

**RELEASING DOWN AND SWINGING UP:  
EXPLORING EXTERNAL EXPRESSION  
THROUGH INTERNAL FALL**

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## ABSTRACT

The goal of my thesis was to investigate how to externalize onstage my inner experience with authenticity and integrity. Using the challenge of playing the role of Irina in Anton Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, a version of the play where she is Deaf, I investigated how to externally communicate an internal experience through the use of the fall. This paper begins with in-studio research of my personal artistic challenge of releasing in order to externalize. It documents my summer work on physicality and voice while researching and training in American Sign Language. My scholarly research explores the phenomena of the fall as distinct from collapse and release, the life of the playwright, the context of the play, and finally, character analysis of Irina. This paper concludes with my findings from the rehearsal process.

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## INTRODUCTION

This document explores my process of discovery throughout my research, rehearsal, and performance of the role of Irina in a unique production of Anton Chekhov's *Three Sisters*. Specifically, it offers sketches into my main personal artistic challenge of finding the external expression of an internal impulse. I plan to meet this challenge by using what I define as the swing: the downward pull of release that when used to its full potential, can also then rebound into external gestural communication. Meeting this challenge involves scholarly research, studio explorations, and experimentations with my findings in rehearsal. I will specifically address my work through Linklater's release practices, in-studio discoveries from the Batdorf Intensive, National Voice Intensive, and my extensive study of American Sign Language (ASL).

First, I will discuss a challenging reaction I had when I heard the casting for *Three Sisters* and the director's concept. Then I will examine how personal discoveries I made regarding my own physical constraints affected my time at York. I will then discuss the concept of the swing through examination of release versus collapse in studio work and in performance. I will also share examples of my practical research: non-verbal storytelling and the study of ASL and offer an overview of the character, play, period, and context of Chekhov's *Three Sisters*. I will discuss my presumptions in approaching this work in a different language, while considering new ways of being onstage without my usual mode of communication. These discussion will culminate with a detailed application of the research to my role. Finally, I will close with journal entries chronicling the applications of my findings throughout the process of rehearsal as well as some reflection on their outcome.

The theme of the 2017 season at York University is *Extraordinary Lives: Difference and Ability*. I have been cast as Irina in Anton Chekhov's *Three Sisters*. In our version of the play Irina is Deaf. When this casting was announced, my challenges were twofold. First, I had to learn as much of a new language as possible. I had to appear natural communicating in ASL and learn to express myself in Chekhov's complex and subtle storytelling. Second, I was confronted with political questions around playing a Deaf character. Facing my own moral frustrations around appropriation, authenticity, and respect, the question was, how best to honour a community to which I do not belong? In other words, how can I perform a Deaf character, when I am not Deaf? This frustration resulted in an overwhelming challenge: not only do I need to learn ASL, but I must represent, in an honest and truthful way, a culture which has done ceaseless work to protect and preserve itself, notably rejecting the term "disability." I decided to address my challenges through a combination of research and collected experiences. I attended Deaf theatre and studied ASL at the Canadian Hearing Society. I devised, rehearsed, and performed a non-verbal children's show for the Toronto International Fringe Festival, and Kingston Ontario's Storefront Theatre Festival. And finally, I did embodied work using the Batdorf Intensive, and the National Voice Intensive, exploring these challenges outside the pressure of rehearsal. My aim was that my studio research will help me narrow the scope of my findings to address my acting challenge, the swing, within the context which has been assigned to me. My scholarly research will refine those findings within the context of other related theories on theatre. My scholarly research will also address the historical references of Anton Chekhov's *Three Sisters* and Russia in the 19th Century. I will combine my findings to address what I mean when I refer to external expression, the fall, and the swing as they pertain to Irina in a Deaf context. As such, my research is

interested in these questions: What is a voice? What is the concept of the fall, as it compares to collapsing, and releasing? Once the fall is defined, what is the upward and outward motion of the impulse? How can I present its full extension and expression? Using the challenge of playing Irina Deaf, how can my signing be authentically executed with integrity? Finally, how do two languages exist in my body at the same time? It is through this combination of studio work and research—the swing and the fall— that I will be able to accurately portray the unique physicality, and the authentic voice, of a Deaf Irina.

### YORK UNIVERSITY OR THE SCORE

The Masters' program began in the fall of 2016. One day after my sleek Montreal bike got caught in the harsh Toronto streetcar tracks, and I fell, cutting up my knees, bumping my chin, and breaking two fingers on my left hand. I attended one of the York Teaching Assistant training sessions with my hand black and blue, unable to put movement pants on due to the severity of my knee abrasion. That night, I went to the emergency room where doctors repositioned my fingers and put me in a cast. I could not have predicted that my first semester would be modified to accommodate this injury. I focused on rehabilitation, accepting my current situation, and absorbing as much of the teachings as I could without the full embodied, sensorial, experience. Before long, I grew a desperate desire to be healed and to experience the training with my whole body and spirit. As the months went by, I kept a strict exercise schedule for my hand, inch by inch going deeper into the physical exercises of my studio work. I imagined the bone inside my flesh healing under the protective cast, and the more I imagined, the more I felt the healing.

I looked forward to the day where I did not need to think about my hand before entering a scene or exploration. I started to prepare and overthink, using for example, my uninjured hand to pick up a prop. I would even take a step with my left foot so that my uninjured right hand would end up on the ground for a particular slide or roll in movement class. I thought that it would be a relief to not mentally prepare myself for a physical movement, that this preparation before entering a scene removed me from being present. I began avoiding the physical preparation in favour of other sensations, like how my scene partner was making me feel. I would soon discover that the preparation I attempted to avoid would always need to be there, it would just manifest elsewhere in my body. As the months of training passed, I found this focus ever-present, spreading throughout my body in an amplified way. In addition to an increased awareness around my hand, I considered how my foot was placed in a certain moment, or how my scene partner made me breathe a certain way. Unbeknownst to me, this increase in awareness was the first step towards the concept of falling that would prove to inform a significant section of my thesis.

I began making a score for when I performed. This was a list in my mind of the variables of experience onstage. Variables that are constantly changing. The score included my internal awareness, my lines, blocking, the audience, time, and space, all of which changed with every breath. The element at the forefront of my mind was dialed up while others were dialed down. For example, if I was focusing on articulating a specifically important word in a sentence so it clarified my argument, then the awareness I had of my feet on the floor might decrease during the delivery of that word. I was fascinated by the exploration of my score in each scene and could get lost in the experience of feeling my body. I was struck with the habits I had developed



in my body and mind in daily class exercises. My knees took longer to heal than anticipated, which taught me to slow down and to give the training time to enter my body memory.

After a year of training, I have discovered I tend to believe I understand a class exercise on an intellectual or pedagogical level; while this is a good exercise in trusting myself and my abilities, it thrusts me into a state of knowing instead of being. I unintentionally privilege the intellectual (mind) over the physical (body). This instinct leads me to moments of frustration as I look to recreate an experience I have already had, instead of accepting the present moment. Out of that frustration, I began appreciating the daily practice of these in-class physical explorations. I could identify the minute changes in my experience based on what had happened to me earlier in the day: what I had eaten (physical alterations), with whom I had spoken (emotional landscape), or something I had read in the news (intellectual or political influences). I accepted that so long as I practiced the techniques, in their specificity and precision, I could adapt to whatever my physical, emotional, and intellectual landscape might be. I was inviting myself to witness my experiences in each new instance. And, just as my hand no longer required a cast but I still had a hyper awareness of it, maybe I could remember to release all the time, not just in a voice session. Release work is the act of undoing the tension patterns created in the musculature of the body on a day-to-day basis. I began releasing whenever possible, becoming preoccupied with what little effort was required to do a given activity. I could get lost in that experience too. I learned that getting lost was having a negative effect on my performance onstage. Instructors at the Voice, and Batdorf Intensives, informed me that as I played my score in performance, I was successful in breathing naturally, and feeling the alignment of my spine. This awareness helped me identify and then adjust whatever postural habits were coming up, but my externalization was

sometimes compromised. I might have appeared as if I drifted away, going too far inside the sensations of my body. I needed to figure out how to feel my body, and to experience a release onstage, while simultaneously going on the journey of a character, and authentically expressing that journey in an external way. Sitting still and feeling my heart was easy, but what happens when I am not still, what happens when I am not sitting? How can I feel what is happening in my body during a dynamic movement?

### RELEASE

Once I could identify the strength of release in my acting, it became clear that my challenge was directly linked. Again, a “release” works to undo tension patterns created in the body’s muscles. In studio, I spent hours feeling what it feels like to let go of muscular tension lying on the floor. From that position, I moved different parts of my body, experimenting with how I could move with as little effort possible. I translated these findings while standing, and eventually while playing a scene. What was the littlest muscular effort needed possible while playing a scene? In a scene, release was achieved by feeling my breathing, my feet on the floor, my relationship to gravity, and my spine alignment, together with letting go of large performance muscles (such as my upper arms or buttocks) if they were not needed. All of this was happening at once and in equal volume; I understood the idea of dialing up a certain sensation and dialing others down, but I wasn’t an expert yet. To my detriment, I was cutting off communication from my audience or scene partner; the externalization of my experience was compromised.

In voice sessions with David Smukler, we discussed releasing as much as possible so that the natural voice could emerge, rather than a voice based on tension holding patterns. I needed to release the musculature involved in creating a vibration or sound. I learned how different the

word release was from the word relax: relaxing was something I could force upon my experience and releasing was allowing the body to do it on its own. Kristin Linklater describes this process as an “unblocked physical awareness through which vibration can flow” (Linklater 329). As such, a release is not forced. During the National Voice Intensive, Authentic Movement instructor and founder of the practice of Syntonics Judith Koltai accused me of substituting what I perceived as release with big breaths in and out. In trying to give my muscles time to let go through breath, I had gone too far in the direction of “willing” release instead of “allowing” release to occur. I had developed a habitual breathing pattern to my stretching. As I rolled down with her hands on my back, she suggested that instead of forcing big breaths, I should just breathe and let the muscles do the lengthening on their own. When I stopped forcing the breath, my humble self sat in a chair at the side, watching and feeling the moment, as my body communicated with Koltai’s touch to continue releasing. My breath just went along for the ride.

### COLLAPSE AND FALL

For the purpose of my research, falling is the process of undoing unnecessary tension to the point of feeling the gravitational pull in multiple directions. I noticed a problem arising in my exploration of this fall. I would release so far into my body, undoing as much unnecessary tension I could, standing there relaxed and comfortable, but my communication would be severed from my scene partner. This, I will call this collapse. Working with the idea that the collapse is the negative result of a fall, how could I toe the line between just enough, and too much, release? I will try to answer this by looking to psychiatry to understand the concept of collapse.

