

ACCESSING THE UNDERGROUND FOREST:  
EXPLORING CONFIDENCE, RELEASE, AND ARTISTIC INTEGRITY  
IN *THE THREE SISTERS*

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## Abstract

With this dissertation, I have investigated the relationship between the unconscious and accessing rich detailed sources as an actor. I have established a methodology for addressing physical and psychological blocks in order to find confidence, detail, specificity, and artistic integrity in performance. I have applied this methodology to my performance of Masha in "Three Sisters" by Anton Chekhov, which was part of the 2016-2017 Theatre@York Season. I have also written an extensive character, period, and author analysis of Masha and Anton Chekhov. During rehearsals and performances of "Three Sisters" I wrote journal entries documenting my process and the application of my methodology to the role of Masha.

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## 1. Artistic Challenge

### The Underground Forest

The Underground Forest is a metaphor used by Clarissa Pinkola Estes in *The Women Who Run With Wolves* to identify the unconscious. Both my professor David Smukler and Clarissa Pinkola Estes contend that the unconscious is a rich creative source. When tapped into by an artist, the unconscious is a well of vivid imagery, sensation, emotion, ideas, and intuitions, all of which inspire and inform the artist's creations. Universal archetypes, many of which are found in mythology from cultures around the globe, are present in the unconscious. The unconscious is the source in which personal inspiration, and mythic resources are mined and utilized by the artist.

Estes' *Underground Forest* is a metaphor for the unconscious in a Freudian sense, but the metaphor has more layers according to Estes' definition. Estes' interpretation of the unconscious states that "the Underground Forest is the source of a woman's sense of self" (Estes 7). The Underground Forest is the place where a woman can find her voice, her sense of self-worth, individuality, and confidence. The Underground Forest is a cradle for a woman's deep personal freedom under any institutional or social constraints.

At this point in my journey as an artist, my artistic challenge is to explore, inhabit and get to know my Underground Forest; my deepest psyche, and my richest creative source. In this paper I will apply various theories of the unconscious—the way it functions and how it can be explored and accessed by an individual—and apply that knowledge to my actor's process. Furthermore, in my research I became

fascinated by “the hero’s journey” and its related mythology. While Joseph Campbell’s *The Hero With A Thousand Faces* gives a traditional break down of the hero’s journey, Estes’ *The Women Who Run With Wolves* unpacks the hero’s journey through a feminist perspective. Both works synthesize structures, metaphors, and images of myths from around the world to create a practical roadmap for the reader. This map served me as directions to my unconscious life and my Underground Forest. As such, I will follow some of the steps of hero’s journey as outlined by Estes and Campbell as a framework to discuss the journey I have taken this summer in addressing my artistic challenge.

Presently, I struggle with tapping into my unconscious sources. For example, I have difficulty creating a detailed world for my characters to inhabit, and so my character development is too general. My characters are currently vague and imprecise; my acting choices are not bold enough. I have trouble accessing deep, private, and vivid images as an actor and sharing them with an audience. My sources are not as individualized as I would like, and not as lush or specific as I know they can be. Currently, my sources and images are somewhat domestic, and limited.

I want to find greater complexity and specificity in my characters, and in the worlds my characters inhabit, by learning to tap into, and share my sources with an audience. Like an artist’s apprentice in the Renaissance, I am not yet painting on the canvas, but exploring colour: how to learn to make a multitude of different colours, how to expand my colour wheel, in order to eventually paint vivid, rich, and complex pictures. I recognize that I am young and inexperienced—I know this because I still see the world in black and white, or through a polarizing perspective. As I expand

my range, I will start seeing the world, myself, and my characters through a lens of specificity rather than limiting binaries of good and bad, success and failure, public and personal.

Likewise, a large combination of factors, including my age and limited experience as an actor, contribute to my lack of belief and ownership of my acting work. I am hungry to develop a self-validating, self-generated artistic voice. With complete transparency I admit that most of my work as an actor at York has been driven by trying to “get it right”. “Get it right” is an expression used in class frequently, but to me it means doing the work in class and rehearsal with the intention of getting a “gold star” from my teacher or director. Often, a metaphoric “thumbs up” from a teacher or director will validate my work as much as, or more, than my own satisfaction with my work. Likewise, a “thumbs down” from a teacher or director will invalidate my work, despite my own initial feelings about it.

As such, I find that I take on my teacher’s or director’s language, approaches, or motivations in the work, rather than finding my own. In doing so, I am impeding the development of my own process, and my own way into and understanding the work. I also prevent myself from really claiming my work and believing in it. If I am not the expert of myself and my own acting, how can I have confidence?

I remember why I loved to act when I was young. I know that flame that motivated me to perform. That flame is still with me now. Yet, as an adult, I have not developed or been in touch, on a primal level, with why I think acting is important or why I want to do it. I know that *not* doing it is not an option. At seventeen I left another acting institution and quit acting. I learned the hard way that life without

my passion is not living. However, now that I am back, I am hungry to find out why I want to do it when I am actually doing it. While I'm sharing work with an audience, or in rehearsal, I want to discover what my unique process is, and what I want to say. I believe I have something to share with the world, and it is not another person's process, language, or for another's approval. So, the question is, what is it?

Furthermore, an essential part of my artistic challenge is to connect to the mythical in theatre: the ancient power of the theatre. For me, acting is essentially storytelling, and theatrical storytelling originated with the Greeks, 2500 years ago. When I'm on stage, telling the story to an audience, it connects both me, the actor, and the audience, to an ancient oral tradition. Because it passes on the stories of generations lost, the ancient tradition of theatrical storytelling is essential, deeply spiritual, and a transcendent experience.

I want to connect with the mythical images that live deep in my unconscious in order to become, consistently, a more impactful and profound mythical storyteller while onstage. To tell the stories of generations lost, I must find a way to connect with the past, both my own, and in the collective unconscious. According to Carl Jung, the collective unconscious is a level of our unconscious minds that is shared with species, "comprising of latent memories from our ancestral and evolutionary past" ("Carl Jung"). Connecting to the collective subconscious will help me go beyond finding sources merely in my personal images, but tap into the universal.

In *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell unpacks the hero's journey. The hero begins her journey by crossing the threshold from "the pale of [her] society to a zone unknown...The adventure is always and everywhere [in



world mythology] a passage beyond the veil of the known, the hero's present sphere, into darkness, the unknown and danger" (Campbell 67). Furthermore, Campbell outlines this region of both treasure and danger as a place of "strangely fluid and polymorphous beings, and the deepest riches of the lost continent of unconscious archetypal images" (Campbell 48). Archetypal images are a symbolic expression given to our deepest unconscious desires, fears and tensions, which underlie the conscious (Campbell 219).

Importantly, the subconscious and the unconscious serve two completely separate purposes. The subconscious "stores short term memory, such as telephone numbers and how to drive a car, and is the way in which the unconscious mind communicates with the conscious mind" ("The Conscious, Subconscious, and Unconscious Mind"). The unconscious mind comprises mental processes that are inaccessible to consciousness but that "influence judgements, feelings, or behaviour. According to Freud, the unconscious mind is the primary source of human behaviour. Like an iceberg, the most important part of the mind is the part you cannot see. Our feelings, motives and decisions are actually powerfully influenced by our past experiences, and stored in the unconscious" ("Unconscious Mind").

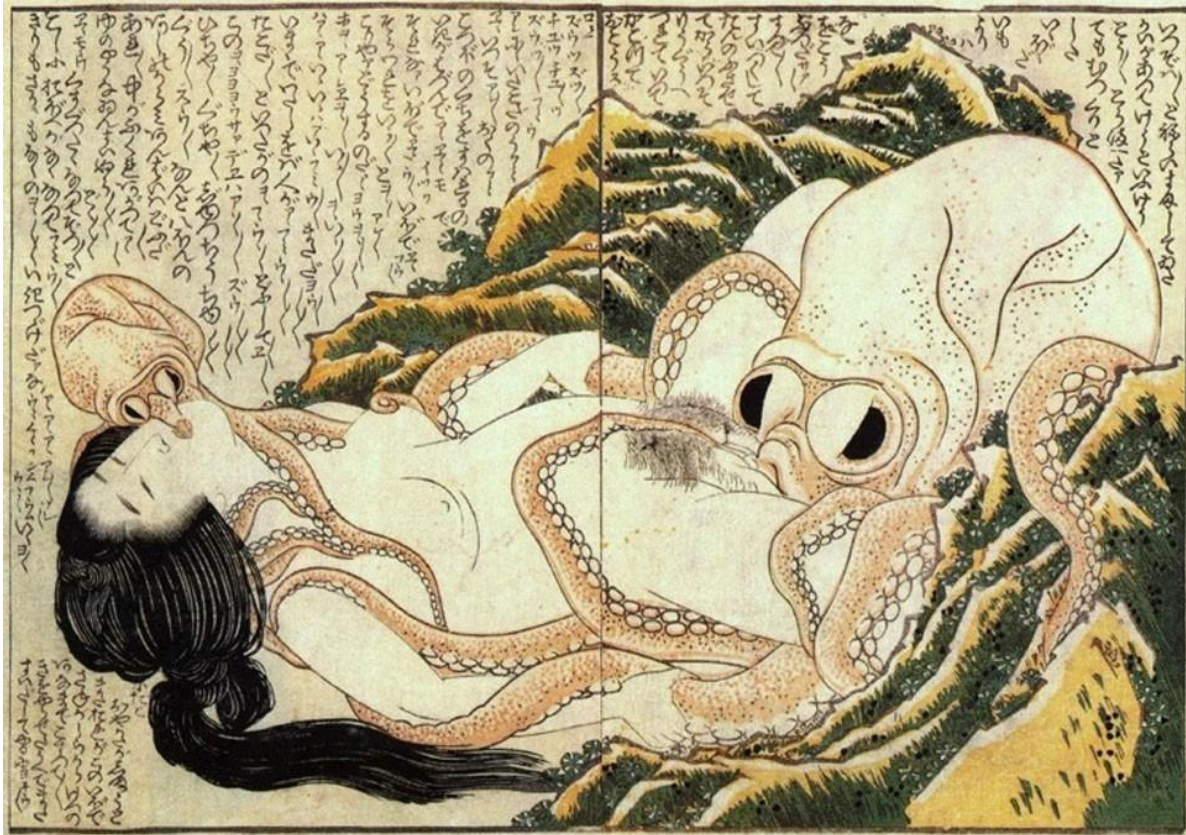
I began addressing my challenge by asking myself the following questions: how do I begin to explore my Underground Forest and leave behind my present sphere? How do I come to work with archetypal images? How do I begin to really know myself, and therefore, my creative sources as an artist? Estes and Campbell both assert the process of entering and knowing the unconscious begins with the crossing of a threshold. This is a transformation through which the hero experiences

a paradigm shift from rational thought, and living within society's expectation, to social independence, and transcendence. Essentially, the crossing of the threshold is a rebirth of the psyche. Firstly, "either by choice, or by force, the hero's civilized exterior is peeled away" (Estes 438). The hero often becomes dirty, unbathed, devoid of decorum, and yet closer to nature and their *wildish* selves. I began my journey of crossing the threshold by peeling back layers of perceptions and ideals that I imposed upon myself in order to fit into society, such as my need to please others, or my sense of self as an artist.

