

THE ACTOR/AUDIENCE RELATIONSHIP:  
VIBRATING WITH PURPOSE IN  
*VENUS*

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## Abstract

The subsequent document examines the vibratory connection that can be shared between an actor and an audience and uses the role of Uncle, in Suzan-Lori Parks' *Venus*, as a practical case in which to examine and reflect on this area of research. This document investigates what is meant by a "vibratory connection," and how increased vibration enhances the sensate experience both for the sender and receiver. The paper will analyze methods of reducing vibration-dampening tensions, increasing resonating chambers of the oral and nasal cavities, and enhancing the connection between an actor and a live audience. The ultimate goal is to develop a practice independent of a rehearsal process that increases the vibrational capacity of an actor.

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## **Introduction**

The centre of my research into the actor/audience relationship has largely been the practice and science of vocal vibrational work. To compliment this I looked at performers who address audience interaction. It was also critical for me, at this point in my development as an artist overall and in the context of working on *Venus*, to cover some teachers and writers who have inspired me regarding theatre, ethics, and morality.

My vibratory connection work started with the Linklater Voice Progression that I have studied with Dennis Krausnick and others at Shakespeare & Company in Lenox, MA, and continued studying at York University and Canada's National Voice Intensive with David Smukler. This work has given me the practical physical tools to reduce tension in various parts of my body in the hope of using them as vibrating resonators to help encourage a sympathetic vibratory conversation between myself and the audience. Working with Judith Koltai and Brad Gibson in Vancouver at Canada's National Voice Intensive also helped give me information physically about how to facilitate this process through anatomical imagery and muscular alignment. In that same vein I have kept a practice with two massage therapists that have helped me work on patterns of muscular tension that have held back my vibrations in the past.

Dealing with the obstacles keeping me from vibrating to my full potential, I found reflection on my physical history to be rewarding. Colic is something that I've always known was associated with my infancy and youth, but I didn't know to what extent that influence had on the body that I walk around with today. I have dealt with a great deal of discomfort in my abdomen and pelvis over the years and it was easier for me to understand the correlation between my cur-

rent physical discomfort and the colic of my youth once I researched the issues on a medical level.

Helping put my studio work in context I have researched the writings of Jean Abitbol and Herbert Kroemer which have helped to lend scientific credit to my cause. This helped with my understanding of vibrations and showed me that the sharing of vibrations between people is not merely a metaphorical ideal but a physical reality of daily life.

I then turned my research to the other side of the equation: the audience. I studied performers including Penn Jillette and Steve Martin for their philosophies and advice. The writings of Sociologist Richard Sennet helped frame the evolution of an audience's behaviour, through the 18th and 19th centuries, shedding light on where some of today's habitual audience behaviours originate.

It was important for me, moving forward, to revisit why this relationship with the audience was so important to me. Making sure that I was not wasting an opportunity in front of an audience vainly, I looked at an actor's role in society. Former Shakespeare & Company Artistic Director, Tony Simotes, shared with me his revelation of the Greek etymological connection between the term "actor" and "maker of ethics." I wanted to make sure that I was taking a socially conscious approach to the issues *Venus* raised regarding racial relations. This led me to start asking questions of myself about how I wanted to approach my thesis role of Uncle.

In researching the play *Venus* by Suzan-Lori Parks, I briefly looked at the play's production history and the time period that the director has chosen to set the piece. Another goal of my research was to address the challenge of closing the distance between myself and the audience non-vibrationally, months before I would be in the same room with them, through the direction

my research would take. My research for *Venus* would be mainly focused on the changing landscape that is racial relations, especially those between the black and white communities in North America. Using the recent unrest in Missouri and New York as a back drop I looked at jazz legend, Miles Davis; Actor/playwright/essayist, Wallace Shawn; Harlem entrepreneur Dapper Dan; and civil rights leader Rev. Jesse Jackson to gain a more diverse perspective on race, privilege, and what can be done to help reverse unhealthy trends.

By continuing to incorporate a healthy studio practice into my days and combining a tension free, vibrating body with intelligent informed choices, I hope to be able to move the audience, be moved by the audience, and create what I judge to be a healthy, vibrant, politically forward performance: to vibrate with purpose.

## **The Actor/Audience Relationship**

### **A Vibrating Connection:**

There has been hyperbolic language created to help differentiate between acting and better acting. I have heard and used words such as “presence,” “grounded,” “honest,” “real,” and “authentic” in the past to try and label a body sensation that I have experienced while performing, observing a performance, or in my everyday civilian life. All those terms are too abstract for me and don’t begin to represent what is actually physically happening for me in those moments. Embedded in our language are words such as “touched,” “moved,” and “agitated,” to describe the experience of being affected by someone’s words, actions, or physical presence. My aim is to examine this sensate experience, show an understanding of the physiology behind it, how I can help encourage this experience between myself and the audience, what my obstacles are from

both within myself and from others, and why I feel this is an important aspect in the relationship between the actor and the audience.

I have approached this problem from three different areas: text and media research, applied studio work, and personal reflection. My research draws from medical textbooks and journals, studies on the human voice, books on sociology, as well as writings of and about professional actors, performers, and entertainers whose work, though perhaps not directly related with the same terminology, is in the same direction as my efforts. My studio work was split between time in Vancouver being guided by Master Teachers of Canada's National Voice Intensive and the continuation of that work on the York University campus in a self-guided capacity. I have found reflections of my personal and familial history the most difficult to document but see them as no less crucial. These reflections not only provide a personal framing for my relationship to the issue but also illuminate the physical obstacles I face in mastering a theoretical and practical understanding of my subject.

My understanding of vibration and resonance up until this point has been due to studying the Linklater Voice Progression. The majority of my exposure to this work was during time-compressed workshops where the emphasis was always placed on pelvic imagery, maximizing diaphragmatic breath (both in ease and capacity,) and clear vocal articulation. Time spent with the post laryngeal vocal tract as a way of creating vocal resonance was never a priority. I had always heard the term vibration as literally applying to the movement of the vocal folds, when sound gets added to breath, but only metaphorically applying to anything else because five years after the concept was first introduced to me I could feel no literal vibrations. I either couldn't produce vibrations, couldn't perceive vibrations, or both. With more time to devote to the Lin-

klater work this past year, my remedial body finally decided to cooperate and metaphorical vibrations were joined by literal ones. My chest, my teeth, my face, and later my skull, shook. I could breathe, engage my vocal folds, and have my throat, face, and entire head vibrate with resonance, helping to amplify my voice as it flew out of my mouth. But this new-found victory came with some unwanted side effects: I couldn't choose when I vibrated. Yes, I would vibrate when I engaged my vocal folds, internally, but I would also vibrate when exposed to external sounds around me. I would vibrate walking past a construction site, on a bus, on the subway, and especially when on a plane. While exercising patience, and being very kind to myself regarding a roller-coaster of emotions that came with the vibrating, there came a great pay-off: I began to vibrate while simply listening to other people. I had been told that this sensation was possible but, previously, only understood it on a theoretical level. Now, with a new sensate understanding to relate this concept, I had to know more.

### **The Science of Vibration:**

To give a more tangible example of how these vibrations are separate from what vocal explorer, Jean Abitbol calls the "classical air-borne auditory system," Abitbol uses this case: "If you press your forehead to a vibrating metal bar you can hear the vibration... It is the bone of your skull that conducts the sound. The transmission is through bone" (110). Yet he still uses the term "hear" because there is an auditory relationship to the vibrations of the skull getting to the inner ear. Another instance he poses is more involved and more to my interest:

The unborn baby perceives two types of sounds: the mother's internal noises, and speech or singing outside the womb. But in order for external noise to be heard, they

have to pass through the abdominal wall, the uterine wall, and the amniotic fluid. This means some of the vibrations will be absorbed along the way as they travel from the outside world to the ear of the unborn child. (Abitbol 44)

In this scenario, my interest extends to the vibrations that are absorbed by the pregnant mother. The external speech or singing will be heard by the mother's ears, but the vibrations being absorbed by her abdomen will never be experienced in that same way. They cannot be heard in the way the vibrations of the metal bar are transmitted through the skull to the inner ear (and might not even be consciously sensed by the mother at all) but they do get absorbed into the woman's body. If the frequency of the sound waves is low enough, studies have found that people can perceive these vibrations in different ways. One study from the UK found that sound waves below 20Hz that are below the threshold of the human ear had people report feeling "an extreme sense of sorrow, coldness, anxiety and even shivers down the spine" (Amos).

Theoretical physicist Herbert Kroemer shares two observations: the first is that "vibration of the body mostly affects the principal input ports, the eyes, and principal output means, hands and mouth" (287). The second is that "exposure to vibration often results in short-lived changes in various physiological parameters such as heart rate... increased muscle tension and initial hyperventilation" (Kroemer 280). Kroemer goes on to list the different resonating frequencies for some individual body parts (such as the head and the eyeballs) that when matched result in physical sensation and, in the case of the eyeballs, blurred vision. The resonating frequencies vary due to the different sizes, shapes, densities, and locations of the body parts. The human voice can include a larger, more varied spectrum of vibrating frequencies if more of the body is involved in the creation of those vibrations. For example, the vibrations of my vocal folds are amplified by

my skull which vibrates the air around me, splaying outward until coming into contact with (and vibrating) another skull that shares the same resonating frequency. I am not only heard but I am felt. The more body parts of my own that I can allow to vibrate in accordance with my voice, the more frequencies I can cover; the more frequencies I can cover, the more people I can hope to move, literally.

### **My Summer Challenge:**

At my April conference with the faculty to discuss my work over my second term of the program, David Smukler, my voice instructor at York University and Canada's National Voice Intensive, issued a challenge to me: find more fluidity in my spine. The areas of my lower back, along my spine, and between my shoulder blades, were still showing signs of immobility. My back has always been one of my physical issues and I have memories of crippling back spasms that would fold me to the floor. One distinct memory I have of myself as a teenager was showering, reaching for the shampoo, only to feel a pain so sudden and sharp that it left me laying on the bottom of the bathtub, curled up, scared to move again for what seemed like an hour. I packed this challenge of finding fluidity in my back with me and headed home to Saskatoon.

Utilizing the studio that is my parents' living room, I took David's advice to both be gentle in my sacral area (the fused vertebrae of the lower spine between the lumbar vertebrae and the tailbone) and exploit the sympathetic nerve relationship the sacrum shares with the base of the skull. This advice translated into repeated, small, subtle rocking of both my skull and my pelvis. Yoga poses that focused on stretching my glutei, hamstring, and oblique-abdominal muscles also resulted in a noticeable increase in flexibility and fluidity. I stayed loose and limber by going for

long walks where I would pay special attention to the movement in my pelvis and hip sockets, mindful of my stride and my feet as they interacted with the ground.

Massage therapy was another method I engaged with during this time and I revisited therapists, Alison Toews and Elise Hammel of Walpole Massage Therapy, who I had started seeing the previous summer. They were both familiar with my body's particular quirks and were encouraging with their observations on the changes it had endured during the winter. Elise, a self-described "mean old lady," "beat up" the larger muscles in my lower body while Alison was much more gentle and precise with my neck and skull, including some TMJ (temporomandibular joint) work inside my mouth previously thought to be too painful because of my ever tight jaw, tongue, and face.

The yoga and massage practice readied my body for arrival at the Voice Intensive in Vancouver. There, I would spend rigorous days filled with voice and movement classes in the mornings while observing master teachers and assisting both faculty and participants when needed. I had attended three of the Intensive's five weeks the year previous, solely as a participant, leaving early to honour a contract commitment. This year I was considered a Teaching Associate and would balance my own work with the overall operation of the Intensive.

