Spring 5-2011

The Misanthrope: Accepting the Notions of Moliere into a Modern Society

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THE MISANTHROPE:

ACCEPTING THE NOTIONS OF MOLIÈRE INTO A MODERN SOCIETY

By

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A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Fine Arts

Major: Theatre

Under the Supervision of Virginia Smith

Lincoln, NE

May, 2011
“The Misanthrope: Accepting the Notions of Molière for a Modern Society” demonstrates the conceptualization, rehearsal process, and critique of the direction for The Misanthrope, produced during the fall semester of 2010 for the Johnny Carson School of Theatre and Film. The conceptualization process included historical research of France during the 1660s and 2000s, meetings with the designers, and analysis of the play through structure and characters. The process included design meetings and rehearsals. The effectiveness of the production was demonstrated through the responses of four reviewers and a Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival respondent. Additional material demonstrates the process and the realized production.
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“Comedy is a ritual in which society’s laughter corrects individual extravagance” – Richard Wilbur

In the first year of undergraduate training at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, I watched a modernized version of Tartuffe. In that production, Orgon witnessed his wife’s encounter with Tartuffe through a glass refrigerator door in his kitchen. The actor playing Orgon pressed his face against the glass and slid down with growing despair as his beloved Tartuffe dropped his pants and advanced on his wife. Through the use of physical comedy and modernization of the text, the director effectively transmitted Orgon’s horror to the audience. As a freshman, I realized for the first time the effectiveness of using a modern setting to tell a classic story. The image froze in my mind for almost 15 years. I remembered this moment when reading The Misanthrope. Upon researching the play, I discovered that the New York Theatre Workshop had modernized a translation of The Misanthrope and set it in an office. Dutch director Ivo van Hove deftly deconstructed the play, adeptly using media to point out how our society has become dependent on virtual relationships (NYTW.org). Modern cultural dependence of social networking, reality television, and electronic gadgets continues to lead Western society into a similar hypocrisy, where participants are encouraged to say what they think but not in person. Hypocrisy in every age forms the crux of the theme of The Misanthrope and how the characters grapple with it makes the play especially transcendent through the ages as a classic work of comedy.
In the advent of social networking, cell phones, and laptops, the world is both more connected and isolated. The use of Skype, cell phone texting and Facebook allows users to communicate while at great distances from each other. These tools allow for quickly passing information, sometimes without much forethought. The reliance on cell phone texting and social networking does not require vocal activity or physical interaction with other individuals and may isolate users further. Western society’s ability to communicate and express itself is rapidly changing. Students are now more prone to text a response than to call each other on the phone. Home telephones are becoming out-dated. It is time to address an increasing dependence on technology to communicate using Molière’s time honored play *The Misanthrope* in the political and social environment of 2010. The play, as translated and modified by Tony Harrison, serves to skewer the hypocrisies of today’s socially elite as much as Molière was able to unmask the hypocrisies of the aristocracy of his own time. The character of Alceste also demands that society look at communication and its effect on others. Using models from late 20th century and early 21st century television like *The Office* and *Friends*, the world of *The Misanthrope* will be constructed in the image that a college audience will recognize while pointing out how as time continues society remains the same.
Chapter 1: Historical Background

The History of Molière

As research for the play began, it appears Molière poured much of his personal life into his character Alceste. Molière, born Jean-Baptiste Poquin, was a legacy to his father’s attempt at nobility. His father purchased the title of Royal Upholsterer, and planned to pass the title to his eldest son, Jean-Baptiste, upon his death (Encyclopedia 382). Molière received his father’s title while still a young man and probably visited the Court while seeing to the royal furnishings (Encyclopedia 106). Witnessing the purchase of lowly noble titles and those working their way up the hierarchy would later affect Molière’s shaping of the character Alceste. Molière later relinquished the title and sought out a living as an actor. Though Alceste does not give up his title, he undauntedly tells the truth even to the point of alienation of his equals or betters. Molière first joined an ill-fated theatre company called Illustre Théâtre where he could further observe the Royal Court (Encyclopedia 106). His associations with various members of Court, including Louis XIV, increased his encounters with nobility, complicating his ability to oppose strongly the negligence evolving in the French court. When he eventually found moments to offer comment, opponents emerged defaming him. Despite attacks, Molière was able to maintain a stable social standing with the king and had not only rejected the nobility once, but was now working for them (Encyclopedia 382).
Why he wrote Misanthrope

Molière’s speech impediment and need to for a rhythmic line delivery relegated him to comedic roles at the beginning of his career (Howarth 11). As he gained respectability, he changed the tone of his plays and his acting methods. His evolution as an actor began when he moved away from standard commedia dell’arte techniques when working with Tiberio Fiorilli, who played Scaramouche (Encyclopedia 419). Fiorilli taught Molière to perform without a mask, leading to the development of Molière’s famous moustache and goatee comically to highlight facial expressions (Encyclopedia 420). Molière suffered increasing hardships, marital discord, and illness after the death of his two sons (Encyclopedia 381). He attempted to write the tragedy of Dom Juan but instead worked it into the comedy The Misanthrope (Encyclopedia 322). He spent five years, the longest time of his career, writing The Misanthrope (Slater xxii). To bring about a real change in his acting and his persona, he removed his moustache to play Alceste (Slater xx). Considering his change of tone, care will need to be placed in working with the character of Alceste whose delicate balance calls attention to hypocrisy and while he feels tremendous love for Célimène.

The choice of one translation over another

Tony Harrison believes that each company and generation needs its own classics (Harrison xx). Once it is affixed to the page, it does not change with time and essentially is left behind (Harrison xxi). The theatre often presents classics to societies in a way that they understand in the moment they receive them. If I were to follow Mr. Harrison’s lead, we would have a new translation of the text that matched my concept of a working office. As a
witness to successful modernizations of older works, I would like to test Harrison’s belief by using an older text and applying a modern concept.

The Wilbur translation presented the cleanest way to present a middle-management view of the world, where the characters are perhaps closer to Molière’s intent and fit the best into The Office TV show concept. A discovery made during the summer made it apparent that modernizing the Wilbur translation would not be feasible. I had worked on various scenes from the translation and was preparing to cut it when the news broke. Other translations and adaptations were suggested, read, discussed and reviewed. The Martin Crimp version had made the most drastic changes to the original text, making Célimène an American actress and offering a string of profanity at the start of the play. The style did not mirror my own. If word play and verbal sparring are an important element in Molière’s original, then finding another one with equal verbal wit was important. Several other translations including Timothy Mooney’s were offered to me. Mooney’s was choppy and hard to read aloud. I found the Harrison translation had intelligent dialogue and references to writing that gave me the verbal wit and a reason to place the story in an office.
Chapter 2: Analysis of the play

There are a number of ways to analyze a play, and in this particular case the Francis Hodge and Michael McLain worksheet from their book Play Directing was requested by advisor Virginia Smith (55 – 56). An additional analysis from Backwards and Forwards by David Ball was included and can be found following the Hodge Analysis. Additionally, I used a technique called an action chart that I was introduced to at Henderson State University, which can be found in the appendix.

Hodge Analysis

I. Given Circumstances

A. Environmental facts

1. Geographical location, including climate

Though Molière wrote his play more than 300 years ago, our connection to it continues. Adapter Tony Harrison hoped that his reconstruction would stand the test of time and become a new classic for his generation. The adaptation was physically difficult to obtain in a recent printing and the 1973 adaptation is at times dated, with mentions of green velvet suits and Charles de Gaulle. Yet, society continues to struggle with the themes found in both the original and the adaptation. Harrison parallels Molière’s intent using a similar setting, political atmosphere, and socio-economic trends.

The setting of the adaptation and the classic is Paris, France where temperatures are mostly mild in the fall. Paris in September averages around 70 degrees Fahrenheit with
smaller chances for rain (discoverfrance.net). The City of Love seems pleasant enough for a romantic walk under tree-lined streets, visiting the Eiffel Tower or witnessing the majesty of the Arc de Triomphe. This production will not require coats for the characters based on this information. Additionally, the setting is also immersed in the fashion scene and will influence costuming further with couture style.

Much of Paris’ history is written in the fabric of the buildings. Rich architectural features from the height of the Sun King and Baroque period include gilding and ornate cornices and columns. Even after the bloody aftermath of the French Revolution, many of the splendid buildings maintain their nobility as imposing figures along the boulevards of the city. Trees line the Champs-Élysées, continuing the city’s beauty and architectural appeal.

Within the city, the characters of the play find themselves in Célimène’s apartment near some French government buildings, probably on or near the Champs-Élysées and presumably near the French Presidential palace or the legislature. Clitandre and Acaste tell Célimène that they recently attended a function for the government and have walked over to her party (Harrison 56).

The French language is distinctly important to this process. The characters in this play would speak French, but does not infer that the characters in our English speaking play need to have an accent. Because of the translation, actors are expected to speak in their English dialects but to pronounce the French words effortlessly and with the appropriate intonations and accent. Students with additional French language exposure will be helpful to this process. Additional help with pronunciation can be found throughout the department and the college.
Molière debuted his play in 1666. Tony Harrison’s translation is set in 1966, 300 years from the original. Time has slipped even further into the future and it is now 30 years past Harrison’s. Harrison mentions in his forward that he hoped to draw an analogy of French President Charles de Gaulle with Louis XIV, the Sung King who was known for absolute power. After looking at France’s history, many historians probably would not have drawn that analogy since de Gaulle included in his government members of multiple political backgrounds to help him govern France (Haine 172). Harrison arbitrary selection of the date places less emphasis on the political background of the play. Many of the references about de Gaulle could probably remain in the text without additional clarification, as many of the World War II generation are still living. There is, however, less analogy of Louis XIV than Harrison intended in 2010. No recent presidents have been noted for absolute government, and if they had, would have been overthrown quickly. Perhaps to our benefit, current French President Nicolas Sarkozy has found himself splashed upon the tabloids for marrying singer Carla Bruni while in office. This flamboyant lifestyle in some ways represents the new aristocracy in the form of celebrity status. The tabloid reports of subsequent affairs by both him and his new wife relate him closer to Alceste than the Sun King. Sarkozy is less a stoic icon of a generation to emulate than a slight embarrassment to the country’s pride. Perhaps to Alceste, this lack of decorum by the country’s president is a problem that every Frenchman might be able to relate. If he were in the U.S. he might have been incensed during the Clinton Presidency and demanded truth in all of his affairs. The generic references to the government in Harrison’s adaptation provide some leeway with the
inclusion of Sarkozy into lines that were meant to be about de Gaulle. The high sense of
celebrity that Sarkozy has now may be regarded as an equivalent for a Molière’s Sun King.
If we are to emulate that behavior, we have to like it first.

The importance of the year can be found in the immediacy it brings to the audience.
UNL’s theatre audience is not necessarily familiar with the events of 1966 and certainly less
familiar with the events of 1666. The key to the success of the play seems to fall on the
timeliness of the period it addresses. An audience is less likely to be compelled to change if
it thinks that it is not being challenged. It could not be any timelier than to be set the play in
the present, fall of 2010. Neither the adaptation nor the original addresses directly the time
of year, though the given details are about the time of day. Considering the beauty of Paris
both visually and temperature-wise, September would be the most logical conclusion. Paris
is in the height of its fashion scene and the government should be in session making
decisions for the country. Additional conversations with costume designer, Beth Skinner,
also aided in that decision by noting that the color palate and styles for fall clothing is often
more appealing than other months. We both were interested for the sake of comedic timing
to remove the hindrance of winter coats. The play offers Alceste and Célimène as examples
of what not to do, making the play somewhat somber and sad at the end. It is not winter in
the relationship, but their relationship has soured, changed and cooled; which could be said
for Paris, the city that Alceste seems to love so much, after the month of September.

The events of the play occur in one day. Act 1 begins in the evening or early
morning, around midnight while a party is underway downstairs. The subsequent workday
occurs in both Acts 2 and 3 as Alceste contends with his lawsuit and later that day as he tries
to recover from his losses. The play stays with conventions of 1666 where offstage events are explained onstage to continue the story.

3. Economic environment

The characters in this play are similar to an upwardly mobile cast of the TV show *Friends*, who are up-and-coming writers, editors, politicians, and rich kids. They are highly intelligent and rising stars in French politics, though they are often flawed in their logic. In the original concept for this play based on the Wilbur translation, I had hoped that the TV show *The Office* would be appropriate in guiding the characters in their relationships with one another. I directed successful tests using this premise for our Directing Period Styles class. This made the characters middle management, with growing wallets but with less authority and nobility. The language in Harrison’s adaptation made me reconsider this option. The weight of the language put emphasis on a higher class. Given Molière’s experience with the nobility and the Crown, it appears that he attempted to gently guide the nobility into acting according to the rules of their station and not acting out against the crown. This further encourages the characters’ high level of wealth and stature. The play encourages the audience to act appropriately by offering the characters as examples. As Alceste seeks truth through his verbal tirades, Philinte proves that the right amount of “brown nosing” or “biting one’s tongue” in a heated moment can aid one in obtaining a goal. It is reminiscent of how industrious people get ahead now, even at institutions of higher learning. Those who speak out often are reprimanded like Alceste but they often provide the impetus for positive change, even if they cannot directly benefit from the change. Philinte ends up the winner, winning Eliante and surviving the onslaught of truths revealed. With the
resolution in mind, it is important for the scope of the play to reflect a sense of nobility and their need for advancement in the hierarchy of their society.

It is surprising that Acaste and Clitandre both sport modern noble titles when the nobility was virtually wiped out during the French Revolution. Titles were certainly less favorable after World War I when most monarchies were overthrown or dissolved. The play mentions *The Almanach de Gotha*, the listed pedigrees of modern nobility, on page 57. The titles and the mention in the play of the listing suggests the British playwright found importance in sharing similarities of titled French with the royalty of the United Kingdom. For Americans, there is less interest in titles. As lighting professor Laurel Shoemaker pointed out, the current society’s nobility is celebrity. The Marquis, Acaste, seems to embody celebrity status the most and will both look and act like a playboy who only needs to snap his fingers to obtain what his desires. He boasts of being “Best Dressed Man last year” (Harrison 67). The combination of celebrity status and nobility will help guide the actors in this transition to the American stage.

Célimène, Alceste, Philinte, Arsinoé and Eliante are members of old money. Their families have long held land, wealth, or both. Alceste may have made the most sacrifices and had the hardest time maintaining his wealth as it is reflected in his cynicism and his direct conflict with an unknown antagonist after his land. Célimène and Eliante are related and probably both inherited or were favored somewhat equally from their grandparents. Arsinoé enjoys the lifestyle her parents have given her and in the world of this concept has her own estate where grapes are grown for wine and she runs her own winery. Her religious zeal that she notes from time to time could account for guilt about her money or that the main
market for the wine is for Catholic churches. Philinte is a young man who was given some things in life but is trying to make the best of the moment. He is our shining example of how to live and is frugal, well dressed and appropriately eco-friendly. He may not have as much as some of the others but is trying to work his way up.

4. Political environment

Harrison mentions in his forward that both his and Molière’s plays toy with control by the government in the height of power. He suggests that the play of power and the use and abuse of power by nobles was recognizable in Charles de Gaulle and his government. Harrison found the similarity between Louis XIV and Charles de Gaulle to be eerie and opportune. De Gaulle imprisoned 300 people for insulting the head of state, using a little known law (Harrison v). Harrison updated his translation to 1966 to make a circle of 300 years later from the original. There does seem like a lack of justice in the play but it does not seem justified in to the same extreme or in the same way as it would have been during the reign of Louis XIV. Louis’ reign was fraught with rebellion in his youth so that it is tangible to believe that he took absolute power of his state (Haine 55-57). In the world of the two plays, neither Louis XIV nor Charles de Gaulle is particularly dangerous or imposing. If anything is absolute power at the present, it is the power the Internet has in social networking and spreading secrets, truths, and lies.

5. Social environment

The social environment of the Baroque period helps to translate the relationships of the characters through costuming. During the Baroque period lead by Louis XIV, social
hierarchy was conveyed through seven indicators: “money, offices, clothing, servants, houses, land, transportation and language” (Structures 19). Many of the lower nobles wanted titles, even if they were of little consequence (Structures 23). This translates now to the 15-minutes of fame that many search for on YouTube. Oronte needs to climb the social ladder and finds some fame in defaming Alceste as an expert analyst in Act. 3. The title stays with him for a few moments. Fine clothing during the Baroque period included wigs and hats with plumes and exemplified one-upmanship (Structures 25-26). Acaste would lead the nobles in wearing the best, most expensive clothing. Célimène would also want to garner attention with haute couture to woo Acaste and Clitandre when they came to visit. Usurpers to titles often used extreme examples of this type of clothing to obtain clout as nobles, which often bordered on foolishness. Rich materials and colors often resembled that of the stage with the commedia dell’arte influence (Structures 27-28). As a usurper, Oronte would try to compete at this level but perhaps fail. For the servants, the lower classes received cast offs or less expensive clothing (Structures 28). This again reminded me of Basque wearing something intentionally worn out or passé, while Dubois would probably try harder to find something she liked but looked more like a clown. She would be like Mimi of the Drew Carey Show. Clothing still remains a strong indicator of societal standing.

In the 1600’s, Paris was over crowded with expensive rates on rooms and land (Structures 34). For prime real estate on the Champs-Élysées, Célimène would need more than just a little bit of inheritance to throw parties and entertain men. Transportation was difficult and most walked during the 1600s (Structures 38). Arsinoé, as a landowner similar to the wine growers of the 17th century, would have some sort of personal transportation, a
classy ride instead of a mule and cart or sedan chair (Structures 38-39). Arsinoé’s car pulls up outside Célimène’s apartment during the party in Act 1. Cars are more prevalent now in the city of Paris than perhaps the mule and cart of Molière’s time. At present, the Paris Métro is a convenient method of transportation, which Arsinoé ignores in favor of her car. In fact, the two marquesses mention they take a cab from their function to come to Célimène’s party on page 56.

