

MAGIC AND MACHINE: USING THE REPÈRE METHOD OF THEATRICAL DEVISING  
TO EXPLORE THE THEMES OF SCIENCE, SPIRITUALISM, AND  
THE HUMAN BRAIN

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the application of The Repère Method of theatrical devising (also know as the RSVP cycles) to the ensemble-devised creation, *Brain Storm*. The narrative of the play centers on 3 characters; one woman dealing with a brain injury and it's emotional and cognitive fall-out, another who believes she can communicate with the deceased across barriers of time and space, and the famous Canadian neurosurgeon Wilder Penfield, who used electrical stimulation to provoke sensory hallucinations in his patients. The Repère Method, which uses objects and stories as resources for the actors to engage with, is explored as a means to find compelling narrative and emotional connection within the devising process and workshop production.

To Coire

and to Claire Ward, my grandmother, and to all the grandmothers and grandfathers who,  
with their love and generosity, have made this particular journey possible for me:

Kirsten & Don, Frank & Gillian, Johnny & Patty and Mary & Stx.

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## Introduction

When I learned about the potential scope and freedom of my thesis project I realized that if this was a project I would be working on for a year or more, it needed to be something I really cared about – something challenging, but also something that would hold my focus and passion for that amount of time and beyond. I remember September 5<sup>th</sup>, 2015, just about to attend the first day of the MFA program at York, and reeling with the anniversary of my husband’s diagnosis. On September 5<sup>th</sup> 2014 we were in a hospital in Las Vegas learning that he had a massive tumour deep inside his brain. He subsequently underwent surgery and although the surgeons felt confident they had resected almost all of it, he was left with a huge visual impairment, a seizure disorder and much of the cognitive and emotional fall-out that accompanies a traumatic brain injury. Coming into this program I had spent a year learning about the brain by confronting its dysfunction, and although I learned a lot, mostly what I learned was about how little we actually know. The British stage director Peter Brook talks about “a deep, formless hunch,” which is often the starting point for his creative process. “It is like a smell, a colour, a shadow...that amorphous non-formed feeling” (Brook, 3) from which he starts preparing. For this project, I had the same experience. It was indeed a smell, or the story of a smell that almost every Canadian kid in the 80s or 90s knew: the smell of burnt toast.

WP: Mrs. Gold, do you feel anything?  
MG: I can see the most wonderful lights.  
WP: And now what do you feel?  
MG: Did you pour cold water on my hand, Dr. Penfield?  
WP: Now what?  
MG: Uh...  
WP: What is it, Mrs. Gold?  
MG: Burnt toast. Dr. Penfield, I can smell burnt toast!

(“Heritage Minutes – Wilder Penfield”)

Wilder Penfield (1891-1976), the famous Canadian neurosurgeon, had come up numerous times in my research, and in fact, has always seemed like an old family friend to me. When I used to see the Heritage Minute on TV as a kid (which were TV spots made by the Government of Canada to celebrate moments in Canadian history), I would think; “Oh yes, my Granny talks to him sometimes”. Of course I knew that he was no longer living, and that by “talking to” what I really meant was that she was psychically channeling his messages from the spirit realm. Claire Ward, (my maternal grandmother, 1919 – 2007) described herself as “a script medium sensitive”. She sat down every Sunday morning and set her left hand to paper and let messages be channeled through her. This process, as described in *The Encyclopedia of Occultism*, is known as “automatic writing” (Spence, 56).

With my husband’s surgery and subsequent brain injury and seizure disorder, I have become aware of the extent to which our perception of reality is fragile and so easily damaged, or manipulated, (as Penfield did in his many experiments). I have been thinking about Penfield a lot as I explore my own deep, formless hunch that Penfield’s work on simulating sensory perception could form an interesting and challenging framework from which to build a theatrical piece. Coupled with my grandmother’s transcripts from her automatic writing, and indeed her own deeply felt connection to Dr. Penfield, I believe I have both an idea and a textual resource that could engender a piece that would hold my focus for many years to come.

Because these are some decidedly large and abstract ideas, I have decided to use the Repère method which focuses on ‘object resources’ to find some emotional and

narrative tent poles on which to string these ideas. My thesis therefore centers on this question: Will employing the Repère method in my devising process help me ground these abstract ideas in a meaningful, visceral and worthy experience for a theatre-going public?

I will structure this essay in four parts. The first will focus on my personal research on Penfield himself, and the connection my grandmother, Claire Ward had with him. The second will describe the Repère method and how I think it will serve this project. The third section I will talk about the workshop I did for this project in the summer of 2016 using Repère, which serves to outline how I am using the process, and finally in the fourth section, I will talk about my goals and hopes for the project, and how I propose to achieve them for this phase of development.

### **Magic or Machine?**

Dr. Penfield, who founded the Montreal Neurological Institute, worked from the 1920s to the 1960s, specializing in epilepsy and brain surgery. He pioneered the “Montreal Procedure” which involved electrically stimulating the brain of a conscious epileptic patient in order to identify the seizure’s point of origin. During his research, Penfield mapped the whole motor cortex of the brain, and was able to provoke auditory, visual and olfactory sensations in his patients just by electrically stimulating specific locations on the brain. This is what was dramatized in the famous Heritage Minute, and detailed extensively in his book *Epilepsy and the Functional Anatomy of the Human Brain*.

Penfield was insatiably curious about metaphysical matters that most surgeons avoid. His book, *The Mystery of the Mind*, outlines his thoughts and research on the concept of whether the mind can be found within the physical structure of the brain. He describes how some types of epilepsy can turn people into “automatons”; they lose consciousness but keep doing the thing they were doing before the seizure occurred – walking, or even driving. The motor cortex still functions but the memory and “mindful” section of the brain is interrupted by the electrical charge of the seizure. Penfield took this to mean that there were “higher brain mechanisms” which dealt with what we now call executive functioning, and “lower brain” (83) mechanisms which handle sensory motor functions. Using electrical stimulation, Penfield was unable to provoke “higher brain” activity such as decision-making or what he called “mind-action”, however he was able to provoke sensory-motor functions, such as causing an arm to twitch, or sensations, such as causing the patient to hear music when none was present. From this he was “forced to conclude that there is no valid evidence that either epileptic discharge or electrical stimulation can activate the mind” (Penfield 1975, 78).

Penfield admits to then stepping outside the “boundaries of natural science” (85), by speculating on the possibility that the mind could outlast the body; “It is clear that, in order to survive after death, the mind must establish a connection with a source of energy other than that of the brain...It is not unreasonable to hope that after death the mind may awaken to another source of energy” (Penfield 1975, 88).

I furnish this specific background on Penfield’s research because it dovetails into my grandmother’s relationship with him. Claire Ward received 3 messages from Wilder Penfield, the first in 1980. She claimed that she only had the most peripheral knowledge

of him and his work. As she writes to a potential publisher; “Dr. Penfield’s name was known to me as a remote public figure but not more closely than that. I certainly had no detailed knowledge of this work on the brain nor of his written work.” (Ward, 1990).

What follows is part of Claire Ward’s automatic writing which she ascribed to Penfield and was eventually published in the spiritualist journal *Beyond*:

Penfield here.

It has been an astonishing revelation to me making the transition after my so-called death. Shout aloud the truth that no entity ceases to be. Every particle within the universe can be transmuted but can never be thrown away. Mortal remains have no value other than the elements which become integrated again. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust is absolutely factual. But the mind goes on. Hallelujah, the mind goes on! My research only touched the fringes of the infinite capacity of human mental resources. The hardly scratched capabilities of human consciousness need concentrated attention from scientists and specialists in the human sciences to explore this important field of study. Man’s consciousness has powers undreamed of by the vast majority. ...I worked strenuously for years to improve knowledge of the physical properties of the mind, but even I had little or no understanding of the help that could be given by removal of fear of death. I am ALIVE ALIVE ALIVE. Could I have stated that with certainty the whole premise and focus of my work would have been affected. Mind is eternal.

WE LIVE! WE LIVE!

Try to convey the glorious triumph of my message. Shout it aloud as I shout it to many colleagues who never hear. We can only relay it through channels like yourself and we rank you a very clear contact.

Our loving thanks, Wilder Penfield.  
(Ward)

So it seems Claire Ward received a message from one of Canada’s eminent scientists, that our consciousness supersedes our physical bodies and continues independently from us past death. Any opinion about whether this is empirically true is irrelevant to me. What fascinates me, is that this communication highlights the fact that

even with all the research and science up to the present, we still cannot explain what consciousness is. Descartes' notion of dualism, - that the mind and body are separate entities - which Penfield subscribed to, has been out of favour in the scientific community for some time. However, science has yet to explain how "the inner world of consciousness arises from the flesh of the brain" (Johnson). . One of the main theories now is that consciousness is a game the brain plays with itself. As George Johnson, the science writer describes; "The brain is a computer that evolved to simulate the outside world, among it's internal models is a simulation of itself...The result is an illusion. Instead of neurons and synapses, we sense a ghostly presence" (Johnson). Michael Graziano, a neuroscientist at Princeton puts it thusly, "The machine mistakenly thinks it has magic inside it." (Johnson) We name that magic consciousness.

This simulacrum, this magic, comes right back to the difficult and exultant art of doing theatre. As theatre makers we are trying to simulate a complete world for the audience to believe in. We create illusions so that we can experience authenticity. The backstage of an elaborate theatre could be a mechanical puppet show mimicking the human brain, with its left and right hemispheres, the ropes and pulleys introducing props and ideas and the energy of the actors animating the whole thing. People say we have built computers as a representation of the human brain, and I would argue that long before this, we built theatres to do the same thing. In contrast to the computer, which embodies the electrically-coded machine, the theatre is the physical embodiment of the magic that we feel our brains to possess.

As humans we have mastered much of the simulation. We have figured out how to recreate many experiences, or at least portray them in a story. Much of the time, the

most effective medium to do this is in TV or film. Far from being discouraged by this as theatre-makers, we should rejoice. As Jordan Tannahill, in his book *Theatre of the Unimpressed* so aptly puts it; “screen-based mediums have relieved the theatre of the burden of verisimilitude” (Tannahill 95). Instead of focusing on the machine, let us focus on the magic.