Master Teacher Judith Koltai's body work classes re-introduced me to the quadropedic fold-over, a position I could barely entertain a year previous. This position involves taking a wider than habitual stance with the knees turned out slightly, folding over in the hip sockets. The hands are then placed on the ground in front of the feet with the fingers facing inward toward each other. Once in place the goals include keeping a straight back, a relaxed neck, reaching toward the ceiling with the tailbone, and allowing the arms to bend as the torso falls ever closer to

the floor. This year, with my re-trained body, I could actually coax some flexibility out of my back line (hamstrings, gluteus, and muscles leading up between my shoulder blades and through my neck) and registered some success executing the position. Tracking my progress through the first three weeks of the Voice Intensive was immensely rewarding.

Back line tension might present itself physically in the form of “bad posture” but also has a direct relation to the distinct evolution of the human voice. Jean Abitbol explains:

In the monkey, the spine and the occipitus form a 45° angle. In man... the angle formed is 90°. The cranium is as if resting on the spine. This being the case, it becomes easy for the larynx to drop lower down inside the neck and take up its perfect position for articulated speech, at the level of the fifth cervical vertebra. Thus, the development of sympathetic resonance chambers at the level of the head and the neck become possible. (28)

My cranium “resting” on top of my spine makes it seem like no muscular tension is needed at all. Certainly a useful image, even if it is a leap of language. These resonating chambers of the head and neck to which Abitbol refers seem to be exactly what I am seeking.

A lot of my time in Vancouver was spent talking with York University alumni Brad Gibson who had previously taken both the MFA Acting and Voice Teacher Certificate programs in which I am enrolled. It was helpful to have open conversations with someone who has been through both programs and has since transitioned into a professional life in the industry in Vancouver. Also helpful were some very practical images he gave me to put in perspective what my body was going through including pictures of various shapes of pelvis’ and a video featuring a direct line of human muscles connecting the tongue to the toes. Brad and I would also take up

residence at the back of the larger morning group classes and it was in these classes where I felt the most progress vocally in Vancouver. During the large group sessions I was relieved of any Associate Teacher duties and was given the opportunity to exclusively participate. With the larger numbers and taking up space at the back of the room, instead of standing with the rest of the group, I sat down, laid on my back, or took whatever position my body was asking for. This was a luxury I'd never given myself permission to attempt in the past and it was very useful taking weight off of my sacrum, pelvis, legs, and feet.

The reward for all this studio work was a class titled, "How Dare You." The session started with David leading everyone through a warm-up focusing on the flexibility of the side and back ribs. Once those reminders were in place, yoga mats were placed throughout the empty auditorium marking distances between the mid-stage area and where the audience would be sitting. The participants were called up one at a time and shifting their focus from near them on stage to increasingly further away from them to the back wall (and sometimes further to the lobby, the mountains, around the world) they voiced the phrase "How Dare You." Having left the intensive after only three weeks as a participant the previous year, David made sure that I received this week four experience. My back ribs were alive and breathing and my voice, ricocheting off every surface of my face and skull, vibrating my entire head, flew out of my mouth. My bones seemed to shake long after the sound faded out. Maybe they were. I had never heard a sound that big originate from within me. The best part was how effortless it was to create. David smiled with his words: "Sounds like the base of your skull is letting go." The trapezius muscle that starts at my mid back and continues up to the base of my skull, the same area that he had challenged me to let go, was now released. By simply adding the intent of communication with a free flowing

channel leading to a speaker system of a skull waiting to reverberate with sound vibrations, my voice filled the room. I could feel my own vibrations bouncing back to me and shaking my stomach. It was like I just stepped off a turbulent flight over the mountains. The fully realized vibrational experience of my voice lies in this direction.

### **Scars Will Tell My Story:**

While I was addressing the tensions in my body, I thought it important to reflect on my own physical history in hopes of understanding how I got to where I am physically today. I have always been told that I was lactose intolerant as a newborn but recently I looked into what that means and how it would have affected me physically. Being born lactose intolerant is very rare and it is extremely unlikely I would have been born so, judging by the way I was treated and the fact that I lived through it. They called me “colic.” I was one of those babies who would cry “persistently and appear to their parents to have abdominal pain” (Marcovitch). I was eight months old when they finally removed milk from my diet and the pain and the crying stopped. Actress Emma Stone, when speaking of her infancy, states that she would “scream constantly” because of her colic and developed “nodules” on her vocal chords (Stone). I have never had my vocal cords examined to that extent, nor do I fear any damage, but the amount of stress placed on my newborn body trying to digest something I couldn’t (and desperately trying to tell someone about it) was not beneficial for me physically. By the age of three I was having milk again regularly but by the age of six I was dealing with colic like symptoms once again. These symptoms included “habitual constipation, with accumulation of fecal material,” a likely related issue that I didn’t realize I still had memories of until engaging in this work (Marcovitch). While exhibiting

these symptoms it was not unusual for me to go seven to ten days without defecating. When the time did come for me to relieve the backlog, the tissue of my rectum would tear, bleed, and remove all desire for me to repeat the act in the future. Suppositories of solidified vaseline were placed in my rectum in hopes of easing this process. I cannot recall whose job that was. “Defecation requires compression of the abdomen and an increase in abdominal pressure, and that process also demands thoracic fixation for efficiency” (Seikel, King, and Drumright 109). Pushing ten days worth of accumulated feces through a narrow rectum requires great muscular force but not as much constant effort as demanded of the muscles that were holding everything in for a week or more at a time. These same muscles of the abdomen, posterior, sacrum, and pelvic region are the ones that today, almost 30 years later, as I release them, allow my body to vibrate and resonate with growing ease. One specific region that has taken a great deal of attention is my right pelvic bone. There, the right ileosacral joint has given me much discomfort and now I discover that area is where the small intestines meets the large intestines. There is a valve called the ileocecal valve which has the primary job to “prevent material from returning to the small intestine” (“Cecum”). I imagine this valve to be under great duress, requiring much muscular support, in order to stand against the pressure I was putting it under. I document this not for spectacle but simply to show one example of how deeply engrained the habitual tensions are that I am dealing with as part of my actor’s challenge.

At this rate I was making great strides in my journey to have a voice that includes a vibrating body. Unfortunately, even if I resonate and vibrate to my capacity, I’m still only half of this communication equation. What can I learn about the other half, the audience, in order to help better make use of this conversation of theatre?

### **Changing Audience Perspective:**

Actor/comedian/writer Steve Martin entered into show business by touring as a stand-up comic and chronicles the process in his book *Born Standing Up*. His journey from playing empty bars to over-capacity amphitheaters is one of not only developing his own voice and style as a performer but finding, growing, and holding an audience. He became “acutely aware of any audience drift, and if [he] sensed trouble, [he] would swerve around it” (Martin 145). This means he was not only talking to his audience but listening for their response in every situation. Yet he did not write “*hear* trouble,” he wrote “*sensed* trouble,” which implies there were more senses being used than just his hearing. On the topic of gathering audience information with his eyes, Martin writes: “Darkness is essential: If light is thrown on the audience, they don’t laugh; I might as well have told them to sit still and be quiet” (2). But in the history of the actor/audience relationship this hasn’t always been the case.

Richard Sennet is a sociologist who has studied the evolution of the audience’s role in performance. In his book *The Fall of Public Man*, Sennet chronicles the change: “In the 1750’s, when an actor turned to the audience to make a point, a sentence or even a word could bring immediate boos or applause” but in the next century a class division emerged amongst audiences and “restraint of emotion in the theater became a way for middle-class audiences to mark the line between themselves and the working class” (206). Middle-class members of the crowds would “sneer at people who showed their emotions at a play” (Sennet, “Fall” 206). More than sneering, theatre class-politics resulted in “[a] good number of violent incidents” during this time (Butsch 40). Ticket prices were raised in an effort to keep the working class out of Covent Garden in

London in 1809 and riots “lasted for 67 days, as protests continued to disrupt performances until finally prices were restored (Butsch 41). Despite restoring previous ticket prices, the middle class soon won out and in less than one hundred years, theatre audiences became tame and quiet. “A ‘respectable’ audience by the 1850’s was an audience that could control its feelings through silence; the old spontaneity was called ‘primitive’” (Sennet, “Fall” 206). With spontaneous audience reactions a thing of the past “by 1870, applause had acquired a new form. One did not interrupt actors in the middle of a scene but held back until the end to applaud... To cease to express oneself immediately when one was moved by a performer was allied to a new silence in the theater” (Sennet, “Fall” 206). Today, silence seems to still be the default setting for most North-American theatre audiences. The one exception: collective laughter.

There is rarely mistaking when an entire audience finds something humorous as spontaneous laughter (that can morph into collective applause) is added by the audience in the middle of a scene. But this is an obvious reaction, the more subtler responses require a more sensate performer to pick up on them. Laughter is, at its most basic level, a breath sensation. If a sensate conversation is something you seek with an audience, as I do, you must be as willing and as able to be moved by them as you are eager to move them.

Penn Jillette (magician/comedian/skeptic) encourages a sensate experience and warns against turning art into a purely intellectual pursuit. Speaking as a live performer, he states that the purpose of art “is for the visceral and the intellectual to collide” (Penn & Teller). The aforementioned Richard Sennet, from a sociologist’s stand point, agrees and sees a withdrawal of the audience in the theatre spill over to the population outside the theatre.

The rules for passive emotion which people used in the theatre they also used out of it, to try to comprehend the emotional life of a milieu of strangers... Here his silence is serving a larger purpose; here he is learning that his codes for interpreting emotional expression are also codes for isolation from others; here he is learning a fundamental truth of modern culture, that the pursuit of personal awareness and feeling is a defense against the experience of social relations. Observations and "turning things over in your mind" take the place of discourse. (Sennet, "Fall" 212-213)

In another of Sennet's books, *The Corrosion of Character*, he continues on this theme of isolation by quoting Horace: "The character of a man depends on his connections to the world" (10). With these interpersonal connections now in question, Sennet goes on to examine the concept that is now in danger and defines "character" as such: "Character particularly focuses upon the long-term aspect of our emotional experience... it is the ethical value we place on our own desires and on our relations to others" ("Corrosion" 10). This mention of "ethical value" was of particular interest to me and reminded me of words from Master Teacher Tony Simotes that would help me bridge my understanding between performing and ethics.

### **Actor/Audience/Ethics:**

I met Tony Simotes when he was the Artistic Director and Master Teacher at Shakespeare & Company in Lenox, Massachusetts. He is of Greek descent and when taking Greek language classes in the early 1990's stumbled upon one fascinating linguistic connection. Tony was going to be visiting family on the island of Mykonos and wanted to be able to tell them what he had pursued as a career. His instructor gave him the word "Ethopios." "Ethopios' (Ee-tho-pios) With

the proper article I or we it means closely -- ‘I am an actor.’ He then said, ‘but in the ancient Greek it also meant to be a maker of ethics!’” (Simotes). Thankfully, Tony has passed this information on through the theatre community encouraging actors to view their jobs as more than merely entertainment.

It just wasn't about doing theater it was about creating something that had a broader reach and emotional resonance in the community and beyond. Our audience was there expecting more and we were committed to giving them that gift of our art in a way that tied back to ancient reasons for evening being on-stage! To be Makers of Ethics! Create something of value that goes beyond a couple of hours of entertainment and deliver something that our souls strive for and need to reaffirm our humanity. The Ancients knew this and thus the layered meaning in the language. As actors we share our artistic souls up there with the audience and enter in to a relationship that we converse on levels that are unseen at times and are truly mystical. (Simotes)

Helping to explain this “unseen” conversation by way of vibratory connection doesn't make it any less “mystical” for me; if anything, it adds more mystique. That our species could have evolved a way of communication through an upright stance, allowing an optimal laryngeal placement, making resonating chambers of the face and throat available which helps to layer in a level of connection beyond the aural exchange of sounds is mystical indeed.