One of the most important questions in this play lies in the social setting. Why does Célimène need to marry a man or play the men off of each other? Why marry at all when our modern world does not dictate that men and women marry when they live together? In Molière’s original play, she needs money to live through the financial support that a husband would provide. As a widow she would have had very little to compensate her spending habits in 1666. As noted earlier, Molière’s marital woes influenced the relationship of Alceste and Célimène. This is 2010, however, and women have begun running companies, running countries and even leaving the duties around the house to their husbands. To me, the answer lies in a power she holds with the government and with the power of holding jobs over someone. Célimène revels in the power she is gaining through her company. Her pettiness runs afoul with manipulation and probably even with the withholding of sex. She enjoys gaining prestige in attracting the richest and most influential men in Paris. She detracts those who might counter that power as proven in her portrait scene on page 57. She is as snobbish as expensive French wine and thus fitting to have her company be a wine review. Her character is reminiscent of Meryl Streep’s in Devil Wears Prada (IMDb). Setting the events in Célimène’s office rather than her apartment makes it her turf and makes
her more powerful. It is the symbol of her freedom and money. We are likely to believe that she does not need to sit at home receiving gentlemen callers; rather she receives them because it is part of her job. Alceste chooses to fight Célimène on her own ground because he courts her in her own dwelling.

3. Religious environment

The events in the original play happen after the Protestant Reformation and in the midst of the Scientific Revolution. In Harrison’s adaptation most characters seem to have few moral reservations except Alceste and Arsinoé. Arsinoé pretends to be a zealous Catholic, but is unmasked by Célimène during their scene at the end of Act 1 as one who wears inappropriate clothing to Mass and is a charlatan. Alceste tends to ask the Heavens for answers in his overdramatic musings. Religion is more ingrained and less of an object of discussion. They are probably all Roman Catholic, but not practicing or only minimally practicing their religion.

B. Previous action

Alceste has been brooding for some time about his relationship with Célimène that needs an immediate answer at the rise of the play. Alceste is also contending with a lawsuit that has aided his anxiety about his future. Célimène has invited a large cadre of people over for a party including Alceste and Philinte. As a last straw before the two men enter, Philinte makes a snide comment about a man he has just jovially addressed, sending Alceste’s heightened sense of honesty and plain speaking into overload. Alceste storms out of the party and into a safe haven upstairs.
C. Polar attitudes of the principal characters, both in the beginning and at the ending

Love is not a rational thing. Alceste believes he loves Célimène because he believes she truly loves him, but Philinte’s questioning of her devotion allows doubt to creep into him. By the end he knows for certain that she does not love him nor is faithful to him even though he still loves her. Célimène whose confidence in wielding her new found power at the beginning loses it at the end as she is reprimanded for manipulating and lying to her influential swath of potential lovers and former friends.

D. Significance of the facts in the total meaning of the play

An important consideration for this play is to acknowledge the darker tone at the end of the play, but to remember that the overall effect is comedic. In Social Structures of Molière’s Comedy, author Gaines states that the gloom is not justifiable at the end of the play (124). The play is not gloomy because the ultimate right is done with Philinte and Eliante helping Alceste, and Alceste is relieved of any wrong doing in suspecting Célimène. He is justified in his suspicions. Our romantic natures, though, sympathize that he is not complete in following his heart. The end tries to persuade us to sympathize with Célimène’s isolation, though she has earned it.

Fighting hypocrisy is the goal of the play rather than attacking the rich statuses of the characters. Alceste offers plenty of suggestions that the world is not right, but the play is not about class struggle since he has been part of the class and simply wishes to speak honestly (Structures 127). The play is “a microscopic dissection of civil misbehavior but not to the
effect of destroying the nobility or class structure” (Structures 127). Alceste is alarmed that his need for honesty and truth is not shared with his friends and his girlfriend. He knows in the depth of his heart that Célimène is false in her love despite his love for her and he begins to call everyone’s merit into question. Célimène is in the forefront of those who are most insincere. She with the others doing wrong are the centers of attention while those like Philinte and Eliante are not (Structures 128). The ones acting within the rules are often ignored in favor of correcting bad behavior. In the end, there is justice and those who have behaved poorly are punished (Structures 128).

II. Dialogue

A. Choice of words

Harrison adapted French words into the English verse, using common French words and recognizable phrases, giving Célimène and her high-minded friends an air of aristocracy. He uses words like mon cher on page 1, belle on page 3, and passé on page 14 to infuse the dialogue with French that a British audience would recognize and perhaps attribute to the well-educated. These phrases may be understood by their context in a sentence. He used the term “Élysée” to refer to the government. The word may also refer to the residence of the French President, similar to the American “White House.” Words like “bathosphere,” “doggerel,” and “Diogenes” needed referencing for comprehension by the cast. Professor Smith advised that these words might be beyond the scope of our college audience. The suggestion inspired the use of media to address some of these terms. The character of Basque was drafted to perform the task to be “everyman” to the relatively young theatre audience. As his status as a servant suggests and by tweaking his purpose in Célimène’s
household, Basque offers an excellent opportunity to give meaning to some words that may stump the audience. The context in which some of the words are spoken will give meaning to other words that are perhaps less familiar like “imprimatur,” “gaol,” and “bloody-mindedness.”

B. Choice of phrases and sentence structures

The original play was written in rhymed couplets, with 12 syllables to a line, called Alexandrines (Slater xxiv). The sentences maintain the rhythm whether it makes sense or not. There is enjambment when the meaning of the sentence runs to the next line to the “natural pause” (Slater xxv). Harrison describes it in the opening to the play as a “ticking time bomb” that builds to a silence rather than an explosion (p. vi). There are also occasional Drydenian triplets such as “conceal,” “appeal,” and “heel” on page 16 of the play (Harrison vi). He added elisions to make the lines come out faster (Harrison p. xviii). He uses compact and dense phrases like “pseudo-civil masquerade” on page 30, giving Alceste the ability to rip through the dialogue without having to go to lengths with added descriptions. The play is shortened to three acts when the original is five. Each line forms a compact bundle of power.

C. Choice of images

Harrison presents a number of images within the language with very few stage directions. The sense that most of the characters are highly intelligent comes from the compact and ornate phrasing of their lines. Even misguided Oronte gives a compelling poem full of potent verbal images. It paints a wonderful picture of water pools in the Sahara and how he despairs in the “miasmal black” (Harrison 43). The poem paints such an interesting
picture that I feel Alceste is unjustified by his denigration of it. Alceste offers a weaker poem that he describes as “awkward” and “passé” (Harrison 46). Motivated by jealousy, Alceste refuses to praise the poem, leading to the crisis of the play.

As a comedy of manners, words like veneer, grin, charade, and make-up are indicative of the hypocrisy that Alceste fights throughout the play. Though it is also a stage property, the physical love letter or *billet doux* also works metaphorically (dictionary.com). The image of the *billet doux* is important at the point where Célimène is truly revealed. The physical *billet doux* helps unmask Célimène for what she really is. As I consider media for this play, the switching from the mask of Célimène’s office logo to the *billet doux* is important in her loss of power. She tries to replace the mask, but everyone has seen under it.

III. Dramatic Action

Titles of the units were given based on personal response to the events in the scene. A brief description follows of dramatic action, explaining the tempo and including the characters and pages involved.

Act 1

1.1 – A Splenetic Fit (p. 27-38) – Philinte and Alceste

Philinte accuses Alceste of having a typical splenetic fit when Alceste storms out of the party downstairs. The tempo of this scene is similar to a game of pool. They set up the shots and then make short work of the table. Philinte and Alceste swap wins. Though
Alceste may ultimately win with passionate playing, Philinte sets up the best and most logical shots.

1.2 – Poetry Slam (p. 38-47) – Oronte, Alceste, and Philinte

Alceste slams Oronte’s poem. It is slow till “Jesus wept,” then all hell breaks loose. Philinte steps in to keep them from physically fighting. Oronte leaves to tattle to the Académie française.

1.3 – I’ll Do It My Way (p. 48) – Philinte and Alceste

Alceste refuses to follow Philinte’s advice to try to fit into the norms of society. The tempo is strong and melodic, like a Frank Sinatra song. It also verifies Alceste’s stubbornness.

1.4 – What’s Love Got to Do with It (p. 49-52) – Alceste and Célimène

Alceste admonishes Célimène for being home to too many men. The scene is reminiscent of a passionate soap opera.

1.5 – Zahadoom (p. 52-54) – Basque, Célimène, and Alceste

This is an obscure reference to the television show Babylon 5 in which a race of aliens known as “shadows” believed that survival of the fittest was the best course for all creatures. Basque alerts Alceste and Célimène that the marquesses are there. Alceste will have to endure their courting of Célimène as the scene plows ahead quickly.
1.6 – Darkness Approaches (p. 55) – Eliante, Philinte, Alceste, and Célimène

Eliante confirms Alceste’s pessimism of the two men’s audience with Célimène.

Their inevitable approach is like a tractor beam pulling them closer to conflict.

1.7 – Charge of the Light Brigade (p. 56-63) – Clitandre, Célimène, Acaste, Eliante, Philinte, and Alceste

The two men charge into the arena. The tempo is like battle and is quick and pointy. They gallop in heroically then Célimène slices their friends down in short order.

1.8 – Nuts (p. 63) – Basque, Alceste, Philinte, Eliante, Acaste, Célimène, and Clitandre

Alceste hears that an Academy Official has come to the party. This is a quick exchange.

1.9 – Whoops, there it is! – (p. 63-66) – Official, Basque, Alceste, Philinte, Eliante, Acaste, Célimène, and Clitandre

Alceste is summoned to resolve his spat with Oronte. It is a medium pace gallop to a quick whack to the head.

1.10 – Let’s Drink on it – (p. 66-69) – Clitandre and Acaste

Clitandre and Acaste form an alliance like an episode of Survivor. There is a degree of one-upmanship and boredom of hearing of the other’s achievements.
1.11 – Love is in the Air (p. 69-70) – Célimène, Clitandre, A caste, and Arsinoé

Clitandre and Acaste stay to hear Célimène cut Arsinoé down till she appears. It is similar to the scene “Charge of the Light Brigade.”

1.12 – Tramp Stamp (p.70-76) – Célimène and Arsinoé

Arsinoé admonishes Célimène’s behavior till the tables are turned on her. Like a sword fight, Arsinoé stabs first then gets hacked up by Célimène. It is quick and nimble towards the end as Célimène gets into her groove.

1.13a – Tit for Tat (p. 76) – Arsinoé, Célimène, and Alceste

Célimène’s solution is to have weekly meetings to discuss the latest gossip and shoves Arsinoé onto the returned Alceste. He who fights and runs away lives to fight another day. A few last quick stabs and then Arsinoé limps over to Alceste who could care less.

1.13b – Tit for Tat (p. 76-79) – Arsinoé and Alceste

Arsinoé gets revenge by promising Alceste the letter from Oronte. The scene is slow and methodical, with a dramatic punch at the end as we enter intermission.

Act 2

2.1 – Secret Love (p.80-83) – Philinte and Eliante

Philinte lets Eliante know that he would gladly marry her. There is the feeling of violin music in the air and a flutter of the heart.
2.2 – Enter the Fury (p. 83-85) – Alceste, Eliante, and Philinte

Alceste denounces Célimène after reading the letter. Like an action movie where everything slows down before it gets blown up.

2.3 – Decepticon (p. 85-91) – Célimène, Alceste, Philinte, and Eliante (Philinte & Eliante exit mid scene)

Célimène transforms as Alceste accuses her of writing a love note to Oronte.

2.4 – Who’s on First (p. 91-95) – Dubois, Alceste, and Célimène

The plays out like a vaudeville routine. Dubois comes to tell Alceste that someone told him to leave town but that she cannot remember whom it was.

Act 3

3.1 – Rack and Ruin (p. 96-100) – Alceste and Philinte

Alceste loses his lawsuit.

3.2 – Choose Wisely (p. 100-103) – Célimène, Oronte, and Alceste

Alceste and Oronte confront Célimène.

3.3 – No Defense (p. 103) – Philinte, Eliante, Oronte, Alceste, and Célimène

Eliante refuses to protect Célimène.
3.4 – The Jig is Up (p. 103-106) – Acaste, Clitandre, Arsinoé, Eliante, Philinte, Oronte, Alceste, and Célimène

Acaste and Clitandre confront Célimène with their letters. Clitandre slams her verbally and leaves.

3.5 – The 2\textsuperscript{nd} Grand Slam (p.106) – Acaste, Arsinoé, Eliante, Philinte, Oronte, Alceste, and Célimène

Acaste makes a similar verbal slam, nearly crying, and leaves.

3.6 – The Last Grand Slam (p. 106-107) – Arsinoé, Eliante, Philinte, Oronte, Alceste, and Célimène

Oronte criticizes her, offers her back to Alceste and leaves.

3.7 – One Last Try (p. 107) – Arsinoé, Eliante, Philinte, Alceste, and Célimène

Arsinoé tries to comfort Alceste and gets rejected.

3.8 – All That’s Left (p. 107-110) – Alceste, Eliante, Philinte, and Célimène

Alceste will marry Célimène if she will come with him to the country. She refuses and is left alone.
IV. Idea

A. Meaning of the title

A misanthrope is someone who distrusts and dislikes the world. Alceste becomes a misanthrope prior to the start of the play and by the conclusion becomes a confirmed bachelor because of it.

B. Philosophical statements in the play:

1. Love is not rational. Alceste tries to make logical arguments to support why he knows Célimène loves him and why he can overlook her faults, but cannot.

2. One should do as society does. Philinte offers many lessons to Alceste to moderate his impulse to declare each opinion especially in the company of influential friends of Célimène.

3. Love is telling someone the truth, even if it hurts. Alceste believes his method of telling the truth is for the ultimate good. He finally understands it at the end when he realizes for his own protection he must part ways with Célimène.

C. How does the action lead directly to the idea (meaning)?

Alceste is constantly trying to unmask the truth and whether Célimène is in love with him or not. He is even blind to the fact that he may lose his lawsuit because he is focused on her.
V. Tone

A. Summarize the analysis by finding a word or phrase to declare the play as a whole. – “The removal of masks”

The Ball Analysis

David Ball’s Backwards & Forwards method comprises of logical arguments that does not ask for mood or tone before first analyzing the script for moments called triggers and heaps. According to Ball, “an event is anything that happens. When one event causes or permits another event, the two events together comprise an action” (11). The analysis allows the reader to make logical assumptions about the play based on the events in it. This works for both new and old plays and helps remove the impediment of adding a concept too early in a process.

Before the play begins, the known sequence of facts are that Philinte and Alceste become friends. Alceste falls in love with Célimène. Alceste begins to demonstrate misanthropic behavior as he begins to distrust Célimène. A lawsuit is brought against Alceste regarding land he owns. Oronte writes a poem for Phyllis. Philinte and Alceste attend a party. Philinte hugs and welcomes a guest he barely knows and then verbally stabs the man in the back. Oronte arrives at the party. The stasis is that Alceste finds humanity to be lacking in moral fiber. The intrusion is that Alceste escapes upstairs because he cannot take anymore of Philinte’s hypocrisy and is stressed from his lawsuit.

In Act 1, Alceste admonishes Philinte for being hypocritical. Philinte teaches the theme of compromise. Philinte turns the conversation to Alceste’s lawsuit. Alceste promises
to give up the case in the promise of correct justice. Philinte charges Alceste with hypocrisy regarding Célimène. Alceste admits her faults, but he thinks he can change her. Philinte tries to offer Eliante as a more suitable mate. Oronte comes upstairs and tries to get Alceste to listen to his poem. Alceste objects because of his undue sincerity. Oronte recites the poem. Alceste criticizes it. Oronte and Alceste debate heatedly over the poem. Oronte storms out. Philinte reprimands Alceste for his sincerity. Oronte runs to the Academy, which occurs offstage. Célimène comes in to check on Alceste. Alceste expresses his concern for Célimène’s behavior. Célimène counters that he is just overly jealous. Acaste and Clitandre arrive at the party downstairs. Alceste decides whether to leave or not. Alceste challenges Célimène to decide between the three suitors. Célimène entertains the men by cutting down the social elite of Paris. The Academy Official arrives to arbitrate Oronte and Alceste’s argument. Alceste goes to Maxim’s, again offstage, while Clitandre and Acaste make a pact. Célimène cuts down Arsinoé as Arsinoé arrives. Célimène defends herself against Arsinoé’s gossip. Arsinoé tells Alceste about Célimène’s letter to another lover.

In Act 2, Philinte recounts the trouble at Maxim’s and professes his love for Eliante. Alceste, in a rage, pledges his heart to Eliante. Alceste demands an explanation from Célimène regarding the letter. The man suing Alceste starts wild rumors about what Alceste is writing. A man goes to Alceste’s house to warn him, which is not seen on stage. Dubois informs Alceste that he needs to leave town.

In Act 3, Alceste loses his lawsuit and returns to work. Philinte tries to comfort him. Oronte arrives to court Célimène. Alceste and Oronte challenge Célimène to decide between
them. Célimène pleads for help from Eliante, who refuses. Clitandre delivers a crushing blow by revealing Célimène’s love letters. Acaste continues to reveal the letters. Oronte leaves in a huff. Arsinoé tries to console Alceste but is rebuffed. Alceste offers a final way for Célimène to get out of the situation using marriage and moving to the country. Célimène refuses. Alceste leaves. Philinte and Eliante leave, leaving Célimène alone. The stasis at the end of the play is that Alceste is alone in the world to find a place he can fit in without hypocrisy and lying lovers. The obstacle of the play is that Alceste continually tries to pin Célimène down to decide whom she loves.