### **The Repère Method for Theatrical Devising**

I decided to use the Repère method to explore these ideas for the stage, as the main focus in Repère is on the interaction between the actor and the space and objects, and how to utilize the deviser’s personal material as a resource to create scenes and narrative.

*Repère*; meaning landmark, or reference point, is a devising method based on cycles of creating and recreating theatrical material from resources. It was employed to great effect by Robert Lepage with Théâtre Repère in the 1980s including his breakout productions of *Circulations*, *Trilogy of Dragons*, and *Vinci*. I had the opportunity to train in this method under Jackie Gosselin of Dynamo Théâtre in Montréal. Jacques Lessard, who founded Théâtre Repère in 1980, adapted his ‘méthode Repère’ from the RSVP Cycles, which he had encountered while on a year-long residency in dance and movement with the American choreographer Anna Halprin in San Francisco California. Anna’s husband Lawrence, an environmental architect, had written *The RSVP Cycles* as a way to distill “nothing less than the creative process – what energizes it – how it functions – and how its universal aspects can have implications for all our fields.” (Halprin 1969, 2). Both husband and wife talk about the RSVP cycles as a way to make

the artistic process “visible”, as the act of creation is often characterized as murky, hard to define, and ever-changing. Their hope was that the RSVP Cycles would liberate the process, making it more available to a wider range of people, thus giving agency and ownership to the groups that work within it.

RSVP stands for Resources, Score, Valuation and Performance. Together, RSVP describes “all the procedures inherent in the creative process” (Halprin 4). Once the practitioners become competent, the stages can be done in any order, but RSVP makes a nice acronym and acts as an invitation for the audience to respond.

In the RSVP Cycles, “Resources” refer to “all the knowable and controllable quantities of a given situation...the building blocks which the group uses as the basis of its operation”. (Halprin 31). Resources are both tangible objects: a suitcase, a map, some shoes - and intangible: personal reactions, anecdotes, feelings. New resources are constantly being introduced and re-engineered within the process.

The ‘Score’ refers to a representation of process. It is a way of “symbolizing reality – of communicating experience through devices other than the experience itself” (Halprin 9). Scores would be written down as a sort of instruction manual for a performer to interpret or respond to. The score is an open-ended system which acts as a guide or even a provocation to the artists who engage with it. Unlike a musical score written by Bach for example, which dictates exactly *how* a piece of music should be played, the RSVP scores “allow the activity itself to generate its own results in process. They communicate but do not control. They energize and guide, they encourage, they evoke responses, they do not impose” (Halprin 19). This has the effect of redefining the role of the artist away from the “solitary hero” (19) and towards a relationship with a

larger creative community by creating a score which allows for the creativity of others as well as oneself.

The 'V' in RSVP stands for 'ValuAction'; a word coined by Halprin to connote the value assigned to each score and what action should be applied to further explore the score. This is an integral aspect to the process where all the participants contribute ideas and opinions about how certain scores work or fail. This step can occur at any point: while evaluating which resources to explore, or exploring the results from the performance of a score.

This leads us to P - Performance, the part of the process where the audience is invited to see the results of the previous steps. Performance simply means an implementing of the score. This does not need to be a large affair; the audience could be the other members of the group. The audience's response is a crucial part of the work and can become a resource for the next cycle of work to be explored.

As I understand it, Anna and Lawrence Halprin used the RSVP Cycles as a tool to democratize and disseminate the creative process across a wide range of participants. This was the 1960s; the idea of community-building and empowerment through art was the goal; process was valued over product. Around the time she deepened her practice with the cycles Anna Halprin gave up performing publicly in order to concentrate on teaching and on the healing work engendered by working with different communities.

In contrast, Jacques Lessard brought his experience working with RSVP back to his theatre community in Quebec City and immediately adapted it for performance. He used the word 'Repère' as his acronym; RE – Resource, P – Partition (score) E-

Evaluation, RE – Representation (performance) and even founded a theatre company in 1980 based on its principles. Twenty-eight years later, I was exposed to his adaptation through my work with Dynamo Théâtre. Training in Repère, I felt I had found a key to much of the cultural currency and artistic process that made Quebecois theatre so exciting. It foregrounded a theatre that was less about the story and more about *how* the story was told, using a corporeal and imagistic vocabulary that I found thrilling. Irène Roy, author of *Le Théâtre Repère*, describes it as “images multidimensionnelles” (59). The artist must use a language that the audience understands, but the artist also needs to subvert that language by adding another dimension to the image. There is a transgression of the structural norms of the language to energize the information and give creative life to the work. This aspect of theatrical play is integral to what sets theatre apart from film or TV. The transformation of images allows us to see both the metaphoric, artistic power of an object and its everyday physical utility as well. It is the “mind-energy” and “brain energy” that Penfield discusses writ large.

In the theatre that interests me, I see objects take on an emotional life that is both multi-dimensional and semiotically transgressive. “The symbolic use of objects depends on how the object is used by actors. On stage, objects are not defined by their ‘reality’ or material qualities, but through the performer’s appropriation of them.” (Dundjerovic 73). This is why, when working with my designer, Will Bezek, I wanted a set that would be able to take on and contain many different images (see appendix C). My hope is that the actor-creators will be able to engage with the set as an object-resource, allowing the object to become the metaphor, embodying the poetry and plurality of meaning that we look for in a dramatic text.

Jacques Lessard summarizes it thus: “We create from tangible resources, not from ideas” (Roy 7). Although this project of mine was birthed from a “formless hunch” and one that teams with abstract ideas, I am hopeful that the focus on using object and narrative resources to create work will help ground these ideas in something emotionally and viscerally relevant to an audience. Lessard describes it another way;

Opinions are not the matter of creation. Every opinion is contestable and every discussion based on the exchange of opinions should be avoided when it is time to create. Boredom and a reduction to the lowest common denominator are habitually the result of artists sitting around a table engaged in a long discussion of opinions. Emotions, now those are not contestable.

(Roy 8) (*translation mine*).

Was Claire Ward receiving messages from a chorus of dead people who were continuing to live in the ethereal realm? In the words of Spirit Wilder Penfield; ‘Does the mind live on’? Does God exist inside or outside the brain? Can our minds communicate past barriers of time and space? These are all questions I am tackling in this project. But the opinions (mine or others) on this matter are not interesting to me. What interests me is the story and how these artists engage with it. It comes back to Roland Barthes’ idea that mythologies in contemporary life are composed of a plurality of narratives. “A culture is the sum of the narratives formed in social patterns. ... Narrative are subjective and flexible”. Robert Lepage affirms that in his practice, veracity or preservation of the story is not important. What is important is how the story “interacts with the outside world and how those who interpret it give it its actualization” (Dundjerovic 05).

## **Summer 2016 Workshop**

In the summer of 2016 I began my investigation into the Repère method with this project by organizing a 4-day devising workshop with 4 actors; the aim was to create 10-15 minutes of material for a showing in September 2016. I deliberately limited the devising workshop to a fixed 4 days to give us a temporal constraint for the creation. Knowing we had a strict time limit would, I hoped, make us more spontaneous and less risk-averse. As Lepage says; the artist must be “in a stage analogous to a lemon being squeezed. The creator must define limits, bounds, constraints and obey them until creation oozes out” (Dundjerovic 76). In my Artistic Challenge Statement I speak about attaining a feeling of awe in the room while we work. This was my goal here. What follows is a day-by-day account of this first foray into the work; what we did, and what we learned.

### **Day 1:**

The actors and I started by doing a physical warm up, in which I led them through some movement exercises to wake up the spine and spatial awareness. We did some listening exercises, followed by five minutes of mindfulness meditation. I concluded the warm up with some highly physical games to get us playing together.

We sat down together to discuss the project. Jacques Lessard is adamant that there be clarity and honesty around goals and the project at the beginning. As a director and frequent project leader, I have often been conflicted about how much to reveal to the company about my vision for the project or to be too specific about what I want. With this project, I decided to jettison any withholding of information and tell them everything. The five of us – all new to each other and new to the project - sat together

and spoke about what interested us and what our goals were. I went first and told my story. I explained my grandmother, her writings; I talked about Wilder Penfield and his research into the brain and epilepsy. That segued into my husband's story and everything my family has been dealing with since the diagnosis. I talked about what my goals were for the four days of devising and into the future of the project. As we went around the circle each person spoke and it became apparent that four out of five of us had close personal encounters with brain tumours or brain injury. When I selected these actors I was unaware of how personal the source material was to most of them. We each carried stories with us that we could share in together.

I had invited them to bring a personal resource to the first rehearsal to work with. All I asked is that it be something which had personal resonance for the actor. We all presented our resources and each person spoke about how that resource resonated with them and what sort of ideas or images it inspired. Two people brought songs, and one a poem. We recorded these impressions on a large sheets of paper and posted them on the wall. Then I asked them to work individually, by picking one of the aspects from the impressions and improvising around that. I stressed the importance of working on the spot, not rehearsing or thinking ahead to what they were going to do, but to let the work happen for us while we watched. They could use any physical resource in the room as well as the ones we had brought in.

I had brought the attaché case that held all of my grandmother's automatic writings for the past 20 years. It is a small leather suitcase, and it has a sticker, one of those 'Hello my name is:' stickers and under that is written 'spiritualism'. It has a pair of beautiful metal filigreed keys, with a hand written label that says, "Large Brown

Suitcase". I have the typed transcripts and some of the original ones, written in a large listing scrawl. The other main resources that I brought were my stories.

We all worked one at a time with the attaché case. This was just simple physical exploration. I set it up so that each movement exploration was building a physical vocabulary that we could carry forth into the next improvisation. I encouraged them to take movements and ideas from each other and integrate them into their own work. At some point, in the explorations with the suitcase, a roll of paper towel, that happened to be in the room was introduced. By the end of the day, I asked them to create a short solo performance score, which they then wrote down on paper to be used again the next day. At the end of each day we fulfilled the evaluation portion of the method, where we discussed the images and ideas that resonated and inspired us the most.

