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Homburg—*Dramaturg's Journal*—The Biography of a Production

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Introduction/the *mise en scène*

This *Journal* was born digital, and is a work in progress, as well as a work in (and about) *process*.

It was inspired by the request of director Jorge Cacheiro that I serve as dramaturg for *Homburg*, JC's new adaptation of *The Prince of Homburg* by the German author Heinrich von Kleist (1777-1811). I decided to keep track of the show from the moment it entered my life as a responsibility and challenge on October 8, 2008, through its world premiere opening and run at the MSU Kasser Theater, March 10-15, 2009.

The Journal speaks for itself. But I will say that part of its "charm" seems to derive from the gradual unfolding of my awareness of exactly I was being drawn into—a separate (un)reality, another world—the intricate methodology of theatrical production.

Heinrich von Kleist—dramatist, essayist, erstwhile journalist—was a quintessential Romantic figure. Born into an aristocratic Prussian family with a tradition of military service, he lost both his parents by the age of fifteen. Through Kleist's mercurial, unhappy career, he fervently yearned for a *Lebensplan* ("life plan") but instead became a hectic and inveterate wanderer and oft-thwarted

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author, given to debilitating anxieties and serially-destructive quarrels with friends. His literary pretensions were openly scorned by his idol, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Kleist engaged in several ill-fated and unconsummated epistolary love affairs until, at thirty-four, less than five months after completing his final work, *The Prince of Homburg,* he finally found a woman devoted enough to commit suicide with him on the banks of the Wannsee River outside Berlin.

The Prince of Homburg—unpublished at the author's death—serves as the basis for Cacheiro's *Homburg.* It is the story of an impetuous, Hamlet-like Prussian cavalry officer who has chronic difficulty choosing between the rigors of service and the allure of dreams—his own and others'. As the play opens, Prince Friedrich "awakens" under a tree away from the battlefield, into a setting that may or may not be a dream. The drama itself often reads as an overheated manifestation of Kleist's imagination rather than a version of the historical account upon which it was based, the June 18, 1675, battle of Fehrbellin. The Prince is set adrift into a complex of relationships that test his mettle: with Hohenzollern, his duplicitous and manipulative friend; the Elector of Brandenburg, imperious monarch and commander, and his empathic wife, the Electress; and the willowy, passionate Princess Natalie, Homburg's cousin. Conflicts of the head and heart arise from the first moments of the play and persist until the ambiguous conclusion. Does the Prince serve the state, or is his legitimate allegiance to his love? Is he guilty of the crime to which he has been condemned to death, or a victim of circumstance? Is he a dilatory scribbler with his head in the clouds, or a martyred, conscience-wracked, existential hero?

Part I: Pre-concept through the eve of the first production meeting

10/8—First formally set-up meeting with Jorge Cacheiro to talk about the show—outside at the cafe. He dwelled preponderantly in the world of the conceptual—words like "performance art," "ephemeral," "layers of perception," "improvisational space," "nothing is really clear," "who is Homburg?" and "who is Kleist, for that matter?"—he says he is looking to create "a metaphor for theatre" and since the only work of his I have seen was *Suburbia* I will magnanimously be forgiven for any misconstruing because that was an "anomaly." He says he wants to return to a "paratheatrical creation" that exudes an "experimental/existential" aura. He speaks of lights being dragged across the stage rather than a fixed grid; of a floor made of paper so that it will be "ripped up" as the play goes along. He is emphatic that he does *not* want any kind of essay or program note or formal critique from me. He is willing to do a talkback for the cast at which I would be the interlocutor. All of this is perfectly fine with me, I say, and I mean it. I feel like a blank slate with respect to JC's ideas and I am secretly pleased to feel this way and

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to simply bring my sensibility to bear. Callbacks are 12/13, rehearsals start 1/19 and we open 3/10.

11/13—JC asked me to find "texts" from the Kleist play and from his letters, and from Christa Wolf's novel, *No Place on Earth*. We spent a hurried fifteen minutes in my office talking about Kafka [The Trial], Kant [dialectic], Wagner [bombastic music], and other German cultural matters of mutual interest. Also discussed uplighting downstage toy soldiers to cast huge shadows. I sent him the link to the Metropolitan Museum exhibition with the Levinthal cibachromes of toy soldiers. JC's imagination is scattered all over the place, *deliberately* unfocused, it seems to me, as if he is trying to be smilingly provocative—not in a self conscious way, just his natural inclination to get me thinking, which is also fine with me for now, although I really don't need all that much incentivizing. My major concern is not to overstep my boundaries as so-called dramaturg although JC does not have any (obvious, excessive) proprietary feelings about the show—as of now, that is. I know he has also met and talked with Erhard Rom about the set but I have no idea what they discussed. In general, there is a conceptual air about the piece—let it happen and go along for the ride; but at the same time you have to *do* something on the ride, and that "something" is coalescing in JC's imagination. It's an interesting M.O. which I can live with—freedom within unstated constraints.

11/14—Another impromptu "corridor"/on the run meeting with JC. This time as a result of my sending him the toy soldier photographs he launched into a quasi-improvisational description of the stage floorboards exploding upward and blossoming out as if a bomb had been dropped thereon. I had been digging more deeply into Kleist's writings and asked JC if he would admit Kleist's essays into the textual mix. At first he was hesitant, then said ok, we would lay everything out on the table and pick and choose. I said I would not get into the stories or the other plays, although the temptation was big—just branch out from the letters into some of the hard-edged themes of the essays. We talked sketchily about the actual Homburg character and who would be cast but I am not familiar with the names of many of the student-actors although I have seen the shows by now and could recognize the students by sight. [No matter, as it is not up to me.] It turns out that on some unconscious level I have turned to rereading Kafka and reading Brecht in the past couple of weeks and now it turns out that they both admired Kleist's work tremendously. One can see why. In the case of K. there is a sense of over-riding dread and the placelessness of place; in the case of B., the alienation of the audience and the didacticism of the theatre and the insistence upon the stage as needing to be expanded as a forum for action of many different and unexpected kinds.

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11/15—Woke up today thinking about the endless "journeying" of Kleist, his peripatetic, obligatory Romantic *wanderjahr* throughout continental Europe all the while resolving to be a writer, yet when you get down to it, his productive period really only spans five years. Everywhere he went, Kleist found it difficult to remain focused—and there is still debate to this day about what he *actually did do* in some of the places he went—i.e., was he a spy … or some such. Rather, for me, writing has always had to be sedentary. I have taken notebooks with me on trips and made "field notes" but the *real* writing always has to be in one specific spot, where I am right now, in my study at my desk in my own house. Even in the years before the computer, I never considered notes/jottings/on-site observations as "real" writing. I have always been very strict on this definition, so when people ask me how long it takes to "write" my books, I first explain the actual definition. It's going to be interesting to see, in this regard, how JC handles the conflation between Kleist/Homburg—insofar as every author has elements of himself in every character he creates. *Madame Bovary, c'est moi*. Stephen Dedalus/James Joyce, etc. When you layer on top of that the emphasis on the dream-state in Homburg you end up with a work that is tissue-layered, ambiguous…

11/16—email to JC—just so we are on the same page—I am referencing the Kleist *Selected Writings* superbly edited by David Constantine—Hackett Publishing Co., Indianapolis and Cambridge, paperback 1997, 2004. I also ordered another book of letters and essays edited by Philip B. Miller called *An Abyss Deep Enough*—will send the particulars soon.

The Constantine preface is brilliant & I urge you to read it & his translation of the play is gorgeous.

The letters here are so aphoristic as to defy excerpting—you cannot go wrong with any of them on pp. 416-427—they are all about the tensions between controlling oneself from within and existing as if a marionette worked by fate; the indecisiveness of hovering between truth and falsity and not being able to discern which is which; the infinite number of ways that doubt invades our every thought. Talk of death is constant. I read someplace—perhaps you have heard this—that for the last decade of his life K. asked several people to commit suicide with him. I also see his exquisite solitude even when in the company of others—the Sartrean "hell is other people." And of course that romantic conviction that his sadness is of a higher order than anybody else's.

Talk to you soon. NB

11/17—Leafing through the new Metropolitan Museum of Art *Bulletin*, a selection of recent acquisitions, I come to *Wanderer in the Storm* (1835), a small oil by Carl Julius von Leypold. It's as if the Romantic era is finding me again while I am going more deeply into Kleist. "A lone man in a fluttering black cape, boots,

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and blue pants walks through an autumnal, storm-swept landscape," writes curator Sabine Rewald in her accompanying note. "The figure of the lonely wanderer in untamed nature as a personification of restless yearning was beloved by the German Romantics," she continues. Indeed, in my own continuing and willful conflation of Kleist and Homburg, both inhabit a dreamscape-landscape. In the case of the former, he literally roams the length and breadth of Europe on an undefined mission—supposedly to "become a writer." In the case of the latter, his somnolence takes us immediately to unresponsive silence when the Elector, Hohenzollern and others try to communicate with him. One can only hazard a guess at what is going through the mind of the Wanderer and the mind of Homburg—an inner journey that mirrors the (metaphorical) outer one. If we could cross over the boundary of the Homburg text and penetrate the unconscious of Homburg asleep under the tree, what would we find there? Part of the allure is the not-knowing—an effective dramatic device that draws us immediately into the action of the play.

11/18—Came across this great quote from Tim Sanford, Artistic Director, Playwrights Horizons, that really resonates as I embark upon this new adventure: "Only a careful reading of a dramatic text can make it come alive . . . It is my background in critical theory that has provided the foundation for how I read. All of the key questions of [wrong term/literary management]—the definition of style, the relation of form and content, and the relation between writer and reader or audience—stand at the center of literary and dramatic theory. So while [again—literary manager—*not* the right term for what I want to do] needs a range of theatrical experience to assess a writer's voice, craft, evolution and importance, a foundation in critical discourse can help put these qualities in perspective … The ability to analyze plays intellectually and historically does not preclude the ability to respond to them emotionally and subjectively. Theory is analogous to craft for the artist." Indeed. As I said earlier, and as I discussed with SK the other evening, I have no interest in "literary management." I am more interested in watching the drama unfold from the outside and in the case of Homburg [as I was explicitly asked by JC] to provide texts and other stimuli—but in the end, at least the way I feel now, it doesn't matter to me what the play is; rather, the application of a sensibility to the work in such a way that illumination is provided.

11/19—I want to make a note of this today as a marker to see if my reaction is premature further down the line. JC announced a production meeting for next Tuesday at 1 pm as "time is of the essence" for the show, and I teach at that time so will not be able to come. This goes to the function of the dramaturg and shows how ill-defined it still is, i.e., apparently *not* obligatory for the initial production meeting (?), which JC had previously told me was important, as the concept would be set

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forth. Being a team player to my core, my initial reaction was annoyance at having to miss the meeting. Then I told myself that my "function" has many dimensions, some unstated and perhaps unknown—even to myself at this early date, so I should put this into a healthier perspective and not over-react. He is the director, after all, and the play is foremost in his mind now, and he has abandoned his purportedly "laid-back" attitude of just a few days ago, in deference to the encroachments of the play "only fifteen weeks away" and on the other side of a four-week Xmas break as well. I can empathize with that sense of time. So, as I said, I am just entering this response as a "flag" here in my journal, and will revisit it, once we are under way and thinking more about the meaning of my role as it evolves. Bottom line, though: I do favor the image of myself around the table *with the others.*

11/20—Act I—Homburg as Hamlet? The dilatory, preoccupied, abstracted, "dreaming" Prince, alone . . . observed from a distance by concerned friends who speculate about his "condition" . . . who seems "ill" and needs a doctor . . . yet how much of his behavior is feigned and how much "real?" . . . Is he a "Madman" as Hohenzollern says? Emotionally confused about the young woman, Natalie, who, by the way, was an ahistorical construct of the author . . . and she runs away from him even as she appreciates his attentions . . . "I lay down in her lap," Homburg says of the night/Natalie as [projected] seductress, as Hamlet asked Ophelia ["as fair a thought to lie between maid's legs"] when they were preparing to watch the play within the play . . . and again, we see Homburg "pencil and writing tablet in hand," as Hamlet had his "tables . . . meet I set it down." . . . and then there is his final monologue in Act I scene six explicitly [stage direction] delivered from "the front of the stage," with that same alchemy of resoluteness and speaking to the abstract air as the doomed Prince in Shakespeare's play. I'm sure there's going to be more of this but it certainly comes across in Act I.

11/21—Came across this observation from writer and dramaturg Maryanne Lynch: "Structure makes a work out of text—however text is defined—but structure itself is a work made out of context." I enjoy theoretical musings like this, but in the end, it's the *application* of theory that excites me and "makes" drama. At this stage in our "*devised*" production of *Homburg*—to use the Anglo buzzword I have seen of late in the English and Australian dramaturgy literature I have been reading—there is no real structure to go on, because the text is to be assembled. And our context is . . . well, I guess it is the setting likewise to be *devised*. The one thing we do know is that it is not the original, "sacred" narrative text. By this stipulation we are already making a statement. The importance of the dramaturg being there from the beginning is made ambiguous when the beginning itself has not been defined. All of this circularity is part of JC's exercise, to be resolved soon, so I should stop hypothesizing and wait.

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11/22—Beginning with the earliest teen-age and early 'twenties letters in the beautifully-edited collection, *An Abyss Deep Enough* and from the outset you can see the fissures in Kleist's "life plan"—the resolution (in writing) to make something of himself; and the reality that he does not know what to make of life, let alone of himself. He is constantly, poignantly taking a firm stand in the obligatory situations of his life and then in the next breath existentially questioning these positions. This omnipresent tug of war between his assurances and resolutions and the simultaneous questioning of the resolutions—no matter what "structure" the play takes in JC's hands I feel that this theme must be manifestly clear to the actors and the audience. There must be an excruciating dialectical tension in the air at all times—this ricocheting between two extremes, at times within the same sentence—it will be interesting to see how that is conveyed theatrically.

11/23—Another theme that moves to the surface as I go through the early letters, especially to K's beloved but distanced Wilhelmine, worshipped more often than not from afar, is this recurrent promise to "one day explain why" any number of his actions, thoughts, words, dreams. It's as if he holds her, and the world, at arm's length *in order to* achieve experience. I remember when I first became entranced by Romanticism while reading Wordsworth &etc. in college—it was because of this unrequited relationship between the sentient person and his world. Nature was—*is*, in Kleist's descriptions—"out there" for the sole purpose of putting him into a position to rhapsodize about it. In this regard I can see where JC is going when he talks about the stage as a huge bare, blank canvas. I picture the lone figure of Homburg at the center and I imagine all kinds of "projected" (in the best sense of that term) images all around, above, behind and beneath him—these images would need to be seen fleetingly, like sensations, rather than discernible pictures, sufficient to determine what they might be, but not too long in duration, in order to prevent the audience from lingering, i.e., thwarting the satisfaction of the audience in the same manner that H. must be thwarted. The same way with any musical accompaniment . . . I know I am now conflating H. and K. indiscriminately but perhaps this is a necessary pitfall.

