her embarrassment at dinner, and her subsequent humiliation the next day during the “all-hell-breaks-loose” office scene.

Understanding the character of Sara was difficult for me, I think. She does strange things, and the two qualities that I could consciously give her were a confident sense of humor, and a sense of pride. Janet suggested that she was a writer, an artist willing to explore new experiences and take risks. This helped explain her “impeccable” English and, to an extent, her boldness. Otherwise, I tried to put myself in the situation, create prior events, and pursue my objectives, and then take the character from there. The costumes also helped me do this. For a long time, Sara’s final monologue was a source of dread to me. In rehearsal I always felt confused and flustered with it, and finally one rehearsal it just kept getting worse and worse (according to Janet, “more and more depressing”) the more I tried to do it. Working that monologue was something that I had to do by myself, on my own time. It would not emerge in rehearsal for me. That evening I wrote and said in English what I thought Sara was saying, then aligned it with the foreign language, and assigned particular English words to particular words in the monologue. Doing this gave me direction and made the monologue much easier to perform. During the second to last performance, the monologue changed slightly while I

was preparing backstage about four minutes before the final scene started. Janet had kept asking me to end the monologue on a tenderer note, and I could never do it. Then, for whatever reason, I found a simple connection in the underlying text I had written in English that let me end on that note.

Working on this play, I learned how much interpretations of the characters, relationships and situations could change from night to night. For me, the second weekend went far better than the first weekend, and by the last two performances I felt comfortable, yet still fresh.