By applying this new sense of vibrational potential between myself and the audience, I hope to maximize the visceral impact that I can achieve, and increase how valuable of a performer I can be for the audience. I take this sense of purpose with me as I tackle the role of Uncle in Suzan-Lori Parks' *Venus*.

## *Venus*

### **Production History:**

The first production of *Venus*, by Suzan-Lori Parks, rehearsed in New York City before opening at the Yale Repertory Theater in New Haven, CT in March of 1996. The show then moved back to New York City for a run at the Public Theatre in May of the same year. The Director, Richard Foreman, who *New York Times* reviewer Bill Brantley calls a “great avant-guard director,” sets the script in a land of “walls emblazoned with chains of words, a tiny pearl chandelier, strings and wires that vivisect space and an indigenous population of people in fezes and granny sunglasses” (Brantley). Brantley writes about the Parks and Foreman collaboration:

both have talent and originality to spare. But that doesn't necessarily mean that they should be married. Neither of their voices is at its strongest in this strangely flat work... It makes its points about racial and sexual exploitation firmly and early and then treads water in contorted postures for two hours... The story of Saartje Baartman, the inspiration for "Venus," is rich in dramatic potential and social reverberations. But those reverberations are so immediately audible that they don't need to be accented as thickly as they are here. (Brantley)

Another production of *Venus* happened in 2011 at Chicago's Steppenwolf Theatre using a cast of only six actors, half the cast of twelve that the original New York City production employed. Director Jess McLeod sets the script on stage amongst a “creepy vision of a 19th century doctor's laboratory. The room is filled with jars of pickled organs, the results of post-mortem dissections and ‘macerations’ – the process of letting flesh putrefy so that the bones beneath it can

be measured accurately” (Sullivan). The change of scenery doesn’t seem to solve the script’s problems as reviewer Catey Sullivan echoes some of Brantley’s concerns of the production 15 years previous.

Parks’ play obscures the vivid, engaging heart of Baartman’s story. Baartman’s is an amazing, inherently dramatic and historically important tale that needs no heightened theatrics or linguistic acrobatics. Yet Parks weighs it down with plenty of both. In doing so, the playwright detracts from her subject’s humanity.

When Parks sticks with a straight-forward dialogue and simply shows what happened to Baartman, *Venus* is strong stuff... the rhythmic sing-song dialogue [is] an ill fit for the story of Saartjie Baartman. (Sullivan)

This “sing-song” dialogue is something that my director, Jamie Robinson, is looking to keep in tact for our upcoming production. He advises:

As to approaching this text I have a couple things to suggest: 1) Attack her text as it is written, including structure, poetic format, punctuation and style. Do read her notes from *The Elements of Style* that are detailed in the opening pages of the script. She gives loads of clues on how to speak her text there. (Robinson)

These notes include where Parks has notated rests, pauses, and transitions in her script. I don’t see many obstacles in adhering to these directions. More challenging, and more fascinating to me, are the structural choices that she makes with her text. In Parks’ text, she chooses where to force the beginning of a new line in a more poetic way, rather than using prose, (as you can see in Uncle’s speech in scene 8, page 136 of our script, in Appendix C.) I have had some experience dealing with poetic verse on stage. The Linklater Voice approach to speaking in verse advises

that the actor breathes before the start of a new verse line in Shakespeare's text (Coleman). I look forward to experimenting with this approach on a contemporary poetic text. My challenge will be to not sacrifice clarity and connection to a modern audience by adhering to this rarely staged modern poetic structure.

### **Theatre @ York Production, 1810:**

Adding to the poetic structure challenge will be Robinson's concept for the show. He has chosen to set the play when the historical events surrounding Saartjie Baartman were taking place in 1810. This includes adhering to the acting style at the time for the play within *Venus*, 'For the Love of the Venus.' A survey of late 18th century and early 19th century actors done by former Royal Shakespeare Company Artistic Director, Trevor Nunn brings up a description (by critic George Henry Lewis) of Edmund Kean's voice, a popular actor of the time period, as "marvelously musical and had tones of searching pathos" (qtd. in RSC Masterclass). Actor and poet Colley Cibber enforced Kean's "musical" approach claiming that "the voice of the singer is not more strictly tied to time and tune than that of an actor and theatrical elocution" (qtd. in RSC Masterclass). Adhering to this theme of musicality certainly goes against my recent explorations in my own Shakespeare performances, and I look forward to the challenge of incorporating this musicality into my actor work in *Venus*.

Historical accuracy was not a priority for Parks when she wrote *Venus*, admitting "Most of it's fabricated" (qtd. in Garrett). Robinson, however, with regard to 'For the Love of the Venus,' was inspired by a story he shared with me about actor John Kemble and comedian Charles Mathews, who got to meet Saartjie Baartman and her manager, Hendrik Cesars.

Charles Mathews, who wrote up these events later in his diary, observed that Saartjie watched the exchange between Kemble and Cesars attentively. “She was,” he said, “obviously very pleased; and, patting her hands together, and holding them up in evident admiration, uttered the unintelligible words, ‘O ma Babba! O ma Babba!’ gazing at the tragedian with unequivocal delight.” For a well-built woman, she had an unexpected daintiness and lightness in her gestures.

“What does she say, sir?” Kemble asked Cesars. “Does she call me her papa?”

“No, sir,” the manager answered, “she says, you are a very fine man.”

Saartjie’s dignified response to Kemble was a classic expression of ubuntu, the African philosophy of humanity, fellow feeling, social decorum, and kindness. Her words signified respect and thanks, and clapping her hands was a courteous gesture of humility. Saartjie was offering appreciation to Kemble for his admiration and concern, and showing esteem for a man who, in her eyes, was a fatherly, and rather handsome, figure.

“Upon my word,” Kemble retorted, emphatically inhaling a pinch of snuff, “the lady does me an infinite honour!”

The two entertainers left together. “Now Mathews, my good fellow, do you know this is a sight which makes me melancholy. I dare say, now, they ill-use that poor creature! Good God—how very shocking!” Kemble and Mathews sauntered off down Piccadilly in search of afternoon tea, speculating about Saartjie and her circumstances.

However, just like all the rest of the audience who had paid two shillings to gape at the Hottentot Venus that afternoon, they knew almost nothing about her. (qtd. in Robinson)

From this interaction between Kimble and Baartman, Robinson would like to take the direction that the actors who portray Uncle and Mother are owners of the Theatre where *For the Love of [The] Venus* is being performed, sometime in 1810 (Theatres such as Drury Lane, The Haymarket, eg.). The Kemble experience is how I envision the Uncle and Mother coming up with the idea to put on this production which challenges and counteracts the abuse of *The Venus* as a Freak Act.” (Robinson)

With this story of John Kemble and Robinson’s words as a starting point, I plan to incorporate stylistic element of the time period that the actor playing Uncle would have utilized, and also aim to have an ethical motivation for taking to the stage as Uncle in hopes of providing a story that humanizes Ms. Bartman, whom many people saw only as a subhuman freak.

### **Ethics in Performance:**

Adding to *Venus*’ specific performance challenges, I considered how I could remain working on my acting challenge, connecting to the audience, while finding relevant researchable materials. I decided to shift my focus to the potential audience. What was on people’s minds? What are they enduring? What could they benefit from? I wanted to take Tony Simotes’ words and apply them to my craft; I wanted to be a “maker of ethics.”

Where Simotes uses the word “ethics,” actor, playwright, and essayist, Wallace Shawn, uses the closely related word “morality:” “‘Morality’ essentially described how a person would behave if he believed all human beings to be equally real, if he cared equally about all human beings, even though one of them happened, in fact, to be himself” (Shawn 26).

I want to show my audience someone ethical, someone moral, to balance what I judge to be unethical and immoral characters in the play. In 'For The Love of the Venus' the play-within-a-play inside *Venus*, Uncle is saddled with the task of bringing The Young Man "an oddity," "Something wild," "Something called 'THE HOTTENTOT VENUS'" (Parks 58). The Hottentot Venus is a young, black, African woman who has been travelling with a freak show because of her specific body proportions being so foreign to that of the European population that pays to see her. The Young Man's father has only two stipulations: "Make sure she's not too strange" and "make sure shes [sic] clean" (Parks 58).

Uncle accepts the task of finding and bringing back The Venus Hottentot to his nephew, The Young Man. This job is given to Uncle because of his previous exposure to the people of Africa. In Act I, Scene 3 of 'For the Love of The Venus,' The Young Man tells his fiancé, The Bride-To-Be: "Uncle took Dad to Africa. / Showed Dad stuff. Blew Dads [sic] mind" (Parks 35). To me, these statements indicate that Uncle has enjoyed previous excursions to Africa, without The Young Man's Dad, in order to now be able to act as someone else's tour-guide. This exposure to another culture will be a theme that I return to in my research. Many of my sources give that exact advice for how to better achieve in life by behaving, as Shawn puts it, "how a person would behave if he believed all human beings to be equally real" (Shawn 26).

Now I turned my attention to my audience, my world around me. I grasped from the headlines these three news stories, taken from The New York Times, that seemed to dominate the later part of 2014. I feel these particular articles do a good job at presenting the facts of these situations with as little bias as any major media outlet offers. The first from November 25th, 2014:

Michael Brown, an unarmed black teenager, was shot and killed on Aug. 9, by Darren Wilson, a white police officer, in Ferguson, Mo., a suburb of St. Louis. The shooting prompted protests that roiled the area for weeks. On Nov. 24, the St. Louis County prosecutor announced that a grand jury decided not to indict Mr. Wilson. The announcement set off another wave of protests. (Buchanan)

The second pertains to a black man who died after an incident with a white police officer.

July 17, 2014

Staten Island Man Dies After Altercation With Police.

On a sidewalk a few blocks from the Staten Island Ferry terminal, the police try to arrest Eric Garner, 43, for selling loose cigarettes. Mr. Garner refuses, nonviolently, to be arrested. An officer puts him in a chokehold, a move forbidden under police rules. Mr. Garner dies. The encounter – including Mr. Garner repeating “I can’t breathe” as he is held down -- is captured on video by a bystander, who supplies it to The Daily News. (Newman)

Lastly, regarding the previous incident in July.

Dec. 3, 2014

Grand Jury Declines to Charge Officer.

The grand jury votes not to bring criminal charges in the death of Mr. Garner. Jonathan C. Moore, a lawyer for the Garner family, said they hoped that federal prosecutors would continue to examine the case, and he urged people upset by the decision to voice their dismay, but to do so peacefully. (Newman)

Writing and performing in a post Eric Garner and Michael Brown era, I decided to dedicate research to the current racial climate in North America, specifically the relationship between black and white populations.

After the two World Trade Center buildings fell on September 11th, 2001, actor Jack Nicholson had his own take on how to deal with the tragedy. Nicholson said, "My reaction to 9/11 was 'This is just a catastrophe, so I'm just going to do comedy for a while'" (qtd. in Hede-gaard). He went on to act in three consecutive comedic movies: *About Schmidt*, *Anger Management*, *Something's Gotta Give*. Along with his audience, Nicholson saw enough horrific images and hate being spewed across the media that he decided what he could offer best were a few laughs to aid in the healing process. An actor can make character, project, and even career choices in response to and to positively affect the world around them.

I met actor/director/teacher Brian McEleney during an audition in New York City for the Brown University/Trinity Rep MFA Acting Program, of which he is the Program Head. He is also a Resident Associate Director with Trinity Rep in Providence, RI. After my audition there was an information session for myself and other people auditioning for admittance to their program. There, Brian spoke about the program at Brown and his own artistic priorities. Among those priorities was his statement: "Every piece of theatre should be a political act" (McEleney). Theatre can be a part of the political commentary that happens in a community. This is something that I want to explore moving forward in my career and will try and experiment with in my research for and performance of *Venus*.

