THE SEARCH FOR CONNECTION
IN SEVEN PLAYS BY NAOMI IIZUKA

A Thesis
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This study examines the seven major published plays by playwright Naomi Iizuka: 36 Views (American Theatre, 2002), Aloha, Say the Pretty Girls (Smith and Kraus, 1999), Language of Angels (TheatreForum, 2000), Polaroid Stories (Smith and Kraus, 1997), Skin (TheatreForum, 1998), Tattoo Girl (Sun and Moon Press, 1998), and War of the Worlds (Smith and Kraus, 2000). Discussion focuses on the ways in which this body of work brings to the forefront the issues and challenges faced by the group of Americans known as Generation X. These Americans, born between the years of 1965 and 1978, exhibit patterns of behavior, attitude, and thought that unify them. The key factor for members of Generation X is the inability to make meaningful, personal connections with one another and with people from other age groups. Iizuka’s plays not only include Generation X characters and situations, but also explore the origins of those situations and what sustains them.

The study examines all of Iizuka’s published works together, dividing them thematically into three groups: those that rework a classic work with a contemporary setting for a contemporary audience (Skin and War of the Worlds), those that examine an individual in relation to a small group (Tattoo Girl, Language of Angels, and 36 Views), and those that examine a group of young people as a whole (Aloha, Say the Pretty Girls and Polaroid Stories). Iizuka’s characters encounter the same sort of problems, in all
situations, pointing to the fact that Generation X attitudes and behaviors are the result of some inescapable societal force. Although Iizuka does not seek solutions to her characters' problems, she provides a means of identification for thousands of Americans, and legitimates their real-life experiences. Because of this, Iizuka emerges as a major theatrical voice for Generation X.
Dedicated to my parents, my sister, and my brother, who make me the eccentric one.
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INTRODUCTION

*life is complicated*  

Playwright Naomi Iizuka is currently working on five commissions for five prominent American regional theatres, including the Kennedy Center, the Mark Taper Forum, and Actors’ Theatre of Louisville. After having achieved scattered productions of her plays throughout the country in the 1990s, particularly on the West Coast and at the Humana Festival of New American Plays in Louisville, Kentucky, her recent play *36 Views* was produced by New York’s Joseph Papp Public Theatre and published in *American Theatre* magazine in February 2002. Iizuka’s unique voice as a playwright and her seven published plays make her worthy of examination, although no other scholarly work has yet been published on Iizuka. This study will be the first to explore both Iizuka and her unpredictable and fresh approach to writing plays.

At 38 years of age, Iizuka’s work is relatively new to the field. She is a member of New Dramatists and has won prestigious awards for her work, which include the NEA/TCG Theatre Artist Residency Program for Playwrights, a Jerome Playwriting Fellowship, and a Many Voices Multicultural Collaboration Grant. She has had seven plays published and many plays produced all over the United States, at major regional

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1 Taken from *Aloha, Say the Pretty Girls* (Smith & Kraus, 1999).
professional theatres such as Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Dallas Theatre Center, and Actors’ Theatre of Louisville. Iizuka has worked in close collaboration with important contemporary American theatre artists such as former Actors Theatre of Louisville Artistic Director Jon Jory and innovative Director Anne Bogart.

However, Iizuka is not yet a widely-recognized name, even amongst theatre scholars and practitioners. I found that I am introducing Iizuka to most of my colleagues and professors through this study. I was first introduced to Iizuka’s work in 2000, when I was part of a 20-something play-reading group at Columbus’ Contemporary American Theatre Company. I discovered that because Iizuka’s work has extreme socio-political immediacy and a sharp focus on contemporary issues, her voice as a playwright is interesting to theatres across the country. In light of Iizuka’s appeal, especially her appeal to a specific (Generation X) audience, her work is worthy of examination in this thesis. Upon closer examination, Iizuka emerges as the theatrical voice representing Generation X, as she consistently explores the world as experienced by Generation X members, whose jaded upbringing and negative outlook toward the future impede their ability to make honest and emotional personal connections with one another. As a member of Generation X, I recognize my personal experience in Iizuka’s characters. They think, speak, and act in a way that, according to my experience, is recognizable and honest. Iizuka uses the voices of her characters to poignantly comment on the situation of the world that she perceives.

As members of Generation X attain leadership positions in society (and in theatre), they will demand that their stories be told. Because Iizuka is portraying the unique experiences of this generation in her plays, in this thesis, I will attempt to situate
Iizuka as an important and significant voice in American theatre. I will examine Iizuka’s seven published plays: Skin (TheatreForum 8:1996); War of the Worlds (Smith and Kraus, 1999); Tattoo Girl (Sun and Moon Press, 1998); Language of Angels (TheatreForum, 2000); Aloha, Say the Pretty Girls (Smith and Kraus, 2000); Polaroid Stories (Smith and Kraus, 1997); and 36 Views (American Theatre, 2002). In so doing, I will align Iizuka with Generation X by emphasizing the ways the characters connect, attempt to connect, or avoid connection with each other.

Iizuka was born in Tokyo, Japan in 1965 to Takehisa Iizuka, a financial analyst (now retired), and Maria Iizuka, an attorney with the Department of Justice who practices environmental law and is a litigator. Takehisa worked for a hotel chain based in Tokyo, but the work took the Iizuka family to Indonesia for two years, and then to Amsterdam, where Naomi lived until the first grade. In 1971, Takehisa began working for World Bank, and the family relocated to the United States (Washington, D.C. area). Naomi Iizuka was raised there, attending Yale to study classic literature. While she was there, Iizuka began writing plays. After graduating with a BA summa cum laude in literature in 1987, she entered Yale law school. She states that because she was “not hugely happy” there, she began to focus on writing. She sent one of her scripts to friend, Los Angeles director Matthew Wilder, and he was struck by her unique style. He told her, “This is great. This doesn’t look like any play I’ve ever read. You should write plays,” and she took his advice. After one unsatisfying year in law school, Iizuka moved to

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2 Smith and Kraus is the publisher of The Humana Festival of New American Plays anthologies.
California, and later earned an MFA in playwriting from the University of California-San Diego in 1992.

Iizuka’s plays generally disregard the unities of time and place, and function outside of a traditional linear structure. Iizuka attributes this “ignorance” of that conventional dramatic structure to her background in English literature, rather than in theatre. She never took a theatre class until graduate school. She claims that she never really learned the traditional playwriting formula, and not having even read many plays, she created her own. In an interview with TheatreForum contributor Gregory Gunter, Iizuka says, “So I think a lot of my style was just not having the formula. It’s like being in the kitchen without a recipe. You just kinda do your own thing,” (Gunter 41).

Iizuka’s “own thing” is an exploration of issues and experience, rather than the exploration of an event. At times her plays seem to take on a circular construction, similar to the feminist plays of Caryl Churchill or Megan Terry. While Iizuka’s plays do not focus on any particular social issue, they explore even broader human experience through those issues. For example, Aloha, Say the Pretty Girls uses a group of young people in New York, who deal with contemporary stress and restriction, including sexism and Generation X syndrome, to examine the way people come and go through each other’s lives and how they succeed or fail to connect with each other.

Another characteristic found in several of Iizuka’s plays is a re-working of an older play, as in Skin, an adaptation of George Buchner’s Woyzeck, or Polaroid Stories,

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3 Iizuka’s move to California was somewhat arbitrary. She says, “I just drove to California, because I had some friends there. Then I sort of struggled for a while,” (Gunter 40).

4 Iizuka did read the classics in college, including a few plays by playwrights such as Shakespeare and Arthur Miller (Gunter 41).
which weaves the lives of contemporary homeless youth into Ovid’s myths. It is precisely Iizuka’s disregard of a traditional treatment of time and space that allows her to effectively juxtapose seemingly unrelated times, places, concepts, or happenings to create an innovative and challenging piece of theatre.

A curious facet of Iizuka’s work is what is absent from her plays. Although Iizuka’s father is of Japanese ethnicity, Iizuka resists the label of Asian-American, citing both her mixed ethnicity and her American experience. Unlike many other Asian-American playwrights, Iizuka’s plays, for the most part, do not deal with Asian-American or Japanese-American themes. While 36 Views does involve Japanese-American characters and Japanese-American artwork, punctuated by other elements of ancient Japanese culture such as Kabuki theatre, it does not deal with the Asian-American experience in a similar way to writers such as David Henry Hwang or Frank Chin.

In recent email correspondence with Iizuka, when asked about Japanese-American drama and Japanese-American playwrights, Iizuka states that she does not align herself with that specific cultural conceptualization. She says, “I think there’s this misconception that if you have a certain surname, you’ve also had a certain set of experiences. And that those experiences are somehow uniform and predictable. And that’s simply not the case.” In certain ways, however, Iizuka’s work does resemble some Asian-American drama.

According to Velina Hasu Houston in the introduction to the Asian American anthology But Still, Like Air, I Rise, “Drama has long been a means for the voices marginalized by the dominant society to document their own histories,” (Houston xiii). While other Asian-American playwrights have traditionally used drama to make their
experiences as a marginalized ethnicity heard, Iizuka does not write about Asians or other marginalized ethnic groups. She says:

I’m not sure there’s a direct, clear, quantifiable connection between one’s heritage and one’s work. I don’t think it works that way. And even if it did, I’m mixed. I’m half-Japanese on my father’s side. On my mother’s side I’m Spanish and Cuban. There’s a range of autobiographical details that one could focus on. I think to privilege one over the other is a losing proposition.

She does, however, write about marginalized Americans, without specifying their ethnicity and, particularly in *Polaroid Stories*, uses drama to document their histories. In this way, Iizuka is both like her Asian-American peers, and at the same time very different from them. While not all plays considered or anthologized as Asian-American drama deal explicitly with the Asian-American experience, the ones that do not, such as Denise Uyehara’s *Hiro*, still specify that the characters are Asian-American and should be played by Asian-American actors. Even though Iizuka does deal with the experiences of marginalized characters, in the majority of her plays, she makes no such stipulation.

Although Iizuka does not claim that any of her plays fit into a particular genre, in writing about socially marginalized people, Iizuka aligns herself with other writers of diversity. Asian-American drama tends to focus on characters who, like the members of Generation X described by Rob Nelson his book *Revolution X: A Survival Guide for Our Generation*, are “in search of common connection and higher love” (Nelson 8). If an over-arching theme can be found to connect all of Iizuka’s published plays, it is the human desire for connection with other humans, on romantic, familial, or platonic

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5 “Denise Uyehara, in her inspiring fantasy *Hiro*, proliferates racial complexity in another sense. Race, here, is merely an incidental feature of the landscape. Though the characters all happen to be Japanese American, race is never thematized explicitly in the play,” (Nelson 13).
friendship levels. This study will examine these plays, with an emphasis on character interaction and relationship.

No previous scholarship exists on Iizuka’s work. Because of their content and style, Iizuka’s plays seem most appealing to a younger, less experienced audience. The scholars among Iizuka’s young target audience are less frequently able to publish scholarship than older and more experienced writers, which may explain the lack of critical attention paid to Iizuka. I will draw on cultural, sociological, and psychological evidence in an attempt to make critical sense of Iizuka’s plays. The seven plays will be divided into three chapters, with each chapter focusing on two or three plays that can be linked thematically.

Chapter One, you want to know my name, the first grouping of plays, will examine War of the Worlds and Skin. These plays both focus on the downward spiral of an individual or individuals, and illuminate how this affects others. It will be essential when looking at these plays to include some background on depression, as important characters display traits of the disorder. War of the Worlds, which was written in collaboration with Anne Bogart and the SITI Company, tells the story of Orson Welles, who produced his greatest works very early in his career and was never again able to replicate that quality of performance and production. Also, as Jones, Iizuka’s main character in Skin, undergoes the same descent into madness as Büchner’s protagonist Woyzeck, I will incorporate research on depression into my discussion of Skin.

When War of the Worlds played at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 2000 it

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6 Taken from Skin (Theatre Forum: 8).

 garnered much praise for its fast pace and extravagant set and lighting designs, but Reviewer Neil Cooper of The Times wrote that the biggest success of the script was the assertion that at the root of Welles’ problems, and of his over-sized ego, was his mother (Cooper). Structured according to his famous work Citizen Kane, Welles’ War of the Worlds explores the life of the man whose ideas always pushed the boundaries, and for that reason were never understood. As a result, Welles could never truly connect with anyone, and Lizuka uses this very specific investigation of a true life to explore the sense of disjointedness that characterizes much of her work.

Skin was produced in Seattle by Printer’s Devil Theatre in 1998 and received high marks for the play’s contemporary relevance, even though a jealous lover play seems to be a cliché in the twenty-first century. Along with praise for this production’s innovative technical components (including video, angular lighting, and set), The Seattle Times reviewer Misha Berson writes in her review of the Printer’s Devil Theatre’s 1998 production, “It [Skin] taps into a very real vein of machismo, passivity and existential oppression that persists in certain pockets of our culture,” (Berson F1). The production by Relentless Theatre at the Los Angeles Playhouse, earlier in 1998, was not quite as warmly received, but Los Angeles Times Reviewer Laurie Winer expressed a dislike for heavy subject matter more than distaste for the script, calling this investigation of Jones and his urban setting, “lugubrious but with moments of real beauty,” (Winer 23).

In Chapter Two, you gotta know what you’re up against, I will examine Language of Angels, Tattoo Girl, and 36 Views, plays that question consequence and morality. Like Skin and War of the Worlds, Language of Angels, Tattoo Girl, and 36

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8 Taken from Language of Angels (Theatre Forum:17).
Views have a narrow focus, but rather than focusing on one character, examine a tightly-knit group of people, a family, best friends, and co-workers.

The action of Tattoo Girl begins when a woman leaves her family. The story of her attempts for self-actualization and of that of her family, in the wake of the separation, is the focus of the play. Called “a play in perpetual motion,” Tattoo Girl’s structure exists outside the realm of the traditional, and features six actors playing twenty characters. Perpetua, the play’s heroine, lives in perpetual motion. Reviewer Susan Eastman says in St. Petersburg Times of the character, “She makes contact, interacts and then slides down a chute to the next experience,” (Eastman 10c). The other characters in Tattoo Girl represent different values, such as conformity and independence, in contrast to Perpetua’s transient approach to life. In this way, Tattoo Girl foreshadows some of Iizuka’s later work, which concentrates on characters who seem to be caught in a tide, and merely moving when swept by the current.

The recent Language of Angels is different from War of the Worlds and Skin in that it is a ghost play that functions as a cautionary tale by telling the story of a small-town high school girl who mysteriously disappears. The play focuses on the lives of her core group of friends for many years after the disappearance. Of the once-healthy group of teens, only two survive into their 30s, one who has inherited his father’s job as a sheriff, and one who became addicted to drugs but now lives as a sober recluse. Despite the tragedy of these young lives, as San Francisco Chronicle reviewer Steven Winn says of the Campo Santo/Intersection 2000 production, Iizuka “celebrates the struggle and humanity and imploded despair of her characters without sentimentalizing it or condescending” (Winn C1). Pieces of the dialogue appear in more than one scene,
connected to more than one specific event, and the scenes do not unfold progressively or answer all of the questions. Iizuka is using this small group of people and a specific event and its aftermath to comment, based on individual stories, on human ability or inability to connect.

Iizuka’s most recently published play, 36 Views, explores the way people and ideas relate to each other, and the way that an idea relates to the thing it signifies. Although 36 Views has a more traditional plot, Iizuka is true to her unique form by using 36 short scenes to tell the story. The story is about the discovery of a priceless Japanese artifact, a 10th Century pillow book. The play questions its authenticity, its value, and how different people ascribe those qualities to it.

Elements of Kabuki theatre are woven throughout 36 Views, which is set in contemporary New York. This contrast is another way that Iizuka questions human relationships. In her own words, in an interview for American Theatre magazine with Celia Wren, Iizuka says, “I’m working with cultures that are, in a way, different from me. Even though I am part Japanese, Kabuki is still remote to me, ...It’s ancient. It’s in a different language. It’s an alien life form, in a way. I think the question becomes: How do you take these artifacts and find a connection to them. How do you create a new life for them?” (Wren 32). Iizuka also claims that 36 Views is about “how we navigate a certain culture” and, presumably, the people, objects, and ideas contained within it (Wren 32).

Chapter Three, you have no herd, you’re herdless, will pair Aloha, Say the Pretty Girls and Polaroid Stories, which focus on disjointed groups of young people, rather than

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9 Taken from Aloha Say the Pretty Girls (Smith and Kraus).
on individuals or families. *Polaroid Stories* was developed when Iizuka conducted a series of intensive interviews with homeless youth in Minneapolis and later in New York. She took the stories these abandoned young people told her and told them through the framework of Greek Mythology. *Aloha, Say the Pretty Girls* deals with the way people enter and exit each other’s lives by following a group of thirty-somethings. Although some of the characters know each other and some do not, their paths continuously cross, but they are unable to connect with each other. The investigation of *Polaroid Stories* and *Aloha, Say the Pretty Girls* will incorporate a sociological investigation of Generation X and the effect of homelessness or economic hardship on teens. The characters from both of these plays display a number of characteristics claimed to situate them within the phenomenon of Generation X, such as economic struggle, lack of appreciation, and negative attitude toward family.

