BODY-MIND BALANCING: EXPLORING DEEP EMBODIMENT IN *OH WHAT A LOVELY WAR!*

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ABSTRACT

Acting methodologies have long been divided into two simplistic streams: "outside-in" and "inside-out." These reductionist models fail to account for the range and synergistic nature of the elements integral to an actor's work. Exploring these elements I discovered a personal tendency toward favouring an intellect removed from its source in breath, body, and imagination, and disengaged from sensation and emotion. Undertaking an exploration of deep embodiment through the practices of Syntonics©, Linklater voice work, Middendorf Breathexperience, and Batdorf Technique, and applied in Theatre@York's production *Oh What a Lovely War!* I discovered a rich new source of information arising not from intellect, but from an intelligent, unified, physical being, or body-mind. This experience has revealed a new understanding of how to approach acting, in which every element becomes a potential entry point into a holistically integrated, reciprocal system, and in which visceral, sensate awareness births true presence and performance.

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Introduction

The research I undertook within the Graduate Acting program at York University led me to discover an imbalance within my instrument, in which I favored an intellect removed from its source in breath, body, and imagination, and disengaged from its counterparts of sensation and emotion. This overly analytical approach resulted in "disembodied" acting or "acting from the neck up." The primary challenge I identified based on this information was that of approaching performance from a more visceral place of felt sensation and taking the risk of remaining in discovery rather than pre-judging or planning the "right" actor choices.

The research I carried out to confront this challenge led me first to Canada's National Voice Intensive, a five-week Linklater-based actor training program, where I encountered many teachers and techniques effective in helping me to achieve greater embodiment. Notable among them were: Linklater voice work as taught by the faculty; Middendorf Breathexperience, as taught by Gayle Murphy and Brad Gibson; Synotics, as taught and developed by Judith Koltai, from the work of Therese Bertherat and Charlotte Selver; and the pioneering work on sensation and imagination developed by Dale Genge and Brad Gibson.

During this time I discovered my body-mind was habitually blocking sensate information with tension while simultaneously overworking, both unnecessarily taxing on my system and quite counterproductive to achieving my aims of authentic expression and spontaneity as an actor. My focus at this stage, therefore, was on release and "non-doing", as I began to "undo" my habits and to reconnect and reroute sensory feeling in my body. At this stage, I also experimented with mask as a tool for physically-informed training and creation, working in the traditions of Keith Johnstone and Philippe Gaulier.

Theoretically, I brought together research from the above-mentioned practitioners with further readings in psychophysical acting methodology, sensory awareness, eastern philosophy, phenomenology and cognitive neuroscience. I was most interested in moving beyond the erroneously dualistic notion of "inside-out" versus "outside-in" methodologies and fortunately discovered other theatre practitioners already applying new findings in cognitive neuroscience to this very problem, most notably Rhonda Blair, Rick Kemp, and John Lutterbie. Bella Merlin and her refreshingly psychophysical interpretation of Stanislavsky's work was also a great help in this arena.

My primary platform for intensive research and exploration of this artistic challenge was through the creation and performance of a variety of characters in the Theatre @ York production of *Oh What a Lovely War*!, directed by MFA Directing candidate Autumn Smith. These roles, eight in total, provided me the opportunity to explore the specificity of fully embodying each distinct character, while also responding with visceral spontaneity to highly dramatic circumstances, often involving life or death stakes.

At this stage of research, my focus shifted to an emphasis on trust and play. The release work I had undertaken and continued to practice had freed up my instrument significantly, but had also revealed a lack of trust in the information I receive from my body. Therefore a new piece of work required me to begin trusting information from my body as thoroughly as I trust the same from my intellect. As well, I had discovered that when *inspired* with a spirit of *playfulness*, the work became easy; I felt free and open to express and explore wildly and un-self-consciously, without a thought about getting it "right." My central question therefore became: what must I do in preparation for the work to most likely ensure that I arrive at each rehearsal and performance imbued with this elevated spirit of playfulness?

I therefore set about identifying all the elements of the work through which I had achieved success in reaching a playful, or inspired, state. Key to this, I hypothesized, was tapping my "source", or what my instructor Professor David Smukler would call my "swamp," the deep wellspring of imagination and emotion located metaphorically, and I would argue physiologically as well, in my abdomen. I was most familiar with tapping this source through the Linklater voice work, and through intensive Grotowski-based physical training I had undertaken prior to my studies at York. As well, the movement class work led by Professor Erika Batdorf was instrumental in giving me clues both to accessing this place, and to designing a warm-up appropriate to preparing my body-mind instrument for the rigorous psychophysical workout of acting.

In terms of "actor's homework," given my particular challenge, I was wary of undertaking an overly analytical research approach to the play and its contents. I therefore focused on materials and explorations that would be more likely to stimulate visceral, emotional, or imaginative responses. This included looking to poems written by soldiers, first-person accounts of life in the trenches, and proletariat novels from the era. I also worked with the text using psychophysical explorations from the Voice Intensive and incorporated a physical approach to character creation analogous to mask work. As well, I looked to my own personal history and undertook practical research, including performing in a repetitive, duration piece in Nuit Blanche, a multi-disciplinary arts festival held annually in Toronto. This experience correlated to director Autumn Smith's concept for the play of factory work.

By emphasizing play, physical sensation (including emotion) and imagination in my preparation, I hoped to circumvent my intellect's reflexive control mechanism and instead allow my body-mind to guide my explorations in preparation and rehearsal. I strove to overcome the

"director" part of my brain that watched and gave notes while I performed by immersing myself more fully in the work through pleasure, breath, and imagination. My key into all of this was through the psychophysical preparation I did before and within rehearsal, and on my own in studio, working toward greater freedom, spontaneity, embodiment and imagination.

CHAPTER TWO

Body-Mind Balancing: Turning Outside-In Inside-Out

Disembodied acting is often cited as a significant problem in North America, where the culture tends to laud intellectual faculties such as reason and judgment, while dismissing body-based information like sensation, emotion and intuition as weak, untrustworthy, and even fraudulent. This, in spite of scientific proof that "there are more nerve endings in your stomach than in your brain: in other words, more processing of information takes place in the stomach area than in the head" (Merlin *The Complete* 163)**.** Philosopher David Abram notes that Western civilization "seems to deny or deaden that life (of the senses), promoting a massive distrust of sensorial experience while valorizing an abstract realm of ideas" (72). Accordingly, North American acting programs often highlight a psychological approach. Writes theatre professor and director Rhonda Blair: "a problem that pervades US acting today, implicitly and sometimes explicitly, is compartmentalization: mind is separated from body, feeling from intellect, reason from emotion" (*The Actor* 25).

This imbalance I have perceived in both myself and the culture at large is based in a false dichotomy between body and mind,[1] the famous "Cartesian split," in which 17th century philosopher René Descartes imagined the mind as a non-physical entity separate from and in control of the machine-like material body (Hatfield). New research in cognitive neuroscience demonstrates that this way of conceptualizing the human being is inaccurate and unnecessarily limiting. Instead, it is now widely accepted that "consciousness – which includes intellectual thought and feeling – is a manifestation of the body" and "emotion, reason, and physicality are ultimately inseparable […] aspects of a single organic process" (Blair *The Actor* 15, xii, 22).

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[1] For an embodied, neurobiologically-informed redefinition of "mind", refer to Siegel, Session 1, Part 3, "A New Definition of Mind".

[2] Refer to Antonio Damasio's "Descartes' Error" and "The Feeling of What Happens."

Theatre scholar and practitioner John Lutterbie offers an easily relatable example: "as we navigate a crowded street, we do not distinguish between thought and movement, but think *in* movement" (156). This unity has long been understood in many eastern philosophies; in yoga, for instance, a significant influence in Stanislavsky's emerging method, the physical and subtle bodies are conceptualized as fluid counterparts continually affecting one another (Zarrilli 63). Likewise, "Buddhist methods of self-cultivation were based on a somatic philosophy in which there was no distinction between body and self. The Japanese word for body, *mi*, can also mean self or I" (Zarrilli 109).

These findings offer significant implications and application to actor methodology and training in terms of how we conceive of the body-mind, and the relationships between its elements, including emotions, thoughts, feelings, sensations, memory, imagination and physical action. This information has lead me to reframe my challenge in that I am not seeking to diminish my intellect or to act from my body *instead of* my mind, but to re-balance these elements to allow their harmonious relational function. "Perfect communication demands from the actor a balanced quartet of emotion, intellect, body, and voice" (Linklater 9). At a deeper level, these operations may be rightly perceived as not separate at all, but as various aspects of a unified system, affecting and being affected by each other and the external environment at a level of great subtlety, through a perpetual, undulating dance. As actors, it behooves us to fine-tune the instruments of our bodies to this level of sensitivity; "tuned to the extent that the subtlest gesture can inspire an emotional response, or the gentlest shift of emotional sensation can arouse the body" (Merlin *Beyond* 29).

The strongest implication to the world of acting I perceive in the transcendence of Descartes' separation of body and mind is a parallel transcendence of the methodological

dichotomy of "outside-in" versus "inside-out". Blair asserts, "these findings finally and definitively set aside the tired acting binary of "inside-out" vs. "outside-in"" (*The Actor* 14). The exciting opportunity we have before us as actors and theatre makers is to blend methodologies and exploit this new understanding of the holistic human being toward increasingly integrated, expansive, and effective methods of training and practice. It is within and supported by this theoretical framework that I present the practical research I have conducted in working towards greater embodiment in acting.

The imbalance I face manifests itself in an actor's process driven by a largely disembodied intellect. Much of this has been unconscious as the tool I act with is myself, and therefore my way of being as an actor is synonymous with my way of being as a human. I relate greatly to Keith Johnstone's reflections that as a young person, "I accepted the idea that my intelligence was the most important part of me. […] I forgot that inspiration isn't intellectual, that you don't have to be perfect" (17). My acting has been driven by the same unconscious drives my person has: fear of losing control, fear of not *knowing,* fear of failure, and a lack of trust in the feelings, sensations, and emotions of my body. Simultaneous to this, it was confusing for me to contemplate that I had a problem with "embodiment" coming from a background in physical theatre. I had erroneously equated proficiency in movement with "embodiment." Being able to move with technical skill (*external*) is not at all the same as being *internally* "hooked up," that is, of expressing oneself from a deep, connected source moving freely outward on an open channel, unimpeded by any extraneous physical tension.

Attending The Voice Intensive provided me with the chance to start from the very beginning, in "beginner's mind." Shunryu Suzuki describes this state of being in his seminal work *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* as "an empty mind and a ready mind. If your mind is empty, it

is always ready for anything; it is open to everything. In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities; in the expert's mind there are few" (2). To this end, I entered the work with a simple intention: to practice *not knowing*. As a person who had always derived a great deal of self worth from "knowing" the "right" answer, this was a radical change. My other goal was to consciously shift my approach from more active, intellectual operations such as judging, reasoning, thinking, and planning, to more receptive, body-based faculties like sensing, feeling, listening, and surrendering. In this way I hoped to affect a shift in focus from my intellect toward my physical body. Indeed, in practice it resulted in a much more sensate experience of the world; "the world of our immediately lived experience, *as* we live it, prior to all our thoughts about it. […] Reality as it engages us before being analyzed" (Abram 40).

This shift in approach related also to the idea of *non-doing*, an eastern concept I found profoundly useful. Charlotte Selver, pioneer sensory awareness teacher writes, "The important thing is that we have to give up doing" (155). Applied to acting, Grotowski-based theatre teacher Stephen Wangh eloquently explains: "Non-action does not mean doing nothing and keeping silent. Let everything be allowed to do what it naturally does, so that its nature will be satisfied" (114). Mask teacher Bari Rolfe adds the idea of doing nothing in order to move away from habit, to stop doing as we always do (11). One personal habit I observed related to having a domineering intellect paired with what I discovered to be a tension-laden physical body was a tendency toward "over-working" or "pushing"; that is, of expressing myself *really intensely* to *really let the* AUDIENCE **KNOW I WAS *REALLY FEELING IT!!!*** This seems to be a common result of insufficient internal connection; master voice teacher Kristin Linklater explains: "Minimum effort demands a commitment to inner processes of imagination and

emotion that stimulate the body and voice to truthful expression" (39). I began to forge a new path through a practice of "doing" or "efforting" as little as possible.

In the context of the Voice Intensive, this meant simply saying the words of the sonnet, without *trying* to add any of my own meaning or commentary (i.e. through tone of voice or articulation of my neck, face, and eyebrows). This proved to be much more difficult than one might imagine. As I began to speak with greater simplicity, I was convinced (in my intellect) that my words were coming out empty and meaningless. This of course was not the case, and over time, as my sensory awareness increased, I began to trust a new source of information, one rooted primarily in my physical being, rather than in my thoughts. Renowned theatre teacher Bella Merlin describes this mistake, common to young actors: "Until we reach the point as actors where we've learnt to trust the decisions made by our psycho-physical apparatus (body, imagination and emotions), we usually rely on our brains (or thought-centre) to do the hard work" (*Beyond* 61).

This development toward a new information source was enabled through a practice of "losing my head" and slowly reconnecting to and placing trust in the sensations of my body. I achieved progress in this area primarily through two avenues: sensory awareness explorations led by Dale Genge and Brad Gibson (discussed in greater detail in a subsequent section); and the practice of Syntonics, a form of deep psychophysical release developed and lead by Judith Koltai. Syntonics practice involves small, precise, repeated actions, inviting a deeper kinesthetic awareness and the elimination of unconscious, dysfunctional habits of muscular contraction (Koltai). It grew primarily out of Koltai's studies in Anti-Gymnastique with Thérèse Bertherat, and Sensory Awareness with Charlotte Selver.

In the holistic model I am working with, physical tension is inextricable from emotional tension, in both cause and effect. As a rudimentary example, most are familiar with the experience of feeling emotionally stressed and finding the muscles in their shoulders and neck begin to tighten and ache. In the long-term, our systems develop habits over time, defined through the creation and repetition of associations within our body-minds. For instance, if every time my boss comes into my office he gives me information that increases my stress levels, before long just the sight of my boss approaching will cause my shoulders to tighten. In instances of trauma, a single event can cause a network of associations ready to fire at a moment's notice. Linklater describes this process: "These impulses, in general, are protective […] When, however, the secondary impulses are so well developed that they blot out the impact of the primary, or reflex, impulse, a habit has formed" (19). She further describes the best actors as having "no extraneous tension. Their muscles are ready to receive the impulses necessary to fulfill action and will ripple with energies in the service of particular stimuli" (39).

Through the work with Ms. Koltai, I discovered with some alarm the tremendous amount of tension I habitually carry in my body, and the frequency with which I contract my musculature. Alexander Lowen, one of the early pioneers of somatic psychotherapy, calls this "muscular armoring […] the total pattern of chronic muscular tensions in the body. They are defined as an armor because they serve to protect an individual against painful and threatening emotional experiences" (13). My own armoring is related to the fears described previously around losing control and not knowing, as well as of being judged or ridiculed by others. Strikingly, I perceived that my body's habituated response to feeling strong emotion is to create tension in order to stop the flow of feeling and response. In fact, my response to almost any action or stimuli is some level of tension. Johnstone cites inflexible drama students who

"experience muscle tension as 'acting,'" true of my own experience in the past (200), while Russian master Stanislavksy identifies "unnecessary physical tensions as 'the most substantial obstacles to creative activity'" (qtd. in Merlin *The Complete* 32).

This patterning had been established throughout my life as a coping mechanism to deal with strong emotions that felt beyond my control and wrought havoc in my relationships, as well as from modeling my parents, who likewise carry a great deal of tension. Over time, this mechanism had established long-held patterns of tension in my body, which had become unconscious habits. This personal history also points to a major reason for the lack of trust I place in my bodily sensations; they had, from my limited perspective, betrayed me, by overwhelming me, and making me unbearable and fickle to those I loved. Through the work of the Voice Intensive, it happily also became clear that the magnitude of my holding was equal to the depth of my sensitivity, that though my tensions seemed impossibly tremendous, so too was my potential to experience deep emotion and sensation.

By identifying so singularly with my rational thoughts and denying my emotional and physical life, I was metaphorically and literally holding my body in a stranglehold. In this constricted state, I experienced only a shallow semblance of the whole range and depth of sensation and emotion possible within my body. Linklater writes: "Defensive neuromuscular programming develops habits of mind and muscle that cut us off from the instinctual connection between emotion and breath" (22). Slowly and painfully, I began to release the long-held patterns, liberating my feeling, sensate body.

Throughout and since the Voice Intensive, I have experienced a radical increase in the depth of my ability to feel, and to allow those feelings to express through my breath, voice, and body. For instance, over the course of one exploration during scene work, I recall my entire

body being flooded with such intense, excited tingling I could barely contain myself. I felt as though I were riding a wild mustang and it was all I could do to find my words and play the scene in the midst of such tremendous stimuli. I continue to practice Syntonics daily as tensions old and new release and re-assert themselves, guided by a newfound awareness of what is and what can be, in what is sure to be an ever-deepening and evolving life-long exploration.

Through, and simultaneous to, this exploration of body-mind release, I discovered an even deeper level of holding at the heart of the body-mind and the key to its liberation: breath. It is restricted breath that constricts one's muscles; breath held or limited in order to suppress and repress our emotions (Lowen 19). "Breathing superficially and irregularly becomes our most effective means of mastering our emotions, of suppressing our feelings" (Bertherat 29). This renders not only our emotions, but also our imaginations, feelings, and impulses inaccessible and effectively dormant (Genge). At the Voice Intensive, breath is explored primarily through the work of Gayle Murphy, a certified Middendorf Breathexperience teacher. Middendorf work is centered around the practice of allowing the breath to come and go on its own, and to sense the movement of breath and sensation within the body through presence and attention. It also includes the idea of "being carried" to invite the physical release of the body, allowing more breath space to open in response ("About Breathexperience").

Engaging in this work, I was surprised to discover how much control I exerted over my breath. Previous to this I had thought myself a great breather as I seldom "held" my breath, but my discovery was in the insidious control I habitually exercised in order to breathe "correctly," that is, long and deeply. I was "good" at breathing. But deep controlled breathing does nothing for an actor, whose breath must be responsive to the changing demands of the scene. "Conscious control of the breath will destroy its sensitivity to changing inner states and severely curtail the

reflex connection between breathing and emotional impulse" (Linklater 44). By breathing "right" I was cutting off my emotions and imagination, the very faculties I needed most. To make matters worse, I also had a patterned habit of going to deep breathing in response to emotion. In other words, as emotions arose within me in my life, I had long practiced breathing deeply in order to avert going into overwhelm or reacting "too emotionally" to a situation. While this may have had some utility in preventing impulsive reactivity in everyday life, it was killing my actor's instincts, for "[a]s long as we are emotionally protective our breathing cannot be free" (Linklater 22). Free-flowing breath is the key into the sensate psychophysical instrument of the body-mind.

Through the practice of allowing my breath to flow in response to my inner and outer experience, I am ever surprised and delighted by the resultant richness of emotion, impulse, image, and vocal quality that arises. Further, free-flowing breath invites these elements to *change and transform* in spontaneous reaction to the given circumstances and my breath response to them. In this way, emotions may be viewed not as something one must *try* to conjure on demand, but merely a natural by-product of free-flowing breath responding to a richly imaginative given set of circumstances. Indeed, scientifically, "psychologists' analysis shows that emotion is an unbidden by-product of persevering with a Plan or objective through a line of physical actions" (Merlin *Beyond* 24).

Blair more radically contends that not only emotion but even *action* will arise spontaneously out of a strong actor process; "We create the right physical and imaginational environments to lead to an efficacious stream of images that lead to the desired behavior and feeling" ("Image" 178). This has profound implications for the common North American actor practice of "actioning" a script and psychologically pre-determining character motivation. She

builds a strong case, citing "Psychologist Daniel Wegner even suggests that we set aside the idea that thoughts *cause* actions and instead think about how the mind *attributes* causation of action to itself, i.e., we act, based on many unconscious factors, and attribute motive afterward" (Blair *The Actor* 59). Wangh corroborates: "an actor who has learned to "listen" to his body will find that character "actions," "intentions," and "objectives" arise organically within the work itself, without the actor needing to sit down to do "table work" to figure them out" (25). My own experience with "actioning" has been that once I move into rehearsal and go back over my original actions, I invariably find they have changed dramatically. That said, the exploration of actioning may not be entirely discounted as it undoubtedly leads to a deeper engagement with and understanding of the character. My curiosity, however, is toward other means of accomplishing the same that are less intellectually driven and engage the whole body-mind more fully.

As I moved through the Voice Intensive and began to free my body and breath, feelings, sensations, and emotions were slowly awakened and experienced within me, primarily through the work led by Brad Gibson and Dale Genge. Gibson and Genge work with the following bottom-up model for understanding the human system:

Thought/Action

Feeling

Emotion

Sensation

Raw Energy/Source

In brief: when a thought or experience is dropped down into the system, **energy** is converted into a physical **sensation** experienced as a positive or negative **emotion,** which is consciously

interpreted as a **feeling**. From that feeling arises an impulse to speak or **act**. To clarify, emotions are sensations experienced in the body. They become feelings when they are consciously interpreted by the mind. For instance, I see a bear, my chest tightens and my breath shortens (**sensation**), I register the impulse to move away from (negative) rather than towards (positive) (**emotion)**, I identify fear (**feeling**). This model grows out of neuroscientist Antonio Damasio's revolutionary work on emotions and feelings[2]. The body-mind's reaction in the form of sensation to a thought or experience is based on memories and associations fused in the past, a process including and bridging the physical, emotional, and thought bodies, as described previously with examples of stress and trauma.

This model has been infinitely useful to me as a way of understanding *how* we as actors are actually doing what we do. The exciting part is that the pathways of information are *multi-directional,* and *any element* may be used as the access point, which is how we move beyond the inside-out/outside-in argument. Blair explains: "Over time, associative learning links emotions with feelings, thoughts, and body in a multivalent network, in which any of the three can "lead" at any given moment; i.e., a body-state, thought, or gesture can initiate a sequence of experience" ("Image" 176). For instance, I might think of something sad and my **thought** triggers my body physiologically which responds with a **sensation-emotion**; I **feel** sad; I impulsively perform the **action** of crying. That's working "inside-out" or as described above, by dropping something down and feeding it back up. But I can also work "outside-in" by hunching my shoulders forward, dropping my head into my hands and breathing in-in-in-out, the pattern of sobbing (Merlin 35). In this way, by changing my **action**, I alter my **sensations/emotions** physiologically, so that I begin to **feel** sad, and from that energy I cry real tears (**action***)*.

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[2] Refer to Antonio Damasio's "Descartes' Error" and "The Feeling of What Happens."

Consequently, a feedback loop is created; this example both begins and ends in action. The final action likewise feeds back into the system creating further change and response. This is a simple example of moving beyond the binary to embrace all possibilities and create a toolbox of ways into the work. For instance, the work can begin with a text (thought), gesture (action), feeling, physical sensation, or image. Any of these gateways (sensation, emotion, feeling, thought, action) can be used as an access point into the whole interconnected system and effect change, from within or without. Seen in this light, "inside and outside are not separate, but working together, and could not operate without the other. The particular direction of working is up to the individual actor as to which suits them best in a particular context" (Zarrilli 192). An actor's job then is to grease all the works, including and especially those most difficult to access, and then to determine which may be most effective in a given situation. Gibson elaborates; "this is not divisive. So it doesn't matter where you enter the work […] It's to create the balance, *so that you have access to all*" (Gibson, emphasis added). In truth, this is a technical description of a process many actors practice intuitively. By making it transparent, we can use this understanding to develop more effective methodology and pedagogy, as well as improve the language we use to talk about the work.

This way of working also finds application in researching a role. If an actor's toolbox contains a variety of explorations, each entering a role from different access points (for instance, through the character's physicalization, through intellectual research, through sense memory, etc.), then exploring all of these avenues in *preparation* for a role creates a strong network of information and associations (images, memories, experiences, sensations, etc.) which make up the character's inner world and the actor's score. Committing the time to this depth of exploration can only result in a more richly textured, "realistic" portrayal of a given character.

This is of great interest to me as a practical model to use and develop in researching my thesis role.

The most useful application I found of Gibson and Genge's emotion-feeling-action model is in an exercise called "groking" or, in longer-form, "cracking words." This involves dropping a single word down into the body where it triggers the neural pathway of associative memories, thoughts and feelings, awakening physical *sensations*, which are then followed as they move and shift in the body, giving rise to imagery and memory, until the *felt sense* is strong enough that the word erupts back out on voice. If the experience is satisfactory, meaning that the actor feels they have truly let go and expressed a strong feeling on voice, the word is followed by a resounding "Yes!" The word is now "tethered"; that is, its pathway in the body-mind has been redirected from thought down into the sensing body, from which richly rooted place it may explode upward whenever it is called upon.

The first time I tried this exercise, I discovered a strong disconnect in myself between sensation and voice. I could connect to sensation, and then to voice, but moving back and forth between the two was difficult and involved a delay while I made the transition. Essentially, for me, speaking was a function of my rational intellect, entirely disconnected from feeling. For many people, through the process of socialization as we grow "our words become utterly detached from their original, visceral connections, so that by the time we are ready to study acting, we have often thoroughly divorced our bodies and our emotions from our voices and words" (Wangh 137). Through regular and ongoing practice, I am now able to speak from a felt sense much more easily and without interruption.

Groking correlates also to my experience of "breathing in the text" as taught by Professor David Smukler. The first time I attempted this, that is, literally "breathing" the words down into

my body as I first read a script, I was shocked by the wealth of emotions and images that arose in response. Prior to this, my "homework" on a text had been almost exclusively intellectual. Uta Hagen asserts: "Whatever intellectual work takes place *at any stage of the game* should serve to stimulate the creative imagination" (150). I now realize it is essential that homework done on a text activates all the other elements of the body-mind from the very first read. This is the meaning of "embodiment," to work in and from the body and the ever-changing sensations of the body, rather than from preconceived ideas or thoughts. "Out of the intelligence of the body-mind spring surprising truths, as opposed to the more predictable fruits of rational frontal-lobe thinking where decisions are made and results are preconceived and controlled" (Linklater 344).

The intellect's role is to make sense of the information and then to feed it down into the physical body, where, fuelled by breath, it fires the neural pathways holding all of the unconscious thoughts, images, feelings and memories associated with that information, which, having been transformed through the process, then finds its way back up and out on impulse. Linklater eloquently expands the intellect's role thusly:

> The intellect guides the imagination to impulse, emotion, sensation, and sound, and it has a powerful responsibility if it is not either to be drowned in emotion or to rise up in self-defense and stifle anarchic impulse. It must mold all that emerges from the creative source into shapes that have sense and meaning. Initially the intellect can whisper suggestions in your ear that guide your explorations; ultimately it is a conduit, not a controller. (357)

Mask has been a successful form for me because it was the place I most consistently, intuitively engaged with many of the elements I have been describing. For instance, it was the only acting work I entered into with a true "beginner's mind," with no preconceived notion of what or how I was going to perform. With a mask covering my face, I felt liberated to be and do almost anything, a common experience in mask work and one of the reasons it is such an effective training tool (Coburn 210). Covered by a mask, I had permission to "lose my head";

the mask became a container for my intellect, freeing me up to respond from my body. Paired with the great physicality involved in finding the mask character, along with an emphasis on breath, I was able to drop into the sensations of my body and allow my imagination to run wild. Improvisation is another key ingredient that afforded me a great deal of freedom by liberating me from the constraints of text, which then lived exclusively in the domain of my intellect.

This reflection on mask work and how to apply all of these findings to work on a character in a scripted text has led me to the develop the following formula:

Homework + Breath + Physical Improvisation = Embodied Character

These three elements roughly correlate to intellect (homework), emotion (breath), and physical body (active improvisation); however, all elements are holistically engaged throughout. Part of my experiment in creating my thesis role will be using this formula to create a character; to do the actor's homework on breath, activating all of the faculties of the body-mind, and to then find the character within my body through physicalized improvisation (as is done in mask work, but without the mask). In this method, the text and the homework become the "mask," the container that hold the character (Eldredge 146). Johnstone maintains "Actors can be possessed by the character they play just as they can be possessed by Masks" (148).

The idea of improvising in character prior to approaching scene work correlates to Stanislavsky's "active analysis," the work he passionately pursued towards the end of his life, in which actors worked through a script through repeated improvisations of scenes, rather than through table work (Merlin *Beyond Stanislavsky* 197). He contends "the quickest and most powerful way of feeling the pulsating connection between your imagination and your body is to improvise" (qtd. in Merlin *The Complete* 126). Uta Hagen likewise affirms: "Improvisations, which serve for a better understanding of the reality of character, circumstances, time and place,

emotions, and the possibilities of varied action, can be of tremendous value" (72). It is common practice in many non-Western performance forms for actors to begin work not by reading a text but by engaging "their bodyminds in an immersive, intensive, and complete psychophysical process" (Zarrilli 36).

My experiences of finding greater embodiment in acting through releasing physical and emotional blocks within myself and reconnecting downward into the sensate body correlate strongly to Grotowski's concept of "via negativa," the idea that an artist's training is not about the accumulation of skills, but simply the removal the blocks within herself that prevent the natural expression of her creativity (qtd. in Wangh 11-12). Michael Chekhov likewise describes "developing one's talent" as "nothing more than freeing it from the influences that hamper, occlude, and frequently destroy it entirely" (qtd. in Wangh 28). Having begun this work of releasing deep, personal blockages to my own creative source, I feel now as if I have only just arrived at the beginning, at the place where I am at last ready to begin to the work, whole, connected, alive. Truly, "the more we advance, the closer we get to the beginning" (Bertherat 135). Equipped with new humility, curiosity and enthusiasm, I move forward embracing this advice from legendary actress and teacher Uta Hagen: "Keep practicing forever" (202).

CHAPTER THREE

Oh What a Lovely War!

A. Introduction

In Theatre@York's 2015 ensemble production of *Oh What a Lovely War!,* I play a variety of characters. Act One finds me in several minor roles as British General and English Soldier, followed by the more significant portrayals of Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson, and later German Soldier in the Christmas 1914 scene. In Act Two I reprise Henry Wilson before depicting Lieutenant, Runner (not a speaking role), Gendarme, and First Soldier. This wide variety of roles will call for flexibility, versatility, range, and precision in shifting quickly and holistically between characters. My practical approach to this challenge is detailed in Part Three; here I present my initial research on the play, its historical context and first person accounts of the people involved, and my own visceral responses and connections to these materials.

Given my particular challenge, I have been wary of overdoing the intellectual research component of my preparation for *Oh What a Lovely War!* I have therefore focused on materials and an approach that would most likely stimulate visceral, emotional, or imaginative responses, such as looking to poems, images, and first-person accounts of the First World War. In terms of historical research, I searched for information which would best help me understand my characters' situations in context, and how this might affect their thoughts, feelings, actions and motives, as well as their relationships. In the case of Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson, I was able to gain quite an explicit understanding of the man himself, both from what others had written about him as well as by reading his own published journals. With most other characters, I gained a generalized understanding of their contexts and was left to fill in the details myself. I also

undertook supplementary practical research, performing in a duration art installation in Nuit Blanche.

Throughout this section I present my own experiences working as a tree-planter and performing in Nuit Blanche in comparison to life as a soldier or factory worker. In so doing, I do not mean to suggest that my experiences of discomfort and boredom are remotely comparable to the singularly unique horrors, dangers and traumas suffered by the soldiers who fought in the First World War. However, given the nature of my artistic challenge, it is appropriate for me to seek a personal, *embodied* connection and possible way *into* the lives of the characters I am creating. I include these details to identify shared phenomena that may provide a link between my own visceral experiences and those of factory workers and, to some extent, soldiers. To preclude the necessity of explanation each time I draw these parallels, I offer this acknowledgement now, along with my deepest respects for the men and women who served in the First World War.

B. *Oh What a Lovely War!*: Then and Now

Oh What a Lovely War! is an epic musical created in 1963 by Joan Littlewood in collaboration with her acting ensemble, the Theatre Workshop. It was developed as a satirical critique of World War I and by extension, wars in general, based around popular songs from the era sardonically re-written in the trenches. Littlewood intentionally avoided depicting anything too horrific on stage, instead projecting large images and statistics from the war to contrast the gay merriment of the characters. She dressed the players as Commedia Dell'arte pierrots to further suggest light entertainment, and hoped audiences would leave the theatre "laughing at 'the vulgarity of war'" (Beale).

For the Theatre @ York production, MFA directing candidate Autumn Smith has chosen to take a different approach, highlighting the ugly, raw, violent reality of war. The play will be set in a factory, inspired by the 1927 classic film *Metropolis*. In contrast to the lightheartedness of the original production, the cast will be playing factory labourers whose job is to reenact the horrors of World War I each day, simulating a "factory of war." This harkens to both Littlewood's and Smith's working class backgrounds and underlines the fact that most World War I soldiers were farm-boys and blue-collar workers. It also mirrors the concept put forth in the play of war as a vital economic engine, that war is a mechanism manufactured and maintained to drive a strong economy.

C. Working Class Background

My family, prior to my generation, is made up almost entirely of working class manual and agricultural labourers. My grandparents and great-grandparents were poor farmers who emigrated to Canada and settled in rural northern Ontario. The men worked in bush-camps in the winter, cutting and hauling timber, and tended their own farms in the summer. Enduring long hours of hard, thankless physical labour has always been a source of pride in my family, along with being skilled in handiwork, a trade, or other survival skills (i.e. hunting, gardening, carpentry, etc.)

I will draw from this personal history in developing my base factory worker character in *Oh What a Lovely War!* This includes connecting to a working class background in my body and feelings. Immediate associations include: a sense of stubborn pride in working hard; a quiet disdain for higher class people who lack practical skills; a certain masculine "tough guy" bravado and competitive spirit; and a survivalist, bottom line sensibility in which one does what

needs be done to provide for one's family. There is not much room, in such a life, for conscious expression of emotions or sensitivity.

In the spring and summers of 2001 – 2002, I worked as a tree-planter for large forestry corporations in northwestern Ontario. This experience correlates to factory work in the long hours (eight to ten hours a day) spent performing the same mundane, repetitive, task (planting upwards of two to three thousand trees a day). It also gives me some small insight into life in the trenches as we performed monotonous physical labour, carrying heavy packs of trees, through all kinds of weather (including days of rain and mud, unbearable heat, and occasionally even snow), and returning "home" each night to sleep in tents. This experience provides an embodied point of reference to some of the physical and mental effects of a factory worker or soldier's lifestyle.

Physically, this includes irritants like foot rot, tics, flies, rashes, chafing, and consequently, insufferable itching. Mentally, I remember several instances of "lost time," where heat, exhaustion and repetition coalesced to make hours pass in the blink of an eye, with no memory of the time past. On other occasions, time dragged on mercilessly and the day seemed like it would never end. The worst was waking from sleep – our one break from the monotony of planting trees – from dreams of planting trees, my mind replaying the images we'd been immersed in all day; there was no getting away from it. I remember also how it quickly became clear that the game was psychological. Bodies will adapt to almost anything demanded of them; the question was of how to quiet the mind, to find the motivation to go on, to work without loathing the work and counting each passing second.

This experience shares some physical hardships in common with trench life, including one's struggle against the elements and long days of hard, repetitive labour. World War I Veteran A.P. Herbert recounts a typical trip to the front line, routinely made by cover of night:

> It was a two-mile trudge in the narrow ditches to the front line. […] this is the kind of thing, more than battle or blood which harasses the spirit of the infantryman and composes his life … Each man a mere lifeless automaton … Mechanically each man grapples with the obstacles, mechanically repeats the ceaseless messages that are passed up and down … to those behind, and stumbles on. He is only conscious of the dead weight of his load, and the braces of his pack biting into his shoulders, of his thirst and the sweat of his body, and the longing to lie down and sleep. When we halt men fall into a doze as they stand and curse pitifully when they are urged on. (Ellis 33)

D. Factory Work and *The Melodious Malfeasance Meat-Grinding Machine*

As part of my research and exploration into the mechanized physical lives of both factory workers and soldiers, in October of 2014 I performed in a Nuit Blanche art installation created by New York artist Dana Sherwood, entitled *The Melodious Malfeasance Meat-Grinding Machine.* Sherwood constructed a macabre gypsy caravan, inside of which I spent four hours preparing and making sausages out of clay. I was instructed not to engage or reveal awareness of the audience; simply to perform my task, alone in my caravan. The repetitive and physically demanding task of making sausages, which utilized authentic equipment, can be seen as analogous to the monotony of factory work, providing insight into the effect of numbingly repetitive labour on the body-mind.

Fig 1., Fig. 2. Stills from *The Melodious Malfeasance Meat-Grinding Machine*

Most strikingly, I noticed how quickly I learned and became accustomed to my task, "checking out" and retreating up into my thoughts, similar to my experiences tree-planting. This at first took the form of merely withdrawing into thought for entertainment, but as time passed I found myself "zoning out," my body completing the tasks by memory, unbidden by my conscious mind. The effect must have read to the audience, as I heard one spectator remark, "she looks like part of the machine." Somewhat alarmingly, I would suddenly come to and have to focus sharply to remain on task, feeling as though I had just woken from a deep, drugged sleep, my movements heavy and clumsy.

This kind of "dissociation" from reality exists on a spectrum, the extreme of which sees people blacking out entirely, sometimes due to trauma. In mild cases, dissociation is described as a coping or defense mechanism that seeks to master, minimize or tolerate stressors, including boredom or conflict (Snyder). The pathological end of the spectrum may involve: a sense that the self or the world is unreal; loss of memory; forgetting identity or assuming a new self; fragmentation of identity; and post-traumatic stress disorder. Many World War I soldiers report experiences at the pathological end of the dissociation spectrum, including being unable to account for lost time or memories, mechanically repeating actions like an automaton, and losing a sense of reality. One English soldier describes the approach of zero hour: "the world became unreal and empty" (Ellis 97).

E. Shellshock and Other Horrors

The most extreme instances of dissociation were the cases of what was loosely termed "shellshock," described by one World War One doctor as "excessive emotion, e.g. sudden horror or fear" (Ellis 116). An eye-witness account describes a sergeant-major who "convulsed with a

dreadful rigor like a man in epilepsy, and clawed at his mouth, moaning horribly, with blind terror in his eyes" (Ellis 118). Another describes a boy shaking uncontrollably, slobbering and likewise clawing at his mouth, "a common, dreadful action" (Ellis 118). In less extreme cases, soldiers "displayed chronic symptoms which gradually intensified – tiredness, irritability, giddiness, inability to concentrate, headaches" (Ellis 117). While official statistics indicate eighty thousand men, or two percent of those who served, suffered a similar fate, it should be emphasized that shell-shock was not a definitive state, but rather "an extreme point along a steady progression of emotional torment. Simply because one did not finally 'break down' did not mean that one was not suffering intense anguish" (Ellis 119).

This cannot be overstated: faced with the horrors and long duration of the war, it is perhaps only surprising that so many men did not break down utterly. The continuous, oppressive soundscape alone could drive a person mad; "'a hurricane of hoarse and hallow banging of raging clamour, of piercing and beast-like screams' which did not begin or end but hung 'poised in the air'" (Ellis 63). The noise and its felt vibrations were physically and mentally trying; a Canadian private describes how "One's whole body seemed to be in a mad macabre dance," and many veterans recount a tortured "feeling of powerlessness, a total and utterly enervating feeling of vulnerability" (qtd. in Ellis 64). A French infantry sergeant evokes this image: "It is as if one were tied to a post and threatened by a fellow swinging a sledgehammer. Now the hammer is swung back for the blow, now it whirls forward, till, just missing your skull, it sends splinters flying from the post once more. This is exactly what it feels like to be exposed to heavy shelling" (Ellis 65).

This unbearable soundscape provides the backdrop for a host of other horrors: the inescapable stench of urine, excrement and rotting corpses; the scourges of lice, venereal

diseases, and rats “fat with human flesh”; the utter exhaustion, thirst, and hunger; the panic at each stirring in the night while on watch; the ceaseless mud, which, horribly, became a drowning hazard, particularly for those already wounded; and the poison gas, “the effects of which did not become apparent for up to twelve hours. But then it began to rot the body, within and without. The skin blistered, the eyes became extremely painful and nausea and vomiting began” (Ellis 55; 66). Add to all of this the common occurrences of witnessing your comrades dying– or being terribly maimed and wounded – of killing and watching men be killed, and the faintest picture of that profoundly horrific reality begins to emerge.

Trench life was characterized by an intensely visceral, animalistic experience; “In the trenches men lived a life of primitive instincts – fear, hunger, thirst – and with the physical extremes, defeaning noises, sudden flashes, extreme cold, agonising pain. Intellect and reason had almost no place” (Ellis 44). In the battle itself “many men have described being overcome with a frenzied blood-lust, an overpowering desire to kill and kill again” (Ellis 168). A British machine gun operator describes an experience during the Battle of the Somme: “I fired at them and watched them fall, chuckling with joy at the technical efficiency of the machine… [Later] anger, and the intensity of the fire, consumed my spirit, and not caring for the consequences, I rose and turned my machine gun upon… [a] battery, laughing loudly as I saw the loaders fall” (Ellis 168). But this intensity of malice was matched by acts of great generosity and compassion; a soldier’s platoon became his family and the human spirit proved resilient in striving toward love, connection and moments of shared joy in spite of, or perhaps because of, the bleakest conditions.

F. Resilient Humanity

Performing at Nuit Blanche informed my approach to *Oh What A Lovely War!* in other ways as well, chiefly in underlining humanity's inborn orientation toward happiness, love and pleasure, and in reminding me that people always live at the centre of their own experience. While performing my repetitive tasks at Nuit Blanche (of which there were four: preparing the meat, grinding the meat, making sausages, and tying the sausages off), I found myself "looking forward" to the sausage-making section, which had become my "favourite." I likewise found a small measure of joy each time I moved on to the next task, escaping the monotony of the task I had just been doing. Although no task was intrinsically any better than the one before, there was pleasure in the relief of change, no matter how small. This indicated the relative measure of these things, as well as a striving toward happiness, or pleasure, regardless of circumstance. I also experienced an odd drive to work faster, to finish quickly, even though that would only mean beginning again. I recognized this was irrational but still felt compelled to follow my quickening impulse.

I was reminded too that people living through difficult conditions do not necessarily view themselves as "down-trodden," "suffering," or "lesser than." From their perspective, everyday life may simply be everyday life. This consciousness will help me avoid playing a one-dimensional stereotype, or an idea of suffering, and give me a window into the complexity of each individual's lived experience. I am reminded too of the narratives we create to make sense of our lives, our understanding of our place in a greater order, and the secret plans, dreams and desires that keep us moving forward, regardless of lived reality.

At the time of the Nuit Blanche performance, I had recently seen a production of Brecht's *Mother Courage* at Stratford and was inspired by the eternally optimistic character of Kattrin,

Mother Courage's mute, disfigured daughter, who remains ever-hopeful, striving toward happiness amidst the desolation of her experience. Even in the bleakest of circumstances, it is our dreams of what is possible that keep us moving forward, toward what we hope and imagine to be a brighter future. In the case of the First World War, countless stories from the front lines tell of young men eagerly sharing photos of their sweethearts back home; writing, reading and re-reading letters to and from their families; and daydreaming of the pretty young wives waiting for them in England with open arms.

Likewise there is significant documentation of the soldiers' gravitation toward music, song, and poetry in the midst of the desolation of the war. In the absence of musical instruments, they made due with mouth-organs, penny-whistles and crude comb-and-paper kazoos. Impromptu breaks from fighting would sometimes take the form of a recital, "as one man or a small group on one side played or sang some tune and were suddenly aware, from the applause at the end, that the enemy had been listening. Then, as often as not, the listeners would give some rendition of their own" (Ellis 171 – 172). The most famous example of such fraternizing across lines is Christmas Day 1914, reenacted at the end of Act One in *Oh What a Lovely War!* On this occasion, up and down the line, men from both sides emerged and exchanged food, drink, cigarettes, photographs and addresses; "Many soldiers were surprised to find that their enemy seemed quite human" (Ellis 172).

Within platoons, the depth of camaraderie and collective spirit that developed between members clearly demarcate deeply loving friendships; "Nothing else can describe the devotion and selflessness that characterized the relationship of men within the same platoon or company. The utter brutality of the surroundings brought out a correspondingly wholehearted compassion for those with whom one was enduring them […] It cut right across barriers of rank" (Ellis 197).

This devotion to one's colleagues often became the primary means of going on in the face of impossible challenges; "Each man struggled with his intense private fears and nearly all triumphed simply because they would rather be dead than be revealed to their fellows as cowards" (Ellis 98). For most men fighting, their greatest fear was neither death nor the enemy, but "fear itself, finding themselves unable to do what they felt was required of them. It was the struggle against any display of personal weakness that kept many of the soldiers going […] obsessed almost with a sense of individual honour" (Ellis 165).

G. Poetry of War

There exist many poems, now published in collections, written by soldiers serving on the front lines of the First World War. I have found these rich, lyrical testimonies – by turns bitter, beautiful, heartbreaking, hopeful, cold – to be a particularly evocative, compelling means of connecting to the visceral reality of the war. I include here excerpts from two poems - *'The rank stench of those bodies haunts me still'*, and *Remorse* – both written by Siegfried Sassoon, one of the most prolific and celebrated of the soldier-poets:

> It's sundown in the camp; some youngster laughs,
> Lifting his mug and drinking health to all
> Who come unscathed from that unpitying waste: -
> (Terror and ruin lurk beneath his gaze.)
> Another sits with tranquil, musing face,
> Puffing his pipe and dreaming of the girl
> Whose last scrawled letter lies upon his knee.
> The sunlight falls, low-ruddy from the west,
> Upon their heads; last week they might have died;
> And now they stretch their limbs in tired content.
> […]
> And there were shouts and curses; someone screamed
> And men began to blunder down the trench
> Without their rifles. It was time to go:
> He grabbed his coat; stood up, gulping some bread;
> Then clutched his head and fell.

I found him him there
In the gray morning when the place was held.
His face was in the mud; one arm flung out
As when he crumpled up; his sturdy legs
Were bent beneath his trunk; heels to the sky. (Silkin 126)

[…] He goes
Heavily, blindly on. And, while he blunders,
'Could anything be worse than this?' – he wonders,
Remembering how he saw those Germans run,
Screaming for mercy among the stumps of trees:
Green-faced, they dodged and darted: there was one
Livid with terror, clutching at his knees…
Our chaps were sticking 'em like pigs… 'O hell!'
He thought – 'there's things in war one dare not tell
Poor father sitting safe at home, who reads
Of dying heroes and their deathless deeds.' (Sassoon 91)

H. German Expressionism: Apocalyptic Landscapes and *Metropolis*

For further sources of imagery I looked to the German expressionists, noted by director Autumn Smith as a source of inspiration, most notably the paintings of Ludwig Meidner and director Fritz Lang's seminal film *Metropolis*. Meidner is chiefly noted for his "Apocalyptic Landscapes," a series of oil paintings began in 1912 and thought to portend the First World War. These works are striking, chaotic, and distorted, with stark lines and disturbing imagery: figures fleeing burning cities, mangled naked bodies, huddled crowds with desperate faces in cold, desolate landscapes.

Fig. 3. Meidner, *Apocalyptic Landscape,* 1913

Meidner's paintings provide powerfully affecting images to sit with and include in my preparatory work of building potent, viscerally connected image banks.

Fig. 4. Meidner, *Apocalyptic Landscape,* 1912

Metropolis is a German expressionistic, dystopian film produced in 1927 by director Fritz Lang. It is a fable about class struggle and the vast gulf between the "masters" in the upper echelons of wealth and power, and the masses of veritable slaves who toil to create and maintain their kingdom but reap no reward themselves. In the context of the First World War this dynamic mirrors that of the politicians and high ranking military officers, who make decisions and issue commands from the safety and comfort and their homes and offices, and the masses of soldiers who enact those orders, pawns in a war being fought for reasons that had nothing to do with them. The sentiments of love and brotherhood described previously, though shared across ranks, did not extend to those officers absent from the front lines. These men were universally held in contempt by the common soldier. The men in the trenches grew increasingly bitter and resentful as time went on over the utter lack of

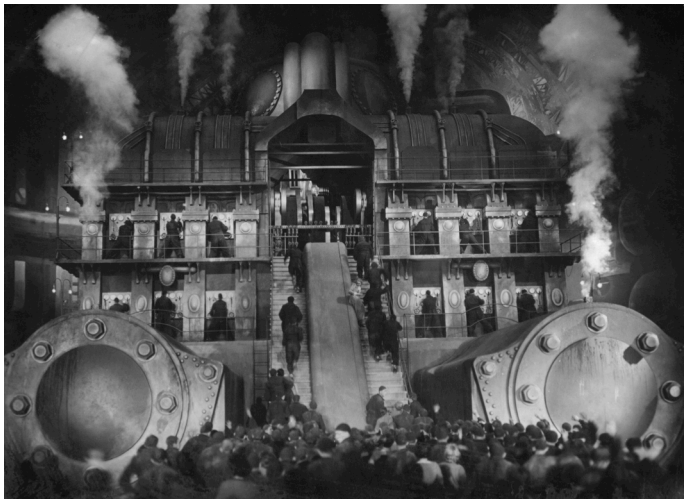

Fig. 5. Production still, *Metropolis*

understanding of their desperate state by those back home, and the censorship of this information by the British military.

Fig 6. Production still, *Metropolis*

Aesthetically, *Metropolis* contrasts two worlds in stark extremes: the mechanistic proletariat life lived deep in the bowls of the earth (akin to the trenches) set against the futuristic, opulent world of the ruling class, lined with skyscrapers, automobiles, and gardens of pleasure (reminiscent of the waltz scene in *Oh What a Lovely War!)*. The physical action of the workers is highly stylized, from marching into work as a single unit, to performing precise mechanical gestures in tandem with the machines they are operating, suggesting they are part of the machine themselves. The imagery and atmosphere of *Metropolis* provides rich audio-visual source material for the creation of the factory world in which our production unfolds, and for my base working class character.

I. Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson

Field Marshal Sir Henry Hughes Wilson was one of the most senior ranking British Army staff officers of the First World War. As Directory of Military Operations at the War Office beginning in 1901, he was instrumental in creating plans to deploy troops to France in the event of a war, and was the top advisor to Sir John French during the 1914 campaign, under the title "Sub Chief of Staff." Prior to his position as DMO, he served as Commandant of the Staff

College, Camberley; under his initiative, and in anticipation of a possible war, faculty and student numbers doubled during his tenure. Irish by descent, and from a political family, he was briefly involved in unionist politics, and was as infamous for his impulsivity as he was famous for his "Irish mirth" (Callwell 171).

Wilson had literally spent years in preparation for the First World War. While at the turn of the century he still "explicitly ruled out Britain becoming involved in a European war", by 1908 he was touring the south of France and into German territory by train, bicycle and motorcar, in reconnaissance for the coming war. When promoted to Director of Military Operations at the British War Office in 1910, Wilson spent that winter conducting, with his staff, a "great strategical War Game" to best predict what the world powers would do when war broke out (Jeffrey 88). The precise, "W.F. Scheme" for deployment of troops along French-German lines at the first sign of German mobilisation was nearly singlehandedly created in virtual secret by Wilson and a handful of his trusted assistants (Callwell 149 – 151).

This information raises the stakes for my character Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson in the Act One scene with his superior, Field Marshal Sir John French. Wilson, an ardent supporter of the French, is clearly eager to share his expertise of the landscape and his plans for battle to a decidedly disinterested and clearly quite ignorant French. Historically, in a 1913 diary entry Wilson "privately recorded his concerns at French's lack of intellect" (Reid 172 – 173). On the other hand, Wilson's position as French's closest confidant made French essential to him; "Although not holding a predominant position at G.H.Q. in theory, Wilson, in virtue of the confidence that Sir J. French reposed in his knowledge and judgment, held almost a prominent position in practice" (Callwell 161). This relationship encounters further turbulence later in the play when Wilson is passed over for a promotion previously promised to him; historically

Wilson made light of this, "though there can be no doubt that he was disappointed and hurt at Sir John's acquiescence in the veto apparently placed by the Prime Minister and Lord Kitchener on an appointment that had been definitely promised" (Callwell 195).

In *Oh What a Lovely War!*, French explains the reason for this veto: "You're such a brute. You'll never be nice to people you don't like" (Theatre Workshop 54). Historically, Wilson writes in his diary of a dispute with Kitchener, his superior, some months earlier: "I answered back, as I have no intention of being bullied by him, especially when he talks such nonsense as he did to-day" (Callwell 160) and describes another meeting with him as "memorable in showing K's colossal ignorance and conceit" (Jeffrey 133). Wilson was noted by his peers as being "a little impulsive" (equated with his being Irish), and historian John Hussey, in discussing his appointment as Commandant, describes Wilson as "a difficult but suitable man" (Jeffrey 66). This phrase sums up his character well: headstrong, opinionated, perhaps lacking in manners of diplomacy, but undeniably intelligent, capable, and a considerable asset to the British Army.

In contrast, Wilson was also noted for his unshakable "cheery optimism" as well as his "courage, good sense, stinging wit, and uproarious Irish mirth" (Callwell 171). He was remembered for keeping everyone's spirits up, even through the darkest, most taxing times, "with that whimsical expression on his face, habitual to him […] In spite of misgivings and mortification, in spite of nights without sleep and of days spent in incessant labour, he maintained an unruffled demeanour and displayed that calmness in adversity that stamps the born leader of men" (Callwell 170 – 171). His lecturing style at Camberley is described as "spellbinding" and "a sort of witty buffoonery … a sort of English stage Irishman" (Jeffrey 82 –

83). Another friend, describing his manner of speaking, makes note of "that half-chaffing, half-serious way which was peculiar to him" (Callwell 167).

It is worth noting here that in keeping with both the original production's satirical enactment of historical figures and events, as well as director Smith's vision of lower class factory workers mocking the elites with bouffant-inspired hyperbolic portrayals, these considerations will take precedence over precise historical accuracy. That said, I believe both may be honoured with precision and great fun. As the events of the play do follow historical records with great accuracy, I will endeavor to remain true to the inner life and drives of each character, while playing with inflating them to farcical proportions.

CHAPTER FOUR

On With the Show!

A. Introduction

At this stage of work, leading up to rehearsals on *Oh What a Lovely War!*, my focus is shifting to an emphasis on play, while maintaining a practice of physical release and visceral connection. I have discovered that when *inspired* with a spirit of *playfulness*, the work becomes easy; I feel free and open to express and explore wildly and un-self-consciously, without a thought about getting it "right." My central question, therefore, has become: what must I do in preparation for the work to arrive at each rehearsal and performance imbued with this elevated spirit of playfulness? In preparation for my thesis roles, I will focus on connecting internally to sensation and source, in pursuit of playfulness, and will draw on the research and explorations described in Part One to create a holistic methodology for researching and creating my characters.

B. A Note on Dialects

All of the characters in Theatre @ York's production of *Oh What a Lovely War!* speak in dialect. My characters' dialects comprise the following: British Received Pronunciation (RP), Cockney, Irish, German, and French. Central to my work on these dialects will be to locate and identify the sensations in my body each dialect calls for and/or creates. As well, to notice and play with any changes in mood or attitude brought on by the dialect, knowing that these shifts may be caused by the physical changes I am making or by stereotyped associations I make to a particular dialect. For example, in practicing Cockney I have found that it imbues me with

feelings of cocky raw confidence, toughness and rebellion, perhaps because of its relatively forward placement in the mouth and relaxed jaw, or perhaps because I unconsciously associate it with 80s punk rock and disenfranchised characters. Regardless of the cause, these shifts are felt through my whole body and provide more fodder for the development of my characters. Technically, I will be using Paul Meier's *Accents and Dialects for Stage and Screen*, listening to samples of native speakers from the International Dialects of English Archive (IDEA) website, and accessing our dialect coaches for assistance.

C. It's Called a "Play" For a Reason

To address the question of playfulness and inspiration, I have set about identifying elements of the work through which I achieved success in reaching a playful, or inspired, state. As discussed, key to this is tapping my "source" or "swamp," an experience I am most familiar with through the Linklater voice work. I have noticed in class that my most successful text sessions invariably follow an exciting voice class, one in which I make a strong connection to source that enlivens and energizes my whole being. From this place, playing with the text is fun and easy; I am hungry for it. The Linklater work offers a strong way in for me, I believe, due to its emphases on breath, physical release, and image. By maintaining a daily practice of voicing from imagination and sensation rather than thought, as well as opening up more breath space in my body and releasing physical tensions, I have developed a practical way of connecting to source in preparation to enter the work.

Intense physical movement has also provided a strong pathway for me into feeling and imagination, as evidenced by the Grotowski-based physical training I undertook prior to my studies at York. This rigorous and challenging practice offered an easy way out of my thoughts

and into image and emotion. As well, the work led by Professor Erika Batdorf in movement class at York has been instrumental in giving me clues both to accessing source, and to designing a holistic, enlivening warm-up. Again, the emphasis on breath, physical release, and dropping my awareness down into my body (as in the practice of noticing "blood, breath, and gravity"), are instrumental in the success of these practices.

I have begun experimenting with blending my vocal and physical warm-ups and intend to continue exploring this practice. I have found, not surprisingly, that each day's warm-up is different, depending on how I am and what I need as I enter the studio on any given day. My work now is to know what is in my toolbox of warm-up possibilities. This includes elements that are absolutely essential every day, and others that may be used on some days but not others. As well, it will be essential for me to identify short-cuts; that is, knowing how to warm-up in ten or fifteen minutes if necessary, while still giving myself the best shot at being dropped in, connected, and ready to play.

Some of the elements I will be working with include: detailed physical awareness and release, performed in relative stillness and including blood, breath and gravity (drawn from Syntonics, Linklater, and Batdorf); Linklater vocal warm-up with an emphasis on source and channel; and vigorous physical improvisation (drawn from Grotowski, Batdorf and yoga). The physical improvisation portion will include warming up my large muscle groups and awakening the length of the spine, pelvis and diaphragm. Awareness, expansion and freedom of breath, as well as connecting to my image life, will be emphasized throughout this practice.

As we move into rehearsal, my warm-up will take me into the image life of the play, and of each individual character. This means using the warm-up to connect into the images, sensations, thoughts, feelings, and memories particular to my experience of the play, and also to

specifically connect with each character's image life. I will identify a signature phrase and gesture for each character that most resonates their internal life for me. To conclude my warm up, I will rapidly move through each signature phrase, playing within and moving randomly between them. This will exercise both my connection to each of my roles and my speed and dexterity in moving between them.

Finally, I have also identified my colleagues as a fantastic source of play and inspiration; through engagement, provocation, and listening, one may easily rouse excitement to play with or "off" a fellow actor. I will therefore bring to rehearsal an eagerness to engage, and will practice listening and focusing intently on my scene partners, to take as much as I can from their choices and impulses. Ideally, we will inspire each other, creating action that is more connected, immediate, engaged and responsive.

D. Psychophysical Character Creation

In terms of character creation, I will apply my working formula of "Homework + Breath + Physical Improvisation = Embodied Character." For "Homework," I will do a textual analysis of the script for each of my characters and answer the "nine questions" (Hagen)[3]. I will endeavour to do a warm-up before I undertake this work in order to connect and ensure I am "breathing the text" down into my body and not merely up into my head. I will especially note personal feelings, memories and associations that arise as I undertake this work, which will serve as markers back into those feelings for me. As I have noticed that working with script in hand is distracting and cumbersome for me, and interferes with my freedom of play, I will endeavor to be off book as early in the rehearsal process as possible.

[3] The "nine questions" guide an actor in exploring their character's history, relationships, current situation, objectives, and obstacles. For a full description, refer to Uta Hagen's "Respect for Acting."

Finally, I will identify the key words and phrases my characters speak throughout the play and grok them. As I am learning my lines, I will work with the text using other psychophysical explorations such as pushing up against a wall, improvising physically while speaking, and playing with changing the rhythm of my speech and/or physicality.

As I do my homework, I will be building an image bank of thoughts, feelings, images, associations, and memories for each character. These image banks will be key to accessing and creating the internal life of each character, and will comprise the material I work with in my warm-ups. The research I have already undertaken, detailed in Part Two, forms an important secondary source for this process. In some cases, where little character information is provided in the text, much of this will be coming from my imagination and secondary sources. For these characters, I will incorporate more physical improvisation into my explorations earlier on, so that the information is coming through my body (rather than through my intellect by sitting and writing), similar to the process I used in creating my solo show.

Once I have an initial sense of each character, I will begin to explore physically in solo studio work. As I develop the unique physicality and voice of each character, it will become linked to that character's image bank. I will draw on the technical character body work I learned in Erika Batdorf's movement class, informed by the burgeoning image life of the character and shifting my focus back and forth between the technical and the improvisational/imaginative, with an emphasis on the latter. As I will be portraying eight different characters in *Oh What a Lovely War!,* it will be important to create distinct character bodies for each, so they are clearly differentiated. As I anticipate my plans may be more ambitious than time will allow, I will focus my efforts most heavily on those characters with more stage time, chiefly Sir Henry Wilson.

Finally, I will strive to begin always in beginner's mind, and to approach the work with that wonderful sense of giving up myself and my ideas to the unknown adventure; to forget what I "know" or what has "worked" in pursuit of new discoveries. In clown terms this is called "dropping the script." This simplicity of showing up, present, without an agenda, ready to engage and play, will be my ultimate aim throughout the rehearsal process.

E. Conclusion

I have identified, then, three spheres of import to my preparation for this role. The first is work to be completed pre-rehearsal and in solo studio sessions and includes analyzing the text, and bringing it to life on breath and through physical improvisations. Next is establishing a practice of warming up physically and vocally before each rehearsal in order to connect to source and best rouse within myself a spirit of playfulness and inspiration. Finally, within rehearsal itself, to approach each day with a beginner's mind, to try new things and make new discoveries, and to practice keen listening and investment in my scene partners. Through these three practices, I aim to create eight fully realized and deeply embodied characters in *Oh What a Lovely War!*

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

Throughout the process of rehearsing and performing Theatre@York's *Oh What a Lovely War!,* I made many discoveries and leaps in my work as an actor. The most profound of these were not things I had set out to do, but routes I was forced to take when my "plans" failed due to constraints of time or the demands of the director's process. This was appropriate and perhaps even predictable given my artistic challenge of an imbalanced and overactive intellect. Most significantly, unforeseen demands of the process led me to a challenging inquiry and subsequent surrender into presence, breath, and embodiment, through which I began to trust the expression of my body-mind. These discoveries, arising from the exciting intersection of theory and praxis, also brought me full circle to a deeper understanding of the methodological questions explored in Chapter One.

Before rehearsals began, I identified three preparatory tasks. The first involved completing textual analyses and solo studio explorations of all of my characters. I did not accomplish this, in part due to time constraints, and in part because it did not seem the most appropriate route. I was wary of undertaking front-end psychological analysis that would result in entering rehearsals with preconceived intellectual notions of the characters and scenes. In rehearsals, I discovered the vital importance of the first pass at each scene in terms of the amount of information revealed and explorations begun.

While I would not recommend entering into every show with this level of ignorance, it seemed a valid approach for this highly adapted production and especially given my artistic challenge. Because so much changed from script to stage and throughout the rehearsal period, I did not feel unprepared, and did complete some text work as the production developed. In the

future, I would attempt to complete this work, in more depth, and in studio explorations, *during* the rehearsal period. I am also now less afraid of doing initial investigations and making choices early on, knowing these ideas will change and grow throughout the process.

My second intention was to warm up physically and vocally before each rehearsal, in order to tap internal connection to source (breath, image, feeling, sensation), and to enter the studio in a playful and inspired state of being. This was one of the most successful and essential elements of my exploration. Drawing primarily on the Linklater-based voice work taught by Prof. David Smukler and Voice Intensive faculty, and the psychophysical warm-up and emotional connection work taught by Prof. Erika Batdorf, I developed a daily warm-up practice throughout the rehearsal process. This enabled me to identify the key elements of such a practice for myself.

I discovered it is important for me to begin on the floor with physical release work such as Syntonics, Feldenkrais, or elements of Linklater. This work is slow and deep, releasing extraneous tension from the body and allowing greater freedom for the flow of breath, image, sensation and emotion. This also provides an opportunity to connect with free-flowing breath as discover what images, thoughts and feelings I am bringing to the work. From there I warm up my joints, inviting organic movement and stretches guided not by my intellect but by the desires of my body. I spend time in both motion and stillness, inviting awareness to the internal viscera and sensations of my body (including blood, breath, gravity, pain, pleasure, temperature, emotion, and sensations). As my awareness deepens, I am led into spontaneous movement, and emotions and images arise as my psychophysical instrument awakens. At any point in this process I may also go to sound, beginning with simple yawns, moans and “hu’s” and allowing those impulses to grow and express freely.

Layered into this organic body-led process, I ensure I move through the following as part of my preparation for the work: awakening the whole length of my spine (twists, undulations, rotations, and pelvic rotations in all directions); moving through the technical vocal exercises (ex. tongue rolls, soft palate, resonators, range, etc.); and vigorous movement (sometimes practiced before going into the organic work). As I progress through this sequence, at some point I come to standing and re-introduce sensory relationship with the external environment. As my tendency is to become enraptured in the internal, future practice will focus on increasing my ability to juggle internal and external stimuli. The performance run in particular taught me the vital importance of listening, fiercely, with my whole body and all of my sense engaged.

Another part of my warm-up I am excited to explore further is the integration of groking with organic movement and visceral/emotional connection. This is a natural marriage of two sensation-based practices, with organic movement and visceral awareness lubricating the way for the free flow of grokked expression. This pairing was also useful to me in *Oh What a Lovely War!* as a way of moving into dialect, something I endeavored to do in each warm-up, especially as we moved into the performance run.

Applied to performance, warm-up is also a critical time to tap specific images, sensations, and emotions integral to the world of the play. In this process, for instance, I discovered I could easily tap an involuntary shaking or twitching through my nervous system that gave rise to feelings of confusion, panic, and fear appropriate to the world of the play. This became part of my nightly warm-up for shows. Beyond that, this was, however, one area I found to be lacking in breadth and richness. I often felt my image bank was not as full as it could be, or has been in past productions. I believe this was in part due to my lack of homework on the play, and in part due to the ongoing confusion about our identities as single or multiple characters. Without a

strong, consistent sense of my character it was difficult to build a specific identity. It was also not until we began previews that our blocking and choreography was finally solidified to the point of embodiment in a way that freed up my actor awareness to deepen the work and find the true presence that leads to discoveries of image, sensation and feeling within a given circumstance.

One thing I failed to do which I would add to my warm-up practice in the future is warming up into specific character bodies and rhythms, especially in a play such as this in which I am playing multiple characters. In general, I did not create the detail and specificity of character bodies I had planned. This was due mainly to time constraints and the basic confusion around who I was and how many characters I was playing. It was not until quite late in rehearsals that it was established our soldiers were consistent characters throughout the play, and synonymous to our workers. In the future I will also work toward what Prof. Batdorf calls "touch and go," that is, easily tapping into a specific feeling through the body, such that it may be psychophysically recreated at will. These things, along with a stronger practice of carrying all of the life and energy activated in a warm-up directly on stage and into a performance, are the directions in which to grow my practice in the future.

My final intention was to stay in discovery, keep returning to beginner's mind, and to practice listening and investing in my scene partners. This came to the forefront especially during our performance run, when I unexpectedly found the images and triggers into scenes that had been working in the past failing. I was coming up dry, feeing at times disconnected, removed and alienated from the world of the play and my role therein. I pondered what to do and soon saw I had no choice but to return to breath, presence, and a deep trust in what arose. This was at first terrifying, as my habitual response when I am "feeling nothing" on stage is to go

into panic and "call up" the appropriate image or feeling. Instead, I practiced simply committing more deeply to allowing my breath, and staying with internal sensation and external sensory awareness. The great fear in relinquishing all control is that nothing will arise, or perhaps worse, the "wrong" thing will arise. In surrendering, however, I found new images, feelings and associations arose in response to the immediacy of the moment. I felt enlivened, energized, and present. The work was new and fresh again. This marks a profound shift in my understanding and practice of acting, from recreation or *doing* into the true presence of *being*.

At last I find I have arrived back at the beginning of the next journey, taking my first uncertain steps, returning to the simplicity of practice. This, more than anything is what I take with me into my next phase of work: the practice. Daily warm-up provide a place to explore, identify, and sharpen the tools available to me. The rehearsal process of *Oh What a Lovely War!* enabled me to identify the elements of an actor's work and make an initial attempt at putting them together. In retrospect, I came up short in homework, which very appropriately, forced me to rely on simple presence and deep listening. Now the work is twofold: maintaining and deepening the practice, an endless exploration; and discovering how to put the elements together anew each time, unique to each play, each process.

Coming full circle back to the discussion of actor methodology where my research began, I can now assert the following. The trouble with "inside-out" and "outside-in" methods of acting is that in both cases they are concerned with external forms; one mental, the other physical. While these are intended to guide the actor to internal sensation, image, and impulse, there is no exercise of these crucial elements themselves. As discussed in Chapter One, these methodologies are unnecessarily limiting in favouring one possible entrance point over all others. The work of practitioners like Batdorf, Gibson and Genge, and the pedagogical

framework of the Voice Intensive, is revolutionary in its focus on the actor's increasing awareness of their own direct experience, resulting in that elusive quality of *presence,* which may be defined as extraordinary awareness of internal and external sensory information.

Ideally, there is no precedence placed on any *one* of the many elements of an actor's work, but rather a holistic understanding of their circular and synergistic nature. The elements referred to include text, sensory information, actor homework, thought, image, physical action/gesture, voice, feeling, emotion, and sensation, supported on a strong foundation of free-flowing breath, fierce presence, and a body free of unnecessary tension. These fundamentally integral elements are too often taught and utilized separately and hierarchically, each school of acting lauding one over the others. Viewed holistically, one element does not *cause* another, nor is one the ultimate way in. Any element may provide a point of entry, giving rise to the others in a continuous, reciprocal feedback loop. This model empowers the actor with a more complete understanding and practice of the tools available to them and their powerfully interrelated nature.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Actor Journal

November 11, 2014 (First Day of Rehearsals)

Tonight I went early and warmed up. I focused on dropping in, connecting to internal felt sensation and "source." Syntonics, organic movement, Linklater, simple voicing. Played with my colleagues. Blood breath gravity, animal body and making a connection with my colleagues are my best friends in this process. Being messy. Dialects work better when I don't think about them and just play the scene (another example of trusting my body). Doing the technical preparation work but then diving in and trusting it will be there –when I do this it comes out better than when I think about each syllable. As people came in today I spoke and played in dialects – it was fun and freeing. This is a leap, as previously I would have been too intimidated by dialects and taking everything too seriously to have done this. The moment-to-moment practice of breath and release is vital now, especially working in dialects. Also placing more emphasis on the *feel* of the dialect in my mouth.

November 15, 2014

Habit → waiting to be told what to do. Implicitly afraid to try anything because I will do something wrong and waste the director's time. I still see myself coming at the character from an outside place; how I *imagine* "my character" would react in the scene, as opposed to *being IN* the scene, *playing* the scene. I did try things today. The first pass is good because it gives me a real sense of the relationships, and what is happening. I saw how my character (Wilson) fit into the play of the scene and improvised with that. Checked in with Autumn if I could keep trying this – she said yes, we talked about it a bit, and this gave me reassurance to play more. This is a

good approach: try things, and if there's no feedback, check in so I don't get hung up on "I might be doing something wrong" and feeling inhibited. I found good play, and a way to be more involved as French's "handler"; feeding him translations and cuing him on what to do.

We also worked on the Christmas Truce. I was surprised at how much emotion was there for me, all at once, as the troops parted way again. We had met the enemy, spent the day together, and they seemed like great guys. And then we part, knowing we are now going to kill each other. And I don't want to do that. I don't want that. It is an impossible situation. Lots of sensation: the snow, the fucking cold, peeling off my boots to dry out my socks, feet numb. Feeling the cold on my cheeks, back of my knees, my low back as I walk. That familiar chin tuck to shield from the wind. The body tensing. My socks will never dry. Feet peeling and falling apart but I can't feel it anyway. Numb. The great, profound risk of going up and over to meet them. Taking that risk just to make human contact, to have a regular Christmas… To share.

December 3, 2014

I'm doing my thing of trying one thing; it "works" and I repeat it. I am still acting from ideas more than impulse. There is impulse too, and emotion, but I am primarily sourcing from brain/intellect/idea. I am realizing that the same way I am led by my body in warm-up now, with the intellect stepping in to take me to something that will meet a specific need, process in rehearsal can happen the same way. I needn't "strategize" and work out in advance what I need to do / how to approach / etc. but simply be present in the room, warmed up, in my animal body, and engage with everything from that place.

My tasks: BE IN THE WORLD. That's all I can do now. Follow quick impulses. Be in my body. Be led by that. This is the time to try things, whether they work or no. Also, to be in

the immediacy of the moment – I don't need to figure out my relationship to French in advance; simply to be there and FEEL what it is. I can take everything off of him.

I have to start with the base factory worker character. It is the factory worker and not I who creates all of the other characters of the show. The way in is not to try to create eight different characters, but to create one complete, connected character, and then set her free to play. So who is my factory worker? Who would I be in that situation? Doing everything quickly and correctly – trying to lessen the suffering of myself and my comrades, while secretly hatching plots for escape and revolt. What are my relationships? How to play in all this?

December 6, 2014

Fun work on the ballroom scene. Relationships becoming clearer; lots of room for specific moments, relationships between characters… with Robertson, French, and Mywanwy especially. What is Wilson's sexual orientation? What is his strategy? Who does he truly ally to? Where are his loyalties? How does he treat his friends? His enemies? For now my expectation is to be French's favourite boy; I feel both personally and professionally affronted when I am passed over for promotion. Robertson is a great buffoon I have no need to hide my contempt for. Mywanwy is my beard, an old friend, a cow but a good time, and understanding of my needs. She is likewise a snobbish underdog. We are lesser because we are actually superior.

Autumn has defined that our worker and soldier are inextricably linked; they are one character. The same person. This is my through-line. All other parts (ex. Wilson) are played by this base worker/soldier character (with cynicism, taking the piss out). This character must be really clear/defined. So I am not playing eight characters after all. So when am I that same soldier/worker and when am I clearly a different character?

January 6, 2015

First day on deck. Did an excellent voice session with David. Releasing occipital joint, shoulder girdle, sacrum and thigh bones, then running energy from the place between the shoulder blades up to the occiput and down to the sacrum – my whole body flooded with sensation. And then the images came – visual, imagined, memory, kinesthetic/sensation and emotion. The trenches, mud, water, flooding, barren landscape, the feeling of cold, desolation, looking down at a dead body, watching my best friends get shot down beside me, shooting a gun, shooting and shooting, blood lust, violence, feeling violent, aggression, anger, fear, despair, sick of, weariness, joy, laughter, camaraderie… Was amazing to be in the space and finally connect imagistically/imaginally/sensorally to the world of the play, to be able to see the trenches and no man's land, transposed on top of the actual playing space.

Surprised by some of the sounds that came out of me as the images intensified. Panting, or the movement of voice in sharp repetitive cries. Panic. Desperation. Terror. Unspecific begging, involuntary cries for help. Get me out, help, confusion, what's happening, how did I get here, how did I end up here, why me, what do I do, I just want to go home, let me out, let me out, let me go, this is madness, desperation, desperation, terror, panic… Panting. Anger rage, the rage of futility, of impotence, of powerlessness, helplessness, of being out of control, of being told, commanded, manipulated, no way out, TRAPPED, the rage and futility of being trapped – the cry of the captive. Victim. Conscious victim, victim coming to consciousness with no means of empowerment, no hope of empowerment, agency. Caught. Mocked. Rage. Despair.

These are the things to keep tapping. The importance of the warm-up will be to tap and explore this image world now. To keep going in and bringing what I find into the work.

Because the play is so heavily choreographed and the choreography keeps changing, it is quite normal that I would feel disconnected and "in my head" as we have been working. As this structure becomes learned, the key is to FOCUS and remember to keep layering in the WORLD – look around, smell, be in my body (breath blood gravity, and carrying the warm-up into the room) so that I can begin to inhabit the world and to move through the choreography from a deeper place connected to source and therefore impulse, emotion, sensation, imagination, and freedom of play. Also to TRUST this will come as the structure solidifies for me.

January 15, 2015

Today was frustrating. We preview in three days. Our daily schedule indicated we would be working some scenes during the day. Great! Finally we seemed to be reaching a point where our cues were set, we were getting to know the show and we could just drop in and do our actor work, discover relationships, be IN it… Instead, we spent four hours going through the entire show, learning new whistle and steam-whistle cues, changing reactions, where we look, etc. It is so frustrating that every time we seem to reach the place where the blocking is internalized enough that I can really drop in and go for it, cues are changed and I am back up in my head making sure I get all the choreography and hit my cues. This is especially frustrating given my actor challenge. Such a heavily cued show with such a strong emphasis on tech elements does not leave much room for the actors to do their work. The entire process has been geared toward the technical choreography of our blocking and integration of tech elements. Our actor work on intention, relationship, etc. has been and continues to be the last priority, which I believe we will only really get to, on our own, going into dress and previews.

Play MOMENT TO MOMENT. Did a great warm-up today with more release in my occipital and sacrum; felt my whole spine fluid and connected in a new way. This made it easy to drop in, experience clear reactive impulse, and hit feelings of panic, confusion, impatience, anger, etc. Still feel my actor homework is lacking, though also just very challenged by the lack of clear container for the work detailed above.

January 18, 2015 (First Preview)

Don't have it all put together yet (my actor process) but have all the pieces and can identify when/what is missing. Right now my world is not full enough – I make discoveries each night but I am in and out – some scenes fuller (of feeling, image, relationship) than others.

Didn't feel like I had a great show tonight, but given the circumstances of the day, perhaps to be expected. I have been feeling bad that everything isn't landed for me yet – that each day in rehearsal some scenes land and others don't, that I'm connected in some places but not others, and that I make new discoveries in the same way. But then I realize that for where I am at in my process, this is normal. And that if the blocking had been set earlier, and I hadn't spent 90% of the rehearsal period memorizing choreography, then I would have been doing what I'm doing now a couple of weeks ago, and been ready to go with a fuller deeper world by opening. So now all I can do is be present, keep doing my homework outside of show times, and trust that I will find what I need in the moment.

This is interesting to me in that it perhaps speaks to a bigger issue of how we produce theatre in Canada (/North America). It is normal to have short rehearsal periods, and for actors to be expected to do their jobs in high-pressure time-compressed situations. It seems we are thrown into almost impossible conditions and then expected to do our work. What would happen

if those conditions were changed? I believe many European models utilize longer rehearsal periods. The company I worked and trained with before coming to York (Grotowski-based) spent on average two to three years developing a new work through a process of rigorous training and development. This is perhaps taken too far to the other extreme, but speaks to a care, commitment and honouring of the work I think is lacking in Canada.

January 20, 2015 (Opening Night)

Tonight I did good work. I do not say that lightly, as I generally do not believe in myself as an actor. This is a big leap forward. My tasks for tonight were: Let go. Trust your body. Be IN the hot cup, moment to moment, have fun, play. I was successful. I played. I set the scenes up for myself and then I went in and played them out. I didn't push. I tried new things. I did things I've never done before. I responded.

Of course I am now at the beginning of a new journey. I am no longer happy to do good *enough*. Something has shifted, the bar raised. Previously I had so little belief in myself that just getting by felt like a huge accomplishment, not sticking out as the one bad actor was success. Now I demand more, look forward to more, move happily toward more – expansive, deeper, bigger, brighter process… I keep having this vision of those actors who are animals onstage, who really are in their healthy animal totally responsive bodies – it is incredible. I aim for this.

January 22, 2015

It is not about judging but about asking the questions. How to find the show anew each night? What to do when the source material fails, stops working? Why does this happen?

Some of the first few shows I played the moment and things came up and I connected and made discoveries and was IN it, and in emotion. Now many of those wells seem to have dried up (Sister Susie, Christmas Truce) and I find myself at a loss. Feel like I am beginning to do a lot of going through the motions of what was once a genuine impulse, rather than finding the impulse anew. In some parts I am still making discoveries and finding the newness. Cards in the trenches was more jovial than usual for me today, which completely changed the following song, "Are We Downhearted," which was a lot feistier. Also then changed the Drill Sargent and carried that energy into the Allies Confer. It is easier being in continuous action and carrying the energy through than it is stopping and starting. How to keep the energy up during long stretches spent offstage? How to stay warm and connected? How to bring the wild animal body I find in warm-up right into performance, and carry it through with endurance? Worth examining.

January 23, 2015

Today in warm-up I found my spine, the whole length of my spine, in a new way. Moving in rotations, twists, undulations in release from sacrum to occiput, energy rippling and moving the entire length. This brings energy and play. My tasks were: whole spine, find the danger, intense presence. I was successful. Anytime I started to go into thought, or drop out of a scene, I went to intense presence. This meant listening (inside and outside – senses, ears, whole body, plus viscera, sensation). During intermission, I stayed *in*: in breath, sensation, presence. Instead of lying under the risers on my back as I usually do (which makes me tired), I put my body in table and played with my spine. This was a great warm-up to jump back into the second act. The danger came in in committing to allowing whatever came. This marks a significant shift. Instead of trying to find or call up a specific image or feeling, I committed to presence,

breath, sensation, and trusting what came. This was terrifying. As usual, when I began this, I felt nothing for the first half a second and began to panic. This is where I would habitually push or make something, "call up" an image or feeling that has "worked" in the past. Instead, the experiment tonight was to breathe, listen, crank up my sensory presence and simply be in the world. This was terrifying at first, but did not fail. But the simple truth is: When I commit and am alive in my body, I will never come up dry. This simple practice led to new moments and discoveries. The show was fresh and alive for me. I was alive in my body. Keys: whole spine activated; breath and intense presence; trusting what arises. In the evening show, I applied the discoveries I made this afternoon and had a great show! I had fun and my energy *increased* over the course of the show, where previously it had been decreasing. I surprised myself. This has been a day of important discoveries.

January 25, 2015 (Day After Closing)

A few thoughts: I didn't do enough actor homework. Both in terms of script and research (which is partly just doing the *right* research). I wish I had gorged on war imagery, films especially, novels. Also, to have spent more time finding the personal connection to each scene. Part of this was a challenge of the process. On the other hand, this lack seems perfectly appropriate at this stage of my explorations given that my challenge was to get "out of my head." It was an intentional choice to abandon actor homework in order to more deeply practice embodiment, sensory awareness, and coming purely from internal, visceral impulses. To this end, I believe I was successful. And now, I can put the actor homework back into the process in a more meaningful way, as simply another layer.

Appendix B: Promptbook Selection

"THE ALLIES CONFER"

20 Oh What a Lovely War

Four **Girls** *enter, two from each side, and join in. They wear revealing sexy costumes and military headgear.*

On Sunday I walk out with a Bo'sun.
On Monday a Rifleman in green,
On Tuesday I choose a 'sub' in the 'Blues',
On Wednesday a Marine;
On Thursday a Terrier from Tooting,
On Friday a Midshipman or two,
But on Saturday I'm willing, if you'll only take the shilling,
To make a man of any one of you.

The **Band** *repeat the chorus.*

Singer Come on, boys; we need a million.

First Girl A million.

Singer Be a man; enlist today.

Second Girl Enlist today.

Singer Have you a man digging your garden, when he should be digging trenches?

Third Girl He should be digging trenches.

Singer Have we any able-bodied men in the house?

Fourth Girl Any able-bodied men?

Singer (*picking up the last line of the chorus*) . . . But on Saturday I'm willing, if you'll only take the shilling,
To make a man of any one of you.[17]

All go off.

An **Army Driver** *sets four cones to represent a car, upstage right. He salutes as* **Field-Marshal Sir John French,** *his* **Aide** *and* **Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson** *take their places and sit in the 'car'. The* **Driver** *starts it up. The sound of the car running and lurching accompanies the scene.*

Newspanel THE ALLIES CONFER.

French Right driver . . . (*They all bump up and down in their*

Take map out of box; lay out on box (lid), Image (Wilson): jackrabbit nervous, twitchy, jumpy (always trying to intercede but failing to)

seats.) Steady on there! One must always remember the class of people these French (*Another bump.*) these French generals come from . . .

workers comment

Aide Yes, sir.

French Mostly tradesmen. Shan't understand a damn' word they say.

Aide With regard to that, sir, do you think I ought to organize an (*Another bump.*) an interpreter? yes of course we'll have an interpreter

French Don't be ridiculous, Wilson; the essential problem at the moment is (*Another bump.*) is the utmost secrecy.

The car continues to run quietly, the light on it lowered. **General Lanrezac**, *his* **Aide** *and the Belgian* **General de Moranneville** *enter downstage left.* **Moranneville***'s country, Belgium, is already lost.*

Lanrezac (*spreading his arms in a gesture of despair*) Personne! (*He strides up and down.*) Où se trouvent les Anglais? . . . Pour l'amour de Dieu, où sont-ils?

Moranneville Your turn to wait now, mon général.

Lanrezac (*to his* **Aide**) Qu'est-ce qu'il dit, le Belge?

French Aide Ce sont les Anglais que nous avons attendu longtemps.

Moranneville Belgium has had her share of waiting – when we held out at Liège hoping for the promised help – that never came.

Lanrezac En français, s'il vous plaît, monsieur. L'anglais je ne comprends pas.

Moranneville (*shrugging his shoulders*) Ça m'est égal!

He walks off contemptuously, leaving the other two to pace up and down. Lights up on the car.

Wilson I've actually worked out the number of carriages we'll need for the first stage, sir, and even the quantity of forage for the horses; wouldn't care to see the figures, would you?

upholsterers

You posh worker playing: Find sensibility

Obj	Obst	Act
launch the attack asap organize move forward to impress seduce.	French (stalling, incompetence, idiocy)	to impress, to incite to battle, to excite, to charm

to seduce.

Lowray zac

French No, no. (*They all lurch.*) Not just now, thank you.

Wilson I thought that . . . considering the terrain . . .

French Yes, yes, we all know about your bicycle rides round France, Wilson.

The car pulls up. They all lurch forward and back, then dismount.

Wilson (*moving forward enthusiastically*) Mon cher Lanrezac. (*They clutch hands, almost embrace.*) Splendid! Splendide de vous revoir.

Lanrezac Enchanté, mon général.

Wilson May I present Field-Marshal Sir John French, Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force?

Lanrezac Bienvenu, monsieur.

French How do you do, sir?

Lanrezac Je vous présente le Général de Moranneville, Commandeur des Forces Belges.

French Belgian? (**Wilson** *nods.*) Splendid! Gallant little Belgium, what?

Lanrezac Oui, mais malheureusement, comme d'habitude, vous êtes en retard. Vous avez l'heure?

French What?

French Aide You are 'ere, mon général, and not a moment too soon.

French Dammit all, we came here as quickly as we could. You have damn' bad roads in France.

Lanrezac Intéressant! Roads? Roads, 'e say? Ah oui, c'est la route maintenant! Que des excuses, toujours des excuses! Et si c'est la fin! Si la France est perdu, c'est à cause de vous. Oui! Dieu sait óu vous étiez –

French Aide God knows where you have been. If France should be lost . . .

Objective | Obstacle | Action

make him like me — French's dismissal, my shame — am I hurt? or merely irritated? — to

To Embrace / Make Love to — social context — to embrace

To unite / To impress — potential tensions — to exult

I present the . . .

yes, but unfortunately, as usual you are late. Have you the time?

Ah yes, it's the roads now. Always excuses! And if this is the end! If France is lost, it's because of you. Yes! God knows where you have been . . .

* Historically, Wilson mis-translated meetings w/ the French intentionally to get what he wanted.

Lanrezac Continuez, continuez.

French Aide We owe it to you.

French Dammit all! We're under no obligation.

Lanrezac (*to his* **Aide**) Tu as traduit tout ce que j'ai dit?

French Aide Oui, mon général, mot à mot.

Lanrezac (*angrily*) Je suis à bout de patience. J'en ai assez. J'en ai assez.

French Aide Je m'excuse, mon général.

Lanrezac Tais toi!

He repeats himself angrily.

Wilson (*to* **French**) I say sir, don't you think we need a translator?

French Certainly not, Wilson. I can handle this perfectly on my own! (*To* **Lanrezac**.) Mon général, promenade s'il vous plaît.

Lanrezac (*snorts*) Ah! On parle français maintenant.

French Bit of an 'accent' (*French pronunciation.*), I'm afraid.

Lanrezac Pas du tout, pas du tout.

French Eh? (*He sees the* **French Aide** *looking at a map.*) Excusez-moi, s'il vous plaît. (*He beckons the* **Aide** *to give him the map.*) Merci. Thank you! (*To* **Lanrezac**.) Mon général, les Allemands . . .

Lanrezac Oui, les Allemands. Je vous écoute, mon général.

French Of course! Yes! Bien sûr. Les Allemands traversent – (*Aside to* **Wilson**.) What's 'cross the river', Wilson?

Wilson Traverser le fleuve.

French Of course! (*To* **Lanrezac**.) Traversent le fleuve . . . ici . . . ahoy, à Hoy.

Obj Obst Act
same w/ French + Lanrezac / Conflict / French's stubborn pride
to sooth, suggest,
win the French back
French's idiocy
smooth, stroke / give it to Lanrezac
TO SEDUCE
impress w/ my superior French.