

EXPLORING AUTHENTIC EXPRESSION
THROUGH BODY/ BREATH CONNECTION
IN THEATRE@YORK'S
OH WHAT A LOVELY WAR

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Abstract

With this thesis, I have investigated authentic expression through body/breath connection. In playing multiple roles in Joan Littlewood's *Oh What A Lovely War*, I set out to find the heart and honesty of the soldier characters that I embodied. In doing so I had to address my habitual muscle tension that has arisen from emotional and psychological barriers from my past in order to find an ease and flow of my breath throughout my body. This was pursued by using warm-up regimens from master teachers David Smukler and Kristin Linklater, and by integrating my sense of Somatic Experiencing as well as yoga techniques. The analysis was ongoing throughout the rehearsal and performance processes. Moreover, the results were gauged by referring to Carey and Carey's four-tier approach relating to competence. During the latter phase of performances, I was able to find the greatest developments in seeking authentic expression through body/breath connection.

Dedication

To my father who died February 10th, 1994, in a tragic logging accident. You give me strength everyday to stand tall and fight for my dreams.

You never said "I'm leaving"
You never said "goodbye"
You were gone before I knew it,
And only God knew why.

There are no words to tell you
Just what I feel inside
The shock, the hurt, the anger
Might gradually subside.

Dad's Poem – By Poet Unknown

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Introduction

My overall artistic challenge as an actor is to find authentic expression, and to become totally present and vulnerable within my performance work. In the multiple thesis roles I am playing in Theatre@York's *Oh What A Lovely War*, I will address my artistic challenge by exploring techniques that require body/breath connection. I will strive to free my body of habitual muscle tension that has arisen from emotional and psychological barriers from my past, stemming from abandonment and the loss of a loved one. Resultant from these problems, I have formed unhealthy survival tactics that have hindered my work as an artist. These factors have caused an emotional disconnection from my body.

To address these obstacles and to reach my goal of authentic expression, I will incorporate tools from my first year of training in the graduate program and my summer research. These will include working through a four-tier approach as described by Carey and Carey that moves from unconscious incompetence to unconscious competence over the rehearsal process. I will also assimilate various warm-up regimens from master voice teachers David Smukler and Kristin Linklater, as well as techniques garnered from yoga and meditation practices to attain my objective of body/breath connection. I will integrate a portion of my sense of somatic experiencing (a scientific approach to the healing of trauma), introduced in semester four of the MFA movement class by Professor Erika Batdorf and written about in author Peter A. Levine's book *Waking the Tiger*.

I will look at the production history of the play by exploring Nadine Holdsworth's biography on theatre practitioner Joan Littlewood. Also, I will research Joan Littlewood's life and work through this text to inform me of her path in relation to the Great War. This will

include her upbringing and anti-establishment views leading up to the creation of *Oh What A Lovely War*. I will investigate the various approaches she incorporated in her formation including Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) and the method 'Eurythmics' formed by Emile Jacques Dalcroze.

As Littlewood's play deals with a complex bureaucracy and moves quickly through scenes that contain political content, I will include in my thesis research a detailed account of the causes of the Great War referring to the online source *Four Steps to War June-Aug 1914*. I will be playing various soldiers that fought in the trenches of WW1 and so I will analyse trench living and the problems that arose from such ghastly conditions. I will seek to gain a better understanding of a soldier's perspective in trench warfare by analysing different soldiers from multiple countries who have recounted their grisly experiences. I will research literature of men such as war survivor Harry Patch and German veteran Erich Maria Remarque who wrote about their accounts on the battlefield and how being surrounded by death affected them on a daily basis. By glimpsing at archival footage located on YouTube of men that experienced 'shell shock' I will gain valuable knowledge of the disturbing mental effects many soldiers were left with after surviving WW1. I will also touch on one of the Great War poets, Siegfried Sassoon. He was a wartime hero and artist who was widely respected in trench warfare and had no fear in speaking out against the exploitation of young men and the political errors of WW1. His voice would go on to speak to the multitudes with some of the grittiest war poetry ever written.

By exploring authentic expression through body/breath connection in various performance roles I aim to address and overcome the psychological and physical barriers that have previously obstructed my work. I will analyse my experiences from past semesters and my summer investigation to accomplish this task. Moreover, by assessing the research I have conducted in

preparation for *Oh What A Lovely War*, my goal is to tell an honest story by finding the heart and core of the characters I will be presenting. As this play does not give an arc or journey to the soldiers I will be playing, it is my job to create the back-story of these men through my scholarly research and rehearsal process. In turn, I will attempt to embody these characters and construct them with an inner life by being totally present and vulnerable in my work.

Artistic Challenge Research

During my first two semesters at York University, I chose to immerse myself back into a studio setting in order to re-discover my capabilities as a theatre artist. I realized that my abilities in connecting my breath with my body were flawed. There were blockages and resistance related to muscle tension interlaced with emotional and psychological barriers that stopped the flow of my breath from connecting with my body. I noticed that I was relying on old habitual muscle patterns to inhabit my work. I detected quickly that these habits were not serving a positive purpose in my craft. As my studio practice intensified I realized my body and my breath appeared to be separate entities.

The resistance from my body and mind towards my breath connection was so extreme it caused my body to revolt in the form of various tension areas and odd body behaviours. Among other things, emotions of sadness, fear and anger would creep in unexpectedly, causing my knees to lock, my sacrum to seize, my trapezius muscles to grip, and my jaw to tighten. Moreover, when a body/breath connection became imminent, my mind would sabotage my connection by calling on voices that were counter-productive and creating a hindrance to my work. These negative inflections told me to run, to fight or just give in to defeat. This is reflected in the description of voice teacher Kristin Linklater, “The natural voice is most perceptibly blocked and distorted by physical tension; it suffers equally from emotional blocks, intellectual blocks, aural blocks and psychological blocks” (8).

As the last semester of my first year in the graduate program came to a close, I remained curious as to how to overcome these impediments. I thus chose to explore authentic expression through body/breath connection as my artistic challenge as an actor. I embarked on a journey of

self-analysis through practical and scholarly research over the summer to intellectually understand why my mind and body were presenting resistance to my breath. I also placed myself in a yoga and meditation regimen in an attempt to fuse my mind and body into a place where I could stay present and vulnerable within my work.

Professor Brene Brown's book *Daring Greatly* changed my entire intellectual approach to my endeavours. It allowed me to understand how my past experiences, starting from the trauma of my childhood, have shaped the way I continue to live and breathe. The severe emotional and psychological damage experienced from my mother continuously abandoning my brothers and me throughout my childhood, combined with the tragic death of my father in a logging accident, has had adverse effects on my life. Although I am aware that my work in acting is not psychoanalysis or therapy, I do believe that without having the knowledge of my emotional past it would be more difficult to attain my goals as an artist. In other words, I affirm that without an understanding of my emotional past there can be no depth or dynamic to the characters I portray. This is because my body, mind and breath are essential tools I must draw upon to achieve my objectives. Jane Boston and Rena Cook proclaim that, "Freeing the breath is therefore of fundamental importance in the process of freeing the whole of the person from their traumatic experiences: physically, psychologically and emotionally" (77).

Brown states that, "Vulnerability is the core, the heart, the center, of meaningful human experiences" (12). She also deems that, "Our willingness to own and engage with our vulnerability determines the depth of our courage and the clarity of our purpose; the level to which we protect ourselves is a measure of our fear and disconnection" (Brown 2). The realization for me was that I strive to be vulnerable and present in my work and everyday life. However, due to my past traumatic experiences in the form of abandonment and loss, I struggle

to forgive myself and feel worthy of love and connection. I believe this has created a detachment between my body and breath experiences.

This discovery set off a chain of events in my research on how to deal with trauma and re-establish a body/breath connection. Among this research, a book entitled *You Can Heal Your Heart* by Louise Hay and David Kessler profoundly changed my approach to my work. Simply, it offered me an opportunity to engage in positive affirmations and to explore the possibility that I am worthy of connection. I recognized in my approach to life and work that unfavourable assertions had been my driving force. As Hay and Kessler describe, “. . . negative aspirations and negative thoughts to try and process what has happened . . . will come out with blame, guilt, and a belief that things have gone wrong” (70). I understood I never allowed myself to heal from my past and transform into a more positive way of thinking. From a young age, rather than allowing myself to feel gratitude and joy, I instead prepared for loss. My experience reflects what Brown describes as a form of disconnection, or rather a protective barrier (112). By engaging daily in positive affirmations I began looking at my past from a new perspective. This gave me the opportunity to explore my body/breath connection through a different channel.

