Taming of Monsters: The Postdramatic Case for Copenhagen

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Taming of Monsters: The Postdramatic Case for Copenhagen

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts degree from the Department of Theatre, Speech, and Dance at the College of William & Mary

By

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Accepted for High Honors
(Honors, High Honors, Highest Honors)

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Addendum to the Committee Recommendation for

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A thesis submitted

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The determination of honors is based particularly on the high level quality of the stage production of Copenhagen, directed by Shaan Sharma in the William and Mary Studio Theatre, October 16-18, 2014

Dr Richard H Palmer (Advisor)
Professor Elizabeth A Wiley
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May 1, 2014
Because my own words fail me,

**Bohr:** Before we can lay our hands on anything, our life’s over.

**Heisenberg:** Before we can glimpse who or what we are, we’re gone and laid to dust.

**Bohr:** Settled among all the dust we raised.

-Michael Frayn, *Copenhagen* (93)

*In loving memory of Paul Daniel Soutter.*

*Thank you for reminding us to find order in the chaos.*
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Introduction

Heisenberg: The more I’ve explained, the deeper the uncertainty has become. Well, I shall be happy to make one more attempt.

-Michael Frayn, *Copenhagen* (4)

“Historically, the revolution was forced by the discovery of mathematical structures that did not fit the patterns of Euclid and Newton. These new structures were regarded…as ‘pathological,’…as a ‘gallery of monsters,’ kin to the cubist painting and atonal music that were upsetting established standards of taste in the arts at about the same time.”¹

To quote my own note in the program of our production, “We can set standards of objectivity and measure to the finest degree of possible accuracy, but in the end all observation is human.” One of the biggest blunders a theatre practitioner can make with Michael Frayn’s *Copenhagen* is to believe that it is a play about science or history. At its core, it is a story of humanity. It is not a treatise of truth, nor does it strive to be a didactic drama. To properly see the play, one must be optimally positioned, distanced from the trivialities of circumstance and understand the wider implications of the action portrayed.

One fateful evening in September, 1941, Werner Heisenberg travelled from Germany to Nazi-occupied Denmark to visit his former mentor, Niels Bohr. Heisenberg

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was the youngest full professor in Germany, taking up his chair at Leipzig at twenty-six years of age. He was the leader of atomic research in Germany, having already contributed his uncertainty principle to the Copenhagen Interpretation of quantum physics. Why, then, risk the danger of travelling out of Germany to visit Bohr? What was so important that he needed to discuss it just then? Journalists, physicists, and historians begged answers of them during their lives and after, only to return with hands empty as they came.

*Copenhagen*’s discourse takes place one evening in 1941 between two eminent European physicists and one of their wives, Werner Heisenberg and Niels and Margrethe Bohr. They being who they are, it would be easy to interpret the play as a discussion of history or as some dramatic form of a scientific manifesto. While, as quantum physicist Adrian Kent affirms, “Frayn gets the scientific technicalities right, captures brilliantly physicists’ ways of thinking and conversational style, and gives us believable versions of Heisenberg and of Niels and Margrethe Bohr,” these are items to structure and inform the content, rather than the heart of the play. Science is an item of form, not integral content. This delineation is paramount. Formless content cannot be conveyed, but empty or unfocused form says nothing. The fact of the play having historical characters discussing historical occurrences indelibly intertwined in physics is merely the result of instance. The incarnation of ideas in these characters, the battle between moralities and perceptions is the true action and subject of the play. One must go further than the play’s surface morphology to understand that it is fundamentally and most importantly a play about human perspective and the inherent limitation thereof.

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Many reviewers and critics trifle with the play’s adherence to historical fact, bemoaning Frayn’s sympathetic portrayal of Werner Heisenberg, who historically was a Nazi physicist. While truth in history is important, it is not the burden of the artist producing a work of historical fiction to perfectly capture it. Frayn rebuts these complaints in his post-postscript, citing 19th century German playwright Friedrich Hebbel,

‘In a good play, everyone is right.’ I assume he means by this not that the audience is invited to approve of everyone’s actions, but that everyone should be allowed the freedom and eloquence to make the most convincing case that he can for himself. ³

In the post-script to the play, he answers the question of how much of the work is fiction and how much is history simply with “The central event in [Copenhagen] is a real one.”⁴ The artist is charged first and foremost with the creation of a space in which ideas do battle. The structure of the arena is based in reality and reflects reality, beyond that fiction may take over. If, from the beginning of the play, we were unsympathetic to Heisenberg and did not accept his ideas because of our preconceptions of him as a character, we would have no action in the play whatsoever. Rather than focusing on the historical accuracies (of which there are many) or inaccuracies (of which there are also many), the play focuses on the humanity, themes, and possibilities at hand within the framework of history. It does not “pretend to ‘be’ history.”⁵

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Frayn’s literary works have run the gamut. He is a prolific modern writer, getting his humble beginnings in journalism in the late 1950s and proceeding to produce a veritable mountain of written works, including plays, screenplays, novels, and non-fiction books, remaining active to this day. His writings span a multitude of different fields, concepts, and themes, but they all tend towards the same end. Through the exploration of different worlds, issues, and characters, Frayn manipulates perspective for the purpose of examining humanity and our conceptions of our universe.

*Copenhagen* was Frayn’s most successful and significant play since *Noises Off* in 1982, and they exhibit remarkably different styles. *Noises Off* is a phenomenally successful comedy, having won both the London Evening Standard Award and Lawrence Olivier Award for Best Comedy in 1982. It is big, farcical, and comedic, in stark contrast to the three character, serious, intense undertaking that was *Copenhagen*. Merritt Moseley contends that this “launched a new kind of Michael Frayn play.” His three most recent plays, *Copenhagen* (1998), *Democracy* (2003), and *Afterlife* (2008) have all stylistically followed suit. Though *Democracy* and *Afterlife* have significantly larger casts, both plays are historical fiction centered on a few individuals. They are modern in style and structure, manipulating time and space on the stage. These plays, again, do not pretend to be transcriptions of history, but extrapolations of events for the purposes of exploration of humanity and perspective.

In writing *Copenhagen*, Michael Frayn did not expect it to have great commercial success. “As he commented, ‘When I wrote it, I didn’t expect anyone would perform it, ...
let alone come and see it.’ He was reluctantly prepared to offer it as a radio play if no one would stage it, simply to get it performed at all.” To his surprise, it became instantly critically acclaimed in England and much the same when it came to America. It has been hailed ever since as one of the most powerful and effective instances of science in theatre.

It is an unconventional script, lacking any of the familiar stage directions, any concretely identifiable setting, and the subject matter and language being esoterically elevated and scientific. The play takes place between three characters that are already dead at the outset of the show, Niels Bohr, his wife Margrethe Bohr, and Werner Heisenberg. For characters who are already dead to have consequences and stakes is a challenge. As such, _Copenhagen_ has the potential to be a very difficult show for an audience to follow or be engaged in. Frayn leaves the freedom to stage the play in innumerable ways, with the dialogue between the characters being the only aspect that is truly concrete.

To actively engage the audience in this show is to actively engage them in the consideration of the individual characters’ perspectives. The constant assertion of the limitation of the individual human perspective and subjectivity thereof throughout all of Frayn’s work, and immensely powerfully in _Copenhagen_, necessitates a presentation by which multiple perspectives can be simultaneously viewed. This necessitates a form by which linear progression can be altered to view and review events from different under different conditions. This necessitates a form by which we can be free from standard dramatic structure, free from boundaries set by conventional setting, character, time, etc.,

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doing away with the obstacles of limited perception to observe the multiple facets through a sort of omnipotent realism. The postdramatic presentation of this script frees the audience from the confines of the tradition of drama, allowing the play to be viewed as an item to be considered, rather than as a narrative to follow.

Postdrama will be discussed in detail later, but it found its way into my process early on. In research before auditions, one of the first articles I read was a case for a postdramatic interpretation of Copenhagen. This case takes the interpretation slightly further than I liked, proposing that one might go about “merely delivering the text, rather than trying to settle on a strategy to represent it.”9 It even went so far as to suggest multi-casting the play, bringing on separate dead and 1941 memory versions of the characters. Or, “One could, in fact, remain with three text bearers, whose neutral, un-addressed deliveries were free to resound around the auditorium…without the constrains of interpretation.”10

This was unsavory to me. It seemed lazy, uninteresting, uninvolved, and artistically pretentious to presume upon your audience interest in disinterested text. So, despite how much I liked many of the ideas proposed in the article, I angrily threw it aside. Many of the postdramatic features took root in my head, however, and flowered after a time. I found my way back to postdrama part way through the process and developed my interpretation of the play.

Copenhagen contends that human perception is an entity of uncertainty. It is a subjective, alterable thing that depends wholly on the state and position of the observer;

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9 Barnett, David. 143.
10 Ibid. 147.
however, even by understanding all perspectives equally we conclude with the resounding unattainability of exact knowledge. The play ends in concrete indeterminacy. The mystery will not be solved. The only way an audience will leave Copenhagen feeling a sense of resolution is if there is harmony between the characters and their perceptions, despite the irreconcilable, inevitable limitations. The best way to create this multi-perspectival lens through which the audience must look at the play to understand the resolution in the final uncertainty is through a postdramatic presentation.
Chapter One

Manipulation of Perspective in Frayn’s Works

Bohr: Heisenberg, I have to say – if people are to be measured strictly in terms of observable quantities…

-Michael Frayn, Copenhagen (92)

To begin with, it should do us some good to peruse Frayn’s previous works to examine the common theme of manipulation of perspective. Very important to the postdramatic theatre briefly touched on already and further delved into in the next chapter is the idea of perspective and its portrayal. Copenhagen in particular discusses the limitation of one person’s point of view in the universe and the limitation of observation. To truly understand the significance of these themes in Copenhagen and postdramatic theatre’s place in it all, a survey of Frayn’s work and an examination of his use of perspective are important.

As Merritt Moseley contends in his book Understanding Michael Frayn, “An effort to sum up Michael Frayn’s accomplishment in a short compass would be pointless and reductive.”11 His works have run the gamut, from his foray into published writing as a comedic journalist in the late 1950’s to his novels, his non-fiction work, translations, screenplays, and stage plays. His prolific works have made him, as the Sunday Times called him in 2002, “the giant who bestrides the British arts.”12 I would not pretend to

11 Moseley, Merritt. 180.
have read all of Frayn’s works for this project, yet still a significant enough number of the relevant works to recognize a thematic consistency in the ways in which he portrays the world. Perspective and the ways we understand the world around us are consistently explored in his work over the past half-century. As Benedict Nightingale, theatre reviewer for the Guardian (Frayn’s seminal publication) says, “His plays are serious comedies about people’s attempts to interpret the world, about the constant battle between the forces of order and disorder, about the search for happiness.”

Though chronologically in terms of publication this may seem an illogical starting place, let us begin at his beginning. A recent book of memoirs of his childhood hints at the importance of perspective evident in his worldview. The book is entitled My Father’s Fortune, and was not originally intended to be autobiographical. Frayn always said that he would never write about himself. As he says, “I intended to write about my father…but I found I had to write about myself because part of his experience in life was having a son and finding ways to get on with him.” The series of anecdotes sheds little light on exactly why Frayn views and portrays the world with such heavy emphasis on perspective and the inherent limitations thereof, but the form in which the stories unfold begin our journey down the rabbit hole. His father had been gone forty years by the time he began this project, so he did not have the benefit of asking questions and constructing these narratives with the help of his father’s perspective. Rather, he says he simply “tried to remember what little he told me and to reconstruct the world as he saw it…” Rather than attempting to write a biography, a third-person recounting of events, Frayn regales

us with tales in the first-person, from his point of view, showing us his relationship with
the world he grew up in with his father. It seems that he must have asked himself how he
could properly describe his father from any perspective other than the only one to which
he is privy – his own.

The playful manipulation of perspective and expectation for conceptually
exploratory purposes quintessential of his work is heavily foreshadowed in Frayn’s early
journalism. He wrote comedic columns for several different papers, and was actually
credited as one of the power players of the proliferation of satire in 1960’s Britain. This
moniker clearly is not birthed from conscious efforts on his part, as he “never seemed
wholly happy to be considered a satirist or credited with the satire boom.” The
unintentional satirical classification of his work likely stems from the highly comic and
skeptical lens he uses to view the world. Slight irreverence and dry wit pervade his
columns, contributing to this air of almost mocking the reader. His voice in these
columns gives the words some agency, freeing them from the page, lending a
significantly more dramatic and even conversational style than would be expected from
the printed word in a newspaper. His columns read so dramatically, in fact, that
selections of those written for the Guardian were (rather unsuccessfully) staged in That
Was the Week That Was, a BBC satirical series in the 1960’s. Additionally, one of the
short plays in the collection Alarms & Excursions, which was first performed the same
year as Copenhagen, is actually a developed dramatization of one of his earlier columns,
“Your inattention, please.” It is unsurprising from this journalism that this career
flourished into such comedic, interesting theatre.

16 Moseley, Merritt. 8.
Multiple collections of his reprinted newspaper columns have been published. Much of their comedy springs from the subtle repositioning of the reader to an unconventional station for the medium; he shifts the reader’s perspective. Frayn addresses the reader in a way that is unfamiliar coming from a newspaper column, revealing unexpected insights about the man behind the curtain, odd framing of information, and other subtle twists. With a plethora of journalism to choose from, I selected one in particular to demonstrate the deconstructive and manipulative utilization of perspective in his articles. The first piece printed in The Additional Michael Frayn is entitled “Welcome aboard!” and exhibits a vigorous butchering of the standard contract between journalist and reader. He begins the piece with formalities, “Hi! My name’s Mike, and I’m your author today.”17 Immediately, this direct address of the reader and conversational introduction to the author shatters the expected barrier. The article continues in a style akin to a train platform announcer relaying delays. He announces delays in the arrival of paragraphs for reasons such as missing their place in the article, major grammatical works in progress, withdrawal after complaints by religious leaders, etc. In recompense for the delays, he comes around serving free asterisks.