*Aloha, Say the Pretty Girls* premiered to mixed reviews at the 1999 Humana Festival of New American Plays in Louisville, but soon after was produced by at least three college theatre departments, Glendale Community College in Los Angeles, University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, and the University of Iowa, mostly due to the youthful energy within the script and the youth of the characters (not much older than college-aged). Capturing the unsettled quality of *Aloha, Say the Pretty Girls*, Reviewer Warren Gers from the Green Bay Press Gazette notes, “*Aloha* is built around the ideas of things being temporary, people being rootless, time being fleeting and life being a game of musical chairs.” (Gers, 10 Nov. 2001). Iizuka herself calls the world of the play, “chaotic and a little bit random,” and the characters who operate within that world appear chaotic and random themselves, which is why they have such difficulty connecting with
each other, despite their drive to settle, to form families, and to love. The only negative criticism *Aloha, Say the Pretty Girls* received after the Louisville Humana Festival production was from *Los Angeles Times* critic Mary Burkin, who claimed that the more mature themes of “grief, forgiveness, growth and reconciliation” could have been better handled by actors in their 30s who have more life experience (Burkin, 10 Nov 2001).

*Aloha, Say the Pretty Girls* was a landmark for Iizuka in 1997, when it was staged at the Humana Festival of New American Plays in Louisville. It received much critical attention and gave Iizuka visibility. Critics were impressed with Iizuka’s ability to bring transcendence to Ovid’s myths through contemporary treatment. Calling *Polaroid Stories* a play that deals with the intimacy question, *Seattle Times* reviewer was struck with the “flamboyant estrangement and fatalism of the misfit teens” that Iizuka writes about and makes human (Berson, 13 Apr. 1997). In an interview about *Polaroid Stories* with M.C. Mason for the *Christian Science Monitor* in April 1997, Iizuka says, “I wanted so much to recognize the humanity of these kids so that they wouldn’t be seen as monsters. There is something about myth that can make your day-to-day travails and experiences understandable in a way that helps you realize you are part of a continuum, which can be wonderfully comforting.” (Mason 15). Here Iizuka revealingly touches on her exploration of human connection, both in her plays and in how she wants to affect the audience.

In the Conclusion, I will synthesize the information explored in the chapters on Iizuka’s plays. Iizuka believes that it is important for a play to be “of a place,” that they have specificity of location, of time and of character. Perhaps this is why her plays speak so clearly, loudly, and urgently to people who work with or read them. Through this
synthesis, I will attempt to situate lizuka as one of the more exciting and important new theatre voices of the 21st Century.
CHAPTER 1

you wanna know my name?\textsuperscript{10}

As a graduate of Yale's classics program, Naomi Iizuka states that she is influenced by great works of literature from throughout history. Her 1996 play \textit{Skin}\textsuperscript{11} (TheatreForum: 8) is no exception, as it is a loose contemporary adaptation of the young George Büchner's 1836 unfinished play, \textit{Woyzeck}. Woyzeck, a military service man, is the servant of a German Captain, who considers him amoral and stupid, largely because Woyzeck is poor. Woyzeck allows the Captain to perform medical experiments on him for extra money, which he gives to Marie, his girlfriend, with whom he has had a son. When he discovers Marie having an affair, he brings Marie to the side of a pond and slits her throat. Woyzeck later realizes that people are looking at him suspiciously and he returns to the pond and presumably drowns himself. The scenes of the play depict the world through the eyes of Woyzeck, and focus on his mental disintegration as a result of his poverty, social isolation, and betrayal.

Iizuka's \textit{Skin} presents the story of \textit{Woyzeck} in contemporary San Diego, with the major characters and events all represented. The characters Mary (Marie) and Jones

\textsuperscript{10} Taken from \textit{Skin} (TheatreForum: 8).

\textsuperscript{11} All quotations of \textit{Skin} will be taken from TheatreForum: 8.
(Woyzeck) seem mutually attracted to each other, possibly even in love, but they cannot connect. Jones attempts over and over again to be part of Marie’s life and, although she seems to have affection for him, she does not trust him. Mary and Jones have a daughter, but Mary will not allow Jones see her. Jones mentally unravels, perceiving he has lost Mary’s love. When he sees Mary with another man, he kills Mary, the object of his affection and obsession.

Like Woyzeck, Skin is expressionistic. Iizuka’s stage directions and dialogue explicitly portray the main character’s anguish and descent into mental instability. The expressionistic style is the most obvious characteristic of Iizuka’s usual diversion from, or avoidance of, the traditional Aristotelian dramatic structure. The characters of Skin adhere to Iizuka’s usual exploration. That is, their malady is their inability to connect with others.

The structure of the play resembles the fragmented lives that Mary and Jones lead. Büchner wrote Woyzeck in 29 short scenes. Iizuka adds three scenes to her script for a total of 32, although, unlike Büchner’s work, Iizuka’s scenes are meant to be performed in a specific order. Iizuka’s enhancement of the cinematic structure serves two important purposes. It further complicates the world of contemporary San Diego that the characters of Skin inhabit, and it facilitates the integration of multi-media design elements, such as video interaction and a complex sound design, which echo what Jones sees and hears in his life and in his mind. Both of these results are beneficial to Iizuka’s main exploration. She illustrates Jones’ descent into madness when Mary, his one perceived personal connection or connection to the world, betrays him. He is thereby left feeling completely
disconnected from humanity, morality, and himself and, in his insanity, immune both to his conscience and to the consequence of his actions.

While Büchner focuses mainly on Woyzeck, and uses Marie as a catalyst to Woyzeck’s story, Iizuka gives Mary’s experience in the story more weight. Iizuka is faithful to the idea of portraying Woyzeck/Jones’ experience, but she widens the focus to include Mary.

The first scene of *Skin* is a monologue by Mary, the equivalent of Büchner’s Marie. She tells of being 14 years old and having an affair with Sean Jones, the Wozzeck equivalent. She describes their troublesome habits of “ditching” class, getting high, and sexual experimentation. More importantly, in this speech Mary indicates her lack of connection to anything she does. She describes a typical evening with Sean.

> and it was like nothing else, and then later Sean would roll on top of me and we’d make out a little, and I’d get gravel and dirt in my panties and little cuts from pressing against all the rocks and glass and shit on the ground, and it was ok, and I’d think about the planes taking off and landing above me, and above the planes, the clouds and the sky… (43).

Even while being intimate with her boyfriend, Mary is so disconnected from what she is physically doing with Sean that she can endure, even ignore, being chaffed by pebbles and cut by glass on the concrete.

From the very beginning, Iizuka presents Mary as an isolated figure, able to live in her own world even in the most intimate of situations. Her detachment from her own personal experiences gives her the quality of being unknowable. She never seems true, because she never seems to take ownership of any of her experiences. Thus, Jones cannot trust his interpretations of what she says and does, so he is constantly questioning
her sincerity and loyalty. Jones becomes obsessed with Mary because he cannot find any resolution to his distrust of her.

In Jones’ obsessive dismay over his life and failing relationship with Mary, as he stumbles through the darkness of the city at night in scene 2, he encounters the police. At the mere sight of Jones, without provocation, the police verbally abuse him, accuse him of being high, and demand identification. lizuka’s stage direction at the top of the scene calls for the police to have “plastic faces the color of flesh, and they are america’s finest” (43). The solitary and disheveled Jones, then, is a distinct contrast to the neat police. The police not only outnumber him, but also represent two even larger populations, that of the police force and, as an extension of that law-keeping body, that of the general population they protect. The police make it maddeningly clear to Jones that he is not one of them, and do not look at him as an individual, but as an anonymous criminal. Police 2 says, “I’m going to tell you what, Jones, I see guys like you every night—I know you. I know what you are. I know every thought that goes through your head. I know every dream. I know what your story is. Do you understand me?” (43-44). Beside the police, who dominate him in this scene, Jones becomes an even more isolated and socially marginalized figure.

Another stage direction of scene 1 is a sound cue. We are to hear “classic rock and jamming z 90 and sweet sweet music” coming from inside Jones’ brain (43). lizuka immediately begins giving the audience a look into Jones’ mind, which functions independently, or is disconnected, from the world he physically inhabits. lizuka takes the first two scenes not to set up any plot, but to situate her two main characters as disconnected and alone.
As emphasized in scene 1 and scene 2, Iizuka gives us a character study. She gives us the experience of Mary and Jones, rather than their story. This is no surprise, as the memorable qualities of Büchner’s work are not the details of the story, but the workings of Woyzeck’s mind.

Another liberty Iizuka takes with the script is in the setting. Iizuka places Skin in modern-day San Diego, but is careful not limit herself to realism. Like scene 1, some of her scenes bring the audience into the world of Jones’ deteriorating mind. Notably, scene 11 contains no dialogue. It consists of a long passage of Iizuka’s stage directions, which reads like a dream sequence.

JONES goes outside and takes a giant piss. And the world turns bright yellow. The sun is a yellow flower. It is the color of golden piss sprayed against the blank which is sky. And it is ecstasy. Whereupon JONES beholds a beautiful cholo standing on the street outside gaslamp liquor. And the cholo is naked from the waist up. And the skin on his back is brown like something you want to eat. Chocolate. Meat. He is a handsome young god, and the crowd moves up close to him, wet-eyed and hungry for something they do not know… (50).

By inserting this scene, Iizuka makes Jones’ hallucination both visual and real. She goes a step beyond Büchner because we actually see what Jones sees, whereas in Woyzeck we merely (though effectively) hear about Woyzeck’s hallucinations. Later in this scene we discover that the cholo has a tattoo of the Virgin Mary, whose expression conveys her eternal rapture. This particular scene, like many in the play, draws attention to Jones’ desire for human connection. He is mesmerized by the tattoo and the cholo, and wants to make contact with tattooed skin (Iizuka describes it as something you want to eat). The image of this tattoo makes him think that God is coming. His desire for physical contact, and the hope of salvation that the image brings to his mind, are manifestations of his
desire to connect abstractly with Mary, resulting from his slowly increasing feeling of disconnection.

In light of Jones’ dissatisfaction with Mary and their relationship, one would assume that he would take action in order to satisfy himself that Mary is sincere and faithful to him. For most of the play, however, Jones takes no real action. He philosophizes. For example, in a conversation between Jones and Mary in scene 5, he tells her:

—I was thinking about all the things that need to happen for it [their relationship] to be perfect. I was thinking about perfection, Mary. I was thinking about being perfect, I was thinking how there’s something that takes all that is perfect and beautiful and makes it into shit, everything you do, everything you say becomes shit, I was trying to get it all straight in my head last night, but I can’t, it’s too much— (46).

Mary, detached as usual, replies only, “Stop it. You think too much, baby. It’ll fuck you up.” Attempting to change the subject, Mary declares that she wants to have some fun, and asks Jones to tell her something, “something stupid. something really stupid. I don’t care what” (46). Confused by this vague request, and unable to understand what she is asking for, or why she is asking for it, Jones gives her no answer and leaves in frustration. Iizuka leaves this scene at an impasse between the two characters, and their isolation from each other despite their attempt to make a connection (Jones’ sharing of his thoughts on perfection, and Mary’s request for Jones to tell her something) is emphasized.

It is precisely scenes such as scene 5, which portray two people trying unsuccessfully to talk to each other and to make sense of one another, which give Iizuka’s plays intense contemporary relevance. The frustration at these characters’ sad and awkward interactions is further complicated by their daughter, a living manifestation
of a physical connection between the two. Even having a child in common is not enough to make these characters emotionally connect with each other. The characters’ frustration at the end of this scene makes an indelible impression on a contemporary audience because it is reminiscent of contemporary problems that involve apathy as a result of not identifying with social norms or expectations, such as Generation X syndrome. Time magazine has described Generation Xers as having, “few heroes, no anthems, no style to call their own” (Gross & Scott 57). Jones and Mary both express the feeling that they are floating around, unanchored, because they do not identify with anything or anyone. In addition, both Jones and Mary seem to be suffering from depression, a frequently talked-about and diagnosed contemporary problem. According to Dr. Anton Tolman of Online Psychological Services, The American Psychological Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual\textsuperscript{12} uses combinations of the following criteria to diagnose depression:

- abnormal moods, such as depressed mood, loss of all interest and pleasure, and irritable mood, which significantly interfered with the person's life;
- appetite or weight disturbance; sleep disturbance; activity disturbance;
- fatigue or loss of energy; self-reproach or inappropriate guilt; poor concentration or indecisiveness; and morbid thoughts of death (not just fear of dying) or suicide (Tolman, 2003).

Jones and Mary, however, go undiagnosed in their isolation throughout the play, with dire consequences. The symptoms of depression are less overt in Mary, and more prominent in Jones, though both strongly show evidence of specific symptoms. Depression: a layman’s guide to the symptoms and cures, by Paul J. Gillette and Marie Hornbeck, lists the symptoms of major depression as:

- persistent sad or empty mood
- feeling hopeless, helpless, worthless, pessimistic and/or guilty

\textsuperscript{12}Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders—Edition Four (American Psychiatric P., 1994).
• substance abuse
• fatigue or loss of interest in ordinary activities, including sex
• disturbances in eating or sleeping patterns
• irritability, increased crying, anxiety and panic attacks
• difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions
• thoughts of suicide, suicide plans or attempts
• persistent physical symptoms or pains that do not respond to treatment

Both Mary and Jones display a frequent sadness or emptiness. In scene 13, Mary’s Girl, their daughter, asks Jones for a happy bedtime story, and he replies, “I don’t know a happy story. I don’t know any” (51). Even when his own child asks him for a simple bedtime story, Jones is so troubled and empty in his state of extreme sadness that he cannot find one to tell her. Overcome with hopelessness enough to commit murder, in scene 28, just after Jones kills Mary, he tells his friend Angel, “I see the world burning. I see it going up in flames. It’s like a star you see in the sky and then it’s gone and all there is is space” (55). To him there is nothing good in the world. Jones’ only outlook is that of despair and destruction.

Mary displays a lack of interest in ordinary activities, including sex, as described in scene 1, when she tells of getting cuts and scrapes from making out with Jones on the pavement, listening to and watching the planes flying overhead. Jones, inundated with bits and pieces of the media and urban life, has trouble concentrating, remembering, and making decisions. As Matthew Wilder, director of the Dallas Theatre Center’s 1996 production of Skin, notes in TheatreForum, it is “as if Jones lived in an empty Dow Electronics warehouse where every appliance was on 24 hours a day” (Wilder 39).

Scene 19, in particular, clearly demonstrates Jones’ distraction. The stage direction at the top of the scene is “night. JONES hears all the sounds of night. They are so loud, they crack his skull” (53). He is alone and suffering, and probably drunk. The
police enter and question him, but he does not respond to their questioning. He says, “a whole world. I hear it and it’s so loud. It’s so loud it hurts,” and he keeps repeating the phrase “when I was,” although he never finishes the thought (53). Jones’ distraction and lack of cooperation with the police leads the two officers to believe that Jones is aggressively picking a fight with them, so they attack him. The consequence of Jones’ detachment from his current situation is that he is beaten by authorities.

Iizuka is saying that the encroachment of the urban world causes Jones’ depression and psychological isolation, and then the condition of being depressed further exacerbates Jones’ situation, worsening his ability to function in the world he lives in. Mary’s experience is similar, though she compensates for her detachment by finding purely temporary and physical connection with Navy Man, a man who means nothing to her and who she expects not to see again. Mary’s act of physical connection with the Navy Man is enough to send the already unstable Jones on a downward spiral.

However, from the beginning of the play, Jones does not seem stable. He is not on a straight and narrow path. His world is surprisingly devoid of people. He interacts with his friend Angel and with Mary and, on occasion, with the police, who are suspicious of him, a lone figure in the night, tormented by noises such as TV static and radio sound bites. Seattle Times Reviewer Misha Berson writes, “Woyzeck is about a man unraveling, but Skin looks at the situation more from a woman’s point of view. These people are profoundly dissatisfied with their environment, and they try to transcend it” (Berson 25 Aug. 1998). Mary uses her affair with the Navy man as escapism, and Jones philosophizes about the attainment of perfection while working to support Mary and his daughter.
Calling the play *Skin* appears to be calling to question the idea of a boundary. Since the play deals specifically with Jones being overcome with artificial interaction (i.e. the television, information, and machine noises in his mind), directors and audiences working on or viewing *Skin* are faced with the question of where the internal and external begin, end, and meet each other. Does Jones descend into madness because of external triggers (Mary’s betrayal, noise, etcetera), or does his internal turmoil, his incessant philosophizing and constant yet hopeless quest for a better life drive him over the edge? How much do these characteristics and actions work together or exacerbate one another?

Iizuka uses the metaphor of skin as a device to ask that question throughout the play. The play’s first mention of skin is in Mary’s speech in *scene 1*, where she mentions being cut by the pavement. The references become more overt and more frequent after that. Jones tells Angel about a town of innocent people who were poisoned by the building of a secret, underground complex. He says, “their skin turned rotten with all kinds of strange cancer” (44). Here, Iizuka references people whose skin was directly, though unknowingly, affected by their environment.