Psychiatrist Bessel Van der Kolk describes the “Three Levels of Safety” in the autonomic nervous system as the regulators of the three fundamental physiological states. The first level is social engagement in the face of an initial threat: calling for help. If no help comes, we revert to the second level, a more primitive way to survive: fight or flight. If this fails the organism tries to preserve itself in the third level by shutting down and expending as little energy as possible. We are then in a state of freeze or collapse (Van der Kolk 82). Van der Kolk describes the collapsed state as: “the ultimate emergency system, and our last resort. Awareness is shut down and we may no longer even register physical pain. Collapse and disengagement are controlled by an evolutionarily ancient part of the parasympathetic nervous system” (85). With this definition of collapse floating around in my head, I explored what it meant to stand in a scene both engaged and released at the same time. I realized that by forcing release I ironically hindered the benefits I could find in release.

I found the balance between release and collapse through the concept of the fall. In class, we practiced falling backwards and having the momentum turn into a roll, then subsequently a stand on our feet, in one continual movement. Repeating this sequence, I realized two things. First, I could fall to the ground no problem. Second, from that fall, I could not get back up using the same momentum. I needed to think about falling in a different way. I needed to capture the downward force of gravity and harness it into an upward swing, a curvature to the movement, to bring me back up to my feet again. This was significantly different from a simple collapse to the floor. I realized this full body collapse to the floor was a metaphor for what was happening to me in a scene. Falling became the perfect example of my struggle in external expression. I could let go and drop into a fall, but how could I bring it back up? In answering this question, I arrived

at the concept of what I will call the swing. To further explore what this swing is to me, I will now turn to Antonin Artaud's Effective state.

### EFFECTIVE STATE AND SWING

In his *Theatre of Cruelty* manifesto, Artaud speaks of a masculine, "effective" state. According to Artaud, the tempo of voluntary thought we project is a forcefully male beat and is followed, without too apparent a transition, by a prolonged involuntary feminine beat, or breath (Artaud 138). Artaud's concept helped me imagine that with every masculine beat there is a feminine beat; so too, with every fall, there is a swing. A fall gains its momentum from the downward gravitational pull, which curves and moves up and out. Therefore, the release happens at the beginning of the fall, giving the muscles permission to let go and be affected. There, in feeling the weight of my body, instead of following that impulse to a collapse, the curve—the swing as I will call it—brings that weight up and out, back to my scene partner.

My definition of the swing is different from other ways I have heard it used. In Musical Theatre, a swing role is when a performer plays one role and is on call for another. "Swinging left or right" is a slang phrase for actor's ability to play good or evil. Swinging left is malicious, strange, or creepy. Swinging right is benevolent, funny, and charismatic. For me, the swing is that moment of direction shift on a swing set. As the swing falls down towards the ground, the chains tighten. It feels like gravity pulls in two directions. Gravity brings that downwards momentum back up and out with the same force. To put it in Artaud's terms, my prolonged feminine beat happens first, but then I get stuck inside it, which turns into a collapse. How can I

ignite Artaud's masculine thought into action? Drawing from Artaud, the answer is in the compartmentalizing of contraction and release: "we localize the breath, we apportion it out in states of contraction and release combined" (138). This is the shift to utilize the energy of the fall to its full potential. It moves away from a collapse and instead externalizes my release through the swing. Just like the suspension of a pendulum before its return swing, I must find the moments where I can be forceful in my masculine effective beats, while being aware that the masculine and feminine are not mutually exclusive. Between the fall and the swing, within release and contraction, are elements of the other. In every action, there is a combination of both contraction and release. The swing is what happens in between; the curve and my externalization is the antithesis of the fall. My challenge is to externalize the upward swing of the fall for my thesis role. This requires precise gestural communication.

### IN PERFORMANCE

It was through an increased awareness around my body as a theatrical instrument that I came to identify my challenge. York training had an incredible physical effect on my body. I realized that my entire body was experiencing constant change: practicing in the studio, healing a bone, performing in a show, eating spinach or eating pasta, and being slapped or being hugged. Every moment that I felt, or was aware of, proved to be a moment of change— even as I breathed. I became increasingly aware of myself, my habits, my triggers, my bodily health, and my gaps in training. Eventually, my focus turned to a deeper look at myself as an artist and my body as an instrument. It was there, that I was able to recognize my strengths, naturally good habits, and ultimately, my challenge. My initial desire was to be trained quickly. This turned into a desire to be open and free (or to release). It is now a desire to authentically externalize my

experience with the freedom of release. My ongoing challenge is to bring authenticity and externalization in my performance alongside physical and emotional release. I took this challenge into performances.

Before, I tended to approach the challenge of a scene pedagogically, overthinking and over intellectualizing my performance. Now, a successful performance is based on my timing with my partners and how deeply I feel something, all in combination with hitting certain marks on my score such as blocking, timing, and remembering my lines. I feel present in my body through my senses, imaging them as doorways to my physicality, and using them as clues to my unique path towards release and physical authenticity. As Utah Hagen suggests: “[t]he five senses are the avenues of our psychological as well as our physical perceptions. They are the avenues to our body, and to our mind and soul” (84). This comes with a feeling of effortlessness in performance. If I feel that a performance is ceasing to have the outcome I usually hit in rehearsal, I tend to push through the rest of the play. My engine starts to rev and I work harder. This sometimes results in injury or fatigue. I used to think “working harder” meant being louder, having a bigger reaction, sweating more, or feeling an ache in my muscles after the show. Now I have discovered that it is not necessarily working harder that helps me but rather, feeling my body more. This allows my actions and reactions to be authentic. Although I get more information from my scene partners due to this awareness, and while my reactions seem to speed up, in actuality, I slow down. I do not anticipate a movement or choice. I sit immersed in the moment, feeling how each thing affects me.

## NON-VERBAL

I began integrating this slowed-down approach to my warm ups and performance style. I created and performed a non-verbal tabletop puppet show for children entitled *My Silly Yum!* With this show, no recognizable language was used. Instead sounds of expression, gesture, and breath illustrated the play. I invited the audience into a fabric world of hand-made objects, on a journey without narration. We filled each beat of the script with action, reaction, and subsequent action. The score of the piece was articulated with rhythmic choreography, a clear floor pattern of blocking, moments of fixed point, and suspension. The puppets made sounds at times of discomfort, excitement, or confusion, but the ultimate vocal journey was in, and through, breath. Through breath, gesture and emotion were brought together to create complex visual storytelling. Or, put differently by Wangh quoting Delsarte, “gesture is the direct agent of the heart...In a word, it is the spirit of which speech is merely the letter” (xxxii). I witnessed this when I would see our audience lean in. I could audibly hear children sighing with the characters, and narrating out loud what they were seeing. Ultimately, *My Silly Yum!* was a journey with an audience who followed the story without the use of language; or, rather, with the use of gestural language.

### ASL

Working with puppetry was my first exploration in non-verbal storytelling. This skill was put to test with my research on ASL. When I embarked on my month-long journey of learning a new culture and language, I was very nervous. I wondered about what happens when two languages are in the body at the same time? What would happen to my general communication when ASL and English sat in me simultaneously? I originally hypothesized ASL might exist within me in a similar way to French and Italian. Would there be much difference in learning ASL? How would the images and feelings of learning a verbal language and learning ASL



differ? As it turns out ASL, based entirely on gesture, facial expression, and cultural body language, is completely different from “another language.” It is more associated to English. And yet, this does not mean that they are the same. Indeed, while learning, if I heard English in my head while I signed, I became quite confused. Smith’s concept of “linguistic interference” perfectly describes some of the original assumptions I brought with me when learning ASL.

Often new students wonder why there are no English words offered as “equivalents” to ASL signs. There is a concept in language learning called linguistic interference. This happens when one language’s structure, meaning, and vocabulary hinders the students ability to engage with the second language on its own. (Smith ix)

One of the first things I learned was how American Sign Language is a different language from British Sign Language or Italian Sign Language. “There are hundreds of identified sign languages in the world, most of them developed indigenously by Deaf people in their countries” (Smith ix). ASL is derived from English-speaking North America’s indigenous Deaf communities. It is also influenced by French Sign Language, which was brought over from France by Laurent Clerc, a Deaf teacher, and Thomas Gallaudet, a hearing minister. They went on to found the famous Deaf University, Gallaudet in Washington, D.C. (Smith vi). Being a visual language, the signs correspond to the visual world and culture surrounding the signer. And yet, it is not simply an English equivalent: “ASL is not a visual code for English, written or spoken. The differences are significant. ASL and English use different modalities (visual/gestural as opposed to aural/oral) and have different phonology and grammar, [...] many signs simply are not directly translatable to English words” (Smith ix). And so, more than learning another language, learning ASL is truly learning another culture.

I began my training in ASL with research on Canadian Deaf culture. I expanded my research by learning the language itself, and talking to local Deaf performers. I began meeting with a Deaf actor, artist, and activist named Sage Lovell who was hired on to interpret my lines for *Three Sisters*. Lovell helped me learn that “the term Deaf with a capital D is an inclusive term because it focuses on what people have – a living culture, an available language, and the infinite untapped possibilities being Deaf can offer” (Smith viii). Surprisingly, the principals of Deaf culture are similar to those of the acting world. I felt less nervous when Lovell shared these similarities with me.

For example: “in Deaf culture, the group comes before the individual, contributing to the group’s success is highly valued” (Smith viii). In the creation of a work of theatre the same is true. Each member of the company plays a vital and important role, and the success of the production is a group effort. Eye contact is also very important in the Deaf community. When conversing, you watch the communicator’s face, while hand and body information is taken in peripherally. We see this in actor training as well. Although a great deal of emphasis is placed on articulation and being heard by the audience, the actor must learn how to communicate physically, which includes a great deal of eye contact. Eye contact helps share and reveal what the actor’s experience is, and creates relationships between characters.

Author and Cognitive Scientist Oliver Sacks wanted to know what was going on in the brain of someone born Deaf with no auditory importing. Are the auditory parts being utilized by something else? Neuroscientist Helen Nevill had the answer; she found that the auditory areas in hearing people had been reallocated for vision in Deaf people (Sacks 3:01). For example, in signing, we look at the face of our communicator, not the hands. Also, Deaf people are safer

drivers; they are more conscious of the periphery of the road than a hearing person typically would be (Sacks 2:15). My early thoughts about ASL were that the language was blunt and direct and there was not much room for nuance and specificity. As I became more familiar, I found there was just as much subtlety as with any dialogue, but the subtleties were indeed visual. Communication is not limited to hands; because the language exists in the body, face, and spirit of expression. Therefore the nuance in the language is found in the entire body.

### LISTENING AND VOICE

As I practice ASL, these nuances become clearer to me. I can tell what my communicator feels about what they are expressing to me, not just what they are communicating. I am listening in a new way. Kristin Linklater says: “visual information can bypass physical responses and easily move into the realm of assessment, appreciation, and judgment. Oral/aural communication is the stuff of an actor’s life. Listening is life-blood, oxygen, food, and drink; when the actor listens, he answers from the body-mind” (328). I will adapt my listening and my voice as Irina to favour the visual information Linklater references. My listening will not be aural, but felt through vibrations. In turn, my voice will become gestural, maintaining the same precise articulation, need to communicate, and feeling, but without the use of my vocal musculature. I am encouraged by the idea that “the voice as an instrument of communication [is] distinct from that of speech” (Linklater 329). I am nervous that because I am not fluent in ASL, I will not be able to authentically fill the space in between lines with the reality of Deafness. What if I make a mistake in signing; will I be able to recover without the improvisational skills necessary? How will I pretend I do not hear other commotion onstage? Will my performance of expression be

limited by my lack of experience and training in ASL? It feels like I am performing ballet when I have no ballet training.

