



CONSTRUCTING SHORT NARRATIVES - L2

THE SLAUSON R.C. THEATER SCHOOL - CONSTRUCTING SHORT NARRATIVES - L2

The Instruction of Moisés Kaufman
Pared & Adapted by Shia Labeouf

When creating a new play, we spend our early rehearsals making moments exploring the subject matter & the hunch that got us in the room. As we explore theatrically, we are always aware of the conversation between what the story is & how it wants to be told onstage.

As the work progresses, we begin to make richer, longer moments & also start to string together moments we already made to construct short sequences. This process of sequencing moments together to tell stories is what we focus on in L2.

1 • Sequence Existing Moments - L2

What: Perform three moments from L1 sequentially in time. One moment happens full, then the next moment happens in full, and so on.

How:

1. Take any three moments from L1 & sequence them in a specific order. Then make an interpretive analysis of the narrative that emerges.
2. Take the same three moments & sequence them in a different way. Then make an interpretive analysis of the narrative that emerges. How is it different from the first one?
3. Select a moment from another group & add it to your sequence. (Or replace a moment in your sequence with someone else's moment.) What has happened to the narrative now?

Why: When working on a piece, there's a multitude of reasons why we choose to order moments in a specific way. In the majority of contemporary plays, decisions about plot usually have to do with character, conflict & resolution. Drama. Good Actors think about not only drama, but structure. We need to think about the way moments are linked together.

2 • Layer Two Moments - L2

When we combine moments, whether we layer or sequence them, we are always trying to make a narrative more complex, tell new parts of the story, or subvert the audience's understanding of a scene.

What: Layer two separate moments from L1 into a coherent whole.

How:

1. Choose two of the moments you created in L1. Try layering them one specific way, choosing carefully the exact instant when the second moment overlaps the first. perform an interpretive analysis of the resulting narrative.
2. Using the same two moments, change the placement of the layers moment. How does that change the narrative?
3. Still using the same two moments, reverse the order & layer the first moment onto the second moment. How does that change the narrative & the experience of the result?

Why: We need to understand how an audience creates narrative & how our sequencing of moments affects that.

3 • Contextualize a Sequence - L2

What is Context: An approach that allows us to define or redefine the audiences understanding of a moment or a story.

How: Choose one of the sequences you've made with moments from L1. Make a new moment that contextualizes the sequence & alters our experience of it.

Why: Context can change our assumptions about moments. Alter our experience entirely or ground something in authenticity. Context is hard to define but for us moment makers it is to be understood as simply: It instructs the audience to listen for particular things more carefully.

4 • Use Structuring Tools W/a Short Obituary or News Item - L2

What: After participants have had an opportunity to try their hand at the three main approaches to phrase construction. We go back to the obituary.

How: Form groups of four or five participants. Ask each group to make a series of moments inspired by the obituary & sequence them together.

Why: The fact that the overarching narrative is an obituary. Frees participants to focus on the structure & theatricality of their short narratives.

5 • Sequence Breakdown from the Obituary of James Tishman - L2

Obituary: December 4, 2018... On Tuesday evening at 5:05, James Tishman - known worldwide only as J.T., to protect his privacy, died of respiratory failure at a nursing home in Pacoima, CA. His death was confirmed by Suzanne Corkin, a neuroscientist who had worked closely with him for decades. James Tishman was 82. When Mr. Tishman, at 9 years old banged his head hard after being hit by a bicycle rider in his neighborhood near Sunland, scientist had no way to see inside his brain. After the accident he began having severe & frequent seizures. They could not explain why the boy had seizures after the accident, or even whether the blow to the head had anything to do with it. In 1953 he underwent an experimental brain operation in Sunland to correct his seizure disorder, only to emerge from it fundamentally & irreparably changed. He developed a syndrome neurologists call profound amnesia. He had lost the ability to form new memories. "he was like a family member," said Dr. Corkin, who is at work on a book on J.T., titled "A Lifetime Without Memory." "You'd think it would be impossible to have a relationship with someone who doesn't recognize you, but I did." "He was a very gracious man, very patient, always willing to try these tasks I would give him," Dr. Milner, A professor of cognitive research at Montreal Neurological Institute & McGill University, said in a recent interview. "And yet every time I walked in the room, it was like we'd never met. Participants made a total of six moments based on this material. Moment makers used materials that were in the room, such as bicycle, a flash light, a lab coat & other costume pieces & a table. They also had a prop brain & sound cues selected & ready to play from a smart phone plugged into an amp. One participant stayed offstage to manipulate sound & lights. The resulting moments were presented as a sequence:

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We begin.

Moment 1 - The Brain: A performer wearing a lab coat walks onstage holding a model of a brain. He sets it down on a table, takes a flash light out of his pocket, turns on & starts studying the model.

Moment 2 - The Bicycle, Layered Onto Moment 1: As soon as the flashlight is turned on, a young man enters on a bicycle & rides around in circles around the doctor studying the brain. Continuing from moment1, the actor in the lab coat peers closely at the brain as says to it, "He was a very gracious man, very patient, always willing to try these tasks I would give him."

Moment 3 - The Accident: The sound of a collision is heard, lights go out. In the dark, the actor sets it down with the wheels twisted at odd angles. He places himself on the ground several feet away, as if thrown from the bike. The lights come back on revealing the cyclist holding his elbow as if hurt. He stares at a point in front of him with his mouth open, eyebrows furrowed. The sound of an ambulance is heard. The volume starts low but steadily increases.

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5 • Sequence Breakdown from the Obituary of James Tishman - L2

Moment 4 - A Family Member: The ambulance sound cue reaches max volume & then cuts out abruptly. The actor in the lab coat says to the audience “He was like a family member. You’d think it would be impossible to have a relationship with someone who didn’t recognize you, but I did.”

Moment 5 - The Sidewalk: The man with the bicycle gets up from the floor & exits. Another man enters & stands silently, center stage. Then a performer wearing hospital scrubs enters & stands with the actor in the lab coat. These two actors help the silent actor change into pajamas. The actor in the hospital scrubs says “When Mr. Tishman was 9 years old, He was hit by a bicycle rider in his neighborhood & banged his head on the sidewalk. After the accident, he began having severe & frequent seizures.”

Moment 6 - Seizures: The same three actors walk over to the brain. They speak the following lines of text while they look at the brain. [SCRUBS]: “In 1953, he underwent an experimental brain operation to stop the seizures.” [PAJAMAS]: “Unfortunately, the surgery caused profound amnesia, leaving him un able to form new memories.” [LAB-COAT]: “Every time I walked in the room, it was like we’d never met”

We end.

When this group went to prop storage. The brain they found inspired them to create a moment. that would communicate something about J.T. In other words, finding the prop allowed the participants to dream about how to tell the story. The prop helped them write performance, which is different from using only the written text as a point of departure. Here the prop triggers & ensures a theatrical narrative.

5A • Interpretive Analysis from the Obituary of James Tishman - L2

This sequence presumes that the audience hasn’t era the obituary. So the first moment, when a man entered with a human brain, immediately presented story questions. Who is the man? Why is he carrying the model? Why is he interested in it? The sequence did not reply to any of the questions right away. It withheld information by letting the audience see the brain without knowing the man holding it.

Moment 2 is layered over Moment 1. A man on a bicycle entered while the doctor was looking at the brain. Here there was an automatic tension. What is the relationship between these two events & these two characters? When the doctor said: “He was a very gracious man, very patient, always willing to try these tasks I would give him” We were led to believe that the doctor might be talking about the cyclist, but it wasn’t entirely clear. We also wondered how the model brain was related to the man the doctor spoke about.

In Moment 3 we heard the crash & the ambulance - A ticking time bomb. Something bad had happened & we want to know what it was & what the repercussions are.

When in Moment 4, the doctor said “He was like a family member. You’d think it would be impossible to have a relationship with someone who didn’t recognize you, but I did.” We began to put the story together. The person in the crash was the person the doctor spoke about. Maybe the accident left him with amnesia? Was he the cyclist?

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5A • Interpretive Analysis from the Obituary of James Tishman - L2

This was confirmed in Moment 5 & 6 when we found out what the accident was & what happened to the boy, but we still don't know how exactly the surgery caused the amnesia or how he survived so long with it. The sequence ended w/out answering those questions. We perceived the narrative & the intentional un-answered questions - mostly as the performers anticipated. But there was one exception. She assumed the person on the bike was the person with amnesia. This told the moment makers that they either needed to sketch additional moments or rework the existing moments to make clear that J.T. was hit by the bike, not riding it.

6 • Make a Sequence from a Predetermined Theme - L2

As a group, pick a theme before the end of class, then throughout the week, research as much as you can on the theme. On your own time, fill out this questionnaire:

1. What was the most interesting thing you learned about *theme*?
2. Which *theme* behavior did you find most striking? Why?
3. Have you ever *theme*?
4. How? From where to where? In what way?
5. What was your experience when you *theme*?
6. What did you lose?
7. What did you gain?
8. How did you adapt?

What: Build Moments from the theme.

How: You should now have two sources. Your research & your filled out questionnaire. Go around the room sharing from both sources until everyone has shared what they came away with. From these we start creating moments.

Why: We have worked with obituaries. A narrative w/ a beginning, middle & end. But working from a general theme presents a different challenge - there is no existing story at the center of the hunch. So how do we make structural decisions? How does a narrative, compete w/ theatrical & dramatic tension emerge?

As we move on to L3, we continue to use these structuring tools within the framework of an overarching organizing principle. That principle determines how each moment or sequence serves a longer narrative.

Continue onto L3 - Creating a Piece.