I began the process of crossing the threshold at the National Voice Intensive. At the Intensive one of the most profound concepts introduced to me was that of "the first brain and the second brain." This metaphor was taught to me by master teacher Brad Gibson, and it illuminated the concept that my instinct, or gut, responds to and processes information in a manner that is as valid as the way my intellect or prefrontal cortex does. For example, the expression gut feeling describes the sensation of our "second brain" or instinctual processing and response to stimuli. In the intensive I started observing how my "gut brain" functions. I became more familiar with sensations such as butterflies, gut feelings, deep perception, and intuitive knowing.

I noticed that my gut brain, or instinct, would respond to a situation, and immediately my intellect would formulate an academic opinion that would drown out my initial gut response. I discovered that there was a massive difference between what I actually feel, and what I *think* I should feel in both moment-to-moment response to everyday life and in my general belief system. The way I *think* I

should feel is most often informed by the status-quo ideals of my society and upbringing.



Ill 1. Hokusai, Katsushika. *The Dream of the Fisherman's Wife*. 1814.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Dream\\_of\\_the\\_Fisherman%27s\\_Wife](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Dream_of_the_Fisherman%27s_Wife). Accessed 10 July 2016.

Specifically, in the studio, I discovered my intellect functions as a very strong sensory system for my instinct. I found that there was a multiplicity of images in my unconscious that my intellect deemed “unsafe for investigation”. During voice explorations my intellect was continually obstructing my investigation with statements such as, “this image is not acceptable”, “this image is too dangerous”, “this sensation is not appropriate”, and the like. Above, fig 1 is an example of the kind of images I have censored. This censorship system functions as a protection against any image, emotion, or sensation, which my ego fears will cause destruction

to my psyche. Meaning, my system censors any image it fears too dark or dangerous for my psyche to survive, or that will alienate me from the protection of society because the image is defiant.

It is important to note that I am not interested in accessing images that are potentially re-triggering. However, in many cases, my psyche is censoring dangerous images that would be very beneficial to me as an artist, and would not cause trauma. I know that my psyche censors images that are essential to my creative toolbox, because it does not censor them for fear I will be unable to handle the images personally. Instead, I fear how these images will be received and accepted by others. In censoring these images, I sacrifice my own voice and artistic life to please others. It is essential that I access these dangerous images as they will help me work from images and an artistic voice that is authentically my own.

Importantly, my habit was to block troubling images related to my childhood, past or family, sensations of anger or extreme arousal, images that were intensely erotic with the same and opposite sex, images of violence, or images of extreme fantastical nature (things I had never seen in fantasy film or imagined in children's books). These "unacceptable" images are incredibly valuable to me as an artist. In my work at the National Voice Intensive, I spent a great deal of time in silence. I did this to ensure I could listen to my instinct and stay connected with my inner voice, and not attempt to please or conform with peers or teachers. During this practice, I also noticed that in blocking aspects of my imagination I was also blocking clear expression in my voice. To control my inner life, I would tighten my tongue root, or hold my breath. Carol Gilligan, a psychologist who focuses on freeing the female

voice, described the role of censorship on a woman's voice: "a woman comes to not know what she knows, has difficulty hearing or listening to her voice, feels disconnect between mind and body, and uses one's voice to cover rather than to convey one's inner world" (Gilligan xxi).

By broadening my connection with my inner life, I noticed I was able to use my voice to portray my inner life, rather than hide it. Furthermore, I became much more interested with myself, and my images, than with others and what they were doing or what they were thinking about me. It was during this time that I began to get in touch with images I was censoring. I discovered the images I mentioned above and started applying them to my studio and scene work.

The result was more specificity in my character and world development, and bolder acting choices. My confidence in my work was much greater as well, because I was invested in my inner world, rather than occupied with how others would receive my inner world. Yet, the process of connecting to my Underground Forest or my deepest inner life is an ongoing challenge. As expected, it is very dense, complex, and will probably take a lifetime to explore and understand. Often, when I ask myself to explore my Underground Forest I feel as if I am standing in front a beautiful deep lake, calling myself to dive into its refreshing water, but I can never go as deep as I would like.

During studio work and through personal voice exploration, I am slowly becoming more comfortable getting deeper and deeper into the lake of my unconscious. I begin this process with an extensive warm up geared at creating ease in my psyche, body and voice. I then spend long periods of time moving deeper into

my subconscious images with different exercises. Sometimes, I meditate with my eyes closed and let my mind move uninhibited from image to image, while vocalizing the image or sensation. Other times, I freely move my body and vocalize, while imaging and exploring dangerous sensation. Some days, when I feel brave I can metaphorically put my head underwater, feel the fresh water on my skin, smell the sweetness and the muddiness of the water, and touch the slimy seaweed under my feet. Other days, when I find my explorations to be more challenging, I can only wade into the water up to my knees, and get cold very quickly.

In performance during the Voice Intensive, I began to notice positive changes in my work from driving deeper into my unconscious. Without feeling the need to censor myself I have more available energy and freedom to speak and respond from my need to communicate (usually sparking from my gut). I also have much more opportunity to listen to my partner authentically, both while they are speaking to me, and while I am listening and observing how my text is landing on them. Furthermore, in performance, simply allowing myself to feel what I feel, and not smother those feelings with my intellect, makes it much easier for me to access my unconscious images with confidence in front of an audience. As a result, I had a much more grounded, confident, subtle and specific performance than before I began this work.

I also found much greater confidence in my work. By seeking the sources of my imagination to inspire my work, I began performing with a sense of searching for truth, rather than for validation. As a result, I was able to reveal my inner life with greater success, take much bigger risks, and ultimately have a stronger effect

on my audience. Jerzy Grotowski, the great Polish theatre creator and theorist, states that publicly revealing one's inner life and imagination is the role of an actor: "If the actor reveals himself by casting off his everyday mask, he makes it possible for the spectator to undertake a similar process of self-penetration" (Grotowski 23).

Furthermore, during the voice intensive, I discovered an understanding of specificity in my image work through Brad Gibson's re-imagination of groking. Brad has taken the term groking from Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land* and reimagined it for the actor's process. Gibson reinterprets groking for the actor as "the process by which the actor drinks in every word of the text, and makes the text their own" (Gibson). The actor's process is a reversal of the playwright's process. The playwright takes very specific; personal images from their soul and translates them into words. In return, the actor takes the words of the playwright and groks them, thereby translating words from text-which at face value is unspecific-into little personal universes which live in their soul or subconscious.

"Little personal universes" is language I use to describe connecting deeply with text. On one hand, this process involves making systematically detailed choices about imagery in text. For example, "a green field" is vague if I, as the actor, can only see it as a green mush. But, if I make imaginative choices about which green field: how big, where, what kind of grass, what time of day, what season, have I been there before, will get the actor to a specific and deep place. Yet, making specific choices about images does not mean I have completely groked the image. Through movement, physicalization of the image, or deep imaging, I let the image inhabit or live in my body. Only after an image has found a home in my body and soul does, for

example, an image of a green field then becomes a very specific feeling, place, colour, and smell.

The greatest challenge for me with groking is trusting simple sensation. A green field may be a simple sensation of dewy grass under my feet, for example, and that is interesting enough. There is no need to push, or indicate my image, but rather it is important to reveal it to an audience. For example, during our session on groking with Brad, I was working on groking the word “illness” from my Lady Macbeth monologue. I was feeling a tingly sensation in my upper rib cage and was vocalizing the word from that sensation. While moving, images of bats, putrid green, wildflowers, and nooses were emanating from my subconscious. Saying the word felt simple and satisfying.

Yet, I didn't trust the simplicity of my sensation and image. By not trusting my image, I started panicking and pumping my breath, and my movement. My images lost detail and became blurry. My sensation felt more intense, yet less satisfying. After observing me, Brad gave me the feedback that I had groked the word in a really engaging way, but I didn't trust my simple sensation. As a result, I tried to push, know and define the sensation and image with my intellect, rather than allowing myself to feel it with my gut.

As conceived by Gibson, groking the text involves detailed understanding of the meaning and images of the words, but it also requires a very solid sense of the text's structure, rhythm and syntax. I know when I have groked text successfully when the wildness and passion of my raw experience, through sensation, emotion, and breath response, is contained and refracted in the strong specifics of the



container of the text. When this is the case, I can experiment with text and have a “what if I tried this” moment, rather than push, demonstrate, or muscle an underdeveloped understanding of the text.

The spirit of experimentation is one of most important tools I started working with this summer. I discovered that getting past judgement, and fear of whether others will like my acting choices, instincts, and images, and just “going for it” is a major step towards bolder, more specific, acting. By groking, embracing my unconscious images, and exploring my ‘Underground Forest’, I am learning to own my artistic voice and choices. The more grounded I am in my personal image life, and acting choices, the less judgment or seeking external validation have room to dilute or limit my work.

During the summer, I discovered that I needed to find strategies to get past intellect, fear of judgement, and the need to be validated, and ground myself in my individual impulses, images and choices. Groking is a very important way I prepare myself for this task. In addition, character and/or body mask is another technique I utilized in the voice intensive to work towards this goal. Mask work allows me to stay in touch with my inner images and life, without distraction from judgement or the audience’s gaze. In first year in Paul Lampert’s class we studied character mask for many weeks. I found that in the “trance” of the mask, I became completely caught up in the movement and voice of the character. I found great confidence and joy onstage because I was not judging my choices, or making choices to please others.

Furthermore, during the summer I discovered numerous other warm-ups, and practices to become more grounded in my Underground Forest and ready for

experimentation, investment in my choices, and presence with my scene partner.

These warm-ups and practices were physical, and psychological. Below is a list of practices that I found beneficial.

Physical: Walking to the Voice Intensive, or Studio work without headphones.  
Allowing myself to really observe the images surrounding me.