Between the inspirational words of Tony Simotes linking ethics to acting, Wallace Shawn's writings on morality, the socially responsible comedic styling's of Jack Nicholson, and

the political act of Brian McEleney is where I want to enter rehearsals for *Venus*, using these elements as a starting priorities for my character of Uncle.

### **Can my performance benefit the audience?**

At the beginning of my time studying at York University with both David Smukler and Erika Batdorf (as my voice instructor and one of my movement instructors respectively) there was included in their curriculums an assignment that included naming someone who's work I emulate or respect. Particularly since there was no information on which actors have played Uncle previous to now I thought finding an example of an actor/character combination as the starting model for Uncle a good beginning.

The 2013 movie *12 Years A Slave* shows the injustices a black man can be forced to endure at the hands of white profiteers. It is an extremely politically conscious movie that deals with a black man who has risen above the expectations some may have for a person of his colour. Ethical white characters are hard to find in this movie that preys on the heart strings of racial prejudice. One such character is played by actor Brad Pitt: a white, lower class, Canadian, employee who works alongside black slaves. More to my use, Benedict Cumberbatch portrays a white, upper class, British, plantation and slave owner who wants to act humanely but is bound in by social, business, and political normalities. Cumberbatch is one such actor who appears to prioritize the integration of physical vibratory sensation with a political sensibility, exactly what I am working towards. Before achieving critical and commercial success on stage, television, and in feature films, Cumberbatch trained at the University of Manchester and the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art where he attended voice classes that spanned many pedagogical ap-

proaches including the Linklater tradition as I have. He was also trained in the classical theatre tradition with Shakespeare credits among his first few roles. He played “the queen of the fairies,” Titania, and “the best Rosalind since Vanessa Redgrave” at “the famous boys’ boarding school,” Harrow (Hicklin). He has, as journalist Stuart McGurk writes, been profiled as a “human tuning fork,” and that his sensitivity “both bad and good feed into his work” (McGurk). For an actor there is an obvious benefit to the sensitive precision that comes with being compared to a tuning fork and McGurk points out that it allows Cumberbatch’s light to “shine that much brighter” (McGurk). Conversely there is a cost: “the barbs may sting more sharply” (McGurk). Surely less sensate actors achieve fame and fortune without the risks that come with living “neon bright,” so why prioritize it as a goal? (McGurk). It seems Mr. Cumberbatch shares the same priority of making political statements that I hope to make with my work. One story tells of a persistent paparazzi photographer who Cumberbatch was unable to elude:

Cumberbatch shrouded himself in a hoodie... and held up a sign he had hastily fashioned that said: “Go photograph Egypt and show the world something important.” The move was lampooned by the British newspapers, particularly when, to the delight of hundreds of fans massed on the street in London for another shoot, Cumberbatch did it again, this time with signs printed with provocative questions about democracy, government intrusion, journalism and the battle between liberty and security in the war on terror. “These are very complex questions and very difficult arguments to be very clear about, so to ask the questions is to stimulate the debate,” he explained. (Hicklin)

Using his celebrity, he brought awareness to events in the world that should be getting the critical news coverage that his every step receives. In this celebrity, watchdog age, where this is no off-

camera, Cumberbatch has taken his work being political (in movies such as *The Fifth Estate* and *The Imitation Game* to go along with *12 Years a Slave*) and tried to use his influence as a artist and celebrity to make a positive impact ethically and politically.

More directly relevant to the recent political unrest in New York City and Ferguson that has bled out to many other communities, I am going to cite sources, quoted at length, on both sides of the self-defined line of privilege, from black and white perspectives.

Writing from a self-professed place of privilege, long time New York City resident, Wallace Shawn, looks at making changes amongst his peers from inside the art world. He is not resistant or oblivious to his status in the world that he has enjoyed his whole life: “Some people like to feel superior because once they were made to feel inferior. Others, including myself, were told constantly in their early days that they were superior and now find themselves to be hopelessly addicted” (Shawn 14). He continues to expound on this idea of superiority:

It’s obviously a characteristic of human beings that we like to feel superior to others. But our problem is that we’re not superior. We like the sensation of being served by others and feeling superior to them, but if we’re forced to get to know the people who serve us, we quickly see that they’re in fact just like us. And then we become uncomfortable-- uncomfortable and scared, because if we can see that we’re just the same, well, they might too, and if they did, they might become terribly, terribly angry, because why should they be serving us? (Shawn 14)

Weirdly, it turns out to be possible for a person to feel superior because someone somehow connected to them has been raised up above others... Incidentally, one unmistakable way to know you’re superior to someone is to beat them up. And just as I feel rather dis-

tinguished if a writer from the United States wins the Nobel Prize, I also feel stronger and more important because my country's army happens to dominate the world. (Shawn 15)

This is an important concept for me understand as I try to make sense of the ever-changing world around me, with particular attention to the racial climate which I find myself living in politically as well as domestically. This perceived cultural hierarchy gains even more attention living in a culturally diverse community like Toronto, and especially the York University campus.

Jay Z, Beyonce, and Kanye West at the top of the music industry, Lebron James and Kevin Durant ruling the NBA's roost, and the head of the United States government, Barack Obama, as President, are all examples of black Americans reaching the pinnacle of their chosen profession. Yet some believe this has not had a positive impact on racial relations in the country.

Dapper Dan is a black fashion pioneer that lived and worked in Harlem in the '80s. He sold his clothing "emblazoned with the monograms of European fashion houses at a time" to anyone who was black, had money, and wanted some extra flash in their wardrobe, from professional athletes to gangsters and drug kingpins (Cooper). "Even though his boutique was short-lived, the flashy leather and fur sportswear he crafted for the black 'elite' was way ahead of its time and became a pivotal influence on men's fashion and the aesthetics of hip-hop culture" (Cooper). When asked about the impact the election of Barack Obama had on young black men, he responded: "did it change how black men carry themselves? I don't think so" (qtd. in Cooper).

Dan offers a down side to Shawn's superior-by-association concept by pointing out:

When you're deprived of everything and you see somebody in your community making it and you don't have that staircase to go up, but you see someone else doing it a different way, [those gangsters] become your first heroes... It looks like magic, and it seems instant. The other process seems long and played out... You have to go to school; you have to do this; you have to do that. But when you see guys go out and sell drugs and rob, it's like instant cash and instant gratification. They are overnight sensations. (qtd. in Cooper)

This "distorted concept of masculinity," as Dan calls it, was all part of a trick by "those demagogues who needed us to think that the white man was such a devil exploited us to the point where it stunted our growth" (qtd. in Cooper). When pressed to be more specific about defining the "demagogues," Dan would only explain: "people make money off of you believing certain things about other people" (qtd. in Cooper). To this point Shawn expounds:

If there are people out there who are envious of us and who might even be tempted to break into our homes and take what we have, well then, part of our good fortune is that we can afford to pay guards to protect us. And if those who protect us need to hit people in the face with the butts of their rifles, or if they need perhaps even turn around and shoot, they have our permission, and we only hope they'll do what they do with diligence and skill. (28)

His last sentence rings fresh in my ears in the light of those events in Ferguson, MO and New York City. Shawn published that paragraph in *Manhattan* in 1985, the same time as when Dapper Dan was selling his wares a few dozen blocks north in Harlem.

“I think that a lot of young people need to get out and do different things, see different places. Talk to people from all over the world and not just in your own neighborhood” (qtd. in Lendrum). These are the words of Tinker Hatfield, a white designer most well known for working alongside black basketball superstar, Michael Jordan to design some of the most iconic sneaker silhouettes ever for Nike. He credits following this advice with designs which are “much richer and more interesting” (qtd. in Lendrum). Hatfield has had the luxury to work with athletes and designers spanning many ethnicities, and has taken inspiration from consumers all over the world.

From a sociologists point of view, the aforementioned Richard Sennet writes about the “disturbing sensations which potentially loom in a diverse multi-cultural community” (Sennet, *Flesh* 365). He credits Roland Barthes with coining the phrase “image repertoire” to explain an encounter between strangers and defines it as such: “Scanning a complex or unfamiliar scene, the individual tries to sort it out rapidly in terms of images which fall into simple and general categories, drawing social stereotypes” (qtd. in Sennet, *Flesh* 365). Barnes directly makes a topical leap: “Encountering a black man or an Arab on the street, a white person registers threat and does not look more searchingly” (qtd. in Sennet, *Flesh* 365).

Dapper Dan sees expanding this “image repertoire” as a model for success. “The more people you come into contact with, the more growth you’re capable of” (qtd. in Cooper). Though he’s quick to point out that wasn’t the way he grew up: “I needed to know that when I was younger. I didn’t have anybody to tell me that. All I had were the people who were saying, ‘Don’t let that white man do that. Watch out’”(qtd. in Cooper).

Black jazz legend, Miles Davis, echoes this sentiment of growing up being wary of the white population. His unease comes from a growing up in East St. Louis, a community steeped in racial unrest. Davis explains:

Back in 1917, that those crazy, sick white people killed all those black people in a race riot... the East St. Louis race riot in 1917 was supposed to be about: black workers replacing white workers in the packing houses. So, the white workers got mad and went on a rampage killing all them black people. That same year black men everywhere were fighting in World War I to help the United States save the world for democracy. They sent us to war to fight and die for them over there; killed us like nothing over here. And it's still like that today. Now, ain't that a bitch. Anyway, maybe some of remembering that is in my personality and comes out in the way I look at most white people. Not all, because there are some great white people. But the way they killed all them black people back then— just shot them down like they were out shooting pigs or stray dogs. Shot them in their houses, shot babies and women. Burned down houses with people in them and hung some black men from lampposts. Anyway, black people there who survived used to talk about it. When I was coming up in East St. Louis, black people I knew never forgot what sick white people had done to them back in 1917. (Davis, 14-15)

I include this story not only to enforce the point I have raised with Dapper Dan but also to draw attention to East St. Louis, IL, which is directly across the Mississippi River from St. Louis, MO, which includes in its suburbs, Ferguson, MO.

When Alice Spieri of *VICE News* asked black Civil rights leader Rev. Jesse Jackson about the tension in Ferguson that has “been simmering for a long while before Michael Brown's

shooting,” Jackson responded that the black community doesn’t “have a fair share of the contracts, they’re living under a kind of legal looting — their jobs have been looted” (qtd. in Speri).

He continues:

People have adjusted to the injustice. One thing worse than oppression is to adjust to it... If you have on a shoe that is too small for your foot, for a while you can make adjustments with your toes, but at some point blisters will set in, and pain, and now you see a lot of blisters, lots of pain, in that community. (qtd. in Speri)

Sadly, this is not an injustice that is isolated to Ferguson, MO. Jackson fears that “Ferguson is just a metaphor for urban America.... The infant mortality rate is high, life expectancy is short, unemployment three or four times the national average, kids dropping out of school — they’ve lost their sense of hope and vitality” (qtd. in Speri).

Dapper Dan’s perspective has a little more optimism from where he still lives in Harlem.

First of all, the white guys coming up today are different. The large majority of them are not like their parents. They just have that subliminal prejudice; they don’t even know they’re prejudiced. And some of them have even overcome that! And a lot of the young black guys coming up, they’re not as angry as I was and as distrusting as I was of white people. So it’s a big difference now. (qtd. in Cooper)

He reiterates Hatfield’s sage advice: “If you’re white and you don’t have any black friends, you’re missing out. And vice versa. You’re limiting yourself. You need to be gay, straight, white, black, Spanish, English, everything” (qtd. in Cooper).