In *scene 4*, however, Mary talks about the scar she has on her stomach from the birth of her daughter. She says, “I have a scar on my belly from when my baby was born. It didn’t close up for a long time. Now it’s so white. When I touch it, it’s all glossy, the skin, and shiny. Sometimes I wake up and I think it hurts, but the doctor says it’s all in my head” (45). Here, the internal, the baby, is directly affecting the skin, and the scar is a permanent manifestation of that interaction. The fact that Mary feels a lingering pain
associated with the scar suggests that the internal can continue to trouble her external life.\textsuperscript{13}

Later in the play, the references to skin begin referring to its removal, and a subsequent revelation of what is beneath. Mary complains, “It’s so hot. I want to go inside. My skin feels like it’s burning off. The sun is so bright” (46). Jones tells her he can see through her in \textit{scene 7}. He says, “I can see all the way inside you...It’s like you have no skin...naked bone, so white so perfect” (47). In both cases, the skin is referred to as a boundary between the internal and external. The sun is burning off Mary’s skin, but not her insides. When Jones claims to be able to see through Mary’s skin, he implies that the internal world of Mary is blocked by her skin. In \textit{scene 13}, Jones describes the “skin” of the sky as a boundary to another space. He says, “cut open the sky, there is space. Inside the sky is space. Inside the sky is black. Peel it open. See it bleed” (51). By using the skin metaphor apart from the idea of human skin, Iizuka seems to be questioning boundaries or borders in general. She is exploring where one unit ends and another begins, everywhere in life. Thus, Iizuka questions human codependence and also explores the internal along with the external, or the way that people define themselves according to others.

Like many of Iizuka’s characters, Mary and Jones are socially isolated. They are separate, or external to the main population, to the ordinary. Mary’s interactions with people are usually sexualized, and she cannot connect with anything or anyone. Jones cannot stay out of trouble with the police, cannot maintain a healthy, personal interaction with anyone, and eventually commits murder. The strength of Iizuka’s play, like her

\textsuperscript{13} Mary’s lingering pain is also a physical sign of depression (Schneidman & Ortega 46).
other plays, lies not in its conclusion, but in the questions it asks. How much of Mary and Jones’ dismal lives is due to their environment, and how much is their own creation? Their inability to live happily, connectedly, and functionally in their environment, eventually leads to their destruction. The fate of their daughter, their internal creation who exists externally from them, however, remains unknown.

The fate of all of Iizuka’s characters is not unknown, however. Her play War of the Worlds\textsuperscript{14} (Smith and Kraus, 2000) explores the life and mind of famous radio personality, film actor, director, and producer, Orson Welles. Born in Wisconsin in 1915, Welles spent his early career as a director and actor in theatre. He made a name for himself leading New York’s Mercury Players, and became a household name with his 1938 CBS radio broadcast of H.G. Wells’ War of the Worlds. When thousands of Americans mistook the fictitious broadcast for an actual alien invasion, national widespread panic and harsh criticism of Welles resulted. Welles’ new notoriety led him to Hollywood, and his contract for the renowned film Citizen Kane, which gave him directorial artistic freedom, rarely granted by Hollywood’s controlling production companies. Citizen Kane enjoyed unprecedented success, both at the box office and from critics, because of Welles’ creative direction, and the critical acclaim lasts still today, as Citizen Kane is often cited by critics as the best film of all time\textsuperscript{15}.

Welles is regarded as a pioneer for elements of his style, including “wide-angle perspective, unusually long takes, abrupt cuts, intricate leaps in time, terse vignettes, and


\textsuperscript{15} Gerard Seenan of The Guardian [London] reports that in a 2002 poll by Sight & Sound magazine, Citizen Kane was named best film of all time by an international panel of 252 critics and directors.
heightened natural sound,” according to William Johnson, contributor to Perspectives on Orson Welles (Johnson 76). Although Welles went on to create several other major films, including The Magnificent Ambersons (1942), The Stranger (1946), The Lady from Shanghai (1946), Macbeth (1948), Othello (1952), Mr. Arkadin (1955), and Touch of Evil (1958), none was as successful, commercially or artistically, as Citizen Kane (Baja 7). In 1975, Welles received a Life Achievement Award from the American Film Institute, but found the success of Citizen Kane overshadowed the rest of his career. Critics accused him of not living up to his early masterpiece. Welles created dozens of scenarios for films he wanted to make, but:

the last third of [his] life was sadly spent receiving awards and honors, performing what he called his ‘dancing bear’ act for prospective backers and their assorted hangers-on, over and over and over again, being denied the support necessary for him to do the work for which he never stopped preparing (Jaglom 306).

Welles died in 1985 in Hollywood, California.

Written in collaboration with Anne Bogart and the SITI Company in 2000, War of the Worlds tells the story of Welles’ rise in Hollywood very early in life, and the rest of his life spent trying to live up to his first movie. After the War of the Worlds radio broadcast, Welles was offered a deal to make films, and created the masterpiece Citizen Kane. After that, he worked on another script, The Magnificent Ambersons, but the studio tampered with the ending and, in Welles’ eyes, ruined it. In order to escape the control the studios had on him, Welles relocated to Europe, where he continued to make movies, never achieving the same success that he enjoyed early in his career.

As Iizuka tells Welles’ story through the frame of his own masterpiece film, Citizen Kane, Welles emerges as an isolated and misunderstood figure, whose great

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physical stature and renowned voice seem to have been created in him a permanent mask that prevented him from ever revealing his true self. As a result of this masking, Welles was able to create amazing and lasting art, but remained disenfranchised throughout his life, unable to achieve the satisfaction of maintaining personal relationships.

The fact that George Orson Welles was an actual person makes for an interesting and effective juxtaposition of that person with his greatest work. Also, the familiarity of Welles’ *Citizen Kane* to the general population gave Iizuka an important communicative tool, the use of a familiar story as a frame for the behind-the-scenes exploration of Welles’ largely unknown personal life and experience.

The play opens with Welles, as an older man, walking into an empty soundstage. Here, as in *Skin*, Iizuka writes very specific and important stage directions. As Welles enters the frame, she describes him, “*He is larger than life... He is droll and dapper and, almost imperceptibly, unwell. He speaks to an audience, seen and unseen.*” The character of Welles begins the play by describing to the audience what will happen on stage during the rest of the play. Already, Iizuka is breaking from traditional fourth-wall realism, and writing a character who directly addresses the audience and makes reference to the play as a play. He says, “Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, my name is Orson Welles. I’d like to take a moment, before we begin, to tell you a little bit about what we’re going to do here tonight” (119).

Welles continues, “What you’re about to see is a modern American story. It’s the story of one man’s life, his life’s work. It’s my story” (119). The second important part of Welles’ opening speech is his equating of his life to his work. This is no ordinary man. He sets himself up as a man whose life is as extraordinary as his greatest work. In
the first seconds of the play, Welles tells the audience that he is not like them. Iizuka is accentuating the differences in this character, making him appear to stand alone as a socially isolated person.

One more important convention of *War of the Worlds*, presented in the first scene, is that of the magic trick. Welles “pulls a tiny box out of thin air,” which contains a woman, his mother Beatrice Nelson, “almost a century ago,” in a room listening to piano music on the radio. Welles brings up the historic scandal over his radio broadcast of H.G. Welles’ *War of the Worlds*, and Beatrice Nelson moves closer to the window. Like the character Kane in *Citizen Kane*, Welles is nostalgic and sad about his childhood. His relationship with his mother will continue to factor into his story throughout the play.

*Scene 2* is the first scene that is strikingly similar to *Citizen Kane*. The lights come up on a projection room, where producers are discussing a documentary of Welles’ life, just as in the scene from *Citizen Kane* where producers in a projection room are discussing a story on Kane. They propose telling the story using the angle of Kane’s last words. Instead of Kane’s “Rosebud,” these producers endeavor to discover the meaning behind Welles’ utterance of “Thorne.” Some of the dialogue in this scene (and throughout the play) is taken directly from *Citizen Kane*, thereby completely immersing Welles, the man, into his own great work. The character Stratten calls for the men to “Get in touch with everybody that ever worked for him—whoever loved him, whoever hated his guts” (122). This tactic no doubt calls to the audience’s memory the investigative journey that is begun in the same way in *Citizen Kane*. In addition, the audience might recall that the truth and significance behind Kane’s last words were never discovered by the people who sought those very answers. Iizuka is setting up the same,
or a similar expectation, about Orson Welles. The audience expects him to remain a
mystery.

_Scene 3_ is the first scene to put forth the idea that Welles’ isolation may have been
a result of his being constantly in the public eye. In another scene reminiscent of _Citizen
Kane_, the investigator Thompson pays a visit to Welles’ former girlfriend, Leni Zadrov.
She drinks a tumbler of scotch in the bar of what is described as “_a generic hotel on the
outskirts of the city_” (122). Zadrov has no answers for Thompson and, in response to his
queries, explodes with “he was a great man, the greatest—nobody understands how great
he was. Why don’t you people leave him alone, just leave him alone—“ (123). Zadrov
further isolates Welles by asserting that he was misunderstood, and implying that he was
misrepresented by the press, who invaded his privacy.

In the next scene we see a film student in a film archive, telling Thompson about
Welles’ life and career. While remarking on the innovation of the camera work in _Citizen
Kane_, the film student also confirms for the audience that Welles’ mother died when he
was a child, and that Welles was disturbed enough by the death and the absence of his
mother to talk about it in his adulthood. Iizuka implies that the death of Welles’ mother
may have contributed to his loneliness in life. However, the film student goes on to
cautions Thompson about making any assumptions about Welles as a man or as an artist
based on Welles as a child. He says, “Oh, don’t tell me you’re one of those people who
thinks the artist’s life has anything to do with anything? Well, have fun figuring it out.
His life, I mean. Which part’s real and which part’s fancy—with Welles, it’s sometimes
hard to tell” (123). While alluding to the infamous _War of the Worlds_ confusion, Iizuka,
by way of the film student, again equates the artist’s work to the artist’s life, and hints
that Welles’ loneliness may have been exacerbated by the fact that people had a hard time
telling when he was being sincere and when he was pretending.

Scene 6 goes on to portray the public’s reaction to the *War of the Worlds*
broadcast through a series of phone calls to the Columbia Broadcasting System. "Izuka is
giving the audience a thorough idea of just how believable this fictive broadcast was to
many people, and the audience sees how believable Welles could be when creating
anything, including his own life.

Scene 7 portrays Welles being reprimanded for the reaction to *War of the Worlds*. He is asked if he meant for it to be entertainment and, using some memorable text from
*Citizen Kane*, replies “I don’t know how to entertain, Taylor. I just try everything I can
think of” (126). In this scene, Welles faces the direct confrontation between fiction and
reality, and an interesting facet of his character is revealed in his reaction to the news that
he has scared so many people. Taylor tells him, “We have an obligation to our listeners,
Orson. They rely on us to tell the truth. They believe us, don’t you see--” (126). Welles
then claims that it is his duty to keep the public from being “taken in by what the powers
that be have to say” (126). He claims that if so many people were scared by his fictive
broadcast, the news station has too much power of manipulation. Immediately after
championing the idea of not manipulating the public, Welles ironically makes sure that
his appearance will send the right message to the press representatives he is about to
meet. He asks Webber how he looks and Webber tells him, “Like you need a shave and a
good night’s sleep.” Welles replies “Good. That’s exactly how I want to look” (127).
Therefore, he is manipulating both the public’s response to him, and their evaluation of
his handling of the night’s historical events. Welles wants people to think he is a good
guy and he consciously takes measures to ensure that adoration from the public.

The play returns to Thompson’s conversation with the film scholar in scene 8.
The film scholar describes the scene where Kane destroys Susan Alexander’s bedroom
after she leaves him. “The rest of it they shot in a single take. They had to. Welles
destroyed the place. It’s the heart, I think, of his character in the story, and in a way, it’s
a rather mysterious moment. It doesn’t feel like acting. It feels real” (128). Iizuka
provides another instance of Welles’ life being equated with his art. She seems to imply
that Welles might not have been acting when filming the scene where he was abandoned
by someone he loves, because he felt abandoned in his own life. His convincing
destruction of the set may be a result of his severe disconnect from human relationships.

As we see in scene 10, however, Welles’ disconnect from human relationships
may have been a result of the way he often thought differently from those around him. In
a discussion with some representatives of the RKO motion picture lot, Welles is
cautionsed against his ideas of making the camera subjective, of putting himself and his
own subjectivity in the camera. Shaffer, the vice president of development and
production, simply tells him, “I don’t understand.” Welles then steps out of the action of
the scene and addresses the audience.

I don’t understand—that’s a direct quote, true to form, true to life. It’s
what was said to me time and time again—“I don’t understand.” I have
spent a lifetime listening to “I don’t understand.” What is there not to
understand? It’s right there. It’s as plain as day. It’s as plain as the nose
on your face. It’s about the frame, you see, it’s all about the frame—
(131).

As Welles trails off, the audience is left with the impression that Welles was a
revolutionary thinker, and was probably socially isolated because of that thinking. No
one could identify with him, and he could not understand their inability to see things his way. In addition, Welles knew that the visual presentation or manipulation of a scene could change its meaning entirely, could give it a whole new subjectivity. Welles seems to have applied this knowledge to his own life as well.

In fact, Welles seems to revel in his ability to manipulate people and situations. Criticized by what lizuka calls "a chorus of Hollywood voices" for everything from exhibitionism to disappointing box office showings on his first two films, Citizen Kane and The Magnificent Ambersons, Welles is amused by the voices speaking up against him. He tells the audience, "It's funny how you can make a person believe almost anything. The power of suggestion" (133).

Then, in one of the most powerful moments in the play, Welles demonstrates the power of suggestion to the audience in the auditorium. He asks the audience to close their eyes, and lizuka calls for silence and for the lights to go completely black. In the darkness Welles continues, "What if I told you now that there was something lurking in the shadows, something alive but not quite human, something just beyond the edges of what you can see? It's very dark, isn't it?" lizuka takes Welles' idea of the power of suggestion a step further, outside of the play and into the realm of the audience, by having Welles directly enact this power over the audience. The immediacy of this moment also serves to make Welles more real, more human, and therefore easier to empathize with.

However, Welles never had an easy time connecting with the public, nor was he sensitive to its needs. During World War II, Welles was asked to make a patriotic movie in Rio de Janeiro, since the studio wanted to keep him from making serious, "trouble
pictures," such as *Citizen Kane* and *The Magnificent Ambersons* (132). Although Welles accepts the assignment and goes to Rio, he receives some disturbing news, interprets the assignment as exile, and rebels. While in Rio, he learns that the studio cut and edited *The Magnificent Ambersons* until it no longer represented Welles' intent, and it later failed at the box office. He explains his rebellion in Rio by telling Stratten, "So the studio destroyed *Ambersons* and then *Ambersons* destroyed me" (136). The studio's rejection of his work, and the public's rejection of his movie left him feeling so alone and disconnected that he became self-destructive, violent, and non-productive.

The protagonists of both *Skin* and *War of the Worlds* do not find a solution to their problems of isolation and loneliness, and their lives end either abruptly and tragically, like Jones', or in emptiness and desolation, like Welles'. Because of these unhappy endings, Generation X members can easily identify with Jones and Welles, and thus *Skin* and *War of the Worlds* become plays with which Generation X members can identify.
CHAPTER 2

you gotta know what you’re up against\textsuperscript{16}

Tattoo Girl\textsuperscript{17} (Sun and Moon Press, 1998), The Language of Angels\textsuperscript{18} (Theatre Forum, 1996), and 36 Views\textsuperscript{19} (American Theatre, 2002) mark three of Iizuka’s significant works that take a deeper look at a group of people who function as a single unit. By examining that unit, Iizuka is able to examine the relationships between the characters who comprise the unit. The reader finds that even within a solid social unit, such as a tightly knit group of high school friends in The Language of Angels, within a nuclear family, such as in Tattoo Girl, or within a group of business associates, as in 36 Views, people interact with each other on a trivial or surface level, unable to achieve any intimate, satisfying, genuine connection with each other or their surroundings.

Tattoo Girl, first performed in Seattle at the Annex Theatre in 1994, is Iizuka’s first significant foray into the problem of Generation X syndrome. The characters of Tattoo Girl live with the contemporary circumstances that created and include Generation

\textsuperscript{16} Taken from Tattoo Girl (Sun and Moon P., 1998)

\textsuperscript{17} All quotations from Tattoo Girl will be taken from From the Other Side of the Century II: A New American Drama 1960-1995. Eds. Messerli, Douglas, & Wellman, Mac. Los Angeles: Sun and Moon P., 1998. 1153-1179.

\textsuperscript{18} All quotations from Language of Angels will be taken from TheatreForum 17 (2000): 16-27.

\textsuperscript{19} All quotations from 36 Views will be taken from American Theatre Feb. 2002: 33-52.
X. Contrary to what the title may suggest, the play’s main character is a young woman named Perpetua, appropriate because she lives in perpetual motion.

_Tattoo Girl_ follows the path of Perpetua, a trumpet-player who wants to become larger than she is. She leaves her family and begins a quest for fame and fulfillment, constantly moving from place to place, from experience to experience. While Perpetua is gone, her husband meets Tattoo Girl, a woman who has a giant tattoo on her back, but who wants to remove it more and more each day. She is moving toward conformity. Meanwhile, Perpetua’s son grows up without a reliable maternal or paternal influence.

Like several other Izuka plays, _Tattoo Girl_ opens with a monologue by a female character. Trumpetee Perpetua is reminiscing about her childhood idolization of Olympic gymnast Nadia Comaneci. Comaneci, to Perpetua, represented flawlessness, awe, and triumph. Perpetua describes her dream to live in the spotlight.

This was 1976 and I wanted to be Nadia Comaneci more than anything in the whole wide world. I wanted to leap and bound and balance on my pinkie from a very great height. I wanted to defy gravity in front of a panel of gloomy Eastern-European judges with names like Uta who would watch me and only me, their jaws slack with awe. I wanted to be Olympic (1157).