Physical/vocal warm-up in the space.

Release work for areas of tension at home after class, or before rehearsal or performance.

Any cardio to keep my body energetic and ready to move—either at home or at the studio.

Body mask work to find character and image from the inside out.

Psychological: Reading poetry, novels that help me connect or grok the image world of the text.

Listening to music that helps me connect to the play.

Meditation in character, in the image world of the character. Sometimes with movement and sometimes in stillness.

Practicing listening, or silence more than talking to ensure I stay in touch with my inner life. Speak because it is necessary, not because I want validation from anyone else.

Journaling all images and sensations discovered in independent work or in rehearsal that was imagined, felt, or from my unconscious, which relates to the text in anyway.

In my observation of my colleagues' performances during the voice intensive I found that an actor is more engaging when they are more interested in *what* they are saying, or *why* are saying something, rather than *how* they are saying it. The more certainty about the meaning of text and the more grounded in their image, the more interesting the performance. Or, the more an actor was invested in their choice, the character's inner life, and trying to affect the scene partner, not in how others would perceive it, the more compelling the choice. Likewise, the more interested a performer is in *what* the sensation of their body is, rather than *how* they look to an audience, the more appealing their performance.

Returning back to the Hero's Journey, I also started listening to my gut and "following my own song, my own star," outside of the studio. I started challenging my ideals, dreams, goals, values, and even my clothes. I wondered, were they truly an expression of me, or a reflection of what I think will elicit approval, acceptance, and admiration from my peers or society at large?

At the beginning of the summer I felt that I didn't know who I was, what I wanted, what I believed in, or how I wanted to express myself. My identity was a mosaic of collected things I wanted to be, rather than who I really am. This mosaic of borrowed beliefs and interests served as a mask. This mask functioned as a public persona. I carefully constructed this public persona to help myself fit in, and avoid any scrutiny, conflict or criticism. I was afraid to explore open-minded, unconventional belief systems, lifestyles and cultures, although my soul was yearning to investigate them. I was overly polite, shy, had very low self-confidence, dressed to hide my body, and buried many of my beliefs, interests, tastes, and values from the world and myself. Slowly I started to let go of status quo ideas, and threw off the yoke of adhering to my own fear of not receiving external validation.

As I started exploring my Underground Forest, I began discovering the authentic me; the wonderful, rich, exciting, soulful wild woman dwelling below the mask. I started following my impulses, which has led me to many changes. Changes that have "outed" me as a unique, alive, powerful woman. I side buzzed my hair, threw out the clothes that concealed my body, and started exploring artists that ignite my imagination like Francis Bacon, David Lynch and Frida Kahlo. I started vocalizing my belief in past lives and reincarnation. I started meditating, and

publically sharing my spiritual self. I stopped shaving my underarm hair and sharing my feminist beliefs in public. I cut out negative people in my life who do not accept me for who I really am. I learned to whittle wood and mushroom hunt. I started reading sci-fi novels. I sought out alternative places, people and experiences in the search to continue broadening my mind.

I started dreaming about my very own, unique life. My identity is now a new mosaic, one that is handcrafted from the intuition and guidance of my true self. I have defined the difference between my public persona and my true self. I can now make the decision whether to hide behind a mask.

In Estes' narration of *The Handless Maiden*, she symbolizes letting go of meaningless seductions presented by society with the heroine losing her hands. By doing so, the heroine then must let go of any ideas, values, or people holding her back from crossing the threshold. The maiden loses her hands, but she gains a much more intuitive sense of knowing, a knowing necessary to embark on the inward journey of exploring the subconscious.

Thus, like the handless maiden, fuelled by my new sense of self, off I went into a different world, under a different sky, with unfamiliar ground under my boots. I was becoming a lone wolf, and began somehow not to feel a part of the life whirling about me. However, I still "had my feet that knew the way, a soul with which to see far, breasts and a belly to sense with, and [I] was ready to make the next descent" (Estes 440).

## The Container

According to Campbell, “myth is the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human cultural manifestation” (“Journey” 3). This metaphor reflects my understanding of the acting process. To be an actor is to be a vessel through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour. Such grand, cosmic energies are channelled through the actor’s instrument: the voice and body. The voice and body serve as a container for the wild intensity of cosmic energies and deep emotions experienced by the actor.

Just as archetypal images and myth transport me from the present moment to vastly different worlds, my sensory life is another source of transportation. My skeleton, organs, and all cells, hold memories of the past. “Our past experiences, the experiences of our ancestors, and experiences from the collective unconscious live as pictures and sensations in the cells themselves” (Estes 380). Simple sensation is often the root inspiration for my acting. For me, simple sensation refers to felt sensation in addition to “sight, taste, smell, hearing, balance/acceleration, temperature, proprioception, pain”, and a large variety of other internal sensations (“Sense”). Image usually develops from sensation in my body. It is in observing, feeling, and revealing simple sensation that I have made my greatest progress in improving specificity and subtlety in my work.



Ill. 2. Vasnetsov, Viktor. *Riding a Flying Carpet*. 1880. State Art Museum, Nizhny Novgorod. [www.agefotostock.com/age/en/Stock-Images/Rights-Managed/FAI-5827](http://www.agefotostock.com/age/en/Stock-Images/Rights-Managed/FAI-5827). Accessed 12 June 2016.

In refining my ability to feel details of my sensory experience, I have found access to multiple specific, complex states of being. For example, if I feel a tingly sensation that arises alongside the emotion of fear, I am learning to investigate the details of that sensation. I ask myself, where does this sensation live; what colour is it, what texture; what image is evolving out of this sensation? Fear, then, becomes hundreds of different states of being rather than one general state of being. Once I have investigated a sensation, I question whether the sensation is strong enough to speak from. In my personal studio explorations, I discovered that simple, detailed sensation is more than enough to motivate the need to communicate. During the voice intensive I found that in performance I have a habit of trying to be interesting rather than being present in the detail of simple sensation. The most important discovery I have made this summer is that tension inhibits me from accessing the

memories in my cells, being present in sensation, and inviting an audience into my sensory experience.

When emotion and sensation begin to bubble up, I have a habit of getting overly excited and “gripping” the sensation or image. I try to hold onto or understand the image, which results in tension. My tension keeps me from finding the real depth of the image. Tension also limits my experience of the emotional state that is arising, blocking my depth of experience to a merely surface one.

Furthermore, to be present in simple sensation and image, I must have the greatest awareness of my physical structure as possible. Tension also inhibits sensory awareness. Places in my body where I have the most tension are the places that I have the most difficulty sensing. These places include my ankles, hip sockets, inner thighs, psoas, outer thighs, shoulder blades, occipital bone and tongue root. Through Judith Koltai’s physical exercises, which I learned at the voice intensive, I began finding a much greater awareness of my body as a whole. Specifically, I really started to understand my skeletal structure, meaning I began to feel ways in which to improve my alignment, and how improvement of my alignment has reduced tension throughout the muscles in my body. I have continued throughout the summer with Judith’s exercises, focusing on easing tension, specifically in the lower half of my body. I do Judith’s gentle exercises at least twenty minutes every day, and target areas where I feel the most tension that specific day. I am referring to habitual tension, meaning muscle groups in my body that are involuntarily contracted. Judith’s exercises are geared at helping an individual identify habitual

holding patterns, and helping the actor release them. I have noticed major improvement in creating ease and space in my most intense areas of tension.

In addition, the more grounded I am in my body, the more I can be present in the “dilemma” of a scene. Gerry Trentham defines the dilemma as the ongoing uncertainty and unknown as experienced by an actor in performance. Living in the dilemma carries the actor through the unknown of the scene, which can lead to inspiration, experimentation and surprises. Living in the dilemma is the exact opposite of following an identical emotional blueprint every performance. Rather than trying to “fix” a scene, or make my acting interesting, I am learning to simply be present with the details of my sensory experience. This kind of presence takes me on a journey in the scene, rather than continually fixing the scene. I live in the dilemma and let myself naturally go somewhere new in the scene with each performance.

The idea of dilemma is another way for me to approach Stanislavski’s methodologies like understanding my character’s objective, and playing specific tactics to achieve that objective despite an obstacle. Above I mention experimenting based on my own sensory experience and dilemma. At this point it is very important for me to look to Stanislavski because the stimuli for my sensory experience is my own images and inner life, but it is also my partner, what my partner is giving me, what I want from my partner, and the obstacle. One challenge posed with this kind of internal work is remembering to stay active in my choices, and always be striving for something in a scene. This work strengthens my internal response to my



situation, objective and partner. Likewise, without the internal work, I am not able to really play or believe in the objective or obstacle.

Objective and obstacle is not something I can believe through text work and definition alone. I must find a way to make those live in my body and in my soul. Much like groking an image, I also must grok these as deeply and specifically as I can. In almost all my work this summer, I learned that groking action, objective and obstacle is rooted in finding an understanding of them in from my unconscious images and inner life.

Objective and obstacle also only feel believable for me if I am fully connected to the person I am saying them too. If I am not present with my scene partner, I can image, or feel sensation all I want, but it will not help me play the scene. All the work of internal imaging, and being present with sensation is so that I can be present with a scene partner. In my work this summer I have found that image and sensation work is all a means to being transparent and present with my scene partner. I have to believe and be detailed and specific about what I'm saying, but, perhaps, more importantly, I need to really say it, and affect my real scene partner with it. Likewise, being present in dilemma also comes from actually hearing what my real scene partner is saying, and allowing myself to be affected by them.



Ill. 3. Goya, Francisco. *La Maja Desnuda*. 1797-1800. Museo Del Prado, Madrid. [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/La\\_maja\\_desnuda](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/La_maja_desnuda). Accessed 13 August 2016.

### Inviting the Audience In

Vibration is literal vocal vibration, from the oscillation of the vocal folds. According to Gibson, vibration is that, as well as being present and transparent onstage. He states, “to vibrate is to reveal one’s inner life to an audience. In essence, to be vibrant is to be present in easy, truthful sensation and image onstage” (Gibson). All my bones can vibrate, and all my cells can vibrate. When my skeleton is fairly aligned, and the muscles in my body have ease, I can feel my whole body vibrate from the very top of my skull, to the tip of my toes. When I am grounded in a specific image and a need to communicate, my whole body vibrates. Therefore, vibration is also dependent on ease and presence. Unconscious habits, holding patterns, and tension also impede vibration.