* * *

At long last, the author becomes frustrated enough with the reader’s apparent complaints about how long they have been waiting for the article to begin. “Look, I’m on my own here…I’m trying to write this entire article single-handed! … I’ve no paper to write on! … Sitting on a broken chair – writing at a desk with three legs…!”18 By the end of the

18 Ibid. 3.
article, it is an absolute abuse of the presuppositions of the form of the newspaper column. The reader does not expect insight into the author’s difficulties in writing, the asterisks should be indicative of a logical break and not objects to be independently recognized or distributed, and paragraphs come in the order they come in because they were arranged, not because they arrive. The complete deconstruction of the standard, expected form virtually pulls the readers’ feet out from under them by obliterating the perceptual relationship they thought they had with the author.

Diverting from the comedic, finding the end of the world of his non-fiction, Frayn has authored two volumes of philosophy in addition to his collections of reprinted articles and his memoirs. These works, Constructions and The Human Touch, are particularly notable as informative and illuminating texts detailing his worldview. Philosophical issues discussed, themes and thoughts expressed, observations he makes about humanity and the universe all coincide with his fictional work. They provide immensely useful means by which one can analyze his fiction.

Constructions is a more formalized philosophical text, with numbered paragraphs (a la Wittgenstein), positing general observations about the world and our perceptions of it. Constructions is not looked upon in the philosophical community as a particularly inspired breakthrough, however it still serves as a useful window into Frayn’s perspective on the world. The book is aptly named, focusing on the way humans impose form and order to understand the world. This idea, along with the simplicity in which he examines it, is mirrored in the subtitle, “Making Sense of Things.” It is an easy-going examination of the tactics we utilize to harness, control, correlate, and understand the chaotic forms of the surrounding universe, i.e. making sense of things. As he says of the human
methodology of understanding, “Our reading of the world and our mastery of notations are intimately linked. We read the world in the way that we read a notation – we make sense of it, we place constructions upon it. We see in the way that we speak, by means of selection and simplification.”

The eternal struggle to understand is one of the most integral themes of *Copenhagen*. Frayn’s work consistently investigates, manipulates, and explores how humanity understands the universe. In the play we find these human constructions limited, as said above, to the individual’s perspective and our limited capacity to notate and express it in significant ways. These observations are additionally limited by the inherent uncertainty that accompanies any and all attempts at measurement.

This individual perspective and the importance of it segues into his much lengthier enquiry into humanity’s place in the universe, *The Human Touch: Our Part in the Creation of a Universe*. Unlike *Constructions* this is not an attempt at formalized philosophy, but rather a prosaic, unconstrained discussion. It reads more like a novel than a manifesto of philosophical thought. He contends, as coincides with common sense, that the universe plainly exists independently of human consciousness. But what can be understood of this independent entity without the context and faculties of human thought? The centrality of humanity in the definition of the universe emphasized in the book is mirrored in Bohr’s longest monologue of *Copenhagen*. The fundamental, worldview shattering importance of their quantum mechanical discoveries led the physicists to the conclusion that “measurement is not an impersonal event that occurs with impartial

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universality. It’s a human act…” and in concluding so, they “put man back at the centre of the universe.” (71)

This definition of the universe is not as concrete as unquestioned and unexamined perception may lead us to believe, however. It seems Frayn’s world-view must have been indelibly affected by his research for Copenhagen. As Bohr says in the same speech, “we discover that there is no precisely determinable objective universe. That the universe exists only as a series of approximations. Only within the limits determined by our relationship with it. Only through the understanding lodged inside the human head.” (71-2) An almost identical, if even more technical, expression of indeterminacy appears in The Human Touch:

We look closer, and see that each particle is in itself a world in flux, a hierarchy of still smaller particles – of particles that are not precisely particles, but additionally and alternatively wave formations, fluctuations in probability, whose precise state can never be fully expressed…These gritty grains of sand, so eminently and geometrically and tangibly there, are analysable into constituents whose defining characteristics can never be completely and precisely determined.20

The inescapable, unrelenting inexactitude of our perception of the universe is inherent to our placement as the ones who perceive it. Infinitely and infinitely it goes on, “the world has no form or substance without you and me to provide them, and you and I have no form or substance without the world to provide them in its turn.”21 As they say, “It’s

21 Ibid. 421
turtles all the way down.” The struggle to reconcile with this uncomfortable, fuzzy indeterminacy of the world around us, crushing unabashedly in on our existential insecurities, is embodied in both of Frayn’s philosophical works. The first is a schematically structured effort to explain man’s methods and desires to impose order on a chaotic world with the hope of understanding, and the second tells us “However hard we try to seize the complexity of the world, it systematically eludes our grasp.” The desperate desire for determinacy is doomed to be eternally and dolefully dissatisfying.

Departing from this existential crisis inducing exploration of epistemology, the many-hatted Michael Frayn is also a fairly prolific, award-winning novelist with eleven fiction novels under his belt. The inherent limitation of the individual human perspective, the concluding note of Copenhagen, is the source of much of his comedy. He writes almost farcically even in his fictional prose, with characters constantly misunderstanding situations and each other due to limited knowledge from their individual place in the universe leading to multitudinous misadventures. In his most recent book, Skios, the main character pretends to be Dr. Norman Wilfred, an important man who had a driver waiting with a sign for him at the airport. In Spies, a child believes that his mother is a German spy and, as Frayn says, “they modify what they see to fit their ideas, rather than do the rational thing, which is to modify their ideas to fit what they see.” How events unfold due to this inherent limitation of perspective is not the only notable movement in his prose, however.

\[22\] Old aphorism to describe infinite regress. Common since at least the early 20th century.
\[23\] Ibid.
\[24\] Moseley, Merritt. 98.
His early novels ended with *Sweet Dreams* in 1973, and he did not return to the scene until 1990 with *The Trick of It*. Between the two periods, a desire to experiment further with the medium of the novel seems to have arisen in the author. In *Constructions*, Frayn discusses the form of the novel, saying “What keeps our attention in stories is wanting to know what happens next. Odd, then, that almost all novels have been written in the past tense.” Frayn throws this out the window with most of his later novels, portraying the events of the narratives in the present tense. He does this in multiple ways: by narrating in such a way that is simultaneous with the actions occurring, through the epistolary altering of the straightforward narrative structure, and through deposition. Respective examples of these alterations would be a character narrating the action first person in real time rather than in the past tense, a narrative being told through the writing of letters between characters rather than straight prose, or a character recounting events at a deposition.

Toying with information given from a narrator and from what perspective they give it is not only an important feature of *Copenhagen*, but also of the postdramatic theatre. Narrators are the most overt link to a perspective. The stark differences in the information given and the reader’s insight into the world of a novel narrated by a third-person, heterodiegetic entity as opposed to the perspective-forcing first-person or the inherently selective information given in an epistolary form embody Frayn’s consistent manipulation of perceptual constructions. From *The Trick of It* through to *Spies*, this first-person construction ruled his fiction, with the return of the standard past-tense, third-person, heterodiegetic telling for *Skios*. This return was integral to the novel, as it was, in

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Frayn’s words, “a bit of an experiment. [He] wanted to see if you could do farce as a novel.”26

The comedy of farce is built upon highly exaggerated situations that largely depend on a third-person view of the action. If we were to observe farce through the eyes of a single character, we would not have the information necessary to understand the absurdity of situation. Misunderstandings compounding on misunderstandings from the characters is the origin of the comedy; if we were only granted one perspective on this grand display of dramatic irony, we would not understand it. For example, in *Noises Off*, characters enter and leave the stage on their cues. Those off stage do not have the information of those on stage and vice versa. The comedy arises because the on stage world and the off stage world cannot communicate, resulting in immense difficulties for the show’s participants. If we saw this farce from the perspective of one character rather than the perspective of the stage, it would simply be confusing and upsetting. There is an old aphorism that comedy is tragedy viewed from across the street. By distancing the audience from a particular character, by providing the events of the play in a wide shot rather than a close angle, he controls not just what the audience sees, but how they see it. As said before, he does this with his novels as well. Frayn’s deliberate manipulation of the reader’s perspective of the narrative of his novels is entrenched in his purpose.

We now delve into the meat of Frayn’s career: his absolute menagerie of plays. While the breadth of this work is far too wide to address in its entirety, we shall narrow in on some particularly pertinent examples to our understanding of his themes from his veritable surfeit of dramatic literature. *Noises Off*, premiering in 1982, was Frayn’s first

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26 Cooke, Rachel.
commercial success, remaining instantly recognizable as a farce at the forefront of modern comedy. Two plays with a large gap in between, *Clouds* (1977) and *Here* (1993), each employ dramatic features exhibited in *Copenhagen* which merit examination. In 1998, the same year *Copenhagen* premiered, he also premiered a comedic collection of short plays, *Alarms & Excursions*. While the two pieces contrast remarkably, there are some notable similarities in the way he portrays humanity’s struggle to find order in an infinitely disordered world. *Copenhagen* sprung a stylistic shift for Frayn into a more experimental and modern stage, one that exemplifies postdramatic theatre, as we will see later. His two most recent plays since 1998, *Democracy* and *Afterlife*, both exhibit this shift.

With over 1,400 performances before closing on the West End (incidentally, breaking all records for the Savoy Theatre), a phenomenally successful run in the United States, prolific staging all around the world, and a film with a star-studded cast, *Noises Off* is easily the most well-known Frayn work. It is often looked upon as the model modern farce in much the same way that *Copenhagen* models the science play. It is a play within a play, where we see the play *Nothing On* from the audience’s perspective in a rehearsal, backstage during a performance, and the audience’s perspective during a different performance. Simply the structure of the play alters and manipulates perspective in a powerful way. The content goes even further, creating a farcical perspective on the process of staging a farce. The idea came to him when watching a production of his first script, *The Two of Us*, which is comprised of four one-act plays for two actors. Of these, *Chinamen* is a short farce in which each actor plays numerous characters. Frayn said, “One night, I watched it all from behind. And I thought the
spectacle of these two actors rushing back and forth…reflected something about the lives we all lead. We all do a certain amount of desperate fixing behind the scenes in order to keep a presentable social front going to the world. We all feel terrified when it’s threatened.”

Using farce, an arguably outdated form of theatre, to consummately satirize itself through itself, utilize the influence of specific and limited perspective, and reflect the chaotic tendencies of day-to-day life, it is no wonder Noises Off found both monstrous commercial success and continues to be an influential piece of art to this day.

Clouds and Here appeared respectively before and after Noises Off, and each employ a similar dramatic or non-dramatic tool to Copenhagen. Clouds is a very early piece of his, touching on his journalistic roots. The play follows three journalists through Cuba, and shows how their personal (mostly sexual) experiences influence their exterior observations of the island. As we see in Copenhagen, human perception is a fluid, subjective, and unreliable thing that can be skewed and altered depending on the state of the observer. All of the characters’ experiences in Clouds are real and true to them, but depend wholly on their individual position from which they make observations. The play employs direct address similarly to Copenhagen, which is not exhibited in his other scripts. He interjects scenes throughout the play where the journalists find themselves on their own, detailing their observations of the day. These scenes show the audience how the characters change their opinions of what they observe based on the developing situations outside of their journalism. The audience is privy to more intimate thoughts of the characters than would be expressed through dialogue. The characters report to directly to the audience their own individual interpretations and observations. This

\[27\] Moseley, Merritt. 133-134.
insight into the characters’ individual thoughts through soliloquy, outside of interpersonal pressures present in standard dialogue, again alters the audience’s standard positioning, playing with perspective and betraying essential, normally hidden information.

*Here* is definitely Frayn’s most stylized dialogue, reading almost like an open scene for the entirety of the play. Between the end of *Noises Off* – during the run of which he had three simultaneous plays running on the West End – and *Copenhagen*, Frayn had a lull in commercial theatrical success. *Here* was an unfortunate piece of that rut, running for only about six weeks. This play begins to toy with the postmodern, existentially pitting a couple against each other in a cyclic, deconstructed manner. The three characters of the play are brought into a single space that develops over a non-linear, but unidirectional and a chronological, but non-specific and irrelevant period of time. They constantly speak past each other, misunderstanding and misrepresenting their own and each other’s thoughts as a result of the limitation of the perspective from their own position. The increasingly dysfunctional couple, Cath and Phil, repeatedly delineate between the individual and the collective perspective, having arguments about if “I” made a decision or “we” made a decision. The apparent impossibility of direct communication and the “circular and unprogressive – and remarkably flat – dialogue and the indecisiveness have a slight suggestion of Samuel Beckett.”28 One can almost read Vladimir and Estragon from *Waiting for Godot* into their exchanges.

**PHIL. (Looks round the room.)** Cath, I think…I think…

**CATH.**…we’ve got it.

**PHIL.** I think.

28 Moseley, Merritt. 156.
CATH. I think we have.
PHIL. I think we may just possibly have.
CATH. You have.
PHIL. We have.
CATH. You did it.
PHIL. We did it.
CATH. Anyway, we’re there.
PHIL. So…
CATH. So we can just…I don’t know!
PHIL. Sit back.
CATH. Yes! sit back and…what?
PHIL. Live. Or whatever.29

The echoes of “What do we do now?” “Wait for Godot.” ring out in the end of this passage.

However inescapable, the comparison to Beckett is rather misleading. While similarities exist in the circular style of dialogue within a confined space, we leave Vladmir and Estragon stranded, presumably eternally, waiting. Things happen in Here. The couple moves into an empty apartment, they move out, they get new things, etc. The apparent impossibility of direct communication originates not from a lack of communication or listening, but because Cath and Phil are speaking from different, irreconcilable perspectives. Frayn wrote that rather than being a play of existential strife, it was more “about the way we do actually construct a world and a life for ourselves.”30 In constructing that world, Cath and Phil run into issues of metaphysics. They speculate

30 Moseley, Merritt. 156.
on the nature of the present, examining a clock and finding that “It’s still
now…Now…Now…More now…”31 They explore the nature of perspective and
associated knowledge. When Cath accuses Phil of looking a certain way, Phil responds

I don’t know how I’m looking. As a matter of fact. Human eyes being
located where they are located. I know how you’re looking. You don’t
know how you’re looking. You know how I’m looking. I don’t, though.

