

**THE PARADOX OF BEHEADING RISK:  
SPECIFICALLY CLEAR AND SUBLIMELY CHAOTIC**

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## **Abstract**

In this paper, I will investigate repetition and accuracy in the simplicity and complexity of the following thesis roles: Tour Guide, Aunt, Female Doctor, and Attendant #2 performed in *Middletown* by Will Eno. I will develop my own actor process which will facilitate a greater sense of clarity, embodiment, and authenticity. With an end goal of identifying an effective approach for both artistic and pedagogical application. The following specific methods that I have performed and studied will be applied: Authentic Movement, Syntonics®, Laban/Bartenieff Movement, and Coordination Patterns™. I will examine body, mind, and spirit through concepts of authenticity, clarity and embodiment (ACE).

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**Artist Challenge**

PANDION Tell me, did you sever any heads?

TEREUS Too many to count.

PANDION Using one swoop? Or does it generally take two or three?

TEREUS Depends on the man.

PANDION Thickness of his neck and all that.

TEREUS Of course.

PANDION How many blows do you think?

TEREUS Sir?

PANDION To chop off my head?

*PANDION bares his neck. TEREUS examines it.*

TEREUS I'd say at least five or six

(Erin Shields, *The Birds*, Act 1 Scene 3 in Celebrated Battle.)

Salty lips was my summer taste, swimming in the Manitou lake in western Saskatchewan on Treaty 6 where I grew up. The Cree named it Manitou, because of the magical healing powers the lake possessed. It has a combination of over twenty types of salt and very high in pH (alkalinity). No fish can survive except a lot of slime and the Manitou Monster; the myth us locals have always known. It is a bit morbid, but people have died in this lake. Some bodies never to be found, which feels impossible since it is salt water; everything rises to the top. My parents have stories that will send shivers down your spine. Coming from a family of storytellers, we exaggerate the edges of the story, but never tell lies. The supper table was our stage and my dad was always the opening act. At least fifteen people gathered around our supper table each evening, as my parents ran a ranch and grain farm which meant a revolving door of people from all over the

globe. Stories are what kept us alive as a family. They were also our heart connection, open to one another when life was not easy, or did not make much sense.

My mentor, Judith Koltai says, ‘move as you must’ in the physical practice of Authentic Movement. I have spent years learning this ‘must’ which turned into a place of hiding and seeking. Lack of know-how kept me hiding from telling stories while seeking how to tell them best. Now I have been found. I can no longer hide, I must embody the stories given to me, even though I shake like the Quakers did when the spirit was upon them. “Just thinking about it makes me shake...I feel terrified,...it’s exposing yourself...exhilarating but also terrifying...if I had a choice, I would stay sat down” (Dandelion 18). I have many tools to tell a story, however I float in full fear, just as I did when I used to swim to the middle of the lake wondering if the Manitou Monster would come for me. Fear is a paradox; it is absurd to be paralyzed by something that is make believe and created by one’s psyche. Keith Johnstone addresses fear, “In normal life the voice in the head is criticizing all the time. If you can bypass it you can be creative. Getting rid of fear? Start with fear” (Keith Johnstone- Improv Guru Beats #1, 00:01:07 - 00:01:20). I have allowed critical voices to cripple me, creating my own monster of fear. In this thesis I will behead the fear with accuracy and repetition. Retired soccer star Abby Wambach delivered the commencement speech to the Barnard College class of 2018, speaking about the challenges in her career and some of the deepest seeds that lie in a woman when she is on the cusp of success:

Like all little girls, I was taught to be grateful. I was taught to keep my head down, stay on the path, and get my job done. I was freaking Little Red Riding Hood. You know the fairy tale. It’s just one iteration of the warning stories girls are told the world over. Little Red Riding Hood heads off through the woods and is given strict instructions: Stay on the path. Don’t talk to anybody. Keep your head down hidden underneath your

Handmaid's Tale cape. And she does...at first. But then she dares to get a little curious and she ventures off the path. That's, of course, when she encounters the big bad wolf and all hell breaks loose. The message is clear: don't be curious, don't make trouble, don't say too much or bad things will happen. I stayed on the path out of fear—not of being eaten by a wolf—but of being cut, being benched, losing my paycheck. If I could go back and tell my younger self one thing it would be this: “Abby, you were never Little Red Riding Hood, you were always the wolf ([barnard.edu](http://barnard.edu)).

In every story we all have to overcome the “monster” that has been following and beating us down. In one of my favourite films, *It's All Gone Pete Tong* tells the story of Ibiza DJ, Frankie Wilde who goes deaf. His addiction to cocaine became heightened when he lost his sense of hearing. A mascot costume resembling a badger shows up coaxing, feeding outrageous amounts of cocaine to Frankie. He musters enough courage to fight the badger, killing him with a shotgun. When he takes off the mascot head; inside the costume is the face of Frankie. It is me, who has created this monster of fear and it is I who has to behead it.