### **Day 2:**

We started with the same warm-up, then we went right into working with the performance scores made the previous day. We exchanged them so that nobody performed their own score. Then we evaluated what interested us. The suitcase and the paper towel were taking on more and more semiotic space. I had the actors pair off. One group worked on a physical choreography using some of the movement motifs that had re-occurred and the other group created a scene around someone who was hearing voices. When each group then presented, I worked with them to develop the idea. The first group's movement motif became a physical choreography that spoke to us about neurological over-stimulation and strategies to cope. The other group used some of Claire Ward's writings in their piece and so we worked that scene for more

specificity. We ended again with new scores and a more developed movement vocabulary to bring into the next day.

### **Day 3:**

On day three I decided I wanted to introduce another resource so I brought in our old Silver Cross baby pram that my grandparents had bought for my mother when she was pregnant. It is a beautiful object that is both modular and extremely evocative. After the warm up, we spent the morning just playing with it physically in the same way we did with the suitcase on the first day. We found many images. It became, at times, a wheel chair, a mouse trap, a steam engine train, a personal projection room and a stretcher. After this fruitful exploration, I wanted to change gears.

Using the objects that we had already explored - the suitcase, the paper towel and the carriage - I asked the actors to improvise scenes using character as a driving force. The characters would be improvised as well, but using the objects as source inspiration. We cycled through 2 or 3 quick improvisations and then hit on one about two sisters visiting their loved one in an assisted-living facility. This improvisation spoke to us, so we developed it some more, still working in a realistic, un-abstracted vein. We zeroed in with more specificity on their characters and the action of the scene.

At this point I asked them to do another physical improvisation - interacting with the same objects, but this time imbued with their new characters. They worked for almost 30 minutes, playing together, integrating the shared vocabulary, exploring the objects, testing out character and text. At points it made the hairs on my arms stand on end. The images were doing exactly what I had hoped for. The paper towel pathways on the floor became the neural pathways in the brain. The written recording of voices

onto the paper towels became a physical expression of memory and its tattered state. As the play progressed and the paper became more shredded, we could see how that happens to the mind as well, and in the end, when the paper got folded up and stuffed into the suitcase, we saw how the suitcase became a repository for information and memories for the next generation to explore. The multi-dimensional images that Irène Roy writes about were manifest, and the ideas I was exploring were being embodied in character and narrative.

#### **Day 4:**

For our last day, we spent the morning playing with our objects in back-lit projection, and then in the afternoon we revisited the score we had made the previous day. We refined the action and arc of the scene and tried to recreate how the paper rolled and worked. What actually happened was completely different but very interesting. This time, I had instructed them to roll the paper to the person they were trying to connect with. They ended up building the hallways of a hospital or assisted-care facility with the paper. They turned our object resource into a spatial resource, thus adding another dimension to the image and transgressing again its original meaning. We ended our workshop with another discussion about the process and what moments felt powerful to each of us.

#### **Workshop Conclusion**

To speak to the process, we achieved what I was hoping for; moments of awe and inspiration in the rehearsal room. By using the objects and stories related to these themes I had proposed, we immersed ourselves in a world that made these themes manifest. The brain injury aspect was more present in the work than I had anticipated,

perhaps because many of us had first-hand experience with it. In these four days, we began the process of plumbing our vast collective resource of images, stories, memories, dreams and accidents and bringing these narratives into a collective mythology.

To speak to the product, I was happy with the visual metaphor that the paper provided and I think the final image had power. Within the narrative, some of what we thought of as 'brain injury' came across as old-age dementia which was not my goal, but a result of a quick turnaround from creation to performance. This 'dementia' narrative gave the piece a derivative feel, and I knew watching it that it needs more specificity for the next go.

### **Second Workshop (April 2017 Performance)**

Now I am into the devising work for what will become the thesis performance in April 2017. Two of the actors returned from the previous workshop and I added 2 more so I have 4 actor-creators working on this project. They all bring their own unique filters to it; some are more adept at verbal or textual exploration, while others are physically trained and use their bodies as the means to express their engagement. We began this workshop in the same way as the first one. They each brought an object-resource to the first rehearsal and we worked with those. I specified this time that it should be something that reminds them of a grandparent.

We began by interacting and improvising with the objects much like we did in the previous workshop. My goal was to build a vocabulary of movement that we could draw upon as we moved forward. As we worked during that first week, I concentrated on

having the actors work physically with each other – actually moving each other’s bodies and getting used to moving together. Sometimes I just put on some music and asked them to improvise physically around an idea, other times I asked them to use Viewpoints tools to create choreography.

As we continued to create material using music, movement and stories as departure points, many of the ideas that came up from the original 5 objects resurfaced. Many of the ideas and stories I am using as resources are abstract. For the actors to be able to ground in the work, I have them work directly with a tangible object. This allows them to commit on an emotional level, making the act of creating more immediate and less abstract. For example, one of the objects we worked with was a handkerchief; the actors created a movement where they draped it over their own faces. The movement itself communicates a feeling of abandon and vulnerability, which we use as shorthand to show when a character is ready to communicate with the spirits found in my Grandmother’s scripts. Creating connections with the objects in this way allows for the abstract idea contained in the source material to be grounded in an emotional gesture devised by the actor. As Lessard says; “emotions are incontestable” (Roy 26). When somebody hits upon a connection with the object, we all recognize it. It isn’t something to be debated necessarily, it isn’t someone’s opinion, it just works.

The work moved up to another level upon receiving our set and costumes from Will Bezek, our designer. Suddenly we had new resources to work with. The movements began to take on a sculptural quality – a density and precision that was not present before. We improvised for hours with the screens Will designed; simple rectangular frames on wheels with fabric panels. They move beautifully and the way

they carve and create space has been extremely satisfying. They have become the transformative spatial resource like the paper was in the first workshop.

Every rehearsal, after the improvising portion, we gather to evaluate the work. My teacher, Jackie Gosselin's mantra during our work in Repère was "Creer, c'est choisir!" - to create is to choose. The act of evaluating and sorting the material is often where the work of art takes shape. As we work we are finding the stories and images that resonate with us. We all feel it when something "works". At this point, the characters have emerged, although the narrative and plot of the play is still murky. Scenes are coming together, but it feels episodic and almost impossible to successfully explore within a 45-minute show. The sheer volume of ideas is daunting.

How will we weave together these inter-related themes of perception, consciousness, neuro-dysfunction, and the scientific/spiritual divide? Will some ideas get lost or abandoned? How will I maintain the connection to my husband's experience while still engaging with these abstract and admittedly lofty artistic concepts? One fear is that we will create a show that will be too abstract and confusing for the brain injury community to engage with. My goal is to create a show that remains accessible to a larger audience, and I hope the Repère method will help us achieve that.

I see any public performance within this way of working to be essentially an open rehearsal. For the April performances I want the actors to be able to explore and improvise in what Lepage calls "peripheral consciousness" (Dundjerovic 12); where they can take the surrounding elements - the audience, the room, any accidents or unplanned events - and use that for material from which to improvise. I want them to be still creating, using the audience as a resource. I agree with Jordan Tannahill when he

writes “The best theatre is theatre that innately understands why it’s a live event and reminds us why we, as humans, continue to live” (92). I hope we can achieve some moments of multi-dimensional wonder and spontaneous play that allows us to tread between different worlds and meanings, where connections are being made and metaphors employed for the benefit of the magic, and maybe the machine as well.

## Rehearsal Journals: BRAIN STORM

### February 10 2017

First rehearsal. On the bus on my way, I receive an email from one of the cast members dropping out. Big disappointment. I am having a really hard time keeping men on the project. It is disheartening to experience the laws of supply and demand acting against my sex in such a blatant way. Men are so much more at a premium in this work and women are totally replaceable. Grrrrrrr.

Goals for the first weekend; A) Working physically together to establish a physical rigour and vocabulary. B) Building trust with physical proximity.

Warm-up Do some release work on the floor, working rolling and diagonals.

5-minute core work à la Dell arte

Rolling each other across the floor to work on isolations and organic movement, and using gravity.

Blind walks where the blind partner has to move their body towards the hand of the guiding partner. Same principal as rolling.

Quad Exercise (from Frantic Assembly) – working on counting 8 counts, and bouncing to the rhythm and integrating simple choreography on specific beats.

Then we created group choreography. I let them free dance to a song, then each came up with 8 counts of choreo that we strung together for a group dance. We used “These are the God Old Days” by SoCalled. Well received.

Next: Table work (à la Dell Arte). Working on action and reaction. No text. Majeure et mineur. They can't move until the person has completely ended their movement. Working disproportionate reactions. Contrast in rhythm and tempos. Alex and Hayley found a good sequence. I had them stop and repeat it a couple times. Shayna and Maiza needed more coaching but got there on the second try. I had them repeat their sequence a few times. I put the groups together and told them to just give each other space for the actions to pass between each other. It worked great. We had a great little scene at the end of the day.

### **Sunday Feb 12 2017**

Goals – To keep working physically and establishing the group. I asked them each to bring in an object that reminded them of a grandparent. We worked these objects using Repère today. Alex brought in these amazing salad servers carved out of wood. The handle of the fork was an old man and the handle of the spoon was an old woman. They look like old Italian *nonnos*. They belonged to Alex's Nonna. Working with them, we all realized how the fork one seemed to embody all these "masculine" qualities – piercing, stabbing, dragging – while the spoon had much more circular, rounded qualities about the movement it engendered. There were really exciting to work with.

### **Tues Feb 21 2017**

I shared the Sherman Alexie poem and realized that the 'spirits' that Claire is dealing with are also the angels that burden and unbalance someone with an ABI. We did movement improv around the words – burden, unbalance, snare, slap, haul. These

are the metaphors and images for me now to work with in terms of the unseen people, forces that are influencing the reality of these characters.

### **Wednesday Feb. 22 2017**

Today I just had Shayna and Alex for 2 hours before Hayley came so, knowing that they both have a facility for text, I decided to do some scene improvisation.