The next phase of my journey involved fusing together these discoveries with a practical approach to my craft. I focused on becoming acutely aware of my body/breath connection as a crucial component to my work. I wanted to explore the realm of releasing the habitual muscle patterns I have imprinted by use of the breath. As Boston and Cook describe, “Awareness of and connection to the breath, the release of excessive muscle action, which inhibits the breath and restricts the voice, is the essence of the craft” (239). In light of this, I sought out a physical activity that would allow my breath and previous emotional and psychological imprinting to

conjoin in a positive manner. This came in the form of yoga. My journey also included a continuation and variation of master voice teacher David Smukler's voice work-out regimen.

I also found another strategy for my exploration. In the article, “(Re) considering the Role of Breath in Training Actors' Voices: Insights from Dahnjeon Breathing and the Phenomena of Breath”, Tara McAllister-Viel quotes researchers Carey and Carey:

. . . the learning cycle begins when we move from unconscious incompetence (habitually using muscles in a way that is inefficient without realizing it), to conscious incompetence (gaining an awareness of the inefficient pattern). From there we can work our way to conscious competence (introducing a new use of muscles through exercise and focused attention), and finally to unconscious competence (using the muscles in a more efficient way without having to think about it) (168).

Yoga proved to be an immense challenge for me. Previously, my physical training from a sports perspective focused on muscular effort and tension. I played competitive rugby for fifteen years that, upon reflection, formed habitual patterns in my body that were not beneficial to my growth as an artist. From a physical and psychological perspective, the numbing of pain while playing rugby was pivotal for survival. As Boston and Cook point out,

A physical habit begins with an in-the-moment reaction to a stimulus--often physical or emotional discomfort or pain that we learn to numb or avoid by assuming a certain shape or affecting a certain behaviour. If the pain or discomfort persists and we continue to assume the physical shape or behaviour that helps us to cope on some level, the behaviour becomes both a self-related behaviour, reinforced through 'muscle memory'

and an ongoing, in-the-moment reflection of one's relationship with and reaction to the world (73).

This analogy is interchangeable with the psychological trauma of my past. Changing my previous habits and engaging in a constructive regimen to release muscle tension are crucial to my exploration of authentic expression through body/breath connection. To produce solutions to this type of challenge, Boston and Cook encourage the fundamentals of, “. . . ease and flow, the release of held muscles and joints, the contrast of softness and strength and the power of liquidity” (164).

Taking this theory into consideration, I believed yoga could address my dilemma. I began my journey with a four-tier approach described by Carey and Carey. First, I opened my mind to the possibility of an unconscious incompetence stage and strived to move my work to a conscious incompetence phase. As I went through exercises in each yoga class I concentrated on an internal self-analysis approach. I educated myself in the ways I was using my muscles that were not beneficial to my craft. I would scan my internal being and, through the use of breath, I attempted to recognize the places of muscle tension in my body. Then I would breathe into these places in order to find an ease of flow and tension release. To begin with, this was a difficult and stressful experience and not overly different to the initial experiences of emotional disconnection I had in movement and voice classes at York. I realized this detachment was not dissimilar to my rugby practice or the years I felt abandoned. I discovered that muscle tension arose from these unfamiliar physical positions I was expected to adopt in my classes. The first feeling I encountered was a sense of deep sadness, an aloneness that quickly turned to panic and fear that I did not belong and that I was not good enough. I felt completely exposed to those around me. This shifted to anger and I felt my muscle tension throughout my body increase to a point where

I was no longer aware of my body. Negative thoughts told me to run and to quit. I lost all association to my body/breath connection.

As I began to realize the negative effects my emotional division was having on my progress in the yoga class I began to self-destruct. I felt abandoned and isolated. My breath became shallow and I felt a fight-or-flight mechanism take hold of my body. Generally, my past instinct was to stand and fight. It took everything within me not to get up, confront the instructor and leave the class. In order to avoid this outcome, I focused on a technique from David Smukler's work-out. I remembered the significance of the bones in the work. Focusing on the bones as a support mechanism to my muscles gave me the freedom to imagine the release of the extreme tension I was experiencing throughout my body. I initiated positive affirmations into my struggle. Then I sat down and began to breathe. I focused my breath into my diaphragm and trusted that when all else failed this was my safety zone. As Linklater attests in her chapter from the book *Breath in Action*, "My starting point is to pay attention to the centre of the diaphragm and, with the lips slightly apart, to tune in to the rhythm of natural, everyday breathing allowing the outgoing breath to escape over the lips in a small loose puff of air 'ff'" (101). The simplicity of breathing into my diaphragm gave me the assurance that I was going to be all right; it grounded me into the present moment. Nothing else needed to matter. It was enough to just be me. I released all my negative thoughts. As the classes continued they became less painful and I became more aware of my inefficient patterns that were not serving me well as an artist. I began to stop blaming myself for the trauma of my past.

As the summer progressed I found moments of conscious competence. As I discussed earlier, Carey and Carey profess this to be the third stage of the work, "introducing a new use of muscles through exercise and focused attention" (168). As in stage four of their approach, I also

had moments of unconscious competence, “using the muscles in a more efficient way without having to think about it” (Carey, Carey 68). However, step three and four of Carey and Carey’s analysis still appear to be my biggest challenges in finding an authentic expression through body/breath connection. I will continue to include the David Smukler work-out from my previous York voice classes in my yoga practice to ground myself in being present and vulnerable in my work.

I embarked on meditative jogging throughout the summer months. The beauty that I found with jogging was that my awareness of my body and breath connection must be integrated to accomplish the practice. Yet, there did not have to be a concentrated effort in this task. I discovered that this form of meditation did not render itself as work for me. Rather it presented itself as a form of stress release. Each running session brought a sense of joy and accomplishment to my life. I felt more freedom focusing on one foot in front of the other instead of centering on my tension areas. The more tired I would become, the more aware of my body/breath connection I became. However, it was not easy to get myself moving with this regimen. My negative voices tried to discourage me from getting started. That being said, once I got on the road, after approximately ten minutes I felt the interlacing of the body and breath within my core. There were less tension areas for me because the looser I became the more distance I felt I could cover. Moreover, the breath automatically had to enter my diaphragm in order to accomplish the task of jogging, which allowed me to remain in the present moment. I found myself less likely to hang onto gloomy thoughts because my body needed energy to finish my run. Upon the completion of each session I felt rejuvenated and full of positive energy. This, for me, was the saving grace of my summer research and I continued to use this practice to celebrate my accomplishments.

Therapist, author and educator Peter A. Levine describes in his book *Waking the Tiger* that, “The past doesn’t matter when we learn to be present; every moment becomes new and creative. We have only to heal our present symptoms and proceed. A healing moment ripples forward and back, out and about” (39). I seek to live by those words as I move forward with my craft and personal growth as an artist. This thesis year gives me the opportunity to heal and explore my inner being through an art form that has given me the strength to continue to exist in what I previously felt to be an unforgiving world.

The challenge I face as an actor is to find authentic expression through body/breath connection. Through body awareness and using specific tools I have attained over my summer research and continue to realize in my MFA classes, I hope to face my emotional and psychological barriers that have hindered my particular advancements as an artist. I will seek to release any unnecessary muscle tension I have developed due to unhealthy survival techniques. This I deem paramount in order to accomplish my acting goals of becoming totally present and vulnerable in my performance work. That being said, I will incorporate my discoveries in the exploration of finding the human truth within the many characters I will be embodying in Theatre@York’s *Oh What A Lovely War*.

Character and Play Research

Joan Littlewood

Joan Littlewood was born in London, England on October 6, 1914 to a poor family. Although young, being exposed to poverty and the general unrest of the middle class suffering during the 1920s and 1930s gave Littlewood an understanding of how bleak survival was in Britain during this time. Biographer Nadine Holdsworth explains, “. . . class divisions widened as many working-class communities suffered a period of extreme physical, social and economic deprivation as unemployment rose rapidly when coal mining textile and steel industries declined . . .” (4). Growing up in a working-class family Littlewood was able to integrate this sense of life into her career as a theatre practitioner. She was brought up by her mother and grandparents. Her grandmother worked in the kitchen of a street pub and this proletariat upbringing would prove to have an adverse impact on Littlewood’s life. It can be argued the influence of her grandmother in this environment set the stage for her fiery and combative approach to the polite and heavily male-dominated arts scene of the time. Holdsworth points out, “Littlewood was a maverick associated with anti-establishment views. She had a fiery temperament and bluntly refused to respect authority for its own sake” (1). Moreover, Holdsworth professes that, “As a person, she stood out in relation to the domesticated, subordinate role assigned to women during this period...” (1).