All I know, since it’s not a matter of observation but a matter of logic, is
that whatever I’m looking like, I’m looking like it because it’s what I look
like.32

The perpetual present and the limitation of singular perspective, not to mention
the existentially stylized cyclic dialogue, all point toward a progression towards new
forms in his work. This is what eventually brought on Copenhagen’s rather unique style
and Frayn’s exploration into modern forms. Copenhagen also exists in a singular space,
has a non-structured representation of time, and exists in a perpetual present. Here was
actually the last play written before 1998 when Frayn released both Alarms & Excursions
and Copenhagen, so it is no wonder we see the beginnings of this style. At the end of
Here, we finally leave Cath and Phil after they have moved out of the apartment,
forgetting the clock in which they had found the perpetual present behind. “The LIGHTS
fade, leaving only the alarm-clock that was underneath the bag illuminated. It ticks
slowly on.”33

31 Frayn, Michael. Here. 114.
32 Ibid. 47.
33 Ibid. 128.
*Alarms & Excursions* requires less treatment than the semi-opaque *Here*. It is fairly straightforward, simply asking us to laugh at ourselves as victims of the chaos of the technological age. Written as an evening of eight short plays, it examines, as we see now that all of his work tends to, how people make sense of their world. The obstacle standing in the way here is the impossibility of harnessing the disorder of an increasingly busy technological world. The characters find their interpersonal relationships obstructed by technology. Released alongside *Copenhagen*, many reviewers admired the dichotomy of his work, though to some it appeared even more lightweight and inconsequential in contrast. Benedict Nightingale drew the comparison between the two plays best, however, understanding the “overriding theme, which is humanity’s doomed efforts to make sense of and impose order on an infinitely puzzling, unsettling world.”

*Democracy* and *Afterlife*, the two most recent full plays written since *Copenhagen*, are astounding in their similarities. It seems that after the failure of *Here* and through the success of *Copenhagen*, Frayn reinvented his theatrical style and the content of his discussions. All three of these most recent plays focus on historical figures in a World War II adjacent time period: *Copenhagen* on physicists Werner Heisenberg and Niels Bohr in the midst of the war, *Democracy* on post-war West German politician Willy Brandt and his Stasi spy personal assistant Günter Guillaume, and *Afterlife* on the life and works of Austrian Jew Max Reinhardt before, during, and after the war. These are the first plays of historical fiction he has produced, and they all pertain to the development of modern European history. He finds and explores interesting ambiguities in isolated pockets of the annals of Europe.

Democracy in particular, though Afterlife as well to a smaller extent, exhibits a feature reminiscent of Chekhov, quite possibly stemming from the many works of Chekhov’s that Frayn has translated. The majority of the action of the play happens off-stage. What the audience sees is the characters dealing with the repercussions of this action. This is, in itself, an interesting perspectival lens. The information granted to the audience comes not from their own observations, but from observations being filtered through the characters. With so many levels of disconnect between the audience and the truth, the audience is being made to ask how much they can trust.

Both plays take place in an abstract space with ill-defined and largely extraneous setting, a non-congruous representation of time, and little to no delineation of scene. The setting in Democracy is described as “A complex of levels and spaces; of desks and chairs; of files and papers; also of characters, who mostly remain around the periphery of the action when not actually involved in it, listening or unobtrusively involved in their work.”\textsuperscript{35} Characters seamlessly transition from one scene to another simply by who they are talking to and the manner in which they converse. Afterlife does the same, interspersing sections with verse both directly from Everyman (the play within the play) and Frayn’s own verse, mimicking its style. The abstract presentation of these plays is very postdramatic in their ill-defined temporality for the purposes of conveying multiple perspectives. Frayn found a freedom with these plays to present these multiple perspectives simultaneously or juxtaposed for a purpose through the manipulation of space and time on the stage. In this, we see the foundation for the theoretical interpretation we developed for the presentation of Copenhagen.

With this review of a significant portion of Frayn’s publication history, the thematic consistency of his interest in perspectival manipulation becomes clear. Despite his wide-reaching wealth of forms of writing, the salient point arises: one cannot know except by observation, and one cannot observe except by their own perspective. Focusing on that perspective, questioning it, tuning it, and questioning it again pervades Frayn’s work as he strives to understand how we understand. Through careful manipulation, he reaches a point in which he attempts to convey multiple perspectives at once in a sort of omnipotent realism. With his latest three, Copenhagen, Democracy, and Afterlife, we see the stylistic similarities in time and space, in form as well as content. Because of this, the development of a method of presentation of multiple limited perspectives within an abstract place, nonstandard representation of time, and isolated space becomes integral.
Chapter Two

Multi-perspectival Staging: *Copenhagen* as Postdramatic Theatre

**Heisenberg:** How difficult it is to see even what’s in front of one’s eyes. All we possess is the present, and the present endlessly dissolves into the past.

-Michael Frayn, *Copenhagen* (86)

Frayn’s evident tendency to play with perspective in his works necessitates investigation of this theme’s implementation in *Copenhagen*. We see a twofold manifestation of this theme. Particularly that through the manipulation of conventional space and time Frayn not only examines the limitation of the individual perspective, but does so through a play, which necessitates a staging that alters the perspective of the audience to an unconventional position as well. The play contains an inherent paradox. The inciting incident, the driving action, the whole reason the play was written is the implicit uncertainty of concrete knowledge from one perspective. How, then, can an audience properly be privy to the content of a multi-perspectival play through the single perspective of audience to stage?

**Postdramatic Theatre**

The answer comes in the interpretation of *Copenhagen* through the lens of postdramatic theory, recently detailed by Hans-Theis Lehmann. To define the
“postdramatic,” it seems necessary to first define the “dramatic,” and return to what exactly is “post” about it. Drama is a broad term, covering an expansive tradition. David Rush offers a concise definition in his guide to play analysis, stating that drama is simply “serious people going about serious business in a serious way.” He pits this particularly against predecessors of the strictly “dramatic” form: classical tragedy, classical comedy, melodrama, and farce. Drama belongs more to the family of the tragic and melodramatic rather than comedic or farcical. Tragedy, he says, is “a serious play that typically deals with serious issues in a somewhat subtle and complex manner,” while melodrama is “a serious play that typically deals with serious dangers in a more obvious fashion.” The definitions are similar in syntax, but make for a large distinction.

Classical tragedies and classical comedies dealt almost completely with their respective material. Aristotle observed that tragedies primarily dealt with issues pertaining to those of higher stature than the common man, while comedy dealt with the base. The development of plays in the middle ground, dealing with the common man’s plight only developed later.

These forms of tragedy and comedy were standards for ages. However, stripped bare of the absurd cases of twindom and mistaken identity unsettling an entire town and miraculously resolving as in The Comedy of Errors or one’s downfall being Satan’s temptation with infinite knowledge as in Doctor Faustus, we are left with simple stories about simple characters. This style of theatre, drama, exists somewhere in between, exploring the private struggle of man and his microcosm.

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37 Rush, David. 141.
Dramatic theatre exists in realistic territory. We are not struggling with the gods or grand cosmic law, nor are we happy products of the fates. The narrative told on stage involves and invites the spectator into the action taking place. The spectator is to be sympathetic to the narrative and the characters, and be emotionally affected by the action. The characters, identifiable as real people, inhabit the stage with real problems. There is stake in the consequences, interest in the outcome, a linear progression that can be followed, and a true, relatable world that enthralls and enraptures the audience. The dramatic theatre is meant to, largely, relate to and emotionally move the “everyman” with a narrative. This is a simple, boiled down understanding of drama, but it will do as a springboard for our definition of postdrama.

“Post-dramatic” theatre, then, exists outside of and reflects upon this dramatic form. The codification of the theory of postdramatic theatre is a very recent development. The term was coined by German theorist Hans-Thies Lehmann in his 1999 book of the same title.38 An important terminological note, “drama” and “theatre” are commonly treated as interchangeable words, which confuses the process of defining the “postdramatic.” Lehmann’s discussion of the origins, features, examples, etc. of postdramatic theatre is immensely rigorous. He leaves the reader with the sense that, rather than a peripheral blip on the trajectory of theatrical tradition, postdrama is a tradition all its own with distinct features and utility beyond straight drama’s capabilities.

38 Because of the importance of Frayn’s acknowledgement in his postscript to Copenhagen of alternative translations of the “Uncertainty Principle,” I examined the original German. Postdramatisches Theater translates directly, fortunately, meaning the English term carries the same weight and connotation as the original. Though, Germans would generally use the prefix “nach-,” as “post-” is generally only utilized for assimilated words.
The theory is complex and multifaceted in origin, necessity, and effect. The detail with which Lehmann introduces the concept is absolutely necessary. However, being such a distinct mode of presentation, boiling it down to its key identifiable features is fairly straightforward. With this theory, we are speaking of leaving the traditional theatrical form of drama behind and what it entails, not leaving behind the process of theatre. Dramatic conventions are discarded to give rise to a new interpretation of staged action. “The mode of perception is shifting: a simultaneous and multi-perspectival form of perceiving is replacing the linear-successive.”39 The aim is building a presentation through which an audience, who inherently has only one perspective of the action of the stage, may have a more all-encompassing view.40

The view granted to the audience with a postdramatic presentation is well put in Frayn’s description of the perspective of God:

“God saw it all. Saw it all in one go, continuously and eternally. And since God was everywhere, he saw it not in perspective, not from some particular viewpoint, but from every possible viewpoint. From all sides of a cube simultaneously, for example. From an angle of ninety degrees to each of those sides – from an angle of one degree, eighty-nine degrees, seventeen degrees. From a millimetre off and a mile off. From every point inside the cube looking out.”41

40 The fractal quality of the representation of perspective in Copenhagen is briefly discussed in my concurrent project, Taming of Monsters: Expansion of the Applications of Fractal Geometry.
41 Frayn, Michael. The Human Touch. 32.
Specifically, postdrama is not *not* drama. Lehmann’s book discusses the terms “post-modernism” or, even more specifically, “post-Brechtian theatre.” These terms do not mean a denial of the form they diverge from, but an acknowledgement of the effect of that theatre on the new form. As such, “The adjective ‘postdramatic’ denotes a theatre that feels bound to operate beyond drama, at a time ‘after’ the authority of the dramatic paradigm in theatre.”42 Let us now look at peculiar aspects of *Copenhagen* that do not quite jive with the dramatic paradigm, and see how postdramatic theatre assists in the perspectival shift necessary.

**Application to *Copenhagen***

*Copenhagen* is a play about ambiguity (or, topically, uncertainty.) Frayn’s works incessantly analyze and manipulate the nature of human perspective, knowledge, and truth, and this play is the most overt of them all. The conclusion, or rather lack thereof, of this exploration is embodied in Heisenberg’s final words of the play. However close they can come to understanding the truth of what happened that fateful evening in 1941, what transpired actually transpired, what exists only exists due to “that final core of uncertainty at the heart of things” (94) which they can never quite grasp.

Revisiting the content of the play, briefly, to illuminate the importance of interpretation, three characters, Heisenberg, Bohr, and Margrethe, debate from the afterlife the events of a visit Heisenberg took to visit Bohr in Denmark in the midst of World War II. They revisit the evening, acting out events in real time, occasionally commenting on them from the future, occasionally throwing observations out to the

42 Lehmann, Hans-Thies. 27,
audience. Each time they go through the events of the evening, they find an issue with their analysis due to some missing event or misinterpretation. They begin again with a “new draft,” and go at it, finally concluding “how muddled our ways of knowing inevitably are and how foolish our attempts to apply abstract ‘truths’ to human affairs are. Even in the pursuit of pure scientific knowledge, our affections and affectations, or prejudices and preconceptions, intrude.”43

As they progress through the play there are three distinct “drafts” of the evening. In the first draft, they get through the revisiting of the evening without much trouble; rarely do characters narrate to the audience, and never do they break to talk to each other from their afterlife perspectives. Immediately after the draft ends, they begin discussing incongruencies.

MARGRETHE: You couldn’t even agree where you’d walked that night.

HEISENBERG: Where we walked? Faelled Park, of course. Where we went so often in the old days.

MARGRETHE: But Faelled Park is behind the Institute, four kilometers away from where we live!

HEISENBERG: I can see the drift of autumn leaves under the street-lamps next to the bandstand.

BOHR: Yes, because you remember it as October!

MARGRETHE: And it was September.

BOHR: No fallen leaves!

MARGRETHE: And it was 1941. No street-lamps!

BOHR: I thought we hadn’t gotten any further than my study. What I can see is the drift of papers under the reading-lamp on my desk.

HEISENBERG: We must have been outside! What I was going to say was treasonable. If I’d been overheard I’d have been executed.

43 King, Robert L. “The Play of Uncertain Ideas.” The Massachusetts Review, 42.2. 2001. (165)
MARGRETHE: So what was this mysterious thing you said?

HEISENBERG: There’s no mystery about it. There never was any mystery. I remember it absolutely clearly, because my life was at stake, and I chose my words very carefully. I simply asked you if as a physicist one had the moral right to work on the practical exploitation of atomic energy. Yes?

BOHR: I don’t recall. (36-37)

Each subsequent draft contains more information about the evening and about motivation of the characters in the moment. Each subsequent draft also sees the characters delivering lines to the audience more frequently, breaking from the temporal space they inhabit to comment on moments and observations. In this we see the complementarity of human knowledge – the more we know about the evening, the less we know about where we are.

The fallibility of memory and the limitation of objective knowledge from any one given perspective forces the audience to accept the inconclusive ending. They leave the theater with little to no more information than when they entered, and are given the power of making the decision themselves: did Heisenberg willfully work for the Nazi regime to develop the atomic bomb, or did he actively try to obstruct its development? The conclusion to this question is irrelevant. It is, analogous to the determination of all properties of a particle in quantum physics, an unsolvable problem. “One form of accurate knowledge creates doubt about another.”

