

I. What is space like on this planet?

To start, this play is set in Reading, Pennsylvania. Given that the story takes place primarily in a bar, the space feels very built. This also connects back to the fact that it feels as if everything that happens or is made on this planet comes at the cost of the blood, *sweat*, and tears of its inhabitants. Denizens of this planet struggle greatly to escape their hometown and the working patterns set up by the people who came before them, so the space is very confined. Space on this planet also feels very internal, in great part due to the “us versus them” mentality that many of the characters foster. The story also takes place in the interior of a popular bar (and briefly in the interior of characters’ offices or homes). The only exception to this rule is the scene between Oscar and Tracey where she finds out the factory is hiring people outside of the union – and that is truly when the world comes crashing down on the characters’ only escape from their reality, so it makes sense that it would take place outside (the exterior reality comes crashing down on the interior facade).

II. How does time behave here?

Given that this play takes place in a version of our own world, time is linear. This story primarily tracks characters from the beginning of one year (2000) to the end, then jumps forward eight years to show three small scenes that occur between September 24 and October 18. However, the seconds, minutes, and hours don’t feel quite as important in this world. Instead, time is marked by major events: birthdays, advancements in a strike, promotions, lock outs, and more. There is essentially one scene per month of the year 2000. In this very familiar world, time does not tend to stand still. It also somehow balances feeling both leisurely and frantic. The characters act as if they have all the time in the world while trying to forget their harsh reality through alcohol, but we are also constantly aware of their desperate need for the occurrence of each major event/milestone that marks their time.

III. What is the planet’s climate?

Just like in real life, the climate of this planet changes as the months progress (cold winter, warm spring, hot summer, and mild autumn). This information can be found in the stage directions at the top of every scene. Emotionally, the climate tends to be rather suffocating. It constantly feels humid and inescapable. Especially considering the fact that most of the characters currently work or have worked in a

factory, the climate of this planet feels like an endlessly sweltering summer. Nobody can escape the need to sweat.

IV. What is the mood of the story?

The mood of this play tends to be conflicted. At times, there is great happiness, especially looking at Tracey's birthday. However, it more often than not feels serious, tense, angry, and ominous. The "fend for yourself" mentality is palpable in some way in almost every character (but especially Tracey), and it never feels like any of them are safe from the boot of their superiors. Violent jokes are made regularly and without much regard for their severity, and serious and scary topics are often the core of drunken conversations.

V. What is the tone of the planet?

The tone tends to be very violent, dangerous, and coarse. One might also add the adjective "passionate" to that list, given how seriously each character takes their opinions, needs, and wishes. Evidently we see the violent tone with what James and Chris do to Oscar at the end of act II, but the regularly mentioned "fend for yourself" mentality also brings a certain level of violence against one's physical, mental, and social health. Given the characters' proximity to hard work, sweat, injuries, and rusty old factories, and considering how passionate all of them are, they all also create a tone of coarseness. Additionally, many of the characters seem to lack a filter, which contributes to the coarse nature of the play.

VI. How are the mood and tone created?

The mood and tone are created primarily through the dialogue between characters, as well as the paths the relationships in this play take. The build-up of tension as the story progresses is hugely important to the tensiveness, anger, and gravity of these characters' lives. As a director, I would want to do a deep dive into the text to really figure out what lines carry the most subtext/backstory and make sure the actors hit those. I would also play a lot with distance. There are many moments where Oscar is present in the bar, but says nothing. I would use those times to really hone in on the sense of "fending for oneself." I could also play with the space between Jason and Chris to showcase tension between them growing (they often seem to be on top of each other, but start to physically grow apart, especially through the second act). This type of distance is already present in the script with Tracey and Cynthia, especially given the amount of time the women try to physically be in different

places, and the amount of times such behavior is alluded to in conversations about how their interactions at work changed after Cynthia got promoted.