As I play with the shapes of expression in ASL, my communication becomes notably clearer. For example, when I first learned how to sign the letter T, I would see the shape as it was being taught to me, look at my own hand, and copy the finger positions to express it back to my instructor. Now, when I wish to express the letter T, I imagine the shape as it was taught to me, and, without looking at my hand, remember how to repeat that shape. I then assume the position with my fingers, confident in the way it feels, so I do not have to double check that it is right. I would like to be able, within a very short rehearsal time, to think of the letter T, and have my hand form the shape without that extra step of translation. I would like to move from learning the words, to simply expressing them.

My goal in learning ASL should not be about performing a Deaf role, but rather about experiencing a personal visual and gesturally expressive world. Artaud's thoughts on gesture and language will be useful for me as I move from learning the language to expressing in ASL. In his *Theatre of Cruelty* manifesto, Artaud says:

It is essential to put an end to the subjugation of the theatre to the text, and to recover the notion of a kind of unique language half-way between gesture and thought. This language cannot be defined except by its possibilities for dynamic expression in space as opposed to the expressive possibilities of spoken dialogue. And what the theatre can still take over from speech is its possibilities for extension beyond words, for development in space, for associative and vibratory action upon sensibility. [...] Here too intervenes the visual language of objects, movements, attitudes, and gestures, but on

condition that their meanings, their physiognomies, their combinations be carried to the point of becoming signs, making a kind of alphabet out of these signs. (Artaud 90)

Artaud's description of dynamic expression reveals to me the tremendous possibilities of my communication. It will be necessary for me to accept that although I will be expressing myself in ASL, there is a significant part of my communicating that will come from my own attitude, gesture, and movement.

### PERIOD

The Deaf character I will play in Anton Chekhov's *Three Sisters* lives in late 19<sup>th</sup> Century Russia: a time of dissatisfaction. The people were isolated in their culture and ruled by a strict unsympathetic army. At home, many families did not do much more than their regular daily events and only saw one another. Politically, it was a time of change to come. The emancipation of Serfdom in 1861 seemed to promise change for those of the peasant class, but it was not the end of classism (Fitzpatrick 12). The gentry had been pampered for centuries with economic advantages and social privileges, and suddenly they would have had to change a large part of their way of life to accommodate new laws.

Anton Chekhov's *Three Sisters* deals with exactly this moment in time, where the gentry was feeling the pressure of the impending middle class and the disappearance of their privilege. In Chekhov's personal life, Serfdom was replaced with severe debts. If the debts were not paid, you were jailed. His father was at risk of this fate and managed to escape by fleeing from their home of Taganrog to Moscow, forcing Chekhov to live between two places (Melchinger 17). Chekhov spent his childhood, adolescence, and young adult life working. First, he worked in his

father's shop and then at the church. He became an academic, then eventually a doctor, writing all the while to finance his schooling (Melchinger 23). As a young boy, his interest in theatre began when he and his friend snuck out of school. Disguised with dark glasses and false beards they saw plays (Melchinger 17). This kind of rebellious nature informed how he approached his work later in life, not only as a doctor offering free medical care to peasants, but also as a writer (Melchinger 45).

Murray Frame, in his book *School for Citizens*, argues that theatre made an important contribution to the development of civil society in imperial Russia through the creation of new cultural enterprises. He says that this contribution occurred in isolation from wider circumstances, but was facilitated by the social and economic changes experienced in Russia at the time. "Between 1898 and 1905, Russian theatre witnessed two "revolutions," one primarily artistic—the radical innovations of the Moscow Art Theatre—the other sociopolitical—the growing opposition to the tsarist regime that resulted in the 1905 revolution" (Frame 172). It is important to emphasize that the creation of new theatres, and the urge to organize theatre as a profession, was born out of a widespread conviction among educated Russians that the stage, as a public forum, had a vital role to perform (Frame 172). "The theatre had direct bearing on human thought, feeling and behaviour [...] Rise of merchant class and intelligentsia of the nineteenth century, theatrical activity surged forward with revolutionary impetus" (Marshall xv). When *Three Sisters* was written, Russia was undergoing a new agenda, the Worker's Revolution of 1905 (Fitzpatrick 31). The noble class in rural towns were aligning themselves with autocracy instead of liberalism, as peasant unrest grew. Military personnel were rallied and much of rural Russia was under Martial law, which of course resulted in many casualties (Fitzpatrick 28).

This tumultuous climate is reflected in the expression of an unpolluted life in Chekhov's work. Karlinsky says: "in Chekhov's writing, there is a continuous expression of longing for a decent, natural, and unpolluted life, a life that mankind cannot achieve if it continues to exterminate other living beings, destroy forests, and abuse the planet that we all share" (Karlinsky 156). This longing is particularly potent in *Three Sisters* with characters either lamenting the past or longing for the future. Chekhov did not write an enormous cannon of material; he died from Tuberculosis at the early age of 44. Even though he wrote short stories throughout his lifetime, it was between 1895 and 1904, in the last years of his life, that he wrote his few theatre masterpieces. Siegfried Melchinger suggests that his contemporaries found the innovation of his works strange and shocking (Melchinger 63) "His works needed time to succeed. The reason was not [...] a lack of dramatic effectiveness, but rather their unusualness" (Melchinger 63). He presented the lives of the aristocracy on the stage, to an audience who had never seen such a simple, realistic depiction before. Melchinger continues, saying Chekhov thought the most important thing was for his people to recognize how badly and boringly they were leading their lives:

This great wise man, who observed everything, who encountered his boring, gray mass of weak people, looked at the lazy inhabitants of his homeland and said to them, with a sad smile and in a tone of mild but profound reproach, with an expression of hopeless sorrow— "Ladies and gentlemen, you are living badly!" (Melchinger 66)

Sick with Tuberculosis, and far from the Moscow Art Theatre, Chekhov expressed this longing as he wrote *Three Sisters*.

PLAY

The Moscow Art Theatre (MAT) was famous for its original productions, including Chekhov's *Three Sisters* which remained in the theatre's repertoire for half a century (Marshall 70). Frame says it was the Art Theatre's association with Chekhov "that sealed its reputation not only for artistic reform but for political radicalism" (172).

Stanislavski founded the famous Moscow Art Theatre, or the MAT, at the beginning of the twentieth century. [...] The MAT has been a mirror of the times, reflecting in its repertoire the vitality of the most progressive forces of Russia, which foreshadowed the 1905 Revolution. (Marshall 70)

The major theme that concerns me in *Three Sisters* is that of cycles of time. The play begins at noon on a Sunday in May. It is Irina's name day, which introduces themes of ageing and the passing of time. In Act Two it is January of the following year. Act Three is four years later at night between two and three in the morning. Act Four is noon again, in the fall. The play begins with the arrival of guests and ends with their departure. All the while, the sisters stay in their home, mulling over themes of farewell, death, and buried hope. Melchinger suggests that through the passing of time and simultaneously the withering of hope, we see the metaphor of the process of ageing (39). The play is a cycle of joy and anguish in life and death.

We see these themes illustrated with Irina's journey throughout the play. Act One begins with Irina's name day, which is on the anniversary of the death of their father a year ago, and there is hope for the future with the arrival of guests. In Act Two Irina has a job, but it is not what she had hoped it would be. The third act culminates in a town-wide fire and the play ends with the death of Irina's fiancé, Tuzenbach. Although the play is riddled with despair, the sisters never fully give in. At the end, they accept their fate. While certainly hope is lost, as they sit together,



we understand that nothing will change for them, except the continued passing of time. Chekhov reminds his audience that hope is a part of life. The risk associated with giving into that hope is that we can be pulled out of experiencing our current life. The only comfort for the sisters is in the idea of Moscow. They obsess about the future, wishing for new beginnings in Moscow, and they obsess about the past, when they used to live in Moscow and their parents were alive. The broken clock is a symbol for how these characters cannot be present in time. For them, there is only past and future.

Just as the mummers come around the town to spread joy, and the Prozorovs will not accept them into their home, they will not accept the naturally changing landscape surrounding their lives. Their disassociation to the outside world, and their over attention to fantasy, is enhanced in Act Three, when the fire outside the family home barely ignites any action from the family inside. Throughout the play, none of the sisters tumble into madness, none of them make a choice to change their fate or to act on their dreams. The three of them sit in their family home as it slowly slips through their fingers in “[a] soft gentle lullaby into decay and despair” (Bloom 62). It becomes obvious that the Prozorov sisters will not take their lives into their own hands. They will not act. It is this that makes the play a true representation of humanity. “This story is told in painstakingly realistic detail, with apparently aimless dialogue, random interactions, and trivial events; yet at the same time the whole work develops a broad and encompassing vision of human life” (Loehlin 135). At first, critics in 1901 described the storyline of Moscow as confusing (Meister 246). Why did the sisters not just up and go? Later they pointed to the characters’ seeming lack of motivation as the feature of a new dramatic method. In *Three Sisters*, Moscow was not a city but “a symbol of a distant resplendent ideal to which suffering souls

yearningly direct their thoughts. It is an illusion, a mirage - to the traveler in a hopeless wilderness [...] it is a vision of a better life” (Meister 246). Chekhov’s realism is ironically steeped in fantasy.

Underneath Chekhov’s realism, he uses writing devices to express deeper messages. At times, his dialogue is spliced: two conversations are going on at the same time in separate areas on the stage. To the audience, it sounds as though they are speaking to one another. For example in Act One at the end of her long speech, Olga says, “if I were married, and stayed home all day, it would be better. I would love my husband,” to which Tuzenbach, on another part of the stage, and to another character, responds, “[y]ou’re being idiotic, I’m tired of listening to you” (Chekhov 8). The hope of return to Moscow mixes with another conversation about something else, forming a third meaning, which undermines the idea that a move to Moscow will ever happen. This writing technique allows the audience to see the play outside the lament of the individual characters, and instead, see the play as a looking glass to the revolution to come. It is through despair that a glimmer of hope is gleaned. As Charles Meister says: “[i]f Chekhov’s plays seem gloomy it is because they represent the last hour before the dawn. It is a not a note of despair but of invisible trust in the coming day” (Meister 248). Vershinin articulates this wish:

Obviously, you can’t hope to prevail against the forces of darkness; little by little you’ll have to succumb, you’ll be overwhelmed you’ll disappear, yes, but not without a trace; in your place, there might come six and then twelve people like you, and on and on, until eventually people like you will make up the majority. In two or three hundred years, life on Earth will be unimaginable wonderful and amazing. This is ultimately what our souls demand, and if this kind of life doesn’t yet exist, we must dream of it, hope for it, imagine

it; we must see more and understand more than our fathers and grandfathers. (Chekhov 25)

The characters in *Three Sisters* long and hope for the future and lament and idolize the past. They rarely acknowledge the present, unless it is in disgust or dissatisfaction. Just as something positive begins to unravel, Chekhov will change the action or have another character enter the scene to halt the event. For instance, whenever Masha and Vershinin have their exchanges of longing towards one another, the scene is punctuated with Masha's husband Kulygin entering the scene.