 Truly, the play is not about the question of Heisenberg’s actions but the way in which they were perceived.

Postdramatic theatre is a particularly useful interpretive theory by which to analyze Copenhagen. There is a clear obliteration of conventions of chronology,

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44 King, Robert L. 165.
linearity, and concrete place evident in the play’s oscillations back and forth seamlessly between 1941\(^{45}\) and the abstract “afterlife” space. The script inherently segregates itself from reality and context for the purposes of exploring the morality of science and the influence of perspective on action. Instead of a historically precise piece of fiction, Frayn’s purpose was to “engage with the material that is available in order to develop a work of art that interrogates themes and does not pretend to ‘be’ history.”\(^ {46}\) It is a historical play segregated from historical context over a time spent outside of the confines of temporality in a space nonrepresentational of place. This is all for the purposes of positioning the audience such that their perspective on the play allows them to be privy to the multiple perspectives within the play.

The progression of the play resembles a dream, bouncing back and forth with no clear rule as to how or why, as they “react arbitrarily, or rather involuntarily and idiosyncratically.”\(^ {47}\) The play does not follow the form of a conventional narrative, but rather a series of moments. As Lehmann puts it, “‘Dream thoughts’ form a texture that resembles collage, montage and fragment rather than a logically structured course of events.”\(^ {48}\) Frayn could easily have written a narrative play, chronologically depicting the events of the evening in 1941, obscuring particular motives and events to ask the same question about Heisenberg’s actions during the war. The presentation of the events as this sort of fragmented montage creates more of a picture that the audience is asked to

\(^{45}\) The characters do reinhabit a period in 1947 briefly, but for simplicity’s sake general reinhabited memory will be referred to as 1941, as it is the overwhelming majority and the subject of the play. 
\(^ {46}\) Barnett, David. 140.
\(^ {47}\) Lehmann, Hans-Thies. 83.
\(^ {48}\) Ibid. 84.
look at in its entirety, from all perspectives simultaneously. This implies that he is not asking about Heisenberg’s actions, but concluding with purposeful indeterminacy.

The multi-perspectival whole of the play is solidified in the characters’ relation to one another at the end of the play. Throughout the course of the play, be the characters in 1941 or the abstract afterlife, they constantly realign loyalties. Sometimes Heisenberg and Bohr align against Margrethe, sometimes Bohr and Margrethe against Heisenberg, sometimes the three of them all conflict with each other. Finally, the three come together, lamenting their limited time on Earth and the insubstantiality of it all, concluding that none of it “will ever quite be located or defined.” (94) This unifying harmony of perspectives emphasizes the necessary joining of individual perspectives to understand, as they have the most complete picture when the three of them come together.

This dreamlike quality of the postdramatic stage gives way to the destruction of conventional forms of time and space. As Barnett addresses, the mere fact that the play takes place within the framework of the three characters already having passed establishes a world devoid of conventional constructions. There is, of course, nothing new to ghosts on stage, “but these particular shades are exploited for their ability to exist outside of time and to offer commentary and response from a position that is itself unaffected by dramatic tension or the ordering of events.”49 The manipulation of time and space contribute to the play’s ability to convey multiple perspectives simultaneously and juxtapose images that would not otherwise be able to be seen within the same frame.

49 Barnett, David. 141.
Time is clearly deconstructed in the postdramatic theatre. The transitions between the past and the afterlife are done at the drop of a hat, whenever it does the play justice. The characters do not provide reason or propose purpose for the transitions; the play does not even suggest that they have control over it. Rather, instead of being a narrative ruled by and progressed by the characters’ volition, it “valorizes the temporal process of becoming a picture as a ‘theatrical’ process.”

In a conventional dramatic form of presenting a narrative, time is unidirectional. Events cannot be revisited or repeated. In *Copenhagen*, however, this is the principal movement that constructs the play. Lehmann contends “Hardly any other procedure is as typical for postdramatic theatre as repetition…” However, repetition is not utilized in postdrama the same way it is utilized in music, poetry, etc. We are used to repetition being a tool to structure and organize. “In the new theatre languages, however, repetition takes on a different, even opposite meaning: formerly employed for structuring and constructing a form, it is now used for the destructuring and deconstructing of story, meaning and totality of form.”

The repetition, the deconstruction of story is utilized to perceive in different ways. If something is presented to us once, we accept it for what it is. However, when events are repeated, “We always see something different in what we have seen before. Therefore, repetition is also capable of producing a new attention punctuated by the memory of the preceding events, an attending to the little differences.”

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50 Lehman, Hans-Thies. 134.
51 Ibid. 156.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid. 157.
importance of the repetition of the evening in 1941. The multiple drafts present the events to the audience in such a way that they are devoid of narrative interest and looking objectively at the differences. These differences arise from perspectival shifts, additional information incorporated by the characters, etc. Repetition is used in *Copenhagen* as a tool to destroy the investment of the audience in outcome, refocusing their difference to why and how changes in what is repeated came about.

Lehmann states that “Postdramatic theatre is a theatre of the present.”⁵⁴ *Copenhagen* is presented in exactly such a way. It is not a chronological progression of events. Though the characters learn and develop over the course of the play, they do so outside of linearity, and each moment inhabited occurs in the present. This perpetual present proves problematic for the characters to grasp, as Heisenberg addresses, “All we possess is the present, and the present endlessly dissolves into the past.” (86) Lehmann offers the same point, saying “The present is necessarily the erosion and slippage of presence.”⁵⁵ This reaffirms the insubstantiality, the uncertainty of any given moment.

Presentation of space is indelibly tied to the construction of time in *Copenhagen*. The space is largely ruled by the transitions in time between individual presents, the repetition and reinhabitation of space. The relationship between space and reality is obscured just as the relationship between time and reality. In *Copenhagen*, however, no one ever leaves the stage, even when in reality they would not be in the same place. Heisenberg and Bohr leave the house to go on a walk, leaving Margrethe alone in the house. Particularly in later drafts, Margrethe observes their walk, in clear disregard for

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⁵⁴ ibid. 143.
⁵⁵ ibid. 144.
the differences in space, and offers commentary. At the beginning of the play, Heisenberg walks from the train platform to the Bohr’s front door, all the while Bohr and Margrethe are on the same stage, the scene transitioning back and forth between the two places. Lehmann provides the postdramatic stage as a contrast to classical theatre, wherein “the distance covered on stage by an actor signifies as a metaphor or symbol for fictive distance.”56 The distance is not designed to be representative of the fictive distance between characters, rather, space is breached and deliberately abused.

Tableaux are also important to the postdramatic stage. Though the implementation of tableaux will be discussed more in the chapter following, the script almost necessitates moments of it. Repetition rears its head again in sections of the script revisiting a sailing accident with Bohr and his son, in which his son fell off the boat and drowned:

BOHR: And once again I see those same few moments that I see every day.
HEISENBERG: Those short moments on the boat, when the tiller slams over in the heavy sea, and Christian is falling.
BOHR: If I hadn’t let him take the helm…
HEISENBERG: Those long moments in the water.
BOHR: Those endless moments in the water.
HEISENBERG: When he’s struggling towards the lifebuoy.
BOHR: So near to touching it.
MARGRETHE: I’m at Tisvilde. I look up from my work. There’s Niels in the doorway, silently watching me. He turns his head away, and I know at once what’s happened.
BOHR: So near, so near! So slight a thing!

56 Ibid. 151.
HEISENBERG: Again and again the tiller slams over. Again and again…

MARGRETHE: Niels turns his head away…

BOHR: Christian reaches for the lifebuoy…

HEISENBERG: But about some things even they never speak.

BOHR: About some things even we only think.

MARGRETHE: Because there’s nothing to be said. (29-30)

It is important to note that even these take place in the perpetual present of the postdramatic stage. Despite the fact that they are retrospective, the characters reinhabit the moment individually, speaking in the present tense. Similar passages act as a refrain of this memory throughout the play, breaking from any dialogue between characters. These passages necessitate that the characters are individually thinking and narrating their thoughts, not speaking with each other.

Many other opportunities exist for tableaux in the play, but these passages are the most overt. The characters are not conversing with one another, but are engrossed in their own thoughts, narrating them to the audience. They are in their own worlds, separated from the other characters, but still perceivable by the audience.

The tableaux can be produced by framing a stage picture “for example, by special lighting surrounding the bodies, by geometrical fields of light defining their places on the floor, by the sculptural precision of the gestures…”57 Such isolation and designation of space is natural to Copenhagen, where characters may be isolated for existing in different places within the “reality” of the play or for existing in different places for narrative purposes.

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57 Ibid. 151.
Narration is another feature integral to the postdramatic stage. These are the most overt instances of presentation of perspective to the audience. Having not one narrator, but each character narrating in their turn truly grants the audience a multi-perspectival view on the play. Each character is given time to break from the “reality” of the play, and express that reality through their own eyes to the audience. Lehmann expresses the importance of narration in the postdramatic theatre, emphasizing “…the main things are the description and the interest in the peculiar act of the personal memory/narration of the actors.”\(^5^8\)

This is clearly exhibited in \textit{Copenhagen}, from Heisenberg’s first lines of the show establishing the uncertainty of his visit in 1941 from his perspective, to Margrethe’s monologue the first time Heisenberg and Bohr leave her in the house alone. Margrethe, as her 1941 self, breaks from the reality of the play to discuss her perspective on the physicists’ walks. Her narrative section is particularly noteworthy. Though none of the three actors ever leaves the stage over the course of the play, this is one of the few times a single character is isolated from the other two within the reality of the play. This allows us more preference to her and her perspective while the men are irrelevant.

Margrethe talks about the history of the physicists’ walks, from the first time they met when “Niels immediately went to look for the presumptuous young man who’d queried his mathematics, and swept him off for a tramp in the country.” (31) She, of course, acknowledges the importance of their walks. These walks grant them the freedom to converse unconstrained by watchful eyes (Margrethe, the Nazi’s bugs in the Bohrs’ household.) We get some additional insight into her perspective on the science

\(^5^8\) Ibid. 109.
and her husband: “I’ve typed out so much in my time about how differently particles behave when they’re unobserved…” (31) She, like the other two, turns science into metaphor for humanity. We see her understanding of the physics (because of her work as Bohr’s secretary) discussed in the play, as well as her understanding of the actions of the men, even when they are unobservable. The narrative passages of Copenhagen give “preference to presence over representation in as much as it is about the communication of personal experience.”59 These personal experiences conveyed, peppered throughout the unstructured reality of the play emphasize the individual perspective of the characters.

The clearest, most profound instance of multi-perspectival narration occurs during the last draft of the play. Again, as we have come to know more about the evening, we have less accurate knowledge of where we are. The insight into individual motive obscures temporality. The knowledge of event makes the passage of time insignificant. In the last draft, we are overwhelmed by narration, “oscillating between extended passages of narration and only interspersed episodes of dialogue.”60 Even within a single line the characters oscillate between the reality of the play and narrating their individual perspective of it to the audience.

MARGRETHE: How is Elisabeth? How are the children?

HEISENBERG: Very well. They send their love, of course…I can feel a third smile in the room, very close to me. Could it be the one I suddenly see for a moment in the mirror there? And is the awkward stranger wearing it in any way connected with this presence that I can feel in the room? This all-enveloping, unobserved presence?

MARGRETHE: I watch the two smiles in the room, one awkward and ingratiating, the other rapidly fading from incautious warmth to bare

59 Ibid. 109.
60 Ibid.
politeness. There’s also a third smile in the room, I know, unchangingly courteous, I hope, and unchangingly guarded.

HEISENBERG: You’ve managed to get some ski-ing?

BOHR: I glance at Margrethe, and for a moment I see what she can see and I can’t – myself, and the smile vanishing from my face as poor Heisenberg blunders on.

HEISENBERG: I look at the two of them looking at me, and for a moment I see the third person in the room as clearly as I see them. Their importunate guest, stumbling from one crass and unwelcome thoughtfulness to the next.

BOHR: I look at him looking at me, anxiously, pleadingly, urging me back to the old days, and I see what he sees. And yes – now it comes, now it comes – there’s someone missing from the room. He sees me. He sees Margrethe. He doesn’t see himself.

HEISENBERG: Two thousand million people in the world, and the one who has to decide their fate is the only one who’s always hidden from me.

BOHR: You suggested a stroll. (87)

For the purposes of clarity, text delivered as dialogue is italicized to differentiate from the narration. The content of this passage mirrors its purpose. These three characters, these isolated globules of thought, emotion, and presence, cannot merge. They are necessarily incompatible, as their perspectives include everything but themselves. Through the process of narration, the audience can observe and correlate these multiple individual perspectives, yielding a holistic, multi-perspectival image.

The postdramatic interpretation of Copenhagen is natural to the ammunition given in the script. Such a staging conveys a multi-perspectival image wherein the whole can be considered by the audience. The dreamlike stage, manipulation of time and space, and narration of events and perspectives all allow for the sort of “simultaneous and multi-
perspectival form of perceiving,6¹ which Lehmann says defines the postdramatic. Granting the audience such a perspective through which to consider the play removes any delusions a narrative progression may cause by being swept up in the story. Rather, the story is used as a tool by which the audience can analyze the effect of morality on science, but more importantly, perspective on knowledge.

6¹ Ibid. 16.
Chapter Three

The Directorial Process

Bohr: You know how strongly I believe that we don’t do science for ourselves, that we do it so we can explain it to others…

-Michael Frayn, Copenhagen (38)

It is rather indisputable that Copenhagen is a masterfully crafted piece of theatre. Its prolific production history and wild commercial success as well as vast intrigue and veritable anthologies of analytic and critical literature from academics herald it as one of the best “science plays” ever written. This being the case, finding problems to address, facets on which to improve, or ways to optimize the performance is no easy task. The script is in itself, a work of considerable merit and ought to be respected as such. With no stage directions, a fluid setting, abstract characters, and no technical necessities, the play lies entirely in the dialogue. If the ideas and the problems of the play can be expressed with nothing but words, what business do I have adding frills to distract from the core purpose of the script?