What is important about her memory is that, as a child, Perpetua believed she could be Olympic, larger than life. The rest of the play deals with the disappointment that Perpetua and others feel when their real world adult experiences do not live up to their childhood dreams.

This disillusionment, mainly due to the declining economic situation of the United States since the 1960s, is one major characteristic of Generation X. Stephen Bennett and Stephen Craig, editors of the book _After the Boom: The Politics of Generation X_ (Rowman and Littlefield, Inc., 1997) quote one true-life Generation Xer saying of his
generation, “Pretty soon we won’t have youth or money, and that’s when we may get a little angry” (Bennett 11). Perpetua, coming out of her youth with little to show for herself, is angry.

The first specific characteristic of Generation X that comes into play in *Tattoo Girl* is the end of Perpetua’s marriage. As reported in *Generation X: The Young Adult Market* (New Strategist Publications, 1997), which provides various demographics of the Thirteenth Generation (Generation X), one in ten women married before age 35 are also divorced by age 35 (Mitchell 155). The widely-circulated and media-friendly term “trial marriages” has come to be associated with Generation X on a colloquial level.

Perpetua’s Husband\textsuperscript{20} asks her, “Perpetua, why do you hate my guts so?” and she replies, “I don’t know. Because you’re cruel, because you’re stupid, because you’re limited in application” (1157). Perpetua is clearly dissatisfied with her marriage, but like her Thirteenth Generation counterparts, she has trouble articulating why. She resorts to calling her husband names after admitting that she does not know why she dislikes him.

Perpetua eventually stumbles on to her real feelings about her Husband. She says, “You pretend everything is the way it’s supposed to be, but it’s not” (1157). Perpetua has a definite expectation for the shape of her life, probably formed in the idealism of childhood. She voices frustration at the dishonesty she detects in her Husband, which contributes to her expectations not being met. Later, she even admits, “I have expectations,” and, “I don’t know what I’m looking for” (1157). Living with this paradox, having an expectation but not knowing what will fulfill that expectation, is

\textsuperscript{20} “Perpetua’s Husband” is the first example of the naming convention in the play, where the characters are named in relation to Perpetua.
central to Perpetua’s inability to connect with anyone or to remain grounded. Because of this paradox, this search for someone or something that meets her expectations, she is in perpetual motion, and perpetual confusion. This confusion blocks her from maintaining any meaningful relationships.

Perpetua’s motion, or the journey of the play, begins with her parting words to her husband. “I’m leaving you. Because I’m sick of the way things are. Because I’m bored. Because you bore me. Because I want to meet new and dazzling people who will make my teeth shiver with electric delight. There is no mystery here” (1158). Her extreme boredom, said to be a bi-product of Generation X’s general belief that they are without opportunity for prosperity, makes her crave excitement, no matter what the price. She is willing to leave her family, to sacrifice a construct more highly valued traditionally than anything else in the American aesthetic, in order to end her boredom.

After being left on his own, Perpetua’s Husband, in scene 2, consoles himself with a men’s magazine. In this magazine, “He comes upon a photograph: the back of a naked girl. On her back: a tattoo of Marshal Foch.” Perpetua’s Husband falls immediately in love with the Tattoo Girl, who comes alive out of the photo and has a conversation with him. After he tells her of his feelings, she says in disgust, “You only know me by my back” (1158). Although Tattoo Girl resists, Perpetua’s Husband continues to show us that he values surface over substance, claiming to have strong feelings for a woman he does not know, based solely on a mark on her body.

At the moment when Perpetua’s Husband’s superficiality is most apparent, we meet Peter, Perpetua’s son. A voice of reason and a reminder of the traditional nuclear family, Peter questions his father’s behavior with Tattoo Girl. Husband replies that he is,
“Getting to know someone new. Life goes on.” This also complies with the Generation X attitude. He continues to be defiant about the end of his marriage, saying, “The past is dead.” Like Perpetua, Perpetua’s Husband is also in constant motion, not connected to anything. Then, Iizuka gives us a physical manifestation of that disconnect. Peter asks to touch Tattoo Girl, and Husband firmly answers, “Don’t even think it” (1159). Thus, Tattoo Girl remains, for the moment, in the abstract, and Husband and Peter are blocked from connecting with her.

At the same time, Perpetua is trying to make a connection of her own with the Bassoon Player. Both musicians, they try to find some common ground in art, but Bassoon Player’s strong belief in the uselessness of art, although in alignment with the typical jaded Generation X view of the world, does not bring them together, but puts up a wall between them. Bassoon Player rants, “What we do is meaningless. Nothing we do makes a difference. Let us not delude ourselves. Art serves no conceivable purpose in the culture in which we live. Zip zero. Nobody cares. Nobody listens.” Bassoon Player is oozing apathy, and almost revels in his perceived obsolescence. Generation X has often been accused of this same characteristic, tagged as laziness or apathy. A 1993 researcher described Generation X members as “apathetic, shiftless, causeless, navel-gazers” (Bennett 10).

What makes Perpetua’s situation interesting, however, is not her alignment with the qualities of Generation X, because that alignment does not seem to be atypical in any way. None of the characters in Tattoo Girl, or any of Iizuka’s plays, show any surprise or resistance to the attitudes and behaviors common to Generation X. Perpetua is exceptional because of her strict adherence to her individuality. She takes pride in her
trumpet-playing and, by extension, her whole way of life. She replies to Bassoon Player, "I'm expressing something unique and special" (1159). While Perpetua's argument in favor of the artist feels refreshing in the context of the play's environment, Iizuka makes us realize that it is the uniqueness of this individual that keeps her isolated. The Bassoon Player views her as completely unrealistic, and thus comes the end of even the possibility for a relationship.

To compound the feeling of isolation, Iizuka sets the next scene at Christmas dinner, where Perpetua, Peter, and Perpetua's mother struggle to get along.\(^{21}\) While Perpetua wants to "strive towards jolliness," Peter echoes a childhood sentiment of Perpetua's. Peter says, "I'm thankful for the advent of snow boarding as a recognized Olympic event." Apparently Peter, too, has thoughts of striving for greatness. The juxtaposition of Peter's young wish to attain greatness with Perpetua's down-graded dream of finding "jolliness" serves to emphasize the possibility of Peter's goals being unattainable. It reinforces Generation X feelings of hopelessness and despair. With nothing to hope for, these characters have nothing to cling to.

Perpetua, almost as if she is conscious of her own disconnectedness, desperately clings to tradition. She tries to force Peter and her mother, neither of whom cooperate, to join her in celebrating and help make her feel like part of a unit. In response to their protests, she says, "Nobody is excused. We are a family and this is Christmas. Snow and Santa Claus and yule logs and Christmas trees and reindeer and jingle bells and little, brown chestnuts roasting on an open fire" (1161). Perpetua's mother resists and leaves,

\(^{21}\) Even the wording of Iizuka's stage directions conveys her general alignment with Generation X attitudes. Instead of romanticizing a traditional Christmas celebration, Iizuka humorously describes the scene by saying, "There is Christmas goo ga" (1160).
and all of the characters are left physically and psychologically separated.

Meanwhile, Perpetua’s Husband, physically separated from Tattoo Girl, is trying to find her. He calls the magazine where he saw her and asks for Tattoo Girl’s information, which they refuse to give him. After threats of violence and lawsuits do not work, he changes tactics. He tells the magazine representative (Pornographer) that he is in love with Tattoo Girl. The Pornographer replies, “Love is tricky” (1161). This simple expression of a Generation X sentiment of impermanence both punctuates and connects the end of Perpetua and Perpetua’s Husband’s relationship, and the beginning of their respective new searches for love and connection. The Pornographer continues, “Love? You’re in love with an airbrushed, two-dimensional thing. Between me and you, buddy, I think you need to reconsider your definition of love” (1161). Like the rest of his life, now empty without Perpetua and Peter, especially on Christmas, Perpetua’s Husband has made love meaningless. He claims to love Tattoo Girl, but can only love the image of this woman, not the actual woman. lizuka shows us a different tactic for a member of Generation X. Rather than risking the possibility of a real relationship’s failure, Perpetua’s Husband makes a superficial connection with a representation of a woman, and forces himself to accept that as enough. Out of pity for Perpetua’s Husband, the Pornographer gives him Tattoo Girl’s coordinates (instead of her address), and Perpetua’s Husband sets out to find the embodiment of his fantasy.

In scene 4 we see Perpetua on a balance beam. She is in constant motion, and her world has expanded to include a barrage of “big, conspicuously friendly faces. They talk too loudly and with far too much gusto.” Amidst all this newness, despairing of her search for a new connection, Perpetua reminisces about the past and reconstructs her
objectives for the future. She says, "I used to want to be Olympic... Now I don't know, I don't know what I want anymore. People are strange. The world is perverse. I think: What has become of my life? Where is this all going? I think: Where does all the time go?" (1162). Thus, not only is her physical life in constant motion, so are her desires and her choices. She is living a life where she makes no commitments, and without commitments, she has no human connections.

Interestingly, as Perpetua is giving voice to these new philosophies, she is talking to Tattoo Girl. They discover differences in one another. Perpetua views Tattoo Girl, who claims that she likes "getting really fucked up," as a person who has reached fulfillment. When Perpetua says, "You seem really modern. You must be very happy," we see the Generation X mentality again shining through (1163). Tattoo Girl finds ways to escape reality, and that escape excites Perpetua, because it seems to be what she is after.

We discover in the second half of scene 4 that Perpetua is escaping from reality by having relationships with men. She goes to bed, and wakes up to find her lover Robert there. Hoping that he is someone with whom she has made a connection, Perpetua asks if he loves her. He replies, "We haven't used that word yet. We're holding off. We're cautious people." She feels let down but she continues to press him and, as she does, the audience discovers that Robert is just as much, if not more, a prisoner of Generation X attitudes and as disgruntled as Perpetua. He tells her, "I hate my job. I've made a mockery of my life" (1165).

He is not alone in that sentiment. Relegated to "reckless bicycle messengers, pizza drivers, yard workers, Wal-Mart shelf-stockers, health-care trainees, and
miscellaneous scavengers, hustlers, and McJobbers in the low-wage/low-benefit service economy,” many members of Generation X become equally jaded by their unfulfilling and unchallenging lifestyles (Howe and Strauss 79). In this discontent, they become flat and unexcitable.

In the last exchange between Perpetua and Robert, that dis-affect is obvious. Robert sadly recalls an elementary school teacher calling him “pert.” Perpetua asks what that means. Although she knows the definition of the word “pert,” “Perky. Peppy. Full of Gusto,” she cannot fathom the embodiment or use of those qualities. Her life is so void of excitement that energy has become a foreign concept to her.

By scene 5, Perpetua’s despair has grown. She begins to reject any notion of her former life. She runs into Peter, now older, in front of a pet shop, and they discuss their life together when Peter was a child. Although Perpetua insists that they never had a normal life, Peter insists that they did. He accuses her of exaggerating. By having Perpetua backed into a corner by her own child, Iizuka makes a strong statement about the despair of feeling disconnected. She finally tells him, “I am not interested in your opinion, Peter, not at all. You only make things worse. Go away. Go away go away go away” (1165). Perpetua becomes even more pitiful and alone by rejecting her own child. She rejects all ties to anyone.

However, the next time we see Perpetua, she is with Tattoo Girl. Because Tattoo Girl craves normalcy, she is having Perpetua scrub off her tattoo. In a sea of disconnectedness, Iizuka finally shows us these two women making an unlikely connection with one another. Tattoo Girl says, “I fucking rue the day I got this tattoo. Jeez, what was I thinking?” Perpetua is able to answer her in identification and
understanding. Perpetua says, "You were thinking: I want to be a rare and special thing. I want to be unique" (1166). Although the two women make a connection with each other, Iizuka demonstrates that even this is not enough for them. They still cling to detachment from conventional life.

Like so many young, single, lonely people, Perpetua and Tattoo Girl go to a bar looking for new people and adventure. They find Edmund, a hops farmer from the Pacific Northwest. To Tattoo Girl, Edmund embodies a simpler lifestyle, and she is attracted to him. She shows him her tattoo. He calls her "beautiful and strange," and in so doing equates her, just as Perpetua’s Husband has done before, with the image on her body (1168). Tattoo Girl, however, is still swayed by his simplicity, and Perpetua becomes angry when she senses Tattoo Girl abandoning her for Edmund.

At this point, Perpetua is approached by The Revolution, who want her to contribute a trumpet song to their protest. She agrees, but even with this new connection to a political movement, she has not found fulfillment. She encounters Henry, a seemingly real being in a world of intangible ideas, who tells her, "Face it: Nobody cares about the Revolution. The Revolution is history" (1170). Perpetua fails in even affiliating herself with an abstract social concept. Henry, the voice of reality, continues with, "At some point, and I mean this, you’re going to have to find something bigger than your own puny, little life to believe in. You’re going to have to find some kind of transcendent meaning" (1170).

Perpetua’s confrontation with Henry’s reality adjusts the steerage of her course. In scene 8, Perpetua’s childhood hero, Nadia Comaneci “appears out of the blackness.” As if to illustrate Perpetua’s disillusionment from her nomadic and fruitless journey,
Comaneci tells her the real story of being an Olympic gymnast. “Hell. It was hell. My joints ached. My muscles killed me. I was so nervous, I couldn’t breathe” (1171).

Although Perpetua decides to keep on moving after their conversation, the idea to return to the stability and groundedness of her life with her Husband and Peter is taking root in her mind.

Perpetua visits Tattoo Girl, who has removed her tattoo, the symbol of her detached and adventurous lifestyle, at Edmund’s farm. Tattoo Girl has several babies, and seems to have traded her tattoo for a life of domesticity. Although Tattoo Girl claims to be happy, she actually does not fit into her new life. Edmund says, “I gave you a home. I gave you a family. When I met you, you were a weirdo, Moira. You were an impoverished freak… I saved you, Moira. I gave your life meaning and depth” (1175). Clearly, Edmund is referring to their children and their home together, though these are not enough for Tattoo Girl. She replies, “You gave me nothing but boredom and aggravation” (1175). Iizuka crosses the paths of the two women. Both began as people who were dissatisfied, but living true to themselves. They then sacrificed some of their choices in pursuit of something better, and, at the end of scene 9, appear to be headed back to their old way of living.

Iizuka begins the last scene of the play by having Perpetua go to Peter’s apartment, where he is watching TV with Perpetua’s Husband. There is a sense of optimism in the visual aspect of this scene, and also in the way Perpetua seems to have come to the end of her journey and to have made peace with it. We finally see Perpetua’s family all together, and Perpetua calls attention to that. She tells her grown son, “I’m home. Your father and I. We’re both home… We love you” (1178).
However, the play does not conclude on a note of happiness. Instead, Perpetua and Perpetua’s Husband banter dialogue despairing of their past, present, and future. In what almost reads as a Generation X anthem, they say such things as, “I’ve been a remarkable ditherer,” “I don’t believe in anything,” “I can’t remember the last time I felt delight,” and, “I never did what needed to be done” (1178). They snap out of this conversation, this one brief moment of connection based on their perceived wasted lives, when Peter returns.

Thus, Iizuka seems to be saying that their child is the one thing that can make their lives worthwhile. Although Perpetua and Perpetua’s husband take solace in this, the final image of the family is that of the three of them huddled on the couch, watching television. They all seem content, though they are substituting television for a real, meaningful connection with each other. Perpetua is back to square one. She cannot overcome her inability to connect.

The final image of the play is that of Tattoo Girl. She has left Edmund and her domestic life and is hitchhiking with her children to Vancouver. She is free and on the road. She writes to her mother, “I’m saving up for a new tattoo. I don’t know what comes next” (1179). Iizuka contrasts Tattoo Girl’s life of uncertainty with Perpetua’s stagnation, but leaves the audience wondering if either lifestyle is better, since both of these women are still alienated and dissatisfied.

Dissatisfaction and alienation are not foreign to Iizuka’s 2000 play, The Language of Angels, which focuses on a group of small-town high school students whose numbers have dwindled severely over their lifetime. These wild, somewhat reckless high school students lost one of their own, Celie, on a night in 1987, when she inexplicably wandered
into one of the many caves in their town, and was never seen again. Subsequently, most of the surviving friends have died early deaths or wasted their lives away, and people describe them as being cursed since the death of Celie. The ghost of Celie haunts them, leading to truths they would not otherwise have known. Iizuka uses a non-linear plot structure to tell the story of the group since the night that Celie died.

*The Language of Angels* begins, like other Iizuka works, with a monologue. The character Seth, Celie’s former boyfriend, starts the play by describing what he remembers about the night Celie died. Because there are thousands of miles of cave beneath them, if one goes too far inside, he or she may never be found. Celie was never found, and the circumstances of her decision to enter the cave alone were never found out.

With Celie’s singing voice as an underscore,22 Seth describes the nature of caves, and in so doing, creates a metaphor for the personalities of his friends, their experience of youth. He calls the caves, “so dark, you can’t imagine how dark it gets...dark even in the middle of the day...no signs of human life.” For Seth, the caves represent total physical isolation. He goes on to describe cave country as, “pure and wild, unknown to man” (17). Thus, he equates his friends and himself with uncivilized nature. He ascribes to them the quality of being untamed and ready to try anything. They are able to escape consequence because they are unattached to humanity.