## CONTEXT

My journey through this version of *Three Sisters* will have dual contexts. Our performance of *Three Sisters* takes place in the original period in which it was first written (1902), in a sanatorium in Yalta where Chekhov himself is living, ill. *Three Sisters* was one of Chekhov's later plays which he wrote when he was sick in Yalta (Troyat 218). He was still associated with the MAT, and, with the company and the theatre in mind, he created one of his most celebrated works. Our director, Tanja Jacobs has situated our production to occur in Chekhov's life as he ages, sick, in the sanatorium. She wrote to our company this summer expressing his love for the MAT.

Chekhov longed for Moscow— he adored it and was married to one of the great actresses of the Moscow Art Theatre, the actress for whom he wrote the role of Masha.

The Moscow Art Theatre was Stanislavski's great revolutionary theatre and Anton Chekhov's artistic home. (Jacobs, email)

In our version, Members of the MAT and support staff of the sanatorium rally together to put on this new play he has been writing, perhaps as a full production or as a simple reading. Part way through the showing, it will melt into a second reality: the Prozorov's story. The actor playing Chekhov will play the role of Ferapont.

Irina is played by a nurse at the sanatorium with whom Chekhov has become close. This nurse happens to be Deaf, perhaps from a disease such as meningitis. She lost her hearing as opposed to being born without it. In her extensive time in the hospital amidst health care providers, she would have developed her own interest in medicine and pursued her nurse's degree. Interestingly, in the United States in 1897, the first female Deaf nurse, May Paxton, received her certification, working alongside Dr. Katharine B. Richardson. Richardson initially dismissed the idea of allowing any Deaf person to pursue her area of study. She then realized that was exactly what had been said about women in the medical profession and humbly changed her mind (Gannon 173). I will use Paxton's experience, and this piece of history, in my exploration of the role of the nurse. For example, there would not have been a lot of sign language communication in the ward. Instead, people would be just beginning to learn how to communicate with me as a new nurse. Many of the other characters will have to communicate with me using ASL, and inevitably there will be choice moments when I am not included in the conversation. This bi-lingual production will be an interesting look into how the hearing and Deaf communities cooperate.

### HEARING ASSUMPTIONS

In my extensive research on Deaf culture, I have come to the wide-eyed understanding that Deafness is not a disability. This is a contentious statement: of course those who experience Deafness are dis-abled by the hearing society they live in. But Deafness is only a hindrance if the hearing community is actively building and maintaining barriers for Deaf individuals. Talking about the representation of Deafness in performance, Harlan Lane says “hearing people are led to the same point of departure in their representation of deaf people: deafness is a bad thing” (Lane 6). In this show, we are most certainly representing the Deaf community from a hearing perspective, but rather than commenting on Deafness, the focus will be on the period Chekhov was writing in, and more importantly the extraordinary character of Irina. The choice to have her Deaf becomes a device in the show as much as any other. Not only are we taking the poetic liberty of using American Sign Language over Russian Sign Language, but I am a hearing person portraying a Deaf person’s experience. For the hearing community, “Deafness is the lack of something not the presence of anything: silence is emptiness, and silence represents the dark side of Deaf people” (Lane 7). Lane is suggesting that ignorance around Deafness comes from fear and lack of understanding, which results in a prejudice about the Deaf experience. The stereotype is that to be Deaf is a dark and terrible thing. It will be my pleasure and determination to use this device to explore the alternative possibilities to this stereotype. In representing Deafness, I will maintain my curiosity, respect, and allyship to the community. The “dark side” Lane mentions will refer instead to Chekhov’s environment inside which Irina brings the light. I strive to prove that the nurse’s Deafness is a gift into the possibilities of telling Irina’s story with complete expression of the body, illuminating and enhancing her need to express. It is not in silence that I

tackle this challenge, but in compassionate declaration of vibrations through the air, those that express her need to communicate and her desire to be heard.

### CHARACTER

It is essential when examining any one of the Prozorov sisters to acknowledge that in isolation, the character has less purpose than with the other two. There are many instances of the rule of three in *Three Sisters*, including staging, events, and character relationships. Scholars point to three love triangles, the rule of three, and the divinity associated with the number. I have even pondered on the three sisters in agricultural folklore: beans, squash, and corn. You cannot have beans without the corn stalk on which it grows, the plants cannot thrive without the nitrogen released from the bean leaves, and the squash provides shade to eliminate direct sunlight where nasty weeds could grow. Chekhov's three sisters encourage each other, help each other, protect each other, and need each other to thrive. If Olga is the protector, the squash, the hearty nutrients, and Masha is the flighty corn, strong-willed, unmovable, and seemingly independent, Irina is the beans, winding through her sisters, climbing on top of ideas, trying to find meaning, and always moving up and out in search of what she seeks. Loehlin clarifies that rather than centering the play on an individual or a clearly defined storyline, Chekhov distributes narrative interest among a large number of characters, and the action seems to proceed almost accidentally through the banal occurrences of everyday life (Loehlin 135). Their lives intertwine in coexistence.

Irina is the youngest and most hopeful sister at the beginning of the play. Gradually, she loses spirit with each act, and eventually admits that her lifelong dream of returning to Moscow

will not happen. The major action of the play revolves around the question of love, or love gone awry (Barricielli 62). Irina is sure, as are her sisters, that going to Moscow means more than simply returning to the way things were. To them, it means happiness for their future, which includes finding a husband, of course. “Marriage and Moscow are synonymous in Irina’s imagination. Neither she nor Olga has been turned from the golden dream by the day-to-day spectacle of Masha’s dull marriage” (Brahms 95). Irina is given the chance to have love with two separate men. She sternly refuses the forthcoming pressure from Solyony and reluctantly accepts the pedestrian companionship Tuzenbach offers; but neither produces the passionate excitement the dream Moscow inspires in her. Moscow is her “imaginary third lover” (Barricelli 62). As long as her love for Moscow remains, her heartbreak will prevail. Her attention is drawn to work which is the next place she hopes to find happiness.

Irina is a symbol of lost innocence in the face of unrealistic dreams and lack of appreciation for life. Chekhov demolishes the character’s dreams, ideals, and desires with irony. In Act One, Irina is hopeful that she has found what she describes as the “secret” to happiness: work. But in Act Two, her hopes are dimmed when she finds herself in the position she earlier dreamed of. Now that she works at the telegraph office, the reality of this dream is not as poetic as she thought. Although she is still hopeful, her dream of work bringing her happiness begins to buckle underneath her. In Act Four she will have passed her teaching exam, but none of these jobs bring her happiness. It is not work itself that is the problem. “Chekhov is not satirizing the idea of work, in fact he calls indolence and ignorance the most disastrous roots of human wretchedness” (Melchinger 140). Instead, work is a metaphor for happiness. Moscow is the crutch on which the three sister’s bond rests so strongly. Their loyalty to each other’s hopes and

dreams echoes throughout the play. Irina is the beans growing out of the shade of the squash, and up the corn stalk, seeking her own light and truth entangled in those who surround her. Yet even in her darkest despair, after the death of her fiancé, she says:

The time will come when everyone will know what all this is for, the suffering; and then there will be no more secrets, but until then we must live, we must work, just work! [...] It's autumn now, soon it will be winter, everything will be covered with snow, and I will be working, working... (Chekhov 121)

Throughout the play, Irina remains hopeful, right until the very end, when she knows they will not make it to Moscow. Yet she still manages to find the light, assuring her sisters that someday they will know what all of the heartache was for.

#### PRODUCTION HISTORY AND APPLICATION TO MY CHALLENGE

*Three Sisters* is a play performed in many different languages all over the world. It has been translated, adapted, interpreted, and continues to be stretched and moulded to suit the times. In 2014, *Three Sisters* was performed at the Wiener Festwochen theatre in Austria under the direction Timothy Kulyabin, without spoken text.

In Kulyabin's version, Chekhov's protagonists – normally interpreted with lofty pathos – must make do without spoken text. Using subtitles frees the actors of all misinterpretations, the words open up a novel perspective on the relationships between the characters, create unexpected levels of new meaning and deal a devastating blow to a theatre overly fixated on textual interpretation. (Three Sisters)



In our production, we will be working with a translation from Russian into English, and then a subsequent translation into ASL. I feel inspired to know of Kulyabin's production as I memorize my lines and enter this unknown territory. I believe experiencing Chekhov through ASL will add a substance of longing to Irina's need to communicate. Scholars and directors alike have expressed this same idea, although not explicitly in the context of sign language, but for interpreting Chekhovian text. Stella Adler says:

[y]ou feel Chekhov the way you feel music or realize a painting. It is not the words, it is something without words that comes through to us, because it is on a human level. The experience is inside. He presented the life around him as it was lived physically and inwardly. The times were turbulent, and Chekhov chose to show with truth and precision the hopeless longing that one felt in one's own heart. (178)

ASL is a gestural language, so we rarely see signs written down. Deaf persons read the same English hearing persons do, but when written down from signing, ASL has its own unique syntax. For the purposes of memorizing lines, for example, from an English script into ASL, the first step is an ASL Gloss. For our production, this was conducted for me by Toronto-based actor, activist, and Deaf culture champion, Sage Lovell. Lovell provided me with the ASL syntax for each one of Chekhov's lines, and an accompanying video for reference.

I began meeting with Lovell in the early days of the summer 2016, after the completion of my intensive ASL 101 course at the Canadian Hearing Society. We began with simple weekly tutoring as we worked through ASL 102. This laid the foundation of the language for me as I dove into understanding Chekhov through my body. My preparation has involved practicing finger spelling words whenever possible, studying the line videos, translating for myself words I

hear on the radio, or what I overhear on the bus. My bedroom wall is covered in small graphics of signs, with those from the play, and those I find more difficult, carefully circled. I believe that the more comfortable I can become in this short time of preparation, the more easily I can work using this frame to lift Irina's desires, and add another dimension to the character, as opposed to taking something away. As I worked in-studio this summer and into the fall semester, I paid particular attention to all the steps involved with communicating a need onstage. I was particularly fascinated upon realizing that there is one, distinct, small step that marks the difference in my acting process between hearing and Deaf communication. In communication with a scene partner, information is vibrated towards me. I absorb and openly receive it, I allow it to affect me, I feel and follow the impulse towards a response, I release into that impulse, and I vibrate that message out. The difference between what it means to "listen" and to "speak" is where a change might occur.