So how can I as an actor help facilitate this change? Wallace Shawn shares his own advice:

In the middle of the night I wonder: Can we in the mansion of arts and letters play a part? Could we reduce the destructiveness of the people we know? Could we possibly use the dreams we create to lure our friends in another direction? Because it's valuable to remember that the feeling of superiority is not the only source of human satisfaction. Imperial dreams are not the only dreams. I've known people, for example, who've derived satisfaction from collecting seashells... People can make a life, it seems, out of love-- out of gardening, out of sex, friendship, the company of animals, the search for enlightenment, the enjoyment of beauty. (Shawn 17-18)

As an actor, I will be looking to the above sources as inspiration in expanding the white-male "image repertoire" (Sennet 365). I will attempt to present Uncle as moral and light, to contrast the heavy, negative history of racial relations and the unfortunate events of the past year. I will be asking myself, how, as an actor, can I play Uncle as "how a person would behave if he believed all human beings to be equally real" (Shawn 26).

### **My Vibrational Growth Plan for *Venus***

In order to maximize my visceral impact as Uncle with my audience, I am setting a goal to maximizing my vibrational capacity, tackling my challenges during this thesis process that includes: my time in the rehearsal room with my cast-mates and Director Jamie Robinson, my self-guided work outside of the rehearsal room, and my performances between March 15-21 of Uncle in Suzan-Lori Parks' *Venus*. My research into the racial themes of *Venus* has led me to try and incorporate a more ethical approach to my work that can benefit my audience. I did not choose to produce this play, nor did I choose to play the character that I am playing, yet, in collaboration

with my scene partners and director, I will attempt to incorporate my own moral agenda (outlined in the previous section) into my performance. My primary physical actor's challenge is that of establishing a vibratory connection with my audience. In the summer of 2014 I began to examine this vibratory connection that I could achieve with my audience. In the following section I will reflect on successes that I have had since the summer and have outlined a plan to help continue the progress I have made in this regard.

In November and December of 2014, during rehearsals for the Theatre @ York production of *Oh What A Lovely War*, I started seeing a chiropractor again for the first time in almost twenty years. The inspiration for the treatment came from a voice class where our focus was the flexibility of the back ribs, allowing breath-flow to and from the large portions of the lower back lungs. I went to one of the sports clinics on the York University campus and met with Michelle Verrilli who asked me a series of questions about my body and my physical history. She quickly went to work on my psoas majors, (muscles that connect my lower back to my upper thighs,) and iliacus, (muscles connecting my pelvis to my upper thighs,) by moving my thigh in my hip socket and massaging the joint. She would continue this type of treatment for my next four visits while adding in acupuncture treatment on my gluteus, (medius and maximus,) various muscles of my lower back, and tensor fascia lata and iliotibial band (that combine to run along the outside of the thigh from the pelvis to the knee.) The electric current that would run through the acupuncture needles would cause my muscles to contract without me having to put in the effort to make them contract. This was a foreign and sometimes nauseating sensation, but as I took time to rest after each visit and soak in a hot bath each of those nights, the adjustments from the treatments didn't interrupt my busy school schedule and I could integrate the increased flexibility

in my pelvis, my hip sockets, my lower back, and my back ribs. The one exception to this routine was when I went directly from one of my acupuncture sessions to an audition for our year end “Shakespeare Projects.” I wanted to press on with my treatments and this unfortunate bit of scheduling was the only time I could fit a session in that particular week. I walked from the campus Track Centre after my session with Verrilli and back to one of the rehearsal rooms for a brief warm up before showing a monologue to the four MFA Directors. I did not attempt anything out of my ordinary routine, as for my physical or vocal warm-up, but by the time I was to walk out of the rehearsal room the vibrations that I was putting through my newly worked on body (muscles that had previously been uncooperative and unvibratable) were making me dizzy and nauseous. I gave a very brief explanation of my current state to the directors, found an appropriate spot in the room (where I could deliver my speech while remaining in contact with a stack of boxes that would support my weight if I needed them to) and began. I have never had an experience of my voice that was so effortlessly resonant. While leaving the room I remembered a quote from Leonard Nimoy: “If it scares you, it’s coming from a place that might hit a creative button” (Nimoy). This was a frightening experience for me; but I got through it. And with less effort being used to help my voice reach others in the space, what could that newly freed up energy be used for? This audition was a great experience for me as an actor. It was a great example of the experimentation that, supported by my training program, could give me the opportunity to experience new sensations in a simulated professional environment but with the forgiving understanding that I am working from an unfamiliar place of exploration. This lesson I hope to be able to repeat and take advantage of more chiropractic visits during the rehearsals and performances while creating the character Uncle in *Venus*.

Shortly following my series of chiropractic appointments, I went back to Saskatoon to visit friends and family over my Christmas break. I also booked a couple visits to the massage therapists at Walpole Massage. My last session before heading back to York for my final semester was with Alison Toews on December 29th. During that time she remarked on the progress the muscles in my back had made since she first started treating me in June 2013. Alison encouraged me that my back was “brand new” and my shoulders were at an improbable “down and back” position for someone in a stressful Graduate School program (Toews, Personal communication). I also got another TMJ treatment from her during that time. Of the tension that had left my jaw and face since my last TMJ treatment, Alison remarked: “keep doing whatever you’re doing” (Toews, Personal communication). This was great affirmation of all the self massaging and stretching that I had been doing on my neck (where Alison notes that I do have some scar tissue consistent with someone who has been “in a bad car accident” and gotten “whiplash,”) the base of my skull, my jaw, and my face (Toews, Personal communication). In a brief written report on my progress, Alison states that “[t]he posterior sub-occipitals and TMJ muscles still create ROM [range of motion] restrictions, but to a lesser extent” (Toews, E-mail). I plan on taking Alison’s advice and will keep implementing self massage and light stretches to my face and neck muscles in hope of further increasing the range of motion available to me in those areas. As I have already found there to be a greater sense of vibration available to me when I carry less tension in my neck and face, I feel this is a worth while continued exploration.

Another area to address that I think would help me to achieve my vibrational goals, is that of my nasal cavity or nasopharynx. The nasopharynx is a large series of chambers behind the nose. Comparatively, it is a more consistent shape and volume than the oral cavity (the mouth)

because it has nothing equivalent to a tongue that can rapidly change its shape as the oral cavity does. But as anyone who has caught a cold and had their nasal cavity become congested can tell you (in a stuffed-up voice) the availability of the nasopharynx can affect the qualities of one's speech.

In *Anatomy & Physiology for Speech, Language, and Hearing*, the authors equate these two chambers, the nasal and oral cavities, to two bottles that make sound when you blow across their openings. They note: "The resonant frequency of a cavity is largely governed by its volume and length, Now, if you were to somehow able to blow across two bottles (one low-resonant frequency, one high resonant frequency), the two tones would combine" (Seikel, King, and Drumright 269). Combining the resonant frequencies of both my oral and nasal cavities would produce a more full spectrum of vibrations. The problem lies in the fact that as far back as I can remember I have breathed almost exclusively through my mouth. Mouth breathing, according to J. Anthony Seikel, Douglas W. King, and David G. Drumright, is often caused by a closing down of the opening between the oropharynx, (the very back of what we can visually see of the mouth,) and the nasopharynx due to the swelling or constricting of muscles or tonsils in the area. This swelling or constricting shrinks the passage way to the nasal cavity "prohibiting adequate nasal respiration" resulting in the breath exchange to happen primarily through the mouth (Seikel, King, and Drumright 428).

If mouth breathing is necessary from a young enough age, it can have a major impact on the shape and structure of the face.

During normal nasal respiration, the tongue maintains fairly constant contact with the upper alveolar ridge and hard palate, but with the mouth open constantly for respiration,

the tongue will exert little pressure there. Without that pressure, the dental arch will narrow and the palate will bulge upward to an extreme vault as the facial bones develop. With narrow dental arches, the permanent teeth will not have adequate space, so they become crowded and prone to caries (decay of bone or tooth)... The nasal cavity will become narrow, increasing the probability of later nasal obstruction. (Seikel, King, and Drumright 428)

“Narrow dental arches” certainly speaks to a problem I’ve dealt with. In my youth I had a permanent tooth grow into my mouth inside my upper dental arch because there simply wasn’t room for it in between all my other teeth. I had never considered that this might affect the shape of my nasal passage or the chances of the passage way being blocked.

My strategy to address this problem will focus on three areas: exercising of the soft palate (the muscles that help separate and close off the oral and nasal cavities,) disciplined breathing through my nose, and advice from a dentist or orthodontist about widening my dental arches. The Linklater Voice Progression has introduced me to many soft palate exercises and I will focus on those that contradict the narrow and upward shape of my mouth (as I have that of a typical mouth breathing shaped mouth detailed above) and encourage the width and dexterity of the muscles. I have begun to shift my breathing to an activity that happens primarily through my nose. This shift of closing my mouth to breathe could easily lead to me adding tensions in my jaw and other parts of my face, neck, and shoulders so I will focus on not adding tension (in those or other areas) to accomplish this. I will also experiment with breathing through my nose with my mouth open. My voice teacher, David Smukler, has shown me a series of yogic breathing exercises that I intend to practice daily. The third area involves some potentially expensive,

time consuming, long term investments to address. My dental appointment at the beginning of February should be able to inform me more of how realistic surgical or other outside manipulation of my jaw or gum ridge can be integrated into my work on *Venus*.

I will continue to explore my voice and my body within the Linklater voice progression. I have set aside 6-7pm on Monday nights to look at issues that I might notice and not have time to address during the week because of my rehearsal schedule. Two challenges I have given myself are to work on the width of my soft palate and focus on using my nasopharynx as a resonating chamber.

With this ever growing capacity for vibration, I enter rehearsals for *Venus*. I will continue encouraging vibrational growth through my own studio time outside rehearsals, visits to a chiropractor, and to the dentist. Engaging my audience with this new vibrational capacity, I want to ensure my (and my character's) motivations for taking to the stage are ethical. Combining this new vibrational awareness as a performer with my desire to work ethically as an artist, I hope to incorporate my research on the current racial climate in North America as a guide in developing a role which holds a perspective offering less contentious alternatives for the future.

## **Conclusions**

Setting out to change the construction of my body to allow for a greater vibrational exchange with the audience was a thrilling, agonizing, and an ultimately successful endeavour.

As rehearsals went on, it became obvious that the focus of my work would be recreating a style of acting consistent with that used during 1810 in London. It became clear that the emphasis of my performance would not be on the role of Uncle, but instead the actor playing the

role of Uncle in the play within the play ‘For the Love of the Venus.’ I felt unprepared for this new perspective and emphasis for the role and sought out other resources to help. At my director’s behest I chose an actor of the period to research in more depth and take inspiration from. Stylistically, for my performance I chose Edmund Kean as my inspiration having mentioned him in my previous research. I located two valuable resources: a book chronicling performances of Shakespeare’s Richard III over the centuries that includes an entire chapter devoted to Edmund Kean, and a prompt script documenting Kean’s performance as Richard III in 1822. *Richard’s Himself Again: A Stage History of Richard III* combines commentary on Kean’s performance from both critics and collaborators. The author, Scott Colley, makes specific note of Kean’s “Expressive eyes and pantomimic actions” that I chose to incorporate into my performance physically (Colley 62). Vocally, actor George Vandenhoff gives testimony that Kean would perform “the same forte and piano, the same crescendo and diminuendo, night after night as if he spoke it from a musical score” and included “long pauses... not only between words, but between syllables of the same word” (qtd. in Colley 62). My director did not want any pauses that Suzan-Lori Parks did not include in the text, so I decided to shorten the pauses but keep shifts, (and in these cases shifts of pitch,) between syllables in the words “lively” and “lovely” (Parks 136).

In the surviving script with notes on Kean’s performance by actor James H. Hacket (who later recreated Kean’s performance with help of those notes) there are blocking and postural/gesture notes and cues recorded at specific times during the dialogue. I have included a sample of this script as Appendix D. Having such a recording of the moment-to-moment movements and gesturers in a pre-Stanislavsky Method, psychological realism world, was helpful. I chose to map my performance as Uncle in a similar fashion as Hacket did of Kean.