As the monologue continues, Iizuka expands the metaphor by having Seth generalize his personal experience into the experience of anyone who faces the caves, and the speech begins to sound like the universal experience of youth. He gives an example

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22 Iizuka describes Celie’s voice as, “*An ancient voice. A young girl’s voice. A voice that would break your heart*” (17).
of someone wandering into a cave while intoxicated and then waking up later. He says, "somebody...wakes up in that pitch black darkness, can't remember how he came to be there, where exactly he is, which way he needs to go to get out, and it's so black, it's like you can't even see your hand when it's this close to your face" (17). This description seems like a nightmare, but Seth is talking about a real experience that is a haunting possibility for someone growing up in cave country. Suddenly, Izuka's audience can relate to the idea of experiencing something that should be a nightmare.

Seth goes on to indirectly describe the panic that characterizes Generation X. He says, "slowly you feel the panic come on, and slowly you understand just how lost you are, and what that means, and you lose all sense of which way is back and which way is forward, all sense of time" (17). Again, a Generation X audience, or an audience familiar with the culture ascribed to Generation X, could begin to identify with the experience of being in the caves, and to recognize it as a defining characteristic of youth culture.

This important monologue concludes with Seth's description of an imagined person lost in the caves who believes he sees light, chases it, and hits a wall. He tells the audience, "When it gets that black, in the deepest part, in the blackest part, the eyes play tricks. The mind plays tricks" (17). That hitting of a wall is reminiscent of Generation X's notion of an unfulfilled promise, usually described as the unattainable American Dream. As frequently noted in mass culture, Generation X is the first generation expected to not achieve a higher standard of living than their parents, and the frustration of that economic reality has caused them not to trust their predecessors.

Celie's presence remains on stage as Kendra begins to speak. She tells the story from her perspective, and does not trust her memory because she has changed as a
person. She says, “I’m not the same person I was then. I don’t even hardly know who
that girl was anymore” (18). She does, however, describe Celie as someone who was
different, someone who did not fit the mold, someone who Kendra did not always
understand. Therefore, in addition to Celie’s already described physical isolation at her
death, Kendra hints at Celie’s psychological or social isolation while she was alive. She
says Celie, “was seeing things different, seeing things we don’t see.”23

JB is the next storyteller, and he adds further evidence of Celie’s isolation: her
father was killed in an automobile accident, and the traumatic event stole her mother’s
sanity. Thus, Celie was left without stable parental influences from the time she was a
young teenager.

JB also talks about the search for Celie after she was discovered missing. He
says, “My daddy, my uncle, Seth and Sean and Joline, their fathers and brothers, too, they
searched the cave, as deep as we could go” (18). This statement further supports the idea
of Celie’s isolation by implying that Celie was so lost that even a virtual army of
searchers could not find her.

In the latter part of this first of three segments that comprise The Language of
Angles, the stories from Seth, Kendra, and JB begin to overlap and to seem one story.
Iizuka uses this technique to bring us into the world of this group of people as they were
in high school, functioning as one unit. They are describing, however, the break-down of
that unit due to the untimely deaths of most of the friends.

Two of the deaths, in particular, are significant. Seth died by entering the cave

23 At this point Kendra also introduces the audience to the idea that Celie was interested in Angels. Kendra
says Celie talked about, “The language of angels, and how light burns” (18).
where Celie died. He says, “In the deepest part, in the blackest part, I saw a light” (18). He claims to have heard the voice of Celie’s ghost. Celie’s ghost then appears and tells the story of JB, who died of seemingly natural causes at an old age, but who had unexplained markings on his back. His daughter found, “angry markings, fingerprints, letters, signs burned into his skin. How they got there, she did not know. Most of them she could not make out, save the words branded on his shoulder blade, clear as though burned into his flesh by a hot iron: --Remember me 4ever and ever” (19). Since those were words that Celie had spray-painted in one of the caves, both of these deaths seem to be related to Celie.

In fact, Celie tells the audience, “Nobody knew what he [JB] did that night so long ago, nobody even suspected. Most thought it was Seth who killed that girl” (19). By revealing the truth of her death, Celie reveals another way in which she is isolated. She is the only one who ever knew the truth. Additionally, in the final moment of the segment, Lizuka gives the stage direction, “CELIE lifts her hand. Fingers, palm, pure light. Across a vast distance, JB feels her touch on his back, a memory burned in flesh” (19). Celie, isolated and existing in a different reality or dimension, is implicated in the deaths of both her former boyfriend and her killer.

The second segment takes place on a night, sometime in the past. Allison and Danielle encounter Michael, who reminds them of someone they used to know. During their meeting all three characters behave in ways that align them with Generation X. Danielle reacts with cynicism to Michael’s story of his trip to Las Vegas and he asks, “Now how does a girl get to be so damn jaded?” and she replies, “Ravages of time, baby” (20). While Michael is trying to make a connection with Danielle, this new and
interesting person he has just encountered, she resists his advances with cynicism.
Sensing her resistance, Michael begins to put up his own guard during the encounter by
 likening the encounter to a game of chance. He says, “Win, lose. You spin that wheel,
you take what comes” (20). He implies that, in his experience, there is no real control
over life, and he is forced to deal with whatever comes his way.

Allison doubts the authenticity of what she sees. She tells Danielle and Michael,
“I read somewhere, you know, when we see the stars in the sky, what we’re really seeing
is a memory. It’s like a photograph, memory of light” (21). In Allison’s world (and
ostensibly in the world of the play), things are not always what they seem. Iizuka uses
this speech to set up the rest of this second segment. Just after Allison’s speech, Iizuka
uses the device of the stoppage of time to introduce Billy to the scene.

Billy talks about how he feels a burning sensation, an image linked to Celie, her
mysterious disappearance, and her ghost. “I’m burning up, boy, I’m on fire, inside my
head, behind my eyes, and I can hardly see through the flames” (21). Billy seems to be
overtaken by Celie, though he does not perceive the connection between Celie and his
demise. In Billy’s later interaction with Allison, he mistreats her, is verbally abusive and
rejects her attempts to connect with him. She asks him to come home with her and he
tells her to go alone.

Iizuka gives us this portrait of Billy and Allison’s relationship in order to
demonstrate the connection between Celie and Billy’s crime. Iizuka seems to imply that
Celine, from whatever other space she is inhabiting after her death, is taking care of her
friend Allison by causing Billy to be taken away from her. Celie is getting Allison out of
a bad situation, and showing Allison Billy’s true colors.
Celie’s is not the only angelic presence, or presence from some other dimension, found in segment 2. As the segment progresses, the character of Michael, a stranger to Allison, Danielle, and Billy, becomes more and more familiar to them. They begin to recognize characteristics of Tommy, Danielle’s deceased boyfriend and part of the group, in Michael. When Michael claims that he and Billy “go way back,” Allison’s memory is cued. She says, “He [Michael] kinda looks like Tommy...In the eyes, something in the eyes” (22).

Allison’s recognition of Tommy in Michael cues Billy to force Allison to leave and, after she does, he remains hostile to Danielle. Resenting her detachment from the group, he says, “Danielle, that girl, she’s cold. Pretty enough, if you like that type, but cold through and through” (22). Billy’s hostility toward Danielle is linked to the association he makes with her and Tommy, his former best friend.

Then, in another movement backwards in time, Danielle, Michael, and Billy are seen on the edge of a mountain, at the time of Tommy’s drunken fall over the cliff. With Michael as Tommy, they relive the events of that night. After Billy steals a wad of money from a man in town, he throws it over the edge of the cliff and maliciously dares Tommy to get it. Probably jealous over Tommy’s intention to leave town with Danielle, Billy is determined to ruin their plans in any way he can. He viciously mocks them with, “Oh, that’s right, I forgot. You got it all figured out. You and Danielle, you got plans, you got all these plans” (23). Tommy then claims that he can fly, and flings himself over the edge of the mountain in search of the money, as the scenario ends.

Danielle, however, continues talking to Michael as if he were Tommy. She mourns that night. She says, “You were right here, you were so close, so close I could
touch you, and then you were gone, and everything stopped, and nothing was the same, and I can’t remember, I can’t remember if I said what I wanted to say. I go back in my mind and I try to think. I try to remember, but I can’t” (24). Iizuka shows us that Danielle’s jaded attitude is a result of her unfulfilled need for closure on the loss of Tommy.

In an almost involuntary attempt to gain that closure, Danielle asks Michael, “Did I tell you what was in my heart? Tell me, quick, tell me so I don’t forget. I don’t want to forget” (24). At this request, Iizuka gives the following stage direction: “MICHAEL touches the side of her face. A breathing. He comes close. He whispers in her ear. A language like no other. A moment suspended in time, outside of time. If word were light” (24). These eerie and somewhat murky stage directions reassure the audience that Michael is an angel, a representative of another place, and he appears to reassure Danielle and to hold Billy responsible for his part in Tommy’s death.

Thus, the angel, the spirit from another time, is the only one able to make contact with the typically cold Danielle, not her human companions. Although Danielle and Tommy had a true connection on earth, it was destroyed by death, and a person whose connections to others were not as strong is to blame. Iizuka uses this second segment, with all of its stoppages of time and retrospective action, to comment on the tragedy of the premature ending of Danielle and Tommy’s connection, and the jaded and angry condition in which Tommy’s death left his friends for years afterward.

Iizuka does not end her play with this dismal outlook, however. She writes a third segment that features the genuine albeit supernatural connection between old friends.
The action of the play moves forward from the past to a visit JB pays to Danielle’s remote home in the mountains.

They talk about the past and note without regret how much they have changed over the years. Danielle says, “We all used to be something, I guess, something else. It don’t pay to hold on too tight, I find” (25). Thus, the events that have transpired in their lives so far have forced them to be malleable, to adjust, and to not align themselves too strongly with any one way of thinking or behaving. This issue comes up again later in the scene, when JB brings up Celie and the girls’ friendship. Danielle says, “You know what it is, baby, when you’re like fifteen, sixteen. It’s like, friends for life, friends forever, no matter what. But it ain’t like that, it never is like that. People fall away, JB. Ain’t like I’m telling you anything you don’t already know” (26). Danielle lives alone in a remote area, only depending on herself, because she has learned not to depend on others. Even her closest friends, like Celie, have left her in some way. Like many of Generation X, she feels deserted, forgotten, and alone, and has learned to cope with this abandonment by becoming wholly self-reliant.

However, Danielle’s isolation may not be as complete as it seems. Early in the third segment, Iizuka gives the stage direction for a banging at Danielle’s door. JB thinks the banging is only rain, and Danielle makes no attempt to answer the door. This is the first bit of the supernatural in the third segment. The conversation on rain continues until JB observes, “Last time [it rained like this] …was the day Sean passed,” and this draws the parallel of Sean and JB, leaving the audience to assume that the deaths were related, possibly caused by the previously-seen ghost of Celie.
Suggestions of the supernatural continue as the deaths of the other group members are discussed, and JB points out loose ends to almost all of them. These loose ends can all be supernaturally tied up by Celie’s ghost. For example, JB asserts that Seth went back into the cave where Celie died because “his conscience got the better of him in the end.” Danielle, once again unable to trust anyone, replies, “It’s a hard thing to know what’s in a man’s heart, to tell lies from the truth. Some folks lie so well, you’d never even know it. Saw things, said he saw things” (27). The last line of this speech implies that the things Seth “saw” were flashes of Celie’s ghost.

Danielle goes on to recall a strange story Seth once told her. He claimed to have witnessed a ladder reaching from the earth into the clouds, and pointed out that a ladder, “lets a soul go up, lets a soul go back down…it works both ways” (27). In Seth’s discovery of such a ladder, Iizuka seems to be connecting the supernatural world to the world of her characters. She is bridging the two worlds. Further evidence of this bridge between the two worlds is JB’s recurring burning pain in his back. However, in that case and in the deaths of the others, Celie’s ghost world has a negative effect on the earth world. Therefore, even that connection between the two worlds is dangerous.

The play concludes, however, after JB leaves Danielle’s house, with a knock on the door. This time, Danielle hears the door, answers it, and Celie appears. Danielle speaks to her as if she were a regular guest, and with a familiarity of an old friend. With this relationship, Iizuka leaves the audience with the illustration of one genuine and lasting connection between friends, and despite the death of one of the characters. This friendship has overcome stringent obstacles, precisely because it was based on a genuine connection, while all of the other relationships failed because they were not.
Iizuka questions the idea of the genuine in *36 Views*. Set in the art-world, the question of authenticity is crucial. The play focuses on Darius Wheeler, a dealer of ancient Asian art-works who prides himself on being able to tell whether a certain piece is authentic or a fake. Wheeler is unable to separate his constant scrutiny and judgment of art works from his dealings with other people, who he uses unscrupulously in pursuit of the next deal. However, his eye for art and the dollar signs art signals to him obstructs his view of the people around him.

Iizuka describes the play as an investigation into the experience of navigating a foreign culture (Wren 32). In the first monologue of the play, Darius Wheeler tells a story about one of his art-dealing trips through the Orient. He describes a stand-off with an armed man as “a little cultural miscommunication” (33). This phrase puts Iizuka’s main idea into focus, and cultural miscommunications happen one after another throughout the play. As Wheeler continues, he sets forth another of Iizuka’s ideas, the question of authenticity. He says of a valuable piece of art, “I knew, as soon as I saw it, as soon as I touched it and held it my hands, I knew it was real” (33). Wheeler claims that his contact with the object, his perception of the object, was enough to guarantee its authenticity. Individual perception is reality to Wheeler, as it is to the Generation X stereotype. Craig and Bennett claim that Xers bond together because they have a common mind-set, even though their perceptions of the world are not always confirmed by other generations (Craig 12). They make their decisions according to their perceptions, which become their reality.

Questioning Wheeler’s absolute confidence is Dr. Setsuko Hearn, faculty member of an East Asian Studies Department. She points out, “People make mistakes, Mr.
Wheeler. They misapprehend.” Undaunted, Wheeler says, “I don’t know why, but I feel as if I know you” (34). Here, Iizuka gives us the first real clue to Wheeler’s surface reality. He and Hearn have only known each other for a minute or two at this point, and because of a simple common interest between them (East Asian Studies), he feels like he knows her. Clearly, Wheeler does not understand the experience of a real personal connection, which goes beyond a mere coincidence.

Wheeler’s Generation X qualities are further illustrated as his interaction with Hearn continues. To impress her, he shows her a jade statue that he treasures. He describes the statue, “With each touch it changes over time, almost imperceptible, impossible to replicate” (34). Wheeler is chasing what he cannot capture, and the fact that the jade is constantly changing is what makes it fascinating and valuable to him. He is not interested in the inner qualities or beauty of the piece, but rather in its changing and mysterious surface.

On the other hand, Claire Tsong, an art restorer who contracts for Wheeler, is not so easily duped by something’s surface qualities. With just a bit of extra examination, she says, “Most of the time with a fake, it’s pretty obvious” (35). Tsong relies more on a non-discursive sense of authenticity, based on observation. She describes it as:

> It’s like, it’s physical, you know, I’m talking about a physical sensation, an instinct. It’s like there’s an invisible thread between you and this thing—I don’t know. It’s hard to explain, it’s not objective, it’s irrational, it’s completely irrational. You can’t quantify or predict it. You just know, all of a sudden you know (36).

Despite Tsong’s opposition to Wheeler, she still aligns herself with Generation X by relying so strongly on her individual perception. She accepts her subjective perception as absolute truth.

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Wheeler's reliance on instinct or intuition, however grounded in appearances, does not always fail him. He is approached by Elizabeth Newman-Orr, a reporter who suspects him of illegally moving art for profit. Although she sets him up for exposure, he detects her scheme, and turns it to his advantage and her ruin. Iizuka thus complicates the character of Wheeler by showing the audience a time when his surface evaluations actually serve him.

At the same time she makes him a character who it is easy to identify with. He tells Newman-Orr, "Things come and go in this life. It's best not to get too attached" (40). As detachment is so common a trait among Generation X, a group who would support the idea of avoiding disappointment, Iizuka is able to implicate the audience along with Wheeler as they find bits of themselves in him. That small bit of identification is significant in an era where, as Wheeler's assistant John Bell says, "hard biographical data is, as is often the case, scant" (41).

What eventually exposes Wheeler as a fake himself is a manuscript that Bell and Tsong create and pass off as a rare discovery from antiquity of immense importance to the field of East Asian studies. The manuscript depicts a woman writing tenderly about her lover. The language is so convincing that Hearn stakes her reputation on it. To her, it is even more real than the actual pillow books on which she has become an expert. Hearn says that women such as the one who allegedly wrote the manuscript had "a kind of emotional clarity, an immediacy, a seamless correspondence between inchoate thought and the written word" (44). Hearn's belief in the manuscript's authenticity adds another layer to the issue of perception and authenticity.
However, Hearn is not duped when it comes to her personal relationships, which she keeps at bay. When Wheeler comes on to her, she doubts his sincerity. She says, "What I believe is that there are words...and then there are the feelings and thoughts behind the words, and that the relationship between the two is neither reliable nor precise, not is it maybe meant to be" (45). Hearn is unwilling to rely solely on Wheeler's words. She needs some other kind of proof in order to believe in his advances, and one might speculate that she is looking for the same kind of feeling that Tsong gets when she spots an authentic piece of art. Hearn tells Wheeler, "I look at you and I don't know what I'm seeing" (45).

