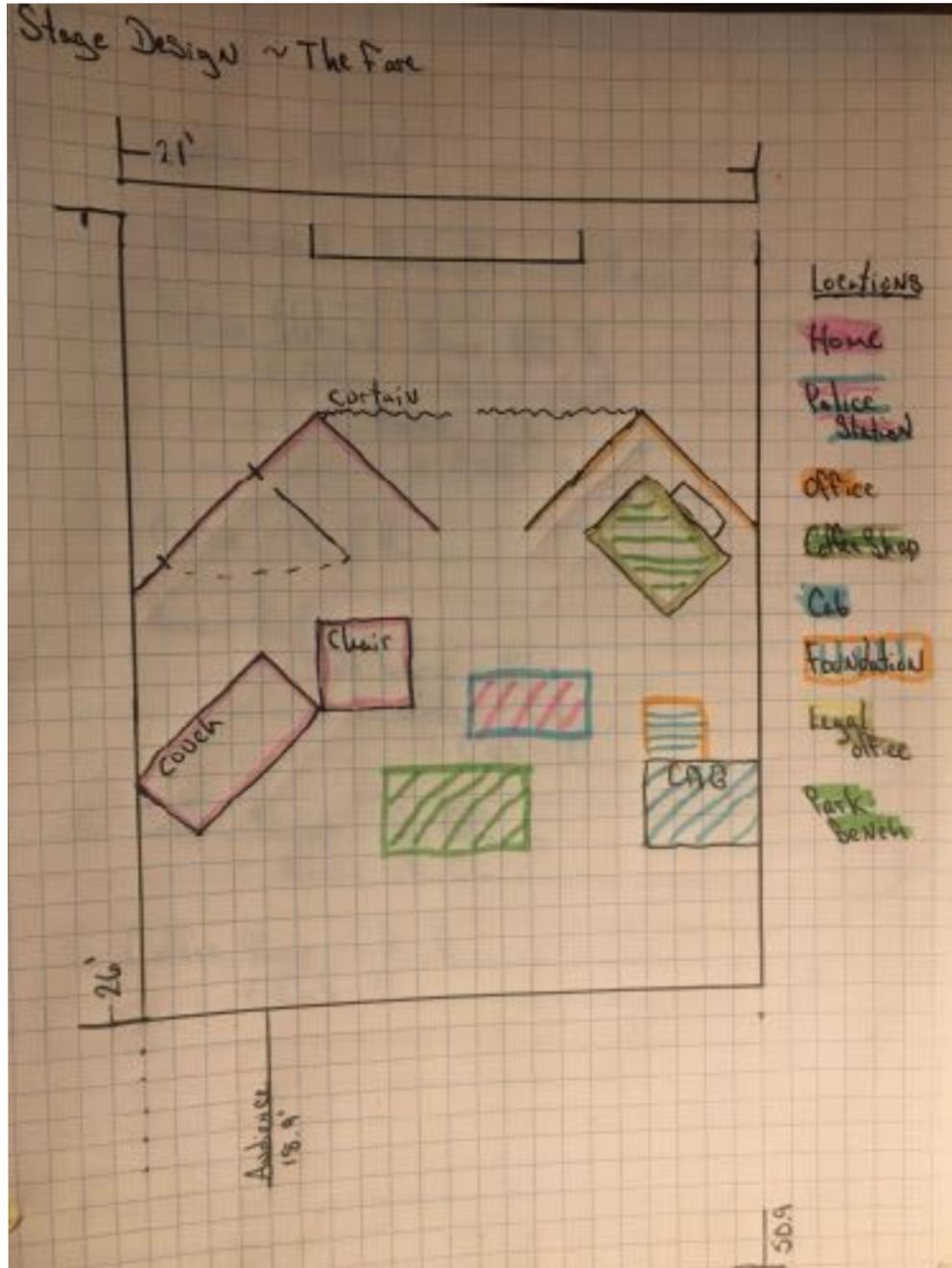


THE FARE
Written by Claude Solnik
Directed by Scott David Reeves





Stage Design

There are eight functioning locations in the script of *The Fare*, they are:

- The Home
- The Police Station
- The Office
- The Coffee Shop
- The Cab
- The Foundation
- The Legal Office
- A Park Bench

The primary concern I had as the director was how to dress a fixed stage as several different locations convincingly with virtually no time between scenes and a minimal budget. I ultimately settled on using up stage and down stage simultaneously, breaking up each location with a focused light plot per location and alternating zones to keep the action of the play moving across the entirety of the space. The key locations The Home and The Office, where the majority of the action took place, occupy the largest of these zones with walls and fixed stage dressings. Then using alternating locations downstage for the Park Bench, Police Station and Coffee Shop with the aid of distinct lights as well as simple, removable props or chairs, each scene and setting came to life.