11/24—I have finished the letters up to the time K. goes to Paris and the imminent "break" with Wilhelmina. I put that word in quotes because the relationship is so epistolary as to be verging upon abstract. There is also of late a condescending tone to the way he feels he must "teach" her how to perceive the world of phenomena which actually is more a construct of his imagination by now. The insistence upon staying in motion reminds me of what I have read so often about sharks who need to keep swimming. He would rather dwell within his mind while moving from place to place rather than pacing back and forth in his room and

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not seeing another person; yet, even in the realm of "Others" he describes his interaction with friends as being purely about satisfying his own mercurial sensations. He persists in describing an ideal domestic situation "with" Wilhelmina, in a house with a family and yet he is compelled to keep on the undefined path of his personal "*bildung*" to her exclusion until he has "found" whatever it is he is looking for so that he will be "ready" for her. What I would give to see her side of the correspondence where I am sure I would find repressed suffering and a desire to please that eventually would have to become worn out. So I have decided as of tomorrow to go back to the play for a while and try to finish that before returning to the letters and also to begin reading the Wolf novel—(which I know JC wants me to get into) as respite from K's mind and also to forestall becoming "angry" with him.

11/25—It's fascinating, and revealing, to read two totally conflicting reviews of February 2002 performances of the Royal Shakespeare Company production of *The Prince of Homburg.* Michael Billington of *The Guardian* revels in the way Kleist's play echoes the great dream-life tradition of Shakespeare, Calderon, Strindberg and Pirandello; and he finds the ambiguity "on the bare, raked stage" invigorating by virtue of being "susceptible to any number of possibilities." Whereas critic Kate Kellaway of *The Guardian*, writing two days later, complains that "the sense of what is real and what is dreamt is more frustrating than provocative." To her, this is no more than a "cold, existential exercise." So there you have it.

Tomorrow afternoon at 2:15 will be the first production meeting for the show. JC, Michael Allen, Erhard Rom, Ingrid Proos, myself, and others TBD will be there. Erhard told me yesterday that he has already been developing many ideas, sketches, etc., and has showed some of them to JC. He mentioned re-using the flats from an opera he designed. Am looking forward to seeing how these "visions" mesh.

Homburg Dramaturg's Journal Part II—From first production meeting through Christmas break

11/26—There we were around the long grey conference table, JC, Erhard, Michael, Ingrid, and me. David Lawson (sound) and Peter West (light) were not present; they have worked with JC before and he likes their work. As JC began to describe his "vision" of the show, I was struck yet again by the tension between "willful not-knowing where it's going to go," i.e., "not knowing how the play will end," Kleist as presenter and imaginer, a character in the play who is constructing the narrative, on "a journey of discovery from order to disorder," JC says, "as the

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work will get away from him … playing in the 'Romper Room' of his mind . . ."—all of this fluidity, "malleability" and flux—creation as the performance goes along—vs. Jorge's mental clarity (obvious to me, anyway) of precisely the opposite sense: that he, the deviser, has many explicit elements, intentionalities and effects already confirmed in his mind. This is the artifice of performance, during which, in real time in the theater, the audience will be made to believe that they are bearing witness to a play that is "feeling its way" when in actual fact it will be utterly pre-conceived.

Further promulgating the illusion of this [non-structural] structure will be the manipulative faculty of the Kleist character, in some instances manifested by his acting as a puppeteer playing with a miniature of the actual set, "conjuring up the play"—like a doll's house or diorama, moving toy figures around, "like a child playing with an imaginary friend," the *deus ex machina* in full view of the audience. I mentioned how much I liked the idea of this "foregrounded prop," and JC immediately corrected me—that actually K. might "pick it up and move it around" to another location on stage—so, even that artifice will not be securely fixed in place.

Ingrid had researched and brought in many images of costumes; Erhard presented some stunning evocations of Anselm Keifer ruined landscapes—detritus and chipped, torn plaster and debris strewn across expansive warehouse-like floor spaces, reminiscent of Mass MoCA or of Dia: Beacon—which I visited during the summer. The surreal juxtaposition of Prussian/Napoleonic regalia—tall shiny riding boots and plumed helmets and glittering swords and rearing, noble horses set against post-apocalyptic gloom and wreckage was, to my mind, a perfect way to begin discussing *the mise en scéne*. But once again, when I weighed in, I got a distinct "vibe" from JC—which conversations I was permitted to enter and which were off-limits, signalled in the way he turned his chair explicitly in ER's or IP's direction—they were on the other side of the table from Michael and me—JC alerting them to "separate one on one meetings" they would be having. JC clearly is the director in his forthright, didactic and emphatic manner and concomitant assumptions about others' behavior. This is a defined *persona* he has obviously employed for many years.

I found myself during the meeting coming out with more and more "external," analogous references to literary matters, the terrain where I felt more comfortable. With reference to a conversation about incomplete or destroyed works akin to Kleist's own unconsummated long play, I mentioned D.H. Lawrence, James Joyce, André Breton, Kafka, Thomas Mann, and other modernist favorites. In the context of costuming and evocation of period drama I also talked about two Broadway productions of classics I had recently seen—the Patrick Stewart *Macbeth* and the Kristen Scott-Thomas *Seagull.* I then made "knowing" and erudite references to the metric text of the Homburg play. I also heard myself praising and complementing

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the others at the meeting, time and time again. Upon reflection these spontaneous effusions coming out of my genuine enthusiasm for *Homburg* now feel a bit over the top; what was I doing . . . straining for credibility? [“Hey, guys, don’t forget about me!”] Feeling my way along in the production meeting by exercising my sensibility, I recalled the conflicted literature on the limits of acceptable dramaturgical behavior—by dramaturgs themselves, in terms of the challenge of fitting in to a collaborative environment wherein others’ roles are more clearly defined—in their minds as well as in the mind of the director.

Note to self: Exhibit more methodical and reasonable behavior modification next time around.

Toward the conclusion of the meeting, JC reiterated with reflective gravity that this “journey” ahead of us was going to be “*very hard*” [emphasis his] and that we were all going to have to labor conscientiously to accommodate this emotionally-draining process of “gestation” of *Homburg* followed at the other end by its inevitable dissolution. JC was talking to himself as much as to us, psyching himself up for the unforeseen challenges and choices ahead.

11/29—Back to the play. Act II—Homburg is hardly ever “in the moment.” He may be onstage, yes; but he is either distracted, thinking, writing, dreaming (as the stage directions make clear), or talking (as he does to Natalie) about what he *will* do and how he *will* act. In Kleist’s letters to Wilhelmina he speaks similarly to her about the generalized hypothesis of their future imagined life together. So often in the play I feel as if the human present is a pretense, a cover for what is going on within H’s psyche. In dramatic terms, how will this illusion be conveyed? I can see the use of filmic projections that JC and ER have talked about in order to visualize making the unconscious conscious, a question of dramatic representation and how important this is to JC. In performance-art terms he wants this to be different than the usual, expected theatrical experience, so then it’s a choice about how far ahead of the audience’s conditioning one wants to push. For instance, I have been reading all week long the critical praise for Martha Clark’s current work, *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, and how she has managed to communicate a surfeit of complex information very successfully, judging from accounts of the performance. There is recognizable imagery on the virtually-transparent bodysuits; performers “flying” through the air with wires intentionally visible; music that fits the subject matter, eroticism that holds and keeps the attention—and all the while, not one review has implied any incoherence to the show, something admirable and very difficult to bring off. That would be my worry with *Homburg*—again, & for the umpteenth time, I would want people to file out of the theatre satisfied they had seen and learned—and *understood*—something *new*—I wouldn’t want them to be too confused or perplexed or alienated . . .

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11/30 & again 12/1—Act III. 5—In Homburg's melodramatic scene with his adoptive "Mother," the Electress, once more I think of Hamlet when he comes to his own mother's chamber, & Gertrude is likewise one step removed from *him* through having married Claudius; even more echoes of Hamlet a bit later on when Homburg tells Natalie to go "to the nunnery." The impassioned speech revealing Homburg's idealization of the family and panicked aversion to death harbors added irony when you realize it was written in the months leading up to Kleist's willful suicide. There is poignant tension between Homburg's pre-emptive failure to obey orders (i.e., do one's duty) and the obligations of military discipline; and the allure of Natalie's love, as she offers to go and plead the case to the Elector for H's redemption. This language is beautifully rendered. At first H. does not "hear" Natalie, he is so distracted and in "contemplation" by the daydreaming that seems to pass across his countenance like clouds rushing in front of the sun, haunted by recurrent visions of the open grave awaiting him. It's weird to be reading [and re-reading] the text right now in a conventional and close manner with the front of my mind; and then at the same time, when I take a pause, to think about how this very same elegant text is going to be truncated, cut, manipulated, rearranged. Hmmm . . . am I more conservative in my regard for the [sacred] text than I thought? Am I more of a "modernist"—less of a postmodernist—than I thought? Do these distinctions even *matter*? I can still think and write dramaturgically even if, in the end, my reservations have little or no effect on the final production. Given that production mode is different than literary mode, shouldn't I be thinking primarily about the most effective *dramatic* iteration of the *mise en scéne*?

[Time will tell. Which is why I'm going to leave these questioning words above; and then, once we start rehearsal, come back, and see to what extent my literary mind can tolerate excisions and changes and their effect upon the integral rhythms of the play.]

12/6—It's the weekend and now I have a chance to do my "homework." Jorge came by my office a few days ago to talk briefly about the callbacks for 12/13 and the kind of actors he was looking for as Kleist and the Princess. His orientation was physical more than anything else; the body type for K. has to be thin, not diminutive—he cannot be a prepossessing person. The Princess has to be willowy, flighty. He reminded me that he needed the excerpt/citations from *An Abyss Deep Enough* for use as sides for the callback. The students weren't going to be reading from the play, but, rather, from K's letters to Wilhelmina. I promised to provide for the weekend, as per below. Going through the text with this presentational aspect in mind I found myself drawn to the instances where K. acts as if he has to declare his mental intentions, to prove himself to W. He always takes some kind of stand and then is likely to contradict himself—pull back from a purportedly strong position. He comes across as impossible to pin down for more than the span of time

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it takes to set down his thoughts. And how frequently he wishes for death, imagining it as the only graceful "solution" to the the incessant problem of life. Here are the excerpts I sent to JC:

p. 19: "if, then . . . none to give."
p. 22: "My late reflections . . . in the military."
p. 26: "I hear the words . . . suffer doubly."
p. 30: "When one has . . . nature as well."
p. 35: "The exercise . . . interesting truth."
p. 40/41: "My plan . . . *Restes fidele*."
p. 42/43: "Imagine yourself . . . genial fate?"
p. 49: "But now hear . . . *completely* . . . "
51: "I went for a walk . . . rankly."
57: "I turn now . . . notes some day."
59/60: "An eighteen-year-old . . . fearful image."
64: "And so . . . cathedral steeples."
67: "—O if only . . . feelings as *these*?"
70: "But from no sight . . . final implications."
76: "It is ever clearer to me . . . to the stars."
82/83: "But there are other ways . . . enough, enough!" [this tutelage, to me, is quintessential]
88: "Whenever we entered a coach . . . until long after."
97: "dear Wilhelmine, grant me . . . on these conditions?"
100: "Forgive this journey—Heinrich."
107-108: "But when thoughts are at war . . . find the *right* choice."
115: "Ah, there is nothing more disgusting . . . neither heat nor light."
117: "As long as we can still visit the ruins . . . its various hues."
121: "I am supposed to be here to study . . . *because the storm can grasp it by the crown.*"
124-125: "For man has an incontrovertible . . . we do as we *ought* to do."
130: "But when I look about me . . . of the world."
134: "A man works . . . letter from you."
139: "But do I not have something . . . just to think of it."
[*143-145: Wilhelmine's one letter to K., returned to her unopened, I found astonishing. Perhaps there will be some way to incorporate . . . ?*]
147-148: "It is quite probable . . . very soon to die. H. K."
159-160: "What we loved in each other . . . Come to me!"
165-166: "Between . . . wakings days."
191: "I am in my room . . . come to naught."

12/7—The next [brief, final] section of this book is called "The Suicide Letters." I will get to these in the next day; before I forget, want to note that the

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more I read in John Willett and Mary Luckhurst's fine work about Brecht's dramaturgical stipulations, most especially in his 17-year stretch of *Messingkauf Dialogues*, the more I see how I am adhering to B's rigorous standards, even to the extent that he expected his dramaturges to be copiously writing, writing, writing . . . taking notes, *Aufschreiberin*, acting as the distanced, informed observer. But not in the diminished sense of mere record keeper or in order to capture the gospel of the director; rather, as a form of *collaborative testimonial* to the events as they unfold, just as I am doing here, from inception of the idea all the way to mounted production. I think I have referred elsewhere to "bearing witness" to the evolution of the play—others speak of the "journey," the "process," & so forth in the same exalting manner. Indeed, as Sue Trauth and I were discussing last night at the intermission of her show, once the process of rehearsal begins it takes over her entire mind, and it is well-nigh impossible to concentrate upon anything else. Whereas I, being a hair's breadth away, and off to the side, as it were, can still accommodate the other matters of life, which adds yet another facet to the dramaturgical mind—its liminal nature—situated between the totally engaged world of the play on one side, and the phenomena of the rest of life on the other. A fine place for me temperamentally because I would not want to cede the space of my entire consciousness to something—unless I were its originator; and even then, while I have certainly been capable of obsession, I have *always* had to keep going on other fronts, no matter what creative project I was involved with. It is healthier in the long run.

12/7 [later]—from he *Suicide Letters*—

p. 202—the Hamlet quote ["The time is out of joint . . . "] for inclusion somewhere in the Homburg piece if we are wanting to establish a resonance with the Shakespeare—it helps explain K's motivations and it will certainly be familiar to the audience.

p. 204—the entire letter to Henriette Vogel, his designated suicide companion—the Vogel/dove parallel is worth considering. What is this theme of being *compelled* to have someone commit suicide *with* him? Suicide as a social/joint action. This is fascinating.

206—"Do you not recall . . . Adieu."

It is interesting that in the autopsy report they refer to the "not-quite fully loaded pistol" which resulted in the bullet lodging in K's brain and not emerging out the back of the skull. Ambivalence?

Yet the bodies were found facing each other in a sitting position in a declivity in the earth with several guns, which implies enhanced preparation in the event one of them did not fire effectively.

Even in death, Kleist mystifies me . . .

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12/8 & 9—. . . likewise, halfway through Christa Wolf's novel, *No Place on Earth*, the story of an imagined meeting between Kleist and Karoline von Gunderode, a "now-forgotten" poet who committed suicide by stabbing herself to death five years before Kleist shot himself—I've had to put the book down now and reconsider the construct of Romantic suicide. I'd understood this as the Chatterton-inspired ideal, the consummate solution to the unfulfilled temporal life, ennobled in the early to mid nineteenth century at the peak of the Movement. But as I have alluded to already—whether through defects in my own learning or what, I am not certain—I am having trouble rationalizing Kleist's particular way of going about it, seeking another to accompany him in his *thanatos*. My instinct is that this coupled way was less the norm. Knowing that Henriette Vogel was suffering from terminal cancer likewise gives value to her suicide—but wherefore the two *together*? Perhaps an idealized loneliness compounded their mutual pain, two solitudes united—because by my reading of this Kleist does not have the same (more conventional) love for Henriette as he did for the rejected Wilhelmine, nor the kind of love he professed for his sister Ulrike. *No Place on Earth*, at least on first reading, I find vague, passive, its constantly shifting point of view often from one sentence to the next (purposefully?) alienating, either to be in keeping with its subject, or to put the reader at arm's length. It is not a particularly "warm" book, that's for sure. For lack of a better metaphor at this moment, it's like "the fly on the wall" effect, except that this fly flits back and forth between being inside Kleist's consciousness and without, in the minds of others around him, or even further, on the disembodied omniscient plane, and in a realm beyond even that, a figment of Wolf's imagination. Wolf zeroes in a lot on Kleist's condition as *illness* in the medical sense, that he is the victim of a *systemic* disease apart from the exalted intoxication of being fatally romantic (or "a" Romantic). Does any of this attitude or p.o.v. have a place on stage in our *Homburg*—it has to—why else would JC insist that I read this book? I am not going to question him on this now. I am going to wait and see, until we are in rehearsals.