In regards to my thesis research, The greatest vibrational growth came from my dedication to breathing through my nose. From an outside perspective this may seem like an overly simple task to devote oneself to, however with a lifetime of practicing the alternative, mouth breathing, this new approach sometimes seemed an impossible task. Often it would feel suffocating, not being able to take in enough air due to the constricted airway. Time spent tending to the tensions in my facial muscles helped open up my nasal passage way and the mindful repetition of breathing in and out allowed my soft palate to find a new resting position. This allowed air to flow to and from my nose rather than closing to divert all the air to and from my mouth. The side affect to this has been that when I am speaking (and even breathing through my mouth) my soft palate remains open to both my nasal and oral cavities, mixing the two resonating chambers and allowing access to more vibratable parts of my face.

A daily yoga practice (morning, afternoon, and night) was a surprise addition to my routine. My body seemed to be requesting more physical activity than I was giving it. The yoga allowed me not only to practice breathing though my nose while in a small variety of movements and postures but also allowed me to incorporate working on my back line that I had identified as an issue at The Voice Intensive. The Sun Salutations that I had learned in 2001 allowed me time to stretch my hip flexors, calves, behind my knees, calves, feet, and shoulders all in the flow of a simple set of movements.

The two chiropractic appointments that I scheduled during rehearsals and performances were a good benchmark to gauge the work that I'd done previously. I was able to incorporate and stay confident and productive in the face of often uncomfortable physical sensation that the treatments produced. I judge this to be an improvement over the "Shakespeare Projects" audition

experience that I have previously described on page 35. If I were to schedule similar sessions in the future, I would want a full day between the acupuncture and a performance or demanding rehearsal based on the results of my most recent sessions. This day would include physical rest, sleep, and some light physical activity to encourage fluidity in the areas that were treated. This conclusion came as a result of comparing my physical state before Friday's showing and Saturday's showing. There are many other contributing factors in comparing the two days, however I feel confident in isolating Saturday night's stability in my lower body as a result of the sacral acupuncture I received on Friday afternoon.

My most significant challenge before this showing of *Venus* was the changing venues between rehearsals, performance, and the ultimate showings. Initially our mid-sized rehearsal room was to give way to a much larger proscenium performance space. My scenes as Uncle were all blocked at the extreme downstage edge of the stage and our only audience (in the world of the play) was to be The Baron Docteur (who had bought every seat in the theatre to watch the performance alone) in the middle of the first row of the balcony. It wasn't difficult to imagine this scenario early in rehearsals as the original performance venue for *Venus* mimicked, on a smaller scale, the theatre in which we were placing the world of the play-within-a-play, 'For the Love of the Venus.' When I finally stepped on the stage of the Sandra Faire and Ivan Fecan Theatre (FFT,) the size of the gestures, voice, and resonance were much more suitable in the context of that venue. When it was announced that the production of *Venus* had been cancelled and that we would only be doing two skeletal showings in the very room we had been rehearsing in, my mind started to worry about the sheer size of my performance girdled in a too small venue. There was talk of adapting certain parts of the show to fit this new performance space but to change 'For the

Love of The Venus' too much would be to remove/alter the style and given circumstances we all had worked so hard to highlight. There was talk of moving the blocking further upstage and therefor further away from the audience to allow for the space that would have been between the actors and the audience in the FFT. This talk was quickly dismissed by the director in preference for keeping the action downstage as close to the audience as sight-lines would allow. My resolve was to continue playing the space as if it were the larger FFT and make only minor sight-line adjustments as I saw fit. My vibrational challenge remained unaltered in the access to my oral and nasal cavities and vibrational access to more tension free parts of my body.

Trying to negotiate an ethical position for my performance was a difficult task. With so much time in rehearsal focused on dialect, style, and vocal resonance, the director's inspiration for 'For the Love of The Venus,' as a "production which challenges and counteracts the abuse of The Venus as a Freak Act," (Robinson) was lost. After the production had been cancelled, Jamie reiterated his theme of Venus being: "prejudicial eyes lead to perverted history." There seemed to be less interest in showing alternatives to this issue of prejudice than to simply demonstrating prejudicial behaviour. As the rehearsal process continued and issues surrounding location and scheduling of rehearsals and performances/showings were in varied states of uncertainty, I took it upon myself to heed Jack Nicholas' advice and was "just going to do comedy for a while" (qtd. in Hedegaard). Uncle might not be able to be presented with my agenda of tolerance and equality but he could be presented as a source of levity for both my colleagues and the audience in the face of the arduous task that is negotiating the political climate of the ongoing CUPE 3903 strike and the challenge of saving a living show from being terminated, unseen.

My political and ethical challenges took centre stage outside of the rehearsal room. I attended CUPE meetings, voted on whether to accept a new contract or not, and participated in picket line activities as a negotiating tactic to win what I believe future students deserve. In this vein, I reached out to the undergraduate actors in Venus who may not have the access to information that the graduate class shared. I wrote to them:

“Hey team. So... Things are complicated. And... If anyone wants to chat about stuff or things, I'm willing to try and help. If anyone is on or near campus tonight I could chat in person or send me a message? I don't know if I have all the answers but if you have questions about the strike or crossing picket lines I might be able to shed some light or point you to someone who can. Cheers! Bob.” (Wicks)

This started a dialogue with one actor that is outlined in Appendix A in a journal entry labeled “Mar. 13th.” This conversation did much to help me clarify and articulate my own ethical standards and political stance on the ever-changing daily circumstances. Additionally, I got to help this undergraduate student stay informed and support them on making their own ethical decision in the face of social and political pressures.

In the end, perhaps my most significant conclusion came with the joy I felt when, even in the face of such conditions that crept in and ultimately cancelled our production, my body could stay available to fulfilling my vibrational potential. This joyful conclusion was not met by accident but by hours of disciplined routine and practice everyday.

Dealing with habitual tensions and the body postures that those tensions helped to create and maintain often felt like an endurance test of discomfort, doubt, and refurbishing of self-iden-

tity; yet I persevered. I developed and maintained a process independent of the rehearsal schedule that allowed me to meet the vibrational goals I set for myself.

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## Appendix A - Selected Journal Entries

Feb. 3rd

We were called in today to improvise the scenes in “For the Love of Venus” (that Suzan-Lori Parks didn’t write) in our actor characters that are producing the play within the play in Venus. The tone was mostly farcical in nature with character meetings and major plot points being top priorities. The characters we found (Uncle, Father, Mother, etc) were very big and broad but lacked any real depth or needs, wants, and desires. I’m worried about alienating the audience with such a flippant treatment of potentially delicate social material. It was hard to tell how the Suzan-Lori Parks scenes were to fit into our improvised narrative as we left those out when presenting our inventions and discoveries to Jamie.

Feb. 5th

Got to chat with Jamie about my farcical concerns. Talked about whether the altruistic views of racial harmony that my research and challenge might be a square peg to the round hole that is the needs of this production. But that pushing the boundaries of presenting racially sensitive material requires a massive amount of listening to and negotiating with the audience. I don’t want them to shut me out or write off what’s going on. I will write about Neil Labute later.

Feb. 7th

Rehearsed Sc. 8, the Bride-to-be/Venus reveal. The family dynamic of Young Man, Uncle, etc has been completely put aside for the preferred dynamic of the acting company putting on the play. Also, partially thanks to the style and partially thanks to emphasis on the performance layer, the play, “For the Love of Venus” is now feeling like the comic relief of Venus. It seems to be not a good play that does a poor job of everything. To do the style without commenting on the style doesn’t seem possible as we have people within our “company” who don’t agree and are breaking ground on a new style. It seems to be less about Venus and race and anything real world and more to do with the company dynamics that we have been improvising in.

Feb. 9th

Studio session. Vibrate while I’m shaking and stretching. Resonate into the muscle or joint. Send healing vibration somewhere. Breathing in through my nose. My right eye and cheek bone were vibrating independently of my head and face. My right eye and cheek bone have been sore when I wake up in the morning, I think because I have been breathing through my nose while I sleep. Yes, headaches.

Feb. 13th

My performance is based on style. “Uncle” does not exist. I am playing an actor in a company performing a play. My choices are based on my actor’s relationships to the other actors in our fictional company. Negotiating young, upstart actors. Keeping my status within the company. Making sure I’m best seen. Poses and fancy style. Jamie wants the style but not in its “elongated vowels” form. He wants the pace to fly, which doesn’t happen in the samples that David gave us. Hopefully the moving faster will help it fit in more and stand out less stylistically. The original plan to have more of the characters speaking RP and cockney would have made more sense but with everything else in an American dialect it sets the 1810 style and the dated dialect off as humorous satire at best, useless drivel at worst. The intention of the play “honouring” the Venus is completely lost. We are silly little white people trying to make art about how a black person infiltrating our midst has affected our lives.

Feb. 15th

Had a good chat with Natalie on Friday about what I had previously written. Trying to keep open communication about this play (within) of ours is tricky. Jamie could be keeping a hidden theme/agenda from us like he did in Brothers’ Book and we’d never know. Going be his concentration on the actors and the style I’m getting that the attitude of the white artists at the time is more important. That the story they’re telling about the family is not as important as the “levity” that they have chosen to treat the subject matter with. If it indeed is levity. With the imposed 1810 style lifted I could see this being a very gritty, absurdist piece about the issues surrounding interracial attraction. Say it like this, (period but way faster,) pose like this, I feel like I’m creating distance between myself and my audience with style rather than closing the gap with what I’m saying. Can I be anything but “ignorant white folk?” Am I (the actor playing Uncle) trying to close the racial gap? Or exploit something topical? Am I doing what I can given my restrictions? No black actors? Can we tell stories that aren’t directly our own? Can I write a black character or a woman character? Is the point that I need to play this white stereotype? Is this eye for an eye? Is the only way white people will understand is to see what we’ve done to others? Show the problem rather than solution?

Feb. 22nd

A few days after my back to back dentist appointments and the top right side of my mouth, behind my molars is sore. Maybe from the wide opening of my mouth. Maybe from the shifting bite due to my new fillings. Maybe my last wisdom tooth. Dentist said leave it, doesn’t matter. I might get it taken out anyway. Couldn’t hurt. And if I do it right after Venus closing I’ll have a week to recover. So I’ve been taking it easy vocally. And mouthily. Until my studio time tomorrow night. I have been using these teeth whitening tray things. They require me to hold my teeth closed for 20 minutes a day. That could/is adding stress. Also I went back to sleeping on a harder bed to help my back and shoulders. That always seems to affect my jaw. And it’s been super cold out. And bundling up plus carrying a bag around (or 3 heavy grocery bags yesterday) doesn’t

help. Extra studio work tomorrow. Sleeping with my mouth closed, breathing through my nose is working. Might be clenching teeth. Getting a night guard from the dentist.

Feb. 23rd

A great voice seminar with David today. I had emailed him about my dentist appointment last week and wanted to follow up with my wisdom tooth query. He had me humming into different areas of my face starting right beside my nose and then moving out under my eyes along my cheek bones. I then started under my nose at my gum ridge and moves out towards my ears on either side to where my wisdom tooth is on one side and a sinus is on the other side. Up around my cheek bone it seemed to be a more noticeable vibrating sensation (rougher) on my right side. And the right side of my gum ridge was noticeably held and dense compared to the ease of the left side. David suggests that I get the wisdom tooth removed in order to help balance the vibrations in my mouth and face. My head feels a bit fuzzy after putting so many vibrations through my skull. The right side of my neck feels warm. Maybe making vibrations go to the most resistant side has helped unlock something. I have a consultation on Friday morning for the dentist to look at the area. That on top of my first chiropractic appointment since Christmas on Wednesday morning... Should be fun. Oh Fool, let me not go mad.