In my research, I have found that listening is a full body experience. It deals with vibrations of the air around me, the ground upon which I stand, the clothing I wear, and the architecture I stand in. My body becomes the ear, with a head, a base and a core, and, just like the ear hole, my core is the area through which I receive messages. I feel the impact of what is being said to me, and how precisely it affects me, by listening to my core physiological and emotional self. How does it feel to have someone say this particular thing to me in this particular moment? Perhaps it feels hurtful, in which case I might sense an immediate weight, a cold sensation in my arms, a fire in my stomach, and a tension in my jaw and fists. What is being said is a vibration in part vocally, in part physically, and in part gesturally. Words in ASL are replaced

with conceptual gesture which carry meaning. As such, my listening takes on a new visual quality.

Irina sees her environment in a different way from her sisters. Her perception of body language and relationships will prove to be sophisticated. Her dream remains hopeful and innocent. This task excites me as an actor, but communicating it will be my truest challenge. As mentioned in my actor's challenge, the release comes quite naturally, it is using the release to its full advantage I find difficult. Brad Gibson, an instructor at the Voice Intensive, describes a person's voice as a transparency to their state. It is a vehicle for our psyche's response and impulse to communication. If my voice is a transparency to what I am feeling in any given moment, then my eyes and gestural expression can be the vehicle through which inner communication is externalized. My voice, in the context of this role, will be expressed with my whole body.

In preparation for playing Irina, I will need to establish a separate warm up from my regular one based entirely on getting into the language of ASL. In my sessions with Lovell, I noticed that it would take almost 30 minutes before there was a nice flow to our communication and eventually my signing. I had better success in a session if it was first thing in the morning or after a good break. Working in ASL is tiring as it engages my whole body: my hands, the precise articulation of my fingers, placement of my arms, facial expressions, and bodily placement. In ASL, where the body is located determines tense, leaning forward means future, leaning backwards is past. Leaning side to side refers to other people. Eyebrows indicate adjectives and other punctuations. To introduce a new topic, the eyebrows are raised. To express amounts, such as a large quantity, the brow is furrowed. To demonstrate a long distance, the tongue is

introduced, and wags back and forth quickly while signing. These are just a few examples of the subtle complexities in the language, which at first seem contradictory to my acting training at York, where using great facial expressions has been discouraged. I notice, after a two-hour session, my retention weakens and some parts of the language that came easily at the beginning of the session become more difficult. I have learned to listen to my body and take breaks when I need to. I have taken this into account as I work my lines, even before rehearsals have begun. I am developing a skill which can take a lifetime to perfect, and am trying my best to be gentle with myself as I make many mistakes and stumble through this learning process. I hope the work I have established in using gravity, in exploring my character's situational stakes, and in ASL tutoring will help develop an endurance that will hold me through the whole play.

On a habitual level, there are many commonalities between my experiences with the actor training and in learning this language. I am thinking in a new way, stretching my comfort levels and exploring vulnerable places. As such, my old habits begin to show up again. I thrust my head and neck forward to make a point, tighten unnecessarily my jaw, lower back, feet, and tongue, and I even notice I hold my breath. Learning ASL was a simple reminder that it is in vulnerability and uncertainty where I must continue to do conscious release work.

## FINDINGS

In *Three Sisters*, Chekhov shows the changing seasons through the years. We follow the characters through the seasons as their lives unfold in relation to the literal weather around them. What happens in the winter is different than in the summer, especially in a climate such as Russia. Scholars point to this device in his plays as essential to the context of the characters' journeys. My journey began in September of 2016 in the fall and in the investigations of falling.

With falling, I was encouraged to release internally, with the intention of releasing, so my natural voice could come through. I attempted to be in better touch with gravity, to use its multi-directional pull to my advantage, and to practice an overall release of habitual unnecessary gripping. I understood my practice to be based around if I could fall “well”. However, in my research and feedback, I was made aware of the dangers in focusing too directly on the fall on its own. There is a risk of collapse. At times, this was my experience. I would fall so far inside, my scene partner would lose connection with me, my vocal energy would fade, and I would become less compelling to watch. I accepted then that the fall was the first part of an action with a beginning, middle, and end. The fall is the first section, the initiation, and the inspiration.

In my conversations with Professor Gibson, I began thinking about falling in a new way. He suggested to me that a fall is something someone does or does not recover from, that there is no control. It is inaction, and therefore un-actable. In my process, the choices I make for my character are with the highest stakes possible. If I choose to play Irina in an apathetic manner, where she says she wants to return to Moscow but does not really care whether or not she makes it, then I have removed the drama altogether. It is a much stronger choice for me to realize the need to get to Moscow in a real way, with real consequences if I do not make it. I must always choose the action— perhaps this is why it is called acting. Falling is not acting. Professor Gibson suggested I look to create an internal fall towards my core, not down to the ground. If, in rehearsal and studio work, I can look at the directionality of the fall, I can begin to avoid the dangers of collapse and welcome the practice of release.

Just as a new breath is demanded of the body, swirls around in the lungs, and releases up and out, so too does this fall. This fall is incomplete without its upward and outward motion. I

had to therefore change the way in which I looked at the fall. The season does not exist in the absence of the other three seasons; there is no fall without the dream of spring. The success of the fall is in its spring (or swing) up and outward to affect my scene partners and the audience. It is Irina, the flower blossoming out of the dark soil.

I believe that to wholly experience a moment in my body onstage is enough to communicate with my audience. I have to trust my audience as living humans who have natural empathy and believe that my ability to play my body chemistry like a musical instrument is my skill and expertise. I can play this chemistry by continuing to practice sensing my body throughout as much of my day as possible. I do not rely on hoping the show will go well, praying the audience be all that I need them to be. Instead, I can trust the hard work I have put in, working synonymously with a team to demonstrate a greatness in collaboration.

How can I externalize in precise, muscled form while releasing on the inside? My drive comes from a faith I have in my abilities, my work, and my training. I am driven by my emotional and spiritual energy and Irina's longing to express. Her need to communicate is my frame. As I move further into my thesis, continuing my training, I wonder if I can feel my heartbeat externalize, the stretch of my muscles, the vibration of my voice, and the communication potential of gesture all at once. I never imagined that in September 2015, when I was lying on the pavement on top of my bicycle with a broken hand, that in September 2016, I would be learning how to communicate using only my hands.

## CONCLUSION

Performing Irina in *Three Sisters*, was a turning point in my experience of fatigue as an actor. I believe the actor is always learning, and as I move into new productions, with new skills, it is my job to investigate, research and execute with the same rigour I approached *Three Sisters*. I will do this with gentleness towards myself and belief in the production. As pertaining to my thesis, I realized, the fall, swing, and externalizing is not as simple as a three part action. It is all happening at the same time, there are swings happening in all directions and to try to break the process apart in observation is to pull myself out of the scene. Breaking it down is useful in writing but not in performances, there is simply too much going on. I still fear letting go of my stomach, low back, and jaw if I am in unknown territory. I am comfortable onstage but in moments of insecurity, such as being inside a language I do not know well, all of my clenching returns. I need to remember that releasing is different from collapse and releasing will allow access to the needs of my character, I learned that through this project. My objective, and the need of my character to be understood were the loudest thing in my score. The upward swing to full extension happens as a result of releasing into the need. What follows is breath that fuels the story, motivation to move around the space, and clarity in communication.

I have trained myself to be present onstage. For me, this means my body is alive, I am breathing, I am focused, and I am ready. This readiness results in an authentic reaction to any given moment. If, for example, I am supposed to be surprised by the entrance of another character, with this readiness I will be. Playing Irina Deaf brought me even further into this state of readiness, as I had to imagine that I could not hear. I was feeling with my whole body,

listening to social cues, body language, and vibrations to inform the way I interacted with my surroundings. Unfortunately, and unexpectedly, as a result of this readiness, the slightest sound would trigger a reaction in me. I therefore had to unlearn this part of my training, or rather add another step in my training. In clown, improvisation, mask work, puppetry, realism, I cannot pretend something on stage didn't happen, I acknowledge all. In order to get around this, I had to live a step ahead of the entire play so I could train myself not to react. For example, I would have a cue line to remind me not to react when Rhode and Fedotik entered the scene in Act One, until I noticed everyone else react either by facial expression or turning their heads in the same direction. This helped quite a bit, as soon enough, I could react at the appropriate time for a Deaf person in a hearing environment. Another factor which helped me authentically react to my world was sounding to myself. If I hummed or made vocal sounds to myself as a distraction, I could respond more to touch and less to external sounds. I also noticed I could feel certain vibrations more than others. When Andrei yelled at me in Act III, I could feel the air around me moving more than any other scene. These extra steps were a lot of work, but proved to be essential in my exploration of Irina.

### WARM UP

In preparation for playing Irina, I needed to establish a warm up based entirely on getting into the language of ASL. Learning ASL was a simple reminder, that it is in vulnerability and uncertainty where my acting challenge creeps in. The necessary warm up as the process went on had to do with rest. If I signed too much before the show, I'd exhaust myself and mix my lines up. I would forget which sections had already passed and getting back on track was confusing. I



had to come to rehearsal loose enough to feel fluid in my movements, but not tired from working out too rigorously. My warm up was either yoga early in the day, or a gentle 20 minutes of simple joint rotations, walking and breathing, and going over difficult sections of text. The mornings when I was able to do Yoga, I had a greater facility to access how I was feeling in a given moment of rehearsal, and more ease and compassion for what we were trying to accomplish as a company. I'd make sure to be hydrated, well rested, and well nourished. I would also begin the run by connecting to those characters I'd be singing to in the show. We would simply sign to each other from across the room, asking how they were today, if they were ready for the run, or any other mundane way into signing, just to get my head in the world. I found communicating with Paul, my main scene partner for the show, the most important. To acknowledge that we were about to work and we were present for each other and ready.

### LISTENING TO MY BODY

Listening to my body was difficult once we got into long rehearsals. A combination of factors affected my fatigue and made listening to my body the last thing on my list. There were times when I actively avoided listening to my body since I knew that if I were to listen, I'd collapse to the floor in fatigue. I learned about compartmentalizing my energy, and this I did not expect to do. I began giving less to the emotionally draining scenes if the director was stopping and starting us. I learned what kinds of foods were better to eat and why. If I had more than two coffees in the day, I'd end up with less energy. If I had a piece of fruit during the last break of the day, it would give me a final push to the end.

I was exhausted during the show, but was able to continue pushing forward and through the process. It was after closing night that I noticed just how much I had worked myself. I slept for many days after the show was over, I had trouble getting out of bed in the morning, I ate pasta and bread everyday, I was emotionally, physically, and mentally drained. I normally experience an invigoration at the end of a show, excitement for the next project and proud of my accomplishments. After *Three Sisters* I had a different feeling. I felt that the work I had done was ripped from my hands, and a rug was pulled from under my feet. I poured myself into this role, learning the language, learning the performance history, playing the role with as much authenticity as I could and showing up everyday as rested, prepared, and ready to work. Suddenly, there was no more tutoring, no more practicing of my lines, no more ASL warm ups, no more Irina. It was a curious feeling, as if I had been broken up with. There was a sense of loss.