12/12—A cold, windy and altogether unappealing day. I was going to go into NYC for research at Lincoln Center Library, but instead spent the whole day at home reading essays in John Willett's *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*. I am often drawn back to B. because I enjoy his manifesto-like style. He is so proscriptive and sure of himself, but does not come across as arrogant; but rather, as a man who genuinely loves the theatre, wholly certain of its purpose and role as a didactic place where people actually learn. He also sees the theatre as compelled graphically to represent its informing times, a place where no intellectualizations or pretenses can be honored. The major element, the "soul" of theatre, is *narrative*; I like this—B. can be an iconoclast yet still echo and revere Aristotle without embarrassment. He can be an iconoclast and still put forth

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detailed "models," as he calls them, for his production of Mother Courage, and hand them to succeeding directors without compunction. For B., the theatre was far more than a series of discrete plays one after another. The stage was a demonstratively social place where the connectives between people had to be believeable and the actor refrained from entering his "character." The stage was an encompassing and representative world that the audience watched in order to have its imagination tested and expanded. The last thing B. wanted in his theatre was a group of silent, motionless bodies situated there without affect . . .

12/13—. . . which, as it turns out, makes a perfect segue to the callbacks in Life Hall 125, wherein Michael and Jorge had set up a table at one end with three chairs and then laid down a line on the floor with masking tape to represent the front edge of the stage. Knowing this journal is going to be posted by Carrie Urbanic on the new ACP Web site next month, I will refrain here from naming the names of the dozens of students who read for the roles; once the cast is chosen, I will start to do so. I *can* talk about the ambience and strategy and process of the callbacks during the time I was there, from 10 am through to 3:45 when they were almost over but I had to leave.

It was odd to sit quietly at the beginning, as the first group of about ten students, boys and girls mixed, came in; and to realize that *I* was nervous for *them*. However, JC soon made the students feel at ease by joking casually, telling them they were "going to have a little fun." Among other physical exercises, he had them grouped in a tight circle gradually backing up, expanding outward ever-so-slowly, excruciatingly slowly, as they talked softly to each other in made-up "German" and kept at least a foot away from each other at all times, smiling and laughing, stopping or touching each other "in an inappropriate place" when JC clapped his hands. Then each one had a chance to walk the tape line slowly and engage in some variant of an assigned movement exercise, i.e., on their toes, crawling on all fours, giggling, or gazing at one of the others lined up against the side. JC told one girl with long blonde hair to gradually bring it forward over the front of her head and down her face until her face was entirely hidden; and another girl to shriek as if she had seen a mouse at her feet. These initial group exercises were all executed even slower than slow motion, with voices dialed down, stressing the conveyance of the body.

A few male students reading for the Kleist role enacted some of the ideas we had discussed in the production meetings: JC offered a handful of peanuts meant to serve as toy soldiers and asked "Kleist" to crouch down and speak to them "in a detached way," as if from out of his fantasy-imagination, "a little boy, or a weird man, an impotent, frustrated fellow who cannot write or create." He then auditioned several pairs of students with sides from an early scene in *The Prince of Homburg* in which Hohenzollern, Homburg's purported friend, talks to the Prince

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and attempts to "wake him up." JC's instructions to the students were just enough to get them started. I was intrigued by his verbal characterization of Hohenzollern as an Iago type character, devil-like, a "Mephistopheles" meant to be foil to the Prince's dreamlike, distracted, Romantic nightwalker personality. "This is not reality," JC insisted over and over. "This is an illusion. This is *theatre*." As JC drew the fuzziness out of the Prince while impressing upon Hohenzollern his sinister ulterior motive, the scene became more extreme and polar, in a good way. I could see and feel the "drama" coming forth.

We watched several run-throughs of the Electress, accompanied by Princess Natalie, receiving sudden word of her husband the Elector's reported death in battle. JC was looking for someone with the ability to convey the sense of the Electress as being "a strong figure, the mother of the Nation, her heart broken but having to go on with her life nevertheless." This was followed by iterations of a romantic scene between the Prince and Natalie in which the dramatic agenda was to demonstrate "the huge dreamer, the nightwalker, the pleader," attempting to win over his "fragile, poignant, free-agent cousin," who, on the contrary, is not immediately drawn to him; yet gradually becomes seduced into a kiss after a procession of his eloquent words. I noticed recurrent flower imagery here and elsewhere in Kleist's text, as "buds" and "fragile plant" morphed into "tendrils" and then into a "winding vine upon the back of this great trunk," the plane surface of her lover's chest becoming erotic, naturalistic, their voices charged with tension. JC wanted to see "a soft moment culminating in the accomplishment of an objective"—the Prince winning his lady love—but most of the students had difficulty building the arc of the progression; they burst forth with passion from the outset of the dialogue. It was a challenge to instruct and channel them into a series of actions and words that gained dynamic and consciously gradated momentum.

The spirit of Shakespeare hung in the big, black-curtained and drafty space—to which Kleist's rhythms and themes bear great resemblance. I heard at times echoes of the madness of Hamlet, the ambition of Macbeth, the jealousy of Othello, the imperiousness of Henry, the impetuousness of Hotspur, the winsomeness of Juliet or Ophelia, the stoicism of Gertrude; I thought of all of these and more during the hours of rhetoric. It was obvious, after a while, who among the aspirants had rehearsed and who was "winging it;" who tried for chemistry with his or her partner, and who remained in his or her own bubble of feeling. So much zeal—raw energy—nervous tension—inexperience—ungainliness —oftentimes a seeming lack of understanding of what the actual text meant in deference to a histrionic and projecting performance. But on the other hand, several times I was moved to tears by the exposed emotions of these kids. My nostalgia for lost youth getting the better of me? I took my cue from Michael and Jorge and did not reveal my reactions. The mask was in place; yes, even I, the *dramaturg*, was playing a role, offering my opinions, when asked, only between exits and entrances.

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12/17—A rushed production meeting at 2 pm today, an hour before the department meeting. There was a palpable air of tension, exacerbated by the fact that Erhard brought in a set design and some concept drawings and set them up on a side table—I got the impression JC was not ready to look at these because he had other preoccupations, becoming evident when he sat down and began to go through the weekly schedule for the show, working backward from opening night. Perhaps there was tension also because since the last time we met we had the callbacks, and the cast—*an excellent one!*—was posted on Monday afternoon on the bulletin board in the corridor outside Michael's office [I ran into a couple of students who had been cast and they were highly-agitated with excitement and anticipation]. JC said in his opening remarks that he was "not going to change a word of the actual script" for *The Prince of Homburg*, but rather would interpolate textual excerpts from the letters and Wolf novel at various points in the story—so, as I questioned/confirmed with him, we will be "maintaining the through-line" of the plot? "Yes." It did occur to me when the students were working from the sides how what they were reading at least bore *some* resemblance to the familiar literature from their classes, and I felt a passing concern about how they might react if they were told at rehearsal that the whole thing was going to be chopped up and rearranged and subverted into outright "performance art" as JC had (I thought) told me when we first discussed his methodology. However, now it appears we will be doing a *combination* of traditional verse drama intercut with "performance-art style" interludes and embellishments. I feel better about this decision and I think the show will be better for it. This is not meant as a slight of the sophistication of our students—who are up for anything—or our audiences, who are reasonably open-minded. It's just that the play itself has a comforting array of recognizable characters, almost in a fairy-tale way: the Prince, the Princess, the "parent" figures, the friends and noblemen, etc. So when JC inserts his other ideas—besides textual and presentational, including sound [David Lawson was at the meeting] and light, which JC reiterated will be "paramount," I am sure we'll end up with an exciting and different evening, made more intriguing by first presenting and then deconstructing/subverting the traditional drama to which we are all accustomed.

Another echelon of pressure—the NASD evaluator will be here during the performance-week of Homburg; and there will also be one evening dedicated to bringing back a lot of Theatre alumni as a way to show them what we are up to now, and begin a concerted effort to attract financial support to the Department—this special performance will be followed by a JC/NB talkback.

Next imperative: Return to the text and finish reading the play. [Carrie liked my spontaneous title for this journal, THE BIOGRAPHY OF A PRODUCTION, but I am not 100% sure about it—will set it down here for future consideration.]

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12/20-21—The denouement of *The Prince of Homburg* is a constantly vacillating meditation on life, love and death. We are accustomed to having faith that love conquers all, but Kleist subverts this expectation by, at the very conclusion, placing the suspicion into our minds that none of the action really "happened" in the first place. I see now what JC meant by telling us that "the play runs away from him [Kleist]." Natalie becomes foregrounded as a strong woman who is driven by her love for her doomed cousin. She slowly discovers her own powers in dealing with those far more (regally) powerful than she is politically. The Elector wants to do the right thing but he also needs to uphold and represent the law; thus he is willing to "forgive" Homburg, but only if H. publicly concedes that the Elector erred. Old soldier Kottwitz, the Fool/Polonius stand-in, is given latitude by the Elector to debate and speak his wise mind without fear of reprisal, and so it becomes his responsibility to stand up for the masses who want the Prince to prevail. Hohenzollern in his last maneuverings is Judas, the betrayer/friend in the walled garden. And the existential Prince—on the way to his final audience with the Elector stopping by the graveyard to view the "vault" awaiting him—hews strictly to his death wish after displays of ambivalence, and goes out of his way not to have to confront Natalie . . . Or . . . is he pursuing this end resolutely and manipulatively in order to draw forth the deeper emotions and allegiances of the others? Does Homburg's blindfold possess symbolic value, manifesting a repressed "vision" beyond the conventions of a man condemned? In the end, the dramatic wheel comes full circle, as the Prince lies where he was first seen by us, on the ground, and the "thundering cannon" wake him (a reversal of the death-salute at the end of Hamlet, summoned by Fortinbras). The Prince becomes conscious into the moment of victory for the army—as if the interim activities were imagined. Which, in another sense, they were, since they emanated from the mind of playwright Kleist, who will, in our production, be orchestrating the action. *This stagecraft will come through as a brilliant stroke!* I'm smiling as I write these words because it has just occurred to me that Kleist is playing a "crafty" trick on us—making the play reflexively comment upon itself as a way to skim the surface of artifice; especially if one knows anything about the final year of his life, while he was writing the play, and the explorations of the viability of suicide were predominant in his thinking. Homburg's hopes and fears—his anxiety about dying countered repeatedly by his desire to meet death—are transmuted into the material of this final phase of the drama. The Prince is an "unconscious gambler," in all senses of both words, impelled toward death while knowing he is dreaming, and therefore will not die, but rather be awakened with the dawn, the "light" that shines through the blindfold. Is this conceit, in turn, an elaborately-repressed wish of Kleist, the fabricator of the drama?

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12/24—JC's email in response to the above entry: "Neil, you are right on with everything and indeed we are going toward a work that is not just about the fascinating content that is *Prince of Homburg*—but is also about art and the artist making it."

Homburg Dramaturg's Journal Part III—From start of rehearsals through set build

1/14—Looking forward with anticipation to the first rehearsal next Tuesday the 20th from 5-9 pm. Today in my inbox received Erhard's sketches for the sets. The first impression was as if they had emanated from inside the brain of Kleist—as if the set was a manifestation of what someone else was thinking: "walls" evocative of manuscript pages ripped open to reveal the actual brick wall of the theatre, and on the floor, magnified sheets of paper strewn about, the rejects of the author's fevered brain. In another view, ER has placed a strip of script handwriting around the walls at molding-level, with Kleist positioned in front of the writing as if he had walked out from the words, been made flesh by them. A third version has ominously-piled thunder-clouds superimposed upon the rear wall, as if the heavens will open at any moment—and there is another view of a massive magnified moon hovering overhead, casting pale light upon the floor. These are supremely literate visual interpretations wherein the stage is a text to be read—but with all ease, not intimidating. To me as a writer, this is most appealing, because the set becomes a variant of language, immediately understandable. Going into this labyrinth, one of my fears had been that the resolutely-experimental nature of the concept might alienate our audiences. I now think that may have been too proprietary, not giving our community enough credit.

1/20—Thus it began. A freezing night. Room 125, 5:30 pm. A circle of chairs: a few people were not there, but I will mention everybody's name—Christian, A.J., Mike, Roger, Larissa, Tara, Irene, Julia, Alli, Adam, Gavin, Jerome, Nikhil, Scott, Josh, David and Anthony. At the long table, Jorge, Michael, and me. JC started out by delineating the course of the journey and the main themes as he envisioned them: that The Prince of Homburg is one of the great plays of theatrical literature; that it is a really difficult piece (he said it as a challenge, not a threat); that it was the classic story of one man's struggle between the exercise of his free will and the pressures to fall in line with the rest; that it was equally going to be—in our production—a meditation on the dynamics of making a work of art, following the artist's way instead of the proscribed mores of one's society. In JC's adaptation/rendition, the author Kleist has been added as a character within the drama. Thus, the audience will become privy to K's inner world grafted upon the dramatic construct of the pre-existing play. This

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character/Kleist will manipulate aspects of meaning, and the audience will need to follow along. It will be the job of our gathered "top-level collegiate ensemble of actors" to come together "as a company" and put the story across.

Throughout JC's pep-talk, the group listened closely, some people taking notes, all exercising extreme concentration. Then they began to read through the entire script, with JC interpolating at the end of major scenes, turning to me on occasion to ask me if I had anything to add. I was secretly proud of my cultivated dramaturgical demeanor, always respectful of the director, assiduously taking notes for this Journal, speaking at first only when called upon but then as we went along finding it easier to interject and also feeling that my commentary was helpful and supportive for the students. I realized last night in the actual practice that the pedagogical core of dramaturgy attracted and inspired me. I was able to draw upon my lifelong affinity with seeing into texts, and then to pull forth viable meanings for the group, posited in such a way that they were not didactic or over-intellectualized; but, rather, illuminating and useful for the actors.

Reviewing my notes as I type, I see that the most frequently-recurring word is "Why?" Why will we be moving lines of text around? Why are these events happening in the way that they are? Why does it always seem as if the Prince is choosing between what he *should* do and what he actually *does* do? Why is it that no matter *what* he does, there are no apparent consequences? Does he ever come out of his apparent sleepwalk? Does he ever *really* want to conform to military order, or is that just a façade?

From time to time, I would allow my eyes to drift away from the printed Bartlett/Bryer RSC script and allow my ears to take over. I listened to the harmonious interplay of male voices—A.J., Mike, Roger, Gavin … I realized how perfectly their tonalities came across, how skillfully and fortuitously their roles had been cast, in such a way that the story was always moving forward through the music of the words even when the dialogue was at times inherently—intentionally-chaotic and confusing. And then in contrast, when Tara spoke, as the Princess, she was the only female voice in a deep sea of soldiers, and her emotionalism shone through. What great counterpoint!

JC was skillful in showing us the progression of Homburg from Romantic to leader to soldier/warrior as the action proceeded until the crystallizing moment when it is revealed that the Elector—the commander—did not die in battle as was thought. This game-changer for the Prince forced him to make a more aggressive move for the Princess even as the Elector, his power restored, stood forth as Homburg's ultimate arbiter and judge. With the heightened foregrounding of Hohenzollern, Homburg's erstwhile friend, sheer politics entered the mix as well … and over all of this, as JC reminded us, we would see the manipulations of Kleist on stage, at one moment approaching the players and arranging their positions, at another ripping up the script in frustration as "the play gets away from

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him" before the final transition, back to the Garden, where it all began, back to the dream—of history, of personality, of the very Theatre itself.