Feb. 25th

Acupuncture on my neck today. And some work on my shoulders and neck too. Tough to keep my neck relaxed at the angle I was laying at but less than an hour after I could feel the pain and tension between my shoulder blades dissipating. My ears are warm. I took another ibuprofen and I still have a headache. Lost my appetite and got a bit nauseous before rehearsal. Had to be slow moving to get into it. Discomfort dissipated as rehearsal went on. Drank a Coke for supper which didn't seem to have the abrupt, uncomfortable spike in anxiety that caffeine and sugar had had post sacral acupuncture before Christmas. My nightly epsom salt bath was a relaxing treat to soak my head and neck in. I slept on my back (with a bit of a thicker pillow) for a few hours before waking to a more restless sleep. I revisited an old yoga practice introduced to me in 2001: Sun Salutations. Fold over, flat back, down dog, up dog. Lunges to sink into my pelvis. Feels great on my back and shoulders, back of my knees, feet, and toes.

Mar. 1st

Reading on the bus/subway post yoga on a Sunday afternoon. What I would call a "panic" or "anxiety" attack. Not sure if it was the reading, not often do I do that. But my upper jaw was vibrating. Trembling. At the end of my subway ride I could feel my neck and shoulders sliding down my back. My sinuses felt hollow. Tension in my head. Around my eyes. OR the releasing of tension. Back of throat. Felt like throwing up. Reminded me of my first meeting with Erika last summer. How I felt sick on the subway and sicker once I got off the subway. Shaking. Breath cycle quickens. Heart pounds. "Anxiety attack" I think Joanne called it/them. Walking up the

stairs at the subway station felt like struggling to swim to the surface of the lake. Desperate for breath. Walking above ground calmed me down in a couple of blocks. Waking up after a night of breathing through my nose, the back of my throat behind my soft palate feels huge. Access to my upper jaw vibrations, sinuses... But it kinda makes me feel crazy too. Like voices in my head, my body is so loud sometimes. And I'm sick of wearing a toque. Even that little bit of pressure on my head during times throughout the day is too much sometimes. My toque stops my head from vibrating? My socks stop my feet? I haven't worn a belt in a year because of that. But likely my underwear stops my pelvis. And I know my beard dampens my face/jaw vibrations but I just can't bring myself to look at myself. Maybe I'll trim it down. But as my muscles and jaw and sinuses and everything change I especially don't enjoy seeing me. I've made appointments for my wisdom tooth extraction for the beginning and end of April. I know that will swell and change my face. But I am very nervous about being sedated.

Mar. 13th

Picketing is taking its toll on my body. Yoga helps. Baths help. My neck is different. My shoulders. My hips. My knees. Today is the first day that I woke up from my nap and my knees ached like they used to mid basketball season when I'm hobbling everywhere off the court and make myself push through on the court. I try and rest and stretch. If I'm trying to be a maker of ethics in my process for the show, here's how I've done that: I chose to message all the undergrad actors in Venus who use Facebook and offer my assistance if they had any questions about the strike, CUPE, or what their options are. One student/actor/undergrad got back to me right away and started a conversation about the social pressures from classmates in following his/her feeling that it was right to abstain from rehearsals. After an off-campus walking italian of the show and concerning emails from the director, people I spoke with were conflicted about crossing either the metaphorical or literal picket line. I ended up at this person's house for a couple hours later that night and, over tea, had a great discussion about the ethics and morality and obligation and continuing under any conditions. I relayed the story of meeting Brian McEleney (Brown/Trinity Rep) in NYC and his words of theatre being a political act. The best political statement I can make with Venus is to not participate in it as long as I am on strike with CUPE. I don't expect everyone to come to this decision. I hope everyone can come to their own decision for their own reasons. Those people who have expressed that they want to support my thesis work by continuing with the show, I have tried to be clear that if anyone wants to support me, they can inform themselves and make a decision on how to proceed based on what is important to them. It's possible that not crossing the picket line I help create is more support for a better cause than our production of Venus. I left rehearsal after the "info session" slash Q&A. The undergrad that I had spoken with the night before also left. He/she did not cave to the social pressures and judgements of colleagues that were present and did what they thought was right. I told him/her that I was proud of them. I told them that sometimes being the first person feels like being the only person. And it can be lonely and isolating. But can inspire others. My mom always told me growing up that if I had a question, ask it. If not for me, for everyone else in the room who has the same question but isn't asking it for one reason or another. She/he acted from an ethical place instead of a place of fear. I then invited him/her to drop by the picket line at The Pond Road and talk

with the MFAs there, listen to what is being said on the line, and ask questions. While there, a great conversation about tuition indexation and negotiating arose. Hopefully this person left with a better understanding of why CUPE is on strike and why we are picketing. This is also the job of a voice teacher. I helped to free a voice. I hope we win. I don't know that we will. If I only ever got into fights that I knew I'd win, I'd never have gotten into any fights. I'm trying to stay up-to-date and informed but also moveable. I'm trying to really, truly listen. As Melee gave us this quote in my first semester here: "real listening means that you're willing to have your mind changed." I could be persuaded to participate in Venus during the strike- but not with any argument I've heard thus far. Back into the studio on Monday night. I'm excited to try and make education better and more affordable and accessible for future students everywhere. And theatre will be a big part of this political event, by my abstaining from it.

Mar. 17th

Venus has officially been cancelled. So what are we doing? An echo of Venus? An adaptation? A documentation of a previous show that didn't live to be performed? Are we preserving as much of the show's style/staging/blocking that we can? Or are we using this new (and old) space and the benefits that we can? Yesterday it seemed that Jamie wanted all the Love of Venus scenes to be as far downstage as they could go. In the FFT that is still a lot of room before audience and a huge auditorium of seating. In 209 that's inches away from the audience and feet from the back wall... but still with the style that would fill up a 2000 seat theatre. The angles with the audience on the sides is sever and we'll look at the pictures tomorrow. I'm finding the scenes funnier with their proximity to the audience. Maybe for the best? The Wonders reblocked using the space. I would love to do the same. Not reblocked as just given more room. But who knows how much time we will have.

Mar. 19th

"Tech Dress" or "Dress" or "Both"

Slept on my left side last night. Woke up with the left side of my jaw tighter than a mouse trap. Took me my entire 4 hours of picketing to loosen it. This left/right imbalance is so hard on my body. A lot of massaging and a lot of jaw opening and closing. Wide. Tall. TMJ without my hands in my mouth. Did my post shower, post nap, post picketing yoga. Moving my face muscles while breathing in and out of my nose cleared up my nasal sinuses. Helps my voice. I looked at my soft palate in the mirror. My left tonsil seems enflamed/enlarged. Uncertain as to the increased width of my soft palate. Feels like it but it don't look much different. What does look different is the amount of space between my soft palate and the back of my throat. This has increased amount and rate of air that passes through my nasal sinus while I speak. The angle of my head vs neck during the Uncle scenes makes me nervous. Losing that 90 degree advantage/optimal raises my larynx and decreases the resonating area between my larynx and mouth. Makes the access to my nasal resonators and facial resonators more important. Nervous for my acupuncture tomorrow. Need/want to try. Only appointment available this week for the "run."

Intermission - The back of my throat and soft palate are sore. On that table during the court scene it's tough not to ride high. Wearing a belt sucks. Wearing a collared shirt sucks. I have a headache from all the face stretching and sinus stuff. My body aches. Stay soft. Delicate. Easy. Effortless. I kinda want to vomit. Or cry.

Mar. 21st

“Opening last night. Felt like a decent preview or IDR. 2nd run through in the space with the new blocking. People still adjusting to entrances and exit points and costume changes delayed the start of some scenes. I chose only to change my costume around when I had plenty of time to do so and to always carry my costume pieces with me somehow on stage. Jamie approached me before (half hour) the show began to talk about the eye line for the For the Love of Venus scenes. He wanted to know how it felt. I told him to ask that question now would be to question all the decisions about who is in the audience, where are they sitting, and what am i doing. I have taken that the scenes are all from different performances rather than from the same night. We simulate audience reaction for one of the scenes, so there must be one? My scenes I had still been playing as if only the Baron Doctor were in the audience and he was sitting in the first row on the balcony. That got complicated a couple of day ago when we flipped the picture (of an already flipped picture) and performed to Neil who is on the same level as us. He moved down for the last scene? Or this is a performance later in the run that he also bough the house fo but chose to sit closer. I have been using that as it falls in line with my growing frustration for the actor who plays The Young Man. The ad-libbed “little shit” moment is indication of that but is now as far upstage as it can get rather than being all the way down stage. The close proximity to the audience (especially those sitting on the floor) was troublesome in the first two scenes with hand gestures built on rib reserve breathing would constantly cover my face from the audience because they're no in the balcony as my given circumstances dictate. But I can't play to the actual audience because they are not there and I'm “in” a much larger theatre. The clicking between Laura and I went over like the metaphoric lead balloon that was dripping acid into the eyes of the adoring on-lookers. Just as their was some building of titters of laughter, done. Jamie used the term “satire” yesterday as though he had been using it the term for months regarding the show. If he had said it before, this is the first time I'd heard it. Reliving the pressures of historical authenticity by pushing the boundaries of satire and farce. This might help reinforce my trying to please the Doctor and inject more levity into the show. But is levity with the clicking will it help be closer or further away from the audience.

After 4 hours of picketing I had a chiropractor session in the afternoon. Michelle did some soft tissue work on my hip flexors and lower back before doing some acupuncture and sending some current through my lower back around my sacrum. I don't think my body had the energy to resist the work, the needles, or the current and all went smooth. I walked home and had a nap. I woke up, did some yoga and stretching and headed to the theatre to warm up my voice. With the whole left/right movement of my jaw and face that is happening there continues to be soreness in my hard/soft palate area on my left side. Releasing muscles shifting jaw makes ease in those areas extra important. Not tensing in my face and neck is key at this point to create volume but to trust

the capacity that I have for breath and free up those neck and facial tensions to be used as resonators for my vibrating voice. With my gesturing arms I still feel the temptations to pull my shoulders up to my ears. Imagining my shoulders down and back and keeping my sternum open helps contrast this temptation. That width might also keep my hands and arms beside me instead of in front of my face. And maybe in front of others' faces on such a small stage.

Mar. 22nd

After "Closing"

Amazing what a good amount to rest will do. A good night's sleep and not walking in a circle for hours has great benefits for my body and voice. While "opening" night I felt tentative and hesitant, "closing" night felt free and playful. A much more effortless voice vibrating my entire skull during my warm up session. Decided to highlight the rolling of my "r"s tonight. I had previously been hesitant because it's a newly acquired and unpredictable skill due to tension in the tip of my tongue. A few months ago I couldn't really do it at all. Tonight I decided to go for it in all my glory. Amazing results. Feeling more comfortable in the space and the proximity to the audience helped to release nervous tension as well. I had a much more thorough warm-up having to focus less on the nuts and bolts of running the show and more on my instrument preparation. It was fun to be at a certain point of my warm up and hearing a bunch of other actors join in with me, enforcing the work like my very own back up singers. It was nice to hear laughter during the "clicking" part of the scene. Uncomfortable but nice. Trying to keep my lower body engaged and active while simulating rib reserve breathing wasn't easy and likely wasn't authentic to the period but it was fun and playful. I tried to not only make diagonals with my arms but also with my legs. Presentational but alive. The night was a win. Got an email from David reinforcing some of the progress that I have been feeling and hearing of my own voice. His particular mention of the back of my throat I know has helped by my dedication to breathing through my nose. And being able to drop my jaw create a larger space inside my mouth. I didn't increase the width of my gum ridge during this process but in other ways in my oral and nasal cavities I have increased the size of the resonating chambers, shed tension, and increased the potential for vibrations both incoming and outgoing.