In the voice intensive I determined my habits which hinder vibration are: I tense my hip flexors, jut out my collar bones, tip my head back and my chin up, nod my head, shorten my spine, lift my shoulders and jut out my jaw. During

performance, I am learning to continually “check in” with these habits, and release them if they are tense or “acting up”. I have also found that firmly planting my feet on the ground, and being present in my feet helps me not tip my chin, nod my head, or shorten my spine. Dropping my pelvic floor, releasing my hip flexors, and breathing into my hip sockets, helps me find ease in my collarbones. Again, most importantly, trusting simple sensation rather than trying to be interesting reduces all these habits, which are a product of pushing and indicating.

Furthermore, my understanding of “inviting the audience in” is being present in sensation and image, and revealing that presence to the audience. As mentioned above, protecting myself from scrutiny is my main block in letting the audience in. On a deep level, I struggle with feeling comfortable under an audience’s gaze. When I perform I often feel shameful or embarrassed of my body onstage. This summer I have worked at being comfortable and fearless when being seen by an audience. In *The Women Who Run With Wolves*, Estes comments on the destructive consequences of North America’s limiting views of beauty.

Women’s bodies are intuitive instruments of knowing passed down through generations by our ancestors. If a woman is taught to hate her body she is cheated from her confidence, and appreciation of the gifts handed down to her from her ancestors (Estes 339).

As I challenged ideals imposed upon me by society, I decided to rethink my definition of beauty. There is joy and great beauty in being a bigger woman. I am learning to appreciate the gifts handed down to me such as beautiful hair, skin, big eyes, and a great butt. As my perspective of myself changes, I notice other’s perspective of me changing as well. In learning to see the beauty of my body, I am allowing myself to be looked at, and people are looking. When I feel sexy, I notice

others admiring my body along with me. My journey of allowing myself to be seen happens mostly in daily life. On the bus, when meeting new people, or grocery shopping, I notice others looking at me. In the past, I would assume that they were looking at me with criticism, and my embarrassment must have been visible, as they would often look away. Now, I accept and invite others who want to look at my body, and I feel very proud of sharing it with them. I feel confident and excited to embark on playing the role of Masha because she is such a deeply sensual character. By learning to love my exterior body I have come to know an ancient, confident, sexual side of myself that I feel absolutely no shame in. I am thrilled to share this new discovery with an audience in *The Three Sisters*.

### Conclusion

Ultimately, my challenge is to continue exploring, deepening, and specifying my sources. The challenge will also be to continue this exploration in performance, and in front of faculty and my peer group. I see myself standing in front of my Underground Forest. I look behind me and see a group of people watching me with blank expressions. At first I feel fear shoot through my body. Are those eyes scrutinizing me? Do they judge the particular make of my Forest? From within the forest I see a large bird watching over me. He is a majestic creature, like none I have seen on earth. His eyes tell me everything's alright. Turning back to the crowd I recognize hunger in their eyes. They long to see what is in the forest as well. Their hunger motivates me to be brave. "Follow me", I say to the crowd. Turning back to the forest, I take a breath, and then take a step forward into the darkness.

## 2. Research Paper

### Introduction

Anton Chekhov's *The Three Sisters* was first performed at the Moscow Art Theatre on January 31st 1901. Written in 1900, the play is quintessentially Chekhovian: it deals with the decline of landowning, gentry families following the abolition of serfdom in 1861, and the development of a new capitalist economy in Russia. Faced with their own irrelevancy, the generation born into this situation, such as the Prozorov sisters, were forced to forge a future for themselves without any foundation of following tradition or following in their parent's footsteps. In *The Three Sisters*, Chekhov investigates how different individuals respond to, and attempt to cope with, their situation. Importantly, Chekhov denied having any kind of political agenda, "he was much more interested in human beings and how they interacted" ("An Introduction to Chekhov"). He showed a great deal of compassion to a variety of philosophical and emotional responses to the Prozorov's desperate situation.

The characters in *The Three Sisters*, specifically the sisters, Masha, Irina and Olga, search for meaning in a time of great transition for Russia. These characters ask the eternal questions about love, life and death, but with incredible lightness and humour. Chekhov was interested in "showing people as they actually are" ("An Introduction To Chekhov"). Stella Adler states, "he felt no obligation to explain life, but to put it down as he saw it truthfully. He put it down for the world to understand: man as he functions as an individual, with the suffering inside" (Adler

178). Chekhov's dedication to verisimilitude of life and human behaviour has defined his plays as realism.

*The Three Sisters* will give me the opportunity to experiment with my artistic challenge in a controlled theatrical circumstance. Chekhov's style of writing asked for a development of a whole new system of acting: Stanislavsky's psychological realism. Stella Adler instructs, "the actor has three-fourths more to do than Chekhov put into the play" (Adler 180). Therefore, I have to seek out and bring my inner truth of feeling and experience to the lines. I have to tap into my richest sources and bring them to the role. I have to be specific about Masha's former life, what she expects when she enters a scene, her objectives, and how she fights for what she wants. Essentially, *The Three Sisters* asks me to directly address my artistic challenge of bringing my richest sources and specificity to the role of Masha.

### The Playwright

Anton Chekhov was born January 29, 1860 in Taganrog, Russia. Chekhov came from peasants "on the way up. Only a generation before, his grandfather...had purchased freedom for his family" (Bunin xvii). Chekhov trained as a doctor, and famously stated that "medicine is my wife, theatre my mistress" (Bunin xvii). Chekhov began his literary career writing comedic anecdotes for literary journals in the early 1880s. However, it wasn't until he moved to Yalta in 1899, due to his failing battle with tuberculosis, that he would write the play that is widely considered his masterpiece: *The Three Sisters*.

Chekhov's major plays, *The Seagull*, *Uncle Vanya*, *The Three Sisters* and *The Cherry Orchard* redefined the terms of tragedy and comedy in the period. The plays

grapple with key existential questions about life and death. They ask, “what is the point of living if soon I will be dead and forgotten”, “is there a reason for all my suffering”, “when and how do I truly begin to live”? Yet, Chekhov described his plays as comedies. On the surface the plays read as bright, animated and energized. Since the premiere of *The Seagull* in 1896 “critics have debated about whether you can define Chekhov’s plays as ‘comedy’ or ‘tragedy’”(“Anton Chekhov”).

The reviews following *The Seagull*’s premiere were bleak. Critics accused Chekhov’s writing of being “heavily oppressive or hopelessly pessimistic... N. Yezhov described the characters as nonentities and eternally dissatisfied people” (Worall 127). Similar complaints were made about *The Three Sisters* as well. Stanislavsky contends with these interpretations of Chekhov with clarity and a depth of understanding for Chekhov’s writing. He states

The men of Chekhov do not bathe, as we did at that time, in their own sorrow. Just the opposite; they, like Chekhov himself, seek life, joy, laughter, courage. The men and women of Chekhov want to live and not to die. They are active and surge to overcome the hard and unbearable impasses into which life has plunged them... Astrov and Uncle Vanya are not simple and small men, but ideal fighters against the terrible realities of the Russia of Chekhov’s time. You will notice the plays are accompanied by the continuous laughter of the audience, which never rings so often and so loud and so clear as it does in his plays, for Chekhov himself was one of the men who are in love with life, and greatly (Stanislavsky 348-352).

Personally, I cannot think of a better definition of idealism or optimism than an individual who believes in a better future although she is surrounded by hopeless circumstances. “All the plays of Chekhov are permeated and end in a faith in a better future in the part of the fatally ill, talented and life-loving poet, whose own life was as hard as that of his heroes” (Stanislavsky 348).

Chekov sought to present life as it was really lived. He wanted to show how people really interacted and what life looked like, both externally and internally. That is why his plays must remain light and buoyant. On YouTube I accessed a production of *The Three Sisters* in Moscow in 2006 in Russian. In the first half of the play there was regular laughter. Characters (not actors) made fun of themselves. The acting remained light whenever possible. When darkness and sorrow came into the story, there was no self-indulgence from the actors, no melodrama, no wallowing. Pain was experienced and then the world moved on, like life. That took away the heaviness that can kill a Chekhov play. What I learned about Chekhov watching it played in Russian is that it is not comedy, and it is not tragedy; imposing either one on it isn't helpful to the actor.

Chekhov understood the constant heartbreak of daily life. That heartbreak is "you sit and say, 'I'll have another cup of tea, my foot's asleep, let's have lunch, but what am I living for?' That is more heartbreaking than saying, 'I'm so tragic'" (Adler 192). In Chekhov, people are heartbroken all day long and live quite normally.

In Chekhov's plays you see characters faced with impossible situations. They experience apathy, but they also have the ambition to fight and the will to struggle for something better. "The individual Chekhov admires most is the one who at least *tires*... He says, 'don't let apathy get you down to the point that you have no self-respect. Make a fight. You must work at it constantly, day and night. You must never stop reading, studying, exercising our will, every hour is precious'" (Adler 177). What I hear from Chekhov, specifically in *The Three Sisters*, is that in moments of despair, or in the face of one's own irrelevancy, the only thing one can do is make a



little art. To make a little music, a little painting, a little writing, a little landscape, is all one can do.

That idea is the key to understanding Masha and Vershinin and why they are so drawn to each other. Both are incredible fighters and extraordinarily optimistic. Masha reads, expresses her free will, and is ravenous for life. Vershinin imagines what life will be like for people in Russia one hundred years after his death and he believes all their suffering will result in a better future. That is why Masha and Vershinin fall in love so desperately and so fast: they immediately recognize the courage, the light, and the hunger for life in each other. Masha is not apathetic to her love for Vershinin. She doesn't say, "what's the point? He'll have to leave in three months, and all the fuss will be for nothing. I will only be more miserable than I was before." Of course they both know Vershinin's regiment will be called to duty. They know their time is extremely limited. Yet, they let themselves fall deeply in love, knowing that they will be ripped apart.

To me, that is an example of exceptional courage. Masha understands the consequences, but she lets Vershinin into her life because she wants to live. At the end of *The Three Sisters* Masha knows love for the first time and that is something Olga will never know, and Irina will likely never know. Even still, after gut wrenching heartbreak, after the Prozorov's property is sold and they know they will never go to Moscow, it is Masha who still has fight in her. She says, "we must live, we must live" (Chekhov 122). Masha has one thing that reaches her and will help her survive. I cannot see pessimism in that kind of thinking. It is optimism. It is incredibly important to note that Chekhov wrote *The Three Sisters* in the last four

years of his life. He knew he was dying. His message is live while you can, take advantage of every moment no matter how bleak the future looks.

