

Palimpsest

Characters

Narrator.....Mona

Time Traveler..... Brujo

Storyteller..... Denise

Former Homeless Person, Mom, and Activist..... Amanda

Betty Leacraft.....Betty Leacraft

Indigenous Person.....Michaela

Block Builder.....,.....Kiki

Setting: December 11, 2016. The Philadelphia Museum of Art Auditorium, Philadelphia, PA Early afternoon. Block Builder sits center downstage, building, then rebuilding blocks with other shapes. All other characters stand on the stage.

NARRATOR: Come visit us. Our main project is at 4th and Master Streets, about a mile from here. One mile away, an entirely different world. Talk with us. Talk with us here, and at 4th and Master Streets. We're diverse. We're passionate. We're Reconstructions.

As the BLOCK BUILDER builds blocks and shapes, the NARRATOR stops in front of her.

NARRATOR: What are you doing here?

BLOCK BUILDER: I'm constructing and reconstructing.

INDIGENOUS PERSON: A better question is what are YOU doing here?

NARRATOR: I'm here to narrate our group's work.

INDIGENOUS PERSON: Asking me questions isn't narration. This feels more like an interview.

NARRATOR: And you don't want to be interviewed?

INDIGENOUS PERSON: I just get tired.

NARRATOR: Tired of being interviewed?

INDIGENOUS PERSON: Tired of talking about my culture. Nothing ever seems to get done after I spend time talking to supposedly left types.

NARRATOR: Well, exactly what is it you want done?

INDIGENOUS PERSON: I want (1) *improvisation*, (2) *improvisation*, and (3) the TRUTH. I want people to know that any reconstruction that takes place in this city is built on the backs of indigenous peoples' lives and labors. I want that done. I want companies and politicians and average people to stop trying to make me and my cultures disappear. I want THAT done. I want our interaction done so that I can rest. And simply be.....out of my face, unless you plan to do something other than talk and interview me.

NARRATOR: Point taken. I didn't mean to offend you.

INDIGENOUS PERSON: Well you did.

NARRATOR: Sorry.

INDIGENOUS PERSON: Save your sorries. Do something. Acknowledge my past. You act like constructing a building at 4th and Master right now, is only about the 'now'. What about past constructions, and the use of the 4th and Master space over time? Anything constructed in this country is constructed on our land. Got it?

NARRATOR: Indeed I do. If I come back with better questions, will you talk to me?

INDIGENOUS PERSON: And you still don't get it! The answers are already there. Do something. Educate people. Act. Act. And act some more.

FORMER HOMELESS PERSON, MOM, AND ACTIVIST: Listen to her.

NARRATOR: I've been listening.

FORMER HOMELESS PERSON, MOM, AND ACTIVIST: If you want to act, you should listen more carefully and not ask irrelevant questions.

NARRATOR: I'm starting to feel a little exhausted.

FORMER HOMELESS PERSON, MOM, AND ACTIVIST: You're feeling exhausted? Just think about how Indigenous Person feels. It's hard to escape an identity that's been forced on you, and most of the time forced identities don't help the person who're thrust into a category. Everyone should be able to name themselves. I'm more than a 'mother', a former 'homeless person' or an 'activist'. I like (*improvisation--insert favorite music, book food, activities*)

NARRATOR: I wasn't---

FORMER HOMELESS PERSON, MOM, AND ACTIVIST: I know what she means about erasure. I am a 48 year old mother to a 26 year son. I'm a worker, a card maker, and a volunteer. I was once homeless. I stayed in a shelter with my son for ten and a half months, just enduring until I received a Section 8 voucher. By the grace of that voucher and an incredible landlord I've been able to stay in my ultra gentrified neighborhood since 1993. Because of the negative psychological head trip homelessness does to a person, I didn't realize I still lived with the boxes I moved out of the shelter a decade after I found housing. I thought the rug would be pulled out from under me, and I'd be homeless again---this thought took residence in my mind. I now volunteer and use my voice for affordable housing because I didn't have a right to speak due to being homeless. I look at the newly appointed HUD czar and scream F-U-C-K!!!!I'll never be able to retire from volunteering now. I'm grateful for solitude, stability, and sanctuary my house provides for me.

NARRATOR: Wow. That's a lot.

FORMER HOMELESS PERSON, MOM, AND ACTIVIST: That's my life.

NARRATOR: I was trying to sympathize.

FORMER HOMELESS PERSON, MOM, AND ACTIVIST: Were you listening to Indigenous Person and me? I don't need your sympathy, but I do need you to stop talking so much if you're not going to do something.

NARRATOR: Aren't there all sorts of ways to 'do something'? I'm not an activist.

INDIGENOUS PERSON: Obviously!

NARRATOR: Please stop attacking me.

INDIGENOUS PERSON: Please stop ignoring me.

NARRATOR: Yikes. I'm going to try to do something. Something. It may not be protesting, but---

BETTY LEACRAFT: I protested in my day.

NARRATOR: I wasn't through talking to Indigenous Person and Former Homeless Person, Mom, and Activist.

BETTY LEACRAFT: I was following up on what you said. I agree with you. There are all sorts of ways to protest. For example, I make quilts.

NARRATOR: What kind of quilts?

BETTY LEACRAFT: Quilts. All different kinds.