Hearn articulates how the ambiguity or mystery surrounding a person can give him beauty or make him indistinguishable from a crowd. Toward the end of the play, the character Owen Matthiassen, an older professor in Hearn's department and an old friend of Wheeler's, describes a series of 46 different paintings of Mt. Fugi by Hokusai. Matthiassen speculates that if Hokusai had lived longer, there would have been even more paintings, because, "The permutations are infinite. How we look at the thing itself, which part we're able to see, if we're able to see at all" (49). Iizuka uses this very sincere character to articulate her message on the ambiguity of perception and authenticity. He later tells Bell, "It's fascinating, isn't, how the human mind works, how it spins yarns, its infinite capacity for fabrication" (51).

In 36 Views, however, not all of Iizuka's characters are trapped in their misinterpretation. In the final scene, Hearn seems to have digested the idea that truth is, at times, subjective. She tells Wheeler,
I said that desire was a complicated thing. That attraction to something, or someone, is, on some level, completely irrational. And that when you find yourself desiring something, or someone, that the things you feel in that moment, there’s a kind of truth to them, however flawed, however incomplete. That maybe it’s unfair to judge (52).

Her relationship to Wheeler, then, is not only based on his perception of a deep connection between them, but also on her perception of him. Their interactions, and the interactions with all of the other characters, are colored more by perception than objective reality. Izuka compares this to a person’s navigation of a foreign culture, asserting that any interaction between people is the same sort of navigation of the unknown. Therefore, the connections people make or fail to make with each other cannot be sound unless there is more than initial investigation. Matthiason says (of the fabricated manuscript), “Once you begin to look, you see, it gives itself away” (49). Izuka is suggesting that people do not really look at each other, and until they do, the false personas they don for others will keep them from having genuine, satisfying relationships.

While Perpetua’s tale in Tattoo Girl is characterized by a feeling of circularity, with characters constantly moving around their lack of connection, without ever finding a solution to their problem, The Language of Angels features action, even from beyond the grave. The family and title character in Tattoo Girl are together, but detached psychologically, while Celie and Danielle (and all of their circle of friends) are detached physically, though together supernaturally. The characters of 36 Views are only truthfully attached to each other by deception. In no case does Izuka write about characters who have it both ways, who are truly together and content in their connection to their loved ones.
CHAPTER 3

kindred consciousness\textsuperscript{24}

As reported by William Dunn, author of \textit{The Baby Bust: A Generation Comes of Age} (American Demographics Books, 1993), beginning in 1965 and lasting through 1978, the birth rate in the US dropped significantly. The children born between these years are known collectively as Generation X, and number about 44 million, just over half as many as the generation before them. The baby boom generation, those born between 1945 and 1965, number 78 million in America (Dunn 200). The baby boomers have demanded attention and support throughout their lives and, through their number, gained power and influence. They continue to make the rules in America, causing Generation X to have grown up virtually ignored by everyone from lawmakers to marketers. Many Generation Xers felt ignored through their childhoods, as their parents left them at home for the office, divorced, and pursued material wealth. As adults, Generation Xers must deal with problems such as increased taxation for Social Security, job stagnation, and record-high educational costs, as a result of the economy and society serving the baby boom. It is no wonder that Generation Xers, now between the ages of

\textsuperscript{24} Taken from \textit{Aloha, Say the Pretty Girls} (Smith and Kraus, 1999).
24 to 38, are sometimes referred to as the Nowhere Generation, and are skeptical about their future (Dunn).

One of the most obvious drawbacks of Generation X is the way its members are driven from their nuclear families. “There is a better than 50/50 chance that the buster child has spent at least one year in a single-parent household situation before reaching age 18,” and such changing family situations left busters\(^{25}\) feeling unsettled and alone. Feeling misunderstood and lonely in their families, they seek out familial relationships elsewhere, particularly during early adulthood. Whether they are successful in forming family units with friends is part of Iizuka’s discussion in *Aloha, Say the Pretty Girls*\(^ {26}\) (Smith and Kraus, 1999) and *Polaroid Stories*\(^ {27}\) (Smith and Kraus, 1997). The characters in *Polaroid Stories*, homeless run-away teenagers in New York, are heavily dependent on one another, as their situation demands. They not only rely on each other for emotional health and support, but they rely on each other in order to meet their basic needs, such as food and shelter. However, in their youth, inexperience, and dismay, they often let each other down, and are then left feeling more disconnected than ever. The characters in *Aloha, Say the Pretty Girls*, on the cusp of their thirties, are Iizuka’s most blatant expression of the traditional Generation X despair. Reaching a turning point, they realize that their lives are characterized by a sense of emptiness. They feel something is missing,
understand that it has something to do with their personal relationships, and somewhat randomly attempt to “settle down.”

These New Yorkers are in the midst of coming and going through each others’ lives. They are forming and breaking relationships, trying to relate and to connect, and finding discontent with their failures. This quirky, episodic script takes us to Hawaii, then to Alaska, and even in these exotic locations the characters’ worlds continuously overlap. Their relationships to each other are reshaped by circumstance, attachment, or desire, though some ultimately still feel alone.

Iizuka’s illustration of the way these characters and others of Generation X move in and out of each other’s lives is set up from the first scene of Aloha..., in which Will stands on the edge of a dark stage and says goodbye in fourteen different ways. Iizuka is indicating that people such as Will have psychologically compensated for having said goodbye many times to many people by creating many different ways to say it. Will’s last goodbye, however, is “aloha,” and he adds, “aloha means good-bye” (1). Iizuka thus sets forth the ambiguity as these characters move through each other’s lives: the word “aloha” can mean either goodbye or hello. Throughout the play, neither the speakers of the word “aloha” or the receivers seem to be sure of the word’s intended meaning.

The first scene also sets up the second, in which Will leaves his girlfriend Vivian for another woman, Joy. Vivian’s response to the news is one of confusion. She says, “Uh, weren’t we, you know, like, in love? I mean, I thought we were, I thought we had been for a while now, and now you’re saying you stopped, you just kinda stopped, and doesn’t that seem a little random and arbitrary and strange, I mean doesn’t that seem a little strange to you?” Vivian’s confusion is not cleared up at all by Will, who seems to
be as taken by surprise as Vivian. He says, "Ok, look, Vivian, I know this is hard, but these things happen to people, they happen all the time, and people live, they go on, they do ok, they survive" (2). The blind acceptance of this major change in both of their lives comes from a sense of having no control over what happens to them. Busters typically suffer from "boomer distrust, career angst, plus a desire to be heard, taken seriously, and appreciated," and feel lack of control from being under appreciated (Dunn 68). Whatever security Vivian felt in their relationship is not enough to make either one of them do anything to try to save their relationship.

As their conversation closes, Iizuka writes the first of many stage directions for jungle sounds, describing it as "the sound of chaos in the jungle" (3). Iizuka uses this jungle metaphor throughout the play to signify her characters possessing both a sense of the chaotic and untamed, and the most basic instinctual behavior of wild animals. Her characters appear not fully evolved, and act on their instincts. The same could be said of Generation X members, who, feeling so dissatisfied with their prospects, have gravitated toward more childlike and instinctively satisfying pursuits. For example, in the early 1990s, a Generation X trend was sucking on pacifiers and baby bottles, "a mock-serious attempt to recapture their fleeting youth and the nurturing they found in too-short supply" (Dunn 105).

Another important characteristic of Iizuka’s cinematic structure in Aloha, Say the Pretty Girls is the inclusion of quick, random glances at characters who are not featured in the scene. For example, as scene 2 (Will and Vivian) changes to scene 3, we see Myrna, a friend of Vivian’s, walk across the stage, pick up a komodo dragon (a part of the animal kingdom that has remained unchanged even as other species evolved), and exit

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without speaking any lines. We then see Joy in a bubble of light, calling out to Will, who in turn calls out to Joy. These short glimpses of characters and their interactions give the play a sense of potential energy and constant change, and make the world of the play feel unsettled.

Scene 3 features Myrna, a schoolteacher, explaining that the komodo dragon she picked up is a piñata. Izuka uses this juxtaposition in this quirky monologue to push the play’s world of contradiction. After Myrna explains that komodo dragons and piñatas come from vastly different parts of the world, she comments, “the world is full of contradictions such as these, life goes on” (4).

After some short development of a story between Vivian, Will, and Joy, and some brief commentary by Myrna, scene 4 introduces Efran and Wendy, who serve the development of the jungle metaphor. Efran works in a pet store where there is a giant terrarium, but no visible pets. Wendy, an out-of-work actress, is sent in to work there as a temporary employee. At the end of the scene, they enter the terrarium, a physical manifestation of the jungle-like world they inhabit. Prior to that, however, during an initial meeting of their two very contrasting personalities, Efran voices an insightful personal characteristic. He says, “my mind is a blank, it’s just a total blank” (6). Izuka thus contrasts the emptiness of the character with the lushness of the terrarium, perhaps providing the baby boomer perspective of Generation X. In their article Generations and Change, Bennett, Craig, and Rademacher claim the boomers think of the Xers as “less intelligent, more apathetic, less active, and more reliant on others than previous birth cohorts” (Bennett 12). To a boomer, the life of a Generation Xer is shallow and empty.
Iizuka uses scene 5 to introduce her next set of characters, roommates Jason and Derek. Jason owns a giant dog that defecates on Derek’s manuscript. These characters struggle with the forces of nature via the dog Otis, whom neither can control. Jason clings to the blind love he feels from dogs, but Derek sees Otis as a force bent on destroying him. In their debate over the animal that controls their world, Jason delivers another of Iizuka’s pronouncements on Generation X. He tells Derek, “you gotta get out more, get out of your head,” painting Derek as an isolated figure who is not in touch with the world around him (8). Indeed, “media accounts…have noted [Xers’] withdrawl from society in general” (Bennett 21). At the end of the scene, in a comic attempt to take control of his situation, Derek drags away a growling Otis in his kennel.

In scene 6, after two scenes of completely new and peripheral characters, Vivian reappears waiting for the subway where she is assaulted at gunpoint by Lee. Vivian’s reaction to the gun is startling to both the audience and to Lee; she does not panic or become visibly alarmed. In fact, Vivian and Lee wind around to discussing their lack of communication and Lee’s empty threat to “do something” if Vivian does not comply. The conversation continues, outside the boundaries of the traditional stakes of a hold-up scene, as Vivian humorously responds, “You’re going to do something? That’s so open-ended. What does that mean: ‘You’re going to do something?’ Maybe I’m going to do something. What do you think of that?” (10). Once again, Iizuka makes reference to the behavior of Generation Xers with Lee’s inability to fully commit to the action he takes. Bennett and Rademacher note that Xers are “taking longer to grow up – marrying later, taking longer to leave the parental nest…and returning home when confronted with a life crisis (such as divorce)” (Bennett 25). Lee’s ensuing struggle with Vivian is symbolic of
non-commitment, and their physical connection in that action is symbolic of their confrontational psychological connection during the scene.

A new character, Jed, is seen in scene 7, writing a letter to his idol Demi Moore. He blindly worships her, as he identifies with the sad characters she has portrayed in the movies. First, he mentions a character who “felt lost and unloved in the world,” and he says, “I could really relate to that.” He continues, “because I am someone who has known sadness in my own life, I felt deeply connected to you from then on” (10). Jed appears to be a person who is so dissatisfied with his own life that he creates an imaginary friendship with a celebrity who he has never met. He is desperately clinging to a connection, despite the fact that it is false and one-sided. Seeking the manifestation of that perceived connection, he later in the letter asks to be Demi’s personal assistant. Seeing the job as a solution, he confesses that “the idea of being aimless and without direction, treading psychic water for the rest of my life, however long the rest of my life may be, makes me want to stick my head in an oven or something” (11). The desperate isolation of disconnection is embodied in Jed.

In contrast to that isolation are Will and Joy, who become engaged in scene 8. With Vivian accidentally watching them, they show their sickeningly sweet happiness, and Vivian’s isolation becomes more potent. She tells Richard, an old friend, “my life is not as it should be,” simply voicing the opinion of a generation of people who feel robbed. “Life sucks. I’m bored. That’s really a lot of their [busters’] message” (Dunn 115).

In scene 9, two of Iizuka’s characters, Wendy and Derek, have a frank discussion about the general attempt to make connections, while trying to do just that. When Wendy
tries to strike up a conversation, Derek is uncomfortable, and he tells her, “maybe there’s something called appropriate distance. Maybe I don’t feel like baring my soul to some stranger I don’t even know” (17). Derek thus reveals his fear of being exposed. It is this fear that keeps him in an agitated state, and keeps him from forming a real bond with anyone.

Scene 11 consists of another letter from Jed to Demi Moore. He continues to talk to her as if they were really having a personal relationship, but reveals his frustration at her lack of response. He says, “I wonder what you’re doing and what you’re thinking about. Though I feel so close to you, sometimes you are a complete mystery to me” (19). Jed puts into a single sentence the experience of a surface-level connection, one that is elusive and confusing and again the audience can identify with Jed’s loneliness. At the end of this scene, Jed flees amidst “incipient turbulence. the roar of an airplane” (19). The act of leaving, manifested in the airport sounds, becomes a significant part of the characters’ lives and psyches, as it is for the highly mobile Xers, who are “at the stage in life when mobility is highest” (Dunn 146).

In scene 12, Myrna tells Vivian of her plans to leave town and her life as she knows it. She defends her decision by asserting, “you are the architect of your own destiny,” but Myrna is not persuaded. She replies, “I don’t know what that means. What does that mean?” Myrna cannot even imagine having control over her life. When Vivian accuses her of being afraid to take control, she says, “I’m not afraid, just deeply deeply depressed” (19). Vivian blames her stagnant life on her depression, on the forces around her that cause problems for her and make her depressed, in much the same way that
Generation X members tend to blame their perceived bleak futures on the previous generation and feel helpless to make any change.

Will gets at the heart of change in scene 13, when he brings up Tiresias the soothsayer. Will comments, “I think the moral of the story is tit for tat. Something’s got to give. So then the question is: if I could predict the future and be very, very wise would I trade in who I am now to become a blind man with breasts?” (21). He questions what he would be willing to sacrifice for ultimate wisdom, and considers a physical sacrifice. He questions whether he values surface appearances more than internal qualities, and in this scene he and Joy have their first disagreement. As Will reveals his potential superficiality, Joy reveals her lack of intellectual understanding of Will’s dilemma, and the connection between the two of them begins to disintegrate.

Will reappears in scene 15, this time wearing prosthetic breasts on a trial basis, exploring his identity. He has gone to see Vivian, who wears brightly colored feathers in her hair, an indication of the primal. They argue over their past relationship, and both question what they saw in each other. Will concludes with, “Is this a dream? Is life a dream?” Vivian calls out his naïve philosophizing, unlike Joy, who was awestruck at his Tiresias speech, and Will’s identity crisis is complicated further, due to the mixed signals he gets from these two women. He tells Vivian to go away, even though they are in her apartment. She argues, but then concedes. She says, “Fine. I’ll go. I don’t care. It’ll be refreshing not to be left for a change” (24).²⁸ Izuka again recalls the notion of leaving and its connection to change. Although characters such as Myrna and Will crave and

²⁸ With 17-19 of every 1,000 busters experiencing parental divorce, the experience of being left permeated the generation (Dunn 28).
create change by leaving, Izuka highlights the more negative aspect of change with
Vivian, what happens when someone is left.

Izuka creates a way for the forces of nature to be measured up against human will
in scene 17. Joy and Derek are each seen in separate bubbles of light. Derek fears Otis
the dog, saying, “I knew that dog was smarter, and stronger, and more highly evolved
than I will ever hope to be, and that just sucks, because I’m a human being, I’m a homo-
sapien, for chrissakes, I should be king of the hill, I should rule.” Joy fears something
more abstract, her impending marriage to Will, whom she realizes she does not love. She
claims, “I don’t love Will, not in the way that love should be, and there’s a way it should
be…maybe I don’t know how to be happy” (28). Although left alone in individual pools
of light, Derek and Joy approach their problems differently. However, they both favor a
meaningful life over materialism, values endorsed by Generation X, according to
University of California at Los Angeles’ *The American Freshman: Twenty-Five Year
Trends* (Dunn 120).

In the next scene, Izuka paints the picture of two people who are intimate
physically with absolutely no emotional or psychological connection. Wendy and Derek
are in bed together and Wendy tells Derek, “I try to have sex in a really casual, sort of
low-key way with guys I don’t know that well or guys I don’t like that much, because
with most guys, I find, it’s better that way” (30). Wendy’s past experiences have led her
to believe that the elimination of an emotional bond makes sex better. Not only is she
expressing a viewpoint given by men throughout time, but she also expresses an
underlying pain related to emotional ties with men. Izuka points out that the past
experiences of people color their attitudes and relationships in the present.
Iizuka then brings Joy, several of whose romantic experiences have occurred during the action of the play, into a discussion with Vivian over their respective failed relationships with Will. Joy says:

You know, I don’t think it was meant to be, this thing with Will and me, but still I think I’m having trouble with how people enter and leave each other’s lives, how suddenly they’re just out of your life, there’s no warning, they’re just gone, and everything’s different, and all you can think of is how exactly did I get here (32).

With Joy, we see exactly how experiences shape an individual, and later in the play we see how Joy makes decisions based on her past and on her perceptions of that past. Iizuka is arguing that an individual’s perception is legitimate.