I attended a talk at the Artists' Health Alliances called “Fear-Free Failure: How to Shape a Resilient Performer”, by Dr Beth McCharles. I took her out for coffee to speak about fear. She told me about her four work ethic archetypes identifying me as a warrior; hard working, passionate, and disciplined. She left me with a question, “maybe you are practicing wrong?” According to Geoff Blades, “...you must have a process to get it” (26). For my MFA Thesis, I will develop my own actor process through the integration of physical practices and devising techniques for a greater sense of clarity, embodiment and authenticity. This will enable the identification of an effective approach with both artistic and pedagogical application. Theodore Dimon investigates process in the musculo-skeletal system and how we need to understand and

approach ourselves as a whole: “Being clear about how to engage in this process is a necessary part of how we must manage our thinking and our emotional attachment to what we’re doing so that we work in a way that corresponds not to what we think is the problem, but to how we are actually designed” (158).

The following specific methods that I have performed and studied will be applied: Authentic Movement, Syntonics®, Laban Movement Analysis, Coordination Patterns™. I will examine body, mind, and spirit through concepts of authenticity, clarity and embodiment (ACE). Breath enables authenticity by connecting to the storyteller in a deeper sense of self. Clarity is the actor engaging the analytical and emotional mental activity in relation to the text. As a result of this process, the actor will bring the text to life and text will inhabit the actor. To have an embodied impulse, there must be a physical practice which enables an increased sensory awareness, alignment, physical freedom and expression of voice. Martha Graham states, “Your concern is to do the work, not to judge it. Your concern is to fall in love with the process, not to grade the outcome. Keep your eyes on your own paper” (qtd. in Clear). ACE will build the foundation of process for me as an actor to facilitate the development of a strong structure for accuracy and repetition, with the goal of taking ownership of my practice so that I can conquer fear.

### **Authenticity**

Marina Abramovich speaks about how visceral the breath can be, “To control the breathing is to control the mind. With different patterns of breathing, you can fall in love, you can hate someone, you can feel the whole spectrum of feelings just by changing your breathing” (qtd. in



Simonini). The script an actor is given to tell derives from a very personal place in the playwright. This originates from a space of breath, disappearance, self-love, trance, muse, and imagination that many artists call different things:

One must give oneself totally, in one's deepest intimacy, with confidence, as what one gives oneself in love. Here lies the key, self-penetration, trance, excel the formal discipline itself - all this can be realized, provided one has given oneself fully, humbly and without defence. This act culminates in a climax. It brings relief. None of the exercises in the various fields of the actor's training must be exercises in skill. They should develop a system of allusions which lead to the elusive and indescribable process of self-donation. All this may sound strange and bring to mind some form of "quackery". If we are to stick to scientific formulas, we can say that it is a particular use of suggestion aiming at an ideoplastic realization. (Grotowski 38)

The authenticity of the art has to be met equally as it was originally developed. A deep, genuine look in the soul of the text to foster a heart connection that is beyond anything one can explain. An actor must therefore make space to establish a bond with the story that is to be embodied:

It is curious that both meditation and dancing are way to "disappear". The world's cultures are full of very specific and technical means for getting to this state of emptiness. Whether Apollonian in character, like Zen, or Dionysian in character, like Sufism, these traditions and the practices they describe take us out of ordinary time. Slowing body/mind activity down to nothing, as in dedication, or involving us in a highly skill and exhausting activism as in dancing or playing Bach partita the ordinary boundaries of our

identity disappear. Keith Johnstone, who left the...invented this exercise for bringing a group of ten or twenty actors in *samadhi*. (Nachmanovitch 53)

My experiment in the studio investigated disappearance by rattling. I learned the ‘rattle’ from Judith Koltai. I wanted to take myself away from the place of seeing life in a linear fashion. I want to be able to disappear so the character, who I am to inhabit, has a chance to have some room for expression. I found out that Judith Koltai learned the rattle from Tedi Tafel who had learned it from, *The Serpent and the Wave (1989)* by Jalaja Bonheim. Tafel who has been practicing the rattle for twenty years, gave me an enlightening response, “It’s to help release fear held in the body. It opens the body, creates more space, is less about making things happen and more about allowing, fosters an ease in the musculature, more access to articulation (space between the bones) effects are both physiological and psychological” (Tafel). You start rattling by standing with your two feet hip width apart. This is followed by sensing and distributing weight equally through the feet, and then moving up and down as if you were on a small trampoline with knees bent. I rattle to Tanya Tagaq, a Canadian throat singer who chases this entity of embodiment. In an interview, Tagaq sheds light on her experience of being fully in her body, “when you are completely in your body it’s when your mind is the freest” (Culture Within Singing, 0:38- 0:41). After I rattle, I follow the space that has been discovered inside of me:

The muse is the living voice, as each of us experiences it, of intuition. Intuition is a synaptic summation, our whole nervous system balancing and combining multivariate complexities in a single flash. It’s like computation; but while computation is a lineal process,

going from A to B to C, intuition computes concentrically. All the steps and variable converge on the central decision-point at once, which is the present moment. (Nachmanovitch 30)

When I taught the rattle to my Movement II film students at George Brown College, the giggles that started told me they felt foolish at first, but it did not take them long to understand the space they were opening up. As artists, we spend our lives trying to figure out how we can communicate with the deepest part of ourselves, so we can connect significantly through story with the audience. There has to be a wild freedom that takes place in the actor to be able to sense the flow.