Chekhov writes plays about human struggle for happiness and meaning. It is important to address what “Moscow” represents in *The Three Sisters*. Throughout the play, the three sisters desperately dream of moving to Moscow. However, Moscow is not simply a city, it is an idea to which the sisters can attach hope too.

Moscow is a dream. In a dream you will be loved, you’ll be happy you’ll meet the man. Your soul will be restored. The dream is an ideal. An idealist does not seek the truth, only her illusion of the truth. She fixates on it. The sisters think it is only “here” where there is such boredom and claustrophobia. Against the magnificence of Moscow, everything seems trivial and diminished. The quest grows more and more until it’s an outcry: “We’ve *got* to get there to save ourselves. We will do *anything to get there!*” (Adler 263).

Moscow is something everyone can understand: wanting your soul to expand. It is the one thing you have to do or you fear you will die. For the sisters, Moscow is about meeting a husband, a man to love. However, it is not pedestrian in any way. It represents wanting to be a human being again through love. As Masha, I want to meet my own love, my own soul, and realize my life, through loving another, through being in the streets where my mother is buried, where I was a child.

### Time of Transition

*The Three Sisters* was written in 1900, an intense time of political, social, and economic transition for Russia. The first Russian Revolution was only five years away, and the country’s identity was transforming. Chekhov specifically explored how the transition to modernity in Russia affected the middle-to-low ranks of gentry families. Chekhov’s lifetime was bounded by two significant historical events. These events reveal the Russia in which Chekhov lived, and wrote his literature.

Chekhov's life began a year before the 1861 Russian emancipation, and ended within months of Bloody Sunday and the beginning of the first Russian Revolution in 1905. Together, these events defined a country in a period of complete transition, and would inspire the situation for Chekhov's works, including *The Three Sisters*.

The Emancipation of the Serfs in 1861 is considered to be the most important reform assumed by Tsar Alexander II. Until 1861 peasants worked under the political system of feudalism. The peasants were bound to "the land of the landowner who also owned the peasant himself" (Zenkovsky). The Emancipation of the Serfs granted peasants the right to be free citizens: to marry, own land, and own businesses. However, serfs were required to buy their citizenship at an incredibly high rate. While this action had many long-term effects and, "did not, at one stroke of the pen, transform the lives of Russia's peasantry, it set in motion fundamental changes to Russia feudal economy and gave the possibility of geographical and class mobility to a huge segment of the population" (Zenkovsky).

The impact of the Emancipation of the Serfs was crucial to Russian history as it set in motion the short period in which Russia would transition from a "vast but remote feudal empire to a political power keg that would rock the history of the twentieth century" (Zenkovsky). As such, in Chekhov's plays we see a Russia still heavily invested in a medieval past while on the precipice of revolutionary change; a Russia rooted in peasant agriculture but undergoing rapid urbanization and industrialization; a Russia ruled by a Tsar but already generating the structures of communism.

Firstly, the Emancipation of the Serfs led to a massive surge of industrialization and urbanization in Russia as newly free peasants began relocating to urban areas to work in factories for greater opportunities. As a result, trade grew both domestically and internationally. In response, the Russian economy began to develop rapidly. Social mobility for peasants was the major impact of the Emancipation of the Serfs on Russia, as it led to the development of a middle class made of peasants who were now factory workers, owners, and industrialists. Capitalism gained traction in Russia as a result of the rise of the middle class and there was a growth in railways, banks, and industry. Likewise, agriculture developed incredibly rapidly with major shift towards commercial farming. Chekhov wrote about the way in which these social, political and economic changes affected the upper class in rural Russia.

As a result of the Emancipation of the Serfs landowning nobles and gentry families lost significant power and wealth as they no longer received annual payments from the serfs. "By 1904, one-third of all noble landholding were mortgaged by the Noble's Land Bank, or were owned by middle class industrialists" ("An Introduction to Chekhov"). Essentially, Chekhov tells the story of the decline of the great estates in Russia. He looks at the lives of the gentry while they were being ousted from their homes, their way of life, and their comfortable positions. The culture for the "Russian country estate experienced its golden age in the 1820s and 1830s. At their height there was something so beautiful about these estates, because in the middle of the Russian countryside there would be this classical mansion.

There was this pool of culture in the middle of nothingness” (“An Introduction to Chekhov”).

Chekhov tells the story of a group of people experiencing transition from one life, one world, to another. Five years after the time *The Three Sisters* was written you have the first Russian Revolution. Russian gentry, middle class, peasants were all splitting and dividing into radical, political camps. The cultural, social, political, and economic institutions, which provided the foundation for these people’s lives were being ripped down all around them. The Tsar had no place; the Russian Orthodox Church had no place; Tolstoy had no place after the Emancipation of the Serfs. The gentry’s understanding of Russian identity, and their own identity, was based on a culture that no longer made sense in a Russia in transition. With the decline of the gentry and aristocracy, Russia saw “the end of a long and deservedly proud tradition that created much of what we still think today as quintessentially Russian, from the country estates, the poetry of Pushkin, to the novels of Tolstoy and the music of Rachmaninov” (Akhtirskaya).

Stella Adler takes these crucial historical events and focuses them from the universal to the personal in relation to Chekhov’s characters. She states, “the bottom line in these periods is pain. Transition is pain...The social situation pushes the character down psychologically into an understanding that he is a failure” (Adler 182–183). He analyses what happens to the gentry when they have lost the security and connection to the past. Masha’s opening lines in *The Three Sisters* are a quote from Pushkin (Marsh). Here, Chekhov is tapping into the collective cultural memory of Russia and nostalgia for Russia’s past life. “Pushkin was, and is, part of the

experience of Russian childhood...and is reminiscent of Russia's recent medieval and feudal past for Chekhov's characters and audiences of 1901" (Marsh). In quoting Pushkin, Masha is mourning the death of the culture she was raised on.

The transition in Russia from 1861 to 1905 was detrimental on the mental wellbeing of the gentry. In the 1880s many members of the gentry "were unable to find happiness or satisfaction in the official system or in the radical movement, many led a life without meaning, searching in vain for an answer as to the why of their existence, to their being and to the real essence of things... Chekhov reveals the hopelessness and useless existence of his generation, where many people experienced total defeat at the age of thirty, found refuge in alcohol, or committed suicide" (Heier 15). Chekhov devises a unique and fascinating perspective on the effect of the Emancipation of the Serfs and the Russian revolution by exploring the pain of the class that was eliminated because of these events.

### Masha and Olga Knipper

Masha, the middle sister in *The Three Sisters*, was a role written by Chekhov for his lover, soon to be wife, Olga Knipper. Significantly, from the opening scene of the play, Masha is presented as very different from her two sisters. The show opens to Irina, the youngest sister's, name day. Irina and the eldest sister Olga are dressed in bright pastels and white. The scene is filled with chatter, celebration, and visions of their future in Moscow. Yet Masha does not participate in the festivities. She sits in a corner wearing black, reading a book, and whistling to herself.

Feminist theorist Cynthia Marsh outlines Masha's character as feminist, revolutionary and subversive. From the opening moment of the play, Masha breaks

convention of appropriate female behaviour in the period. She wears black, whistles, which was “seen as ominous or unlucky by Russians, and in the period unladylike. Masha is a problem to her sisters...When she finally speaks, she draws on the cultural memory of the audience, speaking not in her own voice, but in the lines of Russia’s greatest poet Pushkin and in the voice of the male narrator of the fairy tale” (Marsh 453). For Marsh, Masha’s behaviour is a subversive act against her marriage, and normative understandings of gender in her time. Similarly, Verna A. Foster, in her comparative study of *The Three Sisters* and Blake Morrison’s *We Are Three Sisters*, a play detailing the lives of the Bronte sisters, demonstrates the details and character types from Chekhov reinterpreted by Morrison.

Marsh states that for the sisters, Moscow is freedom, self-fulfillment, the achievement of love and satisfying work. *The Three Sisters* depicts “the limitations and disappointments imposed on intelligent, cultured women by the stultifying society in which they were obliged to live and by the foolishness or thoughtlessness of the men in their lives” (Marsh 116). Masha, a gifted pianist and the most intelligent of the three sisters, is therefore the most crushed and stifled by the women’s surrounding circumstances. Likewise, character of Emily Bronte in *We Are Three Sisters*, whom Morrison based on Chekhov’s Masha, is the gloomiest and angriest of her three sisters. Both Morrison and Chekhov seem to argue that it is the most talented and original women who are the most affected by their limited lives.

For Stella Adler, Masha’s unconventional behaviour is twofold. Firstly, Adler analyses the sister’s isolation and the detrimental effects that isolation has on Masha. Masha and her sisters are incredibly cultured, well educated, and Masha is a

gifted pianist. However, living in a provincial town three hundred miles from Moscow, the women feel suffocated. There are no outlets for intellectual or cultural stimulation, apart from interacting with the officers from the regiment. Masha has no one to play the piano for, and so she gives up her art. "When you give up your art, you start wearing black" (Adler 264). Masha is also grieving loveless marriage, another reason why she chooses to wear black. All of her potential seems wasted; her life is meaningless.

Masha is married to a man she does not love. She is in tremendous pain because she is trapped. Whether she is trapped by restrictions forced on women in the period, her family's isolation, or her loveless marriage, Masha is a prisoner in her own life. "Masha sits there in black, whistling, because she has died already. She's revived by love for a few hours and then she dies again. Where can Masha go? She's married. You didn't divorce in those days. She is married to a middle-class, boring, intellectual" (Adler 265). In large part we can ascertain that Masha is the "odd" one of her sisters, or the gloomiest, because she is the sister who is least able to be unaffected by their heartbreaking situation.

Furthermore, we can ascertain that Masha's strangeness and volatility is not an act of angst. It is not adolescent. "Masha is either going to become a drunk or kill herself" (Adler 266). Adler's thoughts resonate with me because it is clear that Masha's situation is a desperate one, her actions are not motivated by petty, pedestrian, or histrionic forces.

Chekhov wrote the role of Masha for the actress Olga Knipper. Understanding Olga's character provides many clues to knowing Masha. Like Masha, Olga was a



young woman of culture and refinement, who spoke French, German and English and was a first-class pianist. In February of 1900, when Chekhov already had his subject for *The Three Sisters*, he commented about one of Olga's photos she had sent him, that there was "a little demon lurking behind your modest expression of quiet sadness" (Pitcher 79). This is an apt description of Masha, in whom there are 'little demon qualities'. Masha is outspoken, short-tempered, and can have boisterous high spirits all alongside a capacity for incredible depth of feeling. Chekhov was aware of this combination in Olga; "she did not hesitate to speak her mind freely about anything or anyone that she disliked, just as Masha is openly critical of Natasha" (Pitcher 79).

Likewise, Chekhov once noted that Olga was a wonderful wife, except "you're quick-tempered, and when you're in a bad mood, it's dangerous to get too close to you"(Pitcher 79), just as in the play, after Vershinin abruptly leaves to care for his wife who has poisoned herself, Masha loses her temper and is rude to all those around her. Chekhov also observed "Olga, like Masha, lived very much in the realm of her own moods and feelings, and was liable to fall into moods of black depression" (Pitcher 79).

Furthermore, much like Masha, Olga had an unconventional and rebellious nature. Olga rejected her family's upper class values to seek a life as an actor, which she felt was her true calling. Despite her family's disapproval of acting, as it was "unlady-like," Olga attended acting school, and taught music to pay for her tuition. She was fiercely independent, and even after Chekhov and she were married she spent the winter living alone in Moscow. As an artist, Olga believed in the ground-

breaking principles that founded the Moscow Art Theatre: “the rejection of theatricality, the emphasis on inner feelings as opposed to external effects—these were second nature to Knipper” (Pitcher 180).

Olga’s style of acting also reveals her deeply emotional nature. “The main feature of her personality and of her talent was always of a love of life, with all its earthly joys, sorrows, interests and passions” (Pitcher 181). Olga Knipper’s Masha is considered to be the greatest performance of Masha in all of Russian theatre history. If Olga believed that feeling and experiencing the character authentically, I have yet another clue into how to play Masha—with deep and authentic emotion.

#### Artistic Challenge in Practice

Masha is a strong, powerful, direct, sexy and intense woman. At a time when women were particularly repressed by their society, Masha manages to remain true to herself and follow her heart in a desperate situation. Masha speaks directly and bluntly, fights for what she wants, and never alters her behaviour to please another. Masha is incredibly courageous in the face of judgment, fear, and pain. Masha has a very rich internal life churning at all times. Masha, for a large portion of the play, is a mystery. Although she has a significant story arch, she doesn’t speak as often as Irina. Masha’s fearlessness, sexuality, and complex inner life are the reasons I have chosen to apply my artistic challenge research to my creation and performance of this role. My artistic challenge is to learn to tap into my richest sources, and do the work from a place of truth, rather than seeking approval; therefore, Masha will be an excellent vessel through which I can experiment with my fears and challenges in a controlled theatrical circumstance.

I have four major points of investigation for applying my artistic challenge research to this role. Firstly, Masha requires the actor to have a very specific and rich inner life. I plan to apply my research this summer on tapping into my unconscious to develop very specific senses of her world, her memories, her images and her experiences. The challenge for me in approaching Chekhov's text is that each character always has inner movement, or inner thinking, that motivates them throughout the action. This inner life is a secret, but the thinking must be strong enough to create movement, life, and change in the actor. For this process I will utilize my work with groking the text.

In these explorations, I investigate where the image lives in my body, what sensations arise in my body in response to an image, and explore the image from embodying what I see and feel. Though it is important for me to make intellectual decisions about Masha's inner life and motivations, I have discovered that the intellectual work can get in my way if I am too focused on it in rehearsal. Moving the work from an intellectual process to an embodied place is a challenge for me, therefore, groking the text will help me connect it to imagined and real experiences from my richest, deepest sources to bring to the role.

The goal here is to look for internal images, sensations and experiences that truly effect, excite, and are provocative. While tapping into these sources, it is important to note that I am not always looking for something from my life or my experience. Whether I have actually lived, seen or felt an image or experience—or not—has nothing to do with its effectiveness in helping me be alive and specific

onstage. The thing that inspires internal movement, specific world building and internal life, which is what I am looking for.

Another key to my challenge with Chekhov is that there is so much inner movement and inner thought in the subtext. An essential way I can connect with Masha's inner movement is developing a very clear understanding of her past. Again, it is important to use evidence from the text to build Masha's backstory in an intellectual sense. However, it will not be an embodied past unless I work in an embodied process of discovering her life. In Allyson McMackon's class this semester we looked at Grotowski's "river" work. In it we physicalize all images we experience related to an idea, an image, a character, a place, or a question about our role for an extended period. This process is slightly different from groking in that it does not involve exploring text in particular, but any aspect of the character or world I am interested in exploring. A founding principle of the work is to find bodies, characters and voices. The river work helps me find richer, more specific, more connected images, related to building a character's world and their inner life, as well as their external body and voice. Through the river work I will deeply explore the inner life, world, and external body of Masha. I plan to do river work and/or groking work twenty minutes every day before rehearsal. Reading poetry, literature and music that helps me tap into the period, or Masha's inner world, will also be essential outside of rehearsal.

Finding confidence playing an empowered, sexual woman onstage will be a challenge for me. As mentioned in my artistic challenge, I have difficulty bringing aspects of my private self: my sexuality, my power, to the public sphere of

performing. I also struggle with feeling comfortable in my skin onstage, especially when I'm playing women who are sexy, or desired. One really helpful technique I have discovered to find confidence, and bring my sexual and powerful self to stage is mask work. Simply put, the mask helps me embody characteristics, physical life, and have confidence in stepping outside my comfort zone in performance. The mask gives me more freedom to take risks. Last year, in our work with Paul Lampert and character mask, I was able to deeply develop character without judgment or an attempt to be "interesting." The mask helped me explore unconscious resources, without awareness of the audience's gaze or judgment.

As such, in rehearsal I will work with body mask throughout the process. In-studio before rehearsals begin I will develop a complex and fully formed body mask as Masha. Costumes are incredibly important as well in my process of embodying the character. With this in mind, I will wear black dresses throughout my body mask development and in rehearsal until we receive our costumes. I will also buy the shoes I will be wearing for the show well in advance. Throughout rehearsal I plan to develop, and tweak the body mask as necessary before or after daily rehearsal.

One of the most fundamental goals for me in this process is working on being grounded and speaking from my pelvis. Masha is a character with weight, mystery, and power. Those qualities can be accessed through my pelvis. However, as I discovered in my research this summer, releasing my hip flexors and my pelvic floor is a risk for me onstage. Therefore, in rehearsal, I will develop an extensive physical and vocal warm-up to open up and release my pelvis, and find weight and a sensation of "falling" in the role. I plan to arrive an hour to forty-five minutes early

for each rehearsal to allow myself time for a proper physical and vocal warm up. My warm up will include Suzuki work to stimulate my core, the Batdorf technique to release my pelvic floor and perineum, and David Smukler's vocal work to resonate from my pelvis. Hopefully, these warm-ups will help me gradually live in my pelvis and confront my fear of being an empowered, sexual woman onstage. I will journal my progress.

Lastly, Masha is a perfect character to address my artistic challenge of working for approval, rather than from my own artistic motivation. Masha is an incredibly iconic character in theatre, and I feel pressure to ensure my creation of her will receive approval from the faculty, my peers and the audience. Building from my research this summer, and during this semester, I have discovered that by releasing tension in my pelvis, I am able to root myself in a search for truth, and my own artistic motivations. Speaking simple truth, being present with simple sensation, being vibratory, are all connected to releasing tension in my pelvis and feeling my weight on the ground. My vocal and physical warm-ups are also crucial in helping me develop a truthful, unique, and individual interpretation of Masha. Releasing my pelvis helps me stay in the question of what is truthful, rather than jumping to 'interesting' conclusions.

In setting myself these goals for applying my summer research to the role of Masha, I hope to develop my ability to take risks, tap and share my richest sources with an audience, create specificity, and further forge my search for truth rather than 'getting it right' in the work. *The Three Sisters* is a tragicomedy that requires rich and bold inner movement in the actor. It asks for extremely high levels of

dedication, focus, and risk. I expect I will be working on my artistic challenge throughout my creative life. *The Three Sisters* is an exciting beginning to addressing my challenges in performance.

### 3. Conclusion

Throughout the process of rehearsing and performing Masha I learned more than I ever expected about my process, what kind of an actor I am, and what I need to do to be successful in a role. I also learned a great deal about what parts of my research did not serve me in my process during this role. The following are some thoughts on the play, my role, and the process I have developed and will continue to apply as I move forward in my artistic life. I have broken these thoughts down into categories.

**Professionalism, discipline, and focus in the rehearsal room.** Prior to this thesis process I would arrive to rehearsal five minutes before beginning or just on time. I am very talkative, and love being around other people. Often in rehearsal I would be socializing and distracting others during work, and would be very unfocused. I also tended to conduct myself like a student in a rehearsal room, not an artist or a professional. I chose to present myself unprofessionally in rehearsal by talking while the director was giving instruction, or by being disrespectful and chatty while other people were working. In my process for *Three Sisters* I would arrive at least 45 minutes early for every rehearsal to warm up. Warming up allowed me to arrive in the room, be physically and emotionally warmed up, and in Masha's state of mind. Importantly, it also helped me have a sense of calm, focus, and discipline that I could carry throughout rehearsal. As I mentioned in my journals, my rehearsals were

significantly more productive and fulfilling when I did a proper warm up, and stayed focused throughout rehearsal.

Furthermore, I worked on professionalism. I dressed well for every rehearsal, always came in with the required work prepared, if not more, and was respectful of the director's instructions, and the work my colleagues were doing. Generally, I found that these changes gave me much greater confidence in my acting work, myself as a whole, and made it much easier for me to focus. I will continue these behaviours moving forward in my process.

**Research.** Throughout this process I discovered that I am a very intellectual and analytical actor. Meaning, at the beginning of my process, the stronger my understanding of the themes, metaphors, and ideas in the play, the more confidence and specificity I will have in my acting choices. Also, the greater understanding I have of the play's period, and playwright, the more I will be able to fully inhabit and understand the world of the play. Importantly, onstage I am not being analytical about the text, however having that foundation gives me so much more freedom to experiment, be spontaneous, and emotionally connect to text while I am performing or rehearsing. Also, being so grounded in the world of the play helped me fall so deep in love with this world and these characters, which makes the world so easy to jump into. For every role, no matter how small, I will do the same amount of research as I did for this thesis, in the capacity that best serves the play. For example, if I am doing a devised piece I will endeavor to understand and research the creators, as well as the themes, contexts, and ideas of what we are exploring.



**Artistic integrity.** Somewhere along the line I read a line from Stella Adler that suggested that an actor would find out the reason they do theatre when they do Chekhov. I had that experience doing Chekhov. Chekhov has become my favourite author and the brilliance and beauty of *Three Sisters* completely astounded me throughout the whole process. I absolutely fell in love with what Chekhov was trying to communicate about mortality and life and love in this piece. I also fell so in love with Masha; her words, her struggle, and the courageous and massive journey she goes on in this play. What Chekhov taught me was that theatre is profound and it matters. The world is going through an incredibly difficult moment, one of fear, alienation, isolation, and numbing. I believe it is essential for human beings to be in a room together, to share physical space, and go on an emotional, spiritual, and intellectual journey together. I believe it is important for the audience and the actors to experience together, even for a moment, an acknowledgement of mortality, or remembering how painfully beautiful life is, or how important art and language are to our existence. While rehearsing and performing *Three Sisters* I was wholly committed to doing justice to Chekhov's words and message. I profoundly wanted to do justice to Masha's journey. Those desires really helped me be less focused on myself, and how well I was acting, or the audience's gaze. Performing Masha became about much more than me. There were rehearsals or moments in performance when I would become self-conscious or focused on the audience's gaze. However when I remembered the importance of Chekhov's language I was often able to refocus on the action.

**Sexuality and Dangerous or Vulnerable Images.** I was very surprised at the ease I was able to access gravity, my pelvis, my sexuality, as well as vulnerable and personal images in the development of Masha. I attribute this ease to numerous aspects. Firstly, we were fortunate enough to get our costumes right at the beginning of rehearsal, and my costume made me feel very comfortable and beautiful. The costume acted as a kind of mask. I felt transformed when I put it on, and through that transformation I was able to access and portray my sexuality without too much fear. I also think my summer research of exploring courage, confidence and ability to access 'dangerous' images really served me. I continued this work throughout first semester in class as well. Therefore, when rehearsal started in December I had become much more comfortable with this process. I will discuss the following aspect in more detail later in this section, however I did a great deal of work generating the imagined world and circumstances of the world, play, Masha's inner life, and her back story. As such, I was immersed by vivid, specific details of a world and life that was very different from my own. I found that developing imagined circumstances, such as imagining a living room that was not my living room, but very detailed, served as a sort of mask as well. With the framework of my imagined circumstances I felt very safe going to dangerous, personal, or vulnerable images.

**Inviting the Audience In.** Inviting the audience in was a very big goal for me during performance. I felt very confident and solid in what I had discovered in rehearsal, and I really wanted to use that foundation to take the leap to invite the audience in. In dress rehearsal I really focused on listening to the audience. Doing this really

slowed down my pace, and perhaps was patronizing to the audience. During the run I discovered that inviting the audience is a feeling rather than something I need to work at. It involves leading the audience, and remaining open in my pelvis, along with every cell of my body, so that the audience can follow my journey. All of the research, homework, prep work, reflection and release work gave me the foundation to achieve inviting the audience in during the play. It felt like flying, but I can't fly a plane that hasn't been properly assembled. In my process moving forward I need to do as much intellectual, physical, emotional and spiritual work is necessary to have the confidence to take off in performance.

**Imagination, the unconscious and details.** I made a major discovery about my process while playing Masha. For my thesis my goal was find specificity in my character and world development. At the beginning of the summer I believed that I could find the source for rich image life and specificity in my unconscious. At the beginning of my research I wanted to fuel my development of world and character specificity from internal, personal, conscious and unconscious sources. What I discovered throughout this process is that, much like inviting the audience in, bringing in my personal depth and experience to a role- be it images, sensations, shared experiences- is a feeling rather than something I need to work at. For example, when Masha confesses her love for Vershinin to her sisters, I had a kind of suitcase of layers, images, thoughts, and states of being I brought to the moment. One layer in my suitcase was my personal understanding of love, my experience with love, and images around the person that I am in love with in my real life. However, as I was speaking, all of my personal conscious and unconscious

associations, experiences, and images around love were not what I was actively imagining or speaking about as Masha. The personal was more like a foundation, or a deep well that supported my emotional life in the moment. Instead I was actively speaking from Masha's thoughts, relationship, and world, which were entirely different from my own.

Instead of working at connecting to personal images from my actual life, I used my imagination and groking to completely develop the world Masha lived in, and then inhabited it. When I built Masha's world with my imagination, her world had nothing to do with my own. Her living room, for example was not my living room. It was something I developed from research and my imagination. My sisters in the play were not my sisters, but Irina and Olga, and with my imagination I developed our past, our relationships, our ways of being. When speaking about my love for Vershinin I was not imaging my current partner, but Vershinin, and the relationship of Vershinin and Masha I had constructed with my imagination. This idea may seem very obvious, but it was totally revolutionary for me. I have always drawn from my personal life in my world and character building in order to create understanding and emotional connection. Last year, if I had done *Three Sisters* I would have imagined my living room, my boyfriend, and my sisters while doing the play. That way of working is why my acting was general or not specific, because I was trying to fit a square into a circle, so to speak.

In this process I discovered that using my imagination to build world and character that is based on the vision of the director, rather than my own life, is essential to my process. Importantly, I discovered that doing so made it so much

easier for me to be present, and affect my scene partners. Rather than trying to imprint my boyfriend's face onto Vershinin, I believed that I was in the world, and Vershinin was the man I loved. As a result, rather than trying to generate emotional connection internally, all I had to do was look into my acting partner's eyes and connection was there. I found I was much more comfortable taking risks, being transparent, and getting messy through this framework.

Importantly, I discovered that detailed acting is very important. Back stories, things that happen offstage, moments from the past, every single thing in the Prozorov living room, where the windows are, the light, everything must be imagined with specificity and detail. No stone can be left unturned if I want to fully create and inhabit the worlds of my characters. Detailed acting will be a main focus of my process moving forward.

Therefore, it is essential to carry in my suitcase both a feeling of how my personal, conscious and unconscious self connects to a role, along with an imagined circumstance and world. In the moment of performance, I trust that my personal layer is deep and felt, but not something I need to work at. Instead, I work at imagining my character and her external world with detail, and inhabiting that world moment to moment.

**Confidence and trust.** I am a much better actor when I am confident. Confidence comes from doing all the work mentioned above to get lost in all the layers and life and details I bring to a character. I have much more time to question my acting, become aware of the audience's gaze, and become self-conscious if I am making general choices, and not fully inhabiting the character and their world. The more

detail, the more focus, the more I have to internally and externally stimulate my while performing, which results in the more confidence. Also, It was very important for me to discover that all the technical work we have done at York, from speech, to Batdorf technique, to vocal training, is in my body. Until Masha I spent a great deal of performance thinking about my alignment, breath, or voice. However, during this performance I learned to trust that the work is there, and I need to live the character's journey rather than being focused on my internal life. Constantly checking in with myself distracts me from the journey and pulls me out of the world. Importantly, if I was pulled out of the story because I was holding my breath, or I felt pain from tensing my lower back, then I would put some awareness on the place of tension and release or breathe. However, I only did so when there was reason too, I did not unnecessarily focus on my internal technique.

*Three Sisters* has been my most enriching experience in theatre so far. Masha is by far my favourite character I have ever played. Through this process I have come to understand myself as an individual and much more about the kind of actor I am. I gathered numerous observations, and understandings about my process, and will continue to explore and develop this process in my artistic career. I am incredibly proud of the confidence, freedom, and artistic integrity I have found on this project. Saying goodbye to Masha and Chekhov has been a very sad experience for me, but I am so excited to bring this process to future roles.

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## Appendix A: Journal Entries

December 16<sup>th</sup>

### *Discoveries*

First, it has been an absolute luxury to have my costume and shoes for my first week of rehearsal. Putting on Masha's dress has been fundamental in my inhabiting and embodying her. The costume and the shoes function as a sort of mask for me, and have helped me begin to develop a character body. Also, the costume gives me a huge amount of confidence. Much like mask, having the costume allows me to feel more comfortable connecting deeply to the character, and reveal more depths of my imagination, swamp and unconscious self. I also have a lot of confidence being 'sexy' or brining Masha's rich inner sexual life to the performance when I'm wearing the costume.

Second, I say, thank you Anton Chekhov for writing such a beautiful role! I feel invigorated playing Masha, she is teaching me so much about transparency and self-confidence and taking risks. What's so beautiful about Masha is she feels so passionately and so extremely. I feel so alive onstage with her. When we were blocking out Act II today, the amazing thing was I wasn't interested in how I sounded, or what others were thinking of my performance. I was simply thinking the thoughts of Masha and speaking and taking my time. Instead of focusing on other's gaze, what they might be thinking, or if I am 'good', I got lost in the character and the world. Particularly when I'm talking to Vershinin. What I feel I am beginning to discover is how essential extensive research is for me in my process. This is the only show where I have done THIS MUCH research, and been this rooted in the literature, music, culture, and general period of the play. IT CHANGES EVERYTHING FOR ME. To understand the world I'm playing in is HUGE. As a result of coming in on the first day of rehearsal with such knowledge about the playwright, character and period is I am falling in love with this story. That effects my acting because I can feel myself being much more interested in telling this story, inhabiting this world, doing justice to Masha's journey, rather than simply being 'liked' onstage.

Jan 6<sup>th</sup>

### *Discoveries*

I am fascinated by something Tanja said in relation to my description of Masha's super objective. For me it is a hunger to devour life, and live artfully. Meaning, Masha wants to experience the beauty and the pain of every moment of life in order to slow time down. She wants to savour and appreciate each moment so that she never loses time. Saying it in another way she is hungry for consciousness. She wants too look life in the face and see it for what it is and love it for what it is and appreciate it's beauty. Interestingly as well, she is also seeking perfection. The perfect moment, the perfect love, the perfect passion. It is the pursuit of that perfection where Masha seeks to find the eternal, the higher, almost Godly

experiences in life that take us out of our mortal condition, even for a moment. I deeply relate to this idea and I when I am playing Masha, I am bringing very, very personal images and experiences to the role. But these images are more of a foundation and a feeling than anything else. Because I am feeling so confident in the character I do not have much fear bringing these parts of myself to the role. I have been coming to rehearsal at least 45 minutes early to warm up my voice, and body, as well as get grounded in the details of Masha's world. A really helpful way I do this is I listen to Glinka or Rachmaninov and imagine Masha playing piano in the house in Moscow or in their present house. While I picture this I remind myself of whatever details I need for that rehearsal- I image her childhood, her parents death, her affair with Vershinin, the rooms we inhabit in the play. I try to do so with as much specificity and detail as possible. Doing these warm ups has been essential for me to have the most productive rehearsals I can have. I am much more focused in rehearsal. Rather than fumbling around for the first 20 minutes trying to get hold of Masha I am already dropped in and able to fully inhabit her from the very start of rehearsal.