Included in the notion of legitimate individual perception is the possibility for revelation and change. In scene 20, set in an airport, several of the characters in Aloha make the decision to change their lives. Jason runs into Lee, and tells him, “my world, it was kinda small. I think I gotta get a bigger life, you know, a whole like bigger way of being” (35). Wendy tells Efran, “Lots of things are not for me. I think I’m about to turn over a new leaf,” and Efran replies, “Everything’s been a little too much for me...everything is just a little too weird and scary” (36). Derek echoes their sentiment with “I’m not happy...I don’t want to just live. I want to be happy” (37). Although all of these characters seem ready for a change, they cannot define how or what they want to change, and they are not equipped to direct themselves toward useful progress. They remain floaters who live in infinite indecision. “Between being adolescents and grownups, busters have developed a new stage in the life cycle...’pre-adults.’ It’s sort of an adulthood apprenticeship...” (Dunn 65). Joy gives voice to this problem when she says, “I don’t know where I’m supposed to go. I’m on standby...I’m not sure what I
need” (38). Thus the airport metaphor is extended to include the idea of flying standby, and all of the characters are trapped in this limbo. Myrna is the one exception; she has made a definite decision to go and has a destination in mind. She has a firm grasp of the situation, and as a result of this, she feels she has learned the right to tell Derek, “Honey, I’m the grown-up in the room” (37). Izuka uses Myrna to suggest to the audience that her characters’ development is also on metaphorical standby, that they have yet to fully mature, to fully evolve.

Vivian’s monologue closes the first act. She shows a map to the children in Myrna’s class, to help them understand Myrna’s departure. Her speech is at first consistent with the viewpoint of most of the characters so far. She finds herself talking about Hawaii, saying, “Hawaii…if you think about it, is just a few tiny islands in the middle of this huge, enormous ocean, in the middle of nowhere, so tiny you can barely see them, and they’re so far away” (38). Hawaii then becomes a picture of extreme isolation, and a representation of the mind-state of the play’s characters. By the end of the speech, however, Vivian comes around to a change in perspective. Looking at the map as a whole unit, she tells them, “But the thing about a map, the best thing of all, you look at it, and places that are really big and far away, don’t seem so big and far away. A whole continent is the distance from your thumb to your fingertip. A whole entire ocean is as big as the palm of your hand” (39). Vivian is comforted by the big picture of the world, and by her change in perspective. She is not more settled or more enlightened than the other characters, but she is beginning to accept her uncertainty, and this change in Vivian foreshadows the second act.
Act 2 opens on a beach in Hawaii, with Efran, Wendy, and Joy randomly running into each other. They discuss their happenstance meeting after their respective escapes from their old lives, and Efran comments, “People, you know... get waylaid. That’s like the human deal” (42). In the way that Vivian began to accept uncertainty, so Efran makes peace with the possibility of unplanned events. Yet even in this growing acceptance, the characters do not find comfort. Wendy, working as a hula dancer, says, “The hula thing is temporary. It’s like a job. It’s not who I really am.” Efran says, “I don’t know who I really am” (44). These sentiments, among the most notorious of the Generation X qualities, continue to isolate the characters, despite their repeated physical proximity.

That past physical proximity, the past relationships between the characters, becomes problematic. For example, Wendy spots Derek, and Joy, now dating Wendy, jealously asks Wendy if she knows him. Wendy does more than answer her question when she replies, “I wouldn’t say I know him. I mean, ‘knowing’: what does that mean, Joy? I mean, do any of us really know each other?” (46). Clearly, despite interweaving of the characters, they have still failed to make solid connections.

The scene cuts to Vivian, who ended up in Alaska, and to Jed. Vivian explains that her move to Alaska was completely arbitrary, and says, “I had this whole plan, but then it kinda fell apart, I find lots of things in my life kinda fall apart” (48). Joy echoes this rueful sentiment with, “I used to have plans. I used to have all these plans” (50). Richard adds, “For me, you know, the past is dead” (51). All of these characters have had the same experience, that of falling short of their goals. Like many Generation Xers,
they feel let down by the world despite their best efforts, and cannot get past that roadblock, to the point where it affects their personal relationships.

A strong example of the detriment to their personal relationship is the fight that Wendy and Joy have. Wendy even laments the permanence of their relationship, and wishes that she could have commitment-free but consistent sex. She says:

Sex now and again is fine. The problem isn’t the sex. The problem is everything around the sex. The problem is the I love yous, and the moo eyes, and the do you love me backs, and the neurotic late night phone calls. I wish it could just be like, you know, you have sex and it is what it is, and then it’s like good-bye, see ya, and you move on to the next thing (53).

Lizuka gives Wendy’s viewpoint legitimacy, which Wendy also finds in the “shared mind-set, then common attitudes, sociology and psychology” of her generation (Craig 3). In the next breath, Wendy says, “I’m damaged…some of my best friends are damaged. It’s not a big deal,” clearly accepting her non-traditional views as socially adverse but socially (in her personal context) sound (53).

The idea of being damaged is continued when Wendy compares twenty-something life to a game of musical chairs, one of Lizuka’s most central and striking metaphors. The element of chance plays a major role. In order to eliminate some of the power of chance, Wendy and the other characters have made changes in their lives to take control. Wendy realizes, however, that even after those changes, “It’s like the same exact thing, it’s like musical chairs only with different chairs” (54). None of the characters have learned to solve their problems, and so still exist in the world of chance and uncertainty.

As the act progresses, Lizuka hints that the characters are not equipped to make meaningful change because they do not know real love, real connection. Joy finds a
stuffed fish and comments, “I think somehow it got separated from its loved ones, and then somewhere along the line, it got stuffed and shellacked” (58). She continues talking about family with “I would love to have a huge, enormous family where there’s a lot of talking and laughing, and everybody is related and we all have nicknames and little traditions and all these family things we do together. What exactly do families do together?” (58). Joy is dreaming of connection, and sees its potential, but has never experienced it, so she has no idea how to achieve it. She is caught in a vicious, broken cycle. The Roper Organization tells us that Xers “long for the romantic notions of a family life they never had. They want a close family, maybe not as large as the Brady Bunch, but as happy. Yet, [Xers] fear such closeness as much as they want it, which explains why they are delaying marriage and parenthood” (Dunn 97).

The action moves back to Vivian and her baby, and her visiting brother Jason. The new family he finds himself a part of brings him to some sad realizations. He tells her “You’re my sister, Vivvie…and we’re just not really part of each other’s lives, because we’re not close, we’ve never been close, I think you could even say we’re strangers, I think it would be fair to say we’re strangers, and we lead completely separate lives, and now you have a baby and the whole thing is just kinda weird to me” (62). Clearly, Jason felt isolated from Vivian in childhood, and continues to feel that way. It bothers him, and on some level he feels his behavior is not right.

Wendy is also bothered by her childhood, but has accepted a more negative outlook on the issue of family. Her vision of the ideal family comes from pop culture. As she is of the television generation, she remembers seeing The Sound of Music every year on television, and the closeness of the Von Trapp family struck a chord with her.
She remarks “I think because I was a sad kid, I envy that closeness a lot...some people are Von Trapps. Some people are not. We are not the Von Trapps. We will never be the Von Trapps. We will never be one big, happy, family” (66-67). This pessimism is key to the experience of Iizuka’s characters, of the people whose stories she tells. Iizuka here establishes that the feeling of helplessness may be rooted in a typical Generation X American upbringing.

As a result of feeling helpless, these characters have not accomplished their goals. For example, Myrna complains, “I’ve traveled a very long distance, and I still have a million things to do.” Derek, referring to his writing, chimes in with “I’ve been working on it a really long time, and I’m missing all these pages, and it’s all out of order, and it’s a mess, it’s a total mess...I suck. I have nothing to show. I have accomplished nothing. What have I been doing all this time? What the hell have I been doing?” (74-75).

Iizuka’s characters are stuck in a motionless inertia, and can produce nothing of which they can be proud. Generation Xers experience this inertia due to the six-to-twelve month period after college graduation it can take to find a first real job, and other such obstacles, in the labor market and economy (Dunn 74).

The philosophizing over the inertia of the characters continues until the close of the play. The final image of the play is that of a life-size snow globe. Iizuka describes it, “a bubble of light. A parentheses of foliage. Inside the foliage are WENDY and JOY. Two pretty girls. A grass skirt. A tattoo. They are tiny, distant figures. They wave in slow motion. Fake snow falls on them. They are happy” (88). The snow globe is the epitome of contradiction. As Derek points out:

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I like how it’s snowing, but it’s Hawaii, I mean, it’s supposed to be Hawaii, but it’s snowing, I like that. And how they’re waving, I like how the girls, how they’re waving, I like that a lot. It’s like they’re saying: hello, you know, or goodbye, or help, maybe they’re saying, help, “help, help me, I’m trapped, get me out of here.” You know, I really, I don’t know what they’re saying (88).

The ambiguity of the snow globe is attractive to Derek. Its ambiguity makes it beautiful and interesting. The girls could be saying anything, giving any sort of positive or negative signal, yet they appear to be happy. For the first time in the play, the characters appear completely blissful and at peace. As Jason points out earlier in the piece, “Not everything makes sense, dude,” and the snow globe is a place where all of the pieces-parts exist together in accord with one another, emanating a sense of inclusion and wholeness that is missing from the characters’ lives. The acceptance of that amalgamated whole, then, could be the answer to their search for fulfillment and solid connection to others.

While Aloha, Say the Pretty Girls focuses on the self-socially disenfranchised group of lonely Generation Xers, Polaroid Stories tackles a group of homeless teens who have a much more tangible experience of disenfranchisement. Their harsh street life leads them to make decisions and to draw conclusions in their own self-interest, much in the way that the Aloha characters do, but the teenagers of Polaroid Stories have much more at stake. Instead of risking their fulfillment or happiness, these youth living on a pier in New York are at risk for their very survival. Most are addicted to drugs and are not above stealing in order to follow their whims, but Iizuka exposes the humanity of these young people as they strive for the same kind of connections with each other and with the world as people everywhere.
This heightened sense of urgency with which the characters live also heightens their stories. Recognizing this, Iizuka chose to write their stories within the framing of Ovid's myths, and thus Polaroid Stories becomes a retelling of Metamorphoses. Still, as in her other works, Iizuka is concerned with the real, the present. In Theatre at the Margins: The Political, the Popular, the Personal, the Profane (U of Alabama P, 2000) Jonathon Chambers describes Iizuka's angle of writing in Polaroid Stories as a "willingness to go beyond the dominant realistic style as a way of exploring the real" (Chambers 37). Thus, the juxtaposition of contemporary street stories with Ovid's myths becomes a technique for reaching the truth of Iizuka's characters' lives, and points to the fact that their stories alone are not enough to make a mark on the desensitized consciousness of the mainstream American population. Because the teens of Polaroid Stories are so unreachably isolated, Iizuka tells their story in a round-about way.

Iizuka titles the first act of her play in blank verse "fucked up love songs." She immediately sets forth both the title and the juxtaposition of the old and new, the high and the low, with a prologue, in which Philomel's solitary voice in song gradually becomes street noise. From there Iizuka gives us the story of D, Dionysus, an Oklahoma boy who has ended up far from home. D, who claims not to have a friend in the whole world, tells the story of his introduction to drugs, a substitute for friendship and personal connection. His story could be the story of any one of these characters.

We are introduced to these other characters in the following scene, wherein "voices in the dark call out" (189). The voices are anonymous and isolated in the dark. They are not connected to a person, a body, or a face. Some of their names, like "nothing girl," "zero," "kaos," and "disappear," even echo that isolation. The characters then
further isolate themselves, both socially and emotionally, through the use of drugs.

Eurydice, escaping an abusive Orpheus, in the next scene “crosses the river of forgetfulness,” which is her metaphor for heroine use. She rationalizes to Persephone, “I got a man like a bad dream/ follows me no matter where I go…I feel his eyes on my back” (191). While the loyalty of another person (Orpheus) seems like a positive, Eurydice looks at it as a negative, since it forces her to ask the question, “Who are you to me?” (192). Orpheus forces her to examine herself in relation to him, which is inconsistent with her view of herself as an isolated figure in the world. In short, like the typical Generation Xer, she is afraid to align herself with anyone.

Eurydice’s reluctance to align herself with anyone is found in other characters, too. Sometimes characters go a step beyond not allowing connection, to deliberately destroying it. For example, Skinheadgirl retaliates against Skinheadboy, breaking their ties with some harsh language: “Yeah, you think this is some kind of goof, you think this is some kind of big fat joke, well, fuck you, cause I ain’t laughing, I’m sick of your stupidass games, fuck you, man, fuck you--” (196). However, none of the characters take anything, including threats from other characters they are tied to, all that seriously because of the transience they ascribe to their lives. Skinheadboy says, “You can call me whatever you want. It don’t make no difference to me. It ain’t like I’m going to be around that long…I’m just killing time” (198). The assumption that they will not be around long allows the characters to keep from making any real connections.

Even when the characters attempt to connect physically, they cannot quite manage it. As Orpheus and Eurydice share an intimate moment, Orpheus has a warped idea of what sharing is like. He describes, “When you sleep, I read your mind. It’s like we’re
lying real close, skull to skull, and our brains meld, they become all Siamese twin like, and I’m like sucking the thoughts right out of your head, swirling them around, seeing how they taste” (200). Orpheus seems to be deliberately coating his sense of connection to Eurydice with a graphic and horrific description in order to distance himself from that connection, to deny it. Such graphic and horrific descriptions of the world may be a result of drug use in the world the Polaroid Stories characters inhabit. One of Iizuka’s stage directions likens a bottle full of pills to precious stones. “Skinheadboy retrieves a bag from the gash in the wall. It rips. Colored pills fall, scatter. They are like jewels—emeralds, rubies, sapphires, opals—pharmaceutical treasure. He grabs as many as he can” (202).

Despite this drug-altered vision of the world, the characters, at times, still display a basic human need, and a need touted by Generation X, to see genuine truth. Dunn sees that Xers have a “serious quest to peel off the veil of illusion and just get down to the real thing” (123). In a scene entitled “The Story of Semele,” Semele tells D, “I want to see you, I want to see you for real, I want to see you as you truly are, that is my wish.” The characters of Polaroid Stories, like Ovid’s characters, have consequences for their desires though, and Semele describes seeing D as follows. “When she saw him, she saw how he was pure fire, so bright, like the sun in the sky, and when she touched his face, she burned” (203). The consequences of connection, for this group of people as for Generation X, are perceived to be severe. The character G sums it up by asking Semele, “Girl, how much shit do I got to swim in to get to you?” (204).

Some characters experience yet another type of disconnection, the feeling of being without substance. Narcissus says, “I’m looking at this guy I used to know, right,
and he’s just standing there, and he don’t say a word. It’s like he’s looking right through me, it’s like I ain’t even there” (212). Narcissus is made aware of his own lack of substance when someone he used to know, but now, presumably, cannot connect with, cannot recognize him. This instance of no recognition only exacerbates Narcissus’ sense of helplessness, further increasing his cynicism and despair, and aligning him with Generation X.

Skinheadboy voices a facet of living a life without substance when he speaks of the boredom he feels. He says, “I’m fuckin bored. Don’t nobody ever tell you how boring all this shit can be. Same ole same ole. Gets so I feel like taking somebody down, just to hear the way they sound, the way their body sounds, just to hear their heart beat, just to know they ain’t all fuckin zombies staring right through you like you ain’t even there” (217). Xers have experience with being overlooked, as they have “been largely ignored by marketers, politicians, and trend-trackers” (Dunn xi). Though Skinheadboy’s boredom with life may be a reference to a drug-induced lack of sensation, he still craves a connection with his humanity. He is willing to go so far as to be violent with someone just to sense pain and suffering, rather than to sense nothing at all.

At the conclusion of the first act, Iizuka begins to give the audience glimpses of the characters’ real-life pasts, as an explanation to their behavior and attitudes in the world of the play. One of the more striking is that of Skinheadboy, who at age seven was tied up and hung in a well by a rope for eight days. He says, “I couldn’t see in the dark. I didn’t never think about dying. I listened. I waited” (291). This horrifying experience no doubt shaped Skinheadboy, but as a defense mechanism, he looks back at it with
distance and detachment. Armed with the skill of detachment, the characters approach their lives on the street without the ability or the will to bond with other human beings.

Act 2 begins with more stories of the characters’ pasts. Narcissus, in what Iizuka calls “an interview with a stranger,” goes through several versions of how he became an orphan, each more sensational than the last, before he is able to tell the truth. His reluctance is yet another defense mechanism, a tactic to keep people at bay. D carries this tactic of fantasy replacing truth out even further with his attitude that there “ain’t no such thing as a true story” (226).

The character Echo is not so comfortable with fantasy, and tries to ground her friends in what she sees, cynically, as reality. She tells Narcissus, “It’s like you see all these things, it’s like you look out into the world and you see all this shit, and you’re like: I want that and that and that, and it’s like it ain’t never enough for you...there ain’t no point in wantin shit you ain’t never gonna get” (232). Iizuka is both commenting on the exaggerated sense of reality that Narcissus and others have, and using Echo as a reiteration of Generation X’s hopeless economic prospects that constantly loom over these characters. They truly believe they will never get what they want.

That despair feeds into other aspects of their lives and belief systems, too. Probably as a result of all the misery with which he has lived, Skinheadboy has trouble having faith in anything. He says, “I don’t even believe in god anyway. I don’t believe in nothing. I mean, what I believe is you can’t believe in nothing. And if you do, you’re gonna lose for sure, cause shit happens” (235). There seems to be no good in the lives of

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29 Xers face “a future of economically devastating taxation and minimal government services,” (Schier 127).
these characters that enables them a positive outlook on anything. Even the typical adolescent love pangs are viewed as destructive. G likens love to a drug addiction when he tells Eurydice, “Girl, you’re talking about love, right, and love is mental. Even in the good times, it’s gonna make you crazy, and in the bad times, I swear, it’s gonna make you wish you could put a bullet through your brain, put yourself out of your own damn misery. And then when it’s all gone, you gonna wish you could do it all over again” (238).