As Clarissa Pinkola Estés in *Women who Run with Wolves (1991)* explains:

Be *wild*; that is how to clear the river. In its original form, the river does not flow in polluted, we manage that. The river does not dry up, we block it. If we want to allow it its freedom, we have to allow our ideational lives to be let loose, to stream, letting anything come, initially censoring nothing. That is creative life. It is made up of divine paradox. It is an entirely interior process. To create one must be willing to be stone stupid, to sit upon a throne on top of a jackass and spill rubies from one's mouth. Then the river will flow, then we can stand in the stream of it raining down. We can put out our skirts and shirts to catch as much as we can carry. (343)

When I created my main character, Linda in my solo show in development called *Hanging by Heartstrings* (working title), I found this 'wild' by improvising her in a solo creation class taught by professor Erika Batdorf. When I put on Linda's costume, she took over and I followed. The performance received such great, positive feedback from the audience in the classroom, that

I was paralyzed with fear as to how to bring her back, since I did not know what I had done for her to show up:

To play is to free ourselves from arbitrary restrictions and expand our field of action. Our play fosters richness of response and adaptive flexibility. This is the evolutionary value of play - play makes us flexible. But reinterpreting reality and begetting novelty, we keep from becoming rigid. Play enables us to rearrange our capacities and our very indignity so that they can be used in unforeseen ways. (Nachmanovitch 42)

When creating the character Linda, I realized I had fear and lacked the ability to repeat when I successfully created a scene in the manner of improvisation. I needed to integrate more technique with the impulse I was following which ultimately led me to an artist in residency with Gerry Trentham. Our primary focus was to work on my solo show, *Hanging from Heartstrings*; a performance piece about mental illness. Through this process, I discovered that my imagination is my strength. I have used this gift to help me remain present both as a writer and an actor. My Achilles' heel is the inability to repeat. I have a lot of fear around the capacity to do the same thing over and over again. Gerry was able to reflect back to me belief that repetition did not feel authentic to me. When I have text, it is a struggle to memorize it because the score has already been set. I am forced to synthesize my imagination and presence into the set text. The only way this can be done is through practice, together with deep intention in the practice.

In order to investigate this idea of deep intention in a practice, this spring I was a participant in Fight Director Canada's Basic Actor Combatant, taught by Fight Master, Simon Fon. He encouraged us to run choreographed fights with intention, involving our mind and body, closing our eyes and visualizing with precision and specificity, while practicing in motion; no detail left

out. Dr Norman Doidge explains what is happening in our brain in such a situation, “The basal ganglia are a clump of neurons deep in the brain, and they light up on brain scans when a person learns to knit together complex sequences of movement and thoughts” (59). Telling a story as an actor does require maintaining a deep level of consciousness to fully engage the body in the process of adopting or playing a particular character. Dr Norman Doidge also emphasized the importance of focusing when trying to learn a new skill:

First, we learn them, by paying close attention to each and every detail. (Think of a child learning to play a piece on the piano.) This conscious learning phase is pre-automatic and requires focused mental effort. It involved prefrontal brain circuits (behind the forehead) and subcortical circuits (deep inside the brain). Only after the child has learned all the details do the basal ganglia come into play and allow him to put the details together into an automatic sequence. (60).

When Trentham and I started working on the material for my solo show, I had created specific movement gestures unearthed in the form of Authentic Movement. I had a tendency to change them each time, until he challenged me not to repeat it as choreography, but to sense and follow the original impulse. Trentham would say “you are inventing” each time. He encouraged me to continue to play with gestures in my daily practice while learning from the place and pleasure of sensation, not form. This felt connected to my stage combat training which placed great emphasis on staying in the repetition to sense the accuracy.

## Clarity

The text of the play is the only tool available for an actor to discover important clues about the character. This includes, but is not limited to, the identity of the character and how they function in society; core values, the era in which they lived, as well as other crucial information relating to the character's past, present and possible future. The actor essentially becomes the detective of a missing person and the text gives clues. The method of analyzing these character clues is what the actor refers to as scansion, which has different methods.

I will utilize the scansion technique called CANDY COVSAPO introduced by colleague Corey Tazmania from the Shakespeare Theatre in New Jersey education department, created by Brian B. Crowe, Doug West, and Jordan Laroya. This technique involves identifying specific words in the text with precise concepts and modalities in mind. For example, 'C' stands for cool/new/unusual words. 'A' is for action words; it helps the actor understand what the character is doing and if kinesthetic action is required. It is rare that we would say "welcome" with no body language to accompany the word "welcome." Though each culture, household, or society welcomes people with different gestures, this could be another clue for the actor to conduct more research about the character's background. 'N' is a new word(s) you may not know. 'D' is searching for descriptive words. 'Y' is your favourite word(s) that may frame an image. 'C' is to compare/contrast words. 'O' represents operative words that identify meaning, and how the words are used. 'V' is how much volume is required. 'S' is to stretch or sustain the word. 'A' is an accent or inflection needed. 'P' is for pitch. 'O' is for your opinion of the word.