Both the Hodge and Ball analyses discuss points of conflict in the play analyzed. Some of the main conflicts in The Misanthrope of “Man versus Himself” are all the characters versus self-doubt, Alceste versus his brash opinion, Célimène versus vanity and greed, and Dubois versus her memory. “Man versus others” in this play includes Alceste versus the man in the lawsuit, Alceste versus Oronte, Alceste versus Célimène, Alceste versus Philinte, Alceste versus Célimène’s suitors, Arsinoé versus Célimène, Eliante versus Célimène, and Clitandre versus Acaste. Alceste versus the norms of societal behavior represents Man versus society. Alceste cannot resist the force of love in Man versus outside forces.

In regards to the forwards of the play, Alceste gets several chances that become near misses in stopping Célimène long enough for a conversation. Each of these moments serve to forward the play as he almost gets an answer from her before she runs off or he is distracted by some life event. The climax begins with the revelation of Célimène’s facade. Each man and woman’s reactions build as they each in turn exit, leaving her to Alceste who
stands by to witness the event. His resolution is to offer her marriage and to move to a quiet part of the countryside, which she refuses, leaving both with ruined reputations.

**Additional Analysis**

Creating a Top 10 list of questions and possible problems is a form of analysis that is perhaps more of an initial reaction to the play and may change over the course of the process. Some of these questions were less applicable upon the completion of the project than I initially thought. The following Top 10 questions and thoughts were considered as I conceptualized the play.

1. The language is challenging and pretentious. The audience potentially needs aid to comprehend the language or a reason to sit and listen to it. The level of success the actors have pursing objectives will influence how well we will perceive what they are saying and enjoy the play.

2. Alceste needs a sense of justification. We have to see how deeply he is affected by Célimène’s actions. We have to know that he is truly in love or very sexually tied to her.

3. The audience needs to love Célimène too. We can’t just be turned against her the whole time. It puts us in Alceste’s shoes. He’s not just raving mad. He got there by being hurt.

4. It is important to have an attractive cast. Not only do they speak well, they look good too. If we are going to try the “Friends” theme, then we need to believe that these
people are the social elite. They need to be well groomed. If they had higher titles like “prince” would the paparazzi follow them and take their pictures?

5. Philinte and Eliante are the keys to correct behavior, and though they do not always speak, their presence needs to be felt.

6. Alceste hardly leaves the stage. This is a tremendous challenge for the actor playing Alceste to maintain objectives and stamina.

7. In plays like Tartuffe, the servants/maids know more or are better informed than the nobles they serve. In this play, Philinte, a noble, knows more. Characters like Basque, a servant, are more clueless. If we make Basque an intern, he can help the audience by cluing them into certain things as he discovers them himself.

8. The Misanthrope is set in Célimène’s apartment. How much does it change when the setting is her office?

9. Does The Misanthrope fit a sort of commedia routine? Is this strictly a standing and talking play or are there moments of comedic action?

10. How do I keep the play active during all the conversations?
Chapter 3: Character Analysis

Alceste

Like many authors and playwrights, Molière blends moments from his life into the characters of the play. The character of Alceste certainly shares some of Molière’s beliefs as well as perhaps some of his tendencies. In updating the translation further from the Tony Harrison 1973 edition, further research into the time period and character of nobility is required. Finding what a post-modern society can relate to and bringing them forward into the 21st century is the key to crafting the play. None is more important to this production than the-would-be hero, Alceste.

The character of Alceste represents the changing social behaviors of the mid 17th century and the constant battle that modern society now holds with fads, trends, and celebrity status. The falsehoods that we see but enjoy are what Alceste rails against. Similarly in the court of Louis XIV, men begin wearing ornate frocks with frilly, lacey sleeves and ribbons to denote their rise into the nouveau riche. Some self-made marquesses found that they could blend in with nobility using this costume. These upstarts and usurpers of titles offended the French nobility (Structure 27). The problem was that everyone found it advantageous to mimic the king’s style of dress, which included these usurpers. Alceste represents the need to maintain old order, morals and codes that distinguish nobility from the lesser middle class citizens. These codes have been implied through French society’s exposure to commedia dell’arte, the Italian form of Renaissance comedy. Alceste tends to follow this comic example rather than any post-modern description of psychoanalysis. Alceste rationalizes his
way through arguments, but at times he enjoys hearing himself talk. Harrison brought this tendency through when Célimène mocks Alceste in the portrait scene of Act I. She notes to Clitandre and Acaste that Alceste is prone to counter his own beliefs. His waffling may well be part of the ultimate question of whether the two will be together at the end. He can clearly see what lies behind her mask but cannot be dissuaded from his love for her. From the beginning he wields a logical argument with Philinte at the start of Act I, but is given to long windedness and loses the effect by bordering on neurosis. He needs to rationalize his love but cannot, making him foolish to the point of folly. Alceste resembles a stock commedia fool even as Molière moved away from traditional commedia dell’arte (Structure 28). In the book, Absent Mothers and Masculine Births, author Larry Riggs argues that Alceste is less humorous as he is a despot, where he turns Célimène into his own image and exposes her within her own world or even in front of her own guests (98-99). He exposes her to them but not with malicious forethought. It recognizes in a small part that Alceste is a moderate version of the Il Capitano character, which has trouble talking with women and often gets carried away with his stories. The character type also strikes martial arts poses, brags about conquests and is often “de-masked” in the end (shane-arts.com). In a form of true love, Alceste believes his duty is to love someone despite their faults and even point those faults out. He is also a conflicted man in love and would be naturally jealous and angry that Célimène is carelessly devoting time to the marquesses who encourage her to make more preposterous statements about their circle of friends. His inability to temper his honesty and jealousy in front of guests makes him foolish. Molière’s study of the character Scaramouche, with Tiberio Fiorilli, proves that that both Molière’s reality and the stock character are in the back of his mind while writing the play.
At the end of the play, Alceste gives Célimène an ultimatum. Rigg seems to believe this is typical of his megalomaniacal tendencies. Rather fitting, perhaps, is that that he tries to offer a manageable solution that will cool the scandal of her improprieties by some form of seclusion. Several references have keyed into the French word *désert* which Alceste says as he makes his proclamation of wedding her. The word can mean the wilderness of Célimène’s salon that translator Tony Harrison seems to believe or it can mean “religious extremism, martyrdom, boredom and even death” that the word implies to Rigg (99). Rigg would infer that demanding Célimène to be transparent and this apparent religious zeal have led Alceste to become an inquisitor and that he wishes to try Célimène as a witch (100). Though religious hypocrisy might be included, the tone of Alceste’s language leads me to believe he is in the throes of love and is unable remove himself from the train wreck of their relationship. Alceste may want Célimène to “serve as a sign of his power” (Rigg 100) but he quickly relinquishes it in hopes that she did not write the letter. He would forgive her in return for her devotion. Essentially what makes his character sad, pathetic, and funny is that he vacillates quickly from extremes and he borders on his own hypocrisy. If his rants were all fire and brimstone, the play would be a much more tragic story. The audience finds the truth of themselves in Alceste as well as the balanced Philinte. We are not right all the time, and with some humility find the truth in our closely guarded beliefs may not have been what we thought.

Without a doubt the motivation of Alceste here is to make sure Célimène is his. He is in more control than normal and acclaiming his personality with more clairvoyance. It is unusual only because he has not been quite this vocal to the rest of the world, but only to his
close friends. His desperation is mounting. Alceste’s moral stance is strict and considered “old school.” Alceste symbolizes old conservatism and religious right. He does not mirror his precursor Dom Juan. In fact, he is his opposite and wants “social eminence” (Structure 112). In his fight with Oronte, he actually gives him a poor poem instead of a good one (Structure 115). Alceste is incapable of bribing the legal system since he is the symbolic loss the nobility has with dealing with its own growing legal system (Structure 118). He tries acting like a prince though he only has one servant and treats him poorly (Structure 119-120). He is not high enough ranked to look down at other nobles, even though their behavior is not exemplary either (Structure 122). He does not realize that justice will prevail in the hands of his rivals, Célimène’s suitors (Structure 123).

He would have started out very polite and follow all the rules set for him about how to act in society. He knows that he should not tell Oronte his true opinion, and finds a way to skirt the subject by using an example from his past, which is probably the only time Alceste lies in this play. His painful truthfulness is what makes it uncomfortable to watch. Alceste is lively, wild-eyed, honest and unwavering. He pursues everything with all his passion in the beginning, full of quick rage. Initially his mood is intense and then changes to logically peeved. Slowly and sadly he becomes aware at the end that the face he loves does not reciprocate and he cannot do anything about it. He has to build into this fervor as he is thwarted continually to talk to Célimène, which would either confirm or calm his fears about their relationship.

I would add that sound is an important factor in this world. In his youth, Alceste might have listened to the offbeat tunes of bands like They Might Be Giants. They have a
twisted sense of humor and silly lyrics. His Monty Python sense of humor is often misinterpreted. As he grew older, he would have found more modern, emotional types of songs in his adulthood. His refinement in education would probably leave him enjoying uncommon music that is poetic and slightly morbid. He probably likes Nina Simone, Ella Fitzgerald, or something smooth and jazzy and perhaps a bit too classic for what people enjoy now. For the purposes of the play it has to have something a little more upbeat since there is a sense of hope or pursuance till the end. The French techno group, Télépopmusic, has a blend of techno and jazz. He probably uses the music to mellow out or recharge.

Célimène

Célimène is a jerk in contrast to Alceste. Moliere reworked monologues from his Don Garcie and introduced them into The Misanthrope (Slater xxi). The monologues give Alceste a tragic tone, which by contrast makes her curt and insincere remarks hit deep (Slater xxi). Célimène enjoys gossip and portrait games (Encyclopedia 73). She is the feminine equivalent of Dom Juan (Encyclopedia 73). Ennui is her weakness. She is partly heroic in going back into French society after being unmasked for coquetry (Encyclopedia 73). Molière may have been working out his own problems using his wife as Célimène. They were reputedly having marital strife at this time, with rumors that Armande was having affairs. He probably felt like the Il Capitan indeed. She could be said to wear her suitors out with her vigor and slashing wit of a tongue. She is always desirous of more attention since many options are better than settling for one. There is always something better, richer or
more attractive on the horizon. As a widow, she has her own will with no one to answer to it. It is strong and unfettered. I imagine her parents are no longer in the picture either as she does not rely on them or mention them. She must rely on her own devices to survive. No one can tell her what to do because her father probably spoiled her well before his passing. Even if she has had a hard life and was not spoiled, she feels entitled and wants to be treated as such. Arsinoé says she is “paying” for the attention she receives. She can be literally giving out sexual favors for advancements or paying with gifts (not sex) to lure men into her world (ala the party).

She is unencumbered because she is widow and can receive guests without threat of scandal (Encyclopedia 73). In fact, many friends and family probably encourage her to re-marry. As the leader of a company, she has social norms to work within, which makes her scheming all the more dangerous. She is not simply a ditsy Paris Hilton who inherited money with no common sense. The further she goes to sell her company and her wares, the more disturbing it is to the audience. She can be described as being sexy, cold, pointed, sharp, and flirtatious. She is whatever is needed in the moment. Her masks change faster than Alceste can remove them. Does this woman have a heart? Her heart is fairly steely with little true emotion showing. All the work she does up until then is easy. If a woman can be said to have “balls,” she has them. She handles situations well and turns them against any threats. Along with the steely imagery she her muscle tension is supple, poised to strike like a snake, with easy and calculated breathing.
Philinte

Philinte is “an exemplary noble figure” (Structure 116) and a “reasoner” (Slater xx). Molière would not have wanted to attack his audience so including Philinte as the man to emulate helps soften the blows (Slater xxi). Philinte wants to help his friend through a difficult time and like a good mechanic, works to fix the problems and offers solutions. His aim is to do what is good for the group and finding and following the societal norms. Morally, he is up right but not without the ability to enjoy a good time or to enjoy the humor of an off color joke. He is poised, yet comfortable, and easy going, pleasant, jovial, and caring.

Eliante

She and Philinte are the examples of proper noble behavior (Structure 122). She points out the theme of the play quoting Lucretius, saying that lovers do not see the faults of the one’s they love (Encyclopedia 163). She likes Alceste, and seems be similar to him. She is one of the few “raisonueurs” which is the voice of the writer. She keeps a level head though she would take Alceste on the rebound (Encyclopedia 164). Eliante represents a woman ahead of her time as a honnête or an honorable member of the nobility (Encyclopedia 164). Her desire is Alceste but finds that Philinte is more perfect for her needs. Philinte is able to deal with extremely opinionated people. She is quieter, yet opinionated like her cousin. Eliante will give Célimène a verbal slap if needed. She is kind, resilient, careful, pretty, and gracious, willing to bite her tongue from time to time.
Clitandre

Alceste fills in some clues by describing him on page 50 as having a “finger like a croissant,” as he “sips his tea,” in “gay Paree” with his high falsetto. If Alceste is the truth teller, then we have to take into consideration in how he describes Clitandre. Célimène retorts that she favors him because he can help with her lawsuit. Alceste calls him a “pipsqueak” on page 50. Clitandre may be based on Lord Byron in the 1819 translation (Harrison v). Clitandre is not a leading man nor a seducer as in other Molière plays (Encyclopedia 92). Clitandre is willing to make fun of the government event when he first enters. As a lawyer though he is more patient and lets Acaste rave on about his finer points before trying to argue with him over Célimène. He negotiates into getting his way when he realizes Acaste will challenge him. He is impeccably dressed, knowledgeable, catty, and persistent. He is likely to nimbly dodge verbal bullets.

Acaste

The jock playboy of Tony Harrison’s version was originally more foppish, if not interchangeable, with his counterpart Clitandre (Encyclopedia 3). He often speaks about his own merits and “gallant love” (Encyclopedia 3). He is rather casual which may have inspired Harrison to make him more of a jock (Encyclopedia 3). He is bombastic enough to become the center of attention and even finds the prime spot when he reads the letter Célimène has written Acaste. His vanity is his charm and flaw (Encyclopedia 3). He is poised to win any job that is given to him; however, he must be currently a theatre critic. In
his speech to Clitandre, he mentions how the audience loves the shows he says he likes or hates those he despises. It still fits the role of the nobility who use to manipulate the audience especially if they sat within view of the stage by the audience (Encyclopedia 457). He is thrilled with dangerous sports or anything that other adrenaline junkies might require. He’s like the guy in the Old Spice commercial, but he uses a more expensive brand of deodorant and uses only the primo cologne. He’s loose and relaxed, enjoys some of the confrontations he gets into and flexes when it is needed. This is fun for him. He is a pompous, self-important playboy.

Arsinoé

Arsinoé is Célimène’s opposite. She is the would-be lover of Alceste and probably closer to him in personality. She comments vocally about the improprieties in which Célimène engages. There is a flaw though that Alceste does not appreciate. She finds a way to be hypocritical that upsets Alceste. Her overt religiousness has associated her with the covert religious organization that influenced the king (Encyclopedia 33). She finds a level of “contentiousness” when she first flirts with Alceste, then when she fails (Encyclopedia 33), then gets Alceste only with Célimène’s infidelity (Structure 117). She wants to be the one who wins Alceste and does perhaps not everything in her power to win, but quite a bit. She would do “God’s will” in public and her own behind closed doors and uses martyrdom as a tool for getting her way. Overtly, she is Orthodox Catholic, though perhaps is kinky because of repressed desires. Careful of what others think of her, she watches people watching her.
Like a hawk, she is astute and keen at picking up bits of gossip and information that may help her. Her revelation of the information and to whom is not always apropos. This probably increases her sense of guilt, thus raising her heart rate.

Oronte

The poetaster that tries to woo Célimène is not a trivial affront but a “thinly disguised bully” (Encyclopedia 353). Having the Marshalsea to intervene was a life and death and matter (Encyclopedia 352). Oronte admires Alceste and looks for ways to be like him, including his advance on Célimène. Unfortunately, Oronte is overly sensitive to criticism, having no real sense of self-worth. Seeing that Alceste is quick to anger, Oronte would find that to be the appropriate way to behave. His poem is full of imagery but ill performed, touching off the jealousy of Alceste and his sense of disgust for pompous individuals.

Dubois

The character of Dubois supports Alceste’s attempt at nobility, but perpetuates his clownish antics. As the inept servant, Dubois presents herself as a buffoon that made me feel like she was a wayward, valley girl secretary. In his attempt to be aristocratic, he has retained a servant even though his ability to afford any others is greatly limited. Because he is a writer, a secretary or personal assistant makes the best analogy. It is not likely that Dubois is Alceste’s agent. If she is, he is likely to do better on his own. Unlike Dorine in
*Tartuffe*, Dubois does not fit the bill of an ingenious servant helping shape the world of the master. Dubois fits into the valet or footman level of servitude according to the customs of 1600’s (*Structures* 30). Dubois shows a lack of intelligence and leaves to meet Alceste at his office with his luggage, but forgets and leaves pertinent information at his apartment. Even though I plan to cast this role as a woman, I doubt he has much to do with her. She is not witty or pretty enough to excite him and leaves her to do the mundane tasks. He probably dictates his articles for her to type, which she will probably have to upload onto the server. He needs her for his status, which is flattering when she shows up. However, her repartee with him leaves much to be desired as they get mired in what may seem like a precursor to a vaudeville routine. The poor girl is just slow.