VII. What is the music of the planet?

The music of this planet feels a lot like chanting. With all the discussions of factory work, striking, and screaming at new workers, it feels as if there is a constant heartbeat of passion for fighting against the system. Given that most of these scenes take place in a bar, one could also relate this chanting back to the drum beats that often shake the floor of clubs and bars. The music of the 2008 scenes feels very melancholic, perhaps similar to music of mourning. The characters understand how much they've lost and spend a lot of time reminiscing on what could have been. Even the 2008 bar scene feels a lot less active and loud. It has aged with the characters.

VIII. Is the planet public or private?

This is a very public planet. Evidently, almost all of these scenes take place in a bar, so there are certainly more people than just the characters we hear speak. That's obvious even through the fact that Oscar rarely gets a chance to speak while working right around the main cast. Additionally, even while older versions of Chris and James are somewhere other than the bar, it still feels like they are performing for someone. Every character has their own set of personal and private issues, but they always seem to end up accidentally dealing with them or sharing them in front of a world of strangers.

IX. In what kinds of patterns do the figures arrange themselves?

The figures tend to appear in a web-like structure. They are all interrelated, but they tend to stand alone by nature and close themselves off from grouping up, even with the people they say they are closest to. We can see that they are not arranged in groups, especially because of Jason and Chris. Jason could be paired up with his mother, Tracey, to make a "group" of racist, white, lower class workers who would do just about anything to keep their jobs. However, both of them disgust each other at certain points in the play (Tracey insults Jason's white supremacist tattoos and Jason does not appreciate Tracey constantly bumming him for money and drinks). Chris and Cynthia could also be paired together as more reasonable mediators, but Chris seems to grow apart from her after she is the one to lock out the workers. Jason and Chris could be seen as a pairing, but even they grow apart as tension

builds, and especially after they end up in prison. Even the scenes between the men and Evan show the web of interconnectedness – they have the same parole officer and have similar conversations with him at the beginning and end of the play.

X. How do figures appear/look?

Figures in this world look pretty much exactly like the humans we know. They are meant to be based in reality. That being said, they may look a little more dirtied up and scrappy than the people we know in privileged scenarios. Any exaggeration of their struggle should still be subtle, though, and based in realistic costuming and makeup.

XI. How do figures dress?

In general, these characters will also dress like the humans we know, at least in terms of typical clothing manufacturing processes. Perhaps those of them who work steady factory jobs often run into the bar still in a jumpsuit uniform. Or perhaps they wear faux-fancy short dresses, like one might expect to see at a bar or club.

XII. How do figures interact?

Figures tend to interact through unfiltered discussion. Characters don't often seem to think much about what they say or do before they say or do it. This is likely partially thanks to their intoxication. It is also this lack of inhibition that leads to the violent interactions late in the story. In any case, most of the discussions that characters have are not very reasonable. If anything, discussions tend to be one-sided in both directions (people seem to have entire conversations talking about two different topics or two completely oppositional opinions on an issue).

XIII. Who has power on this planet? How is it achieved?

The only people with “real” power on this planet seem to be the executives of the factory: people we never meet in a location we never actually see. Put simply, power essentially comes from money and a hereditary history of power. If your grandparents had power that they passed down to your parents, who passed it down to you, you're essentially untouchable, and can choose how miserable everyone underneath you has to be. We see Cynthia “gain power” when she gets promoted, but, ultimately, she is just as much of a puppet for the higher-ups as the friends she looks out. She was given a little bit more privilege, but not more power. We also see that trend in the fact that Jason and Tracey, white people who should naturally have

some level of white privilege, are in the exact same boat as their black and Spanish-American counterparts.

XIV. What are the language habits?

Language almost always comes in the form of dialogue, and it is very based in prose. Characters tend to let their emotions lead their dialogue (thus their lack of filter), maybe save for Stan, who seems to try to keep his wits about him and think based in practicality, rather than emotion. There are more patterns of interruption than of silence. The dialogue moves quickly and characters constantly talk over one another. Conversations are passionate and often derail just to come back to a conclusive point three pages later.