The text must become what the actor embodies during rehearsals and performance. Following the CANDY COVSAPO technique allows a sweet sensation of falling in love with the words of the text. I explained to my George Brown students this summer while teaching movement II that as an actor, one must treat the text like a lover; the first moment you feel their breath

on your skin, the graze of a touch, staying up all night talking and sharing kisses. There are so many firsts when falling in love with a person. However, taking the text further than “firsts” is necessary in order to properly play a particular character. The text must be fully embodied. Maya Angelou provided a summary of love as the following, “Love recognizes no barriers. It jumps hurdles, leaps fences, penetrates walls to arrive at its destination full of hope” (qtd. in Hillin).

Provision of time is of great importance to gain adequate clarity of text which then ensures that it comes from a place of truth and trust. The actor must understand language in a complex way. Through these investigations, I came to understand that my practice needed to include routinely reading aloud. I started such a practice this summer despite the fear of doing so. What became very apparent in this research was how much breath I held when reading text out loud. The actor must be able to lift the words off the page, igniting story, and propelling imagination in the audience. According to Charolette Selver:

When you find yourself holding your breath, wait a little. Wait until your breathing begins to function again for whatever you happen to be doing. You will notice that, when your breathing stops, something is not quite right in your relationship to what you are doing. Either you are too anxious, or too hesitant, or too shy, or resisting something, or holding back in some way. In other words, you are not fully there for what you happen to be doing at that moment; and it is very interesting psychologically to find out what makes you stop your breath at that particular moment. (75)

I encountered a lot of fear during sessions of reading text out loud, instead of establishing a bond or falling in love with the text associated with the character’s role. It was evident that fear of memorizing text and assimilation in a deeply conscious state still presents a huge challenge.

Personality will show up in great amounts when clarity is at the helm. When an actor begins to embody the words, it is necessary to start to live inside the character. During training of other aspiring actors in movement, I spend time talking about personality because it informs the way humans live and see the world. Alain de Botton, a writer of book of essays, in his presentation on *ZeitgeistMinds: Why You Will Marry the Wrong Person*, speaks about how knowing oneself is a prerequisite to having the ability to communicate with another person:

So therefore, you can be addicted to almost anything, so long as it keeps you away from yourself. It will keep you away from tricky self-knowledge and most of us are addicts. Thanks to all sorts of technologies and distraction etc. We can have a good life where will almost certainly be guaranteed not to spend any time with ourselves. You can be guaranteed you don't have to talk to yourself. And this is a disaster for your capacity to have a relationship with another person because until you know yourself, you can't properly relate to another person. (*Why You Will Marry the Wrong Person*, 5:22-5:59)

Only after understanding and knowing oneself does it become possible to have the ability to listen to another person. Allan de Botton further explains how the lack of ability to see oneself can make a human become defensive. Therefore, for the actor, getting inside oneself helps to build the intelligence to listen, react, relate, and breathe life into a character.

To identify one's nature, I am using the system called Coordination Patterns™, which is a method that issues four fundamental patterns in the nervous system:

Betsy called them Coordination Patterns™ because they describe how opposing muscles groups are coordinated in motion and also how motion, emotion, thoughts, and action



function together. Learning about the patterns was like finding a missing map that connected movement, mindset, and behaviour. (Wetzig xxi)

The names of Coordination Patterns™ are: *thrust, shape, swing, flow* breaking down into personality and physical patterns. “Home pattern can help you see more clearly where your natural strengths lie and what you’re likely to find fulfilling.” (Wetzig 22). If a character identified dominantly in a home pattern of *shape*, the actor would perform exercises that would specifically target muscular patterns of a *shape*, especially if the actor was not familiar with this home pattern. These patterns are modelled in the book titled *Move to Greatness*. Language on the other hand often reveals how we function inside our worldview. “Each pattern has its own way of moving, talking, playing, and even getting into trouble. Activate the movement of a particular pattern and you access the feeling, thoughts, and behaviour that go with it.” (Wetzig xx)