**Academy Official**

Cardinal Richelieu established the *Académie Française* in 1634. The purpose of the venture was to produce a French dictionary using 40 French intellectuals. They rarely intervened in literary quarrels as the play suggests but rather reviewed classical or scholarly works, and rarely theatre (*Encyclopedia* 2). The official represents the symbol of authority in French literary tendencies and is well educated and self-important. The Official is not entirely effective in persuading Alceste to leave for Maxim’s and has to be aided by Philinte in imparting the weight and severity of the situation. The Official’s sole purpose in the play is to interrupt Alceste in his progress with Célimène.
Célimène’s servant is Basque, the one and only servant in her household, not counting her misused cousin, Eliante. Historically, Basque speaks French poorly and is either lower class or from another country (Encyclopedia 44). Harrison makes little mention of Basque in stage directions or through dialogue. He is described as “blasé” when introducing Célimène’s guests (Encyclopedia 44). His seemingly slacker like attitude made me think he was an intern from the United States whose desire to study abroad landed him a somewhat dismal internship at Célimène’s office. As an American he would be somewhat nonplussed by mounting drama by using his smart phone to give immediate feedback to the world. In essence he would be laid back, with an easy gait, maybe not using his full height by slumping slightly. He is ultimately trying to have some sort of experience while being cool but will probably miss some things because he is texting his way through life. Basque is the view of the audience on the subject matter, commenting as we might feel about what is happening on stage.
Chapter 4: Concept

Initial response:

This is a tale of two love stories. One fits the traditional boy gets girl. The other is the tale of the true Misanthrope who has girl and then loses girl. He may get girl sometime in the future but not in the world of the play. Alceste and Philinte’s relationship reminds me of Bob Hope and Bing Crosby in all the “Road to” movies of the 1940s. Bob Hope’s character tended to lose the girl to Bing Crosby’s character. It became a running gag till Bob wins in Road to Rio.

It is really a response to Molière’s life situations. It is a way to slap people around without doing it physically. It is particularly biting about the hypocrisy that we live with everyday. An office setting seems the most logical placement of this story since it is also a place where we are forced to sensor ourselves the most. In an age of Political Correction, we do not always say what we mean and are encouraged to create new language to talk around situations. We can get behind Alceste and root for him to understand the necessity of balancing truthfulness with the white lies needed to get along with others. Philinte represents the best use of nobility by being a source of inspiration and the logical argument to Alceste. His plot line is romantic and comedic. If we follow Alceste, it is dramatic.
Directing Concept:

Type or Genre: a comedy of manners

Historical Period of Action: Though the play was set in France in 1966 I would like to set this production in modern day corporate France, with a similar premise to the hit television shows *The Office* and *Friends*. Stylistically there are elements of presentation and of the traditional comedy of manners form from the 1600s but using modern dress and setting.

A. Casting requirements

The play requires 6 males and may require up to four females. The Academy Official and Dubois may be combined for one actor or actress to play. Dubois acts as Alceste’s personal assistant and will become present within the world of the office. As Alceste may also compete with Célimène, I would like an actress to portray his assistant. Célimène would have a man portray her assistant. Alceste, Philinte and Célimène have the greatest opportunities for Capstone projects. Joey Galda will be receiving his Capstone for Oronte and Ayana DeNovellis will also receive her Capstone as Arsinoé. It will be important to help guide these students on stage as well as with their own thesis work.

II. General Staging Considerations

This show could be staged on either the Howell or the Studio. Using the Howell Stage as a proscenium will inform me of how projections will be used in the play and will help me to have a multi-leveled playing space for the show.
III. Technical Considerations

A. Setting:

This set should be a unit set, specific to a modern office where desks, computers and laptops coexist with cell phones, shredders, and hand sanitizer. No one says what he or she really means except behind someone’s back or on Facebook. Like Phoebe in Friends, sometimes the ones who do speak really should not at all. To aid in the projections, we would need a projection screen as part of the office conference area. This can be built into the wall. Projecting onto the walls will be challenging with blocking in front of them and lighting in addition. Probably rear projection will need to be considered. Pigmentation of the walls on these projection surfaces versus the regular wall areas will need to blend together and look like a unified whole. To highlight the expensive taste of the hostess, the scenic design will include jewel tones and old French elements with modern lamps, drapes and furniture while Alceste’s world within it is more black and white like the television show The Office.

An image from the television show The Office (IMDb).
B. Lighting:

Lighting should bounce softly through the set but still have a bite to it as harsh reality is revealed in the removal of masks. There are no elaborate cueing or special effects known at this time. Natural lighting and lighting from computer or cell phone screens will provide additional lighting. Wall scones and practicals will motivate lighting.

C. Costuming:

Economically and socially the characters would wear business and business casual dress. Business wear may be easier to attain but perhaps more costly. Though we are in an imaginary world, there is a base of realism to what they wear. In Act I, the characters are attending a wine tasting. Basque the intern will be less formal. Acaste will be similar to Don Jonson of Miami Vice and Clitandre will be a clotheshorse. Alceste is a little off and out of fashion, though a bit hip in doing so. Philinte and Eliante are attractive though modestly so. Arsinoé alternately shows, and hides her sex appeal. Célimène is into the French fashion scene and would be influenced by Elle, Vogue, and Marie Clare.

D. Sound:

There are a lot of ambient noises in the office that would establish themselves at the beginning of scenes and then fade away. The top and end of acts will be opportunities to play with elevator music and fun contemporary alternative music. Sound design plays a key role in the way we introduce characters with TV show style entrance themes. The overall theme is Jazzy and techno for which Paris is known. Philinte seems to represent the best pop
music, which would be The Beatles “All You Need Is Love.” Cell-phone rings are indicative of the irritation happening in the play and also who is calling the character and will be distinctive and informative of tone.

E. Make-up:

Make-up should fit the social class and style sense of the character. The only character with an excessive make-up effect could be Acaste. I imagine he would have a tan, either real or otherwise. Célimène would wear the most glamorous make-up of the female staff. Dubois would clownishly wear hers. As for hair, I initially envisioned Célimène with a Bump-it, a device that lifts one’s hair at the crown. Bump-its may be out of fashion by the time of this production and distinctly American.

F. Properties:

There are a large number of office supplies including hand sanitizer, staplers, reams of paper, cell-phones and laptops with built in cameras, office chairs and desks. This will be a task of accumulation. The acquisition of a usable television will be the hardest challenge. The office furnishings would be functional and attractive and demonstrate the current trend in interior design.

G. Multi-media needs (slides, projections, video, etc.)

The modernization of the play lends itself to modernization of the aside, which includes status updates on Twitter and Facebook. Using the technology that we all know and love, we will use cell phones to shoot video on stage, tweet asides and video blogs to the
onstage screen, and monitor cell phone break ups. The use of the software Skype during this season’s Theatrix lends itself to laptop interfacing. Built-in cameras on computers can magnify emotions and reveal inner thoughts or office hypocrisy. Alceste may control some of this technology as he realizes how fake his co-workers are.

From The New York Theatre Workshop – *The Misanthrope*

As an additional website project for the class New Media Production 1, I am building a mock website to be projected during the play. The website would represent the on-line magazine that Célimène runs covering French wines. As part of my thesis consideration, media must be present in the design of the production. What better way to show our own hypocrisy than taking a look at Facebook or Twitter, two sources of perpetual declarations of our feelings while stabbing someone else in the back? My concept for Basque is to help lead our 112 Intro to Theatre students on the journey of the play by providing comment or information through the use of tweets, wikis or by watching YouTube videos which will be produced in thought-bubble type projections on the set. In addition to
media in the forms of tweets, I plan for Célimène to use a social networking site to find pictures of her so-called friends as ammunition for her diatribe against them. There is quite a bit of material to be created for projections.

I plan to create a site that represents the mock company that Célimène runs in Paris. It will be English language and feature a few fake ads, show pictures of the cast as contributors to the magazine, and feature an article about the annual wine tasting for the magazine’s anniversary publication. I would like the site to be somewhat darkly colored but clean, with the possibility of Basque finding needed information within the site for his wikis. The site does not need to be live for the performance, but must be accessed as a projection cue. I would like to use one of the mock ads to be Alceste’s real estate broker who is suing him. There would be around two pages.

The Connoisseurs’ Guide (cgcw.com) uses buttons moving across the top F position. Though the buttons do not bevel, they are clearly marked and to the point. The ultimate
determination of color of the site will be dependent on the color of the set. During our test of the new projectors, we discovered that they could project onto a black surface, though greater contrast seems to work the best in situations where significant additional light is present on the image.

IV. Additional Comments

I am genuinely a fan of Molière. One of the first plays I performed in was a children’s version of The Miser. Keeping plays in the world in which they were written can be beneficial in pointing out how similar we are to our pasts, providing a miniature history lesson and an appreciation of how we have changed through the ages. The Misanthrope, however, lends itself to a modernization as a comment on our present society. Several opportunities were provided during the last school year to explore this modernized Molière world during Styles class. There are still moments of shock as Célimène and Arsinoé trade verbal barbs, Alceste explaining why Oronte’s poem should not be published, and Philinte and Eliante become a couple at the end. Revealing the technology throughout the play brings the audience surprise and satisfaction as they recognize their actions and how it blends into the world Molière created 300 years ago. Solving the problems of the play is aided by the use of society now and the elements and technology on which we rely.

This play focuses on language and word play, which makes gaudy scenery or moody lighting unnecessary and unwarranted. Though working on this adaptation, I feel a few eye-popping graphics are warranted to aid understanding the vocabulary or to keep the play active visually. Word play is a lost art and I would like practice working on a show that is
language heavy and less technical as far as cueing and design (except for the multi-media). Production design and comedy lie within my strengths while I have not had many opportunities to work on purely language based plays. It is less weakness than lack of practice. *The Misanthrope* allows a swath of period research and comparisons to current society as well as challenging work on beat-to-beat moments. This production concept leaves clear, yet a simple visual image, which frees time for me to delve more into personal acting choices.

The production will be technically challenging regardless of its concept. Coordination of video images, cell phones and tweeting will take patience and determination to combine. If we are able to borrow phones and laptops, most of the communication software is free. Some of the technicalities of this show may have been worked out during *Speech & Debate* and in class this semester. A moment of pre-recorded video can also be included into this mix as Alceste reads the letter Célimène wrote to Oronte.

I realize *Tartuffe* will have been completed the semester prior to this presentation. I believe that the two will not be recognizable. We often do Shakespeare but are able to separate them by a year. Using the television series *The Office* and even the movie *Office Space* as a starting point, we can apply the wide spectrum of personalities to similar scenarios in our business world. Through class work and rereading, I found that all the scenes could be reasonably staged in the office setting instead of Célimène’s house. With favorable responses from the JCSTF students, there was a sense that our 112 audiences would also enjoy drawing the similarities to current office situations to Molière’s world. After working on scenes from *The Misanthrope* for Styles class, I realized that I might not have a perfect
understanding for Molière’s original audience but that I understand how to apply his life lessons to our current American audience. The masks and follies of our current society lie in our overuse of technology. Comedy continues to be one of my stronger genres and since this story is bitter at times, I feel that it stretches beyond my normal comfort range for comedy. Overall it lends itself to a thoughtful and truly attainable comedy of manners.
Chapter 5: Process

Casting

A graduate director once taught me that casting was 90% of creating a successful play. Casting for this play was crucial in terms of language, leadership, teamwork and a sense of playfulness. The initial auditions were typically tinged with anxiety both for performer and director. As a director, I hope that every actor will inspire me with clear acting choices that are enjoyable and interesting to watch and in general, be the right one for the role. It is better to have many good choices than many poor choices. Actors who have sat in the director’s seat at least once realize that directors want them to succeed. I firmly believe that all actors should work as a director early in their career to rid them of the fear of failure. The auditions for Dylan and The Misanthrope lasted for about 5 hours as we heard Molière monologues in rhyme and contemporary monologues for Dylan. It was interesting to see how students perceived their own skills and to which director the student directed their audition. Instead of winning both directors, most students picked one battle to win by preparing one monologue more thoroughly than the other. Several students emerged for their ability to handle the language and make interesting choices.

During callbacks, Trent Stork and Alexander Jeffery made bold choices for the character Alceste. In the end Jeffery had a slightly lighter feeling to his character and a stronger sense of sexual chemistry with his acting partners. Calandra Daby also made more seductive choices for Célimène and paired well with Jeffery. Joey Galda underwhelmed me as Alceste’s friend, Philinte, but his natural exuberance reigned as Oronte. Oronte is needy
and clingy and absolutely wants to be liked. Galda highlighted these moments during the callback. Mike Lee played Philinte with an easy-going charm, ready to connect with Alceste and calm him down. There was also a sense of vulnerability that amused me and I wanted the audience to identify with Philinte. Jaimie Pruden paired well with Mike and found an earnest yet gentle Eliante who also could find moments of exuberant expression. Billy Jones recently arrived from Arizona and was unknown. I was impressed with his ability to switch tactics when prompted during the callbacks and cast him as Clitandre. I felt that Devon Schovanec is under used in the department and found he made some clever choices for Acaste. Schovanec has an athletic persona and I believe that he fit into the role of Acaste physically and that the role would stretch him and give him another tool for his acting kit.

One of harder roles to cast was Arsinoé. I called back a number of younger, untested actresses for the part to see their capabilities. Through the process Virginia advised me to lean away from these actresses to provide the best possible outcome for my thesis. My costume designer also reminded me that Arsinoé was considered an older character relative to Célimène. I considered that the level of maturity may be older but had never considered the character to be physically older. To pair with Calandra Daby as Célimène, there was no one older except vocal performance graduate student Julie Soroko who did not seem to fit into the world of the play. After further consideration, I was much less interested in age as I was with overall acting talent and complimenting with what I considered at the time as the cast. Ayana DeNovellis had been a close contender for the role of Célimène and I felt she rivaled Ms. Daby the best. When in doubt, pick the best actor. Another challenge was finding the servant roles. Since there was very little dialogue for Basque or for Dubois and I
considered these roles to be more physical, I decided to try using improvisation as part of
the casting process. I discovered that Shade Ingraham and Sarah Arten worked the best at
creating roles during this process. Lucy Myrtue may have also been an excellent choice had
I provided text. I was once again encouraged by various professors to choose older actors
who may not have had opportunities to be in Main Stage plays. Shade was amazingly
expressive as Basque and Sarah Arten had comedic talent as Dubois and the Academy
Official.

As I finalized my casting, Aaron Sawyer and I meet with Paul Steger, Director of the
JCSTF and Brad Buffum to negotiate casting, if needed, and post our lists. It was mostly a
pain-free casting process. Virginia was quick to alert both directors when there was a
potential overlap and we found that with this knowledge and the actors’ sense of what
worked best for them that most roles were not an issue. A discussion may have proved
valuable to both directors about our choices but at this point no one was interested in tangling
with it. As the list was posted, I had no buyer’s remorse and excitedly waited for the start of
rehearsal.

Initial meetings:

Scenic:

Amber Naylor was selected as the scenic designer in the late spring of 2010. We
spoke before she left town to work Santa Fe Opera for the summer. Our focus was creating
an office world. We toyed with an idea for the set that included dry erase board walls, where
the characters would draw on the walls till they are filled by the end of the show. We always
considered the need for two levels and the need to separate areas. Before we headed out for summer, we started looking heavily at the offices of various modern companies like Google, Facebook, and architectural firms. The shape and usual aspects of the offices were clean, simple, and yet vibrant. These offices inspire computer programmers and artists, not gossipy aristocrats. The design of the office rose in ostentation with the choice of the Harrison translation.

Amber presented the sketch again for me of the floor plan early in our production meetings. I discovered that I wanted a strong up stage entrance. I had explained earlier that I needed spaces for Alceste and Philinte and a separate space or door for Célimène. The design had Eliante’s entrance up stage right, which I liked and wanted to keep. The hallway from stage left did not seem very usable from behind Célimène’s office space. I liked using the windows though. When I went to URTA’s in Chicago, I saw Shinning City at The Goodman Theatre and remembered the set had a giant window that showed the passage of time and weather through a series of lighting effects against the scenery upstage. Among other consideration, I asked to push the set downstage to make it visible to those in the balcony and noted that with a play full of language that the actors’ proximity to the audience would be crucial. In the Howell Theatre, the sound drops in quality upstage of the proscenium arch. I encouraged Amber to consider how the walls might bounce the sound downstage. At this time, I was not aware of who my sound designer was or whether microphones would be a real option to use.
To complete the world, we considered what sort of establishment would fit in the play and decided that a wine review would be most effective both with pretention and with the Parisian snob factor. As we continued discussing it, we focused on Célimène’s world, the importance of old money and prestige and the need to retain it, and where geographically it was situated in Paris. Considering these thoughts, Amber began blending the Baroque design with the Google office space, as a renovated building on the Champs-Élysées. Once we decided that Célimène owned a wine review, aided by the constant drinking in the Harrison text, colors were chosen. The opulence of the Baroque style mixed with the clean and vibrant colors would produce a luxurious space for Célimène.
Lighting:

As one of my former professors and also a scenic designer, Laurel Shoemaker made significant contributions outside of her lighting design duties. She proposed to use a functioning television to feed the media and offered suggestions about how it might be obtained. She suggested we use a gobo to project onto the surface of the set to help alert the audience when there would be a tweet, then use each of the two projectors on either side of the stage to project the media. She also told me about how Blue Man Group involves the audience using a scrolling device that tells the audience what to do, which in effect gets the audience into the show before it starts.

When talking with Laurel about lighting, I noticed that she had a picture of “Balloon Dog” in the Louvre by Jeff Koons on her bulletin board. It was a fun picture that had the modern and Baroque elements that Amber had discussed. We also talked about the natural light from the windows and how they could tell the audience what time of day, location, and perhaps what season it was. With the use of realism in the lighting, we discussed practicals and sought to find ways to have some emotional or dramatic moments with lighting as well. We decided that light would be motivated from practicals and through blocking, such as turning on desk lamps, and a standing lamp. She suggested that Oronte prepare to read his poem while adjusting a lamp to set the mood. Laurel’s quirky sense of humor made meetings fun and enjoyable. The lighting design was tricky as she lit around two rear projected panels and one front projection.
Costume design:

I was captivated during my research by something I read in a *Marie Claire* magazine about *idée recue*, “an accepted notion,” that French women were sexy. The intern who wrote it thought that French and Americans had different views of what was sexy (Marie Claire). After consideration of the temperature and viewing the movie *Devil Wears Prada*, the Paris fashion scene intrigued me. I wondered how they constantly sport *haute couture* until I realized they are neither battling extreme heat nor cold temperatures.
My initial chats with the costume designer revealed where I had weaknesses in character development. At first, Célimène’s business suit was too sharp and pointy. She needed to be approachable, even if she is duplicitous. Dubois looked entirely too well put together to be so ditzy and the Academy Official confused me. I realized I had not asked sufficient questions and needed to better define the characters. We both had questions regarding what the men would look like in eveningwear. She also suggested that Basque would be considerably less presentable for formal wear as an intern and might wear chucks. One thing she really latched onto was a herringbone jacket with elbow patches for Alceste. I had a feeling it would not fit Alex Jeffery so left it until I could define what I thought might help the conversation again. After some consideration, I attached the following photos to send her. I found an image of a French Academy Official, which was very close to what she had. Florence Delay, on the left, is a female member of the French Academy.
I determined that I liked an expensive yet somewhat casual look for the men in eveningwear for Acaste and Clitandre found at Chicstories.com. I hoped for a formal but not necessarily “black tie” look for Philinte and Alceste. Basque would not own anything quite as tasteful so he would either have an ill fitting tux or a mix and match suit, but the chucks idea was still appealing. If we did not go with the black suit look for the formal wear, Alceste would be presentable in a herringbone pattern. I attached a few pictures that I thought compared to her designs.