As an actress Littlewood trained at The Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA), but as Holdsworth states, Littlewood, “soon grew frustrated by the type of people she met and the limited learning environment she encountered” (5). She left RADA, and for the rest of her career

Littlewood created radical and ground-breaking theatre with her creative ensemble as a powerful director amidst the backdrop of life in the United Kingdom from 1945-1965 (22).

Littlewood had no qualms about stealing ideas from prolific creators such as Bertolt Brecht, Augusto Boal and Constantin Stanislavsky to name a few, then would integrate these diverse styles into her creative process. She would further define her approach by incorporating the work of Rudolf Laban into her movement-based theatre. As described in the resource pack by Jillian Campana, “Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) is a study of the basic principles of movement structure and purpose. Created by Rudolph Laban (1879-1958), LMA is both a clear and concise language for describing human movement and an analysis of movement” (1). Holdsworth proclaims, “Littlewood was determined to counteract the static ‘talking head’ quality of British acting by creating theatre that placed dynamic movement at its centre and recognised the whole body as the primary resource of the actor” (51). In addition, Littlewood integrated the method ‘Eurhythmics’ pioneered by music educator Emile Jacques Dalcroze. As stated in the Encyclopedia Britannica, “Eurythmics was designed to deepen awareness of musical rhythms and aimed ‘to create by the help of rhythm a rapid and regular current of communication between brain and body. (Dalcroze’s) pupils were taught to indicate note values by movement of the feet and body and time values by movements of the arms”” (Encyclopedia Britannica).

By molding various approaches and styles into her work, Littlewood would put forth new and dynamic theatre that would garner critical attention from British society. Holdsworth affirms, “she was a pioneer of the creative ensemble, devised performance, improvisation and for a theatre that moved beyond polite regurgitation of middle-class life to capture the exuberance, wit and poetry of working-class lives and communities” (1).

Oh What A Lovely War

In 1953 Littlewood's troupe resided in the Theatre Royal in Stratford, East London. Here she would continue to construct cutting-edge theatre to wide appeal. In 1963 her troupe adapted a radio play by Charles Cilton and titled it *Oh What A Lovely War*. Holdsworth claims that this was, "the production that secured Littlewood's reputation as one of the great twentieth century directors..." (77). The show combined many aspects of her theatrical innovations from her past and included these facets in this one piece. The play was a comment on the atrocities and poor elitist management of World War One. As Holdsworth points out, "The long held suspicion that the War was ill-conceived and ill-managed by a brutal and incompetent upper class elite that stayed well away from the danger zones of the front line was by now widespread and Theatre Workshop gave voice to this view" (80). Littlewood exposed the political truth of the time as well as telling a story of what these innocent young men were forced to endure in the trenches from 1914-1918. Holdsworth corroborates that *Oh What A Lovely War*, "attempts to uncover the everyday 'truth' of the First World War, the first truly modern, industrialised and mechanical war that caused unimaginable scales of death and trauma as it was played out across land, sea and air" (79).

Oh What A Lovely War was first performed at Theatre Royal on March 19, 1963 and its run lasted four weeks to rave audience reviews. Holdsworth quotes Henry T. Murdoch from the *Philadelphia Enquirer*:

(The show) . . . is a potent one. It hits hard, sometimes unmercifully hard. It shouts and screams and hammers and it has no intention of letting its audience relax. But we think it will stand out in the memory and perhaps in the conscience of almost any adult audience (111).

Due to the success of this world premiere the play transferred to Wyndham's Theatre in London's West End and ran for a year (108). Holdsworth certifies “. . . the show certainly made an impact on individual audience members, critics and the development of theatre practice in the twentieth century” (110).

Trench Life

Trench living and warfare became a daily routine for soldiers during WW1, but it was something that neither side had expected. Both the Triple Alliance and the Triple Entente anticipated a quick war that would prove their respective campaigns victorious. It was foreseen to be a conflict of great movement. However, it quickly turned into a war of stalemate that would last the better part of four years (First World War.com).

The standoff that ensued between the Triple Alliance and the Triple Entente had never before been seen in wartime history. Trenches were dug by both sides to hold their ground and as a means of protection from enemy fire. Author Laura McCrackin states:

Trenches soon stretched hundreds of miles throughout northern Europe, protected by barbed wire and buried land mines. Laid out in a zig-zag pattern so enemy fire could not sweep along the whole length of the trenches and destroy them, the trenches were only about 2 metres deep, with dirt walls reinforced by sandbags. Between the trenches of the opposing forces was flat land called “no man's land” where soldiers could easily be picked off by enemy machine guns in their attempts to clear out the trenches (McCrackin).

Soldiers lived in these trenches for months at a time, not only dealing with the threat of death from the constant fire power of their enemy, but also from the hazards of disease and infection. As described in the article *Life in The Trenches*:

Rats in their millions infested trenches...Gorging themselves on human remains (grotesquely disfiguring them by eating their eyes and liver)...a single rat could produce up to 900 offspring in a year, spreading infection and contaminating food (First World War.com).

Harry Patch was a World War One survivor who lived to be one hundred and six. He spoke of rats being the size of cats that would chew on anything to survive and would even go for the leather shoelaces in the soldiers' boots. He claimed at night he could feel them scampering over him as he tried to sleep with a blanket protecting his face (BBC – History – World Wars: The Last Tommy Gallery).

Rats were not the only serious problem within the confines of these trenches. Lice presented themselves as being an equal adversary to the soldiers, causing contamination and infection. Men developed serious fevers that began with extreme pain that could take up to three months from which to recover. Lice were not identified as the source of Trench Fever until near the end of the war (First World War.com Life in the Trenches). Patch remembers that after being injured and evacuated from trench life, his clothes had to be burned to get rid of the lice infestation. He certified that, "For each louse, he had his own particular bite, and his own itch and he'd drive you mad" (BBC – History – World Wars: The Last Tommy Gallery). The suffering was extensive for these men and many did not have the luxury of a bath for a month or more at a time, so there was very little relief from these irritating and unhealthy culprits.

To add further, trench foot was a common infection of the feet. Simply put, it was a rotting of the foot due to poor environmental conditions. McCrackin attests:

Soldiers had no latrine or garbage disposal, nowhere to sleep but hunched up against the trench walls and nowhere to go but into enemy territory to escape the filthy confines. When it rained, the trenches were flooded with cold, muddy water...Disease spread easily and many developed trench foot, where the flesh around the toes begins to rot due to prolonged dampness (2).

A horrible odour was also ever present in the trenches due to rotting feet, dried sweat, lack of latrine facilities, cigarettes, and most horrifically dead bodies. McCrackin verifies “Rotting carcasses lay around in the thousands. For example, 200,000 men were killed on the Somme battlefields, many of which lay in shallow graves” (3).

Trench Warfare

Death was a reality for the men in the trenches during the entire campaign. It was estimated that there were more than ten million killed and over twenty million casualties in the four years of war. The battles fought lost men at an alarming rate. To give an idea of the catastrophes that occurred, the New Zealand Herald published an article on the bloodiest battles of World War One. The obscene onslaught that had the most casualties took place during the Hundred Day Offensive, which consisted of numerous allied offences at various locations between July 1 and November 18, 1916. On the first day the British lost close to 20,000 soldiers. In the entire tug-of-war the Germans lost 600,000 men. At the end of the campaign there were 1,855,369 casualties (6).

In a fracas a German infantryman recounts:

The British army had horrible losses and they'd estimated that they lost within the first ten minutes of the Battle of the Somme fourteen thousand dead. Our regiment lost approximately seventy-five percent of its men and after ten days on the front line we were withdrawn...the French was supposed to have lost in one day a hundred thousand casualties" (Life in the Trenches).

First-hand accounts from the survivors of such battles were told with gruesome details. In the appendix of the novel *The Donkeys*, Alan Clark placed an extract of Captain F. Hitchcock's diary on his experience in one of the battles of Ypres. Hitchcock recounts that on August 12, 1915:

Dawn broke at four a.m. and within half an hour I had two casualties. Pte. Bowes was killed by an explosive bullet in the head, and Pte. Duffy was wounded by an enfilade bullet...The ridge in our rear was covered with dead men who had been wiped out in the final assault of the German position: their faces were blackened and swollen from three days' exposure to the August sun, and quite unrecognizable. Some of the bodies were badly dismembered (Clark 198).

Hitchcock also explains in this excerpt that, "Serving in the Ypres salient one was not unaccustomed to seeing men blown to pieces and, therefore, I expected to see bad sights on the battle-field, but I had never anticipated such a dreadful and desolate sight as the (Battle of the) Hooge presented" (Clark 199).