I realized I wanted to do that scene in Eugene's kitchen from almost 2 years ago when Eugene was quizzing Coire on what he sees and perceives after the surgery. And I realized this whole process has had an aspect of that - of me as the artist, sort of fetishizing Coire's experience, and finding the magic and mystery in it so fascinating, and what a privileged position that is coming from. I realize that my first instinct is to use the brain injury as an access point to the mysterious, and that if I do that, I have to address that that is coming from my own un-brain-injured perspective. It is a way to clean it up and make it all literate for an audience of discerning theatre-goers, and not about really engaging with the TBI community. Very interesting stuff.

The improv was framed like this: Two friends meeting at a café. One is recovering from a brain injury. One is asking her about it. Really great stuff came out. The idea of the friend who is fascinated by the changes Shayna has undergone with her perception. Alex's facility with the text is so great. We talked about some of the ideas I wanted to explore and they came out really organically. We did it a couple times and each improv felt sort of perfect. The challenge is taking it, putting it into a script and still finding that groundedness and authenticity.

We also did some movement improv to explore Shayna's experience of the café as someone who is suffering. We distilled it down to a movement sequence between her and Hayley where Hayley is her 'angel' that is drawing her sideways into nausea and overstimulation.

### **Thursday Feb. 23 2017**

We worked on the café scene again, this time consolidating the movement improvisations with the text improv. Hayley and Shayna were together again, and this time we added in Maiza to amplify Alex. We found really good stuff. A repetition of 'you can't drive, you can't read, you can't watch TV, you can't...etc. etc. etc.' which was so powerful. I cried. Shayna tried valiantly to counter it with 'I can still .....etc.'. It was really powerful. Also distilled a sequence for Alex and Maiza using their hands in canon, as a way to show the blurring of reality for Shayna.

### **Sunday Feb 26 2017**

They did what I think was an hour-long improv using the frames which we had now (without the fabric). It was so exciting. It ended up with Maiza being Alex's voice as she navigated a sort of gym set-up that you would have in a rehab gym. The frames were on their sides like walking bars. Watching Alex and Maiza work together with the text was so interesting. Alex is so good at embodying somebody else's voice with her face, and Maiza's spontaneity and focus in English was surprising.

### **Thursday and Friday March 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>**

We didn't have Alex for any of these days because she was committed to Dream Play, so I decided to work on creating a movement vocabulary and perhaps create some sequences. Today the resource we worked with was the costumes and the screens that Will brought in ready for us. So working with the costumes first, I put on some music and asked them to improvise individually in finding how the costume affects their movements, purely using the physical sensorial feedback from wearing them, and also asking them to use the costumes to inspire characterological movements and gestures. They came up with some movements that were really interesting, so I asked them to keep those, and to let them come back in the next improv. We worked with ideas of prepping, cleaning, organizing for surgery, because I knew we needed a sequence like that. Will (our designer) was there in the room to see how everything moved and he was very happy to see how we were using movement.

One image that came up which I really liked was the screens downstage, flat, with one open like a door. It felt like the waiting room which the clinic behind. I actually asked them to use some viewpoints strategies like using the grid and working off each other for this improv, and I think I worked really well. Especially the changes in tempo. It created both that urgency that you see in hospitals sometimes, but also the excruciating waiting – where you just cannot fathom why everything is taking so long.

### **March 9<sup>th</sup> 2017**

When I decided I would no longer try to pursue the elusive male to fill out the cast, I knew I would need to find some sort of way to play Penfield that would theatricalize

and heighten him. My suspicion was that Alex would end up being him, but I also wanted to work with the idea of voice mapping Alex's voice on another actor the way we did in the improv one day with her and Maïza. On Thursday I asked them to do the scene that I wrote dealing with Penfield and the patient having the ecstatic seizure, with Alex doing the text and Maiza embodying Penfield. It worked ok. It wasn't an operatic moment or anything but I could see the potential for it. Maiza had a hard time because she felt constantly behind Alex and felt there wasn't enough connection between them. Duly noted!

### **March 10<sup>th</sup> 2017**

On Friday I asked them to work on just improvising within two different scenes, which Alex and Maïza working together on Penfield and Hayley and Shayna working on Claire. Watching Alex and Maiza was so exciting. They really worked off each other and seeing as they were both working to their own strengths (Alex – improvising text, and Maiza improvising movement) it became a wonderful way to explore character. Penfield turned into a nervous, self-doubting work-aholic who was consumed in finding the answer to bolster his career. We saw his stakes so clearly.

### **March 24 2017**

We have settled on characters so I asked them to do some character exploration at home by writing a letter to someone as their characters. Shayna wrote this beautiful piece about working with the kids, doing a show and how every time she turned their head and they went out of her vision, and how when she turned back she discovered

that the children had aged 5 years, and then 10 years' ad 10 again until they had turned into old people – unseeing and uncomprehending of her stories. It was really beautiful. All the discussions we had around character today were so interesting. Maïza was talking about Penfield in really interesting ways – about the tumour being a door to God – ‘who knew the perpetrator of your departure would be the cure as well?’ (her writing – amazing!). We started talking about the energy in cancer cells, and how they regenerate much like the cells of a growing fetus, and how tapping into that energy could be the key. Penfield’s sister came up – the idea that as he operated on her, old family stuff came out and he became flustered and she died – (all our ideas. Not what really happened. Although he did operate on his sister’s brain tumour). Hayley came up with the idea that she was writing to her grandchild who wasn’t born yet.

### **April 04 2017**

Two weeks to tech week and things do not feel like they are moving very fast. Everybody is very excited about using the screens for projection, but I am feeling overwhelmed by the logistics of doing that for this stage of the project and so I have made the decision that this workshop will only be focusing on text and movement ideas, not technology.

At this point I need to figure out chronology. I think we open with the waiting room movement sequence and then go from there. Maybe Kate goes directly from the doctor’s office to the café? Here are some questions I need to think about:

Does every scene end with Kate having to sleep?

What is the smell that reminds Kate of Granny?

How do we integrate that?

Is there contact with Granny during Kate's surgery?

How does Lois fit in to any of this?

How to establish that Lois is not Claire?

Did Claire have a right hemisphere stroke and that is what caused the writing?

Is there a conflict between the idea that Claire's writing is magic or just the result of neuro dysfunction?

### **April 15<sup>th</sup> 2017**

Today I think we found the end of the play. I had written a scene between Claire and Kate in the hospital after Kate's surgery, but I knew we needed something else to end on. Coire had said I should come back to 'put the pencil in your left hand' and then I had the idea that Kate should be working with an Occupational Therapist to be relearning how to write. I brought up the idea in rehearsal and all the actors thought it was perfect. Then Alex had the idea that we should be working with a flashcard of a tree – "make a mental image of a tree" and that the word that she is trying to write is 'Tree'. So we tried it once with Maiza being the OT and it worked.

### **April 20<sup>th</sup> – Opening night**

I felt very nervous all day about this. I was mostly worried about being able to keep it all together with my whole family in the room. I choked up at reading the land acknowledgment, took a deep breath and recovered. As I watched the show I felt like I knew it was a good show. I love the beginning and how it starts so slowly and we get all

that time to look at what is happening on the stage. I cried at some points throughout but I can't remember when now.

When it was over and I hugged my family I saw how shattered my mom was, and I felt badly. She told me; "You should have told me it so much about Coire and brain injury". I had that thought myself in the past couple weeks and had honestly just forgotten. I didn't want to make a show that is harrowing. That is not what I set out to do. And for most people I don't think it is, but for my family, who have been on the front lines with me for the past 2.5 years I think it was very hard.

This all comes back to the major question I am struggling with now that the show is made and on it's feet. Does Art help? Can it help heal? Can it help us process? Everyone, especially artists claim this function. It is in our litany of reasons that we list off when trying to justify our existence and usefulness within society.

### **April 23 – After Closing**

Following on that previous entry; for me the jury is definitely out. I don't see doing this show as having helped me heal, and certainly not Coire. He doesn't like seeing his story up there. It highlights the struggle he is having with his own self worth. How can I possibly think that doing this show is a good thing for him? He has always been a very private person on any digital platform. He is generous in person but very guarded online. That seems to have extended to the theatre as well. I think he feels like the character of Kate is defining him for a whole bunch of people who don't know him. This is the last thing I set out to do – I do NOT want to make life harder for Coire by doing this project. It makes me question everything. This show should be in service

to his story. It should not be using his story to make a show so I can get my MFA degree. Coire says, and I understand this as well, that this is my story too, but if I am hurting him by putting it out there, then I am achieving the opposite of what I set out to do.

I had two people tell me (who know Coire very well) that they finally understand better now what he goes through every day by watching this show. That is a big deal for me. I have told these people many times what Coire goes through, but if they finally get it by seeing it theatricalized than that must count for something. I also had people tell me they realized how self-centered their attempts at relating to Coire are by seeing the character of Emma in the show. These instances are the most satisfying feedback that I received around the show.

## **Conclusion**

Did employing the Repère method in my devising process help me ground these abstract ideas in a meaningful, visceral and worthy experience for a theatre-going public?

Looking back on the whole process starting last summer, I see now that the deep exploration of Repère happened in the workshop for my summer showing. That was when I really allowed us to be process-driven instead of product-driven. By constraining the time, and giving myself a goal of 20 minutes of material, I was able to manage my own expectations and concentrate more fully on the process of exploring Repère. I was largely happy with the result from the summer workshop, although I felt it skewed too close to dementia rather than brain injury and I did agree that it was a little sentimental

in parts. For the April showing then, the stakes were higher, as I knew we would be showing in public, outside of the academic institution. I think this made me more product-driven, and I did take the reins more, controlling the direction of the narrative, rather than letting the stories emerge from the objects. In addition, because we had already explored the objects that I found interesting (the attaché case, the baby carriage, the paper) in my summer showing, I did not feel compelled to work with those same objects again.