This question drove me to focus my efforts in the production process less upon what the production and more upon what the audience needed. It is a subtle shift in focus that I think was ultimately beneficial to our end. Particularly in the world of our design concepts, instead of pouring our efforts into the question of what does the play need, we allowed ourselves to step back and ask how we wanted to affect the audience. The play
needs nothing and asks for nothing. The audience, however, can be affected in a number of different ways with the same script, as Frayn leaves the presentation of that material open.

It is this demand of what the audience needs rather than what the play asks for that called for a postdramatic approach to the show. I have already said how I saw and discarded a postdramatic interpretation, but it stuck with me and fueled the development of our production. As has been addressed, the text speaks for itself and all historical contexts are merely convenient framing to discuss the moral issues within an accessible arena. Therefore, rather than existing within context of the time, what we see on stage is to be, in Barnett’s terms, an “experience of a perpetual present.”\(^\text{62}\) We needed to separate the action on stage from all of the atrocities of the war, from all of the implications of Heisenberg’s allegiance, from all of the devastation of the detonation of the bombs into a world where the ideas and moralities can be discussed without bias. Therefore, to most effectively convey the battle of perspectives in the script, our choices aimed to create sympathetic characters with realistic moral dilemmas in a world that is simultaneously separated from but framed by historical context.

That being said, and frankness being the best manner of going about things, I went into the direction process of this play without the concrete conception of what I specifically wanted to accomplish. For a play in which arguably the central tenant is ‘one cannot concretely or wholly understand anything,’ an attempt at a wholly understood interpretation and idea of what specifically was to be accomplished seemed like an insurmountable task. The seed of postdrama was planted, but not yet flowered. I did not,

\(^{62}\) Barnett, David. (140)
however, go in without a to-do list. The intent behind the production was present, without the theory to specifically describe it. Theory is, however, a descriptive mechanism, and retrofitting and refining worked remarkably well for us. As Claire Marshall of Forced Entertainment said in an interview, “You don’t set out to make a postmodernist [or postdramatic] piece of work.” We set out with specific goals pertaining to the way in which we wanted the show to be communicated to an audience. When the goals were well defined, the theory fell into place.

Underneath the current of perspectival battle culminating in uncertainty, the production had to effectively communicate the science to the audience. We needed interesting characters and situations despite circumstance, and, primarily, to create a show that would bring the consideration of esoteric subjects of the sciences and the moral implications thereof to a layman’s level. The understanding of complex sciences is unnecessary; grasping the conflict that accompanies them is integral. Essentially, we were tasked with understanding and interest. With complex scientific subjects so indelibly tied to involvement in the play, it may be difficult to attain understanding and interest with the common audience. Ensuring that the audience would engage in the science and morality was my initial principal goal in the process.

I found that throughout our process I would fight with myself over choices that would make matters easier for the actors, make for a better show, but did not fit into what I wanted at that moment. As such, a complete, comprehensive goal would have been useful, rather than having a stream of ideas that eventually collated during the process. Retrofitting worked remarkably well with our process, as, even with a fuzzy trajectory

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initially, most of the decisions made conformed to my eventual main goal for the production. We constructed a postdramatic playing space navigated by realistic characters within this abstract world, allowing for simultaneous distance and involvement to optimize the audience’s perspective. Most of those decisions that did not conform were able to be altered down the line to contribute towards this end goal.

The Set

The first choice made was to make the set more presentational than would be conventional. As Barnett says, “In postdramatic theatre…sets do not represent places.”⁶⁴ This spoke to me, offering the possibility of creating an abstract space that not only separates the space from the historical context, but offers some confinement according to the limitation of the characters’ memory.

After being notified that I had a directorial slot at the end of the previous academic term, I made a concept sketch of what I wanted from the set. Many elements were added to it and altered within it by the scenic designer, Rachel Fugate, but the essence of presentational straightforwardness was

⁶⁴ Barnett, David. (140)
retained. In fact, with the arrangement of the furniture and the addition of a coffee table weighing the space down in the center, the changes made for an even more rigid playing space than I originally suggested. This presentational quality was to suggest the contemplation by the audience of an entity, an image, a collage as Lehmann called it, of multiple perspectives coinciding.

The most naturalistic way to orient a set is to set it on an angle. Straight lines on a stage feel stilted, unnatural, and presentational, which was exactly our goal. There ought to be points of focus at the two downstage corners, tapering up to one in upstage center. There should be obstacles in the set for the actors to fight with. I liked the idea, however, of focusing most of the set towards the center of our playing space, giving the stage a dense nucleus where the actors were attracted most of the time, but in moments of high energy they would, like electrons in an atom, jump to higher energy levels and travel outside this nucleus.

The play is very often done in the round to emphasize the motif of observation. The audience would then not only be able to observe the actors, but observe those observing the actors and see the how they were affected. This parallels how Heisenberg observes the movement of an electron through a cloud chamber, saying “There isn’t a track! … Only external effects!” (65) The idea that something being observed changes its nature is integral and makes staging the show in the round a powerful choice. While I liked this idea, I turned away from it because it would limit our playing space. I did, however, use the full riser set-up we have available for the Studio Theatre space and brought the actors’ playing space as close to the risers as I could, making the space
something approaching a “half-round.” This was in the hopes of still impressing that motif of observation, altering the perspective of the audience through their orientation.

Around this presentational set with a pseudo-half-round, we built a literal border between the audience and the play. Around the whole playing space were short walls of piled papers with scientific scribbles, stacks of books, a typewriter, and the like. The purpose of this was twofold: to further emphasize the line between the observers and those being observed and to demonstrate the confinement of the characters by the limitations of their own knowledge and memory. The line between the observers and the observed is simply a forced reminder that the audience is not a part of the actions of the stage, and thus rather than being an involved participant, they are an observer. As in Brecht’s epic theatre, rather than inviting the audience to be swept away with emotion by the actions of the stage, we were closing off that venue and demanding conclusions be drawn about the questions posed in the play. Instead of communicating the experiences of the characters, we were communicating facts.

There were two main aspects of the set that were added or altered from my initial concept: the cityscape of the river district of Copenhagen looming in the background and the furniture of the set being period Art Deco. These choices seemingly conflict with Barnett’s contention that in the postdramatic theatre the set does not represent place.65 However, these essences of space I believe were useful to convey particular pressures on the characters, yet conflicted in a way that allowed the indeterminacy of particular setting to remain. These pressures – of the Bohr’s home, of Copenhagen – further the feeling of personal memory that accompanies narration in postdrama. It is a line from the

65 Barnett, David. 140.
characters’ perspective that we can draw to the audience, without incorporating the disruptive historical context.

As the play shifts seamlessly between time periods, ethereal planes, and physical settings in 1941, different pressures exert themselves on the characters. When in the Bohrs’ home, there is the imminent danger of being overheard. When outside, they can speak more freely. When in the afterlife space, they know more and can speak completely freely. While the action exists in a perpetual present and the particular place is not important, the nature of the locations imposes certain pressures on the characters that inform how they deal with their moral anxieties. As such, it was necessary to create those impositions.

The period furniture was to build the home around them, to serve as a constant reminder that they were inside walls that had ears. At the same time, it is a home that the Bohrs had lived in and made for themselves, that Heisenberg was familiar with and comfortable in. The familiarity with the home space with the danger of being overheard is more easily conveyed to an audience with the homey, period furniture than with cold, neutral chairs.

The Copenhagen cityscape was a slightly different matter. Rather than creating a cityscape of where Bohr’s house actually was located in Copenhagen, we decided to make it the most iconic image of the city – the colorful houses of the river district. This served to designate an “outside” space in which they could speak more freely, but created a symbolic aesthetic that was useful as well. The skyline was dark and towered above the

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66 One patron even noted that they had forgotten the title of the show, walked in, and said “It looks like Copenhagen!”
actors in tall, stilted, straight lines. Although they were outside, they could not escape the structure and conformity. This cityscape was not a creation of the Nazi regime in Denmark, of course, but the compressed houses with no open space, the straight lines, the towering figures, all helped to communicate a sense of oppressive order even when in the freedom of the open air. These two aspects of the set that actually implied placement are inherently conflicting enough that a specific, localized place would never be specified. Instead, through these representational, perspectival images, we communicated and imposed external pressures that informed how the characters handled their discourse.

There was an aspect of the set that I had put in my initial concept sketch that did not work to further our goals as much as I would have liked. There were two doors on stage. One imaginary, and used whenever entering or exiting the Bohrs’ house in the memory plane. The other was a physical door, never used under light, set upstage center in between the two towers. The first door was necessary; the second disrupted the unity of space and distracted from the purpose of the set. It was an early brainchild if utilized properly may have been beneficial, but ultimately because of my blocking simply served as a distraction and one of the unnecessary frills I chastised earlier.

The door was meant to symbolize that there is, in fact, more beyond this limited space in which they exist, but they never open the door because they are indeed limited by their knowledge and memories. It was to be a physical representation of uncertainty. As
Frayn says in his postscript, “You can be uncertain about things which are themselves entirely definite, and about which you could be entirely certain if you were better informed.” (99) The playing space is an uncertain realm with finite information with which to analyze the situation, while outside the door, if you were better informed, would be the complete certainty. I intended to use it as a suggestive device, on stage and never used, constantly weighing on our minds that there exists more beyond what we can access. I believe in theory it could have been an interesting addition to the space, but as it was utilized it just served to be distracting, confusing, and ultimately detract from the audience’s understanding of the space.

Ultimately, the set was constructed to be an abstract space, malleable to the moment, presentational and walled off from the audience. It inherently limited what was available to the characters, while hinting slightly at their personal perspectives and memories.

**The Lights**

Seemingly the most controversial portion of our production was the lighting design, the critiques and praises of which will be discussed in the next chapter. Because of the minimal set, lack of costume changes, etc., the shifts between the memory space and afterlife space were primarily designated by lighting changes. As such, the lights were responsible for the clarity and understanding of the transient and uncertain worlds that the characters inhabited.

We created two main palates for these worlds, a spectral blue designating the abstract afterlife space and sepia toned ambers to designate when the characters were
transported back into memory. The spectral blues included ground lighting from underneath the audience risers, casting jarring shadows of the characters on the backdrop of Copenhagen. The ambers were intended to cast a nostalgic quality of old photography while creating a more realistic world.

One of the largest ‘eureka’ moments of the production process was with a concept for the lighting design that I still believe stands up on paper, but ultimately detracted from the show. At the beginning of the show, the characters are very sure of exactly where they are. When they transport back to memory, the shifts are distinct. They do not comment from the perspective of their future selves while in the events of the memory. Rather, they primarily stay in the moment and analyze after the events of the first draft. This first draft, however, tells them the least of the events of the evening, with each subsequent draft revealing more of the truth.

Embracing the concept of complementarity, John Ponder White and I developed a progressive muddling of the lights to obscure exactly where the action of the play took place. In each subsequent draft, the characters have more of a tendency to divert and comment on the occurrences from the perspective of their dead selves. They go on tangents of thought experiments that never happened, but begin with and are based in the reality of their memory. As such, as the play progresses, as the characters know more about the evening’s events and intentions, we know less about where exactly this action is taking place. In similar form, the play began with hard transitions, clearly delineating between the memory and afterlife spaces, but slowly transitioned to softer fades with ambers and blues mixed together. This was meant to provoke the audience’s uncertainty and questioning of the action. The ambiguity was a distancing mechanism, keeping them
from being fully involved, while keeping them engaged in the moral discussion and analysis of perspective.

The shifts between the lighting, the saturation of the blues and the ambers, and the ground lighting casting shadows on the back wall all helped to create another integral aspect of the postdramatic stage. The show begins in the afterlife space, flushed with blues, grotesque shadows cast on the back wall. It is clear that we do not exist in a world that would be customary on the naturalistic stage. This helped distanced the action on stage from being set in a particular place, as well as altered our perspective of time. Hans-Thies Lehmann refers to time in postdramatic theatre as dreamlike, rather than what reality.\textsuperscript{67} The ability to fluidly transition from one time to the next is an unconventional way to navigate time and seems more dreamlike than anything else. Particularly in the afterlife space, the palate and angles of lights suggested a dream-land, devoid of time and location.

The Costumes

As the characters primarily only inhabit one evening or death over the course of the play, no costume changes were necessary. We dressed them in conventional 1940’s business attire, though with slightly more color than might be expected. We wanted contrast between Bohr and Heisenberg, so we gave them opposing suit colors. Heisenberg had a lighter, tan suit that was slightly big on him, while we dressed Bohr in a cutting charcoal.

\textsuperscript{67} Lehmann, Hans-Thies. 155-156.
We hoped that the lighter color would endear Heisenberg more to the audience than a dark, imposing suit would. The suit was slightly large on him, which was the result of happenstance, but we kept it as it gave him the look of a boy inheriting his father’s suit and hoping to grow into it. This visual representation of his overwhelming responsibilities and pressures bringing him to the point where he turns to his old mentor, his father figure for guidance was an additional effort to soften the influence of history on the character.

Bohr’s red tie matched Margrethe’s red blouse, giving a visual representation of their matrimonial bond. Margrethe’s skirt, on the other hand, was a tan color similar to Heisenberg. Margrethe often served as the a moral indicator in the show, alternately berating both men when they went off the rails. As such, we decided that visually tying her to both men via color composition would be useful. These colors were further echoed in the set. The two chairs were brown to match Margrethe and Heisenberg, while the bench was red like the Bohrs. This primarily served to tie Margrethe to her home, making her a maternal entity analogous to Bohr as the father figure.