When the reading was done, promptly at 9:00, and the cast was putting on their coats and checking their cell phones and chattering among themselves on the way out, Christian, who plays Kleist, came up to me and asked how he could get the edition of Kleist's letters I had referenced in my remarks. "I need everything I can get my hands on," he said fervently. "I need to get inside the guy's head as soon as possible." I promised to email him this morning with the title of the book I've been using for my research, *An Abyss Deep Enough*. "Abyss" indeed . . . We're all going to descend down there. We *have* to . . .

1/21—The production meeting this afternoon was about the budgetary and physical/material logistics of the set design—Erhard going over his groundplan/section/deck plan/wall "A"/wall "B"/wall "C" and baseboard detail drawings with MA, Randy Mugleston, Aaron Bockros, Ed Flynn and the production staff. Peter West, the lighting designer, was also there, and Debra Otte, our chief costume designer, sat in on behalf of Jessica Lustig, who will be coming in to join the team, now that Ingrid Proos has left for Australia. All of these comings and goings were compounded by JC's pacing back and forth restlessly behind Erhard and murmuring ominously about the "perfect storm" we might face if we did not deal with certain pressing issues, while ER kept on speaking deliberatively. On top of this ferment lay the added anxiety of the Department still not having hired a TD. After thirty minutes of largely-opaque (to me) discussion about "rakes" and "counter-rakes," and "Hollywood" and "Broadway" set structures, and the relative merits of fog and mist machines, I was feeling tense and frustrated. It was disorienting to have been an integral participant in one dimension of our production with such ease of spirit one day; and then, the very next day, to be out of my element. I tried telling myself that the debates around the table were "not my problem," but to no avail, because I feel such affinity with the team and the show, and it was impossible to remain at arm's length about anything. I hated the idea that I had to sit there with nothing to contribute.

1/22—Tonight JC spent the first hour working with Christian (Kleist) and A.J. (Homburg) alone, on the beginning of the play, in a kind of dimly-lit, speechless pantomime to establish the premise of Kleist as the maker of the play or, as JC put it, to show the audience, as they are filing into the theatre, Homburg as a character emerging from the imagination of Kleist. In the creative process itself, character is developed, gestates, is born, flourishes … and dies (we shall see . . .) The final element must remain ambiguous here. Although I am keeping a journal of the production, I do not want to reveal too many secrets and surprises before the show opens. From time to time I have—and will continue to—censor myself. I will

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report on some moments, but not others; spotlight some focal points, and omit others. [*This editorializing is for the benefit of you, Dear Readers, the audience out in the wider world beyond the production, who will be coming to the play in March—to allow you to enjoy the fullest pleasure.*] Tonight's session was the ultimate manifestation of "devising" theatre, in that JC gave initial instructions to set Christian and A.J. on their way—and then stepped back and watched their improvisations unfold—periodically getting up from his chair and guiding them slightly, nudging them one way or another. They sought ways of showing Kleist's mercurial personality—his meekness and delicacy in conflict with his manic eruptions, talking murmurously to himself at one moment and exploding into heavy breathing the next, while coming to terms with the realization that he is constructing the *piéce de resistance*, the masterpiece. JC then called in the male ensemble for a run-through the battle scene that opens Act II. The band of brothers took shape as they worked toward rudimentary blocking, but their progress was severely impeded by linguistic glitches in the Bartlett/Bryer translation. We kept having to stop and revise lines on the spot so that they would flow. At one point JC called upon me to elucidate a questioning motif in Homburg's dialogue with his comrades and I could sense that everyone realized the script was fractured and getting in the way of the message. I had to leave early, and when I woke up the following morning found Alisone Alcordo's Rehearsal Report in my inbox (as she has stepped in as stage manager). Alisone mentioned in her notes that we would be shifting over to a new translation of the play—David Constantine's version, which I had so highly praised to JC months ago. I am pleased at this choice. Constantine's work is lyrical, strongly-iambic and rich, and will add depth and texture to the presentation.

1/26—A noted director once said something to the effect that *only reading* the script of a play was tantamount to going into a restaurant and reading the menu without tasting any food. I thought this was rather extreme. But now, having watched a few rehearsals in the same timeframe that I am also teaching a section of "Play Script Interpretation," I'm revisiting the assertion, and I can appreciate the merits. Rather than "either-or," it is more accurate to say that *reading* and *witnessing* theatre are two different, complementary experiences, possessing distinct qualities; it's too extreme to say that one is undisputably "better" than the other. Case in point, sitting in on some nicely-developing performances the past few days, then last night sending out this *Journal* to the cast for the first time, and in immediate response (well, to be truthful, more like 2:00 or 3:00 a.m.) receiving enthusiastic emails from several students asking if they can meet and talk with me about helping them understand the text more clearly. On the one hand, we have intuitive performers entering the work without complete literary knowledge—especially since they now have a new script in hand and have been told to be off-

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book in six days—yet they are still able, because of their skills (and gifts) to put words across with emotion; on the other hand, they likewise know their performances will improve with deeper comprehension.

Tara and A.J., in scene rehearsal yesterday as Princess Natalie and Homburg, are good examples of this issue: her voice—naturally melodious and poignant, an instrument—in contrast with A.J.'s tone and bearing—low and inherently humble. These are natural selves in front of us, bringing inborn conflict to the stage as a result of good casting—and then the director taking that inherent contrast and working to get multi-layered, building up characters required by the story they inhabit. "Forget about the emotion," he told them at one point. "Get the ideas crystal-clear." Then followed a few minutes of conversation with me about what the author Kleist "was trying to say." JC's instruction was blatantly counter-intuitive when I heard it the first time, but Tara and A.J. responded by focusing more upon each other, establishing eye-contact, therefore conveying the appearance of communication to the audience. "This is your world," JC said a moment later. "You're reading each other now." Toward the climax of the scene, Homburg, seated, struggles to write a letter in response to the Elector's conditional promise of freedom. JC told him to get up out of the chair and walk around and away from Natalie while raising his voice in anger and petulance. A.J. moved literally from sitting to standing and emotionally from dignity to disturbance.

During the scene immediately following, the ensemble of soldiers gathered to present their case to the Elector. Homburg was absent, yet I *felt* him in the room, and said so. Such is the larger meaning of the Hero, the major protagonist, in the realm of a play, where the space before you tells you things that a page in a book cannot—to revisit my initial thoughts above. Mindful of following the action, you cannot possibly constantly—or consciously—register and tell yourself who is and is not *present*, but the *presence* of the hero is noteworthy no matter what is transpiring.

Later the same day . . . No matter what else I do—and, as is usual for me, I am doing a lot of thinking and writing about several other intellectual and pedagogical issues and longer-term writing projects (including another book) at the same time—it is impossible to get "the show" out of my mind. It is always flowing there, a constant, subterranean river of preoccupation. I have talked with colleagues on the Department directing faculty about how they maintain all their other teaching and "life in general" responsibilities while they are in the thick of a production, and they have told me how difficult it is. The play begins to take over your life, they say, and you have to engage in very strict mental conditioning to manage. Fortunately, I have had experience in this regard. All those years, "back in the day," as a freelance writer, working out of our tiny apartment, when the kids were little, and juggling many assignments in controlled chaos; followed by

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decades of arts administration, first running a huge development department, and then an entire foundation, conditioned me in the art of compartmentalization—while thank God not losing my healthy addiction to creativity, and the constant generation of new ideas. That said, I can feel *Homburg* as an ever-expanding territory in my imagination. And we are only one week into rehearsals.

1/28—Last night, rehearsing Act II, scenes 1-8, was about first putting the soldiers and then the ladies through their paces. The emphasis was upon the alchemy that comes out of the volatile combination of meaning and music—"music" in this case being the iambic line and its imperatives. JC zeroed in on the actors' natural tendency to speak faster, accelerate deeper into the lines. He pulled them back time and again to "hit those syllables like a musician . . . *attack* the *beginning* of the lines, and *lift* the *ends* of the lines." Just as it was imperative for the actors to know "where they are going" with the lines, it was also necessary to push the inherent idea, to imagine people and places mentioned. To that end, he stopped for reflection and discussion after particularly noteworthy beats. I sat in silence, figuring I would know intuitively when to contribute. I was mindful that certain kinds of subjective comments coming from me as the dramaturg would be off-limits. I decided, at first, to remain in the realm of overall explication, i.e., of a symbol or difficult vocabulary word, where silence hung in the air, and JC half-turned toward me, or one of the students, lined up in chairs, looked over at me. That would be my cue to say something useful. As the evening progressed, the discussions became more permeable and I felt less deliberative about intervening, but even so, as much as I was tempted, I stopped myself from outright spontaneity.

About three hours in, JC made an emphatic comment to the students about "finding the intellectual part *first* and the emotional part *later*." He was cautioning them against prematurely loading connotative emotional expression into the lines before being completely conversant with meaning. He reminded them of the incremental nature of the work, that there were still "weeks and weeks to go." When some of the histrionics were a little over the top and "actory" sounding, JC urged them to go back and find their "real" voices, which they were instantly—remarkably—able to do. At times like these, the word "director" made eminent sense, as someone who is a synthesis of *guide* and *driver*. It is a difficult path to maintain, because if you cross over into dogmatism then you pre-empt and devalue the young actor's sense of self-discovery. You run the risk of interfering with his or her precious "journey." So, in that spirit, I, too, only spoke up when the "moment" called out for it; happily, the longer I am in rehearsal the more adept I become at sensing these moments.

1/29—The production meeting yesterday afternoon was a more lucid experience for me than last week's. It's like learning a new language—there is no

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substitute for total immersion; or, even better, travelling to the foreign country itself ("*Theatreland?*"), living among the inhabitants and native speakers. My biggest breakthrough—which I kept to myself—was coming to comprehend the distinction between *haze* and *fog.* It seems, according to Randy Mugleston's helpful dichotomy, that *haze* tends to drift laterally from left to right across the Kasser stage due to the vicissitudes of the ventilation system, whereas *fog* rises up, which is the effect Jorge is looking for—"the morning fog of the swamp."

There was further discussion around the table about swords, guns, and banners, as the time for actual depiction encroached upon the commensurately-contracting realm of conjecture. It was a pleasure to be introduced to Jessica Lustig, our new costume designer. After the meeting broke up in a record-breaking twenty-one minutes, Jessica and I sat and talked for awhile. She showed me inspiration images she had borrowed from The New York Public Library Picture Collection. Several caught my eye: a tall Napoleonic-era soldier, hatless, leaning distractedly against a marble mantlepiece; Nazi soldiers marching in close ranks wearing characteristic rounded helmets (there will be no plumes in this production, JL told me); and a striking portrait of Kleist's contemporary, Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840), painter of the famous Romantic image *Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer* (*Wanderer on the Fog-sea*). While I knew Friedrich's apt and iconic work, I had never seen a picture of the artist himself. Jessica was drawn to his piercing eyes and high, pale brow. She then showed me her preliminary sketches for the costumes, in blue and charcoal/pencil and wash, based upon conversations with Debra Otte and JC. The women's gowns are layered, diaphanous, and Empire-waisted, and the Princess will be dressed all in white; the soldiers are fitted, high-collared, brass-buttoned, their uniform palette in shades of grey, sporting high black riding boots. Her one drawing of Homburg depicted the Prince as we first encounter him in stage, lounging on the ground against a tree, arms outstretched, wearing a loosely-fitting blouse, jodhpurs and boots. I recalled for Jessica my flashback memory from a summertime matinée in 1977 at the Chelsea Theatre Center in NYC when my wifeand I saw the indelible Frank Langella—at that time in his late 30s, lanky, black-haired, dark eyes darting back and forth—starring as the Prince.

1/30—5:45 am—Lying in bed thinking about the resolution—or, better, *irresolution* at the end of Act II scene viii, after Homburg has heard that the Elector is *not* dead after all, and so has to scramble to regroup and redefine his position in the space of a few frenetic moments. Whereas the Prince had the eyes of the Princess and the nation focused upon him, suddenly now he is back to square one, suffering from a spontaneous power-vacuum. The theme sounded hauntingly familiar. I clambered upstairs in the darkness to my study and started leafing through excerpts from other works by Kleist in the David Constantine anthology,

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and soon found what was nagging at me—a short essay, *Reflection,* that Kleist wrote in December 1810 for the *Berliner Abendblatter* in the form of a letter addressed to the son he never had. "The proper time for reflection," K. says, giving hypothetical advice, "is not before you act, but after … [W]hen the deed is done, our powers of reflection may serve the purpose they were actually given us for, namely to bring us to consciousness of what was wrong or unsound in how we acted and to regulate the feelings for other occasions in the future. Life itself is a struggle with Fate; and in our actions it is much as it is in a wrestling match . . . "

Noon—Tara/Princess Natalie came to see me to talk about the play. She was very concerned about how to achieve a better understanding of her character and so had been asking herself questions such as, "What would have been a typical day in the life of a woman in Princess Natalie's time period? What is her back-story?" She had not had much luck going to the Library to find books about Kleist; those she did dig out were too dated, academic, and dry. The more we talked, the more I realized that what Tara—and probably many of the others—needed was an insight into the transcendent European Romantic mentality, the *Zeitgeist* consciousness of the brink of the nineteenth century when *The Prince of Homburg* was written—rather than attempting to probe the historical moment when the events giving rise to the play occurred. This challenge opens up the larger and more comprehensive issue of cultural literacy facing our drama students. They are filled with energy and enthusiasm and the desire to do well and to respond to our (the professors') advice; this is wonderful. But unless and until they embrace the *contexts* for the works they are performing and/or studying in class, they will not achieve full appreciation—an appreciation which, in turn, will inform their time on stage and increase their understanding as theatre artists. Although Tara, a devoted actress, had taken the initiative to contact me in response to the first installment of my Journal, that did not mean to me that the other cast members did not feel similarly. The more I teach here, and especially in this Department, to which I am still a newcomer, the more I learn that every student is different, every one has a differently-calibrated learning curve, and we as teachers must respect that, and let them march to the beat of their different drummers. I reassured Tara that to spare her further tribulations wandering around the Library, I would find some good Web sites on Romanticism and email them to her. I chose ones where the emphasis was on the visual in order to help stimulate her imagination:

http://www.artchive.com/artchive/romanticism.html
http://www.metmuseum.org/TOAH/hd/roma/hd_roma.htm

5:00-6:45 p.m.—The Battle, Act II, scenes I and 2—A.J., Roger, Gavin, Jerome, Anthony, Josh. At first it was all about JC hammering away at the urgency of keeping the metric figure in consonance with the meaning of the words spoken.

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"Know where you are going with the idea," he said at one point, and, at another, "The idea has to flow with the words." This was a tough road, largely (I thought) because the actors are not *conversant* with such language. It is one thing to study Shakespeare, to use the appropriate analogy, and analyze it line by line and quite another to articulate iambic pentameter with syntactical awareness, a difficulty further compounded by a continuing struggle with the basic vocabulary of battle. So it was most helpful to abandon these recitations which were only fitfully "off-book," and spend the second part of rehearsal collectively going through the entire scenario of what was actually happening on the battlefield through the descriptive words of the characters watching the events unfold, then comparing these events in "real" time to the initial command instructions and strategy that had been laid out earlier. Everybody chimed in on this entertaining deconstruction, and, when it was done, JC had them read through the whole scene again. The improvements in both articulation and resultant imagery were admirable. Toward the end of scene 2, when Homburg makes his pre-emptive, impulsive choice to give the command to charge—not to place too melodramatic an emphasis on this—my heart was pounding with a potent mixture of anxiety and excitement. Everybody stood up to take a break, and I told JC how I was feeling. He gave me a mischievous smile with anticipation at bringing in the rhapsody of Wagner's music over the crackles and flare-ups of muskets and cannon-fire blasting through the rolling fog.