Formal, yet not black tie.
Herringbone for Alceste.

A more casual look.

The costume designs were altered to fit these looks a bit more and Célimène’s suit became less sharp around the collar.

Props:

Sirui Wang was the properties master and her initial conversations were with the scenic designer as we talked about the need for technology on stage. We initially discussed
desktop computers then switched to laptops as we discovered they could easily move out of the way. The main problems would be finding a large enough television to use for the media, finding cell phones that lit up, and borrowing computers or even iPads. Procuring the television proved challenging since she attempted to have it loaned first from in house and then from a store. She managed to borrow computers from the UNL Computer Services and cell phones from production team members.

Other properties included a large amount of beverages that looked like wine. The costume designer was not excited about the prospect of having red grape juice stains on the costumes, so some of the glasses and bottles contained white grape juice. The tracking of all the glassware became somewhat challenging for stage management but they worked through it. A wine bar and cabinet for the wine bottles and glasses was designed by the scenic designer and placed up stage of the sofa, with a coffee pot on top of it. Additional set dressing was aided by the scenic designer and attempted to add to the luxury of the space with streamlined office supplies and presentations of rare wine.

Sound:

Logan Caldwell, who enjoys creating his own dance mixes, was my sound designer. To work in a possible strength for him, we discussed the possibility of entrance themes for each character or possibly an annoying cell phone bleep to keep the television show atmosphere in the play and add some character coloring that we might lose with lighting. Logan always surprised me with the sheer volume and hip factor of the music he found. I talked about getting the audience involved at the beginning of the play and Laurel told me about Blue Man Group. Logan is an apparent guru at projections, and explained how it
might be possible to stream images of the audience onto the screens. After further discussions, the pre-show ambience would be less about the audience and more about establishing the show. One of the songs I liked for the show was “Complaint Department” by Luiki Liu. It was very whiny and yet dead pan and fit with Célimène. He gave me tons of music and as I prepared for the show I began listening to my choices and had to remove some of my normal favorites to fit them all onto my iPod Touch. We moved into the techno style with retro influences, quirky pieces that remind me of the film Oceans 11 and any James Bond flick. Also included were songs with funny lyrics. The sheer amount of music was tough to wade through and we pinned the moments down to where they might be useful.

Projections:

My primary concern about projections was what they looked like, but as I found through the course of the production the most important element was on what they were projected. Lucas Sevedge, projections designer, and I had initial discussions about the floor plan and he quickly expressed concerns about the placement of screens. I initially thought about them being off to the sides on the proscenium arch, but began realizing they would be harder to watch during the show. We talked about possibly using a window shade as a projection surface over the windows or over Célimène’s glass window area. By the end, we both were very much concerned and questioning how the screens would be integrated into the scenery. Laurel had proposed a tweet logo that would be shot up on the set using a spotlight, like an indicator from an iPhone application to look over to the sidewall. After consideration, it would distract the view of the audience as they craned over to look at the wall and back again. We had a separate meeting and determined how to use the space on
stage in three areas. One space would be next to Philinte’s desk. Another space would be over Célimène’s door and the biggest area would be up center in the architecture of the wall. The large space up center would be the logo and for the cell phone and the one smaller one for tweets. Once the locations were decided, then the way the projections would be applied to the wall became a challenge. None of us had ever tried rear projecting through painted muslin and I was afraid the set would be built and painted before a solution was discovered.

Individual meetings:

The Production Manager was quick to have Emily schedule separate meetings before moving past the first production meeting. Having rarely had individual meetings with designers, and as a former stage manager, finding them highly suspicious and not productive to the group, I reluctantly followed course with meetings. The floodgates opened up and I ended up scheduling separate meetings with all the designers that were there. As I discovered, there was more freedom with less people hanging over our shoulders, but I became the dispenser of information a few times, which pulled me back into a stage manager mindset. I still believe that tough chats with a number of designers present will solve some problems faster and with a more unifying influence.

The Dogs of War:

Actresses Ayana DeNovellis and Cali Daby approached me with an idea prior to the start of rehearsals to add two dogs to the Arsinoé and Célimène confrontation scene in Act 1. They wanted to carry small dogs in each of their purses, like Paris Hilton. They would also be happy to try larger dogs to one up the other with smarter and more attractive poodles,
supplied by Virginia Smith. I laughed at first, seeing how enthusiastic they were. Apparently, I should have been more concerned. While I was talking about costumes, the designer asked if we were going to have dogs in the play. With a mild degree of shock I realized that the actresses had approached the costume designer as well. Another costume grad offered her dog as well, with promotional pictures on her smartphone. Ayana also offered up Gomez, Aaron Sawyer’s dog. A fellow graduate student commented that Gomez was a rather hefty, slightly blind, and older dog that might need a diaper, and was not trained to sit in a purse for a long period of time. Aside from that note, I ended consideration for that concept as I thought it would distract from the swordplay of the language and be another busy moment on stage.

Week 3: September 12-18:

In week three, we had the first meeting with all the designers. Emily Wall, stage manager, was leaving for Spain the next week and would leave Brad Buffum, production manager, to run the next meeting. He reminded us that we were producing a comedy though he claimed no one had mentioned it. I considered the remark and believe the direction of the design elements represented comedic tones. Because of outside meetings and the general consensus that all has run smoothly, we moved the production meetings back a half hour to 8:30 a.m. instead of 8:00 a.m. I was unsure whether it was efficiency, communication, or the lack of fighting that moved the meetings along quickly. If we had to decide in the moment, there would be heated, time-consuming discussion. Some arguments might be more useful, but I did not feel encouraged to do so in the moment.
At a separate projection meeting with Lucas and Amber, we discussed widening the wall upstage to provide more room for projections. It had a similar aspect ratio to a Blackberry or iPhone, and was taller than it was wide. We decided that we needed more surface space for the lower stage right screen because of sightlines. Amber and Lucas ran downstage to look at the stage while Kathy looked at the ground plan and calmly offered the space above the door as another way to offer a dual system of projections. We believed at the time that all three areas could be rear projected. We continued discussion of the gobo design for the spot light and would use something similar to SkyRock and Twitter logos. The design was given the nickname of “twitbook.” SkyRock is the French equivalent to Facebook.

Laurel showed me photos and a slide show of some warm interior lighting, joking that she would like a ceiling on the set. Laurel suggested adding stronger lighting for moments when characters reveal something about themselves on stage. She had trouble with Philinte but I think his moment of revelation comes closer to the end of the play.

I discovered the song “All You Need Is Love” would be a perfect way to endear us to Philinte at the top of Act 2, sum up the show at the end, and discussed the suggestion with Logan. I think the character likes The Beatles because he is the most likable character and would probably like the most likable music. The opening to the song is the French National Anthem known as La Marseillaise, which tied into the revolutionary ideals The Beatles held at the time of the recording.

We also had a unifying color meeting. Scenic had color choices and floor designs to discuss. The floor would be swirly, but tiled in a creamy and brown/black marble design,
with brown baseboards. In general the scenic designer looked for colors of wine and
warm browns. She described how every other panel on the ground level next to the desks
would be gray and magenta, where the gray panel would be for the rear projections. For the
tall curvy wall just down of Célimène’s office, chocolate would be the choice. Apparently
Amber has been inspired by the Roche Bobois catalog. The design examples from the
catalog were fantastic. The company uses black and white with accented colors. The
modern seating pops out against the expensive looking backgrounds. The amount of color in
the design made me wonder if it was too busy. The jewel tone accents should work for the
costume design and compliment the scenery. A diminished amount of browns would be used
in costuming during Act 1, except for the Academy Official. Philinte would wear brown in
Act 2.

For the production meeting, I reminded them about the comedic elements in the play
and clarified to the designers that we had begun in that direction. The colors, how we
planned to use practicals in the lighting and the hand props, even the set all had elements I
thought were funny or fun. Discussions during the meeting revolve around color choices and
procuring the television. We further discussed what the projection surface in the center
would look like, whether it would have the detail of marbling or whether a picture would be
projected there the whole time such as the company logo. We talked about adding a
Roomba, which added the extra flair of technology to the play and would emphasize on the
use of comedic three’s. Sound hoped to throw sound off the proscenium arch so we would
be less certain of its origin. Costumes added a tuxedo t-shirt to Basque’s Act 1 look that I
thought was funny.
Week 5: September 26- October 2

Our stage manager returned for our regularly scheduled production meeting and the individual meetings happened with less frequency. Amber and I discussed the drops upstage of the windows and she had Rachel Aguirre sketch up a street view. The perspective was too low and I also wanted the Eifel Tower and the Arc de Triomphe included in the windows. We found a street view later that confirmed that both could be seen at the same time. House Electrician, Kathy Lorenzen, informed us that if we wanted the Eifel or the Arc to light up individually that she needed the drop by October 25th to build the grains of wheat into the drop before tech. On other fronts, Amber and I debated the color of Célimène’s wall. She wanted a very dark black wall which looked like it was off stage and too dark to be in the world of the play. Célimène might be a bad person but she is not sheer evil. Amber, Lucas and I still need to continue meeting to resolve the projection surfaces. I am still very concerned that we will not be able to project through the muslin. In costume design, swatches and smoking jackets were presented. I did not like the smoking jacket for Alceste as I tried to define him as someone with a sense of style, but without the funds to wear Armani nor enjoyed the extreme pretense of high fashion. With the length of Alex’s arms, we were limited to the availability of our stock.

For a separate projections meeting, I figured out the name of the company as I was looking at an article in Marie Clare. The intern was writing about idée reçue, which in French means “accepted notion.” It fit my concept and rhymed with wine review. We began thinking of a logo for Idée Reçue Wine Review. We discovered Basque could help explain visually where to look by coming on stage before the show starts to change the music and train the audience to look at certain places on the set for the media. We still need a
testing for the screens. I thought the rear projection would washout with lighting, so I hoped we could prove this before further work on building the set.

Week 6: October 3 – 9

During this week, we began with a meeting about wall sconces and the chandelier. Any meeting with Laurel has the potential for being hilarious. Her office provides a creative outlet, with the painted squares on the walls, her mounted computer screen, and also the many toys. I decided that there was no clean way with sight lines to get a chandelier on stage and scraped the idea. It had the right aesthetic but there was no uninhibited position to place it. At the main entrance it would block the wall projection. Downstage right it would hang down in front of Célimène’s door and we wondered why we would put it over Philinte and Alceste. Amber hoped to put two sconces downstage on or near the proscenium arch, four upstage next to the windows, and two on Célimène’s office wall. This would provide enough motivation for the lighting. We also discussed lamps. When asked where she might find lamps, Laurel said “Nebraska Furniture Mart is the grown up toy store.” We thought about whether to use the grains of wheat lighting to put into the drops behind the windows. They will be framed and Laurel planned to light them with the tiny lights and with additional sources to establish time of day. Sketches continued to develop for the drops and they planned how best to paint them for lighting.

Director/designer design philosophy moment:

I obviously got along with my designers too well. Laurel joked that I needed to get a 6-sided die, write 6 different concepts for the show on it, then shake and toss it onto the table
when I had the sudden urge to change my concept. In her need to blow off steam about another design process, it made me think about all the decisions that I make as a director. I constantly make decisions based on the world of the play. They were so intuitive sometimes that I did not talk through the decisions with designers. The designers were on track with the concept. If anything, they built it up. I have had faith and confidence in my design team to make informed decisions. Amber and Beth took elements of the past using the original Molière and blended it with the now in their designs. Those contributions put a visual stamp on the show. I trusted all my designers to make logical artistic choices to aid me. I might later regret being so easy-going in the moment. I did not feel like I needed to fight against anything since we were pulling in the same direction. If I did feel like something was not right for the show, I did not feel that I needed to battle over it. All I had to do was make a decision and calmly talk to the designer about it, giving my artistic understanding of how it might work and why it might not fit this show. Everyone had been bending over backwards to give me what I wanted, so I was not inclined to abuse it. No one wanted to argue with me. Everyone was tired of that type of process.

At our weekly production meeting I felt we were making some very strong decisions about the world of the play. Some of these decisions might prove ugly later in the process. We discussed the ideas Lucas and I had about projections for the start of show with Basque. I could probably tell people the show was going to be done upside down, and no one is awake enough to be horribly concerned. Amber mentioned our compromise about Célimène’s wall and instead of painting the wall black; she planned on a gray color. In
discussion about the perspective on the drop, we added another level so we look out at the Arc de Triomphe and Eiffel Tower.

The costume designer narrowed her color palate to “bolder pastels” and wanted browns for Eliante. I thought we needed equality in color to Célimène. It was appropriate that the two lovers who were compatible with each other were in the similar colors. I reminded Beth that we did not want to telegraph it too much at the beginning. I suggested something in the “bold pastels” be found to tie them together instead. Eliante is a vibrant character like Alceste and should be a worthy opponent to Célimène. There was an assortment of colors again that needed to be checked with other departments requiring a color meeting. I did not want to be the only one communicating designs to other designers. Without hashing out concepts and practicalities in these big production meetings, the meetings became reports, and not meetings. Sound rarely reported anything about the design. He probably needed a personal agenda when he appeared for meetings. Mostly, he told everyone we were still narrowing down the song selection. There was still a ton of music and we needed to start rehearsals before making some of the decisions. For a while we debated about when light-hang, focus, load-in, and paint call would happen and landed on dates.

I made sure that I put the Roomba into Kathy’s world. She said she had one at home she could borrow, or she could make one. Emily made sure she understood what additional crew positions she would need to run the show. She surmised that she would need a spot operator, a Roomba operator, plus sound and light board operators as per the norm.

The technical director bemoaned the fact that no one was coming into build the set. I learned outside of the meeting that Sandy did not require shop hours as a requirement for her
classes. This was a potential problem. I knew from the previous show that no one came in to help with lighting, leaving hours and hours of work to the small lighting team. Lucas presented the idea that he wanted the logo to change color while it was projected. I thought that it might be distracting, but waited to say anything. I believe that often a bad idea will fall out of circulation and realized if I attacked the subject in the meeting, they would just have me schedule a separate meeting. Lucas and I had not met yet to discuss the twitbook logo and we needed to schedule a test of the projector. Kathy was about to leave town and suggested Logan turn on the Dylan projector to do the test. I stressed the need to do this before our set loaded into the space. My blocking would depend on where the projections would be. Amber panicked that there was not enough muslin to do a test till the Dylan cyclorama came down. Janice Stauffer in the costume shop offered some scrap muslin for the test. They got the material and painted it all in the same day.

Week 7: October 10 – October 16

In the production meeting, we needed to discuss the projection test, which did not happen Friday since Logan was not there. Logan misunderstood what we asked him to do. In a phone conversation, I explained to him how Kathy expressly directed that no one touch the machines except him. He called me back while I chatted with Laurel and we arranged a test on Saturday with Jeff to moderate. Saturday, with everyone present, we decided not to use the Dylan projector after all. Logan pulled a lesser quality projector for the test. To everyone’s surprise, the projector worked effectively and clearly shone through the painted muslin.
During the production meeting, I became confused about the material for wall surfaces. I had hoped that all the surfaces would be uniformly covered in muslin. They explained to me that most flats would be covered with luan or masonite. After further consideration, I realized we needed mostly luan panels to block the glow from the projectors. My fear was that all the surfaces would not look the same. They assured me that their goal was making the surface uniform. We also discovered that Kathy would be building a Roomba. We looked at swatches yesterday and I liked where Beth was going with the types and looks of the fabric. We had another color meeting to reschedule. Amber’s approach to the Baroque world has been to add details against a peachy-tan wall. The fear at the time was whether the actors would blend into the surface with their skin tone. Amber believed the details and the windows would contrast enough to pop people away from the wall.

Sirui was tentative about doing anything without approval from Jacob Heger, the prop shop supervisor. She searched for a flat screen television and I wondered if she did anything else. The only props we had were the ones stage management pulled for rehearsal. Logan should have music in rehearsal to see what works. Jeff suggested this during the meeting we had with him on Saturday about projections. I decided then that we should meet on Saturday to make sure he can help me get Logan on the same page. Projections and I needed to create a bird logo for the fake social networking site that will be due next week. It would then be sent to Kathy and Amber. Amber also needed a copy of the company logo. Erica was positive that everything was being built quickly. They scheduled paint call would for Saturday Oct. 23. Amber and I also needed to meet to determine furniture drawings. She decided to build the furniture. I must have looked skeptical because she reassured me that it could be done.
Week 8: October 10 – 16

Our first rehearsal was October 11. After feeling uncomfortable in my presentation of my concept, I prepared more for the first rehearsal. My impression of Tartuffe last semester was that some had gotten the language, but were so enthralled with it, they forgot to make it comedy. I greeted the cast and welcomed them into the process and told them my belief that the acting bar had been set high with Compleat Female Stage Beauty and Dylan and that I expected the same level of work. I told them that the overall objective of the play was that Alceste wanted to unmask everyone and realized he was most exposed and in most need of a mask by the end. We ask the audience if he will ever be with Célimène at the end.