I reflected on the exhausted I felt after the show and I realized it was a result of three major factors. The first was, of course, working in another language. It was complex storytelling for a beginner in ASL. I needed more time with my tutor, more time on the scenes with my partners, more support from the director, and more Deaf artists on the project. The second was how clear it became that the Deaf story was not the priority in the rehearsal hall and I struggled with having my awareness in two places at once. I felt a responsibility to fight for the Deaf story when Sage was not in the room. When Sage was called for rehearsal, it was mostly for one-on-one tutoring in another room with the other actors. We were not coached on how to communicate with one another onstage. Therefore, when we had moments of only sign language in the play, I felt as though if I did not stop our rehearsals to advocate for Irina in the moment, then no one

would. Sage told me that even productions with full cast of Deaf actors have ASL coaches. We were desperately in need of someone on the outside to watch for clarity in the sign language communication, to watch for whether or not Irina was included in conversation, and in monitoring sight lines. A rehearsal director for the Deaf storyline would have meant I could focus on Irina's journey and not have to split my focus to keep track of the authenticity of my character's Deafness. Being the advocate for the Deaf story pulled me out of the scene, the world of the play, the emotional journey of the character, and this took a lot of energy. Eventually, I had to let go of that responsibility. I had to accept I would never achieve the true experience of a Deaf person, and do the best I could considering the level of my signing and my knowledge of Deaf culture. I began focusing on clarity of communication first and foremost, my physical releasing, and emotional journey came second to being understood. Finally, the third reason for fatigue was a result of the length of *Three Sisters*. We were running the show just shy of 4 hours, and for my character it was 4 hours of hanging onto hope, trying to be understood, and being met with continuous disappointment. I realized that as I worked at what felt like a marathon for my hands, fingers, facial muscles, and posture, that if I focused on communicating clearly, everything else would follow suit. All the work I did in the summer, and the classes in my first year at York proved to have stuck. Falling to external expression was happening.

## GOALS

My goal when the piece began was to use the swing of the fall to its external potential. I learned in rehearsal that this was not a uniquely physical exploration but the combination of the character's objective together with a bodily experience. It's not interesting to watch someone

simply release onstage as that becomes a wash of emotion without specificity. Specificity comes easy to me if my focus is on my objective. My goal after we began rehearsals was to endure the sheer size of my task. The fall became secondary to specificity in my sign language, or pretending not to hear commotion onstage. The fall, swing, and extension became a process I could trust I was doing without even thinking about it.

The first rehearsal, I was so thrilled at the simple fact that I got through the script in one sitting; something I hadn't done before. I burst into tears the minute we finished, in part because of how difficult those four hours were, and in part because I was so proud of myself; it felt like the exam I'd been studying for. Once rehearsals and blocking began, I felt I had to keep up with how fast the play was moving. I would often feel as though I was slowing the play down, I could sense the possibility of really flying through the script, and in scenes where Irina doesn't speak, this became very obvious to me. I was experiencing perhaps a feeling the York season theme permitted me to, the feeling of burdening others because of my condition. My experience was in a flash of a moment, yet it stayed with me. Aside from the tangible elimination of my own speech and therefore limitation in my communication, I felt dis-abled by the group around me. I felt responsible for the fact that the show took 4 hours to get through, and so began sacrificing the quality of my signing in favour of time or in favour of the emotional connection to the other characters. I felt frustrated that the director would have us spend hours setting and re-setting the table, which fork goes to which plate, transitions of scenes and so forth. Why weren't we running the ASL exchanges over and over? We could have smoothed the communication out, increased reaction time, practiced for the sake of clarity and refinement. Why was this neglected? Perhaps

the director did not feel equipped to handle directing scenes where signing was involved seeing as they do not sign. I felt oppressed by the rehearsal process, not being able to communicate in my own language because I was trying to live the reality of my character, yet feeling quite limited in my vocabulary of this second language. I learned that there is agency as the actor, and depending on the relationship I have with my director, I can and will always fight for the integrity of my character's journey. I feared that doing this play meant I would have to put aside my disagreement with the idea of a hearing person playing a Deaf role. In the end, I was able to use my knowledge of Deaf culture and my passion for the story to demand that Irina's plight be understood. I could help create a world halfway between the reality of the Deaf experience, and the hearing world's interpretation of what it might be.

Checking in with Sage regularly was important to my process. Even though we had no time scheduled together when they were at rehearsals, I would make sure to go over and check in about the process. I was grateful for Sage's general encouragement, while coaching me on specific moments. Sage told me I was smoother when I wasn't nervous. I was embarrassed to know that was being observed, that but I knew it to be true. This became especially clear to me on closing night.

## RECEPTION

On the third and final night of the show, there were ten Deaf patrons present and this turned out to be the perfect culmination of the frustrations I'd been feeling all along. Since only the spoken lines of the show were interpreted, I noticed my signing improve significantly in this performance. I was aware that whatever I signed was the only way the Deaf patrons would be

able to understand the story. I became aware of every mistake I made, embarrassed as I signed. I turned my body towards that section of the audience, and took my time trying to focus on grammar and completion of thoughts. I began watching myself pretend to be Deaf for the first time. I was living in the world of this community with them, and I could feel that it was insufficient. The patrons made their concerns known after the show let out, and there was even an escalation in the hallway between one audience member and the director. I heard them say that to call the production bilingual was misleading as most of the signed portions of the play were not understandable. I felt validated in all of my worries about the production as a whole, after so many conversations with Sage, other actors in the show, my friends and family. Later, once when most of the audience was gone, I went over to the group of Deaf patrons and spoke with them. I thanked them for coming to the show and how important it was for everyone to hear what the actual Deaf community had to say about the show. My greatest accomplishment was found in this conversation. These patrons expressed their gratefulness in my fight for the Deaf story through this process. They said I was the most articulate onstage, that I could even pass as a Deaf person given my facial expressions and how I communicated. They agreed, my sign language is beginner, but the way I lived on the stage was not. After this night, Sage and I have had many debriefing conversations, and my knowledge of the Deaf experience has continued to expand beyond the show. I feel so grateful for this experience.

### AFFIRMATION MOVING FORWARD

In approaching my acting challenge to other shows, my favourite thing will happen first, I will listen to my body. If my body is tired, I will seek the rest needed to endure, or

compartmentalize my energy in order to survive. If I am spending too much energy on disagreeing with the project, I will have a hard time giving over to the elements that invigorate me, like the character's need. I will listen to myself before the process has begun, and carefully decide whether it is a project I can get behind so that I can be sure to give myself wholly to the character and the character's circumstances. This, in turn, will result in a positive working attitude, environment, and higher quality of work. I will trust that I have the ability to release without collapse. When I release I will have access to the needs of my character which is the engine to drive forward whatever skill necessary, even if it is another language, to get those needs met.

## OBSERVATION JOURNALS

### **December 1**

My Book: Before starting I've cut up and pasted my working script into a big bound book. I've written in definitions, translations of certain latin or Russian words, added pronunciation bits, and clarified things about certain characters. I've got a section in the back for notes from rehearsal, and I've even taken the time to decorate each Act with a title page of watercolour and pastel drawings to inspire what it is Irina would have doodled.

I am looking forward to speaking with other members of the cast and the director about nuances, the other characters and other things in the play. I feel like I am coming at the process from one perspective, and the doors will be opening around me, like my peripheral vision expanding. I have imagined Russian culture, read up on it, explored it as much as possible without ever having visited. I changed my bedroom around so the majority of what I look at each morning would be within the colour scheme I imagine Irina looked at. I've been listening to Tchaicovski. (a way better choice than the frightening Stravinsky). And I have been cooking Russian foods to taste what she would taste. I have found more than anything a strong desire for a simple shift in my senses. I think this has to do with removing my hearing.

### **December 6**

We did the first read through, and I think in combination with reading the entire play outloud with actual people to each character, combined with the events of my friends mother, the stress leading up to that point, and finally doing the entire play signed, I burst into tears of overwhelmed. It was a tremendous feat to actually get to that table and read through the entire thing (it took us over 3 hours). I was so proud of myself and my work, I was very disappointed at times, fearing people would think I should be far further along than I am considering how much time I've put in. But I got such wonderful words from my colleagues and the director or encouragement and congratulations that I felt able to rise to the challenge.

When I walked in, with the costumes, tables, chairs, bright eyes and excitement, I just about burst into tears after having worked so hard alone on this play. Writing my supporting documents, learning ASL, meeting with Sage. There were so many unanswered questions for me, I felt isolated and alone, so to walk into a room with 20 people sitting in a circle was thrilling. I was sad to see one of my friends was no longer in the show because his mother tragically passed away. This was so sad for many members of the cast, and even more reason to do a good job. Life is fragile and although I am stressed, I will find the joy and comfort I always do in doing a show.

### **December 9**

I've been clunking around a music stand with my big bound book on it so I have access to both my hands for signing. I am struggling so much with simple communication. Diving straight into



blocking when I haven't actually practiced speaking with my scene partners is so much harder in a different language and with just my hands. First of all, the other actors don't really understand ASL so the more I sign, I feel like I am overacting in order to get a point to them, but I can see them attempting to understand but mostly reading my body to try to get when my line is done. Today I felt like no one was listening to me, I wouldn't be finished a line and they would already start speaking over me. I think, just like in life I will see what happens if I just start singing over them as well. Sage taught me that once you start to understand what someone is getting at you can start acknowledging that. So instead of standing and receiving what people are saying or singing to me (or through Paul, who plays Chekhov, my interpreter, to me) I will be acknowledging all the while. So I might nod or show my understanding. Another thing started today, which was that there are these long silences that at first were completely awful, it was as if someone forgot a line. The play is chugging along then it's my turn to speak and it's totally embarrassing, everyone is just looking at me wondering when it's over. Then when I finish, the play picks up again. And I cannot converse the way I do in English. When I try, it's sloppy and embarrassing. It feels as if I have to get everyone's attention to awkwardly sign my way through a speech then punctuate it's end. It doesn't feel like communication yet. I wonder if it will? We are all such beginners.

Sage said maybe I'll begin to understand the Deaf experience this way. I'm not sure about that.

I have been compartmentalizing my time better, I am focused, and I am able to withstand an entire long day in ASL, blocking, line memorization etc. I don't feel like I am listening to my body all that much, and am forcing myself to avoid that in fact because I know underneath I am exhausted and doubtful of my abilities. I am so afraid of doing this wrong, I am presenting myself in an overtly professional way, with confidence and clarity.

#### **January 4**

It's the day before we go into rehearsals after a 3 week break for the holidays. My discoveries in working on my lines have helped me as I prep for our return:

We don't have a lot of time to get through such an immense play, and it's unclear how far we will get. The director keeps saying we will get as far as we get, and that's about it.