## Appendix B - Alison Toews Evaluation

### Report on Bob Wicks

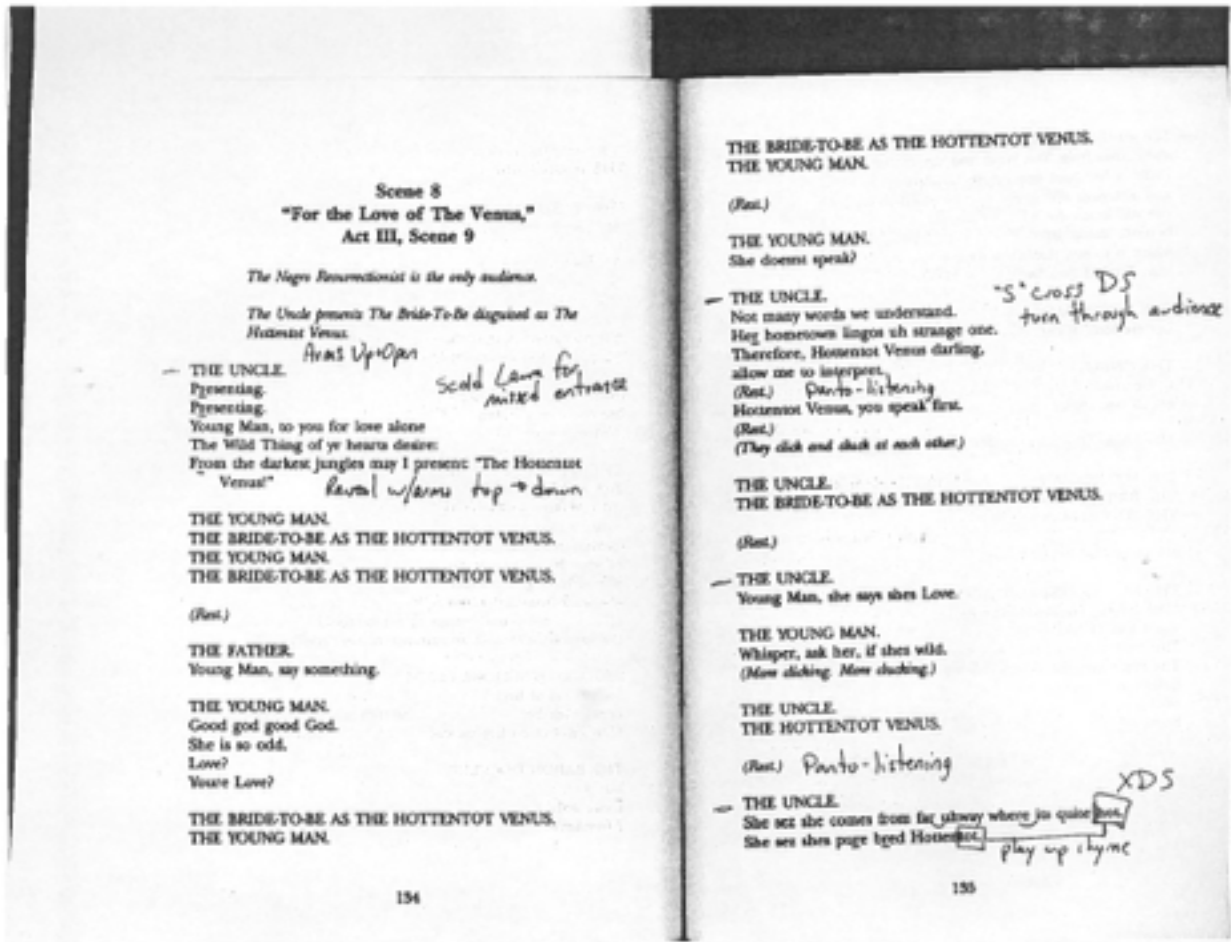
Bob came in for his first massage treatment on June 24, 2013. He presented with generalized low back pain and stiffness in his neck and shoulders. Both shoulders (AC joints) were forward, the right gluteal had increased tone, and the psoas major (hip flexor) was bilaterally tight.

By October, 2013, Bob's gluteals and psoas major achieved a healthy tone, but tightness and ROM restrictions were manifesting in the rotator cuff, posterior sub-occipitals and TMJ. The shoulders were still anterior, but to a lesser degree.

By December, 2014, there is no discernible asymmetry in Bob's seated posture. The AC joints sit in natural plumb line and there is no obvious asymmetry in superior/inferior positioning of the scapulae. The posterior sub-occipitals and TMJ muscles still create ROM restrictions, but to a lesser extent.

Alison Toews, RMT  
January 13/2015

Appendix C - Venus Prompt Script Extract



— She sez if wilds your desire  
she comes from The Wilds and she carries them behind her.  
[Wild is her back ground her fundament so to speak  
and although shes grown accustomed to our civil ways  
she still holds the Wilds within her  
behind, inside, infront  
wh [which is to say, that all yr days  
wh [with her will be a lively looky blin.]

THE YOUNG MAN  
Let me look at her!

— THE UNCLE  
Circle around  
get all her angles.

(The Young Man orbits briefly.)

THE YOUNG MAN,  
THE BRIDE-TO-BE AS THE HOTTENTOT VENUS,  
THE YOUNG MAN.

(He stares hard at her. Tableau.)

THE NEGRO RESURRECTIONIST.  
"The height, measured after death,  
was 4 feet 11 and 1/2 inches.  
The total weight of the body was 98 pounds avoidsphinx ...  
The great amounts of subcutaneous fat were  
quite surprising."  
(Exit.)  
Scene #7.

"spin" her

[trace her  
back + ass]

pose to Dr.  
w/content.

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## Scene 7 She'll Make a Splendid Corpse

Bright sunshine.

The Venus is her bedroom daydreaming. She wears a wig.

THE VENUS.  
He spends all his time with me because he loves me.  
He hardly visits her at all.  
She may be his wife all right but shes all dried up.  
He is not thuh most thrilling lay Ive had, but his gold makes  
up thuh difference and hhhhh  
I love him.  
He will leave that wife for good and we'll get married (we  
better or I'll make a scene) oh, we'll get married.  
And we will be in bed and make love all day long.  
Hahahaha.  
We'll set tongues wagging for the rest of the century.  
The Doctor will introduce me to Napoleon himself! Oh,  
yes yr Royal Highness the Negro question does keep me  
awake at night oh yes it does.  
Servant girl! Do this and that!  
When I'm Mistress I'll be a tough cookie.  
I'll rule the house with an iron fist and have the most  
wonderful parties.  
Society will seek me out: Wheres Venus? Right here!  
Hhhhh. I need uh new wig.  
Every afternoon I'll take a 5 hour bath. In hot seawater.  
After my bath they'll pat me down.  
20 servants will attend me.  
They'll rub my body with the most expensive oils  
perfume my big buttocks and sprinkle them with gold dust!

(The Baron Doctor enters and watches her.)

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And send thy hearers weeping to their beds.  
 [*Exeunt, King Henry, and Lieut. a.H. Tressel, L.B.*]

SCENE II.—*The Entrance to the Inner Ward.*

*Whistle* Enter GLOSTER, L.H. *W to centre*

Glos. Now is the winter of our discontent  
 Made glorious summer by the sun\* of York;  
 And all the clouds, that lower'd upon our house,  
 In the deep bosom of the ocean-buried. *(unfolds his arms)*  
 Now are our brows bound with victorious *and really, the King*  
 wreaths,

Our bruised arms hung up for monuments;  
 Our stern alarms are chang'd to merry meet-  
 ings;

Our dreadful marches to delightful measures.  
 Grim-visag'd war has smooth'd his wrinkled

*(grins & frets)* front;  
 And now, instead of mounting barbed steeds,  
 To fright the souls of fearful adversaries,—  
 He capers nimbly in a lady's chamber,  
 To the lascivious pleasing of a lute: *(grins & frets)*  
 But I,—that am not shap'd for sportive tricks,  
 Nor made to court an amorous looking-glass;  
 I,—that am rudely stamp'd, and want love's ma-  
 jesty,

To strut before a wanton ambling nymph;  
 I,—that am curtail'd of man's fair proportion.

\* Alluding to the cognizance of Edward IV. which was a sun, in memory of the three suns which are said to have appeared at the battle which he gained over the Lancastrians, at Mortimer's Cross.

*Gloster enters hastily. head low. arms, feet  
 at the words  
 "ocean buried" — unfolds his arms &  
 walks the stage till "and now" —  
 (grins & frets) — "But I" — (stands  
 & pulls on his garment tighter and looks  
 the centre writhing his body R &  
 L and using his right hand*

*vehement play with sword belt*  
 Cheated of feature by dissembling nature,  
 Deform'd, unfinish'd, sent before my time  
 Into this breathing world, scarce half made up,  
 And that so lamely, and unfashionable:  
 That dogs bark at me, as I halt by them;—  
 Why I, in this weak, piping time of peace,  
 Have no delight to pass away my hours,  
 Unless to see my shadow in the sun,  
 And descant on my own deformity:  
*starts up*  
 Then, since this earth affords no joy to me,  
 But to command, to check, and o'erbear such  
 As are of happier person than myself;  
 Why then, to me this restless world's but hell,  
*to my his "with what ease"*  
 Till this mis-shapen trunk's aspiring head  
 Be circled in a glorious diadem;—  
 But then 'tis fixed on such a height; oh! I  
 Must stretch the utmost reaching of my soul. \*  
 I'll climb betimes, without remorse or dread,  
 And my first step shall be on Henry's head. \*  
*stretches [Exit, r.g.]*

SCENE III.—King Henry's Chamber.—KING  
HENRY discovered sleeping.

*Ring* Enter LIEUTENANT, R.H.D.

Lieut. Asleep so soon, but sorrow mends no  
 seasons,  
 The morning, noon, and night, with her's the  
 same;  
 She's fond of any hour that yield's repose.  
 King H. (Waking.) Who's there! Lieutenant!  
 is it you! Come hither!

"Deformed"  
 (vehement - plays with his  
 sword belt - starts and X's)  
 "Then since - starts up - "Why then"  
 - seeing his right arm - "This trunk"  
 her trunk - strikes his breast 2 times &  
 points to his forehead  
 "circled" pauses - chuckles & X R.H.  
 \* you toward R.H.  
 \* hesitates - (with hostility)

*Lieut.* You shake, my lord, and look affrighted.

*King H.* Oh! I have had the fearful 'st dream'  
such sights,

That, as I live,

I would not pass another hour so dreadful,

Though twere to buy a world of happy days.

Reach me a book;—I'll try if reading can

Divert these melancholy thoughts.—(*Lieut. gives*  
him a book which he takes from the table.)

Enter GLOSTER, R.H.D.

— *Glos.* Good day, my lord; what, at your book  
so hard?

I disturb you. (*Lieut. advances to R.H.D.*)

*King H.* You do indeed

— *Glos.* (To *Lieut.*) Friend, leave us to our-  
selves, we must confer.

*King H.* What bloody scene has *Roscus* now  
to act? "Of *Exit Lieut. R.H.D.*

— *Glos.* Suspicion always haunts the guilty mind;  
The thief does fear each bush an officer.

*King H.* Where thieves without controlment  
rob and kill,

The traveller does fear each bush a thief:

The poor bird that has been already hm'd,

With trembling wings misdoubts of every bush:

And I, the hapless mate of one sweet bird,

Have now the fatal object in my eye,

By whom my young one bled, was caught, and  
kill'd.

— *Glos.* Why what a peevish fool was that of  
Crete,

Henry seated, Gloster enters  
R. walks up toward sofa  
stand R. of Henry - they converse  
down in that position.

Gloster a piece hardened against his wrongs  
and rather inattentive - then shrugs his  
shoulders at him & chuckles maliciously -