The Office inspired my concept. Why a wine review? The office setting is the epitome of hypocrisy. From the text we know that they all are writers. We decided that wine was involved because it allowed a degree of snootiness and would be important to the government in Paris. Basque played a larger role in my concept as an intern to this company. He would be the audience’s connection to the play.

Amber came in and talked about the set design, showed the model, and discussed the colors and opulence of the back wall with the scrollwork. Beth was unable to attend but I described the high fashion. We warned the ladies about the high heels and that we will be rehearsing in them on stage. Laurel was not there for lighting but I described with Amber how we would use sconces and lamps in the show to motivate the lighting. We also discussed the windows and time of day. Logan played some of the songs and explained some conceptual work about the techno jazz and picking music to fit the characters. Lucas
shared tweet and wiki thoughts for the projections. He showed them the company logo.

The actors were so excited about all this that they were practically high-fiving each other.

Before reading the text, I explained that we would be word-perfect and explained that it was time to use any and all methods for memorization. I asked if anyone had a learning disability to let Emily and me know in private and they really needed to pay attention to beats and objectives. We discussed the structure of the play and how it builds to a “silence” as Harrison remarked in the forward to the play. In terms of momentum, Alceste is frenetic at the beginning and then he begins to realize what is happening, is justified at the end and calms down. Philinte and Eliante are our role models. They balance diplomacy and can speak their mind when appropriate. The meanings of the words are important. It is a British translation of the play and from the 1970s. I asked the cast to circle every word they did not understand and encouraged Shade to consider it as an American, uncertain of the way of life in Paris. I also asked them to bring a thesaurus for the next rehearsal and tell them to take notes. The notes could be impressions, thoughts on objectives, or things they found funny.

For the read through, I asked them to read for understanding, a technique that William Ball suggested in A Sense of Direction. They could muddle through pronunciations as best as they could. The next rehearsal we would start adding character objectives and talk more about characters. The stage manager helped us through the pronunciations because of her more recent experience with French.

Célimène = like regimen  
Alceste = like “zest”  
Oronte = Or-ont  
Philinte = fil-ent  
Eliante = El-e-aunt  
Basque = Baz-k  
Arsinoé – Ar-sin-o-way
I also suggested movies to think about such as *Ocean’s Eleven*, *What’s Up, Doc?*, and *Bringing Up Baby*. During the reading I took notes on what was funny, what we could not pronounce, what we really tripped over, what worked, and realized that I forgot to tell them what to cut. Everyone was positive except Billy Jones, who did not seem to understand what was happening at all.

The second rehearsal included a character building exercise that included choosing a favorite wine for their character. Devon picked Château Pétrus because when he researched it, it was known as the most pretentious. Mostly, I learned that these actors did not enjoy wine and were mostly too young to drink. The hope of the exercise was to encourage research and to take them to a more ostentatious lifestyle.

During this read through I had Shade take a tally of snarky comments and possible wikis he might write. He was not inspired by the exercise. He thought Basque was dim. I thought we could use that though it might not sustain us through the show. We read through Act 1 and talked about beats, stopping to chat as needed. We stopped at each scene and made sure we understood what we read. At breaks, Billy asked questions. The text was a initial barrier to him but he began making connections.

In our third rehearsal, we talked about super objectives and I could tell everyone was eager to move out of the table work phase. They did not grasp the language yet, but
sometimes putting actions in one’s body helps. We read Act 2 and 3 and stumbled through the names again. After reading, we did some movement work. I discussed the 5 types of movement, as I learned them from Paul Stager in my undergraduate movement class. The types of movement were based the book *The Actor’s Image*. We explored “swing,” “bouncy,” “sustained,” “vibratory,” and “suspend and release.” I told them how Molière worked with *commedia* and that there would be some influences in the show from that. We explored what animal their character was. Shade discovered that he was like a penguin, which made him seem like a butler. Both Billy and Ayana thought their characters were ostriches. Perhaps when Arsinoé and Clitandre leave at the end of Act 3 they decide to date each other. Another funny pairing was Alceste and Célimène. Alex was a black lab while Cali was a black cat. It seemed perfect, so we kept it. Joey wanted Oronte to be a koala. It seemed too needy to have the confidence needed to show off in front of Alceste. We would probably need to change that later. Mike and Jaimie picked birds. Devon was an eagle. I let them all settle into thinking about it further. I had them work through a movement as if they were drunk and realized that Mike’s Philinte was very helpful and kept trying to help Basque. For everyone else, it was a nice exercise and gave me an opportunity to see how the cast moved.

For our color meeting, Laurel suggested that we could have something projected in the center screen like the logo in a wine colored field it could sit inside, to help pop the actors away from the wall. It seemed sophisticated as well. Amber tried to add more colors to the palate and Laurel launched into a small color lecture that was directed to my scenic designer via me. We both received the information and Amber withdrew the colors and we looked for
ways to carry colors in triangles and threes through the set. The sofa would be champagne with neutral pillows and could have a color that tied into it like the red from Célimène’s door. The furniture was as ornate as the set, with the stools being covered in a ribbon pattern with the sofa champagne color underneath. This sounded great but I was still concerned that I might be let down.

In a projections meeting during this week, Lucas gave up solving the douser situation for the projectors in blackouts. I agreed with the demand, for the moment. If I could put Kathy Lorenzen, house electrician, on the task of acquiring dousers, I would try. I worried that since he had no advisor that he would not creatively solve the challenges of the technology. I did not feel I could devote extra time trying to solve it for him now that we were in rehearsals. We simplified and specified projections for Act 1, which cut out some of the aspects I liked but might find distracting. I also cut the unnecessary bird/tweet logo. The projections were in the field of view and we saw them regardless.

I was excited to start blocking and pre-blocked the scenes. We started fairly quickly though somewhat artificially with movement on beat changes. Philinte and Alceste’s scene covered the play’s initial exposition. Oronte’s entrance signaled the beginning of action. The Oronte scene was clever but I asked Joey to ground his character more so he had someplace to go later. Once Célimène joined the scene it became fairly chaotic. The pacing of the dialogue allowed for some comedic moments physically that built until the entrance of Acaste and Clitandre. The Célimène and Alceste scene received less attention because of the amount of time it took to block. I fell back into the groove of blocking and being inspired in
the moment. My natural reaction was to rely on vaudevillian moments or physical humor, which we added in small bits. It would continue to a small degree with the other characters and scenes. In development were two moments when Alceste and Célimène appeared to be in an awkward situation when it was not quite as bad as it looked. Basque walked in both times to announce the marquesses and was funny. I was ecstatic at the end of rehearsal and the ASM’s were laughing. Alex promised to talk with Stan to maintain his vocal control through the play.

Week 9: October 17 – 23

We learned in our production meeting that we should be loading into the space soon. Production elements from the previous show were not moved out of way yet, and would not be until a later that day. Amber showed us the painter elevations and the details that would help visually push actors away from walls. I told the lighting designer to cut the bird logo/spot light and we decided not to use the grains of wheat to light the drops. We asked for rehearsal shoes but actors would need to bring their own. Lucas announced that we would have no dousers and Laurel countered that everything would glow in a blackout and that we needed them. We were at a loss for the moment with no good solutions. I committed to procuring a camera for the live video component but needed to let Kathy know the type and input of the device. Stage management helped me schedule and arrange photos for our mock-Facebook projections. We had Richard but no Logan to represent sound. I sent an email to Paul, forgot to send one to Jeff, and was reminded that I needed to include everyone. By the end I should have a meeting soon with Logan and Jeff.
Rehearsals started off sluggishly after Fall Break. No one takes notes anymore. I am noticing it more and more with students, not just on this project. In terms of style, I discussed the need for each character to let their mask slip. The revelation of the truth causes the character a moment of doubt. I sometimes speak a different directing language when working with my Célimène and Acaste. They want direct, actable commands, which is not unreasonable and I would rather not completely feed them every choice. Some actors latch onto discovering their own moments. I felt the actors playing Philinte and Alceste, who had the most time with me, understood this. Arsinoé and Clitandre also found their own moments. Actor Devon Schovanec comfortably asked questions. Our Oronte had a nicely rooted character but would vacillate on the flamboyant.

The exciting moments in rehearsal were finding the spark that made a boring scene into something fun to watch. I discovered that does not always work when members of the cast are not there on a regular basis. I did not want to waste Sarah Arten’s time by having her sit through other scenes. I wonder if it would have been beneficial to have her more present to feel the flow of the show. The blocking felt heavy handed at points in the show and I planned to fix them. I want to elevate the intelligence of all the characters but had fun with the comedy.

Week 10: October 24 – 30

In our production meeting, we resorted to finding the sofa and bench. I was encouraged to come to the men’s fittings. Beth thinks the brown suit needed to be seen under various types of light. We scheduled the Facebook style portraits and Célimène and Alceste for the publicity shot. The TV would be $140 rent, with $250 deposit that would be refunded
at the end. Sandy recommended we look at what was possible on campus from inventory. No one thought such a thing existed. We needed to keep some budget to be use towards furniture. Kathy asked if we needed practical power plugs on stage for the computers, the tall lamp and desk lamps. Do they go into wall that we see, or do they magically go behind the set? It was something my scenic designer and I needed to chat about.

Rehearsals proved rough as the cast went off book. The Arsinoé and Célimène scene came to a screaming halt during Célimène’s monologue. I told Ayana to use her normal voice since her affected Arsinoé voice had been too tense and hard to understand. The guys, Clitandre and Acaste, found some moments of competition, which enriched their scene. We needed more now from Célimène and Arsinoé. Mr. Steger attended our rehearsal. Time management wise, we got through the first act and worked some moments and continued to find fun moments with Acaste and Clitandre. I toyed with the idea that the perspective of the musical motifs came from Alceste and Logan played with a few songs to get the feeling during rehearsal. The communication was rough since he was running the sound through the house system in the balcony. Eventual headway was made in the week when we transformed the most boring scene into a scene with the highest stakes. In 3.1, Alceste is on the verge of suicide, needing attention from Philinte. His world is crashing down and goes through an array of emotions before Oronte enters with Célimène. The scene was also great for the relationship of Philinte and Alceste. We found cleaner moments with Dubois. I found a way to replicate the Roomba appearance into the end of the act again. We realized that scene 2.4 really needed work. It lacked commitment and they did not know their lines. We found that the letter became the impetus for the Alceste and Célimène scene. It worked till Dubois
arrived. Paul let me know that the women’s scene should be as nice as possible like Gwendolyn and Cecily in The Importance of Being Earnest.

Week 11: October 31 – November 6:

I entered rehearsals this week with a more solid plan before a run through, looking for ways to have fun again, trying to liven the moments of blank stares or constant smiles. I included Paul’s note about trying the Arsinoé and Célimène scene completely nice and innocent. The run thru went well, but felt that Alceste bore the brunt of keeping and ramping the tempo to the end of Act 1 with a few moments of release with Philinte. The dart guns needed to be clarified, but I still wanted to keep them because they make the characters identifiable to the audience. The Célimène and Arsinoé scene still needed help and so did the end of Act 3. Virginia thought that I had gotten Alceste upstaged by Philinte. I could see that at his desk, Alceste was looking up stage to talk to Philinte. We adjusted as I thought was needed. Her other comments dealt with Billy and Joey’s strength of choices. Act 1 was labored, as we are aware, while Acts 2 and 3 were much easier to watch. The Act 3 staging needed to be clever, not wild. Célimène could be curter, ruder and snippier and overall, bitchier when she lets her guard down or puts someone in their place. She still needed to remain approachable to most of the men when she replaces her mask. I planned to have Virginia come to another run before she left town.

As the temperature changed, I began having back pain. As I recall, other directors have pain in the seats in that theatre. Work continued and one of our discoveries was that Oronte played the end of the poem slam scene before it happened. He adjusted and improved in the scene. After explaining the Act 2 confrontation scene and talking about objectives,
and getting the same reactions, I tried to heat up the sexual tension between Alex and Cali by playing the scene as if they were in a Spanish soap opera. As can be imagined by a sane actress, Cali was utterly confused. As I have learned from many professors and directors, sometimes it is necessary to explain the same thing many ways or to break it open with something extreme or seemingly unrelated. It worked in the moment and I had them keep it. Now the challenge was smoothing those moments together so it did not look like a Spanish soap opera in the middle of Paris. The actors understandably cling to notes that make the most sense. Sometimes it is harder to pry the initial choice from their hands as the scene matures.

During the production meeting, we discussed that the press release shots would be taken on Friday. Decking continued, while the main wall was done incorrectly and was too wide for the space. The solution was to center it on the platform and I confirmed with Amber that would be a sufficient fix without rebuilding the entire center section. On other fronts, rear projection to the space over Célimène’s wall would now need to be front-projected due to space confinements backstage. The Saturday before tech we would do a dry tech, look at general looks for lights, set volumes and look at projections. We will schedule paper tech for Friday but could not at the moment confirm it with Logan, who was absent. His assistant Richard was there but we also need Logan to coordinate the setting of the cues and to record the pre-show announcement. I needed to contact Jeff while keeping Richard in the loop. As an educator, I did not wish to destroy our young sound designer’s career, but actions on previous shows made him seem less reliable in my mind. They were finally talking about building furniture next week in the props department. They ordered parts and
office supplies thru Marilyn Duba, the theatre accountant. We still needed to have some way to charge the cell phones. The coffee bar was finished this week.

Erica was proud that they were building the set in the space, when load in was not scheduled to happen till Monday. The second paint call would focus on the floor and trompe-l’œil. I learned that the word trompe-l’œil is a painting term meaning to fool the eye. The technique would be employed to paint details on the walls upstage, making them look three dimensional, or that is at least what my scenic designer told me. Decking would need to be finished by then. Lighting needed the sconces to be built before they could be installed. We built a great many items for this show. It made me nervous whether it would all get done. Some good news was that the dousers were ordered, and coming in next Tuesday. We would have two to put into the light board. We would be short one but we could use a person to operate that one. Freshman theatre majors were apparently in abundance for run crew positions and we have asked for one to live under the set for a few hours each night.

Eventually in every theatre endeavor, I become nervous about one to two weeks before opening. As my stress presents differently each time, I discovered that this time my whole body ached and I found the distraction an obstacle in communicating with actors. Cali and Devon always had lots of questions, which encouraged me that they deeply considered their roles, but it seemed they were afraid to try new things without approval. It may be that they needed more time to process notes or were sensing stress. I found it challenging to have an intelligent student in directing class who analyzed my process while she participated in it. The two of us became strained as I attempted to move Cali to explore bolder choices. Billy was strengthening his choices. He found some moments but needed to let them mature. His
background in improvisation helped find him moments. Ayana excelled at taking notes and making them hers. I was glad to have her experience on stage. I had my sound designer for one of the rehearsals, but it took longer to work scenes trying to include the elements into the show. I showed the cast a scene from What’s Up, Doc? and I think I only confused them more. For the next rehearsal, I would let them do more finding and I would do less “confusing.” It was time to get a flow going.

The next day, I sat Mike and Alex down and had them say their lines to each other without blocking. It helped them connect with the lines and was quite nice. They said they would be going to hang out over the weekend to do a bit more “method” acting by bonding. They hung out in very different groups so this should be helpful. Also I described Philinte as a mechanic that tweaks the machine (Alceste) to make it run smoothly. When Philinte cannot control him, Alceste gets out of whack. It seemed to motivate Mike. It was hard to hang onto “neutral” or “example of the way we should be.” He seemed really happy with the one hour of rehearsal we had. We also worked on Dubois and found that to make Sarah understand the situation, Dubois had to really love Alceste. When in doubt, chose love. It may not be a breakthrough but specific choices with blocking and moments were made. She was closer to looking like she fit the rest of the show. Shade was great. He was really delightful and I should have complemented him more. The more positive the feedback from me; the harder the cast worked. Cali was able to make some big choices and carried the rest of the scene in a similar mode.

After the photography of the profile pictures and publicity shots, I thought I would take a nap. I did not get the nap and was not productive the rest of the day. During the
rehearsal, I felt dizzy and had to sit on the stage and then lay down. I started to confuse the actors and myself and then simply could not focus at all. My stage manager called off rehearsal after work on the first scene of Act 3. I eventually made it home on my own and went directly to bed.

Week 12: November 7 – November 13

   I made up for Friday by pushing our runs all together, starting Monday. Virginia walked in thinking we were running Act I. I forgot that she did not receive UNL e-mails at home. I lost my last opportunity to have Virginia watch the show until her return. Her perspective would have been much appreciated. Rehearsal though rebounded and moved forward. I cleaned up the top of the *billet doux* section of Act 3 where everyone entered on the top floor. To keep rehearsal spicy in between cleaning moments, I found some radical choices. Most everyone wanted to feel safe and set the show but the opportunity allowed Billy to build a hilarious climax reading Célimène’s letter that ended with him hitting her with a pillow. We cleaned the blocking and choices of all the guests leaving during that section. The next task was allowing Cali to be alone on stage at the end. I also wanted to work more specifically with Mike’s “contumely” line. He had trouble making the monologue build. Next would be continually strengthening Joey and Billy’s characterizations. I thought I got Joey to find new things.

   I met with Logan about sound. He had not gotten the speakers moved because of the paint call. If he had been at the meeting he could have scheduled time or worked with them about availability. We decided that the background music during the party should be the group Crystal Method. He plotted out timings on door openings and closings. We talked
about pre-show music and using Hocus Pocus songs prior to Basque entering. The plan still was to do a voice over and to have the songs shift once Basque turns them on.

Virginia left town without seeing a run through. Though disappointed and stressed, I tried to embrace it. Everyone forgot Act 1 when we ran it, but they rebounded about midway. Going into Act 2 they remembered more, and by Act 3 they had reestablished the rhythm. I needed to help them work Act 1 and make specific choices. I worked the opening with Alex, Mike and Shade.

