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Area of Study: Chemistry (Course 5)

Today, I had the fortunate and enlightening experience of witnessing a new play workshop for Ken Urban's *The Immortals*. This was my first time participating in a professional workshop, as I had limited exposure to theater and drama before coming to MIT. However, after taking the Introduction to Playwriting class last semester and Playwrights' Workshop this semester, both taught by Professor Urban, I felt like I had been thrust into the world of theater, and I have been greatly enjoying it. Thus, I found it an amazing opportunity to arrive here and see an actual workshop in action.

I arrived early Saturday afternoon to W97, just as the cast was trickling in for the session. I had met some of the actors previously, when that had visited the Playwrights' Workshop class, and I was even offered some delicious tangerines: fuel for the next few hours. As the actors, director, and playwright all arrived, the previously empty stage became animated as people settled in, casually conversing about their lives and about the staged reading that had occurred the previous night.

Professor Urban and the director eventually started the session, and began by sharing new pages and edits with the actors. Many of the actors went about annotating and adding the pages to their performance binders as Ken explained his thoughts on some of the changed scenes based on the previous night's reading. The director then highlighted an agenda for the session, citing specific scenes that the actors would be rehearsing and assessing. In the following two hours, the actors performed those specific scenes, and then the playwright and director offered their thoughts. The actors themselves took an active role in the discussion, asking the director questions about how their characters should act.

As a playwright, Professor Urban explained to the room his thoughts on why he had his characters make certain decisions and the "drivers" of their actions. Afterwards, the director and actors engaged in a lengthy conversation, asking questions and going back and forth on character motivations, how their lines should be delivered, and other elements. Often, productive discussions led to edits including the removal of lines, addition of new lines, or even changes to the structure of the scene. The actors and director would note these changes, and the group would move forward to the next scene.

Throughout this process, I was pleasantly surprised by how organically everything worked. From Professor Urban's playwriting class, I had thought that the playwright's creative process was predominantly independent, as they conceived, constructed, and edited their scenes, but by working actively with a director and cast of actors, there is a lively dynamic and the written play is subject to even further change as new ideas are brought forward. The process is actually incredibly symbiotic, as playwright, director, and actors all work together to make the play truly come to life. Going forward towards Playwrights' Workshop, I will keep this relationship dynamic in mind, as I will be working with a director and actors to take my own play to the next level. All in all, this was a very positive experience and helped introduce me to some of the elements of play production, live in the field; I look forward to participating in the workshop process myself in the near future.