Bohr’s primary costume feature was a fake belly. While we were not adhering to the historical accuracy of the characters, Bohr was a slightly heftier man in his later years, and the belly served to age the character. It also enhanced his relationship with Heisenberg, as their mentor-mentee made father-son relationship would hold no water if the two actors appeared to be peers. The gut successfully distanced Bohr in age from Heisenberg through not only his appearance, but the physicality it necessitates.
Intricacies with belts versus suspenders, what sort of jewelry Margrethe should wear, styles of ties and such were conversations that we had, but do not merit going into here. Beyond the distinct choices enumerated here, decisions were made simply based on what the designers and the actors felt like the characters would wear.  

The Sound

The sound design of our production was the most unexpected development of the process. I had anticipated wanting no more than some period music to set the tone while the house was filling, possibly intermission music, and music during curtain call. My sound designer, Eliot Bacon, had question after question about the sort of music I wanted, if I wanted any diegetic sounds, if I wanted non-diegetic sounds to color certain parts of the show, and eventually we developed quite a soundscape for a show that could easily be done with nothing. This was likely the biggest frill we added, though not without purpose.

To begin with, we found that Heisenberg in particular was phenomenally musically inclined. He viewed music as another way of understanding the world. In fact, if he had not been a physicist, he likely would have been a concert pianist. Roughly translated from his book *Ordnung der Wirklichkeit (Reality and its Order)*, Heisenberg says, “Even representations of reality that are quite far removed from the exact sciences, such as music or the fine arts, reveal upon closer analysis manifestations of inner organizations that are intimately related to mathematical laws.” Music is an integral part

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68 We did find a fascinating historical costume item that we unfortunately were not able to take advantage of. In Nazi occupied Denmark, Danish citizens would string four coins of their currency together with a red string and wear them on their lapels as a sign of nationality and resistance.  
of the script as well, with Heisenberg’s memory tied to the music that was played in the moment. In accordance, we made our pre-show, intermission, and post-show music out of contemporary German composers.\footnote{The final non-diegetic song of the play and one of the pre-show songs were of particular note. The song underscoring the final moments of the play is Franz Schubert’s Trio in B Flat Major: 2nd Movement, which Heisenberg called “the most beautiful trio on earth.” One of the songs in the pre-show was Mozart’s Sonata in A Major, which, once letters were released by the families after the unveiling of \textit{Copenhagen}, we know Heisenberg played for the Bohrs because he wrote to tell his wife Elisabeth about it.}

As music plays a significant part in the script, we felt it would be useful to make use of the specific songs mentioned in the script. For example, Heisenberg describes “listening to the thump of bombs falling all around [them]. And on the radio someone playing the Beethoven G minor cello sonata…” (51) The words themselves have one power, but hearing the terrifying low rumbles with the somber notes of the cello affects an audience in an entirely different way. The music is outside of the world we have built. It is not a part of the afterlife space, Bohr and Margrethe do not hear the music as Heisenberg calls it forward. In this way we are distanced from the space with the music.

Additionally, the music is tied to his memory in a way such that when he remembers it, we hear it. It ties the audience to Heisenberg more closely as we live and experience his memories in a more visceral way than if he were simply sharing them. This compounded upon the personal memory of narration and enhanced the audience’s perception of Heisenberg’s perspective. As the most easily damnable character for his involvement with Nazi Germany, all efforts to endear him to the audience were useful. Being so intimately involved in his memory as to hear the music he hears is a strong link between Heisenberg and the audience, giving him an edge over the other two characters.
The Direction

Largely, I directed the play from a naturalistic perspective. There were a few deliberate stylistic choices made, but primarily the aim was shifting the audience’s perspective on naturalistic action through the use of technical elements. Within the space created, then, we can have naturalistic, sympathetic characters to reach out to the audience through the proper lens. If we played with the style of presentation, stilting the characters or further distancing the audience from them, the perspectives of the characters would be harder to see. The audience needed a presentation of words that they are used to – naturalism – to accept the ultimate, multi-perspectival image.

Severing the space from historical ties was an important aspect of this performance, particularly for making the characters equally sympathetic. Again, all characters must have equal standing in the eyes of the audience. It is difficult to redeem Heisenberg within the context of history, particularly to an American audience. Working for the Nazi regime forever taints his image. However, separating him from his history and characterizing him as a victim of circumstance rather than a villain allows his voice equal merit against the ever-prudent, level-headed Bohr. Margrethe as a soft-spoken, intelligent, dutiful wife is easy to accept, but makes her perspective less important. Making her a morally strong spitfire who can hold her own again against titans of theoretical physics develops her to a point of level standing. Only equally sympathetic and equally strong characters will be equally heard.

In addition, two decisions in particular gilded the naturalistic presentation. First, the actors directly addressed the audience. This was a decision I battled for a good
portion of the process. I originally wanted the audience to simply be observing this experiment taking place onstage. This was before I embraced the postdramatic presentation, of course. However, after trying to motivate the observations the characters make in-world, I surrendered to the decision that they must be speaking to the audience.

To address that, I set a rule for when they may deliver a line out: if they are speaking to another character, observing something for themselves, or analyzing those observations for themselves, they must stay in-world; if they are reporting information, observations, or analysis, they may take it to the audience. This made it so they shared their processed perspective directly to the audience, while the audience saw them actually process their perspective in-world. For the most part, this is a clear distinction in the nature of the lines. Some, we had to battle with and make a decision. Ultimately, though, this proved to be a powerful postdramatic tool, linking character’s personal perspective to audience.

The second big decision I made was forcing the actors into deliberate, distinct, almost taxing motions to inhabit their memory. This was to blur the naturalism of memory slightly, as their memories are inexact and not quite to be trusted. We attempted this by beginning each new “draft” of the evening with Heisenberg walking exactly the same path as he repeats similar phrases of “crunching over the gravel” and “the heavy door swings open.” The actor playing Bohr had to mime a door opening every time to let Heisenberg in. When the two physicists left to go on their walk, they again had to pass through the mimed door, and walk a confined outer ring of our playing space in slow motion. Slow motion is another tool natural to the postdramatic stage. “The act of striding along is decomposed, becoming the lifting of a foot, advancing of a leg, sliding
shift of weight, careful coming down of the sole. The scenic ‘action’ (walking) takes on the beauty of a purposeless pure gesture.” The repetition of particular motions and deconstruction of movement distances the audience from involvement in the actions themselves, allowing them to contemplate how and rather than what.

An unexpected and retroactively realized beneficial choice was in the casting. Though the sting of World War II is no longer in our immediate memory, the stigma of the German, blonde-haired, blue-eyed, perfect Aryan against the Jew is alive and well in our consciousness. I cast the roles colorblind to the actual historical context, focusing simply on which actors could best utilize and portray the role strictly in terms of what the text and I threw at them. As a result, I unintentionally cast practically a poster boy for the Aryan master-race, Baxter Gaston, for the role of the half-Jewish Bohr and a Jewish actor, Jack Reibstein, as Heisenberg. While I do not believe this had an immense effect on their appeal to the audience, the reversal of their roles could do nothing but further sever the characters from their historical counterparts. The severance of space from context while, again, not historically accurate by any stretch of the imagination, assisted in the aim of presenting an ahistorical, isolated image for the purposes of moral and intellectual examination.

To conclude, our goal was to primarily use the technical aspects of the show – set, lights, costumes, and sound – to build our world of abstract place and inconsequential time. They were all to contribute to a stage of perpetual present, severing ties with the historical context, but tying it to personal memory. With the characters, then, we strove to draw the audience in to the characters and their moral struggle. We wanted to build all

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71 Lehmann, Hans-Thies. 164.
characters to an equal standing to have their perspectives equally considered. The culmination of this staging was a postdramatic presentation of *Copenhagen* that allowed conflicting perspectives to do battle, unperturbed by context.
Chapter Four

Post-Production Responses

**Bohr:** …measurement is not an impersonal event that occurs with impartial universality. It’s a human act, carried out from a specific point of view in time and space, from the one particular viewpoint of a possible observer.

- Michael Frayn, *Copenhagen* (71)

To gauge audience reception to our performance, I had three resources. The first was a classic technique of providing a short audience survey for patrons to fill out and return at the end of the production. I was wary of the utility of this method for gauging audience response, so it was primarily utilized for demographics of my audiences and creative, short responses to possibly solicit one interesting, insightful response amongst one hundred. I was pleasantly surprised by how many useful responses I received from the surveys. Many of the results yielded were actually more interesting than I thought, but they do not have as in depth of comments as the other sources of feedback. More weight was placed on individual personal interviews I did with audience members who saw the show and the couple of reviews written by theatre students in the department.

**Audience Surveys**

The audience surveys\(^{72}\) were ultimately the least significant means of feedback. The nature of such questioning limits the freedom of response, in contrast to the line of

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\(^{72}\) The format of the surveys is attached in Appendix A.
question and answer that can be pursued through a personal interview. However, it was a fascinating way to canvass the larger audience to get some key information. Of the possible 300 people who could have seen the show if sold out every time, 218 surveys were received in varying forms of completeness. Most surveys had at least the front fully completed. This consisted of two general questions about the patron as a theatregoer and a question to help ascertain the perspective of the patron on the battle between objectivity and subjectivity. The response to the back of the survey was slightly more sporadic, with people partially filling it out, not responding, or responding in ways which were not useful. The back side consisted of two open ended questions, looking for the audience’s reaction to the content of the show. Because of the enormous response, much of the material on the surveys was interesting to note and useful towards understanding how the show reached an audience, though not hugely compelling towards any particular conclusion because of their inherently limited depth.

I was interested in the demographic questions simply to determine the draw of this show. It is a popular, intelligent show with many attractors for different segments of a campus community beyond the standard theatergoing crowd. This was reflected in the responses on the surveys, with many people saying that either their interest in science was the main draw or that they were equally interested in science and theatre. A few were even specifically interested in this show, having been familiar with it before. One patron said “This was the third time I have seen this play and it was the most personal and moving.” As is to be expected, most responses indicated that the audience often attended live theatre. Many, however, did report that they rarely went to see live theatre.

73 Audience Survey #1.
with a few even having indicated that this was the first performance they have attended. Though this is no implication of causality, it is possible that the far reach of the content of *Copenhagen* drew more of a diverse crowd than would be expected. This, though not integral to the interpretation or reception of the show, is paramount to its vitality as an important piece of theatre. It also means that the clear portrayal of a complex, multi-perspectival show is even more important; neither the science nor theatrical conventions can be taken for advantage, as improper treatment of either could be disastrous for a portion of the audience’s understanding.

Those who did respond on the backs of the surveys had widely varying things to say. From unrecognizable geometric doodles to topical poetry to insightful philosophical pontification, reactions differ as much as each individual’s perspective. The first question on the back of the survey was to respond, however they chose, to the quote “Man is the measure of all things.” This gleaned some insightful responses, even poetically: “We require just a measuring tape / To measure a man’s neck at the nape, / But to measure the Earth / Or our ultimate worth / We need just a man as the tape.”

Some were slightly less insightful, but topical and amusing all the same. “Dreary autumn days, / Memories a haze, / Endless talk, / Unanswered thoughts / Of particles and waves.” Though these poetic expressions may not be critical analysis or thoughts indicative of intense intellectual engagement with the show, they are original. These and several other poems were written by people who evidently felt compelled enough to respond in some creative manner. If this was some innate impulse of theirs to be creative if given an outlet or something in the show that inspired them to respond in that manner

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74 Audience Survey #2.
75 Audience Survey #3.
is indeterminable. It is, at the least, an indication that they at least felt that it was worth their time to do so. This is heartening, as the effort put into these responses is likely tied, at least in part, to how well our implementation of the postdramatic staging of the show engaged the audience. Engagement elicits response.

More critical thought came through from these questions, as well. The most relevant response encapsulated the purpose of the postdramatic stage we had created: “This is why there are many different perspectives – we only know things through observation, which is subjective.”76 There is not one, universal perspective. We are limited to our own. Even through a multi-perspectival staging, we are limited in our knowledge to the subjective observations of the three characters. Many responses related to perspective, position, and the inherent limitation associated with them. “Because your frame of reference – time, position, knowledge, life – matters. It changes things.”77

Where the demographic questions particularly become interesting is correlating them with responses like these. Both of the above responses came from people who rarely or only sometimes attended live theatre. The content of the show expresses these fallacies of individual perspective and the uncertainty inherent in observation. However, relating the perspectival theme in such a meaningful way as to receive responses such as these from audience members unfamiliar with the theatre is particularly significant. This means that the treatment of this theme in the show, to these patrons, overshadowed the difficulties of the science, the politics of the nuclear bomb, or any other feature of the show that could have been construed as the most important. Rather, the idea of

76 Audience Survey #4.
77 Audience Survey #5.
perspective limiting one’s world stood salient. This is notable to hear from sporadic theatregoers, as they may be more likely to be swept up in story, more likely to lose sight of the action, and overall more likely to fall into any obstacle that might be surmounted by a theatrical background.

Somewhat defeatist responses to uncertainty arose from the multitude. “Then how can we logically assume anything? A false proposition can be used to prove any statement, so if our systems of deductions must all necessarily contain paradoxes, then knowledge means nothing. Thanks.”78 Though it sounds as if they are disgruntled by this idea, the patron is exactly correct, and just this is what constitutes the conflict in Copenhagen. Both Bohr and Heisenberg believe themselves to be correct, as their statements of truth are based on slightly different, equally false propositions. Knowledge, of course, does not mean nothing, but it is important understand certain limitations. As another survey says, “We are the measure of what we perceive, but what we perceive isn’t reality.”79 A world is out there that informs us and we act based upon the information we perceive from it. However, what we perceive is inexact and not strictly reality.

The responses, again, ranged from insightful to angry, poetic to pointless. We received nothing more than a drawing of a box on the back of one audience survey80, and nothing but “GAH.”81 (an expression of frustration) angrily scrawled across the back of another. Another patron responded simply with “get over yourself.”82 A slightly more

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78 Audience Survey #6.
79 Audience Survey #7.
80 Audience Survey #8.
81 Audience Survey #9.
82 Audience Survey #10.
constructive patron lamented that there were “Too many interesting points. Sometimes seemingly distracting. Too much to say, so it’s hard to understand everything but one’s own thing.”