I feel a lot of stress around what's expected of me. When I look at the play as a whole I am overwhelmed. Mostly since we haven't looked past Act 2 in the blocking.

When I go over my lines in the parts we've blocked I have a way better sense of memorization, intention etc.

Earplugs: I worked up the courage to finally ask Sage what they thought about me using earplugs in rehearsal. I explained to them what a tremendous difficulty it has been pretending I cannot hear commotion onstage, or lines being spoken around me. I would often turn my head when a sound would happen because as I've learned in the past 1.5 years at York, you can't let anything go unnoticed onstage. Every choice matters, and so when someone is trying to get my attention,

and I am working towards authenticity in my acting, how am I supposed to pretend I don't know they are trying to get my attention and then calculate and decide when it is I actually do see them? I noticed extra attention I was paying to calculating when and where I hear what, and how much of someone's facial expressions, mouth movements, or body language I could understand without ASL. Since I was paying so much attention to that, I would forget my blocking all together. There was just so much information going around in my head as I tried to simply remember my lines and connect with my scene partner. Remembering blocking is hard enough as is but suddenly there was an extra layer to the blocking: where was I facing? If I was faced away from action onstage, it became a choice when I think Irina would notice other people's eye contact and turn around, or when the nurse playing Irina was so lost she'd have to look over to Chekhov for the interpretation. It all became too much for me to keep track of.

Sage asked me why I didn't just use earplugs in rehearsal. I explained I was worried that would be a bad choice, or insensitive to Sage's or other Deaf folks experience. Who cares that I am struggling in rehearsals? It doesn't compare to the struggle Deaf folks encounter daily in a hearing society. Sage told me it mattered more that I wasn't getting too lost in these moments, trying to decide how it COULD be without my hearing and instead just to see how it is. So coming back to rehearsal this week, I am going to try.

Other prep for this week:

Plan 1: Earplugs

Plan 2: Memorization goals.

Plan 3: Externalization, extension and swing.

## **January 6**

This particularity about how i've memorized certain phrases. Some are sloppily memorized, because of where I start a section of the script so I'm not warmed up for example. Or vice versa where I am getting tired so the end of the sections are more slopping. Consistently. Need to practice out of order.

When I get really worked up i noticed I wanted to vocalize! Do dancers? Wow! It took more energy to not vocalize! Then to express the whole body. Trust believe!  
Nerves around lack of preparation. Can I release and let the breath in? EVER? This play is about endurance. There is salvation somewhere in life. To be an adult is to realize that's not possible. Others who think they are will be hurt. The danger of false hope. Dreaming is dangerous because you're not here now. Irina tries to be here in her bluntness, directness.

I need to sleep an hour more every night.

I feel like I'm in a different play than everyone else.

## January 8

WHAT DO I UNDERSTAND WHEN PEOPLE SPEAK TO ME? WHAT DONT I UNDERSTAND?? I AM IN CONSTANT NEGOTIATION WITH MYSELF AS AN ACTOR AND IT'S TROUBLING.

When do I know someone is finished speaking? I think I start signing before they are done sometimes? But the frame of the play is such that I can't not know what's about to happen because I'm in a play within a play! And it's not the FIRST READ.

My animal body is heightened, the first time we did the Solyony scene, I felt him through my whole body. I needed out and he was the predator. But I had nowhere to go and I had only three gestures I could repeat to get him to back off. I WANTED TO SCREAM. I was shaking when we stopped and my scene partner told me it was an experience he wouldn't forget because it was so alive.

ASL ISSUES: Bouncing, pounding during my fingerspelling. Articulation still applies! Not too tight, not sharp enough. FLOW.

\*\*I'm scared that to the hearing person I'll look like a bad actor who exaggerates and to the Deaf person I'll look like a joke/disaster - or worse...that i'm mimicking.

## January 10

A new level down. Too much colloquial acting. NOW for me the ASL is too contemporary for this play...

My focus on my task has taken a back burner to my frustrations with this process. We only done the scenes of acts 3 and 4 one time though. i think this director doesn't believe in repetition. Repletion is exactly what I need. -> need to regain my focus.

There's a trap I am falling into where I don't give my all in rehearsal because I am afraid of expelling all of my energy, when we work 8 hours I begin to lose my mind!!!

Trying to narrow myself upwards in the dress. I feel a power in the upward pull of energy. My neck straightens, i feel my heels on the ground (even though I am in heels) and the dress is now my friend. The constraint of it somehow works with all the constraints I feel in the play, the world, the process, the ASL. I am SO noticing all the gripping it's a great play and period to practice breath space and release work.

Trying to get rid of my book. it's an anchor. Leaning a bit on those who are voicing my text. It's a funny route to take to simplify the burden.

1. Constant struggle to find the motivation to stay in the scene / moment with others when absolutely no one is translating for me. Authentically, I would just leave the room or insist they include me.

2. Still accidentally turn my head towards commotion when I certainly wouldn't hear it. Often negotiating whether or not I would feel it. But my sense of feeling is that of a hearing person, same with my peripheral vision. SO FUCK. Nervous to try but will do earplugs soon.
3. Noticing scene partner's eyes. Trying to negotiate as people who live in close proximity, family etc for so many years, would there be whole bunch I understand without language? I think so.

### **January 20**

I don't think I've squared my hips and shoulders to the audience at the same time. ASL is so vulnerable, I can't share it fully to the audience. I'm afraid!

3.5 hour run of the show...

With Michael, Sage, Amanda, Sean, Tanja, Katya, Robyn, Judy, 2 light and projector people and another dude in the audience, there was something about turning out to the audience. I cant do it fully. Always right directly to the scene partner. When I do turn out I actually eyes down or up, but not on horizon. Waaaayyyy too vulnerable. Whole show! All about the journey.

I hid the whole run. Young woman. BUCK UP.

Sage said to turn out during the listening and the speaking. ShARE.

Nonna passed away yesterday. I have to go to the funeral on Sunday and miss Q2Q.

Started 6 days before the show to feel that i am listening to my scene partners vs. waiting until they are done their line to do my line.

Confusion with lines.

I do my lines according to the gloss, sometimes the speaker waits for me sometimes I wait for the speaker, we haven't had enough repetitions to get a rhythm down!

### **January 24**

Yesterday I wore earplugs for the run of our first run since the lights were set;. I took them out after Act 1.

What did I learn?

I have established a lot of auditory cues of this role since I am a h hearing person.

Taking one sense away is less functional since I'm not Deaf. I don't have visual compensations going on. So it's actually less authentic and more of a DISABILITY.

I took the earplugs out because the director kept talking to us from the table and because I was becoming distracted by how lovely it was to be in my own quiet little world where my needs were the loudest. Hearing my own experience differently. I heard my own breath, my bones

moving, my vocal reactions muffled. Other senses were certainly louder, I could smell my scene partner's breath, or maybe i was just more aware?

SWING: It's fucking fast. Every move is apart of the swing. It's not so separate.

Sage reassured me it's good to sign slowly onstage because people should know what I'm saying and need to see/understand. Need to work on turning out and playing to the audience.

This language has the tone of the play.

The image is the bond between the characters. Our need to master language is to form connections through language.

I can't see improvement.

OKAY my goal for the dress with a full audience: Find the joy in the acts. Make Moscow real in my mind. Release my heels. Observe everything with my eyes. Open to the audience.

### **January 28**

The show was just shy of 4 hours last night. I could feel my feet, heart, my jaw especially. I was aware of the audience but more so my scene partners and sage and i had to think ahead of my audience due to a lagging nature of the show. i thought about wha was coming next a lot since id never done the show straight through 4 acts.

I came aware of Sage interpreting the show. Each time it was my line, Sage would turn and watch me. Having my tutor present makes my feelings of inadequacy amplify. I want to do well for Sage for my supervisors. Those eyes on me help me focus Its my scene partners who matter even more. they were looking at me listening to me trying to be understood. Pacing was all fucked up. I made mistakes, and turned me head several times in reaction to a sound.

I watched myself this whole show because there were 10 Deaf people present, and my family, and my friends, and my supervisor. Everything on this night. There was something that happened in the hall, all I heard was sounds of a distressed Deaf person and the interpreter saying "But you're not listening to me, I am telling you I didn't understand your play". It was very uncomfortable and I watched the director walk away from the conversation.

They told me I did a good job, and although I heard that from a lot of different people, to hear it from Deaf people was overwhelming. I did it? Did I do it? Holy shit!

Sage said I know 500 signs.

### **January 30**

The show is done, I can't even begin to think about what comes next. I'm so tired, I'm just in bed all the time and I can't process that this is over. We haven't even hit a stride in running this show? It felt like a conversation one long conversation and it's incomplete.

Image 1

Saratov: Port City on Volga River.

ASL ACT II

THREE SISTERS

**TUZENBACH.** And I'm going to keep coming to the telegraph office and walking you home for ten, twenty years, until you tell me to go away... [Noticing MASHA and VERDUNSKAYA, Approvingly] Oh, it's you! Good evening!

1. **IRINA.** I'm home, at last. [To MASHA.] A woman came in, just as I was about to leave. She wanted to send a telegram to her brother in Saratov, telling him that her son had died today, but she couldn't remember her brother's address. So she ended up just sending it to Saratov: that's all, no number, no street name. She was crying and I snapped at her for no reason. I said, "Oh, hurry up, would you." It was so stupid. Are the mummies coming tonight?

**MASHA.** Yes.

2. **IRINA** [sits down in an armchair]. I have to sit down. I'm so tired.

**TUZENBACH** [smiling]. When you come back from work, you look so young and so forlorn. [Pause.]

3. **IRINA.** Tired. No, I don't like the telegraph office, I don't.

**MASHA.** You've lost weight. [whistling]. And you look younger, your face looks like a boy's...

**TUZENBACH.** That's because of the haircut.

1. Ready leave work woman come in  
Her letter brother far become.  
Inform son recent died.  
Understand remember address? Can't.  
Send hope! Fingers  
Number none, address none.  
Crying.  
Hey! Hurry up!  
Me stupid.  
Tonight everybody music come!  
*point@ me come*  
sit by the lamp

2. Need sit. Exhausted. tired.

3. Tired, that office letter me like not.

46

Image 2

... enter w Tuz + Versh.

Point to doors/chairs

→ We were downstairs watching the fire and being in Dining Room with others.

THREE SISTERS

hands, a head; maybe I don't really exist, and I only think that I walk, eat, sleep. [Weeps.] Oh, if only. If only I really didn't exist! [Stops crying, gloomily.] God knows.... The other day there was a conversation going on at the club - they were talking about Shakespeare, Voltaire.... I've never read any of it, not a single line, but I sat there with this expression on my face, looking as if I had. The same with the others. Disgusting! And then I thought of that woman, the one I let die ... and it all came back to me, my stomach knotted up, I wanted to retch.... So instead I got drunk...

Enter IRINA, VERSHININ and TUZENBACH. TUZENBACH is wearing a new, fashionable civilian suit.