Initial Research

The Fare written by Claude Solnik, a resident playwright for Theater for A New City in New York's lower east side is based off of actual events. A banker and a cab driver have an altercation, which captures the public's interest taking the national stage sparking conversations about 'hate crimes' and 'Islamophobia' in a post 9/11 era.

These events took place in Connecticut and New York City in late 2012. The case revolves around William Bryan Jennings of CT, and Hassan Ahmad of NY via Egypt. The play is loosely based off of the events affecting both the cab driver and the banker after the altercation in the cab, tracking the fallout for Jennings as he is ousted from his job, denied backpay and has criminal charges filed against him.



I was initially contacted by Mr Solnik to direct a play, but he wasn't specific which of his plays he would like to have directed as he had several he wanted to bring to the stage. I was drawn to this particular story because it felt relevant after the presidential election, the Muslim ban, and the rising anti-Muslim rhetoric I was hearing throughout the nation. The first draft was too long and I sat with Mr Solnik through several rewrites to cut the play down and eliminate unneeded scenes in order to streamline the story.

The central themes of the play are the concept "it takes a lifetime to build a reputation and seconds to destroy it" while touching on the socially relevant concept of racism, classism and prejudice. We the audience watch the fallout of one decision unwinding a man's life and career, while tracking the criminal case and society's reaction to both men involved in the incident. The characters in the play become rough similarities to their real life counterparts, which allowed us the creative license to tell our story and demonstrate both sides of a looming and precarious social issue in America.

Directing and Acting in a Performance

The decision to direct and act in this production was initially floated by Mr Solnik, but I jumped at the opportunity. Artistically, I am drawn to participating in work I direct, finding inspiration from creatives such as David Cale or Eric Bogosian. However, if acting in a production interferes with the work I have no problem functioning strictly as a director.

The best way I know how to balance acting in a production while directing really comes down to having a creative team you can trust, as well as a clear set of goals for each scene. The stage manager Holly Jian was instrumental to my success as a director and actor, as she kept meticulous notes on blocking, updating every change as it occurred, and allowing me to concentrate when I needed to as an actor while allowing the creative input of my fellow cast members. I would begin each scene with clear blocking to suit the setting, each characters goals, and the scene, but I was still flexible enough to have each actor give their creative input to what they felt was honest to their performance. As the scenes evolved, we could move forward with the faith we would know how we got there and where we were going.



Goals and Evaluations

The primary goal for this play was to address the racial and socioeconomic biases Americans have adopted in the last decade. With a protagonist that was apart of the Wall Street elite and several antagonists ranging from the corporate structure itself, the judicial system and a Muslim, we were able to stand a lot of preconceived notions on their head. By subverting the idea of a victim to a Wall Street banker, the audience is challenged to empathize with someone who was only days before on top of the world.

Through the narrative of *The Fare* the tendrils of success are cut away and we watch the character of Richard Hoagland (based off of Jennings) come close to loosing everything he has worked his whole life for because of a criminal case brought against him by Omar (Ahmad's character) for "assault, hate crimes and theft of services." The climax of the play (as in real life) is when Omar fumbles his case against Hoagland and the whole affair is dropped by the courts. In our fictitious ending we bring the two character together for a final scene to talk about what they think would be justice.

The goal for the play beyond the performance itself was to participate in creating a positive human narrative regarding race, success and decency. We received reviews from an Indian based readership in New York, a Muslim based readership, a Off Broadway audience, as well as several independent blogs about the work. The results were inconclusive as to the solution of the issues, but the hope is to demonstrate positive possibilities for discussion, and in that I would say the play was a success.

As a director I enjoyed watching the actors take the characters and make them their own. Auditions, resumes and call backs are an ordeal, but finding the right people makes all the difference. I did much of the technical work for the show with the help of assistants; building the sets, setting the lights, choosing costumes as well as getting the props. Partnering with the stage manager, and relying to the crew during a performance is what makes a show work, and while the house had some technical issues, it was still overall a rewarding and (with several sold out shows) a profitable experience.

Stylistically my focus was geared towards a realism, with practical props available whenever possible. My influences in this would be Constantin Stanislavski and Lee Strasberg. There was a touch of surrealism in the work with a couple of speeches involving dreams, but I honestly kept my focus on telling the story directly. In that the final work was clear and concise, I would say it was an overall success.

For me personally, I am very proud of the work. I feel the cast was very dedicated to the story and we all felt it's relevance to this particular moment in time. While there is a frustration that there is no solution in sight, I in a way, am glad it doesn't offer some nonexistent fluffy ending, but hopefully inspired a healthy discussion about what justice might look like in todays world. What I found interesting about the work was how it resonated with different audience members, as some people sided with my character and others with Omar. I appreciated that play didn't impose a real winner or loser to the debate, but left the audience to come to their own conclusions.