The next day, we made considerable improvement to Act 1. It was much more enjoyable and I gave the “good” and “nice” notes that help positive reinforcement. After the run we worked the end of the play, which never had successfully worked. Alex understood suddenly that he was playing against the “boy gets girl” expectation and adjusted to make the ending both somewhat comedic and tragic. In turn, Cali realized and understood how to be lost and confused while she was alone on stage at the end. Most designers came to watch. Logan was there for sound. I still worried that he did not know how to deal with stage managers. He told Emily that she missed the cue, instead of running the sound cues or telling her where to place them. I thought the entrance music might work if we got full commitment from actors.

In our production meeting, we discussed how Maggie drove the Roomba with increasing expertise and it seemed to fit well in the moments it was onstage. Costumes reported pretty much everything had been purchased except for a few accessories. She wanted to add costumes Sunday night and then add make-up on Tuesday. I was okay with that but Brad seemed concerned that we were throwing too much at the actors. At this point I
thought we needed to work with some of the costumes. Laurel said the lights were focused and she would start building cues. For projections, Lucas had the hardware in place. He needed to get a cable that should be arriving Friday. He would work on positioning the projector and has been writing cues. I joined him for a meeting to set up the camera angle. The TV was coming as well as office supplies, but where was the furniture? They were still building the pieces, and I let them know I was anxious to get it soon. Scenic tried to put up the big middle screen along with the door and pillars but got to the door and screen. Sound said the cues were written. We needed the microphone to be placed near camera for Célimène’s office, but the speakers were hung.

The next few rehearsals included working the Basque pre-show blocking, seeing the intense Theatrix show *The Inferno*, and doing a very introspective run thru. We were all feeling the strange weather and the stress of the approaching technical rehearsal. One day off made a huge difference. It was not as bad as Monday’s Act 1 run, but we lacked energy. Notes revealed the need to simplify, and Cali and Alex admitted the desire to cut some lines, which I approved. I worked hard to simplify Dubois’ choices and gave her something more actable. Dubois’ deep desire for Alceste worked the best in the moment. We cut some business with a tweet to Basque to simplify. We continued to look and work on ways to strengthen Billy and Joey’s performances. Joey adjusted well. Billy made occasional strong choices but did not always connect them. I still thought we were positive and progressing. A colleague thought I would be sad it was the last time I was working with the actors, without the confusion of tech. I know I would still like time, but there is something about a looming due date to spark some creative, albeit, last minute juices. Cali was still finding some extra
brassiness and progressing along nicely. Devon worked very hard to please me and constantly asked questions. Logan was doing better to figure out the process. The rest of cast and crew were plugging away. Most importantly, my stage manager kept us organized and kept me calm.

The last night before the day off, I went to do “Live at the Mill” with Alex Jeffery. The Bill Stibor interview went well and can be found on-line. Speaking with knowledgeable people was refreshing. Later, Paul Steger came to watch a run through which pointed out to me that Act 1 still felt long. We talked about the Arsinoé and Célimène scene and how he thought it was too chipper now. The scene had been a struggle and we had not found what worked yet. Adding back the verbal fencing might help. Some of the blocking was superfluous in his opinion like Célimène’s bit getting the drink. He also thought that Célimène needed a “calling card” technique that we knew when she was lying or trying to manipulate the men. I thought she already had one. In another scene, the Academy Official was moving stage right with Basque, which was an odd choice. He suggested that Alceste move upstage with the Official instead making perfect sense and helping solve a weird spot. The ending of Act 3 needed to speed up. He suggested they overlap their exits. Something that I was struggling with but had not named was the fact there was only one way to get down stage. It was just that poor little floating staircase controlling all motion between upstage and downstage. He also thought the set was pushed too far downstage and it did not give them enough acting space. I think he was also somewhat concerned about the amount of colors on the set. At the end of his comments, he asked me if I felt proud of it. That is a hard question to ask someone about to enter tech week. I was proud of it, but wanted it to be
perfect like so many parents want their children to be perfect. The confidence was there, but I would have enjoyed a few more opinions from objective viewers.

Paper tech moved along smoothly and quickly. Everyone was prepared. During Dry Tech, however, projections were not prepared at all. I realized my concern for my sound designer had overshadowed the lack of progress with my projections designer. I was certain that the upstage centered projector was not powerful enough for the whole wall and needed adjustment. The walls were flesh toned as feared and especially the screen. Having something on it seemed important from visually losing the actors against the wall. The set was not complete either, which meant there was not enough information to make a decision at the time regarding projections. Lucas planned to finish all the projections. Lights showed me looks for each act. They seemed fine at the time. I wondered what the point of a cohesive show was if all the designers do not see each other’s work. I imagine Laurel knew it would be a waste of time, namely for her. The sound cues took the longest but we seemed to make the most headway. I thought the cues needed to fade into the moment more, but when he added fades they did not work either.

Week 13: November 14 – 20

Both stage management and I were calm during tech, realizing what we were working with yesterday. We worked cue-to-cue, ending the show right at break. We returned and added costumes to the run-thru. It was strange to me that I did not have a lot to say. The set was incomplete and the correct furniture was missing. Yelling would be ineffective since everyone was busy teching. Laurel constantly worked on her cues so as soon as I took a
note, she changed the cue. The sound cues progressed, but I still did not have all the
projections. Amber rejoined us after her show and was equally horrified and mesmerized by
what was lacking from the set. I told her sternly of my unhappiness. She assured me there
would be a solution. I am certainly disappointed and not having much success in obtaining a
finished product.

It was technically second dress, though listed as our first. Stress was getting to me
from not having everything in place. Things were getting very last minute. Amber yelled at
her crew the night before and there was much wailing and gnashing of teeth. We got most of
the furniture and had beverages but the acting was off. An approaching rainstorm came up
and messed with my inner ear. Everything got quiet. Beth stopped laughing, and the cast
lost their energy. I tried to help them with specific moments. Joey kept his performance
lively and Mike found moments in Act 2. Cali needed to have more fun with Célimène’s
bitchiness. Everything became very busy and flat, and I could not stand to look at it. I think
we all were somewhat depressed.

During notes, we found some happiness and we were much more positive afterwards.
The shape of Act 1 was better, but Act 3 was really off. The sound cues were louder to
account for a full house, and perhaps too loud for my ear to take. It would take an all night
paint call to finish. I wish they had done that earlier.

November 16:

Act I shaped up. Alex and I talked about how 1.1 was all over the map but we talked
through the build of the show and where Alceste fit in it. Alex was stressed and worn out.
Exposition is hard to direct to a tactics only actor, but the shape got better as the scene progressed. Also scene 1.13 with Arsinoé needed Alceste to be more enthralled with her. He needed information from Arsinoé. Arsinoé’s desire to be with him overwhelm his own tactics and he has been running away. We got the best build in Act 1 yet. Célimène ramped up the quick verbal barbs. The Arsinoé and Célimène scene was really good. The grandslam section-tempo was in a great pace. There were a lot of fun moments during the run.

From preview to opening the cast garnered more energy but the show still lacked perfection. The dousers and projections were not quite synced and left an unpolished feeling on the production. There were some moments that connected and gave the audience a laugh, and they seemed curious or intrigued by the Roomba. Mostly, the show did not seem completely connected yet.

November 19, Friday:

I met with Andy Hendrickson and his wife before the show and went to Misty’s. We talked about the city scene in Lincoln, a little about the show and about our lives in general. My main concern was explaining the intent of the media and the modernization. I also discussed The Office inspiration and sitcom feel we were attempting. The two met me at the theatre and made it to sit before Shade started his pre-show routine. The sound seemed soft. Things were misfiring acting wise, and not quite right. Mike surprised me tonight with the depth of work he had done on Philinte. I was proud of how he had grown into his role. Joey was on fire this evening as well. The KCACTF response was mostly positive. He said it was an attractive production and visually stunning. He thought I had a very distinctive acting
style in the production, that may have not been executed consistently, but he was amazed 
how the actors would get out of awkward positions. The cast however took command of the 
style and language, in his opinion. He thought it was a very fine production with a talented 
group of people. Upon entering the theatre, he was impressed by the sophisticated 
environment. He noticed the strong angular lines and the curves of the set. He thought it 
was fun and a lot to look at. He discerned that it was an office setting and also liked the 
different types of practicals. I took nearly 4 pages of detailed notes. One of the less positive 
notes was that Act I was too long and a lot to listen to. I enjoyed his honest opinion and 
fresh set of eyes. Joey had gotten a nice mention and we talked about the richness of 
costumes. The actors’ shoes transfixed him along with the media. He thought we did a great 
job incorporating them. Alex and Mike were chosen for Irene Ryan nominations.

November 20, Saturday:

I missed Dr. Grange and Dr. Miller’s attendance. Apparently the performance was an 
abysmal experience for everyone. The cast said they rallied to give the best show they could 
but it was hard to bolster a reaction and promised me it was a good show despite efforts. I 
told them about the Nebraska Theatre Caravan performing to six people in a 2000 seat 
auditorium. I guess it made them feel a bit better. We headed off to break for Thanksgiving.

The final week:

The final week started roughly after a week off. During the brush up, I stopped it and 
told Emily to do a speed through. I encouraged them to move along briskly. Alex hung onto
the note and rushed the next evening’s performance while Calandra and Joey tried to match the speed. Running over the moments certainly made the show less interesting. I offered the correction though I did not watch the next two nights. Passing by the intercom and through the reports, I heard that the show was in a better rhythm and that the audience seemed responsive. During these days, Dr. Borden attended.

The final show was an amazing performance with everyone working towards the same goal, which made me happy that my advisor was able to see it. The Célimène and Arsinoé scene was really on and finally worked which moved the Arsinoé and Alceste scene along. Devon and Billy had a greater connection and better comeuppance during their scene as well. There were extremes on the other end of the spectrum. Joey reached the over-the-top moment by lying down on the couch. Cali actually spit into Arsinoé’s coffee cup, and I about fell under my seat. Despite the flaws, the performance was the best in combined effort.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

I learned from mistakes and victories during this process and discovered new challenges for future work and possibilities for solving them. Four reviewers commenting on the performance were Dr. Ian Borden, Dr. William Grange, Professor Virginia Smith and Paul Steger. Asking the same set of ten questions, the following is their responses summarized. Also interwoven are occasional comments from the KC ACTF respondent, Andrew Hendrickson of Mount Marty College, a Benedictine school in South Dakota.

1. Did the pre-show pantomime sufficiently introduce the media and some of the effects for the performance?

   The hope for Basques’ pre-show antics was to help establish how the media would be used during the play and where to look to find them. Dr. Grange believed the beginning was an “ineffective conceit” as did Mr. Steger who felt it did not build to anything dramatically. Dr. Borden and Ms. Smith suggested that it could have gone further to establish the media and possibly the party downstairs. A moment that would have helped to establish the Roomba sooner, as Ms. Smith suggested, was to have Basque interact with it in this section. Mr. Hendrickson was intrigued by the cleverness and he along with Ms. Smith were put in a “great mood” and made them ready for a “fun ride.” In response, I did not allow myself enough time to work through the events to shape its dramatic effect on the whole production and did not initially consider whether it brought out or diminished energy to start the show. I debated about how
much to reveal in the opening and if that would leave any discoveries to happen during
the performance. The idea rooted in the discussion about involving the audience like a
Blue Man Group performance and was geared towards an event that engaged the
audience. In establishing the beginning with Basque, I ask the audience to watch it
actively for Basque and remove him mostly from the later acts. I may also have asked
them to watch for movement and media rather than listening to language and then fought
the rest of the show to make them listen.

The Roomba, originating as an off-handed mention during a production meeting,
had the potential of justifying itself as its own character. I placed its entrances during
critical moments for comic effect. I found that in Act 1 I had trouble placing it in the
scene without detracting from the dramatic action or minimizing its effect. It never
could really be seen and without the introduction as pointed out by Ms. Smith, it was
always a curiosity rather than its own character. In hindsight, I should have entertained
the idea, but cut it if I could not find appropriate moments to use it. After working with
such small budgets for Theatrix, the thought of cutting anything seemed wasteful. As
Virginia might counsel me, sometimes we have to “kill our babies.”

2. Was the casting effective?

Dr. Borden pointed out that the degree of effectiveness on the casting varied.
While most actors were able to make the language understandable, few managed to
make it come alive and really pursue an objective on stage. From his perspective, we
were engaged in a degree of talking heads that did not interact well. I agree that the hardest challenge with the actors was using intonations of the language to pursue objectives. Mr. Steger thought the younger members of the cast were provided an opportunity to learn the application of their craft to a complicated and long narrative production and he believed each member seemed equipped to create an appropriate arc for the character’s development. Ms. Smith supported the casting but questioned the characterization of some of the players. She was more concerned about playing the end result too soon. In the case of Philinte, a shy guy who could only hope to get Eliante, and then hope against hope, succeeding was lost with the always-charming Mike Lee as someone who was seemingly predetermined to win the love of Eliante. Other believability issues included Célimène’s suitors, though looked right but either did not match the degree of realism of the other characters in the example of Clitandre and Acaste or would never be in love with Célimène such as Oronte. Dr. Grange stated, “The cast for the most part found itself caught, in my opinion, between efforts to present the play realistically and to fight against the rhymed couplets of translator Tony Harrison.” The de-emphasis of the language into prose made it unclear to him why they were trying to act out the words. He was most strongly supportive of Joey Galda and Calandra Daby’s performances. I would agree that Joey was enjoyable during the performances, but would disagree that he always fit appropriately with his character’s mission. Calandra certainly worked to make things work even when she did not completely understand what she was pursuing or her character’s overall goal.

For me the struggle to liven the language and create characters that fit the world
were quintessential and my primary focuses, though I still believe that there are elements of commedia lurking in the characters and sought to find moments of comedic movement. The casting was strong and felt the majority of the cast was able to meet the demands of learning, understanding and making a connection to the language. Some of the early physical choices of a few of the less trained actors seemed very stuck and leading these few actors away from the choices were not completely successful. Two actors strained to make literal commitments to the ideas we discussed in rehearsal which were meant to inspire the energy, not the objective, and I spent some energy with them trying to undo my initial suggestions. In order to help aid students or younger actors, I often talk in terms of energy rather than objective. This worked with a few actors while actors like Alex Jeffery and Cali Daby wanted specific objectives and tactics. I was flexible in trying to meet the challenges of each actor and in unifying the overall cast.

3. Did the modern office concept including the use of current social norms such as social network sites, websites, smart phones and personal computers work to point out current societal hypocrisies?

The responses to this question touched on a number of various other elements in the production. The modernization seemed to prove more effective than the specific modern office strategy. Dr. Grange pointed out that “there was no sense of a modern office onstage; it was clear that these individuals are, as the script dictates, members of an elite who seek advancement up the ladder of status. The location, it seemed clear to
me, was Célimène’s salon where she entertains suitors of one kind or another. The use of personal electronic devices was more or less effective, revealing inner thoughts of characters as if they were asides or spoken to confidants.” Dr. Borden also felt that the modernization made a significant impact but did not feel strongly compelled by the office setting. Mr. Steger believed “the concept worked but (did) not believe the overall scenic environment was conducive to a variety of movement patterns and staging possibilities.” “The downstage area almost always seemed cramped, with only one way to get in or out of the environment,” which limited the staging, he said. He continued with, “It did, however, provide an environment that towered over the individual, giving the feeling that the characters are trapped in their own world, isolated from the towering history that surrounds them.”

As the project unfolded, I discovered that the office setting was diminishing and let it morph more into Célimène’s salon without making a strong commitment to the change. The Harrison translation did not fit the original concept and should have been reassessed. As Ms. Smith suggested, some elements could have remained such as Célimène’s Skype call to Alceste and might have been more emphatic with another application of the technique. I could also have kept Philinte’s recording of Alceste’s rant, but tossed other media that distracted or diminished what was happening on stage. I was somewhat torn to prove that media could work in the play as I was compelled to integrate it as a prerequisite for my thesis. I would have enjoyed more media but found it probably would have been distracting against the language. To solve some of the problems I encountered during dry tech, I certainly could have listened to my own red
flags and made the decision to liberally and judiciously make the cuts needed. One fix may have been removing the projector on the center back wall and simply painting the canvas a matching wine color, helping to pop the actors away from a skin tone color and dropping the muddied center projections. As I told my sound designer, the television aspect of the concept with theme music would either be enormously successful or a total failure. As we implemented it, I would say that it did not fit completely into the production and probably should have also been cut. I would have enjoyed more advice from the sound designer’s advisor on how to make the element work or at least have had Mr. O’Brien present for a rehearsal.

4. Did each act build to its end?

Most of the responses were in agreement that they did not end with a “strong punch.” In particular Virginia mentioned that ending an act on an exit line was “hard to make climactic.” KCACTF Respondent Hendrickson found that Act 1 in particular was hard to listen to for its duration. Dr. Grange differed slightly and considered “each act progressed towards a conclusion, as the script provides. The production maintained the script’s structural integrity, and the investment in the Célimène-Alceste relationship was clear.” There was a certain lack of consistency on each act’s build as I have noted in the journal of my process. I worked often to find ways to sustain the flow and energy of an act and then to build it. The structure of the play in part counters its own build. Alceste rages at the beginning and quiets as other’s voice their rage at Célimène at the
end. Perhaps finding more ways to transfer the energy when Alceste left the stage would have bolstered a bigger build. As mentioned earlier, the media, sound and even the Roomba may have undercut advances in building the acts to their end.

I have had many conversations with theatre professionals about how theatre is matching the shortening attention spans of our younger audiences with shorter plays, more diversions and even with television style scene changes. It is a conversation I have had in children’s theatre and now with college students. Are actors and audiences trained for a shorter attention span? The solution should be based on what the director thinks the problem is. For this production, my answer was to ask the audience to listen longer instead of cutting it to fit a preconceived notion of their attention span. A few more cuts in Act 1 would have made it shorter but I feel that I needed to see how it worked without heavy cutting. The process of building dramatically to the end of each act is still a difficult challenge for me that may have been more successful in the shorter acts and not as much during Act 1.