Hand-to-hand combat was another reality in this war. One particular story that caught my attention was of a German infantryman sharing a haunting tale of how he killed a French soldier with his rifle:

One day we got orders to storm a French position . . . I was confronted by a French Corporal. . . For a moment I felt the fear of death . . . I was quicker than he was . . . I ran my bayonet through his chest and he fell, put his hand on the place where I had hit him and then I thrust again. Blood came out of his mouth and he died. I felt physically ill. I nearly vomited. My knees were shaking and I was quite frankly ashamed of myself. My comrades . . . were absolutely undisturbed by what had happened . . . But I had in front of me the dead . . . soldier and how I would have liked him to have raised his hand. I would have shaken his hand and we would have been the best of friends . . . (I) had nothing against him personally, who only wore the uniform of another nation, who spoke another language . . . I woke up at night sometimes drenched in sweat because I saw the eyes of my fallen adversary, of the enemy, and I tried to convince myself . . . what would have happened to me if I wouldn't have thrust my bayonet first into his belly . . . but to see the other's whites in the eyes and then to run with a bayonet against a man it was against my conception and against my inner feeling (Life in the Trenches).

To add further, author Noah Berlatsky's relates an analysis of an occurrence shared by *All Quiet on the Western Front* author Erich Maria Remarque, while fighting at Ypres:

Erich watches a shell hitting another friend. 'I saw him lying in the mud, with his belly torn open. Such a sight is not comprehensible. And also not comprehensible is that it takes so many years before the full terror really gets to you', he will say later (31).

War Poet

Siegfried Sassoon was one of the Great War poets and a wartime hero. He fought on the frontlines with the British 7th division during World War One, garnering the name 'Mad Jack' for his reckless feats as a soldier. As an online biography describes, "Siegfried gained a reputation for fearless bravery in action. He frequently took on dangerous missions with scant regard for his own life: his men felt tremendous confidence in his presence, inspired by his bravery and courage" (2).

Although he signed up willingly as a soldier in 1915 it was believed he gained a vehement distaste for the war after experiencing the trench life and hearing of the senseless death of his younger brother in battle during the Gallipoli campaign. He gained a medal for bringing a wounded soldier back from 'No Man's Land' on another occasion, "Siegfried single-handedly took a heavily defended German trench in the Hindenburg line, killing an estimated 50 Germans with hand grenades. However, his response on taking the German trench was to sit down and read a book of poetry rather than signalling for reinforcements" (2).

As can be seen his loyalty to his peers was extraordinary, but his anger against the generals and politicians for the bloodbath they continued to support led him to write a letter to *The Times*. It articulated his concerns as the online biography briefly retells, "I am making this statement as an act of wilful defiance of military authority, because I believe that the War is being deliberately prolonged by those who have the power to end it" (3). This did not sit well with the British brain trust and Sassoon narrowly missed a court martial. With the help of a friend, fellow poet Robert Graves, he was diagnosed by a panel of doctors as suffering from shell shock.

Consequently, he was shipped to an asylum (Learn Peace, A Peace Pledge Union 1). He returned to the front lines in 1917 only to be wounded in the head by a bullet from one of his own men. As confirmed by the article Learn Peace, “(he) survived to write some of the most savage anti-war poems ever written, the more deadly because unlike stay-at-home poets, he knew, as did other soldier poets of the war, what they were writing about” (2).

Research Application

I have set out to attain authentic expression through body/breath connection in the rehearsal journey and performance aspects of my work in *Oh What A Lovely War*. I will attempt to rid my body of any unnecessary habitual muscle patterns and emotional blockages that I may encounter that have the opportunity of getting in the way of me being authentic in my performance work. My intention is to make internal observations and adjustments to help understand how my body connects to my breath in a positive constructive way. I will embark on this exploration to create a credible character experience within the framework of *Oh What A Lovely War*. This will be assessed throughout the rehearsal process as I develop the multiple soldier characters that I have chosen to focus on as part of my thesis.

The significance of creating honest characters through the use of my body is crucial in delivering Joan Littlewood's message in her original creation of *Oh What A Lovely War*. The essential argument Holdsworth proclaims, “. . . is to attack upper class incompetence, insensitivity and hypocrisy . . . From the start the aim of *Oh What A Lovely War* was to provide a collective voice for the many ordinary soldiers who had lost their lives and been reduced to nameless and faceless statistics” (79-80).

Littlewood grew up in a time of strife in a middle-class family in Britain. She incorporated the aspects of her upbringing into her work and fought for the ordinary person in society. In *Oh What A Lovely War*, Littlewood related to the soldiers dying in the trenches and in ‘No Man's Land’ during WW1. She voiced the futilities of war through her creation in order to disrupt the nature of high society's ignorance.

I grew up in a small working-class logging family during the recession of the 1980s and although it would have been a very different world compared to Littlewood's Britain, it can still be said that the overall sentiments of Littlewood's world have correlations to the proletariat upbringing I experienced. Not unlike Littlewood, I lived with very little growing up and I had to fight to have a voice that said something in the wider view of society. This play offers me the opportunity to share the voices of lower-class soldiers forced into catastrophic events. My great-grandfather fought in and survived the Great War. He was an honourable labouring-class man. I could have been one of those men in the trenches had I been born in another era.

War poet Siegfried Sassoon was a blue-collar worker before the conflict and one of those soldiers that got through WW1. His accomplishments in war, his poetry, his integrity and his morals reflected the courage of the common man thrown into the abyss of the Great War. The loyalty he portrayed to his co-patriots and the bravery he possessed in speaking out against the elitist war crimes were an inspiration to a culture embroiled in conflict. For these reasons Sassoon was also an inspiration to me and fuelled my exploration into the type of soldier research I sought to attain. Using authentic expression through body/breath connection and including analyses of Sassoon, my great-grandfather and other stalwart WW1 soldiers, I intend to honor the working-class man that fought and in many cases died due to the unfortunate realities of the war machine. This I will attempt to accomplish through our production of Joan Littlewood's *Oh What A Lovely War*.

In order to find authentic expression, I must face the abandonment issues of my past and use the experiences I have worked through to help better bring these men who fought in the trenches to life. I must incorporate techniques to keep my breath flowing freely within my body

in a constructive manner. These will include assimilating the studio work I learned from master voice teacher David Smukler that encourages storytelling through the freedom of breath. This is realised through a full body experience coinciding with muscle release and vocalization. I will also incorporate a portion of Somatic Experiencing into my warm-up regimen that was taught by my movement professor Erika Batdorf and developed by Peter Levine.

Somatic Experiencing (SE) is a potent psychobiological method for resolving trauma symptoms and relieving chronic stress. The SE approach releases traumatic shock, which is key to transforming PTSD and the wounds of emotional and early developmental attachment trauma...SE offers a framework to assess where a person is "stuck" in the fight, flight, freeze, or collapse responses and provides clinical tools to resolve these fixated physiological states . . . Trauma may begin as acute stress from a perceived life-threat or as the end product of cumulative stress. Both types of stress can seriously impair a person's ability to function with resilience and ease. Trauma may result from a wide variety of stressors such as accidents, invasive medical procedures, sexual or physical assault, emotional abuse, neglect, war, natural disasters, loss, birth trauma, or the corrosive stressors of ongoing fear and conflict (Somatic Trauma Institute).

Participating in this method within my movement curriculum has allowed me to look at myself and heal some of the trauma from my past. In other words, it has helped me overcome some of my psychological barriers that have hindered my work previously and allowed my breath to have more freedom within my body as it relates to my acting intentions. I intend to pursue Somatic Experiencing further in the rehearsal process of *Oh What A Lovely War* to help guide me in finding authentic expression through body/breath connection.

Moreover, the research I have done on this therapy has also led me to an understanding of the physiological states these WW1 soldiers must have been in after experiencing the horrific nature of trench warfare, i.e. “. . . where a person is ‘stuck’ in the fight, flight, freeze, or collapse responses” (Somatic Trauma Institute). This can be seen in YouTube footage I found of a man that had been hospitalized after WW1 because of the psychological trauma he experienced. In the clip he is being filmed in a confined space, wandering aimlessly around the room. He appears to be unsteady on his feet. He then falls to the floor and seems to convulse on his back before erratically struggling to his feet as if stuck in mud, trying to find his legs, and then stumbles out of frame (Shell Shock Victim WW1, YouTube).

This finding is vital in understanding the effects of trauma on a human being due to war. It shows a soldier that may not have discharged the imprinting of the extreme situations WW1 would have presented, thus keeping him in a state of, “fight, flight, freeze, or collapse responses” (Somatic Trauma Institute). This information is crucial to me in grasping the plight of a WW1 soldier. It also gives me valuable insight into how I may be able to personalize the creation of my characters through Somatic Experiencing using aspects of my own challenges.