### **In the Face of Fear**

Facing fear is living in the unknown and Dr Joe Dispenza says in his interview with Impact Theory, “We learn most about ourselves and others when we are uncomfortable” (How to Unlock the Full Potential of Your Mind, 00:21:39 - 00:21:44). I felt very uncomfortable in a stage combat workshop this Spring. I had no idea how difficult this training would be. I walked blindly into the familiar and unfamiliar. Throwing punches is a familiar gesture to me, as I grew up with many boys around me. I know how to throw a punch to the head and a knee to the stomach, and run! I do not look fast but I can sprint faster than anyone I know, especially when fear is driving me to run from a boy I just slapped across the face. As the workshop went on, a deep rage was unleashed in me. I felt out of control and dangerous. Of course, I kept it in check with

smiles, laughter and funny comments, but inside I was wild. I was deeply stressed and had been knocked off my balance. On the day of the test, my fights lacked grounding, and I was the only one who was granted a “pass with conditions”, which meant I had to do another fight for Fon. I was in flight mode. I was devastated. After weeks of trying to leave this state of rage and unease, I emailed Fon saying I had no interest in finishing and thanked him for the workshop. Again, I felt unsure in my response, but was not willing to risk going back to the rage I had stuffed down during stage combat. Fon knew I had the skill level to go deeper into the work and saw the benefit if I continued to try. I was convinced he was another confirmation that “Carmen is not good enough.”

Instead of beheading the monster, I allowed it a comfortable place to sit, leaving not much room for myself. I was failing at stage combat not doing cocaine like Frankie Wilde in the film *It's All Gone Pete Tong (2004)*. But, all I was really doing was rewiring and firing the old story I have been set on changing. I am building an actor process in order to have a strong structure to develop accuracy and repetition. I was walking away from the invitation. I am serving the monster by allowing him to be comfortable instead of learning to live in the unknown.

The words of award-winning coach and sport psychologist, Dr Beth McCharles came back to me, “Maybe you have been practicing wrong?” I thought of her diagram of the four personality types: the warrior, performer, natural, and participant. I am a warrior but why was I backing down? That is when I heard the loop that I had so many times used as my excuse; “I always work the hardest. Why do I always have to work the hardest?” Dr McCharles had challenged me to use this as a strength, but inside I had quietly dismissed her. Besides scientist, teacher, lecturer, and author, Dr Joe Dispenza, on Impact Theory spoke about “How to Unlock the Full Potential of your Mind”. He spoke about how old habitual thoughts and the ability they

have to keep a person in the same place. How you react to something in a hardwired response, will initially set the tone for your life:

They'll say I am this way because of this event that happened to me 15 or 20 years ago. What that means from biological standpoint is that they haven't been able to change since that event. Then the emotions from the experience tend to give the body and the brain a rush of energy. So, people become addicted to the rush of those emotions and they use the problems and conditions in their life to reaffirm their limitation. At least they can feel something. When it comes time to change, you say, to the person, well why are you this way? Every time they recall the event they're producing the same chemistry in their brain and body as if the event is occurring. Firing and wiring the same circuits and setting the same emotional signature to the body. What's the relevance behind that? Well, your body is the unconscious mind, it doesn't know the difference between the experience that's creating the emotion, and the emotion that you're creating by thought alone. The body's believing it's living in the same past experience 24 hours a day seven days a week 365 days a year. When those emotions influence certain thoughts, and they do, then those thoughts create the same emotions, and those same emotions influence the same thoughts. Now entire person's state of being is in the past. Then the hardest part about change is not making the same choice as you did the day before period. And, the moment you decide to make a different choice, get ready, because it's going to feel uncomfortable, it's going to feel unfamiliar. (How to Unlock the Full Potential of Your Mind, 8:39 - 10:10)

I am taking the first swipe at beheading the monster of fear, by exposing my failures, though it has to be more than disclosure. I will take the second thrust knowing how thick the neck of my

fear monster has, by finishing my stage combat training, developing a daily practice of accuracy, and to reading aloud.

### **Embodiment**

I have always been told how free of a person I am in the way I move and express myself. I believed this until I met my partner's mother, Mrs Ogunniyi who visited from Nigeria this summer. On our first encounter, she hugged me like I was one of her own. At the break of dawn, I woke up to his parents singing and praying. I grew up in a church family but we went to church on Sundays and said prayers before supper. This woman embodied her faith, her Jesus, her life. When I came around the corner to get my cup of coffee in the morning, she met me singing, dancing and praising the Lord! She grabbed my hands and we started to move. I do not mean "white people dancing", I mean down low to the ground grooving dancing. Things I have only ever experienced at a club. This is a Christian woman in her 60s showing me how to "get down". I was in a bit of shock and joy. She has a relationship with the sky and the ground and she uses the ground to get closer to her sky. I witnessed the way Mrs Ogunniyi stood with her feet planted like roots deep into ground. She could have written this definition of embodiment I discovered written in 1540s, "a soul or spirit invested with a physical form" ([etymonline.com](http://etymonline.com)).

My research continues to take me closer and closer to the ground. How divine that ground is. After spending three hours in the "en guard" position, facing my fear in stage combat, I got into bed that night and felt my jaw soften as if it swung off its hinge, but it was still intact. In the morning I started to conduct an interview with Val Campbell, my mentor. The first thing she said with no prompting from me, "the only reason someone would hold their jaw is because they don't trust their grounding." My mouth drops open. She continues:

From a psychosomatic point of view: if you don't have the ground underneath you, you are not trusting it. You're holding your upper body up, of course, you are afraid. How could you be anything else? The earth is our ally and you think you have to do it all yourself. Of course you are going to feel you are not up to the task. It makes perfect sense. (Campbell)

All the effort I put into holding this place of familiarity was not required. Our physicality is an expression of our words and Judith Koltai plays with this concept in language:

Contemporary English and other modern languages still use physical, spatial and sensory/kinesthetic metaphor when speaking of human experience, of emotion, of relationship. We “hold our tongue.” We “swallow our pride.” We “stick our neck out.” We “stand on two feet.” We “put up a good front.” In relationships, we keep people “at arm's length” we “turn our back on someone,” we “bend over backwards” to please. Even intellectual understandings are primarily experienced and expressed in physical/sensory terms. When we understand something, it “makes sense.” When we truly know something, it is “under our belt.” When we “wholeheartedly” agree, we “embrace an idea.” (Koltai 378)

I have been studying for eight years with Judith Koltai who created Embodied Practice®; an integrated discipline of which I am a member of The Professional Guild and Masterclass of Embodied Practice®; a study and research collective founded by Koltai in 1996:

Embodied Practice® is an integrative discipline synthesis of the practices and principles of the trademark method Syntonics®, as well as developments and applications of the practice called Authentic Movement. Syntonics® is guided by educational, rehabilitative and aesthetic principles. The goal is elimination of unconscious dysfunctional muscular and movement habits and recovery of harmonious balancing of effort in action and in rest. Authentic Movement is a body-based discipline, a physical practice. The discipline is rooted in the principles of expressive dance and Jungian Depth Psychology. It is practiced in a wide range of fields for personal/creative insight investigation, mystical contemplation and the expressive and performing arts. Its potential is to bring to consciousness previously hidden elements of unique personal, spiritual and creative aspects of being through the tangible experience of the body.

([www.embodiedpractice-judithkoltai.com](http://www.embodiedpractice-judithkoltai.com))

I have been mentored by Val and Judith in Syntonics® and find this work invaluable for the actor and part of my own personal practice to keep greater sensation awake in myself. In Syntonics®, we are taught about deep sensations and how the four muscular chains functions. How behaviour can manifest and distort our muscular chains and contain compensations of dis-alignment. It important to have some kind of postural awareness as an actor; to be able to sense if my head is always tilted to the left for example. Our organism is our instrument and therefore, it has to be a great orchestra of ourselves internally and externally.

My interview continues with a long-time guild member and student of Judith Koltai's, Val Campbell, about the application of Authentic Movement to text:

Carmen: How did you apply Authentic Movement to your Mother Courage role?

Val: When I started to take Mother Courage into Authentic Movement, there was no text, just the character, and she started to sniff like a dog. I started sniffing like a dog. It was the root of the character to always sniff things out: food, opportunities, survival. I never used that gesture, but it informed me of Mother Courage. My conscience mind would have never come up with a sniffing dog for the role of Mother Courage. It had to come from the collective unconscious. Mother Courage is in the collective unconscious in concert of me going in and doing the practice. This is the beauty of practice as you have the potential of finding surprises. I was putting myself in the hands of the practice to see what would be revealed. So much of our actor work is contextualized as exploration and Authentic Movement is something completely different.

Carmen: What is coming up for me is deep trust. A trust inside of oneself and to know that those words will come.

Val: Yes, absolutely. It goes back to the Meisner motto, "I am enough". I am only enough, I do not know if I can say this, but, if I am fully embodied and working from my sensations, then I am enough. What else is there? Anything else would be embellishment. The only reason you hold your jaw is because you do not have the ground underneath you. It is an embellishment. Charlotte Selver says "all tension is either withholding or over effort." All these threads come together again and again.

Carmen: I struggle with repetition. What are your thoughts?

Val: In Authentic Movement, we talk about the unitive state of consciousness which is permeable; everything touches, affects and moves me. And, that is the ideal state of the actor instead of armoured and rehearsed down to a tee and then I am going to “repeat it.” As actors we know there is a real problem when we try to repeat our rehearsal. The rehearsal is repetition. If you are trying to repeat your rehearsal, you are in the past. You have to trust what you have done in your rehearsal in your repetition, as it will hold in the same way. I was not thinking about the sniffing dog when I was playing Mother Courage. I trust now that it is there.

(Campbell)

### **Conclusion of the Artistic Challenge**

I will investigate my acting challenge of repetition and accuracy in the simplicity and complexity of these four characters. I will use my four roles in *Middletown* by Will Eno: Tour Guide, Aunt, Female Doctor, and Attendant #2 to embody with authenticity and clarity. Eno creates a platform of humour and courage while combining metaphysics with mundanity of daily life, weaving in the boldness of birth and death in his play:

Yet nestled amid all the homey detail is a prickly awareness of the awesome mystery of existence, the void whence everything came and into which it all may one day go. And a casual acknowledgment of the despair nibbling at the edge of the sensitive psyche is just another part of everyday life, like the cream in our morning coffee.



(Isherwood Charles, Word-Woozy Roundelay in Average Town Ruled by Singular Sadness, [nytimes.com](https://www.nytimes.com))

The character's entangled everyday conversations leading to perception of self, and confession of truth reveals small details of lives of these characters. This leaves room for a deep focus on reiteration, and the ability to hear tempo in the text.

I will start with Authentic Movement practice to find the authenticity of each of these characters. In addition, I will find the clarity in the text with Coordination Patterns™ utilizing CANDY COVSAPO. The embodying will be the container of grounding. I will explore my daily practice, my physical warm up in the studio, reading out loud, and working on my stage combat fight. My investigation around ACE will allow me to find the accuracy and repetition of *Middletown* so I can have a deeper understanding and thought process of the character's ground underneath them and myself.

### **Middletown: The Play**

In an interview, author Will Eno states:

*Middletown* is in some ways a- it's a play about a town. A person, this guy who lives in a town and a woman who moves there, and the people who are around in that town. I guess, I mean the town as most plays tend to have a - one location that's meant to metaphorically represent the world. So I certainly mean this to be one version of the world. Something that was very much on my mind with *Middletown*, it's just that, sometimes glancing interactions you can have with people that might potentially be life-saving

things. Sometimes we don't have those, you know, we don't even have those glancing interactions or we do have them but we aren't able to kind of build on. Really when I started out with the play, I was just trying to create a play that had a birth in it and a death in it. Some other things that emphasized those two events has parentheses. Then there's this whole rich middle part of our lives where it all really happens. *Middletown* as the play it probably works a little bit more in terms of accumulation rather than the heavy plot twist sort of things. It's just humanist and humaneness and humaneness. My hope I guess for production and with the play is that it like I say it would accumulate in that way. Then really would there be this moment that would be sound and movement of that dance but not words. Just all of the accumulated thoughts and feelings of the whole would be present in the room in that moment. Then it's kind of just a, it's a gentle diminuendo. I think is the musical term.

(Eno, 00:00:08 - 00:02:30)

I have not been in many American small towns. This summer I went to Buffalo, New York and spent some time in a small suburb called Amherst. I assumed Canadian and American towns had greater similarities. Listening to the people around me, I felt a different flavour of speech, worldview, and essence of these American people. This summer we had family from Nigeria visiting. I was concerned our different cultures would cause discord. Instead, we found a routine and common ground enabling laughter over our differences. Listening to our guests, I felt a different flavour of speech, worldview, and essence. I grew up in a small town in western Saskatchewan where we were tucked away in trees and lakes. I knew one way of speaking, one worldview and only the essence of the people in my community. Will Eno in an interview entitled "Middle of *Middletown*" stated, "It is a pretty good picture of consciousness as I know it. I

wanted to write something that was a statement of what life feels to me on earth”(Eno, 00:00:33 - 00:00:40).

*Middletown* is a story of humanity that follows death, birth and daily occurrences in between. I believe there is a strong common thread in humans; loneliness. I am infatuated with the loneliness experience. I have spent most of my life running or turning around and trying to embrace it. We all enter and exit this world alone. As I travel through *Middletown*, loneliness rattles on the edges and through the middle of the characters, especially the relationship of the two main characters, namely John Dodge and Mary Swanson. I believe Will Eno’s theme of loneliness addresses our mortality as humans. I keep asking myself if Eno is writing about dying or living?

“One of the realities is that you are going to die.” The rest of us have an amazing ability to ignore this eventuality, which Varki dubs "an evolutionary quirk”

(Melissa Hogenboom, Many animals seem to kill themselves, but it is not suicide, [BBC.com](http://BBC.com))

I often think my obsession with loneliness is rooted in my innate fear of death.

Still, his fascination with life and death and the nature of existence remains unabated. But that doesn’t mean he’s a depressed or dour soul. In fact, thinking about death, he suggests, helps us all to better understand and affirm life.

(Christopher Wallenberg, Playwright Will Eno on metaphysics and ‘Middletown’, [bostonglobe.com](http://bostonglobe.com))

John’s death close to the end of play in Act Two, Scene Eleven of *Middletown* can be sad or a surprise. I found it stunning. When I was a child, death was part of my everyday life. On a ranch,

death and birth happened regularly. When an animal died or gave birth, it would usually find a private place. Even though John's death is alone, there is a dignity in finding his own death by himself like animals did on our farm. When an animal was close to death, my dad always knew. He would keep an eye on the animal to make sure it found its resting place. Perhaps he believed death is travelled alone. When my dad was dying of cancer, the Doctor told us we needed to release him so he could let go. Each sibling went into his room that day alone and I wondered if my dad had done the same thing for those animals on our ranch; i.e. let them go? That evening, my brothers insisted they take the night shift sitting with dad. I had stayed every night. My brother dosed off for a second and my other brother had gone to grab a quick cup of coffee. It was those few seconds my dad went into the trees and died like an animal alone. How fragile breath really is. I am left with a question, do we die the way we lived our life? John Dodge lived most of his life in pain and alone, though his name is quickly redeemed after his passing. It is as if the pain of John dissolved and a rare second chance was given through Mary's little boy in Act Two, Scene Ten:

FEMALE DOCTOR: He just wants his mommy. (*She pulls up the blanket, to cover the baby, which makes a small sound.*) Take the cloth off him. There you go. As much skin-to-skin contact as possible. Just let him feel you holding him.