Ever on the defensive, Eurydice adds this caution, which epitomizes the thinking that causes isolation, “Don’t let nobody get too close, cause I don’t care how nice somebody is, fuck nice, you let them get close enough, they’ll take everything you own, your own self even. Ain’t nobody who won’t” (238). Echoing the sentiment of Aloha’s characters, Eurydice explains how she manages to stay alone with, “Sometimes, it’s like if I can just keep moving, nothing bad’ll happen. Sometimes, it’s like if I stop, I’ll die” (239). Eurydice’s life is a vicious cycle of running, fatigue, stress, and more running.

Polaroid Stories draws to a close with an epilogue titled “Metamorphoses.” As if to suggest that the characters have died, or are dead to the world, the stage is dark, and voices call names of street teens out of the dark. Iizuka says:

The dark goes back further than anyone can see. Light on a wall of Polaroid pictures like an anonymous shrine somebody left behind. As the voices call out, the polaroids gradually come clear. From out of the black green surface emerge the faces of a thousand kids. They stare you down (244).

The abundance of pictures and the semi-permanent nature of the polaroids make the problems of the teenagers abundant and real. As in Aloha, Say the Pretty Girls, Iizuka has managed to make her characters’ experiences, so often dismissed as generic and
insignificant by the media and American society, genuine, and appealing to an audience on a personal level. Because Iizuka is able to humanize the problems that face Generation X, she wins them over and creates poignant and palpable theatre that matters.
CONCLUSION

In examining Lizuka’s work, her plays represent a wide span of ideas and classifications, varying in style, form, and content. To a different extent and by different means, they represent authenticity and truth. Lizuka’s scripts combine worlds, sometimes foreign and sometimes artificial, resulting in uncompromising and seemingly honest examinations of the human condition.

Her attention to the contemporary American world of Generation X gives the impression of being especially truthful and noteworthy. While traditional goods and services, industries and government agencies turn their backs on Generation X, their unique stories remain in the dark. On the other hand, Lizuka makes Generation X her target audience, and brings its stories, problems, and special beauty to the forefront, while constantly questioning the idea of connection and its absence from the lives of these young people. Lizuka seems to be talking to Generation X as a marginalized group. As Generation X members are marginalized by their small number they are unified by common experience. Many experienced physical or emotional abandonment by parents or parental figures. Generation X members are unified by some common expectations and attitudes, such as a sense of impermanence in life, a negative outlook about the future, and the perception of living as isolated and lonely individuals.
Each of her plays examines the human condition specific to Generation X in relation to other humans. How isolated can a person become? How can people be lonely in the middle of a city? How can they be lonely amongst friends? Is there something fundamental in a person’s environment or upbringing that keeps him/her from forming lasting ties with others? Why cannot Generation X members find what they are looking for? Why cannot they find who they are looking for? Although Iizuka provides no answers, she does a useful service by simply posing the questions.

However, Iizuka’s focus on Generation X may be a reason that her plays have not yet been extremely widely produced. Their appeal is specific to her target audience, Generation X. Because there are so few Generation X members and because public perception of Generation X is often negative, theatres may be hesitant to produce plays that would appeal to a small percentage of their audience population. In addition, Generation X members are still comparatively young. The oldest Generation X members are in their late thirties, and may not yet have come to positions of power in theatres. Until Generation X members are decision makers at major theatres plays that examine their experiences may not be widely produced. In addition, Iizuka’s plays tend to incorporate extensive use of stage technology, an expense that many theatres either cannot afford, or are not equipped to handle.

One of Iizuka’s greatest strengths is her characters’ use of language. Their speech is poetic and interesting, while precisely mimicking actual dialogue. As a result, her characters and their situations are believable and realistic. Her plays also often include aspects of expressionism, and some of her most interesting scenes involve no dialogue,
but an intense illustration of a character’s state of being or experience, using both action and technology.

*War of the Worlds*, a fictional biographical account of a real man’s life, takes its shape from Orson Welles’ artistic biographical opus, *Citizen Kane*. In the words of the biographer, Welles was, “a genius or a charlatan, the real thing or a very good fake, I don’t know which,” (Smith and Kraus, 1999, 121). Those same words could be used to describe lizuka’s script, and perhaps lizuka herself. She probed the mind and life of Welles, an innovative and highly regarded artist, only to discover that his creativity is born of his loneliness, and this seems to suggest that disconnection is not only a problem amongst the characters in stories but for real, visibly successful people. lizuka exposes this part of humanity and shows the audience that even big personalities can be lost in a vast world.

However, lizuka does not provide answers to all of the human questions. The character of Welles himself, perhaps speaking for all people, tells the audience, “It’s difficult to dissect the creative process.” (Smith and Kraus 2000, 133). The process of living, of making lasting connections to other people through whatever means, is sometimes mysterious and inexplicable.

With *Skin*, lizuka demonstrates that the problem of isolation is not new. By taking Büchner’s 1836 story, re-working it, and setting it in the current day, lizuka shows that the problems that Woyzeck and the other characters faced are still challenging people today. Economic hardship, hopeless ambition, and few familial connections continue to plague contemporary American society. These hardships contribute to illnesses such as depression and continue to have tragic circumstances, as evidenced by the believable
characters of Skin, Jones, Mary, and others. Lizuka ensures the characters’ believability by writing for them dialogue that can be played with psychological realism. At the same time, she provides space, both temporal and physical, and justification in her expressionistic stage directions, for non-realistic design and staging. This heightens the audience’s sense of Jones’ isolation and the situation that leads Mary to infidelity, without drawing a strict distinction between Jones and Mary and an average contemporary living a typical American life. Büchner’s old story is accessible and appealing to audiences, especially audience members of the same approximate age as Generation X.

As Lizuka herself born in 1965 is a member of Generation X, her plays deal with Generation X issues. Lizuka takes Generation X issues, isolation in particular, seriously, and dramatizes them in such a way that they are neither offensive nor trivialized. Polaroid Stories is an attempt to give voice to a specific sub-population of Generation X, homeless teenagers who live with life-threatening circumstances, either as a result of childhood misfortune or of having fallen into the trap of drugs. What makes Lizuka unique as she tells this story, however, is that she does not point the finger at the teenagers, nor at others. She simply tells the story, and in so doing asks what needs to change in order to make life better for these people, and to keep others out of the same situation?

Not only is Lizuka an advocate for marginalized people, or for marginalized members of Generation X, she also includes average young Americans. The simple act of inclusion provides a means of identification and representation in theatre for Generation X. Members of Generation X are naturally looking for plays that tell their
stories in a seemingly authentic and recognizable way, and this is what makes Iizuka’s work so attractive. *Language of Angels* takes a look at the youngest members of Generation X, teenagers from a small town. The helplessness and stagnation these characters feel is no surprise, considering the economic situation of their town, and the difficulty they have escaping it. Iizuka is successful with this story because the problems the teenagers face are essentially the same problems faced by Generation X.

More middle of the road American young people inhabit the world of *Aloha, Say the Pretty Girls*, and they deal with isolation, lack of ambition, and cynicism about the future, just as the characters do from *Language of Angels*. These problems are not specific to a small number of people, but are representative of an entire American generation of young adults. In addition, *Aloha, Say the Pretty Girls* deals with cynicism about traditional American values, such as the acquisition of wealth and material goods, and deals with failed attempts at building a family or living as a family, in a meaningful way, without calling Generation X spoiled or lazy. Instead it points to these problems as the products of our time.

The breakdown of the family as a societal problem is explored more deeply in *Tattoo Girl*, which journeys through a middle-class woman’s secret dream of escaping her suburban lifestyle for something more unique, only to learn that her family is what is most important in the long run. Iizuka is not making any moral pronouncements. She provides a woman’s exploration of the unknown, unexperienced, and exotic, that is important, rather than the woman’s eventual choosing of the traditional. Iizuka legitimizes the Generation X longing for a life free from perceived mundane drabness.

With *36 Views*, Iizuka has created a world of characters who escape the mundane by
dealing with exotic and ancient Asian art. Despite their exotic interests, however, these characters must still be on guard for imposters, empty representations of the art and knowledge they value so highly.

Iizuka’s writing explores the world as experienced by Generation X, a group of people who function in American society as virtual outcasts, after being raised in the shadow of the Baby Boom. Generation X’s troubled childhood, pessimism about the future, and small number keeps them under-represented and misunderstood by a large part of American society. Iizuka works against that bias, giving voice to marginalized people, “the new lonely,” making their problems appear as serious and insurmountable as they do to the members of Generation X (Pappano 8). Because Iizuka’s plays do not generally end happily, audiences are left at a point of contradiction, and are thus forced to come to their own decision about who or what is right or wrong. Generation X audiences are forced out of their apathy.

Iizuka’s plays are charged with a sense of honesty. Even when she writes non-realistic, non-linear scenes and dialogue, as she often does, the reader/viewer senses a truth within. Iizuka uses her plays to comment on the state of being of a generation of people (Generation X), a society at large, and the culture they embody. Iizuka points out the problems that contemporary Americans face without being overly cynical about the future. Although many of her characters are colored by a sense of hopelessness, Iizuka seems to remain optimistic and continues making her contribution to the world by telling the stories of the people around her. Her success in representing isolated people on stage provides Iizuka a lasting audience, Generation X, ensuring her future success as a playwright, and making her a unique and important theatrical voice in our time.

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APPENDIX A

PLAY SUMMARIES

CHAPTER 1

*Skin*:
Iizuka’s *Skin* (TheatreForum:8) presents the story of George Büchner’s *Woyzeck* in contemporary San Diego, with the major characters and events all represented. The characters Mary (Marie) and Jones (Woyzeck) seem mutually attracted to each other, possibly even in love, but they cannot connect. Jones attempts over and over again to be part of Marie’s life and, although she seems to have affection for him, she does not trust him. Mary and Jones have a daughter, but Mary will not allow Jones see her. Jones mentally unravels, perceiving he has lost Mary’s love. When he sees Mary with another man, he kills Mary, the object of his affection and obsession.

*War of the Worlds*:
Written in collaboration with Anne Bogart and the SITI Company in 2000, *War of the Worlds* (Smith and Kraus, 2000) tells the story of Orson Welles’ rise in Hollywood very early in life, and the rest of his life spent trying to live up to is first movie. After the 1938 *War of the Worlds* radio broadcast, Welles was offered a deal to make films, and created the masterpiece *Citizen Kane*. After that, he worked on another script, *The Magnificent Ambersons*, but the studio tampered with the ending and, in Welles’ eyes, ruined it. In order to escape the control the studios had on him, Welles relocated to Europe, where he

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continued to make movies, but never achieved the same success that he enjoyed early in his career.

CHAPTER 2
Tattoo Girl:
*Tattoo Girl* (Sun and Moon Press, 1998) follows the path of Perpetua, a trumpet-player who wants to become larger than she is. She leaves her family and begins a quest for fame and fulfillment, constantly moving from place to place, from experience to experience. While Perpetua is gone, her husband meets Tattoo Girl, a woman who has a giant tattoo on her back, but who wants to remove it more and more each day. She is moving toward conformity. Meanwhile, Perpetua’s son grows up without a reliable maternal or paternal influence. As Tattoo Girl moves more toward conformity, Perpetua moves away from it. Both are searching for a connection to something, until both women discover what truly brings them happiness.

*Language of Angels:* Dissatisfaction and alienation are not foreign to Iizuka’s 2000 play, *Language of Angels* (*TheatreForum*, 2000), which focuses on a group of small-town high school students whose numbers have dwindled severely over their lifetime. These wild, somewhat reckless high school students lost one of their own, Celie, on a night in 1987, when she inexplicably wandered into one of the many caves in their town, and was never seen again. Subsequently, most of the surviving friends have died early deaths or wasted their lives away, and people describe them as being cursed since the death of Celie. The ghost
of Celie haunts them, leading them to truths they would not otherwise have known. Iizuka uses a non-linear plot structure to tell the story of the group since the night that Celie died.

36 Views:
36 Views (American Theatre, 2002) focuses on Darius Wheeler, a dealer of ancient Asian art-works who prides himself on being able to tell whether a certain piece is authentic or a fake. Wheeler is unable to separate his constant scrutiny and judgment of art works from his dealings with other people, who he uses unscrupulously in pursuit of the next deal. When an 11th Century Japanese pillow book is discovered, it has the potential to change the scholarship of the period and also to make Wheeler rich. However, the authenticity of the pillow book is questionable, and the narrative follows Wheeler and the other characters’ attempts to trace the book’s authenticity, as well as their reasons for doing so.

CHAPTER 3
Aloha, Say the Pretty Girls:
The young New Yorkers of Aloha, Say the Pretty Girls (Smith and Kraus, 1999) are in the midst of coming and going through each others’ lives. They are forming and breaking relationships, trying to relate and to connect, and finding discontent with their failures. As the characters try to make lasting connections, this quirky, episodic script takes us from New York to Hawaii, then to Alaska and, even in these exotic locations the characters’ worlds continuously overlap, but they remain unsatisfied. Their relationships to each other are reshaped by circumstance, attachment, or desire, though some still ultimately feel alone.
Polaroid Stories:
Iizuka re-works Ovid’s myths of Metamorphoses with the stories of homeless teenagers living on a pier in New York in Polaroid Stories (Smith and Kraus, 1997). The heightened sense of urgency with which the characters live also heightens their stories. Instead of risking their fulfillment or happiness, these youth living on a pier in New York are at risk for their very survival. Most are addicted to drugs and are not above stealing in order to follow their whims, but lizuka exposes the humanity of these young people as they strive for the same kind of connection with each other and with the world as people everywhere.
APPENDIX C

SELECTED CHRONOLOGY

1965  Naomi Iizuka is born to Takehisa and Maria Iizuka in Tokyo, Japan.

1966-1968  Takehisa is employed by a hotel chain based in Tokyo, and the Iizuka family lives in Indonesia.

1968-1971  Iizuka family lives in Amsterdam, Holland.

1971  Takehisa takes a job with World Bank and Iizuka family relocates to Washington, D.C., where Naomi starts first grade and is raised.

1983  Naomi becomes an undergraduate at Yale because of her interest in their Classics program.


1987  Naomi graduates with a BA summa cum laude in literature from Yale’s Classics program, and begins Yale Law School. She continues writing plays on the side, feeling dissatisfied with her studies.

1987  Naomi leaves Yale and moves to California.

1989  Naomi enters University of California – San Diego’s MFA program in playwriting.

1990  The Source Theatre in Washington, D.C. produces her early play And Then She Was Screaming, her first major production.

1992  Naomi graduates with an MFA in playwriting from the University of California – San Diego.
1994  *Tattoo Girl* premieres at Nada in New York and is also produced by Seattle’s Annex Theatre.

1995  *Skin* premieres at Dallas Theatre Center and is also produced by New York’s Soho Rep.

1997  *Polaroid Stories* premieres at the Actors’ Theatre of Louisville’s Humana Festival of New American Plays.

1999  *Aloha, Say the Pretty Girls* premieres at the Actors’ Theatre of Louisville’s Humana Festival of New American Plays.

2000  *War of the Worlds* premieres at the Actors’ Theatre of Louisville’s Humana Festival of New American Plays.


2001  *36 Views* premieres at Berkeley Repertory Theatre.

APPENDIX D

PRODUCTION

lizuka's plays have been produced by:

Actors Theatre of Louisville
Alice's Fourth Door (New York)
Annex Theatre (Seattle)
Berkeley Repertory Theatre
The Brooklyn Academy of Music
Camposanto + Intersection for the Arts (San Francisco)
The Dallas Theatre Center
The Edinburgh Festival
Frontera@HydePark Theatre
Glendale Community College
Hudson Theatre (Los Angeles)
Nada (New York)
New York University
Off Center Theatre (Tampa)
Printer's Devil Theatre (Seattle)
Sledgehammer Theatre (San Diego)
Soho Rep
Source Theatre (Washington, D.C.)
Tectonic Theatre Project/ Theatre at St. Clements (New York)
Theatre E (San Diego)
Undermain Theatre
University of Iowa
Univeristy of Wisconsin - Green Bay

lizuka's plays have been workshopped by:
A.S.K. Theatre Projects
Bay Area Playwrights Festival
Geva Theatre
Hedgebrook
Joseph Papp Public Theatre
McCarter Theatre Center
Midwest PlayLabs and En Gardes Arts/ P.S.122
San Jose Repertory Theatre
The Sundance Theatre Laboratory

Awards
Gerbode Foundation Fellowship
Japanese American Citizens’ League Fellowship
Jerome Playwriting Fellowship
Many Voices Multicultural Collaboration Grant
Mark Taper Forum Mentor Playwrights’ Program
McKnight Fellowship
NEA/TCG Theatre Artist Residency Program for Playwrights
PEN Center USA West Award for Drama
Princeton University’s Hodder Fellowship
Whiting Award

Current Commissions
Actors’ Theatre of Louisville
Campo Santo + Intersection for the Arts
Children’s Theatre Company (Minneapolis)
Geva Theatre
Kennedy Center
Mark Taper Forum


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Jaglom, Henry. "Orson Unmasks Himself." Perspectives on Orson Welles. Ed. Beja, 


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NEWSPAPERS (Reviews and Previews)


THEATRE PERIODICALS:


