

SENSITISING THE INSTRUMENT

Exploring Artistic Vulnerability and Physical Range in *Middletown* by Will Eno

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Abstract

A compelling, authentic and dynamic actor must strip away all of their armour and allow them self to see and be seen with their whole being. They must be open, fascinated, curious, all consumed by the present moment, spontaneous, and free. Free from judgement, free from self-criticism and free from shame. They must be vulnerable. This thesis is a multi-modal investigation which seeks to explore my artistic vulnerability in rehearsals and creation and develop my physical practices and range when creating characters. The work of social scientists Brené Brown and Kristin Neff was used to strengthen my self-compassion so that I was able to take the necessary risks to allow myself to fail, and to see those valuable failures as moments of growth and learning rather than shame and ridicule. Through continued research into authentic movements practices, embodied practice and Jacques Lecoq movement pedagogy, I fused this artistic vulnerability with dynamic physical range to create five vastly contrasting and compelling characters in the play *Middletown* by Will Eno.

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Introduction

“As an actor, in order to reveal what’s at stake for the character on the deepest level and allow for pertinent communication with the audience, I must make myself, for ultimate expression, more vulnerable than in life. I want to remove the mask I might normally use as a cover. What you reveal and do when you are truly vulnerable and wounded is totally different from when, as in life, your purpose is, so often, to prove that you are invulnerable.”

Uta Hagan—*Respect for Acting*

In order to be compelling, authentic and dynamic an actor must strip away all of their armour and allow themselves to see and be seen with their whole being. They must rid themselves of this armour so that they can return to their inner child, to the imagination, to play—open, fascinated, curious, all consumed by the present moment, spontaneous, and free. Free from judgement, free from self-criticism, free from shame and insecurities that come from our adult life. They must be vulnerable. As an actor, an artist and a human being, I lack this much-coveted vulnerability and therefore my acting, ability to create and to “just be,” on stage and in rehearsal, is limited. My equal fear of failure and success coupled with self-criticism and my inability to receive and process feedback effectively has meant that my acting is often too controlled, precise and formulated. I know the rules and I must follow them. But acting requires so much more. It requires risk taking, failing and getting messy. To me, vulnerability is the willingness to get things wrong, to open myself to a process where there is a high chance that I will fail from time to time and to risk with my eyes wide open. This summer I embarked on a research journey which encompassed my relationship with my past, how I work in the present, and how I hope to grow in the future. Firstly, I defined vulnerability for myself and began to develop a relationship of self-care, which I called “Strengthening the Net.” Working with a counsellor and investigating work of social scientists Brené Brown and Kristin Neff, I was able to realise and release some blocks from my past and create an internal language of self-care to aid in my vulnerability journey.

Secondly, in workshops with The Batdorf Technique (Toronto, June 2018) and a residency with Frantic Assembly (London UK, July 2018) I realised how much being in the flow of authentic movement and physical problem solving allows me to be free. Moving forward, I will be researching theatre practitioner Jacques Lecoq to find techniques and exercises to take into the rehearsal room when creating the my four wildly contrasting characters in *Middletown*. It is my aim to find the vulnerability, authenticity and physicality in each, by wholeheartedly giving myself into risk and failure in the creation process.

Soothing the Child and Strengthening the Net

“Vulnerability is not weakness, and the uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure we face every day are not optional... Our willingness to own and engage with our vulnerability determines the depth of our courage and the clarity of our purpose; the level to which we protect ourselves from being vulnerable is a measure of our fear and disconnection”

Brené Brown—*Daring Greatly*

When I think about actors and people who I aspire to be I see heroines who are unafraid to be seen in all of their imperfect glory. In her book *Daring Greatly*, Brené Brown says “We love seeing raw truth and openness in other people, but we’re afraid to let them see it in us. We’re afraid that our truth isn’t enough—that what we have to offer isn’t enough without the bells and whistles, without editing, and impressing.” (41) As a child growing up in New Zealand I was constantly praised for my talents. When I made the right sounds, and said the right things, I was told that I was “good”, “talented” and “right”. My sense of self-worth then became tied into this notion of “getting it right”. Contrastingly, I was also faced with the Tall Poppy Syndrome.

Australian National Dictionary defines a “tall poppy” as a “person who is conspicuously successful and (frequently) as one whose distinction, rank or wealth attracts envious notice or hostility” (Ramson, 1988). To tall poppy is to cut (an

apparently successful person) down to size. The tall poppy syndrome (TPS) refers to the tall poppying of tall poppies.” (Mouly & Sankaran, 285).

I felt as if I was put on a pedestal and with each and every achievement the potential fall became imperceptible. I felt the need to control, edit, and shape my image so as to not disappoint the people around me. This was a big task for someone so young. As a result of this, I believe that I developed an imposter syndrome complex. Anna Parkman states “Those dealing with impostor tendencies put a considerable amount of pressure on themselves to maintain the façade and as such are known to exhibit high levels of perfectionism and workaholic behaviours.” (Parkman, 51) Taking “uncalculated” risks became impossible as I believed that the impending failure would prove to everyone around me that I was a fraud, and confirm to myself that I was not worthy of this praise.

Working with my counsellor, I was able to open past traumas, learned behaviours and expectations, and began use tools of self-compassion and kindness to allow my vulnerable self to be seen. My inability to not take courageous risks has meant that I have forever been skating in my “safe zone”; doing enough work so that I will not fail and not quite doing enough to fully reach my possible potential, therefore not pushing the pedestal higher. Again, the words of Brown rang true: “we dismiss vulnerability as weakness only when we realise that we’ve confused feeling with failing and emotions with liabilities.” (35). Exposing real, true emotions in my everyday life and being less than “perfect” in my studies and endeavours was seen as a weakness by me, and thus I associated vulnerability with weakness. Through my research I have come to see that this perfectionism crushes creativity and I was constantly “Serpentining” through my life. Brown explains serpentining as a

means of trying to control a situation, backing out of it, pretending it’s not happening, or maybe even pretending that you don’t care. We use it to dodge conflict, discomfort, possible confrontation, the potential for shame or hurt, and/or criticism (self- or other-inflicted). Serpentine can lead to hiding out, pretending, avoidance, procrastination, rationalizing, blaming and lying (165).

In order to be able to allow myself to be vulnerable I first had to sooth the child and strengthen the net of self-compassion, so that when I do fail (which is inevitable with the acting challenges I have set in front of me) I will be able to hold myself with care and less self-judgement. Self-compassion was a concept that was new to me, as I thought that if I was too self-compassionate I would be lazy and selfish. But I now see the value of this practice. Using the work outlined in Kristin Neff's *Self-Compassion—The proven power of being kind to yourself*, I was able to allow myself to sit with discomfort, conflict and pain in order to work through it. I recognised negative self-talk and, instead of pushing it aside, I was able to hold it with kindness and care. I believe that this personal growth was wholly necessary for the next step: putting it into practice in the acting studio. By allowing myself to be seen and affected by others in an authentic way, I could tap into my deep, internal intuition. I needed both that internal sense as well as some serious rest in order to achieve the next steps of my journey.

Tapping into the Animal and Instinct

“Trauma is about trying to forget, hiding how scared, enraged, or helpless you are. Theatre is about finding ways of telling the truth and conveying deep truths to your audience. This required pushing through blockages to discover your own truth, exploring and examining your own internal experience so that it can emerge in your voice and body on stage.”

Bessel van der Kolk—*The Body Keeps Score*.

The second part of my summer research took me into the studio. Choosing to take part in Erika Batdorf's *The Batdorf Technique* (TBT) summer intensive was a daunting process. Within class time I had only fleeting moments where I was able to “fully drop into” the work, and was unsure if I was going to be able to handle the two-week process. Erika's comments of “Don't be a Good Student!” and “Don't get it right!” (which were repeated to me weekly in classes) were ringing in my ears. My perfectionism critic chimed in with the retort, “I am

doing what you asked me to do, so why are you telling me not to be right?” which left me confused and frustrated with myself and the process. Before I entered in the studio I took time to consider what it would look like if I was not a “good student”. This caused anxiety. I immediately had thoughts of not doing the workshop, my chest tightened, my throat clenched and my mind went into overdrive. I was able to use Neff’s self-compassion techniques in this moment and spoke to my fears. I made the decision to entire the studio space with these three goals;

1. Find validation from within not from others.
2. To move out of my head and into my body.
3. Focus on my own work and not the perceived judgements and interpretations of others.

It was my aim that all three of these would allow me to focus on myself, to live in sensations and to work to let go of both internal and external judgements. Neff’s book on self-compassion became a strong ally for the work that I was doing in the studio. I observed that I found it difficult to separate myself (person) from the work (product) that I was completing. Neff writes, “When we recognize that we are the product of countless factors that we don’t normally identify with, we don’t need to take our “personal failing” so personally. When we acknowledge the intricate web of causes and condition in which we are all imbedded, we can be less judgmental of ourselves and others.” (73) This thought allowed me to take pressure off of myself (person) and realise that any mistakes and failings were not a reflection of myself and therefore were nothing to be feared.

By working on switching off that area of my brain and truly connecting into my body, I was able to connect more authentically to the movement and sensations that were presented to me. This feeling was echoed in the work of Bessel van der Kolk in his book *The Body Keeps Score* when he said “Our sense of agency, how much we feel in control, is defined by

our relationship with our bodies and its rhythms... In order to find our voice, we have to be *in* our bodies—able to breathe fully and able to access our inner sensations.” (333) For me, the breakthrough came at the end of the first week. I was able to release my pelvic floor and my hips and find the open channel up through to my occipital joint, jaw and mouth. Freeing up this passage and no longer holding unnecessary tension meant that I was able to deeply ground myself and allow myself be seen. The kinaesthetic transfer and energy output was observed by Erika and the other tutors as alive and palpable, and they noted that I was “kicking out some big stuff” which I believe to be a combination of past trauma blocks and deep connection which manifested itself into vivid imagery which was experienced fully in my body and voice. But most importantly, I was able to feel the difference inside of me. I felt more connected, more alive and was working from a place that I had never found before, thus achieving my first goal of finding validation from within. My desire to progress with this work and muscle it out was strong, but I was advised to rest. “Unlike self-criticism, which asks if you’re good enough, self-compassion asks *what’s good for you?* Self-compassion taps into your inner desire to be healthy and happy.” (Neff, 165). What was good for my “healthy animal” at this point was to rest, to let the new connections and learning that I had created within the studio manifest deep roots. In my mind, rest would normally equal weakness, but again Erika impressed on me the importance of listening to my body. There was a cognitive disconnect between what my brain and body wanted. My body was exhausted, it wanted to cry and at times struggled to get out of bed. My mind, on the other hand was full of negative self-talk. “Why are you not strong enough to keep going?” “You did it once, you should be able to do it again,” “Everyone will think you are weak if you don’t go in.” In this instance, embracing my vulnerability meant sitting with the discomfort of doing nothing. Although there was no physical manifestation or output of the work that was happening, internally new and valuable connections were being made.

After the rest period, I began to seek other forms of movement to experiment with. In Contact Improvisation classes, I was able to continue working on trusting my instinct and move in a free-flowing way without interpretation or judgement. Authentic Movement sessions with Carmen Patterson provided a movement meditation; I found joy and freedom tuning into my body and moving uninhibited through the space. I then returned to the dance studio and took jazz choreography and ballet classes at City Dance Corps. In these classes, I endeavoured to feel my introspective awareness whilst working in choreographic structures (which proved difficult, and is something that I will continue to practice and explore). Throughout these classes I also took a joyful approach. I had not been in a dance studio for many years and I was not the strongest member of the class, but when it came time to perform the choreography I gave it my all and I held my mistakes with humour rather than berating myself for “not getting it right.” I also strengthened my yoga practice by integrating weekly yoga class into my practice and also attended a day long workshop of *Heart Yoga* facilitated by Karuna Erickson which, again, showed me the importance of stillness and rest. All of these endeavours reinforced how valuable movement is to my personal and professional practice.

In London, England, my desire to move as I created was solidified as I completed a week-long residency with the Devised theatre company *Frantic Assembly*. The work was fast paced, high energy and required a strong level of physical awareness and problem-solving. The aspects of the work that resonated the most with my artistic challenge was the demand for play and Frantic’s signature style of making everything “pedestrian”. At the beginning of the session, Company Director Scott Graham said that he wanted us all to be mad scientists who got it wrong. We were tasked to come up with wild ideas and try them out and trust the directors. Also, demanding the work be “pedestrian” meant that they just wanted to see us on stage, no characters, no “acting” and no frills. To achieve this, I was able to use the TBT

work that I had cultivated to tap into a connected and authentic place. Although my time spent with Frantic Assembly confirmed the way that I want to create in the future and provided me with an array of devising and creation tools and techniques, I found that I easily slipped back into old patterns and was constantly having dialogues with myself to ensure that I was living in the present, letting go of judgements and expectations. When I found myself retreating into my thoughts and had no time to sit and inhabit the moment I was able to use the Reorientating Technique as outlined in Eric Maisel's book *Fearless Creating*. In this technique "you learn to take your mind *off* the piece of negative self-talk, the doubt, the worry, the stressor in the environment, and focus your mind elsewhere." (244) In each instance, I would centre myself with breath and reorientate myself to the work. This technique, coupled with Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) research that I had been doing, enabled me to focus on the present moment and on my task at hand. Then, when I was in a space where I could better deal with my negative self-talk, I was able to revisit them with self-compassion and care. This is something that I will continue to journal as I move into more studio work and rehearsal.

Moving Forward

"When we stop caring about what people think, we lose out capacity for connection. When we become defined by what people think, we lose out willingness to be vulnerable. If we dismiss all the criticism, we lose out on important feedback, but if we subject ourselves to the hatefulness, our spirits get crushed. It's a tightrope."

Brené Brown—*Daring Greatly*

The pedestal that I was perched upon as a young child has morphed into a tightrope; malleable, moving and playful. In her book *The Creative Habit*, Twyla Tharp speaks about Mimi Paul, a fearless famous Ballet dancer from New York who was always pushing her

body to super human lengths. Falling was inevitable but also reminded everyone that she was human. “Hitting the ground seemed to transform Mimi: it was though the stage absorbed the energy of the fall and injected it back into her with an extra dose of fearlessness” (213-14). As I move forward into the studio to create my solo show, back into classes in the Fall and Winter terms and into rehearsals for *Middletown*, I will continue to widen my knowledge of physical theatre practices, as I believe connecting with my body is where I feel most free. In addition to the Laban work explored in movement, I will investigate the physical theatre exercises of Lecoq, as he draws on the experience of daily life, but seeks to radically increase the range of expressivity through the embodiment of animals, qualities and materials. I will use his works “Theatre of Movement and Gesture” and “The Moving Body: Teaching Creative Theatre” to deepen my cognitive understanding of his practice and will seek physical workshops from Torontonians practitioners to ensure the work is engrained into my body. I will continue to solidify my movement practice and continue to see people and allow myself to be seen every day. I will endeavour to explore and play with heart and vulnerability, knowing that I have a robust net of self-compassion and skills to catch me when I fall.

Will Eno and the World of the Play

“It is humanness, and humanness, and humanness”

Will Eno (Interview with Samuel French Publishing)

Will Eno’s play *Middletown* examines the short period in-between life and death, where human connection, albeit fleeting and often superficial, can have a profound ripple effect on our outcome.

Writer for Time Out Magazine, New York, Diane Snyder wrote about Will Eno's beginnings in life and the theatre in an article entitled "Will Eno builds a strange new world—The wonderfully odd playwright makes small-town America absurd."

The youngest of three children, Eno grew up in suburban Boston, the son of a lawyer father and a mother who was a volunteer activist (and arrested with Ed Asner once). After leaving high school early, Eno trained as a cyclist at the Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, winning a silver medal in the national championships. Then a job painting houses steered him in another direction: "The guy I worked for was really into John Donne, and he always played audiobooks while we worked, so I started moving toward this other life." (Eno)

In that life, he studied writing with noted editor Gordon Lish and found a champion in Edward Albee when he was a fellow at the playwright's namesake foundation. At the time, Eno was just beginning to work on plays after writing fiction. He didn't start going to the theater until his late twenties, and when he talks about its allure, he doesn't describe a memorable production but the experience itself. "With phones ringing and people coughing, you're just somehow aware of the humanness," he says. "There's something triumphantly mortal about the whole thing." (Snyder)

This humanness and normality can be seen as a theme throughout all of Will Eno's works, which include; *Thom Pain (Based on Nothing)* 2004, *Tragedy: A Tragedy* 2008, *Title and Deed* 2012, *Gnit* 2013, *The Realistic Joneses* 2014 and most recently *Wakey, Wakey* 2017. His characters are often raw and real, offering audiences a glimpse into their own existential angst and darkest fears. What makes Eno's plays extraordinary is his expert command of language. The New York Times critic Charles Isherwood dubbed Eno "a Samuel Beckett for the Jon Stewart generation" and his work often gets compared to that of his mentor Edward Albee, as well as Beckett, and Pinter. *Middletown* is no exception. "Mr. Eno's gift for articulating life's absurd beauty and it's no less absurd horrors may be unmatched among writers of his generation. But he is more naturally adept at shaping words into sentences that shimmer with wit and meaning than at shaping scenes into a formally satisfying play." (Isherwood)

The process of writing *Middletown* began in 2002 with a simple idea. In an interview with Time Out magazine, Eno noted the beginning incarnations of the script were

problematic and the voices of the characters in *Middletown* were like a “dysfunctional Greek Chorus... You couldn't really hear what they were saying, and they didn't say the same thing” (qtd. in Snyder). After putting down the play and picking it back up five years later, Eno was still not satisfied, proclaiming “I had a very simple idea, and I think, through cowardice, I kept not seeing that through. I wanted a birth and a death and some allusion to the middle.” Expanding on this idea in an interview with Samuel French Publishing House, Eno added “I wanted to write a play with a birth in it and a death in it and some other things that just emphasised those two events as parentheses, and then there is this whole rich middle part of our lives where is really all happens.” (Eno, Samuel French) This notion of life and death would come back into Eno’s life in a profound way as in 2014, four years after the Off-Broadway premier of *Middletown*, Eno’s father died, and his daughter was born within a 24 hour window of each other.

The script of *Middletown* calls for the largest cast in Eno’s oeuvre and is made up of a collection of moments and interactions between inhabitants of a small “normal” town in America. The dialogue between the characters explores miscommunication and probing truths, coloured and conveyed by sharp, witty language. Eno’s affinity for monologues, which can be seen in his one-man shows, is also prevalent in this play with larger numbers. When asked what draws him to this way of writing in an interview with *The Guardian*, Eno recounted:

“In some ways, I'm probably drawn to the monologue," he says, "because I was a pretty quiet kid, as there wasn't a lot of emphasis on talking in the house I grew up in, and so a lot of the conversations I had were in my head or to rocks and dogs. That said, I've always found it to be a form that, potentially, has a great amount of theatrical energy in it. The total effect and meaning of a play probably always has to include the audience's private responses and conjuring's, and if the thoughts and feelings of the play can ping back and forth between audience and performer, a large and meaningful amount of area can be covered. The monologue strikes me as an elegant and economical way to accomplish that pinging." (Lawson)

The pace and delivery of the language is also important in the performance of Eno's texts. As a comment to the actors in *Middletown*, Will Eno instructed in his author's note:

“A general note on the acting: the first and probably most important thing is that the characters should sound, as in most plays, like normal human beings, talking. There is some philosophy in the play and even perhaps poetry, but the characters in the play are mainly speaking off the tops of their heads, perhaps sometimes thinking out loud, perhaps sometimes seeking to share or clarify a thought they've been having. A serious and simple and kind of matter-of-fact delivery is probably best. Of course, there are moment of emotional difficulty, yearning, wonderment, etc., but in general, I think the play should move along at a pretty good clip, like life.” (Eno, 6)

The first production of *Middletown* was performed Off-Broadway at Vineyard Theatre on October 13th 2010, with Artistic Director, Douglas Aibel. The performance was directed by Ken Rus Schmoll, with sets and costumes by David Zinn, lighting by Tyler Micoleau, and sound by Jill BC Du Boff. In an interview with Time Out Magazine, New York, Schmoll recounts feeling “emotionally devastated by it [*Middletown*] on the first read. It's both mysterious and accessible, and there's just no consensus to what the play's about, or what should have the most emotional impact. Ultimately, it's about something so human: the question of what does it mean to be a person.” (qtd. in Snyder). Schmoll's impression and interpretation of the script was also echoed by theatre reviewers of the first production. Charles Isherwood wrote “*Middletown* glimmers from start to finish with tart, funny, [and] gorgeous little comments on big things: the need for love and forgiveness, the search for meaning in life, the long, lonely ache of disappointment.” (Isherwood). In an interview for the Brooklyn Rail publication, Ben Gassman notes “As with all of Eno's plays, love, lifespan, death, the durability of language, and the biodegradability of desire figure prominently” and also discusses the poignant depth and relevance of Eno's work for a modern-day audience. “Trying is a big Eno motif... What makes Will Eno a hero is that he can get up in the morning. Will Eno writes heroes for our time... Howling in the caverns of our language,

treading in the unknowing, grabbing at the driftwood of joke, generally trying, Will Eno is waging a passive-aggressive battle in words against time.” (Gassman)

The play was brought to a Canadian audience at the Shaw Festival in 2017. Director Meg Roe commented on the process of questioning and creating the world of *Middletown* in her director’s note, saying, “We considered the magic of togetherness and the importance of the individual within the universal. We wondered about connection, the effort of it, the absence of it in our daily lives, and about context, how the banal can become divine, and how meaning is pinned to imagination. We sought miracles. We pursued boredom. We found both in the other.” (Roe) Critics were also taken with the 2017 Shaw production and their comments echoed that of their American counterparts, but contrastingly, they discussed the lackluster track of events and storyline. Karen Fricker, reviewing for *The Toronto Star*, commented on the “lonely, doughty, philosophical people.” and muses that the play sets to ask difficult questions. “What do humans have in common, what’s it all about and why do we keep going even though we know where it’s all heading? The play tries to address these lofty questions, and what makes it touching and funny rather than unbearably pretentious is that it reminds itself and us constantly that asking these unanswerables is absurd but makes us human.” (Fricker, 2017) Robert Cushman, writing for the *National Post*, also echo’s the existential and possibly monotonous nature of the production, writing “its message is that whoever we are, wherever we are, we are constantly in the middle, caught between those two mortal poles. That is undeniably true. But I don’t know that it’s very profound.” (Cushman, 2017). In a contrasting take on Will Eno’s writing, J. Kelly Nestruck writing for the *Global Mail* was seemingly unimpressed, “My first experiences with Eno's work left me highly skeptical of him as a writer, thinking of him as a sitcom writer for the stage – and entirely too on the nose with his philosophical musings.” He then goes on to add, “but there's an oddball poeticism to his writing, a compelling insistency to the way he circles back on themes that

creates an eddy that sucks you into his worlds when performers truly relax into his work and don't try to sell it too hard.” (Nestruck, 2017)

Ben Gassman sums up *Middletown* with ease, “Going to see a Will Eno play is like going to an amusement park of everyday malaise. Not the roller-coaster section. The quieter corners of the amusement park. Log flume. Haunted house. Your existential dread is aroused, is dropped onto a haunted log flume and aurally accelerated by events on stage, mostly by the stringing together of words, by events in language. But somehow in the acceleration you are calmed, you get to leave a little lighter. Or more convinced that you are not alone. Even though you are, you absolutely are. More, that your loneliness is not alone. Your inability to be understood is not unique. Your loneliness has fantastic company. Everyone is having a really hard time, too. We are all just waiting for our cells to metastasize.” (Gassman)

Finding the Shapes

“Neither belief nor identification is enough – one must be able genuinely to play”

The Moving Body – Jacques Lecoq

In the foreword for *The Moving Body*, Simon McBurney describes Lecoq as being “like an architect,” noting that “his analysis as to how the human body functions in space was linked directly to how we might unravel the structure of drama itself” (Lecoq, Lariasse, Carasso, ix). This analytical and geometrical approach to the human body and movement was discovered by Lecoq through sport. At age seventeen, whilst exercising on the parallel and horizontal bars at a Paris gymnastics club, he found that the movement through space demanded by gymnastic exercise was of a purely abstract order. “In doing these physical movements I discovered extraordinary sensations which could be carried over into everyday life.” (Lecoq, Lariasse, Carasso 3) This physical interest was to be the basis of all of Lecoq’s work and

exploration. In his method of teaching Lecoq expresses, “I have always given priority to the external world over inner experience... It is more important to observe how beings and objects move and how they find a reflection in us.” (Lecoq, Lariasse, Carasso 19). The founder of l'École Internationale de Théâtre Jacques Lecoq in 1956, Lecoq developed teaching methods that have inspired numerous practitioners of physical theatre, in which gesture is at the basis of the performance. (Lecoq, preface). His unorthodox style of training applied the laws of movement to dramatic creation and to different style of acting traditions; including mask performance, tragedy, melodrama, commedia dell'arte and clowning, and has bought students from all over the world to train. Lecoq's teachings were primarily focused in the body, and therefore “ego” and the search for “self-enlightenment and for spiritual bliss” had little attraction. Lecoq stated, “I prefer to see more distance between the actor's own ego and the character performed” (Lecoq, Lariasse, Carasso, 19) and that the first step of training at l'École Internationale de Théâtre Jacques Lecoq was to “strip away all previously learned experiences which might hinder them [the actor] from rediscovering life at its most authentic” (Lecoq, Lariasse, Carasso, 27). The challenging duality for myself as a performer at this moment on my journey, is to find the correlation between bringing my authentic self to the work and developing a physical practice which would allow myself to explore and cultivate a deep understanding of character and text. After my work with The Batdorf Technique and Frantic Assembly in the summer, I discovered that personally, I need to start from the body and then layer in the psychological work to ensure that my characters state of being was unique, authentic, and grounded. Developing my ability for improvisation and play was also paramount to allowing my artistic vulnerability to be honored as I moved forward in this learning. I found Lecoq's physical pedagogy fascinating as I read his works “*The Moving Body*” and “*Theatre of Movement and Gesture*,” which laid the foundation for my understanding of his principles. In addition to this textual research, I also felt a need to

experience the work with Torontonians practitioners to ensure my understanding was ingrained in my body. I was able to attend a workshop on Transposition using Lecoq pedagogy with Goat Howl Theatre Company, and later viewed the work of Quote Unquote Collective who use Lecoq pedagogy in their devising process. My work in movement classes with Sallie Lyons, which incorporated the study of authentic movement and Grotowski's "River Work," also aided my character exploration. The marriage of Grotowski and Lecoq's work was evident, and I was able to fuse some of those principles as I took my exploration to the studio. Here, I worked from silence to sound and I chose to focus on creating a gestural language, contrasting shapes, and tempos for each of my characters.

6a Gesture

In the book *Jacques Lecoq & British Theatre*, Simon Murray notes that "gesture precedes knowledge, gesture precedes thought, gesture precedes language." (Murray, 27) and in the teachings of Lecoq, gestural language is a key pillar in the architecture of character. "The face, the hands and the body display feelings, passions and dramatic states, presenting to the observer permanent behavioural patterns natural to the person's characters, or occasional behaviour revealed by special situations such as anger and fear" (Lecoq, 15). A gesture can be internationally recognised or idiosyncratic to a person or moment. Lecoq categorized expressive gestures into three sections; *Gestures of action* which tend to involve whole body, *gesture of expression* which involve the emotions and the person's basic states, and *gestures of demonstration* which punctuate words, or precede, prolong or replace them (Lecoq, 9). When exploring gesture in the studio and developing my physical range, I was able to choose an idiosyncratic gesture for each of my four roles, thus creating a hook (repeatable idiosyncratic gesture) that would serve as a trigger for the remainder of the

character's shape and tempo to materialize. It was my hope that these hooks would allow me to transition between the characters in rehearsal and in performance.

6b Shape and Character Axis

I used exercises in the studio to develop my character's shape and axis. In an interview with Lecoq trained, Toronto based theatre practitioner, Adam Paolozza, I discussed with him what elements he considered to be at the cornerstone of creating a character using Lecoq's pedagogy. He spoke about the actor being able to use their body to create dynamic and unique shapes for their character. Being able to manipulate and isolate body parts to reveal idiosyncratic postures, walks and stances for each of the characters (Paolozza). These ideas were also reinforced in my readings and the workshops that I participated in. My journey began with observation. Lecoq notes that "The mime actor draws the fundamental elements of his performance from this observation of real life, which enriches him and his style of dramatic expression." (Lecoq, 8), thus my research took me to the streets, to coffee shops and campus hallways to observe different people's relationship with gravity, the space they occupy and their walk/gait. I also participated in a workshop with Goat Howl Theatre Company where I was able to explore the transposition of colours and paintings into shapes, energies and movement pieces. This physical research armed me with a wealth a knowledge as I began my own character explorations. In the studio I began from a neutral state, a state combining calm and curiosity; I was then able to drop in my different characters and explore their bodies. When creating the character shape, I focused on the form of their spine, the openness or closedness of their posture and their purchase on the ground (how do they stand? What is their contact with the ground?). I also explored the character's relationship to what Lecoq defines as "two essential actions; 'to pull' and 'to push'" (Lecoq, Lariasse, Carasso, 79). In *Theatre of Gesture and Movement*, he goes on to say "'Pushing-pulling' is the

directional motor that comes about along with: pushing-oneself-pulling-oneself and being-pushed-being-pulled. At this level movement takes on its true dimension, organizing itself in the time-space, through rhythm.” (Lecoq, 89). In my opinion, this concept of push and pull with respect to character development also materializes itself in the context of the play; as it is the character pushing and pulling in different moments. These are questions that I will continue to explore in rehearsals.

6c Rhythm vs Tempo

Lecoq defines the difference between Rhythm and Tempo in *The Moving Body* as;

“Rhythm – an organic sense of movement not to be confused with Tempo. Tempo is geometrical, rhythm is organic. Tempo can be defined, while rhythm is difficult to grasp. Rhythm is the result of an actor’s response to another live performer. It may be found in waiting, but also in action. To enter into the rhythm is, precisely, to enter into the great driving force of life itself. Rhythm is at the root of everything, like a mystery.” (Lecoq, Lariasse, Carasso, 167)

In my quest to develop physical range, I was intrigued to explore how tempo would manifest itself in each of my characters. The pace of how each character walks through the space, their topography, and their use of pause was explored in the studio allowing me to develop an external tempo for each character. I then turned to the character’s inner tempo, working with breath; where the breath originates from and how does it change in different situations were some questions that I examined. This allowed each of my characters to possess their own unique tempo, and thus developed my physical range. Each character owning their unique tempo means that I will be able to experiment with rhythm when I enter rehearsals with the ensemble, as Lecoq noted that “each character must be both part of the group and separate, must find his own rhythmic beat and his specific space.” (Lecoq, Lariasse, Carasso, 33)

By working in the studio in this way I was able to create an architectural blueprint for each of my characters (each is outlined below and in appendixes 1-4). The next step in my

creation will be to implement the element of pedagogy which Lecoq considers most important, play. Simon Murray noted in his essay that “Play is a dynamic principle which informs the quality of interaction between performers and with their audience, but also opened up possibilities for action which can both liberate the actor from ‘literalness’ of the text and enrich it with additional (physical and visual) meaning.” (34) Moving into the rehearsal room I would be able to develop each of my character’s rhythm, as Lecoq believes “Rhythm is the result of an actor’s response to another live performer” and that “True play can only be founded on one’s reaction to another” (Lecoq, Lariasse, Carasso, 30)

Developing the character

“When you push a given moment to its limit, you reveal its attitude”

Moving Body – Jacques Lecoq

Although Lecoq’s work uses a range of mask techniques, I chose to focus on the three above features of his pedagogy (Gesture, Shape & Axis, Rhythm & Tempo) to develop my characters. When developing a basic shape, tempo and gestural language for each of my characters, I began each exploration from a place of neutral. I incorporated elements of The Batdorf Technique’s warm up, yoga practices, authentic movement and Grotowski’s river work to ensure my actor self was ready to listen to the authentic impulses that arose in the moment. This work gave birth to the shapes, gestures, and finally language. I also invoked Lecoq’s “Lines of force which define a character” (Lecoq, Lariasse, Carasso, 61) which asks actors to decide upon three words which essentially describe the character, which are then developed and contrasted as the characterisation grows. I also built the concept of elements into my exploration. Lecoq states “with research into the dynamics of nature, natural elements... different levels of acting are developed.” (Lecoq, Lariasse, Carasso, 14). I

experimented with the idea of water (a moving, resisting force originating in the pelvis), fire (born from within, it flows from breathing and from the diaphragm), air (found through flight, the whole body is drawn in) and earth (compress, smooth, stretch; sensation begins from the hands before spreading to the whole body). Descriptions and findings are outlined below and in appendices A-D. Please note these descriptions are in first draft form and will be further developed in the rehearsal room with director Jackie Maxwell and the ensemble and documentation and journal entries of development will be documented.

7a Sweetheart

Lines of Force: Focused, Closed, Light (appendix A)

Sweetheart is a sixteen-year-old girl who has come along to see a production with her Aunt. In the script she is described as “a girl with a mild mental disability” and all of her lines are said “very loudly, but not shouted” (Eno, 41). Her attention to detail and lack of social interaction skills indicated to that she is potentially on the autistic spectrum. Souchay, Celine, et al, characterises autism as “lack of apparent affection (p. 2), withdrawal from people (p. 2), lack of attention to people (p. 32), non-communicative use of language (p. 27), lack of communicative gestures (p. 8), treating parts of people as detached objects (p. 27), lack of eye contact (p. 26), treating people as inanimate objects (p. 15), lack of behaviour appropriate to cultural norms (p. 30), attention to the non-social aspects of people (p. 31), lack of awareness of the feelings of [and] to others (p. 95), and lack of *savoir-faire* (p. 94). (Page numbers refer to the edition of collected papers, Kanner, 1973.)” and that “social abnormalities such as non-reciprocal speech are evident even in autistic adolescents” (382). When exploring Sweetheart in the studio, I found that she occupied a small space, opting to keep her hands clasped in front of her torso and her feet close together on the floor with her weight evenly distributed. Her detail-oriented focus was evident, as she is able to receive and

recall lines from the play. By applying traits of ASD, such as lack of attention to people, I was able to play with the idea that her intuition, engagement and ability to recall events came from a much deeper place and knowing of the events that were happening in front of her. This almost gave her another-worldly presence. I found the interesting push pull of her observations to the other world juxtaposed with the events that were happening in her own head. This combination of eager focus and closed hiding states meant that her axis was pulled in two directions. Her back body was hunched, and her shoulders were rounded; however, she led with her forehead. When walking her weight was evenly distributed on small steps. Water was the element that resonated with Sweetheart, as the constant resistance of her intention and focus was strong. Because of the nature of this character, I will continue to work in a mindful and vulnerable way in rehearsal to develop her own idiosyncratic non-verbal language in her interactions with the other characters on stage.

7b Greg

Lines of Force: Proud, Chiseled, Heavy (appendix B)

Greg is an astronaut who is the pride of the Middletown Community, as the one who was able to escape from the small-town mentality and make something of himself. I found the duality of this character's physical muscularity interesting when contrasted against the weightlessness of the scene. When I started to explore Greg in the studio, I hypothesised that his element would be air, but later realised that the more compelling choice would be to explore earth, thus grounding him. This exploration led to intense sensation and grounding in the pelvis and core, whilst allowing his arms and legs to appear more weightless. His proud line of force meant that he held his chest high and his lower lumbar spine was tucked under. My legs were slightly bowed and bent at the knees with feet turned out, allowing me to drop my centre of gravity lower. All of his gestures were very direct and strong, often

punching through the air. When walking, I tended to favour the outer edge of my feet and walked with a roll through from heel to toe, allowing me to maintain a low centre of gravity in my pelvis.

7c Attendant One (Susanne)

Lines of Force: Efficient, Quick tempered, Swift (appendix C)

I began investigating the creation of my third character, Attendant One, by observing the movement of a lit flame, because the head of a flame can flicker with erratic movement. I moved around the studio with force, using pause to punctuate and contrast the movement. When discussing the laws of motion in *The Moving Body*, Lecoq ruminates that “There is no action without reaction, motion is continuous, it never stops... there is no motion without fixed point, motion highlights the fixed point, the fixed point, too, is in motion” (Lecoq, Lariasse, Carasso , 89). Attendant One’s gestural language was angular and used Laban’s effort action terms flick and dab frequently. She was a character that drove from her hips and her axis was pulled in a forward momentum.

7d Landscaper (Elaine)

Lines of Force: Crystal, Earthy, Calm (appendix D)

By way of contrast, the Landscaper was the embodiment of air. Through explorations I discovered that this character was strongly connected to the world around her, and frequently practiced T’ai Chi. Her axis was vertical and one of complete calm and stillness; able to stand firmly on the earth without the need to be pushed or pulled in either direction. The Landscaper held her arms at the side with her soft parts of her arms open to the world. This shows openness and vulnerability. As I was experimenting with the role, I also found that the character enjoyed occupying low levels closer to the ground. Her inner tempo was

calm and even, and her energy flowed from her heart centre. During the scene where the Landscaper interacts with the police officer, I imagine that tension will emerge as their energies interact.

Moving Forward into Rehearsals

“It must have a clear beginning and an end, for any moment which fails to end has no true beginning. The sense of an ending is essential.”

Moving Body – Jacques Lecoq

On creating performance, Lecoq said; “It’s a game: believing, making believe, doubting, daring. All these observations are part of playing and performing for the pleasure of the public and for that of the actor as well” (Theatre of Movement and Gesture 16). It is my aim that I am able to allow myself to explore and develop my physical range, and to dare and to fail whilst still honouring my authentic instincts and vulnerability. While each of the characters I will portray are different, they all hold their own connection to the poetic and philosophical themes of the play. As I move forward into the rehearsal process, I know that my work will be challenged and molded. I intend to continue my practice of self-care that I developed through the summer and integrate this with a rigorous physical practice.

Conclusion

Selecting “vulnerability” as the direction for my artistic challenge provided an excellent opportunity for personal growth and development. It was equal parts daunting and electrifying. This introspective journey culminated in my solo show, where insecurities of body image, performance anxiety, perfectionism and a need for validation were portrayed through the physical practices I explored throughout the summer. This “look in the mirror” gave me a vision of who I am as person and an artist, allowing me to explore the work with more authenticity and depth. This was also reflected in my personal life, where I was able to be still, and to be honest with my emotions and those around me. The success of my solo show allowed me to trust in my process and the research I had completed. The risks taken, and solid foundation that I created, propelled me into rehearsals for *Middletown* with excitement.

An overly positive tourist, a chiselled jawed astronaut, a focused and engaged young theatre goer, an earthy empathetic tree lover and an efficiently compassionate hospital attendant were my five characters that I had to create in the play. These five dynamically and energetically diverse characters illuminated a slightly different challenge of vulnerability and tested my range. Vulnerability morphed into authenticity and a compelling need to listen, and to see and be seen. A lot of my instincts for character physicality that originated in the studio prior to rehearsals were validated and appreciated by director, Jackie Maxwell; however, each character developed and grew as they appeared in the rehearsal room and interacted with characters around them. Incorporating Lecoq’s principals with work on character arcs, given circumstances and objectives prior to rehearsal and in the studio, meant that upon entering the rehearsal space I was able to live in the characters. Having completed robust character creation work in the studio before entering the rehearsal room, I was able to take

risks and play with my scene partners which added depth to my characters and their relationships. I believe that this physical preparation was a key to my success.

The astronaut, Greg, was physically the most different from myself. The true challenge came in the juxtaposition of the language I was speaking and the quality of the line delivery. As Eno states in the stage direction;

“Both Greg and Ground Control are mainly pre-occupied with computer figures and flight adjustments and are not really interested in poetry or philosophy, though these things seem to arise, driven by the circumstance of being in space and seeing Earth.”
(Eno)

The research into the Overview Effect helped greatly in this scene. Astronauts who went into space had such a profound experience of seeing the earth for just as it was, without distance and space separating us. However; in the portrayal of the character Greg, this wonder and awe was something that I had to contain. I had to keep him conversational and therefore relied on the connection with my scene partner to achieve this. Not being able to see Ground Control meant that I really had to listen to the subtleties in his voice and react accordingly. Also, the contrast of constantly weightless moving arms, and animated naturalistic facial expression whilst on top of a moving ladder provided a challenging, yet visually dynamic picture for the audience. Although I found acting at heights enjoyable, it was the isolation of my arms and vocal quality which I found difficult. At times I found that my vocal energy and pace would move at the speed of my arms, or vice versa, when each had to be independent of each other. The Director noted that if the eerie music in the scene, my movements and my voice were all the same pace; the scene dragged. To oppose this, I had to ensure that my vocal quality and facial expression were as if I were speaking to a friend at a baseball game, and the atmospheric elements of the scene would be taken care of by the movements and music. This was the only scene in the play where play against was employed. To ensure that I

was achieving the right look for performance, I would often speak to my classmates and slowly move my arms to imitate the idea of being in space.

Although my initial research into autism provided an appropriate starting point for the character of Sweetheart, discoveries in the rehearsal room moved me in a different direction. Many children with autism display their own idiosyncratic symptoms differently, however, they often don't engage with the person speaking or the world around them, rather they are more likely to gaze off and are more interested in the story that is going on in their head. Sweetheart, on the other hand, was intensely focused on what was going on in the play and spoke with volume and energy. I found myself moving away from labels and focusing more on sensations and movement. I also felt uneasy portraying a character with a mental disability "label" and opted to focus more on actionable physical sensations and movements to embody this role. Employing the skills that I have learnt with The Batdorf Technique over the summer allowed me to achieve this. I found that a lot of Sweetheart's energy and impetus to speak resided in her feet. I was able to hold my feet in constant contact which created friction and heat. For the energy to flow from her feet up through her body allowed for the delay in her thoughts and ensured that she was constantly listening.

Lecoq's principles of tempo and rhythm was apparent in the scene between the Cop and Landscaper. The opposing tempos of the two characters made for an interesting push/pull in the scene. At the beginning of the rehearsals we struggled to find flow within this scene. This changed when I was able to hold strong to my own character's tempo, objectives and actions and sink into my physicality. I was able to achieve my physical connection through a release in my pelvic floor, a deep awareness of sinking into the ground and low levels throughout this scene. When I tapped into this earthy energy and held strong to my characters inner rhythm, the dynamics in the scene were subtle and appropriate. Choosing to use my

natural New Zealand accent for this scene also allowed me to feel more embodied and authentic in the character.

The rhythm and energy of the Female Attendant also contrasted the characters around her. I often chose to enter the space with a quicker pace than what was happening around me to show the efficiency and drive of the character. I was able to sit into the character's shape, ensuring that I was focusing all of my attention and actions on my scene partner. This, coupled with an acute awareness of my angles in stance and relationship to others, allowed me to drastically change the rhythm of the scene when I entered. Because I was given praise for my character in the beginning of the rehearsal process, I was wary that she was going to become stagnant. At times, an old familiar process of trying to push or muscle to manufacture moments would arise. This habitual road block has hindered my connection with others on stage in the past and has made my work seem presentational rather than real. When I noticed that I was working in this a way, I would take a moment to reconnect with my breath and the shape of the character and focus my attention back onto my scene partner; listening, seeing and being seen. Allowing myself to continue in a mode of play ensured that I was discovering new moments with this character through till the final performance.

My final character, the Female Tourist, was given to me three weeks before the show opened, and therefore, I was unable to do the in-depth character research and studio work that I had done for the others. In its place, I was given the opportunity to truncate my process and work on the floor and in rehearsals. This process was informed much more by the director's input and the work of my scene partner. Operating in this way raised doubt and fear in my mind. I was left open and vulnerable as I did not have the time and was not solely in control of the blueprint for my character. Nevertheless, working in this way provided so much joy. I was able to solidify my process and prove that my methodology was robust.

The creation and performance of these five characters clearly showed my facility with physical, vocal and energetic range, but my work on *Middletown* prompted thoughts and questions about the next step in my learning. As a naturally energetic person and actor in a very naturalistic play, I was aware of my “hot” energy. I often felt that my energy did not match the work of others around me. This was not necessarily a detriment to the play or the story that we were telling, as I only received positive reassurance and feedback from the Director and cast. Nevertheless, it did prompt me to think about the relationship between energy and authenticity, and how that manifests itself in my body and is perceived in my own mind. Can an actor have a pulsating and hot energy on stage, make bold choices, take risks and still be authentic and grounded in their work? Or does one have to dilute their energy to achieve authenticity and be believable? Although I believe I was able to successfully juggle these aspects throughout the process with my uses of physical hooks, focus and play, I look forward to continuing this exploration in the future.

Middletown provided a fascinating exercise in concentration and connection. Throughout this process I have learnt the value of preparation and time. I have learnt to embrace my own instincts and trust my creative voice. I have solidified physical practices which I will continue to use to create dynamically authentic and compelling characters. I have cultivated a relationship with myself and now value my vulnerability as a strength in my artistic tool box. All of these aspects of my artistic challenge and thesis journey have provided me the space and time to take risks and play, thus allowing me to grow as a performer. I am proud of the work that I have completed and look forward playing, creating and performing with focused, harnessed and grounded energy in future roles.

Journal Entries

Saturday 8th December 2018 – Self Care vs. Obligation

At the end of the first week of rehearsals I was sick. So sick. After a bout of strep throat, I was knocked out with the flu. I was able to be present in body in the first part of the rehearsals and tried my best to be an active member in the rehearsal room, contributing to discussions where I could. On Saturday morning before the final day, I fainted in the shower and had a really bad fever. My inner dialogue was telling me that it was my responsibility to be in at rehearsal and if I was not in the room I would be letting everyone down. The notion of the “tough girl” came back into my mind – the idea that I had to be strong enough to get through this and work. Consequently, I felt a lot of guilt and I was mentally beating myself up that I was not able to get to the final day of rehearsal. The overwhelming negative thoughts that Jackie would be disappointed with me if I was not in the room and the false manifestation of pressure that I put on myself was palpably heavy. In that moment I was able to remember back to the work that I did in the summer and used some of the techniques of Neff to calm some of my guilt. By recognising that being in the theatre, not only would I not be doing myself any favours, I was also putting the ensemble in jeopardy. Allowing my body the necessary time to recover meant that I also wasn't doing more damage in the long run. Luckily, I have incredible group of people around my who took notes for me, video recorded the conversation so that I was able to listen to it at a later date and sent me well wishes. I was able to catch up on all that I missed in that one rehearsal and prepare myself for after the Christmas break.

Thursday 3rd January 2019 – Energy & Rhythm

First day of full rehearsals, and first time for me not being sick. I finally felt that I was up to my full energy and ready to listen and respond to my cast members... and it was so much

fun. I really do get such joy from creating and working with others. One thing that I have noticed is that I have a lot of energy (this is not a new thing that I am noticing) and when I am acting in the moment and on stage I am worrying that I am pushing. This feeling of pushing or “overacting” is something that has been in my head from critiques that I have received from professors, that due to my Musical theatre training I often push for things, rather than just allowing them to be. I felt that when I entered the scene my rhythm and energy lifted those around me, but I found that I was above them. This feeling made me feel self-conscious of my work.

Saturday 5th January 2019 – New Character

So, if four wildly different characters were not enough to play with, I have been given another! From today, I will be also playing the Female tourist. I will be working in the scene with Lucas and Carmen. I am really excited to work in this scene with the two of them, because it is hilariously funny and the bouncing relationship between the two tourists will be super fun to explore. This will also give me an opportunity to explore a truncated version of my character creation process that I took my other characters through in the studio. To see if I can run with a new character quickly will be a challenge (not to mention more lines to learn!).

Tuesday 8th January 2019 – Sweetheart & Hot energy

Another day thinking about energy and how I present myself on stage. Today was the first time that we worked on the intermission scene and I really got to inhabit the body of *Sweetheart* – my most challenging character. When working with her in the rehearsal room I had created a solid base for her, but I was not sure how she was going to interact and move with others. The loudness of her speech coupled with her physicality was challenging and I

was having trouble finding the motivation for her to speak. She is an extremely focused and attentive character who picks up everything that is going on around her, but I am not sure how to show that or where that energy comes from. Also – because the scene is blocked with all the characters sitting the forward momentum that I found in the studio space was difficult. In a conversation with Jackie about the final scene when Sweetheart comes up on to the stage and wants to see the baby, I was unable to unlock some keys to her objective and impetus to move. When running the intermission scene today, I found that she really wanted to be in the conversation, she wanted to be a part of the world of the play and she enjoyed where she was. I also found that the character’s feet and hands played a big part in both showing her excitement and hiding her thoughts. In the following rehearsals I am going to play with the sensations in my feet and see if I can convey the transfer of energy from the feet up through the body, which will then motivate the speaking. Another interesting thing about her was that she always thinks before she speaks, so I am hoping that the journey of the energy from the feet to the mouth will give time for her to think and then respond. I am very nervous about this character. Especially playing a child with a “mild mental disability”. I do not want to offend anyone or get something wrong.

Another comment was made in a rehearsal discussion today from a classmate who said that I have “hot energy”. Again, with the energy. I think that this is one of my greatest traits as a person and an actor, but I wonder if I am using it in a way that is focused and effective or each of the characters that I am trying to portray? There is a lot of thinking to be done about this as I move up to opening night.

Saturday 12th January 2019 – Praise/Validation

One of my main foci for my artistic challenge was to trust my instincts and my own inner voice, rather than seeking validation from those around me. Now, I did not seek this validation, but it did come. After the rehearsal on Saturday I received an email from the assistant director saying that my energy and focus in the room was noted, appreciated and valued in all of the scene work that I had been doing and in the preparation that I done. My first reaction – I am sure that this email had been sent to everyone as a little boost in morale. And then I had to stop myself and reframe my mind. Yes, even if this email had been sent to everyone in the room, is that any reason why it was less valid for me? Did I not deserve this praise? I had been working hard on all of my characters and continued to be focused throughout. So many thoughts scrambled through my mind. And I stopped for a second and thought about my own opinion. I was proud of the work that I was putting up in the room. I was holding myself accountable, I was listening, and I was showing up and being present and positive... and I was loving it! I realised that the validation from outside was good, but it wasn't necessary. I think that this was a major breakthrough, as I was not waiting for someone to tell me I was doing a "good job", but I was doing the work.

Saturday 19th January 2019 - Thrust in Tech Rehearsals

"Remember Amanda, you are an actor." The key phrase running through my head through tech weekend. The pace that we were working this day and my want to get-things-done, were not lining up. I was in a different rhythm to everyone else and I found that I was working in an override of Thrust. Decisions that we had made about set changes and transition in past rehearsals were not remembered by others and simple solutions to problems seemed evident to me. I found myself getting really frustrated by those around me and had to keep reminding myself to let it go. My role in this production is "Actor" – not designer, not director, not stage

manager. I had to focus myself to my job and execute it the best that I could. The only person that I could look after and have governance on was myself, and therefore, I did everything in my power to ensure that all of my direction in the transitions was specific and motivated and that I never missed a cue. Being able to take control of my own actions gave me some peace.

Wednesday 23rd January 2019 - Dress Rehearsal and Kinaesthetic Transfer (KT)

The final dress rehearsal was an interesting one, especially for my character of the attendant. There was a part in act two where the Mechanic does a dance after John Dodge has died. This was the first time that Kelly had done the dance full out and I watched her performance on stage. I am a naturally empathetic mover and I experienced what the Batdorf Technique called kinaesthetic transfer, where energy moves from one performer to the next kinaesthetically. Because I was not expecting this to happen, I was not in the body of my character and when it came time to enter on stage to disrupt the scene, my head was all over the place. I did discover some new things in the scene but the whole thing felt cloudy. It was a strange feeling.

Thursday 24th January 2019 - Opening Energy

I spent the day before opening feeling super relaxed. The whole process of working had left me feeling secure in all of my roles. A lot of the notes that I would get in runs were good – “I like that character, a lot”, “great connection and scene”, “Good work” ... and apart from the general make sure you listen and really communicate with each other, I was on the right track. I was excited to get the piece in front of an audience. Throughout my warm up on opening I was fine. I checked in with all of the character bodies that I have created to make sure that their walks, hooks and stances were solid and that I was able to change the energy between them. I vocally warmed up and stretched. I felt ready. And then as soon as I stepped

out on the stage and saw the audience I was overcome with nerves. Throughout my first scene as the *Female tourist*, my energy was running high and I was struggling to keep it contained. It felt frantic and often times the audience's response (and sometimes lack of response) to lines took me out of myself. I was ultra-aware of the audience and everyone around me. At times this took me out of my scenes. I was aware of the laughs that other people were getting and (at times) I was mentally preparing and comparing myself and my performance to them. This frantic energy meant that I had to ground and focus myself. In these moments on stage I really invested in my scene partner, I tried to live in the sensations of my characters' bodies that I had mapped out and really try to communicate and listen. When I was at the side of the stage waiting to go on, I tried to quiet the chatter in my brain by reminding myself that this is my work, and that I had a job to do. At times in the performance my body was visibly shaking – in the astronaut scene the top of my right thigh was vibrating like crazy and I was unable to make it stop. Again, I tried to use the images to lock me and hold me in the scene. (I am really not sure how to switch off these nerves... but maybe one of the most important things is to live with them, not try and shut them down, but also not let them hinder my work either.)

After the show, everyone was hugging, congratulating each other and feeling proud of themselves and I was feeling steady. I wasn't super excited, and I wasn't down... I just was just there. But why – had I used all of my energy on stage and doing my work? Did I not do what I was supposed to and felt underwhelmed? Was there anything wrong with feeling the way I was feeling? Was I not proud of myself? Did I have to be elated? Did I expect to feel different? So many questions swirled around, and I am not too sure if I have the answers yet... but I am happy to sit in the questions.

The audience was really receptive and gave a lot of feedback.

Friday 24th January 2019 - During the Run

Everything seemed to settle a bit for the second show, although working in the round was a really interesting experience. Being able to always see the audience's faces and reactions meant that I had to be really strong about my character's journey and arc. If I lost focus for even a moment, I would have to work so much harder to get back in. I relied a lot on my scene partners for today's two show day. Giving and listening to them ensured that I was focused and in the scene. I am loving the things that I am finding with Greg and The Attendant. A two-show day was super tiring, but really rewarding.

Sunday 27th January 2019 - Post-Closing

And it is done! Five incredible different characters now live inside me. What a wild feeling. Throughout the show as I was getting changed from each character I said a little goodbye in the mirror... it was bitter sweet. My feelings post show are mixed. I think that I was able to really differentiate the rhythm/tempo, shape, body, voice and essence of each of the characters. The feedback that I received throughout the process and throughout the run was only positive. I wonder what it would have been like to inhabit one character fully and experience a character arc. I wonder what it would have been like to be a "main" character. I am still not too sure why I place value on that track. I think that I have also solidified some very strong practices for myself to be a successful and authentic actor.

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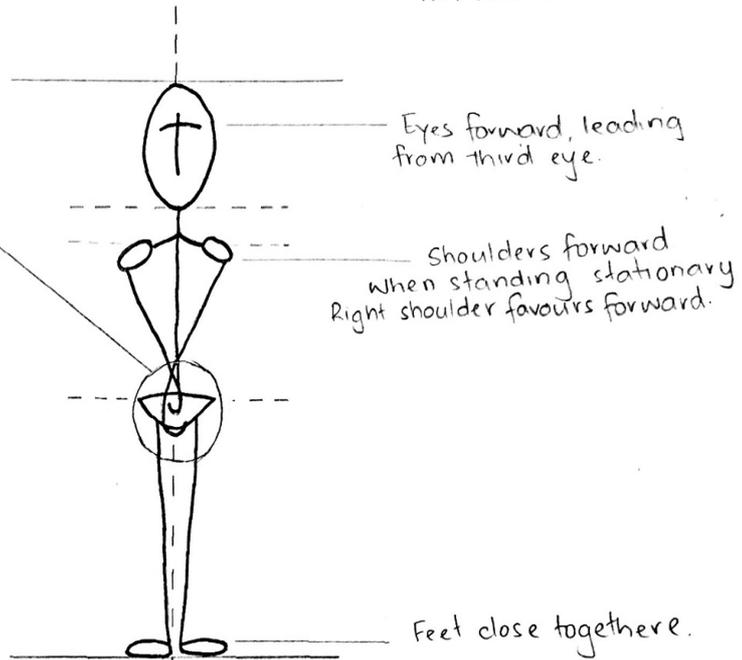
Appendix A: Sweetheart

APPENDIX ONE

Gesture / Hook

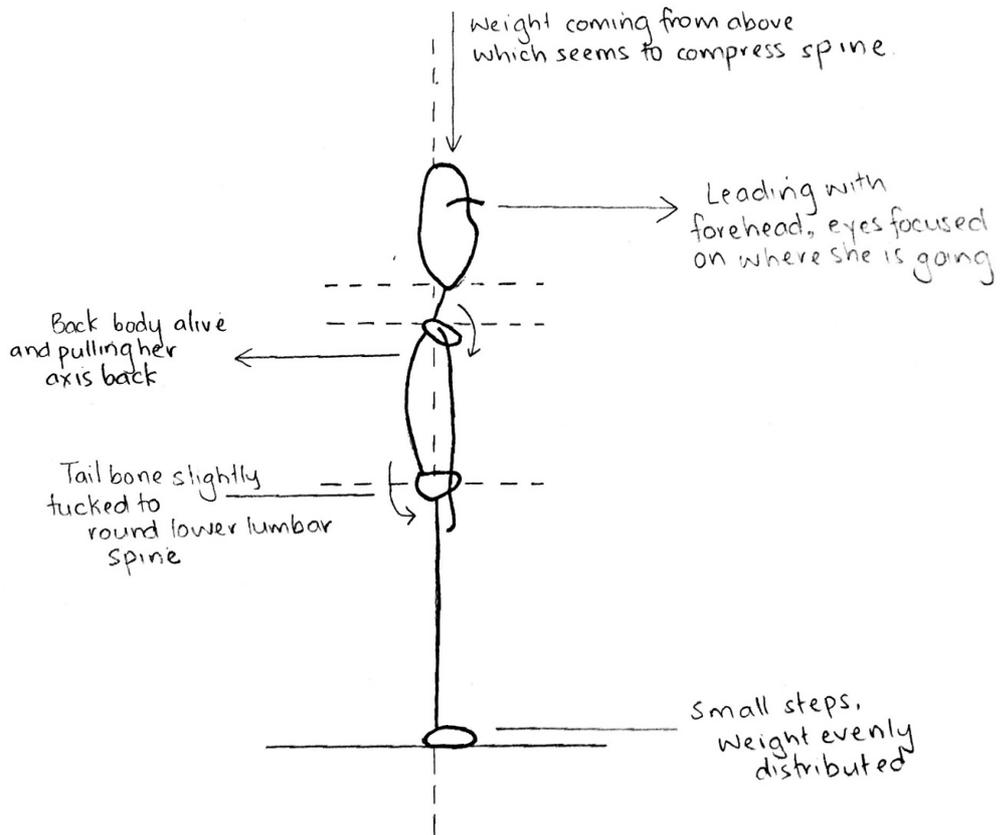
Hands clasped in front of body

Also when she is nervous she plays with a piece of her hair



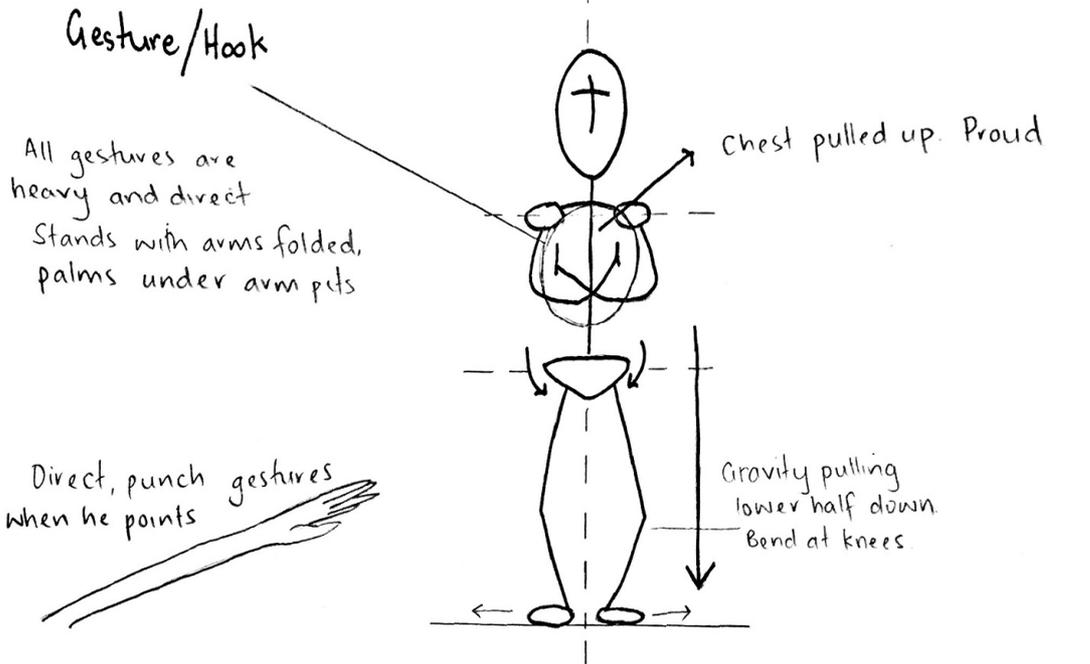
SWEETHEART

FOCUSED, CLOSED, LIGHT



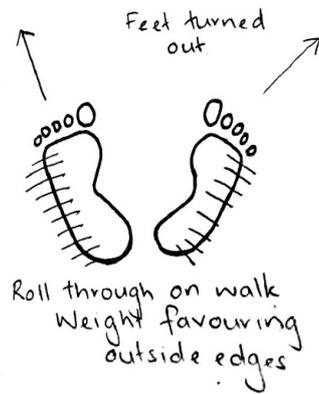
Appendix B: Greg

APPENDIX TWO

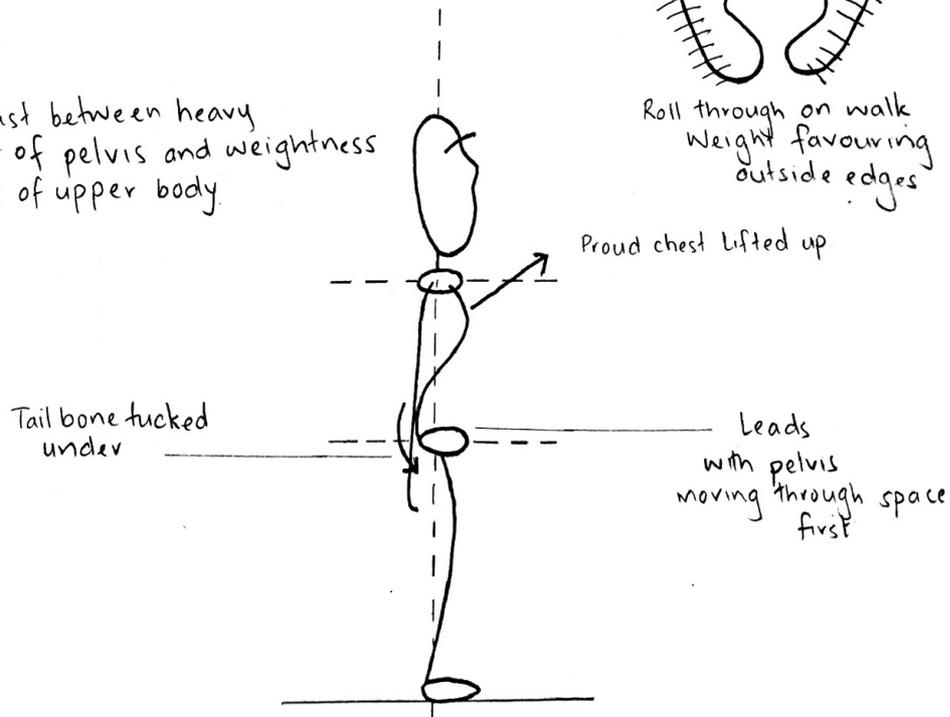


GREG

PROUD, CHISELED, HEAVY



Contrast between heavy weight of pelvis and weightlessness case of upper body



Appendix C: Attendant One

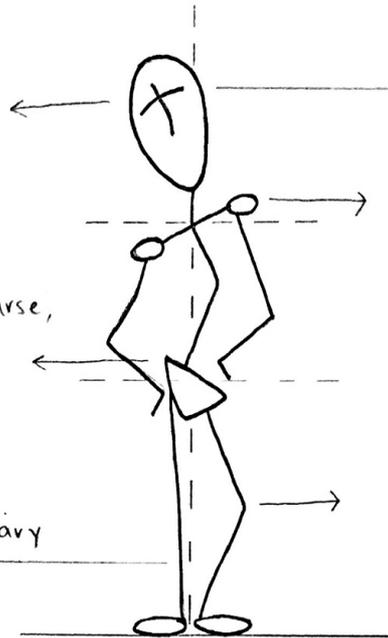
APPENDIX THREE

Gesture/Hook.

ANGLES

Arms and hands always at 90°. Holding something (clip board, purse, pen) constantly moving

When stationary weight is held on one hip.



Head moves first and then body follows.

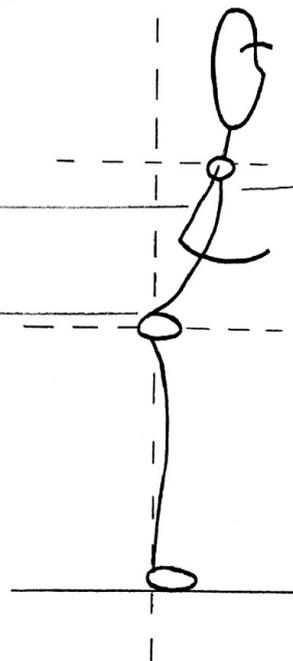
ATTENDANT ONE

EFFICIENT, QUICK TEMPERED, SWIFT.

Quick pace and Tempo

Arms swing at 90° angle.

Constant movement of hips in a figure of eight when walking loose hips.



Pulled forward

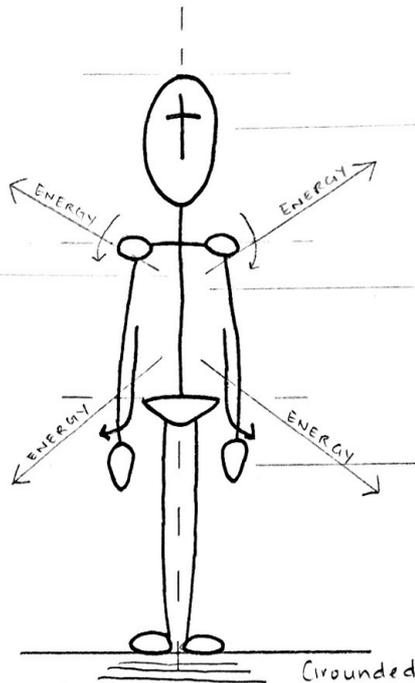
Appendix D: Landscaper

APPENDIX FOUR

Gesture / Hook

Open palms and
Fore arm.

Shoulders
slightly
rounded and alive to
open back body.



Head balanced on
top of spine. Ease
and calm movement

Energy radiating
from center of
body

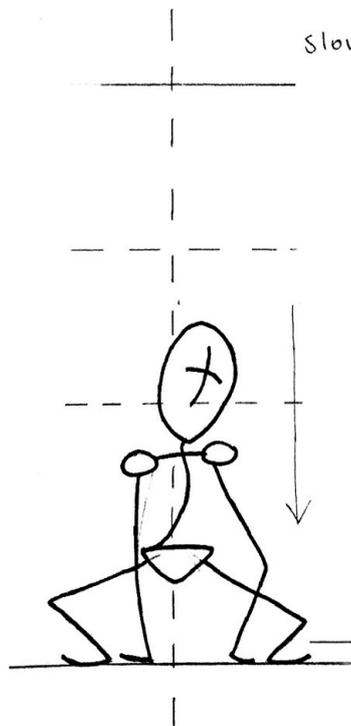
Palms and
forearms open
and facing out

LANDSCAPER

CRYSTAL, EARTHY, CALM

Enjoys occupying low
levels and being closer to
the ground. Thinks with
hands on the ground.
Holds a crystal always.
Practices Tai chi

slow & Even tempo
punctuated by moments
of pause and
breath.



low centre of gravity

Feet and
hands on
the earth

Appendix E: Scenes from Actor's Prompt Script

OBJECTIVE: Retrieve Data From Space Station
OBSTACLE: The beauty and majesty of planet earth

RISK

NORTH AMERICAN ACCENT w LOW VOCAL QUALITY

[FIGHT AGAINST THE FLOW NEW THOUGHTS]

NO SUDDEN MOVEMENTS ON LADDER. LEGS + THIGHS LOCKED ARMS CONSTANTLY MOVING

First time in space seeing the earth from this vantage point

32 MIDDLETOWN

Enter from [2] on lighting change

Scene Seven

Up ladder - tap Can to Move.

(GREG is in a space capsule, floating. The following lines are amplified, with some static and perhaps some delay, as though a radio transmission. Both GREG and GROUND CONTROL are mainly pre-occupied with computer figures and flight adjustments and are not really interested in poetry or philosophy, though these things seem to arise, driven by the circumstance of being in space and seeing Earth. GROUND CONTROL may be seated on stage, perhaps facing away from the audience.)

the delivery more matter of fact

[? WHAT DID GREG EXPECT TO SEE]

GROUND CONTROL. Cormorant Nine. (pause) Cormorant Nine. This is Ground Control, Houston. Do you read? Do you copy?

Seems so close not far away

GREG. This is C-9. Copy. Sounds like you're in my living room. Over.

GROUND CONTROL. The things we can do. Go ahead, C-9. How's life?

TO INFORM

GREG. What a view, is one thing. I've heard about it. But, what a wonderful... I never knew how round round was, Houston. God. All this space, it's just pure majesty, it's endless, majestic. But it's cold, it's almost just raw data, raw mathematics. Then you see little planet Earth and - my God, she's just so welcoming and good. Seems like a symphony should be playing. It, wow, it's just this beautiful fragile thing, something a happy child would draw. It's so blue. Houston.

looking tiny

Keep mouth moving short syllables move out

WORK

? makes him philosophical, takes his breath away.

AWE WONDER

[CONVERSATIONAL]

Move hand to ear piece. Head up on angle to listen

GROUND CONTROL. (Indistinct sentence. Something like, "Five - . Gull sensor. Ooh min. I've.")

GREG. Repeat, please. - Can't hear him.

GROUND CONTROL. Fifty-one degrees. Angle sensor arm, two minutes forty-five.

move arm in front of body

GREG. Copy. Arm is in position. (A short indistinct sentence.)

GROUND CONTROL. What's that? Didn't catch that.

GREG. (pause) Sorry?

GROUND CONTROL. Go ahead, Greg.

WOW GOD WONDERFUL MAJESTIC WELCOMING GOOD BEAUTIFUL FRAGILE

[IN DIRECT ACTION]

'Raw Data Raw Mathematics'

Physics - Familiar mode.

FOCUS ON THE SOUND OF LUCAS' VOICE

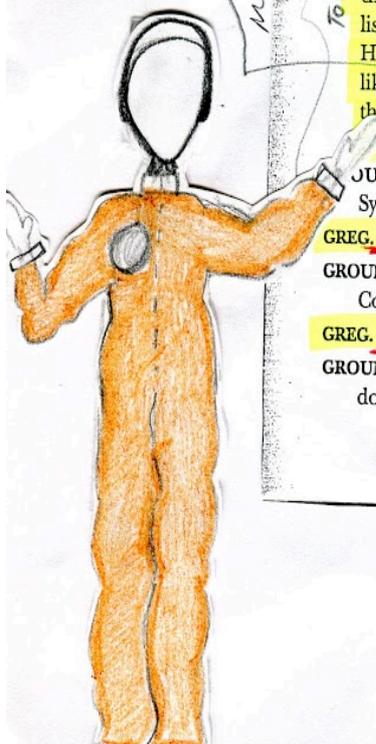
ALL NEW THOUGHTS!
Pick them out.

Looking @ earth → thinking
about middletown → library,
Librarian → Mechanic
People

Home
Middle town
Mechanic

Joke
between
GC + G.

Realising
what he
sounds like



more mystical
to wonder

PLAY AGAINST

MIDDLETOWN

ROCK
TO JUSTIFY

GREG. Oh, I'm just trying to picture life, back home. There's a guy there I remember, thought he found a meteorite, once. It was normal sedimentary rock, just made from dead animals and plants crushed together. He was disappointed. Shouldn't have been. I was never crazy about him, I think he bashed my mailbox in, but he shouldn't have been sad. That rock, that guy who found it, the field he found it in, all these things are miraculous because all these things are earthly. The words he used to refer to it, the breath it took to make the words, all of it. Just, sacredly and profoundly and mysteriously - well, yeah - earthly.

GROUND CONTROL. Are you getting mystical on us, Greg?
GREG. I'm just looking and talking, Houston. I didn't prepare anything.

GROUND CONTROL. Just giving you a hard time, partner.

GREG. Okay.

GROUND CONTROL. Looking good. Go ahead.

GREG. I'm done. But I just have to say, it doesn't look lonely from up here. Everything looks right-next-door. It's where you're sitting, right now. How 'bout that. You're breathing the Earth's atmosphere. You got mountains and clouds, oceans. People out doing things together. Soccer games and birthday parties, listening to beautiful music. Inexpressible, you know. How'd we get so lucky? (brief pause) I probably sound like a real cliché. Me, with my chiseled features and the flight suit, waxing all poetic. Waxing all fragile and religious.

GROUND CONTROL. All right, Greg. (brief pause) Synchronize, one seven six.

GREG. Synchronize.

GROUND CONTROL. Copy. (Pause. An eerie sound.) Say again, Cormorant Niner?

GREG. I didn't say anything. Go ahead, Houston.

GROUND CONTROL. Roger. No matter. Looking good. We do recommend P65 alignment, plus point two two.

Images are coming
and he is just
speaking

Remember
Mechanic in
detail
33
Pace
change

FACT!

Overview effect

Astronauts going
into space as
scientists and
coming back as
humanitarians.
Seeing

Take more time

FACTS MIXED IN
WITH AWE
+ SPLENDOR

BOTH OF US HEAR THE SOUND

What is this?

RISK

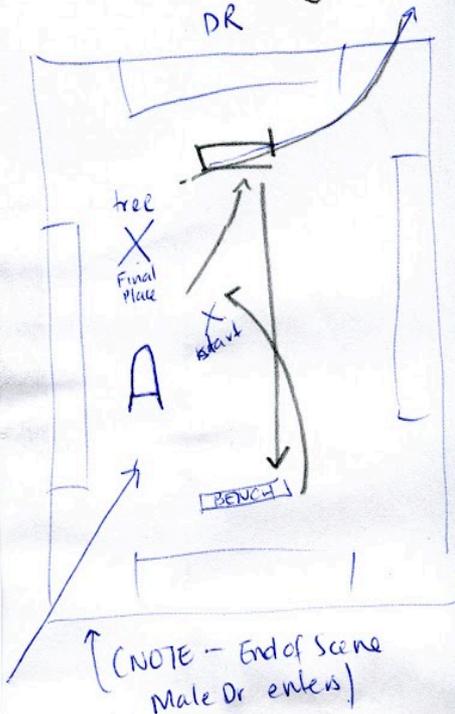
Sharp turned
head and torso
on ladder to
find where sound
was coming from
- hold legs tight
- ladder from moving

(Trying to give something to people who have nothing.)

- Kids who have cancer
- Grieving Family

OBJECTIVE: PLANT TREE

OBSTACLE: Cop talking / interruption wheel barrow



heavy question. Cops mum passed away. Checking if sister is okay. Don't make too heavy

First mention of family

To include To join

MIDDLETOWN 49

Scene Two

Enter humming Around Control Major
(Entrance and lawn of Middletown Hospital. Bright day. A sign that says "Emergency" is staked into the grass. LANDSCAPER is on his knees on the grass, preparing to plant a tree, a young sapling. COP enters and quietly approaches LANDSCAPER from behind. COP holds his hand out in the shape of gun, aimed at the back of LANDSCAPER's head.)

GOP. Bang! **FRICTIONED** ^{hit the ground} | recognis who it is

LANDSCAPER. (Startled. Recovers.) Jesus. Hey.

GOP. I could have killed you, just then.

LANDSCAPER. And that's somehow my fault? **TO SASS, TO DEFY**

GOP. Planting a tree?

LANDSCAPER. Great work - you solved the case of what I'm doing. **TO MOCK**

GOP. Don't be smart.

LANDSCAPER. Done. **TO JOKE, TO SURRENDER**

GOP. How's my sister? **Prochek**

LANDSCAPER. She's good. She wants you to come over for dinner, next week. (We finished the new patio and we're having a cookout. (some business with the tree))

GOP. Sounds good. (very brief pause) What type is it? Elm?

LANDSCAPER. White Ash, I think. Although it could be a Green Ash. They're surprisingly hard to tell apart.

GOP. Fair enough. (brief pause) Pretty day.

LANDSCAPER. (looking for a place to plant the tree) Where do you think this should go? **To include**

GOP. I don't know - somewhere. (Brief pause. Shaking his head, contemplatively, somewhat disdainfully.) People.

LANDSCAPER. I know. (brief pause) Actually, I don't know. What, specifically, about people? **ASK QUESTION, DO TO CONFES**

GOP. Just: people. The things they do. You think you know people. You don't. You think you caught some non-suicidal gleam in their eye. You didn't. You never know what people are going to do.

Ask Q, dont focus on Answer. Plant tree

Relationship LS + COP

I am married to Cops Sister. We are cordial to each other but aren't the best of friends.

He is very order orientated and rules focused and I am more free and intouch with chance / nature / elements.

This makes for an interesting dynamics.

TEMPO in this will be an interesting dynamic.

I need to breath - slowdown - show my empathy for the world around me.

TAKE TIME / SLOWDOWN

REASON FOR PLANTING TREE - Was meant to do it earlier in the week, but lost track of time. When John and Mary went in that morning it made me realise that I had to get in. For the people. To sooth them, something to comfort them. Something sturdy and permanent

lots of commas - extended thoughts. lots of connectives?

TO INFORM
[so they wheeled some guy past here, this morning. He ^(IMAGE LIFTING HEAD) lifted his head up, you know, "Wait, wait, one more look." That was a sight.] ^{That was a bad start to my day his was worse}

AND THEN [Then a pregnant lady went in, crying, trying to carry all her stuff. ^(IMAGE LOOK ON HER FACE) She looked so lonely, which, you know, when you think about it, she totally isn't. ^{she has a baby!} Reason for PLANT THAT TREE! IT SHOULD HAVE BEEN DONE AGES AGO.] I think

To Hasten - [It made me wish the thing was already done.]
To Comfort - it'll be soothing, you know, this tree, just nice for people. Bald kids going in on sunny school days. Shattered families leaving in the rain. Just a good old tree. [Year in, year out ...] ^{Permanent For all time. Not fleeting.}

COP ... Maybe someday some young lovers'll carve their initials into it.

Into this. Pretty incomprehensible: The Future

COP Response to guidelines + gives: Yeah, maybe ^{SMILE} [I buried some sunglasses around back ^{SCREAM DOWN} this morning. Just to give somebody something to find ^{cheerily} someday.] ^{Joke, something connected to the future - in the future.} Hey, what's that ^{Oh my, what have I just found} I always think ^{drats.}

Still - Alas. ^{To wonder} That's got to be a really old word: "Rock" ^{drats.} This always happens.

How often do tragedies happen in this town, or is today an unusually busy day?



TREE = SOOTHING + NICE



Objective: To get to do filing & get home

Prop: Clip Board.

Obstacle: Finding Greg in the middle of the Corridor

SCENE TWELVE

ATTENDANT: Craig?

Enter #4
move
centre
& see Kelly STOP

MECHANIC: (this line is spoken very quietly and indistinctly)

ANULES!

I was beautiful.

ATTENDANT: Did you just say you were beautiful?

Energy @ top completely contrasts Mechanic.

(Mechanic nods.)

To mock.

Well, then, I'm sure you were // Everything fits okay? (Brief pause. He nods) You're

going to be in paediatric, today. The kids love to see the Dance of Spring. Just move

around, ring the bells // I don't know if you did any of the of the reading I gave you? PAUSE

About ancient philosophies and the nature of time? Tick tock, tick tock, tick tock. I'm

guessing that's a 'no'. ~~Okay. Just be spiritual. Try to tell about the world and make~~

people feel okay. Don't use "to be" verbs. No is, was, or, will be. Too many tenses

gets confusing. They're just little kids. Keep it simple. You know, "I dance and

children grow strong and happy. Flowers are pretty". Something like that. Sound

They'll love it. Okay (brief pause) Did you just wake up? Are you okay?

MECHANIC: Yeah.

ATTENDANT: Are you going to be all right? (He nods) All right. You'll be great.

They're just little kids. Smile and go around in circle and they see the history of the

world. They're just like us, except smaller. Okay?

MECHANIC: Yeah.

ATTENDANT: Okay. I've got to do some filing. I want to get out of here before dark

so I can play tennis. Thanks, Craig.

(She exits.) → EXIT #3

(Mechanic moves down stage. Brief pause. As if a soliloquy.)

MECHANIC: Me.

(Lights down.)

Scene change to accommodate
outward appropriateness.
- MORRIS DANCING, BEL
- SPRING TIME - MAY POUE
- TIME OF YEAR

? Has she delt with him before.
Has she seen him in this state before?
Why does n't she care he is out of it.
How old is little.
Does she care

Not of this world. Other worldly. Free.

BUSINESS

To order

To dismiss

To mock

To instruct

Intermission

To worry

↓ look into his eyes. look him up and down



EFFICIENT, QUICK TEMPERED, SWIFT, PERFECT