With this group, we spent some time with the objects that they brought in; the handkerchief, the salad serving spoons, the nude-coloured shirt, the tea and the tea cups, and the phonograph needles. We spent two or three rehearsals exploring these objects, and those explorations yielded a common lexicon that we were able to draw on throughout the process. However, it was the stories I had around the project that became the louder resource. We used stories as our resources instead of objects. I introduced poems or ideas that inspired movement explorations, rather than finding a story through the object. The explorations were inspired by real events, such as the examination choreography, which I had first hand experience with.

The screens became the only dominant object-resource during the process. We spent the most time exploring them – how they moved, how the actors interacted with them, what images could be teased from them. Once we had accrued a catalogue of images, then we would focus again on building narrative through improvising. Once we had the text, I would work on how to transition between ideas and this is where the screens would usually come into play. They were the only objects that became multi-dimensional, as Irène Roy would put it. They became walls, doors, the membrane

between this world and the next, DNA, electrical circuits, etc. I think we have more explorations to do with the screens using lights and projections properly. I think there are many more layers to be discovered with them.

Early on in the process I brought in a Sherman Alexie poem: *Grief Calls Us to the Things of This World* as a resource and we did movement explorations using the images and especially the verbs in the poem – burden, unbalance, haul, snare. We worked with the idea of the “angels” from Alexie’s poem as these figures who are both present for Claire in her automatic writing, and present for Kate in her brain-injured awareness. We integrated them into the café scene. Hayley and Maïza were the angels/surgeons that wrested Kate from the jaws of death but also torment and burden her in her new life. The movement is what really made it come alive for me, by externalizing Kate’s reality, and showing the physical sensations she experiences and the gaps in awareness and time that afflict her.

As far as using my grandmother’s writings, I decided to divide them up in four parts and have each actor come into rehearsal with an idea for an image they want to explore with the group or alone. This was where “make a mental image of tree” began to take on its own life. I didn’t want to overwhelm the actors with having to read all those writing, but funnily enough, later on in the process they all asked for the full scripts, so in the end I did end up copying them and giving them out to all four actors.

### **What worked? What didn’t work?**

To be honest, I don’t have enough distance at this point, 3 days after the show, to really speak to this question. The show felt very different depending on the audience.

For two of the shows there was more laughter, and two of the shows were more quiet. When the audience laughed I was visited by a rush of conflicting feelings; the thrill I get when a joke lands, and then the revulsion at hearing people laugh at real situations that have been so painful for my family. People always laughed at the gibberish moment in the café, and this is something that is very real for people with ABI and is deeply distressing for them. But I do want the show to be buoyed by the laughter of the audience. For Coire, I know that is important as well. His currency is comedy – a pure, traditional, technical comedy. Part of being able to honour him, is to sure that this show employs aspects of theatre that he finds satisfying.

Erika came in towards the end of the rehearsal process and told me she thought we were playing too broad. She told me “you’re losing your audience” by playing for comedy. Watching the show, I realized that what Erika sees as playing too broad, I see as hitting the mark. We just have a different aesthetic. I’ve never been interested in hyper-realism in the theatre. I have always been attracted to a style that is somewhat stylized. It is heightened, more physically expressive, in the face as well as the body. In my mind, every character but Kate should exist in a heightened, over-saturated reality that reflects Kate’s over-stimulated perceptions. I think that the show does exist in that realm. The Penfield surgery scene needs to be re-written a little to tweak the build so that it really soars. I think that scene should recall Chaplin or Buster Keaton. I think there is more room in it for some grotesque slapstick that really works on people’s anxiety and fears around surgery, especially brain surgery.

Some things need to be clarified for the audience. We need to do a better job of introducing Penfield and his work to the audience. It needs to be clear what he did and

what his area of expertise was. We also need to make Granny and Penfield's relationship more clear. The relationship between Granny and Kate is good, but I think the theme of "unfinished work" with both of them could be highlighted more. The character of Emma, I see now, is the conduit for the relatable aspects of the story for most people in the audience. We need to find a way to deepen her relationship to Kate, while also working the angle of her always saying the wrong thing. I think this is our best chance at popping off a laugh here and there.

The biggest aspect which needs more development in Kate's character. I felt this and I got feedback from numerous people who told me they wanted to know more about her before her surgery – what was she like, and how has she changed. Coire suggested a dressing room scene to open the play, where they are all lit up post-show and we get to see Kate as a full, dynamic person. I am not sure yet that Shayna is able to bring the energy, density and intensity to the role that it demands. She may just be too young.

All in all, this was one of the easiest devising experiences I have had in terms of group dynamics and work flow. The fact that it was very much my project with my ideas and experiences, seemed to focus the roles in the group. There were no power struggles or undue creative tensions. By focusing on the emotions within the stories, I think we avoided being dragged down by the morass of opinions that Jacques Lessard speaks about. There were many times during the improvisations where we all knew that we were on the right track because we could feel the emotion present. I was diligent about employing the cycles of the Repère method, (Resource, Partition, Evaluation, and Representation) so that at the end of each session we would sit down

and discuss what worked and what didn't for each of the members of the group. I felt very lucky to have these actors who gave so generously of their talents and ideas, very much in the service of my goal. Having the Repère method as a back bone to our process gave us a structure that we could all recognize and it broke down the project into smaller steps which makes the whole project more surmountable. I am happy with the piece the method produced. It feels very much inline with how I see myself as a creator and I think, for the most part, it tackles some very abstract ideas with a narrative that people can relate to. There is obviously more work to do, but working this way has reinforced my preference for working collaboratively and reinvigorated my desire to keep refining and accruing a methodology for devising theatre that I can count on in the years to come.

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Wednesday Jan. 30, 1980 11.30 a.m. SYMBOL 200

- Brittle diplomatic relations may occur because of Canada's help with Americans in Iran. Please pray for inflamed passions to subside. The Middle East trial of strength reflects martial energy engulfing the planet. The violence manifesting in multiple outbreaks feeds on hatred uncontrolled by any reason. Mankind does not realize that thoughts are responsible for creating the various traits making differences in individuals. Each person is a physical record of thoughts.

Claire: geometric drawing.

Take a break. Please try to return later. There is a message we are preparing and you would provide the clearest channel for transmission.  
David symbol.

Thursday Jan. 31, 1980 10.45 a.m. SYMBOL 201

- Penfold has asked the privilege of sending a message through you.

Penfield here.

It has been an astonishing revelation to me making the trans<sup>ition</sup>~~ition~~ after my so-called death. Shout aloud the truth that no entity ceases to be. Every particle within the universe can be transmuted but can never be thrown away. Mortal remains have no value other than the elements which become integrated again. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust is absolutely factual. Preservation of bodies inside metal or cement containers interferes with the natural process of reclamation and purification.

But the mind goes on. Hallelujah the mind goes on. My research only touched the fringes of the infinite capacity of human mental resources. The hardly scratched capabilities of human consciousness need concentrated attention from scientists and specialists in the human sciences to explore this important field of study. Man's (generic for human) consciousness has powers undreamed of by the vast majority. Prodigious efforts are being made to influence an increase of awareness to vital truths. Different races and religions use different terms but all refer to what Anglicans call the Holy Spirit. Prayers are answered through the intervention and application of this loving Spirit. If men were only aware of the glorious gift vouchsafed to them with the mind.

It has been very kind of you to allow me this privilege. Brave efforts are needed to expand understanding by sharing knowledge that can be helpful. I worked strenuously for years to improve knowledge of the physical properties of the mind but even I had little or no understanding of the help that could be given by removal of fear of death.

I am alive alive alive. Could I have stated that with certainty the whole premise and focus of my work would have been affected. Mind is eternal.

We live! We live!

Try to convey the glorious triumph of my message. Shout it aloud as I shout it to many colleagues who never hear. We can only relay ~~it~~ it through channels like you and we rank you as a very clear contact.

Our loving thanks. Wilder Penfield.

Symbol. Thank you Claire for persevering with that message. Reception has improved. Relax now.

Love David symbol

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Tuesday February 5, 1980 2.15 p.m. SYMBOL 204

- Praise the Lord means loving all things in heaven and earth. Psychic transmissions are part of the natural order of creation but modern man has become so estranged from his spiritual heritage that his heterodox religious groups have lost much truth. Each concentrates on a small portion of the vast knowledge forming the Divine truths. Prayer is the hardiest survivor. Practically all religions have retained a tradition of appeal to divine forces. It is in other areas of belief that major differences occur. ~~Psychic attitudes is not that sentence.~~ Psychic experience is such an area.

The fundamentalists see only the influence of the devil refusing to believe in the demonstrated action of the Holy Ghost. Scripture has many references to psychic incidents running through it. These are accepted Biblically but ignored or derided if claimed as matter of fact occurrences now. The etheric force active in both cases is exactly the same. All truths proclaim the Glory of God and all manifestations of eternal love come from the Almighty Omnipotent Father.

God's relationship to man is the greatest of all mysteries and cannot be comprehended by mortals. Small glimpses are given to mortals whose perceptive attunement is highly developed. There is nothing in psychic activity of a spiritual nature which conflicts with regular worship. All of life becomes one thankful outpouring of love for the Almighty and all his creation.

Too many scientific psychical researchers try to ignore spiritual components of entities experiences thereby invalidating serious efforts at understanding. Parents discourage children and often stifle development in early years.

Blessings on your work. David symbol/

Saturday February 5, 1980 10.05 a.m. SYMBOL 205

- Good morning Claire.

Eternal truths rarely theatrical (difficulty with last word). That should have an 'e' after th. No wonder we had trouble. Your spelling expertize holds rein even in dissociation. Moreover that helped you prepare for carrying out your assignment.

To continue. Evidence that proves in tangible material terms survival of death would negate the real world of spirit by according precedence to material manifestations as understood by mortals. It is the mortal world which is tenuous and unreal not the eternal universe. The tests given to sensitives in efforts made to understand psychic phenomena all fail because the premise is wrong.

(Break to answer doorbell - Louise Davis canvassing for Girl Guide cookies. Written apology by C. Sorry about that break. Symbol. She was a charming child.)

To continue.