2/3—Don't want to get too pretentious or "high-brow" as I go along, but have been reading Kierkegaard (not far away from Kleist psychologically, when you think about it) and noticed what he means by "experimenting." He says, "I wanted the concept to come into existence in the individuality and the situation." This is what JC and the cast are doing with *Homburg.* They are rigorously respecting a pre-existing text (except in those instances where we substitute a word or phrase that reads better in English). The experimental part comes from weaving through the *persona* of Kleist [i.e., "individuality"] as well as other theatrical "situations" and additions (some of which have been cited here, some of which remain to be invented). The connotation of "experiment" in theatre can spill over into "far-out" or "edgy" or "avant-garde." However, it also exists in a simpler arena structurally, especially when the experiment is *predicated*, as our production is, upon valuing the original work. I have always believed that all experimental art must give acknowledgement to what came before as well as the situation out of which it arose. Take Dada as a vivid and immediate example. For its time, there wasn't much that was wierder or wilder, but Dada *never* claimed to emerge out of *nothing*—always openly acknowledging its birth-pangs in the cataclysm of the Great War.

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. . . later the same day . . . JC spent an hour during the first part of rehearsal this evening in one-on-one session with Christian, who plays the role of Kleist and who (I can tell) has been getting fidgety about not having anything to do as of yet. JC explained to him that the priority is to get the play crystallized first, and then work on specific, calibrated "interventions" in the form of excerpts from Kleist's writings that JC has provided to Christian. They talked about these selected passages; Christian recited them one by one; and then JC asked him where in the play he thought would be the right place to insert them. It was a marvelously collaborative and inductive process, and C. had some good ideas. "You have the biggest acting challenge of anyone," JC told him. "I am going to keep feeding new lines to you up until the end and maybe even while the show is in performance." Christian thought that was "cool," as well he should—because the Kleist character acts as a subversive/connective tissue in the drama. As I had been musing earlier this morning, the integral nature of the original is preserved, then the disruptive element is intercut, to create a weaving *other text* possessing its own parallel arc. The three of us talked about the adverse circumstances of Kleist's brief life, his chronic inability to resolve the dialectic he saw and felt in every circumstance, the extreme degree to which his creative endeavors were suffused with suffering—pain as a corollary to art. "What if *you* did not fit into a structured world; how would *you* react?" JC asked C. a while later. Between bursts of inspiration and excitement, Christian became introspective, his eyes gazing inward. This bodes well for the performance.

2/4—Production meeting in the Conference Room—An exponentially-bigger crowd this week—props, sound, electrical and set assistants—Alice, Josh, Ed, and Dennis—in addition to the usual group. The logistical details are multiplying as well: Does the giant door through which everyone has their exits and entrances open and close by itself? Would it be possible for Kleist to write across the back wall in huge block letters [like a subway graffiti-artist?] using a legible medium that could be erased between acts? [Erhard seemed skeptical]. JC had up until now seen the toy soldiers that Kleist is supposed to deploy in front of the footlights as being able to fit into his pockets, but Peter West is now saying that they would be too small to cast the right kind of upward shadow. The soldiers need to be at least "G.I. Joe" size—in which case, how can Kleist carry them around? In a low voice, I suggested saddle-bags, but fortunately nobody heard me . . . just as well . . . Then there was the question of the size and shape of the regimental banners captured from the Swiss army and laid at the feet of the Elector as souvenirs of triumph in battle. Aaron and Erhard sketched them as proper standards affixed to rigid cross-bars; but JC wants something in the realm of *pennants* that ripple and billow in the breeze. And what about the chairs on stage? They are meant to be early 19th century style but, as someone said, "You can't just drive over to K-Mart and pick

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them up . . . we need time to find them." Jessica gleefully held up a blue wool officers' overcoat with two rows of brass buttons running down the front and said she had found three more like it in the costume shop; now all she needed was vintage epaulettes. Her discovery was greeted with delight and applause.

. . . later the same day . . . I sat in on JC's scene work with A.J./Homburg and Roger/Hohenzollern. Once again I felt the desperation in their friendship, as Homburg tries to communicate intimately, struggling against the constraints of his official position—his *station*, as it were—as well as the inhibitions of his fevered imagination that creates "strange dreams" which he tries to describe, but come out sounding like hallucinations, and Hohenzollern calls him a "madman." "The stage is yours," JC told A.J. as the two actors rose to their feet and tested the ground beneath them. The Prince must carry himself like a prince while at the same time demonstrating hesitancy, vulnerability, mortality; while on the other hand, Hohenzollern must tread a fine line between loyalty and self-interest.

2/5—*A Dramaturgical Moment, Perhaps*—Walking hurriedly to teach my class, hands plunged deeply into pockets and head bent against a knife-like winter wind, I bumped into Erhard outside Life Hall. "*Guten morgen*," I said to him, in jest. He was dead serious and stopped me in my tracks. "Those banners . . ." he said. "I'm still not clear as to what Jorge wants." I assured E. they were supposed to be "silky-flowy" and "wavy." The first image that popped into my mind was a long-ago production of *Macbeth* I had seen—"You know, like Shakespeare in the Park, that kind of thing." Erhard got that. "O.K., thanks, that's what I thought," he replied, and continued on his way. I forged ahead toward College Hall, against the bone-chilling gusts, late for my seminar on *The History of the Imagination* (how appropriate).

2/6—I sat for an hour with A.J. before rehearsal and we talked about the difficulties of the role, which are many; but I told him I thought he was the perfect person for the part of the Prince *because* of the difficulties themselves, and the bare fact that he, A.J., knows all too well that, in "real life," he is so different from the character. He understands the distinction and is working hard—perhaps too hard—to take it on. He also happens to be an inordinately introspective young person, and this fascination with the poetic language of so many of the lines slows him down. These vibrant paradoxes convinced me even more that A.J. will come through. Then, when I got home late last last night, I dug out my thirty-year-old copy of *Romanticism* by Hugh Honour. Something I had read in there in the past … was nagging at me . . . ah yes, *there* it was, on p.23, underlined in pencil all those decades ago—"The only constant and common factor in the ever-shifting attitudes and scales of belief [of the Romantics]," Honour wrote, "was belief in the

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importance of individuality—of the individual self and its capacity for experience—and the rejection of values not expressive of it. This emphasis on the supreme value of the personal sensibility of the artist is, of course, closely allied to those notions of genuineness and sincerity and living experience (*Erlebnis* in German philosophy) which led to the Romantic conception of personal authenticity or what, for want of a better word, one may call personal truth."

I am not ashamed to admit that I was moved nearly to tears by the lovely recitations of Larissa, Tara and Julia—Electress, Natalie, and Lady in Waiting—rehearsing their scene with Homburg when he comes to plead with the Electress for her help in saving him from the firing squad. I was impressed with the way those who were not speaking gave fixed and rapt attention to the person who was, reaching heretofore unexplored depths of empathy. I had not yet had the uninterrupted opportunity to watch Larissa and Tara interacting as aunt and niece, both of them overwhelmed with fear and dread at the Prince's impending fate; victimized by their diminished status as women in a man's world, yet equally impassioned about what thread of hope still remained that they might grasp. When JC moved the group seated in a semi-circle into basic blocking, A.J. took the moment when the Prince grasps the Electress around her knees, and played it over a few times. The transition from reading/almost but not quite off-book to enactment made the physical contact more powerful. As the Prince called her "Mother," and invoked his childhood under her nurturing guidance, the Electress laid her hand gently on his head, conveying so much with that simple, poignant gesture.

2/7—What a great sight!—everybody on stage at the beginning of III.1—A.J., Mike, Roger, Larissa, Tara, Irene, Julia, Allison, Adam, Gavin, Jerome, Nikhil, Scott, Josh, David, and Anthony—while Christian delivers his Kleist monologue to set the tone. I was in my usual spot facing everybody as if I had a front row center orchestra seat, and when Christian, gazing into the middle-distance, spoke his final line introducing the scene, ". . . something to make you run away," I got a chill of foreboding up my spine, and impulsively called out to JC that I thought that was *really* going to make the audience spring to attention and wonder what on earth was about to happen. "Well," he replied hesitantly, striding back and forth, ". . . *perhaps* we will cross the fourth wall with that … I'm not sure yet . . . we'll see . . ." At which point I felt, yet again, that I had gone too far, and backpedaled. "Of course, I 'm not the director," I said, "that's just my opinion . . . ," as Christian just stood there, looking at me and then at Jorge, seeking a sign. JC told C. to run the monologue again from the top, which he did with gusto. Meanwhile, the rest of the cast was spread out, left and right, engaged in ad-lib conversation, what JC called "the murmur of the public as life goes on." I decided to keep my mouth shut for the next half hour and instead of formulating intelligent and/or supportive reactions to

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what was going on, simply allowed myself the pleasure of observing these young people with their virtually inexhaustible energy.

2/9—JC took A.J. aside tonight, far upstage, by the shabby, poorly-hung black curtains, away from the others, and talked at length with him again about "using his imagination" to create a truly "Romantic character," ever-mindful that his (A.J.'s) personal style was markedly different than the Prince of Homburg's style. How, JC asked, would he envision a modern-day Romantic figure? [The artist formerly known as] Prince, and Lenny Kravitz, came to A.J's mind as good examples to reach for in visual terms. "You need to come into a room in a way that everybody notices," JC said. "You are playing an extraordinary human being—the best soldier and the best lover . . . and the play, in itself, is a war, in which the stakes are high—who does the audience care about the most?" JC pushed more deeply than I have heard before about the "larger than life" dimensions of the Prince, his "transcendent and elevated" bearing, and, with respect to the spoken lines, that at this point JC as director was predominantly "interested in clarity. I am not interested in feelings yet. Right now you should be asking yourself with every line, *'Do I really know what I am saying?'* The feelings you are trying to express now are premature; they will not be resolved for another ten or fifteen days, when you *own* the role."

A few minutes later, A.J. was delivering a line evoking what "the poet tells us" about "the span above the earth and the realm below . . . " and I realized suddenly—so suddenly that I did not write down what scene it was because the metaphor was more important to me—that the Romanticism of the play permeates every scene, no matter who is talking, because the work is a haunting reflection of the ethos of Kleist's epoch. The year of the actual battle of Fehrbellin, 1675, is a pretext, in much the same way that Hamlet's "Denmark" or Macbeth's "Scotland" are pretexts for mental situations of rampant indecision. When we "analyze" Hamlet, we do not delve into the daily life of the ancient Danish court; rather, we seek to determine the ways in which Elizabethan psychology is made manifest.

In that spirit, I told Jorge during a ten-minute break that I thought "in ten or fifteen days" it might be a good idea for me to talk with the cast about the literary and moral world of early 19th century Europe—the years that literally were the *center of gravity* of Romanticism and that gave issue to *The Prince of Homburg*—the resonances of language in the feverish text of the play that call forth "inflated feelings and impossible passions" swinging wildly between sublime elation and bleak despair; yearning love and the insanity of romance; the sanctity of Nature; the receding goals of permanence in deference to the constancy of change through eternity; the paradigmatic aspiring, solitary individual; the ephemeral flower; the fog of the unconscious; the allure of antiquity; the false, conflicted glories of war.

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"Yes . . . more like ten days from now . . . but first they have to *own* their lines, *own* the play," he replied.

. . . ***later that night*** . . . spent a fascinating hour looking for inspiration images that would work for an invitation to our show, after which my head was spinning around even more within the vortex of Romanticism:

http://farm1.static.flickr.com/182/425611332_a3872e4faf_o.jpg
http://images.easyart.com/i/prints/rw/en_easyart/lg/3/0/Portrait-of-an-Artist-in-his-Studio-Theodore-Gericault-302614.jpg
http://www.historyofjihad.org/austria7.jpg
http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/e/ef/Hugo_lerocherdelermitage.jpg/120px-Hugo_lerocherdelermitage.jpg
http://www.filmfestivals.com/cannes97/gprince.gif

2/11—2:30 pm—Production Meeting—JC began by ruefully yet stoically announcing that *Homburg* was "a bear of a play" but that "stumble-throughs" were continuing apace. [*Full dramaturgical disclosure*: When I first heard that phrase a couple of weeks ago, I thought it was a somewhat derogatory slogan that JC had made up; now I learn from reading Alisone's Rehearsal Reports it is an actual theatrical term and is part of the developmental process.] He spoke about the difficulty of the language and the "clunkiness" of the translation. Hence the fact that some of the actors were still not quite off-book was to be expected—even so, it was frustrating. Another challenge is to find more variants for integrating the character of Kleist into the ongoing action; to my less-demanding eyes, the several instances I have seen thus far have been excellent. I did not realize, until talking yesterday to our Assistant Director, Sandy Taylor, that she and Christian Castro are devising the placement of the Kleist-quotes—and doing a brilliant job. I hesitate to divulge the nature of these herein, because I do not want to spoil the fun for the audience . . .

We then went around the table as usual. It was heartening to hear again from Aaron that "sets are going well" and that the Kasser staff has further accommodated to our team, allowing more time to build within their space. But—another surprise!—here I had been assuming that fog machine issues were sorted out, but now it seems, upon further investigation, that the minuscule particles created within the "fog" emanating from the grates in the floor of the stage have the potential to trigger the fire alarm in the theatre, at which point the fire-curtain descends within ten seconds. Furthermore, Randy reported with customary equanimity, the natural fog/air movement from left to right will be inhibited from dissipating properly due to the construction of the set. Randy offered to talk further with "Fireman Bobby" [*NOTE:* This is the affectionate nick-name for University Fire Marshall Robert Ferrara] about the matter.

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Erhard launched into a detailed rundown of prop/set concerns. I was *stunned* to find out that the banner issue was still unresolved from last week—after I had mistakenly come to the assured conclusion that all was well. To the contrary, the flags are *not* meant to be pennant-shaped, because that would prohibit them from unfurling as the soldiers march in and out. They must hang rectangularly, mounted upon poles, with a cross-bar running through the top. Thankfully, JC agreed that the banners do not have to be graphically or historically-accurate; they will be "generic" but stylish, deliberately without incongruous coloration. Erhard reported that it will *not* be possible to mount removable muslin on the rear wall of the set where Kleist does his wild scribbling. JC added to the mix of complexity of prop requirements by insisting that everyone in the cast will need a place to sit on stage, therefore six chairs and a bench will not be sufficient. Also: The massive, twelve-foot high, three-foot wide door only opens once at the beginning of the play, and will be controlled by a strand of monofilament rather than a complex winch mechanism which would need to be built down into and below the floor. And the cloud-scheme meant to be projected against the rear wall still lacked a "moving, layered" effect, Erhard continued, so he was trying to obtain the enabling computer program.

Another shift from stasis to tumult—those little toy soldiers I had thought were to be "G.I. Joe" size because of difficulties in uplighting anything smaller . . . well, this week it transpires they *can* be miniatures after all. JC also wants miniature equestrian horses to cast malevolent, ghostly shadows hovering above the actors. Erhard said he could acquire an actual *projection* of equestrian horses to overlay and gradually supercede the shadows; JC was emphatic that we cannot have such enhanced assistance. It would "lose the poverty of the effect."

5:30 pm—Erhard came to the start of rehearsal and showed us his 11 X 17 computer-generated color drawings, as well as architectural renderings, and a three-dimensional mock-up of the *Homburg* set complete with figures and furniture. The students said it looked "cool" and "awesome," and everybody crowded around and peered into the model and imagined where they would be standing and walking during their performance. Erhard spoke animatedly to the assembled cast about his "minimalist" aesthetic style, intended to highlight "what the piece is about psychologically," the stage conceived as eminently adaptable, "not dictating too much what has to happen where." He left the graphic materials tacked to the wall, and placed the set maquette on a high table so that everyone could look at them at their leisure.

This presentation segued nicely into JC's positioning everyone for their spots at the beginning of Act II immediately following intermission. He placed "the ladies" in one group stage left, and "the soldiers" stage right in two groups, playing chess and talking. He moved people around with a light touch to the shoulder here and there,

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intermittently stepping back and away to contemplate the configuration of bodies aligned in space. JC's expert eye was in evidence; the tableau, when crystallized, took on a painterly aspect. The action was set in motion by Anthony/Stranz, midstage with his back to the audience, lighting a cigarette. Irene/Lady Bork is a student in my Play Script Interpretation class and I had asked her earlier that afternoon what she actually "talks" about when JC tells the ladies to start a conversation in low voices. To my delight, Irene told me that she and Julia and Larissa and Allison and Tara are speaking in character; they all have developed detailed back stories about themselves, and the fabricated "gossip" stays determinedly within the parameters of the play.

2/12, late afternoon—Walking to the parking lot at 4:45, I ran into Christian and Adam coming toward me from the dorm. "Hey, Neil," Christian called out. "Where are *you* going? Rehearsal starts in fifteen minutes." "I'm not coming today," I said. "I need to go home and take a break to ponder all of the artistic dimensions and decisions being made. I'll be there tomorrow." "That's a great excuse," Adam said, smiling. "I'll have to remember that and try it myself." The two of them laughed merrily and continued along. But what I'd said to them was true. What I've managed to write about so far this week represents the mere tip of the iceberg that is *Homburg* in the making. At times, sitting quietly off to the side of the room scribbling during the hothouse atmosphere of rehearsal, I have felt "*The Thing Itself*" opening up like some huge, dense chasm of possibilities even as paradoxically the days go by and the structure becomes tighter and the alternatives narrow.

2/13—The opening and closing of the play are slow-motion, enchanted, ritualized mirror-images of each other—everyone in the Court of the Elector proceeding onstage to witness the onset of the Prince's dream; and then, two hours later, the final, richly-ambiguous "hour of his ordeals"—*martyrdom or redemption?—death or transfiguration?*—beginning and ending in the Sacred Garden—all meticulously calibrated second-by-second to a funereal drumbeat. The seventeen-member ensemble responds exquisitely to JC's choreography, coming together then drifting apart in ones and twos as a well-oiled interlocking human machine, each part integral to each other. The powerful, vacillating focus upon the Prince at center stage is enhanced by rudimentary, dim lighting, half-a-dozen simple clip-lamps lying sideways on the floor, revealing the actors' pale, smooth faces and drab street-clothes—everyone bundled up, shoulders hunched, arms crossed, cloaked in layers of hoodies, scarves, and sweaters against the damp chill of the rehearsal hall, as the building heat has been turned off on the eve of a holiday weekend.

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2/14—The costume boots arrived and, as I entered the hall, the guys were trying them on and stomping back and forth across the floor as JC instructed them on how to walk, heel hitting the ground *hard*. Princess Natalie will wear boots, too, in the Second Act, as an integral component of her "masculinization"—after all, she is the commander of the regiment bearing her name and, through Tara's increasingly-accelerated and imperative performance, takes charge summarily, dispensing orders with flair. Listening to the dialogue between Tara/Princess and Mike/Elector when she comes on bended knee to plead with her uncle for the salvation of the Prince, I heard as if for the first time the harshly repeated dialectic of fatherland and the rule of law *versus* affairs of the heart and dreams. Later on, as JC coached Adam/Dorfling on *his* sudden entrance and ensuing confrontation with the Elector, an interesting point arose about how important it is for the actor to "come in [to the scene] on *text*—to *explode* with text." They've got to burst onstage with a message already internalized and percolating in their minds so that it comes across to the audience before a word is even uttered. We in the audience cannot be waiting for the message or our attention will be diverted, diminished. Not only in spoken words but in written modes the text is always there in Homburg. We lose count of the hurried letters, crumpled notes, military dispatches and other epistolary signs that behind the façade of the drama resides the compulsively-generating mind of a writer writing about writing . . .

In a poignant scene just before the Prince's final transformation in the Garden [I leave the reference intentionally vague here, again, out of respect to You, Dear Reader, who will soon be coming to see the play], Anthony/Stranz offered A.J./Kleist a carnation. I jotted the moment down in my notebook because the name of that all-too-common flower set off a chain of long-submerged memories . . . It *meant* something . . . as Kleist would surely have known . . . yes! . . . Pink carnations were filled with symbolic meaning—going back to antiquity, the Greek ceremonial crowns ("*corone*"); and the other powerful root in the Latin "*caro*"/"*carnis*" meaning flesh, and its extension, "*incarnation*," God made flesh; as a matter of fact, in German heraldry the color of the carnation specifically refers to the tincture of human skin. Let us not forget the apocryphal story that when Jesus suffered his final agonies, and his mother Mary wept at his plight, it is said that carnations sprang up where her tears fell.

After the break, JC continued with inductive notes on the pervasively anxious atmosphere of the drama. It's a time of rampant instability and political insurrection; the rumor mill grinds, murmurs of gossip drift here and there, the nexus of control changes hands from one moment to the next, flitting mothlike and erratic across the stage: "Things fall apart/the center cannot hold."

2/15—[Received this wonderful email from Julia/Lady in Waiting]—Hey Neil, I read the first half of your journals in the first email about a month ago,

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mostly to get a better idea of the world of the play and to understand what the performance art part of the piece is supposed to be. The journal was very interesting to read and although I don't always completely understand what is going on, it was interesting to see your struggles through this process as an artist. Because of the journals and rehearsals I am really starting to love the fact that Kleist is apart of this play and how he is watching his world unfold and work against and with him . . . plus Christian does a great job. It was also interesting to view this play through Jorge's eyes and your eyes through the journal and see what was wanted for auditions, meetings and for the play. Learning about Kleist's life in the journals was also interesting. I am going to try to read the rest but with school, rehearsals, hw and work, time is limited! Thank you for writing the journals because they are really helpful. Also, thank you for your insights during rehearsals because honestly it is really helpful, even though you mostly regard certain lines and lead characters, it is helpful for me in understanding this world. I know you kind of spoke about not knowing where you fit in sometimes in the process and what your role is (correct me if I'm wrong) but I think your insight really helps a lot of actors make sense of this and make better choices.

2/16—JC reminded the cast in all seriousness that there were three weeks to go until the opening. I took him aside and asked if I could have some time to speak directly to the cast. I could tell instantly that he thought the end of this week was too soon. We agreed upon next Tuesday the 24th at 5:00 p.m., and I reassured him that I would take up no more than half an hour of rehearsal time.

Tonight was once again about JC pushing A.J. to express in his own words his objectives in a given scene; then to find the meaning of the textual words spoken beyond simply eloquent recitation; and, below the meaning, to look for resonances—people and places—in his life experiences to help him convey a legitimate emotion linked to those experiences so that the audience would connect personally with him. Immediately thereafter, running a scene with Roger/Hohenzollern, the script called for A.J./Homburg to swoon/fall to the ground. "Try to fall *in a Romantic way*," JC instructed him. From one moment to the next, these young actors are being asked to shift from micro to macro, from the poetic dynamics of a line to the visual and psychological conditions of an Era . . .

2/17—further to the above . . . from Pierre Courthon, *Romanticism* (1961)—"There will always be Romanticism, and there always has been since primeval man took his first steps on the path of culture. But it seems unlikely that there will ever be another movement so wholeheartedly devoted to the cult of the heroic, of sublimated passion, of reckless violence and untrammeled freedom, as that which launched a revolt against the frigid conventions of society . . . It was like an eruption of a volcano in the night, or a stampede through a world of shadows

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heralding the sudden rapture of a glimpse of the moon breaking through clouds, or a sunburst on a rainy day. Such was the unforgettable experience of those who witnessed the triumphant breakthrough of this new movement with its insistence on the dramatic moment, its soaring aspirations, its mingling of swashbuckling militarism with moods of wistful reverie and a craving for the inapprehensible, its obsession with death and the sublime, 'the consecration and the poet's dream.'"

2/18—Production Meeting. JC led off this afternoon by stating that he and the cast were "still struggling in the rehearsal hall" [more on that perception later]. The predominant theme of this meeting otherwise was "when do we *have* the theatre . . . when can we get into the Kasser Theatre . . . ?" JC was anxious to get the cast up and moving around on the raked platform. Aaron said he was shooting for the middle of next week but was understandably cautious about letting anybody on stage until it was perfectly safe. Peter West was quite "focused" about the lighting situation: "The plot itself is not a gigantic undertaking," he said. "What we have in the air is a good place to start, and I am positive we will not get ourselves into a box." The report from costumes—Jessica Lustig—was equally good. The additional boots had arrived; four coats were shipped UPS ground instead of air, so they would be delayed by a few days, but no big deal; the ladies' clothes were all cut out; the parasols had arrived. Jessica warmly invited anyone who wanted to see the colors and textures of the fabrics to visit the costume shop. [*Note to self*: I should do this soon.] We then moved on to the continuously-morphing saga of haze and fog. Yesterday they conducted a "haze test" and it did not set off any alarms. However the fire marshall will not modify the particle detectors. Someone pointed out, in continuation of last week's dialogue, that "haze is different than fog . . . less of a problem." Someone else—thinking ahead—advised that when the trough was built transversely into the stage floor we needed to be sure that the fog hose would fit into it, as the trough was only "eighteen inches front to back." At this point I felt that I was taking notes but not "getting" the evolution of the haze/fog issue. I will wait until it comes up again next week and see how I adjust. Erhard raised the matter of how long we would be allowed to stay in the theatre every night for rehearsal. Jared said that everybody had to be out by 11 pm sharp—no exceptions, because, after that magic hour, "the Monster comes into play." There was collective, knowing (sardonic?) laughter around the table.

After the meeting as the others left the room JC said he realized that my natural personality was to be more supportive of the students in rehearsal, but that this was the moment when they had to start bearing down. I told him that I had been chatting with Josh and Adam earlier in the day and that they thought things were going really well. JC was skeptical of this, as he had noted at the outset of the meeting. In his view, there is still a long way to go, and he is setting the bar higher. I promised to be more rigorous going forward.

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2/19—Ran into Mike/Elector in the corridor and he told me that he and Anthony/Stranz had imagined an alternate and more definitive ending for the play. They seemed to *want* the show to end conclusively, not ambiguously. A few days ago, Nikhil/Morner had said much the same thing to me. I tried to explain to Mike that such an ending, while perhaps more comforting to the actors, would be inconsistent with Kleist's entire world view of irresolution; this was a play that came out of a mentality that could never countenance tying up any loose ends—that the only true resolution for Kleist was death. Mike nodded but did not seem too convinced.

Jessica had invited me to come visit the costume shop so after class I went up there. The first thing I saw when I entered the room was Princess Natalie's gown, glowing as if from within, gossamer and sparkling-silver on the lacy surface with a silvery sheath beneath, draped over and around a dress-dummy bathed in eastern light filtered among bare winter trees and suffused through a row of windows.

. . . **that evening** . . . the emotional stakes in rehearsal have been ratcheted up several notches. Tears flowed in several scenes as the tenuousness of the Prince's future was stretched to the breaking point and JC pushed and pushed some more, intentionally interrupting moments at the height of their crisis. During ten minute breaks in the lobby, actors stood and sat singly, staring off into space, rubbing their eyes; others were surrounded by cast members seeming to console them . . . (about what? I thought) . . . perhaps the gradual death of their inhibitions and the disintegration of protective layers separating them from the abstract rawness of their feelings. This is a point in rehearsal, several students have told me, when they are feeling comfortable in their bodies and have found opportunities to work on the nuances of their lines. But the inevitable, ironic consequence is that with the energy and confidence to explore more thoroughly comes exposure and nakedness.

Erhard sat in on the rehearsal and we spoke again about the banners taken from the Swiss army in triumph of the victory. By now it is an "in-joke" between us and we can have a quiet laugh . . . but on the other hand, E. wants to see the issue resolved, and he feels more strongly now that they *must* be wavy pennants and *not* mounted on "T" shaped poles. I urged him to speak directly with JC about this, and he did, and they seem to have agreed that the banners needing to be rolled up when they are cast onto the ground at the feet of the Elector is another good reason to make them "billowy" and not rigid. At another scene, E. asked me why Christian/Kleist was writing on the side wall in *addition* to the back wall of the set. "I did not put any paper up there on that side," he said to me. "I don't *get* it." Again, I told him to take that issue up with Jorge.

During a run-through of Act III.1, when Hohenzollern comes to visit Homburg in jail, I found myself yet again wishing the pace could be picked up

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somewhat. It seemed slow, too much verbiage muddling the message and interfering with the drive forward. I did not say anything because I felt it was not my place, but then JC told A.J. and Roger to stop sitting down on the floor and on a chair (as the stage directions indicated) and instead to walk around, keep moving. Then a few minutes later he tapped me on the arm, and said in a whisper that he thought the scene "still wasn't working." Tonight, when I got home, I took out the script, went through the 5 ½ page scene with a pencil, and attempted to thin out the dialogue, like pruning, or weeding. Halfway along, I upbraided myself, "How *dare* you tinker with the words of the poet Kleist? How *presumptuous* of you!" Then another inner voice answered, "It seems sacrilegious but the problem with the translation from German is the ponderousness and end-loading of many of the sentences."

2/21—My careful line-edits were done with the goal of creating a rapid-fire, more spontaneous-seeming exchange between the two comrades, during which less explication was required from each because they are so intimate and can anticipate each others' thoughts; and further, to enhance the effect of Hohenzollern's probing to find out exactly how much the Prince already assumes and then goading him to do *something*, quite literally to "*change his mind*," coax him to get engaged in the momentum of his life, not let events carry him along haphazardly—this effort at persuasion all the while complicated by Hohenzollern's other, unspoken motives. It was a tough haul but I was happy with the results after reviewing one more time. I xeroxed the pages, put them in an envelope, and slipped them under the door of JC's office yesterday morning. He emailed me today that he had received the pages and would soon read them.

2/23—*Two weeks to go*. JC and I were chatting half-heartedly and quietly in the empty rehearsal space; while in the Conference room across the hall Roger and A.J. were, indeed running my newly-edited scene with Julie Lawrence's coaching. JC used the metaphor of "the train approaching the station" and I conjured up an image of the station master slowly waving his lantern back and forth, back and forth; then JC said he visualized a raggedy brass band standing on the platform getting ready to play and then we decided to stop trying to come up with these Kafkaesque and Fellini-esque analogies as Mike, Adam and Josh walked in and it was time to start rehearsal and blocking of Act II.9. I remarked how in re-reading the play again over the weekend I had noticed how often the Elector mentions "*The Prince of Homburg*," like an escalating refrain throughout the story—from all different points of view, benign, bemused, accusatory, anticipatory, angry, vengeful . . . As I have elsewhere noted, the Prince is onstage even when he is not physically there. He is a ghost in absence and remains partly-spiritlike in presence. He always seems to have an aura around him when there are others nearby. Even

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Natalie and Hohenzollern can only get so close, before either they, or the Prince, severs the connection.