As a performer I must embody how these men lived in order to get to the core of their suffering. Thus, I must portray to an audience the depth of this conflict through my character interpretation. On a universal level I must illustrate the adverse effects it had on the human condition. This research gives me the knowledge necessary to understand how these men lived and breathed in their unsavoury living conditions.

In addition, during this show I must integrate singing and dialects into my characters. In fact, I have a solo number that I must sing acapella as a British soldier. Singing and dialects

terrify me as an actor. These tasks have the potential of triggering emotional responses from my past which include panic, fear and a deep sense of sadness. The above coincides with a feeling of not belonging and not being good enough to be here. The danger of these emotions being triggered is that anger takes over. In other words, the fight-or-flight mechanism (as experienced in my early summer yoga practice) takes hold of my core, shutting down my ability to breathe into my diaphragm, which of course is necessary to find my natural voice. The idea of ease and flow will be lost and the unnecessary activation of habitual muscle control could lead me to lose the connection that I so desperately need to stay present and to attain authentic expression through body/breath connection.

To counteract these responses my goal will be to focus on the Linklater breathing techniques taught by David Smukler. I will refer back to my yoga practice where at times near the end of the summer my use of breath was able to neutralize the muscle tension and negative reactions arising from the fear of performing the duties that had been set upon me. During the rehearsal process in *Oh What A Lovely War* I will make an effort to allow the sadness, fear and anger to be here within me without locking my sacrum, jaw and shoulders into old tension habits that will not serve me. If these areas are to lock it must be out of a conscious decision to do so, so that my breath is still giving me the ability and necessary support to be in the moment as a vulnerable and present actor portraying a character. In other words, I would like to use these feelings of pain and insecurity from my past that may arise in my work in a more natural constructive manner to get to the heart of these characters I will be playing.

I will also continue a light jogging regimen before or after my rehearsal day as a stress reliever and positive physical activity to keep me in the present moment. Moreover, this will

allow my breath to flow freely throughout my body without effort. Jogging will also give me the opportunity to celebrate my accomplishments rather than dwell on the negative thoughts that have the potential of arising during a vigorous rehearsal schedule.

The emotional turbulence of my past may provide an authentic connection to these soldiers who experienced the horrors of the Great War. However, without a healthy way through the exploration, I will not be able to sustain my personal emotional needs to serve the portrayal of these characters through the duration of a run. A major goal for me will be to put my research and my training in this program into practice to alleviate the destructive chain reaction from happening within my body. I would like to acknowledge these responses that I have deemed negative in my life and transform them into the positive addressing of my artistic challenge during the rehearsal period and performance week of *Oh What A Lovely War*.

In closing, I have included a war poem by Siegfried Sassoon because it illustrates in a short three stanza composition the nature of a young man's quandary and desperation during WW1. Furthermore, it propels me forward into the honest character research I am seeking in relation to our construction of Joan Littlewood's *Oh What A Lovely War*:

“Suicide in the Trenches”

I knew a simple soldier boy
 Who grinned at life in empty joy,
 Slept soundly through the lonesome dark,
 And whistled early with the lark.

In winter trenches, cowed and glum,
 With crumps and lice and lack of rum,
 He put a bullet through his brain.
 No one spoke of him again.

You smug-faced crowds with kindling eye
Who cheer when soldier lads march by,
Sneak home and pray you'll never know
The hell where youth and laughter go.

(poemhunter.com)

Conclusion

It was been a true test of my will to attain authentic expression through body/breath connection in the rehearsal journey and performance aspects of my work in *Oh What A Lovely War*. The disorganized nature of the process and the challenges that presented themselves that were out of my control were a recipe for disaster. Nonetheless, I stayed honest with my task in finding the human truth within the many characters I embodied in this production, one instance of which will be explained in later paragraphs.

There were also moments of joy that I experienced within this process. In the Christmas truce scene I just allowed myself to be present, to be in the moment and to have fun with my colleagues with the text that was being provided. I focused on what I wanted from my scene partners and trusted that all the hard work that I had invested with my classmates would show up within the ensemble. We had become quite close due to the difficult working conditions we endured in this process and we were adamant that as a fortified unit we would pull the show together. We were essentially a band of brothers and sisters thrown into wartime scenarios, and there were correlations in this play that were close to the journey we had all been on during our time together here at York University. The experience on this production was a strong example of ensemble building in a process of turmoil. I treated the Christmas truce section as a positive affirmation in my work. It allowed me to forgive myself for any mistakes I had made in Act One and it invigorated me to forge on in a positive frame of mind into Act Two.

There were some interesting moments with my colleagues that I will cherish. One such moment was when Neil Silcox cut off a line of mine in the waltz scene during one of our brief interactions. It was an instantaneous reaction we both had, and the feeling of being completely

alert and in the moment could not have been more authentic. This was one such time that I would say I accomplished stage four of the Carey and Carey model, which is “unconscious competence (using the muscles in a more efficient way without having to think about it)” (168).

At one of the most vulnerable phases of development for me within this process, a student (whose identity was never made known) accused me of drinking alcohol out of my flask during a rehearsal. The confusion seemed to have come to fruition because I had a hand prop that was not from the property department. This set off some kind of negative chain reaction within the hierarchal structure that was in place. In all fairness, I had never been given a flask that I had requested, and so to find the authenticity I was looking for in my character development, I took it upon myself to solve my immediate conundrum by providing myself with the item I felt necessary to do the job that was being asked of me.

I was humiliated that this nasty and unwarranted (and not to mention untrue) drinking accusation was made public in the room when the bottle was sniffed. Moreover, a professor I had never laid eyes on in my life demanded my bottle from me. I informed him that in the professional world that I came from I answer to my director and my stage manager in this type of setting and the last time I checked this program followed that mandate. I told him that if he felt otherwise then we could take it up at another date with the Graduate Program Director at his convenience. I then handed the bottle (willingly I might add) to my director. Needless to say the professor (still unknown to me) walked away.

I felt betrayed, humiliated and utterly defeated. I felt unwanted and dejected: with all the hard work that I had put into my characters up to this point, this incident is what took precedence in that room. I just wanted to walk out. This was not about the work in which I had invested so

much of my precious time at York University. It had become some power struggle within the establishment.

I tried to breathe (which did not work), and my worst fear had now presented itself. I was angry, deeply hurt, and the fight-or-flight mechanism that constantly challenges me in stressful situations had kicked in. I was doing everything I could to keep my body from grasping onto the muscle tension that presented emotional barriers and that prevented the flow of my breath from connecting with my body. I felt that what had just occurred was a blatant disrespect to my personal integrity. I felt my knees lock, my sacrum began to seize, my jaw and trapezius muscles tighten, and in that moment I could not stop them. This is the most frustrated I had been at York University. I was doing everything I could to access the tools I had gained in voice professor David Smukler's class to bring me back to a productive workable place, like the bone work and breathing exercises described earlier in this thesis material, but my negative voices had locked into my psyche and my emotional barriers were not coming down.

Ironically, the scene that was about to be rehearsed was the song, "I Don't Want To Be A Soldier": four drunken soldiers singing about the disgusting nature of the upper echelon of society forcing men into unsavoury war conditions that many times resulted in their death. It was a song that lashed out against the establishment that controlled the masses. I decided to allow my emotions to be where they were in that moment and do the scene with the rage-against-the-machine feeling I was experiencing, since all my other avenues were failing me. However, I tracked my internal journey in a very visceral way as I progressed and I allowed stage two of the Carey and Carey theory to be present, which is "conscious incompetence (gaining an awareness of the inefficient pattern)" (168). I directed my anger into my character and intentions, which were in essence to chastise the institution that sent so many young men to their death.

It was a fascinating theatrical experience because in retrospect it gave me the exact tone that was necessary to play this scene. It allowed me to discharge the threat I had just experienced previous to this moment. As stated on the Somatic Trauma Institute website, “Under threat, massive amounts of energy are mobilized in readiness for self-defence via the fight, flight, and freeze responses” (Somatic Training Institute). Moreover, “Central to the work of Somatic Experiencing is the engagement of the individual's "observing self" – that is, the ability to stay present with awareness while tracking bodily sensations, images, behaviours, meanings and emotions” (Treating Psychological Trauma with Somatic Experiencing).

I used the above to attain my acting goals, while discharging the negative trauma to which I had been subjected using Somatic Experience techniques introduced in Professor Erika Batdorf’s movement class. This method allowed me to free myself from being “stuck in the fight, flight, freeze or collapse response” (Somatic Training Institute). That being said, I may have failed to release my habitual muscle tension initially. However, moving through this was central to my healing in the moment and it also added a natural dynamic to my character that provided me with valuable information pertinent to the play. It also gave me important insight into where I needed to progress on the Carey and Carey scale, which is stage three, “conscious competence (introducing a new use of muscles through exercise and focused attention)” (168).