Tests are set up always to determine how psychic phenomena can be related to and reconciled with the material world. They should be trying to understand those ways in which the material world fits into the cosmic

## Appendix B

### BRAIN STORM - Working Script

Written by Taliesin McEnaney, Hayley Carr, Alexandra Montagnese,

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Maiza Dubhé, and Shayna Virginillo

#### **Scene 1**

##### WAITING ROOM AND CLINIC

(Choreography behind the screens with the 3 doctors (ALEX, MAIZA and HAYLEY).  
'KATE' waits in the waiting room)

(Moves into exam choreography. This time the 3 doctors are conducting the exam on  
KATE)

Doc: Luckily your stroke was in a relatively quiet part of your brain. Your speech wasn't  
affected. But in the surgery to remove the clot, your visual pathways were  
compromised.

Kate: Compromised?

Doc: And you have some left side weakness, but overall, you are alive, so we did our  
job.

Kate: But I feel so nauseous all the time.

Doc: We are starting you on a rehabilitative regime right away. You are very lucky we  
were able to catch it when we did. As for the left field deficit, well I say the solution for  
that is to just turn your head.

*(sequence to show kate's new perceptions)*

#### **Scene 2 Two friends in a café (EMMA and KATE)**

Maiza (server) Hayley (other people in the restaurant)

EMMA is already in the restaurant, KATE enters

EMMA – Hi! Oh it's so good to see you!!

KATE - Hi

*They hug*

A – You look great! Look at you! How are you?

KATE- Good.....umm....

EMMA– So I guess you're not working now?

KATE – Yeah, they hired some one else to take over my contract

A- Seriously? But they'll have to hire you back once you're feeling better right?

KATE – well, yeah, I hope so

EMMA– well...at least now you have time to work on your play! You must have so much new insight into it.

KATE – No, I'm really not able to yet. Reading is really hard for me now.

EMMA– of course, of course.

KATE – So.... How are you? How is Jeremy?

EMMA– Oh you know Jeremy! Always a pain in the frickin.....But I can't complain, seriously. I can't. Do you want some coffee?

KATE- Uh, no, I'll just have a peppermint tea.

EMMA– (to waitress) Can we have some tea over here? (tea gesture)

EMMA– So, You're off work. How do you fill your days?

KATE – I sleep a lot. And go to rehab and therapy.

EMMA– Wow, what's that like?

KATE – well, I'm in a room with a lot of old people. Mostly stroke victims, like me I guess.

EMMA Really! And so are you doing physical therapy?

KATE – and occupational, and speech therapy.

EMMA– Speech! But you're talking fine, I don't notice any difference anyway.

KATE – The speech therapy is more for cognitive stuff. Word recognition...I don't know, they have me drawing clocks, and houses. It's actually the worst.  
(Hayley sits down beside KATEayna. Choreography commences)

EMMA– Oh yeah! If I had to draw a house, god it would be a mess. I am so bad at that stuff.... Are you ok?

KATE – yeah... I think I just want some tea.

EMMA– oh Right. Tea! (gesture) So what's different for you? Like...what are they working on in rehab?

KATE – Well, perception is really different. And everything is more intense. And this smell – I keep smelling this smell. That I think is my grandparents house. You know how old people's houses have a really specific smell?

EMMA– Oh yeah. Is it gross?

KATE – No, it smells like... rosewater and ...dried currents. But everytime I smell it I get this super intense flashback of being at their house as a little girl. And it always comes accompanied by this phrase in my head: 'make a mental image of tree'.

EMMA– Wow. Spooky

KATE: But also noise is so much harder now. Like ...what is that noise right now?

*(Hayley and Maiza are making noise)*

EMMA– That? Oh I think there's a truck double parked out front.

KATE – No... that.

*(Maiza dragging chairs around the floor)*

EMMA– That? Oh, that's the woman sweeping under the table. God, you're right. Could she be any louder? So do you have like, super-human hearing now? Are you like more attuned to environmental sounds?

KATE – No..i don't think it's better. It's like all the sounds are so loud, I can't figure out which sound is coming from your mouth.

EMMA– So ...so you babble here? Still mar ga oices?

KATE – Sorry, what?

EMMA– Do you like, ever hear voices? I've heard sometime that people when they get a blow to the head, they hallucinate on stuff like marijuana

KATE- No, no I don't think so.

*(Hayley beside KATE)*

EMMA– Are you OK? *(hand choreography with Maiza)*

KATE – yeah, just, I'd could use some tea.

EMMA– of course. Tea! *(gesture)* ..... So did you drive here?

KATE – No. No they took my license away.

EMMA– What?? Assholes! You're a great driver!!

KATE – Well, yeah, but I can't see on my left side

A- What? Like your left eye?

KATE – It's actually the whole left side, in both eyes. Like now *(turns her head)* I can't see you. *(turns back)* now I can see you.

EMMA– You should have told me!! So that is SO interesting! Can you see this hand?

KATE- *(turns head to see it)* Well now I can.

EMMA– Can you see my face?

KATE – Yeah. But faces look different. It's hard for me to recognize people anymore

A- Wow. That is so interesting. You actually see things differently now...LITERALLY! Like you have a truly unique perspective. It's really interesting. Have you tried writing about it? You must have so many ideas

KATE – Actually I can't write really anymore. Or read.

A- You can't write?

KATE – Yeah, I'm working on it with the therapist

EMMA– oh my god. You can't write, you can't read, you can't drive, you can't

KATE – Reading is getting a little better...I just get so

A- see, you can't drink, you can't drive, you can't see, you can't

KATE – tired. But I think it's the medication too you know?

EMMA– read, you can't write, you can't watch TV, you can't drive you can't

KATE – Hopefully once I get of the medication my head will clear up

EMMA– oh god yes, like when I was on the pill it was like I was a crazy person. I couldn't think straight. I totally know what you mean.

KATE- But they say I have to stay on them for at least a year. They don't want me having a seizure.

EMMA– Oh god, are you having seizures?

KATE – No. Well I had one in the hospital. But they don't think it will happen again

EMMA– Phew! You had me worried there, like “what am I in for here?”

KATE – Yeah (*Hayley beside Shayna*)

EMMA– But you know, if there is anything I can do. Please call me. Seriously, anything. Like if you need a ride somewhere, I'm there. Or if you just want me to come over and read your grandma's writings to you...Cause...you can't drive, you can't see, you can't read, you can't write, you can't drink, you can't work, you can't

(Hayley, and Maiza are shaking)

EMMA– You know I heard walnuts are really good for your brain. Are you eating lots of nuts? And Goji berries are good for your eyes. Maybe that will help with your vision...Are you OK?

KATE – Yeah, just feeling nauseous (still on the floor)

EMMA– You're tired. Let's go.

H & M – Lets go.

KATE – I just need a minute

EMMA Are you going to throw up? Should I get a bowl? Miss? (gesture)  
I know I still get carsick. (pause) But that's only when Jeremy is driving! HAHA! (*double laugh with Maiza*)

(*KATEa is back up in her chair*)

EMMA– Ahh...(smiling at her) That was a good cup of tea

KATE: Do you smell that?

#### **SCENE 4 – Claire**

*Claire is seen downstage left, writing at her desk.*

ARTHUR – Darling, is it time for tea? (a shadow behind one screen)

C – oh yes, I suppose it is. I'll put the kettle on

S1 – Put the pencil in your left hand

S2 – Make a mental image of a tree to get the ....

S1 – Put the pencil in your left hand

S2 – Make a mental image of a tree and I will know to come

S1 – you are needed for the work which God has set for you to do

S2 – You have been healing people since many lives

S1 – Put the pencil in your left hand

S2 – Make a mental image of a tree

(Kettle whistles.....)

A – Darling??

C – yes...Coming.

Penfield sits down beside her. Begins to guide her writing hand

S1: Claire, it is your purpose to write a message to the world. Reaction may be incredulity but do not let the magnitude of the task overwhelm you. You have been chosen for this work because you love mankind and wish to help them.

S1: People living on other planes are able to communicate through thought waves, electrical impulses that can be picked up by mortals sensitive to high frequency vibrations. Death is only a switching from low to high frequency. Mankind has lost the chemical ability to change at will from one plane to ...

*Kate Enters*

KATE– Granny I have tea for you

CLAIRE – Oh! You scared me

K – I have to walk really slowly because it's really hot!

C- thank you dear.

K – (pause) What are you doing?

C- Writing

K – What are you writing?

C- Messages. From people

K – Which people? Friends of yours?

C – Well, they're not exactly friends. They're like spirits

K – Spirits? Like ghosts?

C- Well, yes, I guess so.

K – I'm not afraid of ghosts. Are you?

C – Well, no. No I'm not. They're just regular people like you and me.

K – But they send you messages, like stories?

C- Well yes

K – will you read me one? A ghost story?

C – Well, I just finished one. I haven't even read it yet.

K - Yes! Read it to me!

C- OK...."It has been an astonishing revelation to me making the transition after my so-called death. Shout aloud the truth that no entity ceases to be. Every particle within the universe can be transmuted but can never be thrown away. Mortal remains have no value other than the elements which become integrated again. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust is absolutely factual."

Penfield - I am ALIVE ALIVE ALIVE. Could I have stated that with certainty the whole premise and focus of my work would have been affected. Mind is eternal. WE LIVE!

EMMA & PENFIELD - WE LIVE! Try to convey the glorious triumph of my message. Shout it aloud as I shout it to many colleagues who never hear. We can only relay it through channels like yourself and we rank you a very clear contact.

EMMA – Our loving thanks, Wilder Penfield. Wow. Wilder Penfield..like “Dr. Penfield, I smell burnt toast “ Dr. Penfield? That is so wild. Your grandmother communicated with him? Only one time?

Kate – No I think it was over 10 years or something

EMMA – OMG, 10 years?? Well that’s it. He has to be a character.

Kate – Oh yes, for sure.

EMMA– He’s so kooky! He has all these idiosyncrasies...Look at this: ”Halleujah the mind goes on!!” Omg, amazing. I would LOVE to play him..I mean..if you want...at least for the reading. After that we can do auditions if you want. But such an amazing character. It’s all there

Kate –Yes.

EMMA -(something about god) So was he religious?

Kate – Yes, I think he was Anglican.