### *Challenges*

However, Michael Greyeyes came to watch our rehearsal for the first time today. I became acutely aware of being watched by Michael and that threw me off. Rather than being in the world of my character I was imagining what my performance looked like to Michael and it took me out of the world. I was no longer surrounded by details, but was interested in Hannah and how I was being perceived. In my posture and body I felt less apart of the world today, perhaps we need to sink back into it. I felt I was assuming poses rather than ruling from an internal confidence as before. I didn't feel as deeply connected to the world as I did in the last week of rehearsal. But that will come. My shoes fit much looser than before, which I think is effecting things. Must get new shoes this weekend.

### *Plans*

How do I keep focus on Masha's world and the details while I'm being watched by anyone outside our cast and crew? Notably, when we have a full audience? My plan is to practice technique from the river work we did with Alyson. In the river, whenever I would get thrown out of my experience, or become distracted by the observer's gaze, it is essential to be patient, be aware that you are blown off course, and wait to find new images to jump into, rather than panicking. Also, another way to jump back into the world is to ask, what am I doing, what am I seeing, what am I seeking? I will try these techniques the next time someone comes to observe rehearsal.

January 11<sup>th</sup>

### *Discoveries*

My sister's pain is my pain and it is deeply upsetting to watch Alex as my sister cry in Act III and tell me she dreamed of love and she knows she'll never have it and she doesn't know how she hasn't killed herself yet. However, I think I'm sinking into it

too much as Hannah, as an actor and falling in love with the tragedy. As an artist, as an actor I feel myself stepping back and enjoying the beauty and the sorrow of what Chekhov has written. I think that is taking me a bit out of the world. How do I feel the sorrow as the character without getting pulled out? I was crying in the scene and after we ran the scene because I, Hannah, was moved by Chekhov's statement about the failure of love to save us. But, for Masha, she is in the height of love and has nothing but total faith and belief in it. This is the great event of her life and she is right in the middle of it. Masha as a character would not be aware that Irina's statement will soon be mirrored by her own story in Act IV. If Masha weeps, she only weeps because she is feeling the pain of her sister.

Act III is incredibly special and incredibly unique because it gives us a glimpse into these characters when they reveal their private lives. First of all everyone is exhausted from this night. The fire also seems to open up an opportunity for everything to change. Fedotik loses everything, and the Prozorovs become dangerously close to losing everything as well. There is an opportunity this night for things to change and there is action on this night. Masha and Vershinin make love for the first time on this night. Also, we see the girls alone together for the first time. The volume is different, the tone is different. Masha lets the pot boil over in so many different ways in this act. The fight with Kulygin, the love affair with Vershinin. The confession to her sisters.

### *Issues*

The confession in Act III. This was our first run and it felt lacking in some way. It felt very much like Hannah making a confession rather than Masha. What I mean by that is I was using images that relate directly to my life. And it wasn't working for me. I need to spend a lot more time answering some questions here. What does being in love mean to Masha, what does it give Masha. This is one of the great events in her life, why? Why does it bring her back to life? How does it satiate her super objective? Importantly, I know from my own experiences of falling in love, it is all about the other person. Yes, you experience and know about your own incredibly strong reactions to this person. But the thing that you go over and over in your head, the thing that keeps you up at night, that makes you ache in the best way, is not your own emotions, but the thought of them. Their beautiful complexity, the shape of their lower lip, their hands. To really root this and give it more colour is not to image my own experience about falling in love, or be fixated on Masha's feeling of love, but to use my understanding of falling in love to create the right imaginative circumstance for Masha. What does Masha want to give Vershinin? Essentially to find the image, sensations, situation, that allows me to have the most grounded and alive experience as Masha during the confession.

### *Plans*

Tomorrow I will grok the text of this confession and do a lot of stream of consciousness writing as Masha as to her love for Vershinin. Also, in relation to who she wants to tell and why.

Questions to be answered in these exercises or over the next few rehearsals:

How come Olga calling her silly makes Masha decide to tell her sisters she loves Vershinin?

How does Irina's heartbreaking speech effect Masha's decision and way in which she confesses?

What does falling in love mean to her personally? What does it mean to them collectively?

Has she ever said these words in her life?

What are the stakes- what does she have to gain, what does she have to lose by telling her sisters?

Jan 17

### *Discoveries*

Today Act III was not played as giddy as I used too. Today it was much more conflicted, there was much more frustration and darker emotion in it. The 'confession' is a frank conversation, and there is so much to play there. The anger at Olga for being silly, trying to convince her, letting her in on the joy, then being pulled to the fear.

I think the thing to explore is balancing the joy with the fear. How to have both extremes in the one monologue.

### *Challenges*

Today was a very difficult day in rehearsal for me. This was our first rehearsal back from Theatre Ontario and High Park callbacks. It was a very stressful weekend and so much is up in the air. My confidence and focus were absolutely shook this weekend. I have been feeling very confident in rehearsal, and very focused. Today was the first day that I was very distracted, not focusing on the scenes when it wasn't my turn to be onstage, and laughing and clowning around in between working scenes. I was totally disconnected from the world and Masha's state of mind. What happened in rehearsal today was I let outside stress effect my focus. As a result my acting in Act IV specifically was disconnected, I was listening to the sound of my own voice and I still very much felt that I was 'Hannah' acting a scene, rather than Masha experiencing her life.

### *Plans*

Do physical work before rehearsal, an hour of yoga, to help release tension, stress, and quiet my body and mind.

Go in an hour and a half early. Spend a half hour to an hour doing river work specific to Masha's inner life in Act III and IV, and grok the 'confession' again. Then, do a solid warm up for a half hour, focused on awareness and freeing the breath, connecting to the core of my body, and connecting to Masha's inner life. Wear a really nice dress tomorrow and do my makeup to boost confidence.

Additional notes: This rehearsal seemed the shortest and least productive for me. Staying in Masha's head and staying focused on the play in rehearsal is INTEGRAL to making the most of my rehearsal time. Although I have had a lot of success in rehearsal so far, I have SO MUCH more to learn.

Dress with an audience January 24th

Difficult performance tonight. Act I and II felt that they were lacking in momentum and energy. And I was totally worn out by Act IV. I'm not sure if it's my own energy that needs to be juiced or if the audience was just grappling with way too much, between the signs, titles, ASL, sanatorium container and acting. It really wasn't much fun. It felt like we were heaving a very heavy thing for three hours. We were all desperately trying to lift it, but it couldn't be carried and couldn't take off. I felt that I was inviting the audience in and they were enjoying the show in Act I but we started losing them by the end of Act II. By Act IV I felt we had lost the audience. I think the way to improve this is fast pace. I think that's the key here.

January 25th

Waking up this morning after the performance two things have become very clear to me. There are two FUNDAMENTAL aspects to Chekhov's writing and to Masha's journey that I had a very strong sense of in the larger part of rehearsal, but seem to be a little less focused on now. The first is that this is a story about people in transition. The intellectual, golden, age of Russia and Russian culture is dead. The time for heroes, for Tolstoy, Pushkin, Rachmaninov is gone. The middle class is coming in and taking over. Revolution is just around the corner. Transition is pain. For Masha, she is living in a Russia that no longer has the security of the Russian past that she was brought up on. Values that she deeply believed in- art, literature, music, heroic men and fragile women, everyone working to create more art, more beauty- that is gone. She is grappling with finding a way to survive in a world where no one believes in what she believes in anymore. She is reshaping her values so she can survive.

Second, and most importantly, despite the pain and the transition and being trapped MASHA DESPERATELY WANTS TO LIVE, TO SURVIVE, TO FIND MEANING, TO EXPERIENCE A LIFE OF TRUTH. She wants this from the very beginning of the play to the very last moment. Despite the loss of Vershinin and the going downhill of her brother, she never gives up, she never is defeated. She fights and she fights and she works, and she rails, and she is COURAGEOUS right to the very end when she says 'we must live'. Never sink into sadness, always fight to change my world, always hope for life, always reach for it, always try and find it.

Opening January 26<sup>th</sup>

Opening went so well! Much better than dress. The changes I made which were successful were: I made sure to drink and eat enough before the show. The show is long and I don't have any time to eat or drink at all during the run, so making sure I have proper sustenance before hand was very helpful for keeping my energy up. TO LIVE AS MY SUPER OBJECTIVE, keeping this in mind kept the whole play moving forward and my journey on a roll. I also felt that I was inviting the audience in by leading, not but taking too much time or listening to them too intently. Inviting the audience in is feeling, not something I have to continually work at. Last night over

email David gave me the advice to enjoy playing one of the greatest roles ever played for women and fly. I feel like I did that tonight. I savoured it but also kept my pace and energy up, which made the whole journey ten times more enjoyable. The love scene with Vershinin was a little rocky, I think I was being too hesitant. I need to tone that down a bit. Overall success!

Closing night January 27th

Before our performance today Tanja told the cast that one thing we can try to focus on is differentiating the rhythm of each act. I found this incredibly helpful in the run. Especially in act III and IV. I was reminded that act III is about violence, chaos, but most importantly for my character, and for all the characters act III, it is a pot boiling over. Andrei has mortgaged the house to the bank, Vershinin and Masha are in an affair, Olga is slowly being forced into the position of headmistress, and Irina decides to marry the Baron and give up on her dream of love. The Doctor is enraged by everyone ignoring Natasha' indecency and their hypocrisy in general. During the run, the idea that each character is expelling, is boiling over and releasing emotion, saying un-sayable things, really helped me find the urgency and bursting emotion of this act. It helped me drive my text forward, and it all seemed more grounded in an inability to keep quiet. Pace was up, rhythm was different, and the act was driven by much stronger need.

Act IV is sober. For my character it is about frank conversation and facing the rest of my life with sobriety. The affair is over, and I learn that life is not and will never be what I expect it to be. But I learn to live, as best I can, with what I have. This act felt clearer and more diversified from the rhythm of the other acts than it has before. Tanja also advised us to lean into time in the play. Constantly be propelling yourself forward she said, don't let yourself get comfortable or sit down into the play always be moving forward. This drive primarily helped my urgency, pace, and tension (for Masha not me as actor). All of these things were like a boost of energy, drive, life, grounding, and gave space for more spontaneity. Leaning forward also changed the weight or layers of images and experience I was able to bring in the performance. It wasn't something that I was actively thinking of but I had my unconscious life, my personal past, my life and present images, and all of Masha's past and present too. I also had the actual present moment of performing and being connected with an audience