Once this scene was completed I felt a tremendous release and I was able to find a resting place to then use my breath more freely. I was able to sit in the sadness and abandonment I had felt with the flask scenario. I was able to reflect on the situation and feel where the panic and fear had developed. I breathed into the places of tension to find an ease of flow into my diaphragm. Although ideally it can be argued this final resting place that I found should have been where my work actually began, it can be noted this was also an invaluable training moment in my process.

As a student at York University it is well established that we are in a learning environment. This turned out to be a beneficial experience that I encountered within the university framework. By throwing myself into the scene and channelling my frustrations into my immediate endeavours it allowed me to make an important discovery within the play. It also allowed the work to move forward rather than having my negative voices internally dictate the outcome of this experience. I hope to access this revelation and use it as a template in the future when extremely stressful situations present themselves.

The purpose of spending so much time on this occurrence within my conclusion is because it directly relates to my artistic challenge and resulted in a positive outcome for my growth as an artist. I was able to incorporate Somatic Experiencing as well as valuable training methodology to determine what was happening internally and move forward with my tasks within the rehearsal process. It could have resulted in me following my habitual self-destructive cycle when this unfavourable situation presented itself. Instead I managed to put my efforts into my work, quash my negative voices, and analyse the incident in a constructive manner. Furthermore, I was able to make some important discoveries on how to deal with negative scenarios in the rehearsal room and put them in my toolbox for future reference.

The show was extremely physical, and although it took its toll on my body throughout the run, it also gave me the opportunity to get out of my head and not think about the work. I had to trust that the effort I had put into rehearsals would guide me in the performances. It was much like the running regimen on which I had embarked the previous summer, because the breath automatically had to enter my diaphragm in order to accomplish my task. It did not have to be a concentrated effort to get my breath flowing throughout my body.

During my German dialogue with actor Alicia Richardson after the Kaiser section in Act One, I literally had been running around for the past thirty minutes in a very heightened state and then I had to run off, discard my jacket and enter the next scene as a different character with a different style of acting. There was no time for preparation; I had to just be in the moment. Yet the work had already been accomplished by dropping in the breath due to the physical application that preceded this scene.

Although it was a physical production there were also moments to actively listen as a spectator to the events taking place. This allowed me to internally observe my tension areas and release them while still being a part of the show. These active resting times proved to be essential to me in relaxing into the work. In other words, it allowed me precious time to analyse my internal structure stemming from my core in order to become more vulnerable and present as an actor.

The Irish Fusiliers' scene was an example of my breathing work that took place during the show before I was onstage. I had about five minutes to myself, close to the risers and out of sight from the audience. In addition to the vigorous warm-up in which I participated during pre-show, I would take the few minutes I had before the Irish Fusiliers' scene to follow through with a few extra Kristin Linklater breathing exercises. I would combine them with some simple stretches to make sure my breath was active in my sacrum and lower abdomen.

This scene demanded this attention because I was to depict, each evening, the horrors of a young soldier going to his death at the hands of friendly fire. It was one of the few naturalistic scenes in the play and there had to be an honest human portrayal within the scenario that developed the gravity of the situation or the momentum of the following scene would be lost.

This was a challenging exhibition for me as there was not a lot of time between moments to show the journey of thoughts this man encountered as a build-up to his death. I trusted the breathing work I had done and entered the scene. I personalized this man's journey. I took into perspective the past camaraderie I had experienced with my rugby friends over the years. I breathed my father's death and that sense of loss I had felt. I looked at actors Soo Garay and Allison Kelly like they were my brothers. Then I listened to the words that were given to me carefully, trusted my breath, followed my acting intentions and instincts, and I played the scene. I did not judge my work nor did I dwell upon it when the job was done. I followed the process above night after night and let the nature of the situation land. I felt the audience could make their own judgements in relation to the scene and I knew if I thought about it too much it would only torment me. I seek to maintain this attitude more within my work. I feel like a beginner when it comes to following that affirmation.

The early performance aspects of this show proved to be the hardest areas to maintain authentic expression through body/breath connection. Having an audience appear into this process was a shock to my system. It took everything in my power to stay grounded and present off the top of the show. During a new phase as an actor I have a tendency to let my adrenaline propel me forward in a scene rather than relying on the techniques that I have garnered to help my work. At one stage during opening night as the Kaiser I blasted my dialogue directly to fellow actor Yvonne Maendel on her scaffolding. I then realized I had no idea what I had just said and I panicked. My breath was riding high and this resulted in me forgetting what was to happen next. To add insult to injury I did not know what part of the play I was in as there are two similar scenes as the Kaiser. Things had been changed so much right up to opening night that I was lost. I managed to look at my scene partner on the stage, speak a line, and then I breathed

and just listened to what she said to me to try and grasp where I was in the context of the play. I had to trust the work I had done over the past two years would serve me as my breath re-connected with my core.

This was one such example (there were many) of me failing at accomplishing my artistic challenge. That being said it created an alert and present moment for me that carried through Act One as the fear of it happening again made me extra cautious in breathing and listening to those around me. Every time I fail onstage I try to fix that failure and hope that it transcends on the stage and creates an honest and true moment, or rather, that my struggle is palpable and thus the human plight is exposed. This essentially is my goal as an artist: to find an honest, true, living and breathing character through my essence. To get through that struggle or obstacle I use the tools I have learned, but without the psychological and emotional barriers of my past and without my body tension and flaws there could not be a compelling moment because it would not be me struggling to exist out there.

In the future I will continue to work on my personal growth as an individual and assess whether this will feed my goals as an artist. I plan on delving further into Somatic Experiencing as the practicing of this technique has provided positive results thus far in my work. I will pursue exercises and practices that will allow me to release my habitual muscle patterns in a quest to seek stage four of Carey and Carey's approach of finding unconscious competence in my work on a more consistent basis.

In *Oh What A Lovely War* I set out to embrace my struggles and create the human truth within the many characters I portrayed. I failed time and time again and then I picked myself up and failed again. This scares me every day of my life and I question if I can continue as a

performer because the deeper I go within myself to expose my flaws and understand the plight of human existence, the less faith I have with society and the structures that we are forced to embrace. My university experience here is no exception and in fact my work grew exponentially in *Oh What A Lovely War* because of the comparisons I was able to make between the university brain trust and the hypocrisy of the incompetent upper class elite during WW1. This is not a pleasant revelation. That being said, I leaped into *Oh What A Lovely War* with a reckless abandon to find the truth and honesty in these men that I portrayed. All things considered, I feel that to the best of my ability within this journey I was able to honour my artistic challenge of seeking authentic expression through body/breath connection.

The men that fought in WW1 were indeed sheep sent to their slaughter. I would like to close with a quote from Carl Sagan, “Think of the rivers of blood spilled by all those generals and emperors so that in glory and triumph they can become the momentary masters of a fraction of a dot” (Carl Sagan – Pale Blue Dot, YouTube).

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Appendix A: Selected Journal Entries

Thursday, November 18th: Read-Through

This was a very strange experience. I have never been through a read-through like this. Is this a York anomaly? Weird? Talk about an intimidating experience. Having to be exposed to this type of setting so early in the process in front of so many people. I have never done a German accent in my career and I was not comfortable trying it in this type of forum, so I didn't. Everyone else put an accent on and seemed to be attempting a performance. Is this what is supposed to happen? I have worked on and off for years in this profession and I have never seen the likes of this. Very strange indeed. I do not intend to drop the accent in my work until I know what I want from my scene partners in a more rehearsed environment.

Thursday, December 4th

We did a rough stumble-through. I mapped out my entrances and exits and character costume changes etc., as homework prior to the beginning of rehearsal. This show is a BEAST. Technically it appears to be more of a show about working within the ensemble than a show to work on my artistic challenge. Nonetheless, the sheer physicality of the show will get my breath moving. I have problems with this play. It was originally a devised theatre piece so to put a stamp on it in any other way is a daunting task for me. However, I am titling it *Oh What A Lovely Moment* because there are some gold nuggets I am finding in the soldier work with just the little interactions I am having with my colleagues that are character driven and fit my intention of finding honesty in my characters with authentic expression through body/breath connection.

Monday, December 9th

We have not been able to put our finger on how to block the waltz scene nor has there been a clear vision of intention here from our director. I am perplexed. It seems to be sheer over-the-top buffoonery without honesty. I will just roll with the punches on this one I guess and try to keep in mind the absurdity of this writing was to point out the hypocrisy of the upper-class elitists who sent so many young men to their death. There has been no specificity in the direction here. I will have to find this one on my own undoubtedly. However, it is early days. We have been without a stage manager for three days. This is ridiculous. Are we following a professional format here at York? I find this to be a very odd training ground. Is not the stage manager a crucial part in structuring a healthy work environment within the theatre scheme?