It is clear that not everyone was equally engaged or had the same reaction to the show, be that due to textual, technical, or theatrical qualms. These frustrated few would seem to be in the minority, however, with most surveys responding either with attempts at insight or simple positive words about the performance.

All things considered, not much can be concretely understood about the way the show reached the audience by the surveys, but they do provide an interesting backdrop to the more rigorous reviews and interviews. From these responses, we can see that a variety of interests drew people to the show, many responded after the show in a way that suggests the show reached them in a way that intellectually engaged them, and a subset of these particularly focused on the perspective as a theme presented in the show. This by no means ensures success, but it is heartening to believe that the audience was reached in an engaging way.

**Student Reviews**

Students from Dr. Richard Palmer’s Introduction to Theatre class saw and reviewed *Copenhagen*, with those two anonymous reviews being given to me. These were wonderful pieces of feedback to receive, as I got them after I did my interviews. From the interviews and the surveys there were critiques, but the response was largely positive. The written reviews, however, were significantly more critical. The most pronounced critique was the closing line of Review #1: “It leaves the solutions, if any, to

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83 Audience Survey #11.
the audience; and the largest question left unsolved is, “Why did I watch *Copenhagen*?”\textsuperscript{84} Having open criticism of the difficulties of the play as well as open praise as to what was done well further develops the understanding of how this production reached an audience.

The reviews were not wholly disparaging, though. There were many positive comments about the actors’ treatment of a complex, scientific text and the monumental historical pressures on the characters. “At their best, the acting and direction both feel deliberate and thoughtful…,”\textsuperscript{85} says Review #2. The way in which the characters communicated with the audience is paramount. The ability to sympathize with each character in their turn was the most important part of their characterization for the multi-perspectival, postdramatic quality to arise from the show.

In a two and a half hour performance of three people on a relatively bare stage doing nothing but talking, it is difficult to retain that sympathy and engagement. However, “Only occasionally does the show wither and fail to engage the audience…”\textsuperscript{86}, as Review #2 says. The occasional lull is natural to conversation, to life, and to the human attention span. The key is that the characters were sympathetic, engaging, and could repeatedly bring the audience back when there was a lull. Reviewer #2 says of the characters that “the fatherly Bohr doesn’t waver once over the play’s run,”\textsuperscript{87} Heisenberg’s “emotional intensity apparent in his monologues about love of country and his family…provides an excellent foil to the more restrained Bohr,”\textsuperscript{88} and Margrethe.

\textsuperscript{84} Introduction to Theatre Review #1, 3.
\textsuperscript{85} Introduction to Theatre Review #2, 1.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid.
“manages to hold the audience captive during perhaps the most emotional moments of the play…”\textsuperscript{89} Though there were some negative statements of moments, the author seems to have been repeatedly engaged and brought back by these aspects of the characters. Reviewer #1 was slightly less impressed. They do concede that “The complicated nature of the science would have been difficult to understand were it not for the performances of the actors clearly explaining the similarity between subatomic physics and humanity.”\textsuperscript{90} However, Heisenberg’s empathy was “difficult to determine from the performance”\textsuperscript{91} and Margrethe’s “mechanical actions did not represent a person, nor did her ecstatic voice.”\textsuperscript{92} Bohr appealed to this reviewer, as “Unfamiliarity soon became something we could relate to: ourselves, and our fellow people, because that is what was presented to us, another human.”\textsuperscript{93} From these reviews it seems that some characters reached some audience members more than others.

Beyond the characters, both reviews discussed the lights and the set, but with rather opposing views. Reviewer #2 heralds the lighting design as “Easily the strongest technical aspect of the show,” saying that it “allows for separation between the two worlds of the play.”\textsuperscript{94} However, its “greatest strength is also its greatest weakness…as the dinner [1941] lights trade atmosphere for visibility…”\textsuperscript{95} Reviewer #1 shares the lamentations of shadows across the actors’ faces, impairing visibility. They add that “the

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{90} Introduction to Theatre Review #1, 1.
\textsuperscript{91} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid. 2.
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{94} Introduction to Theatre Review #2, 1.
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid.
lighting was an unnatural nuisance, even in spite of the other-worldly sense of the play,” saying “it was difficult to determine what the lighting designer was trying to portray.”

These frustrations with the lighting design will be echoed in the interviews, and manifests as a twofold issue. Those I interviewed did not note the shadows as a particularly notable issue, though they did have similar qualms with not understanding what we were trying to accomplish with the lights. The shadows were a combination of the limitations of the space and the angles at which we placed the lights. To further contrast the two worlds, light hit the actors not only in different colors, but from different places. In the lighting for 1941, this was largely from above. As such, unfortunate shadows were cast on actors’ faces. We did attempt to play with shadows and their messages with the lights. In the afterlife, the actors’ shadows were cast up on the back wall creating ghost images of themselves, superimposed over Copenhagen. There was an artistic justification that the shadows are representative of the limitations of their memory; things hide in the dark corners that they can never fully know. Justification aside, however, in the theatre it is does no good to have an actor in shadow, particularly for long periods of time.

Reviewer #1 said of the shifts that “Whenever the lights shifted…the scene subtly adjusted itself to the lights. The motivation for the actors’ tonal shifts appeared to originate from the lights, rather than an actual desire to change the tone of the show.” This sort of involuntary shifting was due to, as quoted before, the postdramatic tendency in which “‘Dream thoughts’ form a texture that resembles collage, montage and fragment

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96 Introduction to Theatre Review #1, 2.
97 Ibid. 2-3.
rather than a logically structured course of events.” Characters were just as guided by the fragmentation of context (memories, experiences, etc.) as they were by their own thoughts and motivations in the moment. This, however, is an unconventional and unfamiliar driving force and likely did not jive with the audience’s conception of standard temporal progression. Ideally the jarring nature of this fragmentation would present the “collage” in such a way that the audience objectively analyzes it as a whole image, rather than getting lost trying to keep up with a nonexistent standard narrative progression. Referring back to what was discussed earlier, this sort of deconstruction of the temporal process to create a picture rather than a progression is natural to the postdramatic stage. It is useful towards the end of portraying multiple perspectives through one image. It is, however, an understandably unconventional and difficult mechanism to follow if unaccustomed and unprepared. We implemented postdramatic principle, but it did not translate properly.

Finally, the reviewers both praised the set for being simple, purposeful, representative, and suggestive. “Nothing is without purpose – even the gilding [barrier] is used at one point, when Bohr snatches from it a piece of paper…,” says Reviewer #2. Reviewer #1 praises the confined playing space, saying, “Enclosed in a circle, the actors, like particles, were made to collide and react…” This confinement, collision, action, and reaction all contributes to the postdramatic sense of perpetual presence. Everyone is always there. Things are always happening in the moment. Both reviewers also addressed the warm hominess of the space in 1941, praising it for giving “an imperfect

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98 Lhemann, Hans-Thies. 84.
99 Introduction to Theatre Review #2, 1.
look at the theoretical physicists,”\textsuperscript{100} and being “strong in their simplicity.”\textsuperscript{101} As a negative feature, one reviewer did mention, as will be discussed in more detail with the interviews, the taunting the audience felt by the unused door in the middle of the upstage wall. That aside, this sort of familiar, unobstructed environment for the characters to interact hopefully lent to an air of accessibility between audience and character.

These reviews were easily the most critical responses I received. One certainly favored the show more than the other, but both had their hefty criticisms. It seems that many of the postdramatic tools that we utilized either obscured understanding or were utilized improperly. The characters wavered between being engaging and uninteresting, as did the script. The lights assisted in delineating between worlds, but confused matters. The set was mostly an effective representation of space, with some slight extraneous factors that detracted from the unity of space. Though pieces of our production fell short, there was still “a sense of urgency as the characters desperately struggle to understand their own past actions.”\textsuperscript{102} The urgency in the conflict between the characters in this struggle to understand necessarily involves a comprehensive perspective; if one character is clearly right, where is the urgency? Despite the confusion, the frustration, and the difficulties in understanding the postdramatic tools we utilized, the understanding of perspective translated.

**Personal Interviews**

With my selection of interviewees, I attempted to get a wide spread of initial conditions under which they saw the show. This ranged from intimate familiarity with

\textsuperscript{100} Introduction to Theatre Review \#1, 2.
\textsuperscript{101} Introduction to Theatre Review \#2, 2.
\textsuperscript{102} Introduction to Theatre Review \#2, 1.
the scientific or theatrical aspects to little familiarity with either, the details of which are listed below:

1) Jordan Leek – Physics major, active theatre patron and practitioner.
2) Isabel DoCampo – International Relations major, active theatre patron and practitioner.
3) Scott Vierick – History and Government major, active theatre patron and practitioner.
4) Alice Perrin – Physics major, limited exposure to theatre.
5) Alex Granato – Anthropology major, improvisational theatre practitioner, active theatre patron.
6) Ethan Blonder – Marketing major with Economics minor, limited exposure to theatre. Only saw Act 1.

William & Mary being a well-rounded liberal arts institution, it was understandably nigh on impossible to find interviewees with exactly no exposure to either the content of the play or theatre as a whole, but the range of exposures served its purpose well.

I did most of my interviews before I received the students’ reviews. I did my best in the interviews to coax out any negative aspects of the show. I wanted to find things that the interviewees did not understand or took them out of the moment, anything that detracted from their enjoyment or understanding. They all had critiques, but their responses were glowingly positive. The harsh critiques of the written reviews help to better understand the pitfalls of the postdramatic presentation attempted, while the positive is a good reinforcement of what we did right. As with the content of the play,
though we cannot hope to fully understand exactly what the effect of our actions was, the nearest way is through multiple perspectives, good or bad.

By and large, these six interviewees immensely enjoyed the show. Though enjoyment is not specifically a postdramatic feature, not enjoying the show would translate to not engaging in the show and thus the inability to see the multi-perspectival picture presented. Jordan Leek said, “As a physics major, it tied everything together so well.” Isabel DoCampo concluded, after much deliberation trying to remember an in-elevator theory she had post-show, “I did extract some greater meaning from all of it.” The fact of audience members not just enjoying the show, but finding some ultimate conclusion suggests engagement with the text, with the whole picture, and not just with the progression of the narrative.

The interviewees pointed out many of the same problems and successes addressed in the reviews. All of them had something to say about the lights, and most of them were both positive and negative. As Scott Vierick said, “There were a few moments where I didn’t quite understand why the lighting changed,” but, “I’m glad it was there. Otherwise I think I would have just assumed that it was all taking place in limbo.” The delineation between spaces was necessary to create the collage and not just portray this text as some linear progression where the characters reenact or discuss events from a stationary point. It was confusing at times, but was a necessary element. As Vierick added later on, “It never got to a point where I didn’t know what was going on.”

106 Ibid.
The lights definitely were again the most contested technical element of the show. They simultaneously sparked confusion, yet were necessary for the designation of worlds. Our hope was that the stark contrast between the two would stick with the audience fairly quickly. As exclusively amber toned lights were used for 1941 while exclusively cool tones were used for the afterlife, we hoped that the changes would be distinct enough for color and direction of light to be recognizable signifiers of location. These palates being set, then, we attempted to combine and muddle them in meaningful ways. We would mix them when the actors were attempting a thought experiment about what could have happened in the evening in the midst of a draft. We would distort the definition of location as motives of the evening became clearer. We tried to do so deliberately and at points we found where it would make sense for more of one color or the other to be on, shifts to take place, and uncertainty to be present.

The best laid plans often go awry, however, and this one clearly did. The lighting changes frustrated and confused the audience as they looked for a reason for a cue and were not able to find the reason we set the cue. Fewer, distinct, meaningful changes could possibly have expressed our intent more clearly. Unfortunately, our implementation of this idea fell short.

Little was expressed of the sound design. Some interviewees had forgotten there even was music in the show or remembered it and could not tie it to a specific moment or remember their opinions about it. It was minimally implemented and generally served to create the tie to personal memory that emphasizes a connection to perspective. In Heisenberg’s longer monologues or more heated moments, because music was indelibly tied to his memory, we brought hints of music in over the text. This was to bring the
audience further into his personal memory, into his perspective. This sort of sporadic incorporation of music, however, “wasn’t,” as Vierick said, “really something that I could connect thematically.”107 Others echoed his thoughts, with Ethan Blonder saying, “Sometimes I thought it was strange…It didn’t feel as natural to me.”108 It did not seem that this effort to develop Heisenberg’s personal perspective was detrimental to understanding, however. When asked if there was anything at all that particularly hindered her understanding of the show, Leek responded that “I can’t think of anything that didn’t seem like it was meant to be there.”109 Alex Granato110 even went so far as to say that the musical underscores helped to add emotional weight to dramatically and intellectually difficult monologues in the show. Heightening the drama of moments was hardly the main goal of the sound design, however. Though a thematically and historically interesting facet of the show, the kindest thing said about the music’s meaningful place in the production was Alice Perrin saying, “I wasn’t really sure what to make of it. I certainly didn’t mind it.”111

The set was much better received. As mentioned before, Copenhagen is most often performed in a very abstract, minimalistic space. The space we created strived to create a more familiar, accessible space to relate to the characters. As Vierick said, “It definitely established the characters as real people…established a human aspect that allowed you to connect with them more.”112 Instead of cutting them off from reality and placing the actors in a cold space of abstraction, the inclusion of Art Deco furniture, of

107 Ibid.
109 Leek, Jordan.
112 Vierick, Scott.
the Copenhagen cityscape, of drinks and tables “allowed you to tie these characters that are dead to their past.”\textsuperscript{113} Again, this brings back the personal memory integral to postdramatic characters. A minimalist set would exclude the context of their memory, clouding and distancing us from the perspective of the characters. All of the interviewees said how \textit{Copenhagen} comes off as a very human play, and the context of place, reminding us of the characters’ real past helped to express that. “It is a play about ideas,” said Vierick, “but it also has this very strong human element to it,”\textsuperscript{114} and a purely minimalistic, abstract setting would ignore that humanity.