1. IRINA. Let's sit down. No one will come in here.  
 VERSHININ. If it hadn't been for the soldiers, the whole town would have burned down. Good men! [Rubs his hands with pleasure.] The salt of the earth! Excellent fellows!  
 KULYGIN [approaching them]. What is the time, if you please?  
 TUZENBACH. Past three, already. It's getting light.
2. IRINA. Everyone is sitting in the dining-room, nobody's leaving. Your friend Solyony is there... [To CHEBURYKIN.] You'd better go to bed, doctor.

ASL

1. Sit sit sit. (pause)  
 Come in, none.  
 (was)

Invite everyone in sit on bed

2. All go out stay where? Food room  
 two hands

(43)

Irina

~~Leave, none.~~

Versh

Your friend, there.

Tuz

arrive. Hey! Doctor, you looking need go sleep. for quiet. Possible that T. know.

Image 3

Amazing capacity to receive info ~~nothing~~ acting.

Masha lies in bed

ACT III

1. IRINA. Yes, Andrei has really gone downhill, living with that woman. He's become petty, and dull and middle-aged. Once he was aiming to be a professor, but yesterday he was bragging that he'd finally been made a member of the District Council. He's a member of the Council, and Protopopov is the chairman.... The whole town is talking about it, laughing up their sleeves, he's the only one who doesn't know anything and doesn't see.... And tonight while everyone else has run off to fight the fire, he's been sitting in his room oblivious to it all. Just playing his violin... [Agitated.] Oh, it's awful, awful, awful! [Weeps.] I can't, I can't bear any more!... I can't, I can't!...

Enter Olga, tidies up her dressing table.

2. [Sobs loudly.] Throw me away, throw me away, I can't stand any more!...

OLGA [frightened]. What is it, what is it? My darling!

3. IRINA [sobbing]. Where is it? Where's it all gone? Oh God, God! I've forgotten it all, everything.... It's all mixed up in my head.... I don't remember the Italian for windows, or ceiling.... I am forgetting it all, every single day, and life is passing us by and it will never come back, never, and we'll never get to Moscow.... I see that now, we won't...

85

50 Irina can't bear anymore confides in Olga who tells her to marry Baron

ASL

1. Yes brother downhill meet that woman. He picky, boring, old. Before dream become teacher. Recent yesterday

Need Hey! Brag you know join town Council.

Him man boss chair town discuss, laugh. He? no idea. (sign?)

Everyone fight fire, hedo? Sit, play violin.

Awful, awful. Suffer can't can't. Suffer, no, can't.

He doesn't know he doesn't see. He's also avoiding.

Still need gloss for 2.

this is happening to me! can you believe my brother



Image 4

celebrate the district council  
 Irina's despair  
 Tuzenbach.

Have not realized  
 I'm in charge  
 of my own  
 life.

3. Where? Where go? (Cover face) God.  
 Forget all. Everything think confused.  
 Window Italian say ceiling?  
 Forget forget forget forget.  
 Life rolling. Remember again never.  
 Go moscow? Never. No, gone.

---

THREE SISTERS

OLGA. My darling, my darling...

1. IRINA [*collecting herself*]. Oh, I'm so miserable....  
 I can't work, I won't work. Enough, enough!  
 I worked at the telegraph office, now I work  
 for the town council, and I hate and despise  
 everything about it.... I'm nearly twenty-  
 four, I've been working all this time and my  
 brain is drying up, I've gotten thin, and old  
 and ugly, and nothing, nothing, no satisfac-  
 tion, and time is passing and it seems that  
 we're getting farther and farther away from  
 the real life, the beautiful life, farther and  
 farther away, and I feel like I'm falling into  
 a pit of darkness. I'm in despair, and how it  
 is I'm still alive, how it is I haven't killed  
 myself yet, I don't understand...

OLGA. Don't cry, my little girl, don't cry.... It hurts  
 me...

2. IRINA. I am not crying, I'm not.... Enough.... See,  
 I am not crying any more. Enough....  
 Enough!

OLGA. Dear little girl, my sweet girl, I'm going to  
 say something to you as your sister, and your  
 friend. Take my advice, and marry the  
 Baron!

IRINA is crying quietly.

You respect him, don't you? You value  
 him?... I know, he's not attractive, but he's

ASL.

1. Sad. Work cant. Work  
 gone. Enough, finish.  
 Before work letter office  
 Now work town council  
 DETEST.  
 EVERYTHING.

Soon age 24 work brain  
 shrink. Skinny, old, ugly!  
 Satisfaction? NONE.  
 Time rolling. Life? Point?  
 Off point. Beautiful life?  
 Off point.  
 Dark tunnel me fall.  
 (sign?) life how? Don't know  
 Not yet killed myself  
 understand not!

2. I'm crying. No no, enough  
 see me cry (sigh? never?)  
 Enough Enough Enough.

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Image 5

# ACT 1

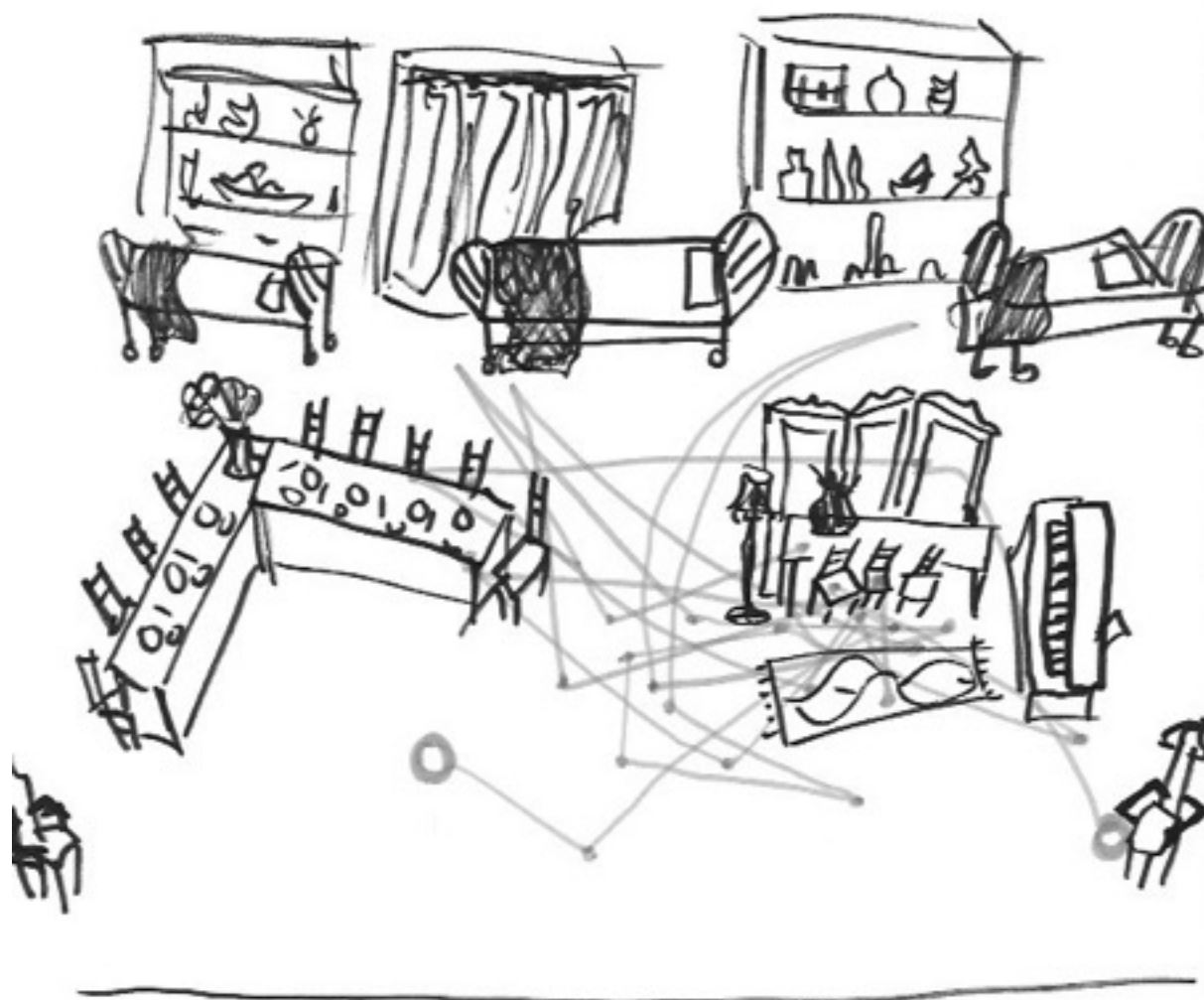


Image 6

# ACT 2



Image 7














# ACT III



Image 8



Image 9

 <p><b>HOUSE FIRE++.</b> <i>There were houses on fire.</i></p>	 <p><b>GROW-UP-TOGETHER</b></p>	 <p><b>NOW, today, present</b></p>	 <p><b>TODAY</b></p>
 <p><b>YESTERDAY, past</b></p>	 <p><b>RECENT, recently</b></p>	 <p><b>LONG-AGO</b></p>	
 <p><b>BEFORE</b></p>	 <p><b>TOMORROW</b></p>	 <p><b>WILL, future</b></p>	
 <p><b>LATER</b></p>	 <p><b>AFTER-AWHILE</b></p>	 <p><b>FAR-IN-FUTURE</b></p>	

## Image 10

Page	Full Line	ASL Gloss
14	Thank him from me!	14. tell him thank you from me!
14	I didn't invite him.	14. not yet invite him.
14	Ivan Romanych, darling, what are you doing?	14. Darling! What you doing?!
15	By why must you give such extravagant presents!	15. why must give extravagant gifts?!
16	Please, sit down. We're so happy to meet you.	16. please sit. We happy meet you.
16	From Moscow, you're from Moscow?	16. All-way from Moscow? You from Moscow?
16	Olya! Olya! Olya, come quick! Lieutenant-Colonel Vershinin has just arrived from Moscow, it seems.	16. Olya! Olya! Olya! Come here quickly. Lieutenant Colonel Vershinin recently arrived from Moscow, seems.
17	Aleksandr, and you're from Moscow...What a surprise!	17. Aleksandr and from Moscow. Surprised!
17	We hope to be there by fall. That's our home town, where we were born...On Old Basemannaya Street...	17. Hope move when fall. Moscow, that our hometown. Where we born. Where... old basmannaya street.
18	Eleven years. Come on, Masha, why are you crying, you silly? You'll have me crying in a moment...	18. 11 years. Masha, common, cry why?? You silly! (crying) influence me crying.
19	Mama is buried in Moscow.	19. mom buried where? Moscow.
21	He's our scholar. He'll be a professor some day. Papa was a soldier, but his son chose an academic career.	21. himself scholar. Will become professor. Dad himself soldier. Son decided academic major.
21	With a certain young lady from around here. She'll probably come by later.	21. with young lady from here. Show up later, maybe.
22	Isn't this a pretty picture frame my brother gave me? He made it himself.	22. beautiful picture from brother? He made it.

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