Tuesday, January 6th: First Rehearsal Back

Late over the Christmas break we were given a new opening song to learn. It is difficult to learn and I cannot understand the necessity to put it in at this phase of the process. We had spent hours choreographing the song "Row Row Row" and now it has been completely chopped. The choice of the new song "Jerusalem" is not an actual song from the show. The director, Autumn Smith, continues to cut the show and rearrange the written segments. She appears to have also become one of the writers of this piece. Although the opening song is beautiful the rhythm of the song does not fit the march that Autumn is asking of us. To add further, she did not articulate very well the direction she wanted for this new opening number or our intention. The frustration has been mounting because Autumn does not seem to have a cohesive vision of what this piece is besides an ode to WW1. This is a fantastic premise, yet the nature of this play demands many different styles and we continue to be confused with the ultimate intentions that are being asked

of us. Having to continuously change segments over and over and over leaves me with little faith in the direction of this production. Yet, I want to believe in her and hope at some point she finds clarity. This way of working causes fear and from my experience when an ensemble becomes scared the control of a room can be lost. I know when I get scared it becomes a real challenge to ground my breath work through new blocking as the show nears opening. I have very little control over the choices the director is making. I must accept the challenges and find a way to keep my breath moving through my body, even if I never receive a chance to repeat a properly blocked scene. I have also been given a new speech at the end of the play to speak as the Kaiser. In Littlewood's play, the Kaiser is gone in Act One. Yet here I am once again? Autumn seems confused about where she had put many of her news panels. These are important cues for us. What a disorganized mess. Our music director even seems confused and unaware of many of the changes Autumn has made. The song "I Don't Want to be a Soldier" has also been changed from two of us singing to four. The work Neil Silcox and I put into the original has been thrown to the wayside. The first ten pages of Act Two have been axed. Many people have lost crucial thesis characters. I lost yet another character. That doesn't seem to matter. It's a damn good thing my thesis is structured around all of my soldier characters. We have been thrown to the wolves and as a group we must save ourselves from the abyss because ultimately when all is said and done it is our asses on the line out there.

Wednesday, January 7th

Kaiser surrender speech: Stay in it no matter how frustrated and insecure I am feeling about being given a new speech to learn so late in the process. Stay in it and let go of being bad at the accent at this stage. The feeling of not being good enough is present with this speech. How can I incorporate this feeling as the Kaiser to make an authentic and true moment? Forgive

myself. This is new component to my work. Of course it won't be perfect on the first attempt on the floor. Remember the stakes of the situation. See my colleagues. Breathe.

Thursday, January 8th

Kaiser surrender speech: I am terrified and insecure with this speech because of the German accent required. Although I have had time to work on a generalized German accent, I have not had time to focus specifically on this speech. I had to do it in front of everyone as the scene requires. I just went for the accent. I was humiliated. I was speaking fast and not taking my time in the areas that needed patience. About halfway through my speech I caught myself. I was angry that I had not done this earlier. I was also aware that I was angry for being given this speech so late in the game. I then gave myself the permission to feel this way and say "Fuck You!" to my internal judges. I slowed down and allowed these feelings to be present as the Kaiser. I just went for it. It freed me up and allowed me to do what I needed to do. Right or wrong. It is my time to find my character. I have a long way to go.

Friday, January 9th

We started with the Christmas Truce scene. Thank God. This scene has been a ray of light for me in a very murky rehearsal process. However, I always felt that I had the permission within myself to be free with the German soldier role and just trust my breath. That being said, Autumn has just cut a big part of this scene. Surprise surprise. Many of my lines have just vanished. However, I don't mind in this instance. Many of my colleagues have lost much more than me over the course of this journey. And we all agree the cuts here move the story along much more smoothly. I have fun with this scene. I always have. I make this German soldier honest and true with the moment. I allowed myself to be silly and free with the accent in this scene from the

beginning. I connect with this guy because the nature of the scene allows me to create an honest sense of humour within the context of the scene. This makes him real. This is one of the few moments in this play that I can engage in an honest, true and funny moment.

Tuesday, January 14th

We did a full run (stumble-through). This is a very difficult time in my process because it demands so many areas of the work to start to come together as one. The difficulty is not rushing moments that are not working yet and trust that the specificity and patience I am working within connecting my breath to my intention of thought in my acting moments will result in a positive outcome. I focused on marking my journey and seeing what is working and what is not. The energy around me was very scattered and we are all at different levels in the work. The most frustrating aspect of today was we were doing a run-through but we had never had all the acting company and assistant stage managers present together once since this process began. How does that happen? This doesn't feel like professional training. It feels like amateur hour. I was under level during the run and nowhere near a performance-ready actor.

Saturday, January 18th

On Friday we were told we would be starting the technical dress rehearsal at ten a.m. sharp. No one believed Autumn and sure enough we didn't start until well after eleven. I didn't breathe properly in the scene called "The World Will Be Engulfed" with Yvonne, Deanne and me. The blocking was changed and it threw me off. I panicked and somehow lost my focus on my body/breath connection work. This was a good time for this to happen so it can be corrected as the process develops. This is typical for me to lose contact with my training at this point as the stress and pressure mounts in preparation for an audience. I must settle down. My work cannot

rely on sheer adrenaline. Breathe. My breath is my friend. I know my lines and intentions. Breathe and trust the work I have done. There was a photographer present before the run to take pictures of various scenes before the dress rehearsal in the evening. I did not understand why it was necessary for him to spend an hour with us before our dress rehearsal as he was taking pictures throughout that dress run as well. In the professional world the photographer comes earlier in the process to take photos for media purposes but why now? The dress rehearsal was stopped because we ran out of time in the theatre. Hahahhahahaha what a joke. We suffer once again and go into preview without being given a proper run before a preview audience. Yet I bet the photographer took some beautiful photographs for the York archives!!! I don't know why I have expectations. We are in a university setting. Not in a professional environment and professionalism has not been a priority up to this point. Why should I expect it to change now? I feel defeated.

Monday, January 19th: Second Preview

Today was about breath between my moments and the focus was about relaxing into the scenes. I am seeing things much more clearly within the play and what is coming next. But today was really about what I found in the Irish Fusiliers' scene. It is a powerful scene in relation to my thesis. The moments have to be quick, clear and precise with my breath for the scene to progress. The stakes are very high. Death is everywhere around us and it could be our lives lost at any moment. Right from the beginning it is crucial to work from moment to moment. It is about the avoidance of death. Going into No Man's Land with friendly fire all around. Yah or Yuk. Subtle high stakes in the progression into No Man's Land. Relationship between my fellow soldiers. Seeing the bridge is out and the significance of that moment to the Irish whiskey bit. Dropping my breath deep to get to the core of the situation. I must portray an honest terrified soldier going

to his death by finding authenticity through body/breath connection! If this man would have survived he could have very well been that shell shock victim I found on YouTube that had survived the war with grave consequences to his mental health. I had a few minutes before the scene by the risers to tap into some Somatic Experience work and see if I could do some hit-and-run on that stage. I found success on this day and throughout the run with the help of a good pre-show warm-up, the physicality required in this run to drop the breath, and the fact I had a few minutes before the scene to focus on the back of my neck and breath dropping into my lower belly and sacrum with the Somatic Experience aspect in play. My colleagues Allison Kelly and Soo Garay were always super-supportive and we always connected before the scene in different ways to ground ourselves into this scene. Some days it was as simple as eye contact. It has been wonderful to find such trust in the work with these colleagues. It helps the scene immensely when it comes to relationship.

Wednesday, January 21st: Matinee

The work really started to drop more today now that my body has become adjusted to having an audience around me. It usually takes a couple of shows to calibrate this phenomenon. I am listening more; therefore I am finding more places to colour my work. There was not much of a house this afternoon, but I found even more fun in the Christmas truce scene by crawling through the audience when it was appropriate and driving the scene forward in an honest manner. I am noticing some scenes are really dragging for me now and I am looking for ways to counter this discovery I have made. For instance, the “Kibosh on the Kaiser” scene is in my opinion unnecessarily long. This is not my doing. However, what can I do to make it better? I feel like I am left hanging out there. Now that we are in full swing with the performance aspect and finally there has been some solidified blocking in place I began to play more with my Kaiser bird

physicality (considering I have a broken bird on my head!). I discovered some interesting animalistic qualities in my work that I had not experimented with before. Another thing that has given me more freedom in my work at this stage is the structured warm-up I have embarked on with my colleague Alicia before the show. We focused on the Smukler/Linklater work we had been training with for the past five terms to relax the body and drop the breath and get the facial resonators warmed up as they are crucial in this work for articulation and intention of thought. It is a poor sound-insulated theatre and difficult to project clearly. In this warm-up there were times that I had the image of being a young sibling following my older sibling around and repeating what they do. However, this proved very valuable in my work to get to the core of my challenges. I discovered my trapezius was super tense and tight today and I worked on relaxing this area before I stepped out onto the stage. I also need this warm-up to avoid losing my voice.