Another commonly discussed and well received aspect of the set by the interviewees was the barrier of paper around the playing space. Leek said, “I really enjoyed the boundary...It showed that this was a space that said it was delegated. This is where things are going to happen.”\textsuperscript{115} As said, the delegation of space for an expression of perpetual presence was important. The idea that this was a place where events were going to occur for consideration was important. The theatre was not just an environment in which a story could play out, it was a delegated space for the purpose of presenting a picture. Alex Granato referenced the disruption between actor and audience, saying that the barrier served as “…this sort of demarcation between the actors and the audience themselves. And it felt like you had put them in this little ring and they were at the center of their own little atom.”\textsuperscript{116} The distance is important for the production to be viewed as whole, and not just a ride. The feeling of it being an observable atom, of the unfolding of

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{115} Leek, Jordan.
\textsuperscript{116} Granato, Alex.
an experiment occurring before the audience, of which they could observe and report on the results, was paramount for the multi-perspectival image to take shape.

We would be remiss not to mention the qualms expressed about the door. The taunting of the door was briefly mentioned in one of the reviews, but the interviewees had more to say about it. The purpose was, again, to have a physical representation of uncertainty; it was a reminder of the limitation of the characters’ knowledge to this space bound by their memory and knowledge as represented by the barrier and the action taking place within it. This, unfortunately, did not translate to the audience. The most positive reaction was starkly neutral from Granato, who said that she did not even remember noticing that there was a door.\textsuperscript{117} Vierick was also fairly kind, saying it did not irk him while watching the show or detract from any particular moments. “I saw it and asked, ‘What’s the door for?’ Then at the end of the play I asked, ‘What was that door for?’”\textsuperscript{118} Others went so far as to say it was distracting, disruptive, confusing, and detracted from the unity of the space. It was, clearly, the outlier of the space presented that could and should have been done without.

We have said that tableaux and stage pictures are an important feature of the postdramatic stage, as these moments express a specific picture to contribute to the ultimate collage. Leek, as a physicist, particularly noted the scenes where the characters’ movements mimicked the movements of subatomic particles in an atom. “To be able to see it made the concepts easier to understand as well.”\textsuperscript{119} \textit{Copenhagen} constantly uses metaphor to explain physics, and then turns the physics back into metaphor to explain

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{118} Vierick, Scott.
\textsuperscript{119} Leek, Jordan.
humanity. The recognition of using the characters as subatomic particles to demonstrate concepts such as uncertainty must have suggested the implications of these concepts on the individuals themselves by this paradigm. If a subatomic particle is observed, it is affected by the observer, just as humans are affected by observation. One can only know so much about two complementary features of a particle, what such complementary features exist in humanity? Tableaux assigning the characters as subatomic particles within this space must have inspired such questions in the observers.

Others had similar comments about the tableaux, stage pictures, and blocking in general. They thought it seemed purposeful and meaningful, though they could not always parse out the meaning. The most acknowledged feature of this purposeful staging was absolutely the atomic blocking, as it helped inform and reflect the content of the show. The one qualm with the blocking that was mentioned a few times was whenever Bohr and Heisenberg would leave the house to take their walk. The two would wander slowly around the periphery of the playing space, have their collision of morality, and return. The walk was not supposed to be representative of real space, time, speed or any such thing. It simply was to present the image of a walk. DoCampo returned multiple times to her dislike for it, however, saying that it was the most jarring part of the show to her. “The walking was awkward. The stroll....The walking was awkward, if you want to put that in your thesis.” Blonder suggested that it was possible that it was a limitation of playing space. He said that the walk may have been easier to reconcile with the space if the pair could have had slightly more room between where they walked around upstage and the area designated as “inside” the Bohr’s house. Other than DoCampo’s

120 DoCampo, Isabel.
lamentations, though, the stroll of the physicists seemed to be perturbing to some, but not an insurmountable pitfall of the show.

A couple of the subjects briefly touched upon the repetitive nature of certain aspects of the show. Repetition is, of course, a profound part of the postdramatic stage and a particularly integral point in *Copenhagen*. Granato expressed her gratitude for it, saying, “The repetition really does help….To have the script itself recognize that rhythm and repetition are sometimes necessary to understand abstract concepts was really useful.”\(^{121}\) The larger repetitive forms of the play like the repeated drafts and revisiting of scientific concepts was not the end of it. The smaller, more decisive repetitions had affected the audience as well. Multiple interviewees mentioned a mannerism that Gaston had developed for Bohr due to the slight paunch we gave him. Every time he sat down, he would undo the button on his jacket, and every time he stood up he would button it up. Of course, this is mostly a practical matter, as for a man with a gut like that it would only be comfortable to have his jacket unbuttoned as he sat. However, as we acknowledged of repetition before, subtle differences are more noticeable in repeated forms. Even in the smallest of forms, emotion, the effects of a moment, and any number of other external factors can affect it. This affectation is then observed by the audience as a difference in a repeated form. In the repetition of both small and large forms, we refocus the audience’s attention to not *what* is happening, but *why* and *how*. These differences, then, inform us of the changes the characters and certain moments in the repeated evening in 1941 undergo as their perception shifts.

\(^{121}\) Granato, Alex.
The characters were much better received by the interviewees than the reviewers. Though individuals had qualms with characters, saying this one was annoying or they disliked the other, the understanding of each individual’s perspective was fairly universal. Leek said that at points in the show she disliked all of the characters, with her opinions of each fluctuating as more information was disclosed. However, “As the story went on and you began to see more of each character’s point of view and why they’re doing things.” Eventually, she was able to contemplate each individual’s perspective and concluded, “Seeing their points of view, I was thinking ‘Oh. They’re both right.’”

The narration was also briefly touched on as a link to the audience, allowing the characters’ individual perspectives to be directly expressed. It is a simple mechanism that serves its purpose well and exclusively as it is supposed to. A character can hardly talk directly to an audience without the audience being aware that they are receiving a direct line to the character’s perspective.

Margrethe was often singled out as a profound character, as she could easily have fallen by the wayside. Here we see two eminent, brilliant physicists and one of their wives. While the two men clearly command attention and respect, she easily could have been a shadow in the play. However, she shouldered her way to the foreground, expressed ideas, and contributed to the battle of perspectives. Her perspective was appreciated because of her candor and power.

Leek’s comments about the development of perspective throughout the play were heartening. The show ultimately concluded in an ambiguous stalemate. Even if the

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122 Leek, Jordan.
audiences favor wavered over the course of the play, even if they disliked a character at times, the character retained enough sympathy and significance to be heard and reach a multi-perspectival conclusion. This developed to a point where at the end of the show, as Granato said, “I didn’t feel like I had missed something, I feel like I had gotten to a place where the conclusion was ambiguity.”

When asked what they ultimately took away from the show, the responses were startlingly profound. Interviewees discussed perspective and the limitation thereof, concluding that “We’ll never truly know what happened in the show.” They discussed the effect of one’s perspective on another’s, with DoCampo saying that “…for so much of it they are talking about how you can really never see yourself until you’re reflected in someone else.” The interviewees not only receiving and understanding, but accepting each character’s perspective was evident. They all concluded that by the end of the show they were up in the air and could not draw a conclusion as to who was right or wrong, extrapolating even to say that precisely that is the point. As Vierick said near the conclusion of his interview, “It’s a debate I think society should have with itself, going into it with the thought that we’re never really going to have a clear answer to this. And that’s okay.”

Culminating Thoughts

The response to our performance was a largely positive one. There were many indications from the surveys and the interviews that much of the audience intellectually engaged in the show and understood the multi-perspectival, intentionally ambiguous

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123 Granato, Alex.
124 Leek, Jordan.
125 DoCampo, Isabel.
conclusion of the play. Even those who did not seem to explicitly understand this enjoyed and took something away from the show, and may have felt the uncertainty without being able to pinpoint exactly how it arose. Of course, there will always be those who did not enjoy or understand, as is the case with anything.

Leading questions to ask about particular postdramatic features, I felt, would be dishonest and ask more what the subjects opinions of my thoughts were, rather than how the show affected them. It is difficult to say exactly how well the multi-perspectival, complete collage came across to the audience, but most people seemed sympathetic to all characters by the end of the play. This is indicative of some understanding that we conclude in a place where each perspective is on an equal standing. They are irreconcilable, ultimately uncertain, but no less equal. All technical, directorial, and acting choices were to contribute to that end: for the audience to understand that there is no conclusive answer, even through the understanding of all perspectives. Despite criticisms of different features of the production, despite facets of our production clearly falling short of attaining or even assisting that goal, it seems that we were able to convey this message to the audience by means of our postdramatic presentation.
Conclusion

**Bohr:** Darkness. Total and final darkness.

**Heisenberg:** Even the questions that haunt us will at last be extinguished. Even the ghosts will die.

- Michael Frayn, *Copenhagen* (79)

What can we determine? If we learned anything, the answer is nothing.

My aim was to portray *Copenhagen* in such a way as to equally convey all perspectives for consideration. The means by which we attempted this was a postdramatic staging wherein we space, time, and standard theatrical convention were altered in such a way as to present multiple perspectives simultaneously. This collage of perception was to be presented to the audience for consideration, resulting in the ultimate conclusion of uncertainty. Is such a multi-perspectival portrayal possible? Did we get there?

The production was tremendously successful. Two of four shows sold out, with a third close behind. Friends recommended the show to friends, people who rarely or never saw live theatre came out, and the show was largely enjoyed.

*Copenhagen* is a complex script about complex matters. We did our best to tackle these issues, with a fairly high degree of success. While one cannot separate the impact of the show from the impressiveness of the script, our portrayal of the text was successful in bringing the show to a close in which the perspectives of the characters were all equally accepted by an audience. The conclusion of ultimate and unrelenting uncertainty
is unacceptable unless we believe that all perspectives are equal and all perspectives are equally limited at the close of the play. This is the only satisfaction attainable.

No responses, reviews, interviews, passing comments, or eavesdropping told me that someone left the show feeling like there was something missing from the conclusion. Nobody left the show feeling as if they had been cheated out of catharsis or had missed the final point. To varying levels of understanding, they accepted that the show culminates in the same indeterminacy that the subdivision of matter does; there is an inherent and unavoidable uncertainty to all things.

In this way, I believe we did get there. We must have, on some level, achieved a multi-perspectival portrayal of Copenhagen to an audience for it to have felt complete when it ends in such an unsettlingly non-final place. The final draft is not completely correct, they have not decided exactly what happened or why, nothing has been resolved except for the tensions between the characters.

Again, it would be a fallacy for any theatre practitioner to believe Copenhagen is a play about science or history. It is an intensely human play, with human ramifications. To know that one cannot know, to understand that understanding is limited is part of our position in the universe. We cannot see all things. We cannot know where we are and where we are going, nor can we know precisely where we came from. All things are imprecise probabilities realized along a certain path, the precise reality of which is just out of our grasp. The human quality of this play is why the resolution is not in the completion of the plot. It reads like a mystery, but we do not end with a solved case. It is a human play that resolves because the humans resolve.
The production had its faults, to be sure. The actors did not, by any means, deliver perfect professional reads of the script. Part of the pitfalls of the performance fall on the shoulders of the director, and I happily share the blame. There was some cloudiness of understanding of the scientific concepts even for the actors. Issues with volume, upstaging, and characterization were brought up in responses. For whatever shortcomings there were, however, there were far more successes. Despite issues, the three actors maintained an audience’s engagement for two and a half hours’ worth of not only esoteric scientific discourse, but repetative esoteric scientific discourse. They earned and kept sympathy and alliance from the audience such that the audience was able to have a satisfying conclusion to the show. They were not perfect, but nothing can be so exact.

In terms of the technical elements, we tried to send too many messages. This mixed and muddled and confused as badly as our lights did as the show progressed. If I were to attempt this show again, I would focus efforts on a few key items, rather than spreading our efforts so wide. Largely, I believe our pitfalls were technical. Choosing specific messages to concretize in our concept and express clearly will give a better understanding of multiple perspectives than loosely muddling lights to express the limitation of knowledge, for example. A unified set that serves to express the personal memory of the characters while segregating historical context and abstracting place is possible without force-feeding the audience expressions of a world beyond by placing an unused door on stage. Music can be powerful when utilized carefully and with a clear intent. The technical conception of this production is provocative on paper; in practice, it is busy, jarring, and distracting. Again, I take blame for the distracted inclusion of too
many good ideas. I will take this moment to blame having a menagerie of phenomenal ideas with which to clutter the show on having a team solely comprised of brilliant designers. *Copenhagen* is not about gaud. It is not about flash or panache. Simplicity serves to convey the uncertain, because it is inherent to our world.

Though dead and indeterminate, Heisenberg, Bohr, and Margrethe speak to us with presence and determination. The play does not end lamenting the existential woes of a world dark, lost, and uncertain. Rather, we embrace this idea. We embrace the infinite potential in the final abyss of the unknowable. We dream and hope and continue on. *Copenhagen* is not a condemnation of perception; it does not tell you that you know nothing. The specters speak to us and say, despite the infinite chaos, despite the unrelenting uncertainty, despite the terrifying inefficacy of our perception, the monsters can be tamed.
Appendix A: Audience Surveys

Preshow survey - circle what best applies:

Why did you come see Copenhagen?

A. Interest in the theatre  
B. Interest in the science  
C. Both equally  
D. Friend involved  
E. Other, please specify:

How often do you see live theatre?

A. Often  
B. Sometimes  
C. Rarely  
D. This is actually my first show

Align yourself with one of these two lines from the show:

“Mathematics is sense! That’s what sense is!”  
“Everything is personal!”

Postshow survey – after seeing the show, react to the following:
(We accept sentences, haikus, pictograms, emoticons, etc.)

“Man is the measure of all things.”

Anything else you’d like to share? Questions, comments, concerns, thoughts, jokes, stories?
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