NARRATOR: Do you have one with you?

BETTY LEACRAFT: Of course not.

NARRATOR: Why not?

BETTY LEACRAFT: There you go with your silly questions. Who carries around quilts? I don't carry around quilts.

NARRATOR: What do you carry around?

BETTY LEACRAFT: My life. I always carry my memories. And some of them are very heavy.

NARRATOR: How can a thought be heavy?

BETTY LEACRAFT: Metaphorically heavy! I carry around my memories all the time. Of things I've witnessed and been a part of. Of communities standing up against negative actions and hate. Of resistance. Of love. Of change.

NARRATOR: But what do you do? How is that related to your quilting?

BETTY LEACRAFT: That IS my quilting. My life. My memories and observations. What I see and feel. What I hear and process.

STORYTELLER: She's an artist.

NARRATOR: Does anyone ever raise their hand around here?

STORYTELLER: What?

NARRATOR: People keep jumping into other peoples' conversations.

STORYTELLER: We're not having conversations. Our speaking to one another as a dialogue. Did you forget this is a play?

NARRATOR: Actually I did. For a minute I thought---

STORYTELLER: I interrupted you because you don't seem to have any idea of what public art is.

NARRATOR: I never said I did.

INDIGENOUS PERSON: You didn't have to. It shows.

NARRATOR: You're still angry with me?

INDIGENOUS PERSON: I don't want you to forget I'm here.

STORYTELLER: I won't forget you're here. When I tell stories I'm acutely aware of this country's historical amnesia. My telling my stories is art. It's public art like what we're doing here. 'Reconstructions' is one part of this incredible project. And since I'm a storyteller, let me fill you in on what's happening at 4th and Master, and why we chose that location for our Reconstructions project. *(improvise with factual information---tell how, what, and why)* Let me put it this way.

The STORYTELLER steps forward and pauses. Then.....

'Our strategy should be not only to confront empire, but to lay siege to it. To deprive it of oxygen. To shame it. To mock it. With our art, our music, our literature, our stubbornness, our joy, our brilliance, our sheer relentlessness – and our ability to tell our own stories. Stories that are different from the ones we're being brainwashed to believe. The corporate revolution will collapse if we refuse to buy what they are selling – their ideas, their version of history, their wars, their weapons, their notion of inevitability. Remember this: We be many and they be few. They need us more than we need them. Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.'

NARRATOR: How poetic. You're a storyteller AND a poet.

STORYTELLER: That last bit was Arundhati Roy.

The NARRATOR stares at the STORYTELLER.

STORYTELLER (CONT'D): I'm a storyteller, not a poet. Why reinvent the wheel? I 'd have given Arundhati Roy credit if you hadn't interrupted me.

NARRATOR: It's always my fault.

INDIGENOUS PERSON: Your words. Not ours.

The NARRATOR looks at, and then walks back to the BLOCK BUILDER.

NARRATOR: Why are you using tuna cans to build a structure?

BLOCK BUILDER: Why not? Constructing and reconstructing things takes all sorts of materials.

NARRATOR: Tuna fish is a material?

BLOCK BUILDER: Why not tuna fish? Reconstructing takes sustenance. Reconstruction involves the material, and all sorts of ideas---things we can't see. Building communities involves taking everyone's needs into account. In

neighborhoods, reconstruction involves basic needs. Ensuring there are no food deserts. Services that are wanted by the people in their neighborhoods, programs geared to them. When new construction begins, it's possible to reconstruct using some of the old pieces and adding some new bits.

NARRATOR: Tuna fish seems like a stretch.

BLOCK BUILDER: Have you ever heard of symbolism? We're in a play.

NARRATOR: I'm aware of that! I'm narrating the whole play.

TIME TRAVELER: In what language? Certainly not 'nahuatl.'

NARRATOR: I don't know that language.

TIME TRAVELER: Precisely my point.

NARRATOR: Where did you come from?

TIME TRAVELER: I've been here all along. Sometimes you see me, and sometimes I blend into a culture, almost seamlessly. I guess I should say cultures.

NARRATOR: You sound mysterious.

TIME TRAVELER: There's nothing mysterious about cultural fluidity. A lot of the natives in North America and other places have lost their native language. But some northern American migrants share the mother tongue called 'nahuatl', as far down to Nicaragua.

When I give a talk about culture and ideology and development, I start it with something like this:

'Hello everyone.

I would like to talk to you in my mother language,
Me gustaria hablarles en mi idioma real,

But I cant, No puedo.

All I can say is

Tlaxoclamati Ometoe
Tlaxoclamati Tonatiu
Tlazaclamati Huehuemencinsi.

Con respeto al a dualidad creadora de vida

Con el respeto al Sol
Con respeto a todos ustedes.'

Because Colonization and now globalization make us act. Cultures build on top of cultures. We are not who we were, and we don't belong here. At least not yet. And by the time we do belong, there are pieces that go missing.

NARRATOR: Is that all you have to say?

TIME TRAVELER: I could say more, but I thought we only had 8 minutes.

NARRATOR: Right. Right. In fact, our presentation is over, at least for today. But we'll be presenting at 4th and Master all year long. 2017 is going to be major, physical and spiritual. Here and there. We will reconstruct in 2017, but mentally and ideologically, our transformation has already begun.

Decidedly NOT the End