XV. What changes in the world?

Even just looking at the bar, the world becomes a lot more melancholy by the end of the play. When Jason and Chris run away from an injured Oscar and Stan, they essentially break the strings that connected the web of interconnectedness between the characters. Eight years later, when the web finally begins to be rebuilt, that reconstruction is a choice made by the characters, rather than simply a reality of the situation they lived in. They are all a bit more grown up, and the mentality of “me versus them” has diminished. We see this especially with how civil Oscar is with Chris and James, and through James rushing to help Stan when he drops his cloth.

XVI. What one striking image in the middle of the play has to happen to get us from the starting image to the ending image?

Scene 3 of Act 2 showcases the beginnings of the web being torn apart. Even when Cynthia was starting to act better than everyone because of her promotion, both she and Tracey still came to Jessie's birthday. This is the first time in years the women haven't been together on one of their birthdays. As I mentioned above, the web had to break so that it could be rebuilt eight years later. Thus, Cynthia locking her friends and family out of the factory, then sitting alone at the bar has to happen so that the tension and feeling of “every man for himself” can increase to the point of Jason getting severely violent and landing himself and Chris in jail.

XVII. What has the world demanded of me?

This world has demanded a lot of conscious thought about how I treat other people with the privilege that I have. It has also demanded more sympathy from me for the

people who are simply struggling to survive, especially those of us who go to extreme lengths – such as white supremacy and violence – in an attempt to gain any sort of power or control over our own lives when we feel we have none.

XVIII. How does this piece speak to other dramatic worlds?

The realism imbued in this world reminds me heavily of the play *Paris* by Eboni Booth. Both worlds deal with the struggles of the working class and the reasons people often get stuck in their hometown. They also both deal with racism, obvious and subtle, and how that impacts the connections people make and how we treat each other. Additionally, both plays end with a subtle feeling of being in a “hopeless limbo.”

XIX. Additional Research

- A. [A brief history of The Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now \(ACORN\)](#)
- B. [Transcript of the final televised presidential debate between Barack Obama and John McCain in 2008](#)
- C. [Former Attorney General Janet Reno on gun violence \(October 2, 2000\)](#)
- D. [Dow Jones Industrial Average 100-Year Chart](#)
- E. [A summary of the great recession of 2008 and its aftermath](#)
- F. [A poem about life after prison and what puts people there in the first place](#)

The first four of the above links relate to what is on the news before the scenes shown in the play. The Dow Jones Index rising and falling is mentioned several times throughout the play, in 2000 and 2008. The Barack Obama versus John McCain debate is mentioned before the final 2008 scene with Evan, where James and Chris really start to feel connected again. Attorney General Reno’s statements about keeping schools safe from gun violence is mentioned before scene 5 of act 2. ACORN is mentioned before the final scene of the play. Were I to direct this show, I would make sure to research all of the events, advancements, and tragedies mentioned in these news segments. I think it is greatly important to understand what is happening in the world around the actors,

especially when thinking about the gravity of the things the characters choose to ignore over the course of this story, since they really only have the energy to focus on their own hardships.

The fifth link relates specifically to the September 2008 scene between Chris and Cynthia. This information could help explain why Cynthia has to work several jobs and has to move houses. Aside from that scene, the housing crisis that came with the Great Recession could explain why Jason struggles so much in 2008 to find a place to stay while refusing to live with Tracey.

The sixth link relates greatly to Chris' character, especially in regards to how he grew and changed while in prison. This poem feels like something Chris himself might write while bored in his cell one day and reminiscing about everything he could have done if he hadn't started attacking Oscar with James (minus the mentions of weed and dope). It discusses how little thought people usually put into what the aftermath of their crime will be, which is certainly seen through Chris' blind rage and instinct to run after seeing what came of his actions. The poem also discusses becoming a teacher for others and more spiritual or religious while in prison, which Chris often discusses as being his experience.

The fifth and sixth links would primarily be used by me to help inform the actors about the situations their characters are in. As a director, I would ask my actors to read the material while doing their character work, and, if I didn't have a dramaturg, I might make a mini-dramaturgy presentation to present to the actors, or to have in my back pocket in case their characters were not feeling clear enough.