The spoils of war—the banners from the Swedish army—are brought in and laid at the Elector's feet, then the Prince addresses the Elector, assuming he can rightfully claim the victory, only to be summarily arrested for entering the fray prematurely. JC worked on Mike rising more forcefully to the occasion and being more in command, to the extent that he needed to manipulate and dominate everyone there. After the Elector declares that the Prince be relieved of his sword, JC told Mike to "move into another theatrical space," allowing the Prince to make a fiery speech from across the divide between them. Again it was a challenge of energy-modulation, as A.J. still needs to learn what some of the words actually *mean*. These are the kinds of moments when I do feel I can step in and help explain, which I did, to good effect.

Thus the director *directs* and the dramaturg *elucidates*.

2/24—The entire cast was called for 5:00 p.m. to hear my half-hour presentation on Romanticism. They sat on the floor and I was perched on a chair, conscious of time-constraints, and so, deciding to focus only upon those elements of this vast, sweeping Movement that pertained to the *Zeitgeist* spirit of the age of Kleist and *Homburg*: the era, from 1770s to 1830s with Kleist hitting the epicenter as *The Prince of Homburg* was written in 1811; the roots in Germany and the migration of the movement to England and thence to America and Transcendentalism; the inspiration for modernism and experimentalism found in Romanticism as reinforcement for JC's decision to include Kleist as a living character in the show; the Romantic belief in the lyric work as, in itself "an event in history," expressing social change embodied within art forms; the assumption that the world is an uncertain, turbulent place, ever in a state of becoming, never perfected, always transient, ephemeral—therefore, human experience not given to resolution, which is why the *play* cannot be resolved; that the work of art, to a Romantic, is an extension of the artist's mind—incorporating the Tradition but subverting it; that Freedom as an ideal is exalted [cf. Rousseau, *Social Contract*], but exists by virtue of Man's incessant drive to break free from his "chains," another pervasive metaphor in the play; that beneath, within, and/or above the world of quotidian phenomena are other varied worlds of dreams, madness, ghosts and myths paralleling everyday experience, worlds that cannot be perceived by everyone, only by certain adherents to the *poetic;* that the Princess Natalie, a fabrication of Kleist's unfulfilled, unconsummated fantasies, is the embodiment of the idealized woman of the era, "the woman of active, independent thought . . . with an empowered mind"—aspiring to attain the qualities of the *male* mind, which is why JC's decision to "masculinize" her in the second act is so apt; Natalie remains on a pedestal as a love-object, the vision of the woman the author never

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had; the realm of Nature, especially flowers and plants, abounds in Homburg—Nature as the wellspring against which Man tests his Imagination, hence the importance of the play's being bracketed by a Garden at the beginning and end, further manifestation of the cyclic version of History cherished by the Romantics, & the driving reason why Homburg and the Elector are at odds with each other throughout the drama—because the verdict of History is at stake; and then, Friendship, such a central concept to the Romantics—as Blake put it, "Opposition is true Friendship," going a long way toward explaining the integral nature of the Hohenzollern/Homburg arguments, making the elusive goals of peace and resolution even more fleeting as Heart and State vie for dominance. The students listened, gazed off into the middle-distance, reflected, were silent for a while, and then, the questions slowly unfurled.

2/25—Production Meeting. Today's atmosphere was fragmented—not disorganized, just bits and pieces springing up from here and there around the table even though JC tried to run it in order. To the continuing credit of the group, however, the meeting clocked in at twenty-two minutes. The overall obsession was once again when we can "get into the space," this time cranked up a few notches. It's now looking like we will not be able to use the Kasser stage until *next Thursday*, giving the actors five days for spiking, blocking, and accustoming themselves before opening on 3/10. I did hear Erhard telling Alice, the prop-master, that the dowels for the banners need to be 1 ¼ inches in diameter; the banner "issue" I can definitively say, is now resolved (*I hope*). Now we are on to swords; someone remarked to Jessica that two of the swords would not have baldricks (the leather strap that goes—messenger-bag like—from shoulder diagonally to waist). This gave rise to a protracted discussion about exactly *which* cast members get swords. Jessica and I, sitting next to each other, started chatting about how important it was for the Elector to have a sword, especially since he leads everyone into battle; but JC seems to envision the Elector *without* a sword. I interjected that when Homburg reaches out in fury and tears off Golz' sword, it would need to be fastened with Velcro or some such. [Nobody answered. Oh well … not my area …] Then we thought how perfect it would be for Kottwitz to carry a riding crop, since he is so much about his horsemanship, and also, it would give him something to use as emphasis for his various overheated statements and declarations. JC liked that idea—or, more precisely, as he always says instead of "liking" something, "We can *try* that, sure." Evidently there is still not a full quota of twelve matching chairs, which remains an imperative need. Lights are still "in pretty good shape." Ed never seems to have any further comment, which is fine with him and everybody. Peter dropped in a little while later and reiterated that message. Jessica also wanted to know if specific times had been set for run-throughs because she wants her two student assistants to be able to see the show so

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they can get a feel for it. She also mentioned that one cast member had missed his fitting time and that, going forward, she was going to institute a $25 fine for this. To which JC replied, “Can you make that $50?” JC in drawing the meeting to the end cautioned all of us against “bringing any ‘drama’ into Kasser that is not about the show … Once we are in there, we are going to need to be serious and focused.” We dwindled to an unresolved conclusion around the matter of also not being able to get into the recording studio in the basement of Kasser in order to do some voice-overs with Christian/Kleist. After everybody else left the room, Alice showed JC, Jessica and me the toy soldiers she had purchased, dumping onto the table the little knights in shining armor and a prince on rearing horseback and a brave soldier with halberd poised, and a princess in a long gown—out of their plastic bag, there they lay, scattered, colorful and fabulous—cheering us immensely.

2/28—Run-through last night [“GO”] was called for 5:15. Everyone was in the room—there was more than the usual amount of horseplay, hugging, joking, fooling around, laughter, eating, giggling, flirting and etc. etc. etc. until JC called all to order. Before the play began, Christian gathered the cast to surround him as if in a huddle and there was some kind of communal ceremony which JC, Sandy and I were not privy to. In the quietness before the action I could sense more than actually hear the rain pouring down outside on this unseasonably balmy evening. I felt as if I were in a church rather than a theatre.

JC had warned me on Monday that he might have to start toughening up his commentary. Indeed, at the end of the first act, it was about the 49-minute mark, the lights came up and JC thanked the cast—and then said “OK guys,” he thought the performance was “*atrocious*.” He went into a heated discourse about people needing to decide “where they were,” and “where they were going,” to “find the character and play to an objective and go for it,” to stop sounding like they were high school students in a Shakespeare play and start “owning the lines as words and saying them to each other in colloquial ways like real conversation.”

He told them to speed up the second act but even so it still came in at 51 minutes, only five minutes shorter than the usual running time.

JC then reviewed and presented Sandy’s notes as dictated to her by him during the rehearsal. People were tired with eyes glazed over, but did their best to remain attentive and receptive. I took my own notes and told JC I would email them to him when I got home:

Jorge—some of this i discussed w/ you last night.

I will be schematic so you can readily access what I'm talking abt.

137ff—hohenzollern still needs narrative clarity

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142—'you can't see the pearl' . . . homburg needs to be more emphatic and stress the metaphorical meaning here and elsewhere - he is too plaintive, not noble enough, not separated enough by degree from Hohenzollern

148—'the plan precisely is to annihilate them' . . . dorfling needs to set this line apart from the preceding with more clarity

150—Homburg monologue—'Fortune' is a *woman*—he needs to speak it as if he *knows* this and feels this fact

155—kottwitz edits—sounded good to me—it works

156—I think homb. should emphasize 'on MY head be it—follow ME friends'

157—I sat with morner and went through my edits with him line by line F.Y.I.

159—princess' revised speech—much better, much clearer sounding

161—'your words fall heavy as gold into my heart'—still needs to be delivered with (I think) resignation rather than just "declaratively"

162—sparren's 'is all this strange to you?' . . . as I sd, not enough sense of self-importance and privileged knowledge

164—elector—'none the less' . . . is fine until "whom mere chance bestows it on me,"—again this goes to making a clearer distinction/reference to homburg himself

166—at bottom—Homburg says "canvases" which destroys the metaphor—it is CANVAS—and also i am not sure the dynamics of this speech are right—too much yelling—just my opinion

III.1—moves much more smoothly—they have made a lot of progress with this scene

III.5—Homburg and the electress—I was confused b/c the blocking had changed so much since the last time i saw it—I thought he was supposed to walk around—the kneeling and getting up needs to be clarified to find the right rhythm for doing that

177—when Homburg bids farewell and exits—still not clear. I think that last line shd be delivered more nobly—not so desperately (this is the case in other places, the over-reliance upon desperation)

181—Natalie—'heart, why do you beat' . . . this is one of the best lines in the play and she says it beautifully but her back is to the audience so maybe she shd turn around . . . ? just my opinion

181—and as we discussed the elector here and elsewhere has to build up his tone of magnanimity and differentiate from imperiousness. I did speak with mike about it for a while and he understands.

182—she really does take over the play in this scene as you wanted her to—no doubt about it anymore—well-done

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188—‘maddest of madmen’—I think “horrified” is the right word here—mortification—appalled—rather than just plain angry
192—as discussed—dorfling's final line is not delivered with enough frustration and “pique”—right now it sounds simply eloquent and declamatory
195 and ff—kottwitz—as we said—appealing, human, but still too choppy. Here and elsewhere it is now a matter of varying dynamics and nuances of emotion rather than “getting through it” and also he has the audience going along for the ride for sure.
198—hohenzollern's speech—again—strained desperation takes precedence over trying to recount a story with narrative coherence
199—we talked about the guys needing to show more emotional reaction in the background instead of just standing there
200—here and elsewhere—the theme of the ‘vault’ being open and homburg surveying it, looking in, etc—I do not feel this has been foregrounded enough—it is an important through-line
201—‘I wish to SUFFER the death imposed upon me’—please get this word right
202—Homburg speech—again—too plaintive—here he should sound more noble—more seeking benediction—shouldnt be so strained
203—elector—‘i'll tell you when you are dismissed’—take advantage of this moment more effectively.
205-06—final yelling, cheering etc.—sandy did a *great* job of orchestrating this passage.
thanks and let me know if you have any questions.
yrs nb
P.S. It is so gratifying to watch you with the kids. Yes, you are a fine director . . . but you are also a great *teacher*.

3/2—At 1:00 this morning I received another email from Julia. It is *remarkable* that a supporting actress with just a few lines has now written twice in response to the Dramaturg’s Journal. It shows me that, as a teacher, you can never know *who* you are reaching—and *how*. Here is Julia’s email:

I have to say that we are a pretty unfocused bunch at times, but when Kleist came over and stood quiet with us, I really got focused and felt a different energy than before he did that. I don't know why he did it but it worked for me. I guess we all have to find that focus within ourselves though. Not only because it's crunch time, but in all our processes. I can feel that the next week is going to be tough. But I'm ready for it. I know exactly what Jorge means about the words sounding like “kids doing a Shakespeare play” and I understand all of his notes. I don't really have lines, but for the others, I think they may understand but I guess it's difficult

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to just take a note and execute it. I want to be at a level where I can do that, just take a director's note and execute it, perfectly. By the way, thanks for putting my note in your journal. And also, I read the part about the analogies and I kind of laughed to myself because I just thought of all the sports analogies that Jorge uses in rehearsal. They work, and he is a great director, but they are pretty funny lol. Just some thoughts. =) Julia

3/3—*One week to go* and this is the first entry I've written *before* a rehearsal or a meeting—I customarily wait until after it is over or the next morning to set down my thoughts. I think because we are coming down the home stretch I am beginning to reflect upon the past five months, especially with regard to the evolution and clarification of my role. Talking with a colleague just the other day, I remarked on the aspect of dramaturgy that got me excited, i.e., the need to be adaptable to the director, and the fact that one's function is defined *relative to* the director. I actually favor this, because it opens up the door to the unexpected and provides you with immediate and ongoing challenges. There can be no "status quo" for the dramaturg. Also, this 'tightrope without a net' experience has helped me gain a much better concept of the kind of dramaturg I would like to *continue* being—someone who is in contact with the cast continuously rather than doing research ahead of time, providing the results of that research, and then backing away. The play-work evolves in rehearsal and is never the same as it was on the day of the first table-read. Thus *the relationship of the actors to that work also evolves*, changes, needs to be revised sometimes from day to day, moment to moment, certainly with an intuitive director. My most important contribution—and I will have more to add to this in the week to come—looking back, has to do with my interventions on behalf of the meaning of the language. I do not tell the actor how I think he or she is supposed to *deliver* that meaning, but I can certainly be relied upon to describe, fill in, color the meaning and give my thoughts on the emotion behind the meaning. I also think that intervening with and editing the script in places where it proved untenable, unspeakable, awkward and so on, turned out to be a positive contribution on my behalf, and one that was successful because the director permitted it—even *asked* for it at times. And the oft-used and somewhat worn out phrase, "another pair of eyes" does hold some validity for me also, insofar as I think the students did like having me in the room as a supportively-felt presence. That influence remains unquantifiable, like so much else in pedagogy.

Later the same day . . . Rehearsal was called for 5:15 and the atmosphere was much more relaxed than last week. No freneticism this evening, no fooling around. People were purposeful and intent. Yet again, for what seemed like the twentieth time, we began with III.1, the pivotal scene where Hohenzollern (Roger) visits his

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friend Homburg (A.J.) in the jail. This time JC told them to act as if there were cell bars between them, so they remained separated and standing while they talked across a space of six feet or so. JC interrupted them countless times asking "what does this *mean* . . . what does *that* mean." At times he said things like "I'm not getting the *urgency* of what you're saying . . . I'm not getting the *objective* of that line . . . That line is not *landing* . . . That line doesn't have the *investment*—Don't try to *feel* your way through it," he said. "*Think* your way through it." As I watched Roger and A.J. go, over and over again, I thought about the layers upon layers that had been added, then taken away, then modified, restaged, "spiked," edited, sped up, slowed down, heightened up, toned down, emphasized and de-emphasized—yet still, the words *lived*.

I noticed afresh the motif of freedom here and elsewhere, as when Hohenzollern asks Homburg "Well then, how can you be *free?*" if the Elector has not returned his sword. So many times through the play this thread appears, as it does throughout the aesthetic of Romanticism. We are only as "free" as we think we are—or as others with (ostensibly) more power decide we are. Freedom, in this Kleist-world, is relative and interdependent; one person's freedom is another's consternation/inhibition. As when, in IV.1, Natalie (Tara) goes to see her uncle, The Elector (Mike), to plead for the release of her lover. Again, how many times in the past six weeks have we run and re-run this scene, the cumulative effect showing tonight to full advantage as JC applied the same method here as he had with the preceding exercise, interrupting frequently to give notes, ideas, inferences—to my eyes, trying to get even more from these two talented actors (who communicate so well between themselves).

Tonight was about the contesting nature of the dialogue, the fact that Natalie comes to present a case and therefore needs to maintain her composure within a certain range; whereas the Elector, because of his finely-tuned consciousness of his station, has likewise to keep some reserve, even as he struggles with empathy for his beloved niece. "Heart" battles with "mind" within both characters, "Fatherland" vs. "blood," leaping back and forth as the advantage is seized then relinquished, by one and then the other. Natalie's ingenuous manipulativeness relative to the Elector, delivered in the guise of self-deprecation, (as she is "only a woman"), recalled Hohenzollern's behavior in counterpoint with Homburg earlier on.