Friday, January 23rd: Matinee (and my best show)

I flubbed a line in the first scene. I was not listening to my fellow actors on the stage. This frustrated me and my work came to life because with that mess-up I was jolted into being present. I drove the Kaiser's intentions to a much more clear and precise place. I found the stakes of the situation and really played with my Kaiser animal in the context of the show. I found so much new stuff. My bird was on fire. This was the first show that I felt I was at a place to be in front of a paying audience. It made me somewhat sad it took me this long to find it. But in hindsight and considering the cluster-fuck of a rehearsal process I have encountered I am grateful to have found this place at all.

Sunday, January 25th: A day after the close of the show

I do feel a sense of accomplishment and once the show found its legs it became a fun piece to perform. That being said, the run was short and a very small part of the process on a time scale. I have NEVER been involved in such a disorganised rehearsal process. As the rehearsal process was the majority of our time spent in the show, it was a challenge to come to rehearsal and find joy in the work. It did not have to be this way. I am glad it is over. I worked very hard and found some wonderful moments with my colleagues on my journey of finding authentic expression through body/breath connection. It was the small moments I found with my colleagues that mattered the most and got me through this process. Glad to be moving on. I am physically and mentally exhausted.

Appendix B: Script Sample

Irish Fusiliers: An Irish infantry regiment of the British Army. Part of the British Expeditionary Force. Fearless warriors they have termed.

SCRIPT SAMPLE

This scene is about LIFE or DEATH. This must be ever present. Always play the I LOVE YOU TAPE in this scene. No matter what the circumstances are. Love my comrades.

Mid afternoon - wet + muddy
Act Two 61

British General They've just got off the train. Most of them haven't eaten for forty-eight hours -

Haig They are moving against a weakened and demoralized enemy. Capture the German line, without further delay.

Two Irish Soldiers, one of them a Sergeant, enter. They wear English army caps and wear the French uniforms, plus green kilts. The First Soldier carries a Union Jack on a pole. They must be good soldiers. *Claw across stage up 500 + Allie*

Sergeant Right boys, up and at 'em!

First and Second Soldier Up the Irish *Sing Tipperary*

Band *same waltz waltz* *together Tam SR beside 500 Banding more*

All these done in advance heard on the fog. The Irish Hindenburg's placed on the pipes. The fog is carried right down to them. They sing themselves into being, having reached their goal as they sing. *LARK - Symbol*

The happier they're being. *Beat change!*

Sergeant We made it.

First Soldier Where are we, Serg?

Sergeant I reckon we've broken into a hill.

Second Soldier Lovely, is it not? Peaceful *Beat change*

First Soldier Peaceful? An' what's that dry great mound of earth confrontin' us? *Beat change*

Sergeant Isn't it an' earthwork then? An' near enough to protect us.

Ser's built. *Four - Gibson* *Beat change*

First Soldier What was that?

Sergeant Must have been a stray one. All the same, Alert listening keep your heads down, fellows. You see, the trouble is, we've been fightin' too well. We've arrived ahead of ourselves. *High stakes!*

First Soldier How many trenches did we capture, Serg? *Beat change!*

Military, a construction formed chiefly of earth for protection against enemy fire, used in both offensive and defensive operations. The fact I don't know what it is shows I am a newbie to the war effort. Always the General's command previous to this scene states this. However this reinforces the fact.

Allow the beat changes to dictate my rhythm in this scene.

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
 Between the crosses row on row
 That mark our place: and in the sky
 The larks still bravely singing fly
 Scarce heard amid the guns below

Part of a poem written by an Irish Fusilier

The next traps follow after,
 and tread the land we won,
 To them 'tis so much hillside
 Re-erected from the hum
 We only walk with reverence
 This sullen mile of mud
 The shell holes hold our history
 and half of them our blood

62 Oh What a Lovely War

Sergeant About nine, I reckon.
 Second Soldier Ten.
 Sergeant Make it a round dozen an' we'll be mentioned
 in despatches!
 Second Soldier We'll be heroes.
 First Soldier 'Twill be one up for the Irish Fusilier!
 (Don't listen, really listen - search)

Second Soldier What was that, Serg?
 Sergeant What was what?
 Second Soldier Sounded like someone callin'.
 Sergeant Where?
 Second Soldier Beyond the mound.
 First Soldier It'll be Limmy wounded. A lot fell in that
 last attack ... in that shell hole over there. (See the shell hole d/s left)

Second Soldier There it is again.
 They all fix. Stakes build second time we have heard it

Sergeant (repeating what he heard) 'Come back. Come back,
 you bloody fools.'
 Second Soldier He's telling us to go back?

Sergeant (yell) Tanks, mate! Get that flag down!
 First Soldier 'Get back then' all that? Easier said than
 done. (SEE THAT - No more land)

Sergeant Shut up. (He listens) He says we're drawn'
 their fire.
 Sarge's yell: Build the fence THIS IS THE SECOND gun shot and I don't know
 where it is coming
 from!?!?

First Soldier Where did that come from? - Try to escape, Rally! There is nowhere to go.
 DESPERATION - PANIC

Sergeant Bejassa, that was one of ours.
 Second Soldier (shout) Don't shoot, it's us. There's
 She stands - OH MY GOD WE ARE IN TROUBLE
 (Alice)

We see men living with their skulls blown open; we see soldiers run with their two feet cut off, they
 stagger on their splinted stumps into the next shell-hole; a lance corporal crawls a mile
 and a half on his hands dragging his smashed knee after him; another goes to the dressing station
 and over his clasped hands bulge his intestines; we see men without mouths, without jaws, without
 we find one man who has held the artery of his arm in his teeth for two hours in order not
 bleed to death ... on every yard there lies a dead man. All Quiet on the Western Front page 134

Handwritten notes on the left side of the page include: "Sky dark in night + rain", "IMAGE HEAR IT How does it feel?", "Omnibus", "REARZATION", "ARE YOU SERIOUS!!", "Build the fence THIS IS THE SECOND", "Rally! There is nowhere to go. DESPERATION - PANIC", "See the shell hole d/s left", "Image the last attack", "Don't change", "Real into what a shell hole meant to this man (my character)", "Back change", "No more land", "Try to escape", "Rally! There is nowhere to go. DESPERATION - PANIC".

Try to get
make me go by
Convincing
front the
battler
I don't work
MURK
What
I don't work
What me?
From the top I
see the bridge is out
to Irish links
stares at the peak
at the scene for me.
Look at
Serg
Go for it!!
Scramble
Stop - complete
stillness - breathe
See the bridge is out
Breathe - don't move
Let this discovery
land - what does it
mean - breathe
drop it into the
sacrum + lower belly
Don't move until
I understand the
situation. Take
Relax, inhale, exhale
the eyes. I fall backwards
and die at the end of
the stage. Arms out on
my back. Do NOT
ankle. Pate my DEATH
humour guard the situation is

human beings over here!
Heavy gasps. They flinch themselves.
Sergeant Now see what you've done, you bloody idiot!
Seamus!
First Soldier *Serg?* I want you to know I am Seamus Serg!
Sergeant You're quick on your pins. Get back to H.Q!
Front! Tell the artillery to raise their bloody sights a bit
an' -
First Soldier Back through all that!
Sergeant - save their shells for Jerry.
First Soldier On me own?
Sergeant It's hard to give ground now we've got so near
our goal.
First Soldier I see that. You want me to tell 'em we've
won.
Sergeant Do that!
First Soldier The battle's won.
And instantly he makes his way upstage and steps.
First Soldier *(softly)* Hey, Serg! That last one got
the bridge.
Second Soldier That means we're cut off.
Sergeant *(softly)* Give yourself a treat Seamus for it.
(The Sergeant and the Second Soldier walk, 2000.) THAT
be the first both he's had this year. *(He watches, then exhales.)*
Seamus! Bring us back a bottle of whiskey ... Irish.
Second Soldier He's gone under, Serg.
Sergeant *(more firmly)* Yeah, they got him. *(He looks at
the Second Soldier.)* Well, someone's got to go.
Second Soldier Sure.
Before the sniper's bullet
run as hard as I can
the bullet hits me between
the eyes. I fall backwards
and die at the end of
the stage. Arms out on
my back. Do NOT
ankle. Pate my DEATH
humour guard the situation is