5. Did the overall performance build to a climax in the third act?

This question was similar to the previous and upon consideration the development of Act 3 was based on the lack of duplicity from the previous two acts, where the unmasking of Célimène was not a satisfying climax, in the opinion of Ms. Smith. She also pointed out that she could see that work was made to ensure it, but I would argue that seeing people work hard does not constitute enjoyable theatre. Discussions during the rehearsal process included duplicity in the sense that each character was wearing a
societal mask that slipped. Sparked by a later comment by Ms. Smith, I would venture this could have been built through moments of earlier dumb show such as Célimène giving Basque letters and Basque giving them to the other men, and if I wished to keep more media, another Skype session with Célimène or finding glints of e-mails as others used the television/computer.

In a different way, Mr. Steger believed the end of Act 3 was lost due to “the scenic environment, and the arrangement of the furniture and accompanying properties.” He thought we could “have provided a more isolated spot for her final moments and discovery of all she (had) lost.” As blocked the final moments were “sequestered to the stage left corner and sofa (making) these life-changing discoveries small and almost exclusively internal.” Virginia’s comment about establishing more duplicity earlier would likely have also aided to the scope of loneliness as Paul suggests with the scenery. In the moment though, I felt that time was given to make the end work with revealing true colors and discussing with the cast to continually make discoveries and not to play the end.

6. Did the use of media compliment the production?

Dr. Borden’s comments on this seemed to fit what I was looking for in terms of style and offered a way to pursue it:

The interactive media was by far the most effective aspect of the production, and every time something happened with it I was greatly entertained and amused.
Unfortunately, these moments were few and far between. I wish you had gone all out with this concept, to the point of significantly departing from a traditional *Misanthrope*, and finding a means of adding projected asides, Skype, and definitions constantly. I would have liked it more if you had found a way to separate the projections from the reality of the set, as well. It was a great idea not executed fully or as well as hoped.

Mr. Steger and Dr. Grange also thought the media worked and complemented the production, though Dr. Grange found it to be a “kind of curious sideshow.” The media and how much was too much, as I mentioned before, was a struggle. Having media was a key motivator in my interest in the original script and if anything, I would have liked to add more rather than take any away. Virginia offered that this was a key “kill your babies” moment and found the media less effective at times. As media continues to progress and I have other opportunities to work with projections designers, I look forward to finding effective ways to use it. During this production, I feel that it never fully reached its potential, whether through cutting ineffective slides or committing to their presence in totality.

7. Was the blocking effective in telling the story?

Overall the blocking seemed effective to the reviewers but the spacing of the scenery was limiting. Hendrickson said during the KCACTF response that he was somewhat jealous that the characters always found effortless yet elegant or clever ways
to get out of strange positions. Creating effective and telling stage images was often a consideration in the earlier stages of rehearsal. During the developmental process, we had worked out a ground plan before summer vacation and then seemingly lost ground when we returned in the fall. My intention to bring the action forward so the space would not swallow the sound was more of a detriment than expected. Once the set was in place I realized the need for another staircase and that the furniture squished the acting space.

Dr. Borden believed that key moments were lost behind furniture, such as the announcement that Philinte and Eliante were a couple. Crosses were made awkward by the stairs and levels. However, he found certain aspects were fun, such as the rolling chairs. He also believed I created several nice acting areas. Virginia thought that the biggest flaw was the set design and that I valiantly tried “to wrestle into submission.” Much of the notes dealt with the flatness of the furniture and the positioning of the desks on stage right. Often Philinte upstaged Alceste in her opinion and offered Philinte the stronger position. Also the upstage area allowed for side-by-side acting instead of allowing for depth. Mr. Steger found it to be a “vast expanse of space while the downstage area was small and cramped. With these limitations in mind, I believe you found inventive ways to make a twenty-five foot entrance or exit somehow work, with energy and sound cues.” Dr. Grange thought the “the show’s blocking was effective,” but found that residual elements of the rehearsal process such as a quick dance move between Alceste and Célimène were out of place. Grange pointed out that “the use of both horizontal levels of the stage was inventive for the most part and it filled the space
well. As you know, I fundamentally disagree that blocking or anything else in the theatre can “tell a story,” since theatre is not in the storytelling business. If you wanted to advance the plot, then it seemed to work. That was especially true in the Célimène Arsinoé scene.” I believe even with the limitations of the set that I created inventive and useful blocking.

8. Did the actors have well-developed characters?

This question could be answered by the question regarding the effectiveness of casting. The responses were polarizing and gave the sense that I was not entirely prepared to tackle the challenge of Molière or lead them through the intricacies of the language. Although I thoroughly discussed with my cast the image of swordplay as a metaphor for the style of delivery, Grange mentioned, “The vocal and articulation problems of the student actors severely hampered them in performance. The characters they played were not well rounded, since three-dimensionality in such characters is fundamentally dependent upon the play’s language. Characters use language as épée, foil, and saber, as they were fencing. As in that activity, certain skills have to be honed for the play’s requisite thrust and parry to be effective.” Grange also discussed the problem in words such as “modish,” “chicanery,” and “Venus de Milo” not rhyming with “kilo.” A search through my notes indicated that occasional pronunciations were problems, but had mostly been solved by opening. There were apparent problems with unvoiced final consonants in “disgust,” “prostitute,” “satirists,” and problems with
voiced consonants in “dazed” and “praised.” Since I was not present that evening, I cannot guarantee that they did not drop those or revert to old habits.

My main concern was creating compelling characters through the pursuance of objectives. Dr. Borden pointed out that most of the actors were unable to make their characters live, in large part because the text prevented them from really working on scene partners. He contended that Jones and Schovanec failed to make their characters in any way compelling, partly from difficulty with physical characterization or interaction. However, the leads obviously had a sense of who they were and were able to make the language understandable but were not compelling. Virginia believed the characters were effective in the usage of comic elements on an individual bases. She believed the production was stylish and smart but did not find the characters very believable. In her opinion, the focus should have been to make what is said true. Particular examples include how we hear that all these men are nuts about Célimène, but we did not see it. We hear that she is leading all of them on, but we do not see it. We hear that Eliante loves Alceste, but we also see that she likes Philinte. Without her longing for Alceste or the moment when suddenly she rejects him, we miss a really satisfying change. The result would have been Philinte overwhelmed with his good fortune and we would cheer for this miracle.

Virginia suggested adding visual action to the play to clarify or enhance the moments such as a prologue that introduces us to all of Célimène’s conquests. Particularly intriguing was the suggestion to add a three minute song with her getting fondled by each in turn, as the party spills on stage, or her giving Basque notes to give
to each and when they read them and swoon, as she celebrates her success. If I had
adjusted the pre-show or added dumb show to precede each act, I could have set up the
work in the office, included the exchange between Oronte and Philinte, or established
the party. Mr. Steger felt that work with the actors was detailed and specific and that
each of them was deeply invested in the character’s needs and wants and found the
through-line of action to lead to an appropriate conclusion for the characters. I
understand that further work on language development is needed for my skill set and
that my first attempt at Moliere, though perhaps not completely effective, was not a
complete failure.

9. Were design elements unified?

I very strongly believe that the design elements were unified and found that a
majority of responses commented that the scenery was beautiful but awkward. Virginia
suggested using circles in the blocking. Depending on the individual, the projections
either needed thinning or expanding but mostly fit the created world. The concept of leit
motifs for character entrances informed them of the time period, but for the most part
did not blend into the world, often removing the reviewer from the experience. Lighting
went mostly unnoticed though to Ms. Shoemaker’s credit, not to her detraction.
Additional elements such as the Roomba had “a negative and very distracting effect on
the play” according to Dr. Borden. Properties overall seemed to be effective. As I
discussed in question 1, the Roomba had great potential in my belief. As Virginia noted,
this element could have been introduced earlier to prevent confusion or cut. I struggled with it and should have cut it from production. As Brad Buffum once pointed out, every director has one thing on which they fixate.

To my greatest surprise was the animosity towards the costume design. Dr. Borden found “the costumes were a terrible disappointment. While I got a sense of who Alceste and Célimène were, no other character was served well by his or her costume. Costumes often did not seem to be cut properly for the actors wearing them, or were found items that did not match the wealth supposedly possessed by the wearer. Certain mixes amplified this, such as tux pants with a regular suit jacket. So while most elements did create the idea of the world, sound and costumes inhibited its reception by the audience.” Virginia also noted that color-coding couples was “self-conscious and sophomoric.” In choosing colors for the production, I became aware of the sheer amount of colors used. My ultimate concern was limiting the amount of color presented on stage. Often costumes, like lighting, require pairing to control the amount of color impact. A few previous experiences I had allowed actors to become floating heads against the background with too many colors on stage, so I was more aware of avoiding those problems. Elements for Clitandre’s jacket would have complimented Acaste’s had we not at the last minute, added blue stripes as requested by Janice Stauffer. His costume reminded me of something from The Sound of Music. I tried to have an open mind but eventually found it was distracting and we opened the show before its full effect was fully noted. As I was instructed, I tried to limit my amount of influence after the opening of the show and did not make an attempt to change it.
For the women, Virginia was also critical of Sarah Arten’s costuming for the very clownish Dubois. Much of this costuming was based on the belief that Dubois, who loses, forgets, and bungles much of the information she is to give to Alceste, is a ditz. A combination of influences for her came from the British AbFab and the Drew Carey Show. Another Virginia comment suggesting that she was an intern or establishing earlier that she worked with Alceste could have been integrated into the play. Although Sarah played two roles, it would have been easy enough to incorporated Dubois more into the show. It might have been effective to make her on even ground with Basque but felt that she had a very specific commedia role in the life of the play. The women’s costumes may have not been cut well, but seemed to work towards the goal. Virginia also believed that “the women’s costumes were more effective, but a bit heavy handed. Célimène’s look was too pushed to slut, Eliante too goody-goody and Arsinoé, too dowdy.” Aside from sound and scenic design, Paul believed that “the design elements were unified.” I was pleased with the scenic and costume design and felt it represented both The Office elements as well as the haute couture that might be found in a highly opinionated Parisian world. It seemed the level of ostentation was not consistent and that though the set was beautiful, it was not functional and that the sound was often ineffective.
10. Did the performance keep the audience engaged over all?

We are often given the difficult task to entertain an audience that may or may not care if we are performing for them. Their response, in part, helps the playwright and director realize if the production has been successful in its presentation. As Dr. Borden believed, it was not over all effective for the audience with a lack of “comic energy in the production” with the responding “glum faces” from the audience. The projections brought to life the play for him, but “failed to engage the audience effectively.” I felt that the comic elements were highlighted as much as possible and Virginia found that she was “very entertained.” We ventured into farce with “delightful moments” and I was able to couch Alex into the comedy well. Less effective was the consistency overall in garnering the response. Paul believed that I was “successful in keeping the audience engaged and interested in the characters and how the compounding story – and the various individual character relationships – developed.” Dr. Grange also added that “there were only 30 people in the audience on the night of November 20, but they seemed to pay close attention. Whether or not they were engaged, amused, or entertained is hard to tell. But they did pay attention.” My interest in audience development and gaining an audience responsive to artistic endeavors has been difficult and tenacious. In the radio industry, no song is placed on the air without validation. I think that if we are afraid of offering our art by endless testing, we do not truly observe and challenge our society. It is difficult to determine what will be popular or not or even successful and I am reminded that process is not as much for them as it is for my formation and the formation and training of theatre students. I hope that I have made
advancements in the rehearsal process and also learned invaluable lessons to take with me on future projects.

As I began to summarize the process, I realize I had a fairly smooth process and sought to have an enjoyable working relationship with the designers, and cast and crew. As a human, I had moments of panic, lack of trust and natural fear. In seeking outside opinion, I found that I was limited to fair weather opinions from those already involved in the process that rarely challenged my decisions and that respected opinion or external assistance was hard to come by and possibly counter productive. I was flattered to have had what seemed like the least amount of over-the-shoulder watching, but would have enjoyed more opinion or debate about the earlier process. I realize that I took a leap towards my future career with minimal comments and contact with those guiding my process. I appreciate the opportunity to explore Molière when I have had little experience working with Shakespeare or Molière. As I have discovered with our film classes, one simply cannot learn everything from a book. I am armed with knowledge now that will allow me to guide language intensive plays and to carefully analyze the need for concepts. I will seek out additional opinion or diction consultation if needed and seek to find trusted opinions during rehearsals and meetings from future colleagues.

When I came to graduate school, I hoped to develop strong concepts like Julie Taymor. I realize through this humbling learning process that a strong concept is not always useful in specific productions. This temperament comes from having to adapt my concept to a play not really meant to have it. A very careful application of any concept should be strongly considered before placing it on a play. I have learned as I work with new works,
placing a strong concept is often detrimental to the new play. I do find pride in the scope of
the project. It is the largest show both in terms of budget, costumes, projections and scenic
elements that I have directed. I boldly applied a concept as an experiment and sought to
discover how to work on a play where language was predominant. My responses to the
notes, in my opinion, offer a maturity and ability to learn from the process. I believe I will
work with confidence on other projects because of the application of lessons learned during
this production and knowledge that I was able to experiment with various materials and texts.

The office design in the end was not practical, but we leaned away from it anyway.
Setting the events in Célimène’s office rather than her apartment made it her turf, made her
more powerful, but also made it impossible to make Alceste not seem petty. The set though
looked like her apartment with some fancy desks. We were successful at making the
production look opulent as mentioned by the KCACFT respondent and my cast. They often
asked how the multi-million dollar set was coming. In solving a sound problem, I was
presented with a spacing challenge. I am not entirely sure that I would willingly use
projections unless a show called for it or it solved some problem. Working with a
professional projections designer might answer this question for me. For this show, I would
have enjoyed more projections but felt it interfered with the language. Overall, the designer
was limited by experience and time to manufacture effective designs. I still enjoyed the
Skype session and believe with some more work that Célimène’s portrait scene could have
been more effective.

The scenery and the costuming focused on elements that blended the old with the
new. In order to make it couture though, it had to look designed. Célimène needed power in
my opinion. In costuming, we agreed upon a slinky red dress and a short skirt power suit to that end. It may have lacked perfection in initial draping and may have lost the effect as the actress struggled with the costume. Alceste, whose rise in class had not happened completely, would need to seem like a hipster yet not quite right with the others. Alex and his character of Alceste would prove one of the hardest to costume. The careful balance of nerd versus love interest was hard to manage and in the end, he was not that spectacular to look at in comparison to the others on stage. Oronte, on the other hand, was amazing and made Joey Galda’s character choices golden but very flamboyant. Dubois was probably too clownish though the character to me is the most clownish and the most representative of the commedia style of the group. Shade Ingraham was identifiable as a hipster intern, in hopes of engaging the college audience. The eveningwear for the men would have been fine for me except for an added element on Clitandre’ jacket. I thought most of the choices were relevant to a television sitcom theme. The color-coding may have been overt, but I was especially happy to work with Beth and hope to have more opportunities. She worked to meet the demands of the production, to make pleasing choices, and wanted to work through problems.

In the small space, the scenic design added a lot of furniture and only gave me one way to get from high to low. I did not recognize that it was a problem till it was built and in place. The staircase made the women nervous and also was hard to navigate for all. We were very cramped in the down stage left area because of the furniture. Amber later admitted that she too was amazed at how big the furniture was versus the space it was to sit in. I feel I made the most of it, forcing uncomfortable situations in tiny nooks and airing out lies in more open areas. It would have also been wise to have found or built the furniture faster. I
also feel that this was a substantial first design for Amber Naylor who was also working as stage manager for an opera at the same time as she was working on the show. As an additional opportunity, I wished that stage manager Emily Wall had a dependable way to see the stage to call the show. Without an option to call it from the light booth, production management limits the experience that future stage managers have at UNL. She made the most of the situation, and has perhaps developed new methods to cope with similar situations.

Sound design for me was difficult. After discussions with Logan, we came upon the musical leit motifs that might be found in a situation comedy. However, implementing it in the rhythm of the play would have benefited with more finesse and less “in your face” blasting. The sound design never really blended in with the rhythm of the language. Jeff O’Brien, when available, had a great ability to mentor and influence Logan while working with a director and cutting down the technical jargon and solidifying and narrowing down the design process. Laurel Shoemaker was an excellent balance on the design team. She was easy to work with using her sense of confidence and affability. Even though we had laughs during our meetings, she also kept us on task and offered new ideas and thoughts to keep it a creative process. She constantly corrected notes and offered suggestions to move towards her perceived goal of the production.

I recognize my own limitations in building an act to a dramatic close and engaging an audience. However, focusing on the audience’s response may have been a limiting factor in this particular case as I misjudged a certain amount of pandering for physical laughs or identification from an audience I conceived as somewhat less informed. My hopes to have
the audience focus on Basque were effective but I released the audience once the projections from and interactions with Basque became fewer. Other elements as discussed earlier pertain to acting choices, building climatic action, and undercutting the build with other elements. I continue to consider audiences and hope to develop audiences all through my career. I learned that a certain amount of fighting and debate are better methods to define and discover what should stay or go. Peacefulness in the creative process is an ideal but does not allow refinement in the details. Healthy debate should be welcomed. I am discovering as I work on my thesis film that a mix of debate and “just do it” works the best. In the future, I will balance the need to be affable with designers with a more challenging and debating attitude. I feel confident that my strengths are my ability to work with blocking and finding and working with comedy. I especially enjoyed discovering how to liven moments in the text and finding ways to include the media. Having a challenge like the addition of media made it akin to finding Easter eggs in the text to support it. The change in translation may have altered or limited my original concept but also helped shorten the original five-act play. I look forward to one day having my own translation or adaptation of classic and creating a unified world through concept and its creative process. Though this process may not be regarded as a full success, it is invaluable and taught me lessons to take with me on future directing ventures. The process on The Misanthrope allowed me to explore the possibilities of modern media within a classic world and blend thoughts and ideas of Molière into our present world.