The role of Natalie is one of the most profound displays of poetry in tribute to the female muse I have ever witnessed on stage. As I said to JC during the break after this complex display of emotions, Natalie is all the more formidable when you consider Kleist's multitude of problems with women—that he was able to liberate himself from personal demons and create her as a flesh and blood creature; or, perhaps, the creation was itself an essential but temporary liberation, one more permutation on the theme of freedom, until the poor, sad K. found the *final*

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freedom of death by suicide within half a year after he wrote the words I was now hearing?

3/4—Production Meeting, began at 2:35. Just when I thought the banners were laid to rest, JC announced that they "are still an issue" and "need to be rehearsed." Yes, *of course*; it is one thing to have the banners ready to specifications, and quite another to "test-drive" them, as it were, and make certain they work in all their magnificent billowing action. And just when I thought the twelve chairs were ready to go, Erhard walked into the room, took a sidelong glance at the elegant, cane-backed, curve-legged example by the door, and pronounced it "not what I asked for." But then after a beat, during which the room was dead silent, he added " . . . but we can work with them." The swords are all in, but the problem still remains of how to accomplish Homburg's successful tearing-off of Golz' sword. "I call this play Men in Boots with Swords Clanking," JC said, only half in jest. The fact of the matter is that until we can rehearse with the men actually walking/tromping around on stage with swords at their sides we will not know the complete extent of their impact upon the ecology of the show. To that end, Stage Manager Alisone handed out a day-by-day schedule of this final week, according to which the first full dress rehearsal will not happen until Sunday evening. Jessica pleaded for an extra day and JC said he would work on it. Because of the snow day this past Monday, the opening itself is now pushed back to Wednesday evening, with Tuesday billed as a Preview, and JC will announce it as such before the curtain that night. Despite these vicissitudes, I was singularly impressed with the "can-do" spirit around the table. Randy had been over to see the set construction and raved about the successful slope of the ramp and the magnitude of the 24-foot high walls. JC then gave a sensible, low-key pep talk to all of us, saying to "be positive, show the best face of our Department, don't descend into chit-chat, and put on a great show, which we all know how to do." Meeting adjourned at 2:54—nineteen minutes!—*fantastic*.

Later the same day . . . 5 pm . . . Dean's Conference Room . . . "Notes." Everyone was sitting around the polished table, all seventeen members of our intrepid Company, some with pads and notebooks at the ready, others simply listening quietly. JC proceeded to talk through the entire first half of the show, moment by moment, scene by scene, words emanating directly from the hard-wired labyrinth of his brain—without one pause, without any actual "Notes" in front of him. Much of what he spoke about concerned guidance in how and where people should *look* while in performance. The rules of eye-contact and focus were laid out imperatively. The rules of gazing off stage without connecting to the audience. The rules of watching a distant battle as if it were really "out there."

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. . . the rules of living in their own world for two hours in such a way as to lend credence to the additional "reality" of the rest of their world that is invoked, even if not literally seen by them or by the audience.

. . . to live in a poetic construct made for their presentation over the course of five days, only to disappear, to be "STRUCK," starting at 10 a.m. on Sunday, March 15th. . .

. . . 3/6 @ 3:00 p.m.—*Through the looking-glass*. I'd never opened the Stage Door before. It was right there, where Randy said it would be, around the side of the Kasser building past the Box Office. For some reason, even though I had been assured it would be open, I reached toward the handle expecting it to resist me. But no . . . I opened the door and became disoriented, not clear which way to turn. Glossy photos on the walls of various University dignitaries posing with visiting show biz and theatrical celebrities. Another door that warned "Do not enter." A couple of hesitant turns this way and that and then another door with a sign saying something to the effect of not entering through the Lobby. I opened it and peered around the corner. It looked like the Lobby to me. I turned left and saw a door that said "Stage Door," (I think.) By now I felt—illogically—as if I were trespassing. I opened the door and there I was, in the other world, a hugely cavernous world, a seemingly-unpopulated space, silent except for the occasional "snap" and "crack" of what sounded like a staple gun, then the occasional "slap" of wood being tossed to the floor. I stepped deeper in and saw the outer sides of constructed walls, wooden sections about six feet wide extending upward more than twenty feet. I walked around toward the steps leading down into the house and, as I did, the vista of the stage set slowly revealed itself, cerulean/powdery/textured blue canvas with white highlights, as if inside a cloud or ascending toward the heavens. The floor beneath was tilted, raked precipitously from back down to front, scuffed and flecked with paint. Three carpenters hammering and cutting barely looked up from their work to acknowledge me. Up in the booth, someone was test-projecting a huge Moon image and it dimly glowed against the back wall. I was so enthralled with the empty magnitude of the place that I did not even take time to imagine the actors "strutting and fretting their hour upon the stage." Instead I marveled at the intricacy of the structure and the way all the pieces seemed to fit together—in a rough-hewn way from the back and yet seamlessly from the front. After five minutes of tentative wandering, I went out the way I came in, saying goodbye to nobody in particular. Outside on the nondescript balcony overlooking the parking lot it was once again an unchanged dimly-sunny and half-heartedly balmy false-spring day, students coming and going, unaware of *the other place* from which I had just emerged, blinking. And soon thereafter, *this* came to me, from our campus photographer, Mike Peters, and today's magical circle was completed. http://www.mikepeters.com/ HM/homburg_index.html

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Homburg Dramaturg's Journal Part IV—From Tech through Strike

3/9—Arriving at 6:00 on a rainy Sunday evening, eight hours after everybody else on this "10 to 10" day, I spent three hours last night at Tech, sitting next to Set Designer Erhard Rom and Costume Designer Jessica Lustig, behind lighting designer Peter West and stage manager Alisone Alcordo, (murmuring into their headphones), and forward and to the right of Sound Designer David Lawson—while JC by turns darted about the room, called out instructions to the actors, stopped the action, dictated notes to Assistant Director Sandy Taylor, and leapt up onto and down from the stage. I mention all of these people by name yet again, because last night really was theirs and the cast's. It was not a night for dramaturgy in the usual sense; it was all sound cues and light cues and missing buttons and loose neckerchiefs and charcoal-smudged cuffs, additional last-minute blocking, and moving spikes two feet upstage and focusing footlights to try one more time to get the miniature horses' shadows to prance along the rear wall. The ladies in waiting spent quite awhile rehearsing the scene in which the Electress faints upon hearing of the Elector's death—a scene made all the more realistic by Larissa's chronic upset stomach brought on by a corset that was far too tight and a dinner eaten in haste. But naturally, she got over it, stoic as always, insisting that the action be played. The Wagner sounded portentous; the organ music swelled; and musket and cannon fire threatened to blow out the sides of the house. I did notice a few things, not having seen everyone in costume until now: no hats (JC hates them); and no swords (just two belts to 'signify' them, and a wise choice, I thought). Faded pale lights made Homburg's conversation with Hohenzollern in the Garden at midnight suitably chilly. The banners flowed effortlessly, deep blue with silvery crosses mounted upon black staffs. Erhard's battle clouds raced in two contrapuntal layers back and forth across the graying sky; and the arched, blood-red, stained glass window at the conclusion of Act I came in to resonate hauntingly with the bottom half of a massive full moon. I praised E. for this imagery under my breath, even as he pointed out to me all of the "flaws" in the set that still needed to be remedied, none of which I could see. But E. and I have batted around this conversation before—i.e., the obsessed expert habituated to the minutest detail vs. the informed theatre-goer happening upon something for the first time. E. sees a complex of problems needing to be solved. I see a three-dimensional translation of the playwright Kleist's metaphorical microcosm unraveling up there in a sparse, blue-tinged lidless wooden box surrounded by the limitless blackness of the Void.

3/10—The Preview performance, still being "teched." I sat dutifully and read the program bios before the play began, attempting to transition into pretending to be a member of the audience who had never seen the show. But once the action

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began, my good intentions at objectivity failed and I found myself, instead, registering the progress made by everyone. Instead of following the through-line of the story, I was thinking about how great everybody looked in their costumes, how the smartly-cut mens' coats showed off the gleam of their high boots; how the ladies' parasols gently opened in contrast with the intrusive cannon-shot; and how poignant were the long-evolving scenes between the Prince and the Princess and Hohenzollern and the Elector and the Electress—how Larissa commanded the heart of the stage in her grief, and A.J. struck the correct tone of ambition, and how the officers and soldiers grouped and regrouped as their allegiances shifted from one partisanship to another. The play tonight was like an organism being born—but then again, I had already seen it innumerable times. At intermission I spoke with several of my students, enjoying the show but having trouble following the plot. I had sent them my journal ahead of time but the aspect of the journal that they favored was the description of the process rather than the elucidation of the story.

And here resides another dimension of theatre that I shall take away from being *inside* a show: living with a play during the life of its realization from concept to enactment is a completely different sensory experience than reading it on the page. "How obvious," you may be saying right now, Dear Reader; yes, it is obvious—but as Mandi, one of my students, remarked to me in our brief intermission chat (a young woman who has chosen to pursue the BA instead of the BFA)—she is already an actress, and she knows this about herself, and so, by extension, she now wants to understand *all the dimensions beyond* acting, in order to become a fully-realized inhabitant of the craft.

3/12—5:30 a.m.—My head buzzing, my heart pounding, I awoke with the realization that last night's performance was the most dream-like I have seen. Or perhaps this is what happens with the play . . . as one experiences it over and over and it burrows ever-more deeply and insidiously into one's imagination, the work starts to take on hallucinatory qualities. The rhythms of the language especially hit home as I was watching last night, and I was quite aware that my breathing was constrained and I felt tense and wound-up—not nervous, just hanging on every word and expecting certain phrases that I have become partial to over these past weeks and months. There is no question anymore that the "plot" is confusing, twisting and tortured, as it fades in and out of what is real and what is not. The characters, themselves, observe the "strangeness" of their situation, and their own mystification compounds the problem for the viewer. The big themes are prominent and the big conflicts are dramatically presented. Rather, it's the nuances and the clouds—reiterating the smoke and fog and clouds of the play—that keep me guessing, even now. The audience respected the dramatic and highly-theatrical appearance of the show, the tableaux and the ritual and the overbearing music; whether they were able to actually follow along remains unclear, but perhaps, in

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the end, Kleist was not seeking coherence even though he always talked about the fact that he wanted a life-plan. By this point in his life, Kleist, like the Prince, said he desired death. The Prince did not necessarily meet it head-on and Kleist does not pull the trigger either—at least not so that *we* will witness it.

Tonight is the "talk-back," so over the next 12 hours I will need to find a way out of this mental morass and into some semblance of dramaturgical coherence for the expectant crowd . . . or then again, maybe I won't. Maybe I'll just go with what I possess.

3/13—5:15 a.m.—Last night when I walked into the lobby I spotted JC sitting in the corner talking on his cell phone. I was going to let him be, but he called me over. I said I was feeling like a Homburg-addict; if I didn't get my nightly "fix" of seeing the show I would go into withdrawal pangs. I said I didn't know what I was going to do with myself after the run ended this weekend. (Roger suggested to me the other day that I could continue to send him and the rest of the cast my journals, but I told him that my life really isn't that interesting, which is not *quite* true . . .). Carrie joined us, and we chatted about the talk-back scheduled for after the performance, and she asked me if I was "ready." Of course, I replied, not saying what I have been thinking for the past several days, that I could probably talk for days on end about *Homburg* and never get close to the bottom of it.

During the show, I jotted down "keywords" in the first and second acts as they occurred to me. It was as if I were seeing it for the first time. The first act was all about insubstantiality: dreams and nothingness and imagination and madness and visions and fainting—the ephemerality of what was (supposedly) happening. Even the battle scene, the way it had been staged behind a screen of smoke, was obscure to the eye and ear. At the top of the second act, Kleist presents his soliloquy about "turning the axe upon myself" as a vivid way of seeing the world in two halves—that eternally Romantic dialectic. Then the play rumbles onward to its conclusion to insist upon this divide, beginning with Hohenzollern pointedly asking Homburg "how [he] can be free" when he does not yet have his sword back in his possession; and from there to metaphors of a more forceful and concrete and insistent nature than in the first act: custody, jail, chains, imprisonment, the grave, the firing squad and death—versus the heart "in [its] dwelling-place" and beyond, the core of all human feeling. As JC has insisted so many times—which will triumph? Will it be the construction of an illusion by the artist, or the destruction of the state by subversion? Will it be the artifice of the play being written, or the shredded words that lead nowhere except to obstruction of the characters' actions?

The talkback went very well because JC and I limited our remarks in deference to hearing from the actors about their biggest challenges in the development of the play. I noticed—as we went around the group and they testified

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resolutely but wearily to the respectful, supportive audience—that the common theme was *the text*, the language, conveying the motifs and meanings of the message. Indeed, how difficult this journey has been for them all, compounded by the relentless ambiguity of the work itself, right down to its final moments, exemplifying the conflicted denouement of the drama of Kleist's sad and tortured life.

3/14—*Last night was even clearer*. At first I thought it might have been because I shifted positions. In the theatre I always gravitate toward the left-hand aisle, preferably *on* the aisle so I can stretch my legs. But this time I headed to the right after I entered. This angle gave me a better approach to the Prince, since almost all of his speeches are delivered from stage right. Furthermore, dare I say it, the fog, so essential to the battle scene, was not used. I surmised that JC was once more "trying something new," but I found out afterwards that no, the fog machines just did not work. The effect was gone but the clarity was there—a paradox if there ever was one. Beyond these stagecraft matters, three more major factors leapt out at me. One was the sharp division between the Elector and the Prince, which, although I have noted it earlier, tonight was signaled like a clarion-call with the Elector's first fiery, threatening speech to the Prince at the outset of the play. He has been warned, and soon, he is warned again, and again. The Elector has no choice but to stand for the dignity and imperatives of his office. Mike carries this through with such force. He took over the stage as JC had been telling him to do for the past two months. The other thing that came home to me was the dilemma of the writer commenting upon this dilemma within the work itself. I cannot recall a piece of theatre that attacks the issue of writing—the difficulties, the obstructions, the challenges—not to mention the physical act of reading letter after letter—with such relentlessness. I admit that JC added the conceit of Kleist tearing his own words down from the walls and scattering them across the floor. Even without that display, the Prince cannot seem to get a grip on his own writing, from the moment he has trouble taking down the orders for battle in his pocket notebook to the revisions of his note from prison that lead to Natalie's desperate frustration. And the third motif that leapt out at me last night was the constant question of "where" the Prince of Homburg *was*. I understood last night that throughout the play, he was everywhere and nowhere—*hic et ubique*, as Hamlet says in pursuit of his father's ghost. After the curtain falls, he lives here, in my mind.

3/15—Sunday—Strike. By the time I arrived in Kasser at 10:30 in the morning, a dozen guys and women in black t-shirts and jeans and work-boots wielding whining electric screwdrivers were stooping and scrambling here and there in a mood of urgent, fiery intensity. The raw two-by-fours underneath the floor were already exposed and being dismantled, their fate—salvaged or not?—

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uncertain; the raked plank floorboards had long since been ripped up and loaded outside in the dumpster; and the blue painted muslin stretched over plywood flats was half-stripped off, dangling in forlorn shreds. I asked Alice how long she thought it would take to do the whole job, start to finish. She said they hoped to be finished by 6 pm . . .

Five minutes was more than enough time for me. I took one last look around and walked out of there.

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