EMMA – But still a scientist. So fascinating. And obviously a mystic too. And a writer! A pretty good one too. ..Or is that your grandma? I mean how much of it do you think she heard word for word, or did she sort of get a feeling and then write it out herself?

Kate – I don’t know. I think it must have been word for word, because when you read this stuff it is not all in her voice.

Emma – Right, but it could have been coming from her subconscious right?

Kate – Uhhhh

Emma – or not! She could totally have been communicating with him, at least I believe that. But was she a writer?

Kate – Yes, she was writing a book about all this stuff.

Emma – A book! Do you have it?

Kate – Well she never finished it. She had to take care of my Grandad a lot. It took up all her time. She was always saying she was going to finish it after he ‘popped off’, but then of course she died first.

Emma – You know my great aunt heard voices.

Kate – Really?

Emma – Yeah, maybe she was schizophrenic or something. But they gave her electroshock therapy. Seriously. And your grandma heard voices and she just wrote them down. Like, where’s the line between being crazy and being an artist?

KATE: I think about that with my surgery. At some point doesn’t the act of making art become a surgical procedure? And I don’t mean in the modern sense of ‘state-of-the-art’ technology and computer-monitored precision, but surgical in the more Victorian sense. Using tools that are too big for the task and working on not much more than instinct, ego, and some sketches drawn in a notebook.

And as an artist you are both both surgeon and patient. You both hold and receive the scalpel, you dig and are dug up. You remove something from yourself, something that must be expressed, triumphantly thrown on the porcelain pan to offer to the murmuration of onlookers in the gallery.

Because doesn’t every artist, at some point in the artistic process say;

KATE AND HAYLEY: ‘I’m doing this to save my life right now’?

KATE: But really, is it just the surgeon part of you saying...

EMMA AND MAIZA: I’m doing this to save your life right now’.

KATE: But the patient part of you is saying; ‘Doc, do we need to do this right now?? Can’t I live with this in me? I actually feel fine’.

DOC: Well, the problem with waiting, is that it puts you at risk for a spontaneous hemorrhage. You want to wait for it to start hemorrhaging? You want to wait for it to just bleed out?

KATE: Well...

DOC: And then we’ll have to go in under an emergency situation with a whole bunch of new variables that we might not be able to control. Is that a risk you’re willing to take?

KATE: It’s just an idea I have in my head...it’s probably not even any good.

DOC: Well we just don’t know until we get in there do we??

EMMA AND MAIZA: Hmm???

KATE:

So the patient part of you acquiesces and you strap yourself down and instead of administering anesthetic, you drink a strong coffee or whatever your drug of choice is. And as the drug enters your blood stream you take on the confidence of the surgeon;

DOC(alex) and KATE:

The world needs to see this. I've done the research. I've done this hundreds, if not thousands of times.'

DOC: (ALEX)

This is the best time in history to have this kind of operation. 20 years ago we couldn't have done it. But now with the advances in technology we can. Well, you know what they say; Nothing works better than surgery! So you're better off doing nothing!!

ALEX AND MAIZA: Ha-ha!

ALEX: Little doctor humour there.

KATE:(silence. Looking at the DOC)

KATE: So the patient part of you lies back and accepts the prevailing wisdom.

SHAYNA AND HAYLEY: 'I'm doing this to save my life right now'.

### **SCENE 5 – IN PENFIELD'S SURGERY**

Doc:

Ok So let's get started shall we? Are you feeling comfortable Mrs. Gold? Ok now you're just going to feel a little pinch with the needle, and then you shouldn't feel much at all (*injects the local anesthetic*). Ok, now you might feel a little pressure as we brace your head. We don't want you jerking around especially if you do end up having a seizure ok? Easy does it. You're doing great Mrs. Gold.

Ok, so we can see your brain now. It looks great. It's a beautiful brain you have Mrs. Gold. Lemme tell ya, I've seen some brains you would not want to take home at night. But yours looks great. So we are just placing the electrodes. (to assistants) that's too close to the subdural left axial artery. Yes, better. Mrs. Gold Here we go.... Do you feel anything yet?

Mrs. Gold: No... just a little cold.

Doc: Ok, that's good because I haven't started anything yet. I was tricking you. Ok now?

Mrs. Gold: Still nothing

Doc: you sure?

Mrs. Gold: Yes.

Doc. Good!! I was tricking you again! They make us do that so we don't get a false positive. Ok, Seriously, seriously. Now?

Mrs. Gold: I think I feel tingling from the knee down to the right foot;

Doc: Ok Now?

Mrs. Gold: Now... Numbness all down my leg, but not the foot

Doc: (to assistant) turn it up to 1.5 volts. Ok now? Now? Now?

Mrs. Gold: Numbness over my forearm. I can't feel my elbow;

Doc: Ok now. (to assistant) Increase again to 2.5 volts please

Mrs. Gold: Ah!

Doc: What is it Mrs. Gold?

Mrs. Gold: my hand, it was like a shock, Tingling

Doc: Turn it down to 2 volts. Let's continue down.

(Beautiful music starts to play)

Mrs. Gold: (humming along)

Doc: Mrs. Gold?  
(music stops)

Mrs. Gold: (Humming)...oh it's gone. Were you playing music Dr.? It was so lovely.

Doc: and now?

(an actress enters with knitting and sits down on a chair in the space, knitting)

Mrs. Gold: Mom! I'm so glad you came.

Mother: Did you go find the cat Lois? It's snowing. We can't leave her outside all night

Mrs. Gold: I didn't let her out. (getting agitated). Margie let her out. It's Margie's turn to go find her.

Mother: You're the oldest, so you're responsible

Mrs. Gold: Damn you mom! You always make it my fault! It's not my fault! Damn you!

Doc: *(to assistant)* ok Stop. *(Mrs. Gold stops the agitation immediately)*. You ok Mrs. Gold?

*(Actress exits)*

Mrs. Gold: Yes

Doc: *(Pause)* *(to assistants)* We're going to continue into the gyrus of the temporal lobe. At 2 volts please

*(Actress re-enters)*

Actress and Mrs. Gold:

Lois, my name is Erica Watmough. Would you please try to comfort my mother? I was killed in a train crash in France last year. She lives in Erndale Road, Manchester, number 98. She endlessly makes remarks blaming herself because she let me go to France. She is so unhappy. Thank you for your loving help.  
*(exits)*

Doc:

Pre-ictal hallucinations. I think we are getting closer to the focal point. Ok, lets move slightly laterally down the gyrus. Starting at 2 volts please.

Mrs. Gold: (gasping)

Doc: what do you feel Mrs. Gold?

Mrs. Gold:

I am..... being carried. The angels are lifting... Their wings are my wings. I am being absorbed. (Gasps again) I am touching... God. He came into me myself; yes, God exists. Heaven is crushing me, coming down on me.

*(Mrs. Gold' right arm begins to shake)*

Doc:

*(to assistant to record)* Clonic movement of the right arm, shoulder, forearm, no movement in trunk. *(to Mrs. Gold)* Can you still tell me what you're seeing?

*(no response. Arm stop shaking; wrist and hand flex)*

Doc: (to assistants) Extreme flexion of wrist, and hand. Mrs. Gold?

Mrs. Gold:

All mortals have an individual signal which registers their thought in the Akashic records. This call signal helps angels to go to the aid of mortals who pray for help. It is a telecommunications system far exceeding in complexity any computer devised by mortals. All living things have thought rays that can link up with the all knowing intelligence.

Doc: *(to assistant)* complex partial seizure followed by Ecstatic expression.

Mrs. Gold: By using electrical impulses people living on other planes are able to communicate thought waves that can be picked up by mortals sensitive to high frequency vibrations. Death is only a switching from low to high frequency vibrations. Mankind has lost the ability to change at will from one plane to another but.....

Doc: But...but???? Mrs. Gold???

Mrs. Gold: Thought signals could be sent from those living on earth to those in theatres elsewhere.

Doc: Theatres where Mrs. Gold?

Mrs. Gold: Thoughts are the basic maintenance source of energy in the universe. Do not try to understand at this point. Explanation will be given in easy stages...  
*(She sleeps)*

Doc: Post-ictal sleep. We have to let her recover. Continue the saline bath. Nurse, did you record all that?

Mrs. Gold: Art is the means of heeding the eternal soul! *(sleeps)*

## ***(La pieta tableau)***

### **SCENE 05 – PENFIELD SPEAKS**

DOC:

Did you see what happened in there Shapiro? She found God!  
We know, or we think we know that the energy of the brain animates the mind. But who is to say that the mind couldn't find another source of energy to connect to beyond the brain? And if the mind, or consciousness, could access another source, another network, why wouldn't it continue on? All the rules, constraints and laws of our universe favour life, they favour survival.

A cell, which we can safely say, does not have a mind, still has a drive, a desire, if you will, to survive, and it will do everything in its power to fulfill that drive. Why would consciousness be any different? How do we know that the mechanics of a single cell aren't the blueprint for the attitudes and intentions of the conscious mind? I believe it wants to survive. The mind wants to go on. Why do we fear death? Because we fear change. We fear jumping the circuit. But I believe its possible to just jump to another circuit, and keep going. The drive, the energy animating it could theoretically go on infinitely. Energy doesn't die as we know, it just changes form. Everything that happens in the brain is electric. Electricity passes through many kinds of conduits. It's passing through us right now.

*Kate on the ground, shaking*

Emma – Are you Ok? Kate? Kate? Some one call an ambulance. Call an ambulance please!

### **Scene 06**

*In the Hospital. Kate wakes up*

Emma: Hey.....Hey. (pause) Do you know where you are?

Kate: Vancouver

Emma – Close! Toronto. We're at the hospital. We're in a goddamned hallway, but we're at the Hospital

Kate: What happened?

Emma: You had a seizure. (Maiza passes) Oh! There's the doctor. (making tea gesture) Doctor! (*DOC keeps walking*)

Emma: Frickin.... Do you want some water?

KATE: Yes

EMMA: Oh there she is...Doctor? She's awake.

DOC: Well..how are we doing here...(checks clipboard) ... Kate?

KATE: Ok...pretty crappy actually.

DOC: Did you take your medications today?

KATE: Yes..yes, I think so.

(DOC does neurological assessment)

DOC: Ok resist my hands (*hand pushing*)...OK...Tell me if you can hear it when I do this..*(finger rubbing beside right ear)*...and now (*finger rubbing beside left ear*) and.....tell me when you can see my fingers (right side)

Kate – Now (nodding)

DOC: and left side .....(getting to center point...flicking the fingers above the head and below)

KATE: Now

EMMA – She doesn't see on her left side.

DOC: Yes I see that. Well Kate. How is your head feeling?

KATE: It hurts. I hurts a lot

DOC: Ok so we'll give you something for that and I'll have the nurse process your discharge papers.

EMMA: That's it? She can go? Don't you need to take some scans or something?

DOC: Seizures are quite common in post-operative patients. She needs to follow up with her neurologist to decide on the best course of action. (to KATE) Ok? (*nods head, leaves*)

EMMA: I spoke to your mom. She's getting on a flight tonight and will be at your house tomorrow morning.

KATE: OK

EMMA: I guess we have to wait for the nurse....So..do you remember anything that happened?

KATE: No, I don't know. I don't think so. Where were we?

EMMA: We were in rehearsal. We were in the middle of the Penfield monologue, and I looked back and you were on the floor. It was so scary. I was freaked. But I got someone to call an ambulance.....So..(turning on the recorder). Do you remember if anything happened during?

KATE: During..during what?

EMMA: During the seizure! It was so crazy. We just did the scene about the ecstatic seizure and then you had one! It was like a message or something. (pause) Did you ...feel any ...presence? Like ..godly?

KATE: What? No!

Emma; But what did it feel like? (bringing the phone closer)

KATE: It feels like.....are you recording this?

EMMA: Well it seems like such good research for the piece.

KATE: No this is not research for the piece. This is my life. There's nothing ecstatic or or ..or ..or..

EMMA: Mystical?...Spiritual?... Transcendental!

KATE: NOTHING OK? It feels like SHIT, it fucking feels like SHIT. It's scary, I feel like my whole reality gets sucked out sideways through my gut. I feel nauseous. I feel stupider. I can't fucking see. It's not a cool interesting thing, so just fucking STOP ASKING ME ABOUT IT. FUCK.

EMMA:.....Ok. OK. I'm sorry. You're right. Lets take a break on the project for a while. It's too much right now. I'm gonna go over there, and call you mom. I said I would.

KATE: Fine.....Do you smell that??

### **Scene 07 – Claire appears to Kate**

*Claire Enters the hospital*

Claire: Eternal truths are rarely theatrical. It is the mortal world which is tenuous and unreal, not the eternal universe.

KATE: Granny?

CLAIRE: OH! Kate, you scared me!

KATE: What are you writing?

CLAIRE: Messages. Messages for you

KATE: For me? From Ghosts?

CLAIRE: Are you afraid of Ghosts?

KATE: Yes, yes I am now.

CLAIRE: Do not be afraid. Make the mental image of a tree. Look at your shoes.

KATE: Make the mental image of a tree.

CLAIRE: Kate. The shoes of your youth are barely worn yet they do not fit your feet anymore. You must leave them. Events, circumstances have conspired to have you choose another path. You must look down at your feet and see the shoes you are wearing. These belong of your present self. Forget the woman you hoped to be. Now it is your turn to practice your gift. It is not the gift you asked for, it is not the gift you dreamed of. But those dreams are to be forgotten. You must search to the corners now with the gift you have.

KATE: What gift? What gift? I have no GIFT. Granny?? Granny????

(Claire disappears)

### **Scene 08 – REHAB**

THERAPIST– Ok Kate. So that’s your right hand. But you are left handed right?

Kate – Uhhh

THERAPIST – So put the pencil in your left hand. Go ahead. Yes. Put the pencil in your left hand. Ok, first image. Can you tell me what this is?

Kate: A tree

THERAPIST – Yes. Great. Ok. So let’s write that down. First letter?

Kate – T

THERAPIST – Yes. Go ahead. Look at it, first, and write it down. Oops.. Put the pencil in your left hand. Good. Good! Ok. Now next letter.

Kate: R

THERAPIST - Good! Now write that letter. Don’t forget this part, on the left side. That’s right. Perfect. Now, next letter –

Kate – E

THERAPIST - Good. So with E – remember to start with the part on the left side. And then the three parts that go the other way...Now start with this side.....ok next letter...

Kate – E

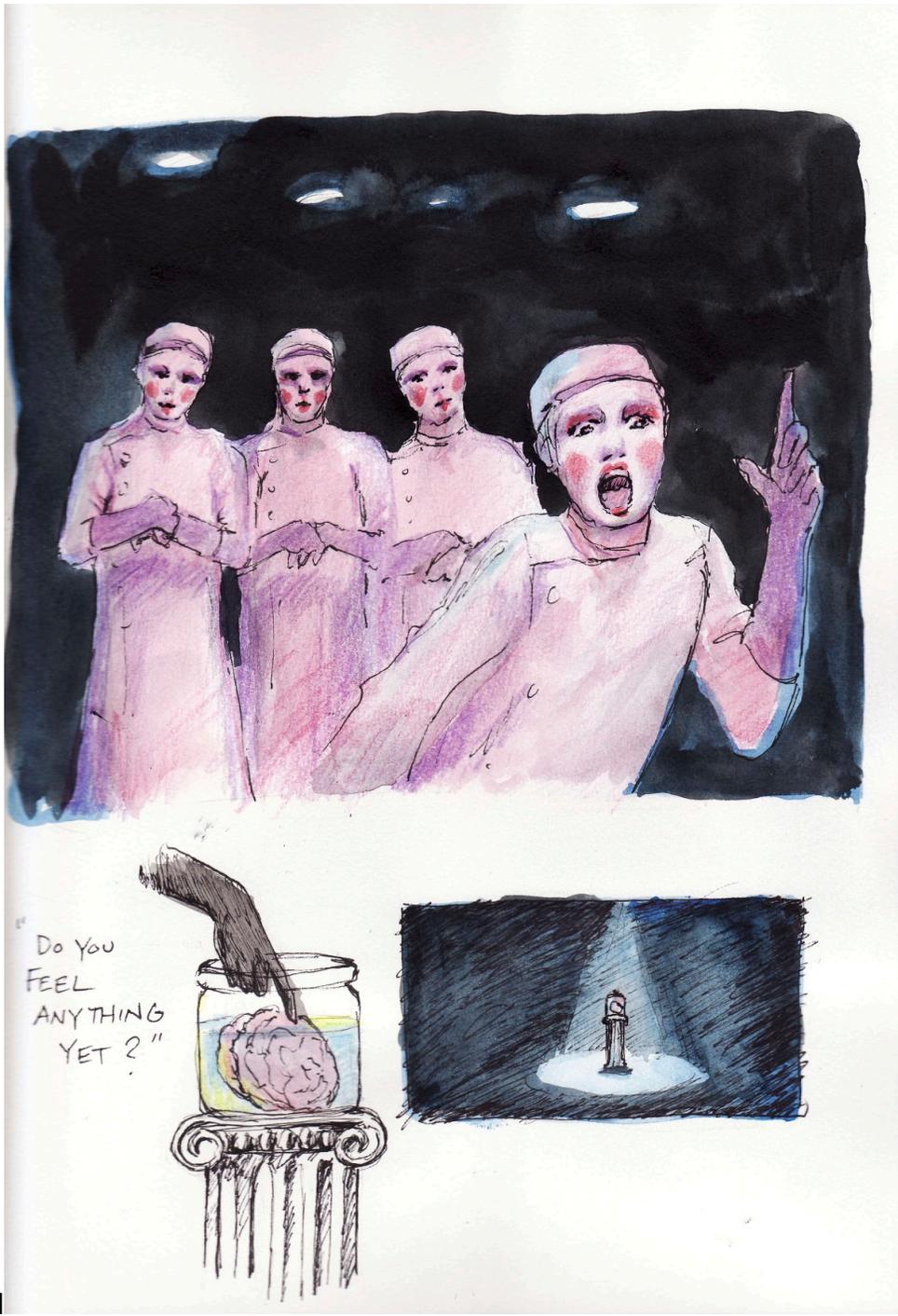
THERAPIST – Yes! E same letter

(Music up. Lights fade)





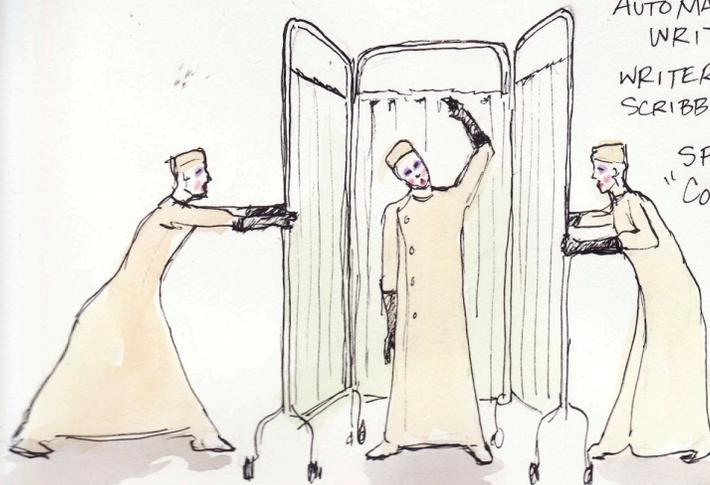
Image 5





USING HOSPITAL PRIVACY SCREENS —

AS SCREEN FOR VIDEO PROJECTIONS OR  
LIVE SHADOW PUPPET SHOW



FOR  
AUTOMATIC  
WRITING :  
WRITER IN TRANCE  
SCRIBBLES IN AIR .

SPIRITS  
"COMMUNICATE"  
THROUGH  
PANELS ...

VERBAL  
CHORUS,  
INTERESTING  
BACK LIGHT  
THROUGH  
FABRIC 2