MRS SWANSON: Hello, John. Welcome to the world, little boy. How does it feel? I wonder what you're feeling. There you go. Sssh. What are you feeling on Earth?

I was in the room when my niece Isabelle was born. I stood across from my brother while the mother bared down to bring life into being. There was complete silence for one second before she took her first breath. A crystal-clear moment of a miracle. It is as if everything stopped,

and we all paid attention. Just as the FEMALE DOCTOR explains how fortuitous we are to be a human in Act Two, Scene Five:

FEMALE DOCTOR: It's not rare, but, it's very lucky - to be a person, just a regular person. Did you know when you combine an egg cell and a sperm cell, there's more ways they can combine, more particular kinds of people that can result, than there are atoms in the Universe?

These moments of tipping into another place and dimension are precious and completely out of our control. Many people see a need to bring their breath to a complete stop. "Latest research shows there were 3,926 suicides in the year 2016 in this country. In 2015, over 3,396,000 Canadians aged 12 and over had suicidal thoughts." (Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention, Suicide in Canada, [Suicideprevention.ca](http://Suicideprevention.ca)). John Dodge tried to take control of a moment in life, his specific imprisonment is spelt out in many scenes between him and the interactions with the *Middletown* characters. In my research on loneliness, environment can be a dominant factor. Small towns can be lonely or beloved places. Community can give you a sense of belonging or being completely ostracized if you do not fit the fabric. I think back to the small town I grew up in. I never belonged in Marsden though I made myself fit. I longed for a transplant. It was those dancing Northern lights that gave it away there was other life beyond those prairie walls.

The actor process can be a lonely one as well. There is a birthing and dying of self to allow the character to have some room to fill out. I know my 'self' can become very critical of what I am bringing into the rehearsal hall. Though as my research continues around repetition and accuracy, the critic does not have much room to speak. My focus is compelled to specifics

and discoveries of the characters. In my studio time, I kept asking, ‘who are you?’ as the character started to reveal itself in Authentic Movement. I am overtaken with the responsibility and privilege of bringing a character to life. I have this innate compulsion to have it figured out before I get in the rehearsal hall. I keep reminding ‘self’ the rehearsal is the middle part of life for these characters. We have no way of knowing the middle parts of our lives. The prep work of ACE is the beginning and the performance is the end. I am about to go into the rich part of these character’s life: rehearsal. To see how the beginnings will manifest themselves into living people with impulses and deep longings.

### **Performance History**

I chose to research specific reviewers, actors, designer and director of various productions which I believe support a deeper look into the depth and accumulated thoughts of Middletown, and the repetition of life:

It’s also about loneliness and the very little things in life.

(Ryan Pointer, Middletown: A play about a town, the world, & life,  
breakingcharactermagazine.com)

The strange beauty of life and its sometimes unbearable weight are both considered with a screwball lyricism in Will Eno’s new play “Middletown,” which opened Wednesday night at the Vineyard Theatre in a pitch-perfect production directed by Ken Rus Schmoll.  
(Charles Isherwood, Word-Woozy Roundelay in Average Town Ruled by Singular Sadness, NYtimes.com)

Eno's "Middletown" could be considered a meditation on birth and death and the lives burning bright in between... But the people in "Middletown" have a strange knack for articulating the secret fears and niggling anxieties, the hidden hopes and dashed dreams beneath the genial pleasantries of small-town life.

(Christopher Wallenberg, Playwright Will Eno on metaphysics and 'Middletown',  
Bostonglobe.com)

How to explain the why – a few minutes after sitting through the curtain call of director Meg Roe's production at the Shaw Festival and applauding politely – I found myself breaking down in the parking lot and having the first full-on weep I've had after a play in years?

(J. Kelly Nestruck, Review: Middletown sucks the viewer into an oddball, poetic world,  
Theglobeandmail.com)

Les Waters the director of the Steppenwolf Theatre Company production in 2011 states:

I found it deeply moving because, you know, it covers birth and death and that long bit in between. The play to me is about the ordinary people who live in a town called Middletown who are experiencing what it is like to be in the middle of everything.

(Lee 00:01:33- 00:04:53)

Antje Ellermann the Scenic Designer in the Steppenwolf Theatre Company production in 2011 contributes:

The houses have always been a key component in various forms as we worked on the design. I was trying to ride that line between a particular town and a particular place in time. And let it be every town in the middle of the US.

(Ellermann 00:02:50 - 00:03:07)

Michael Patrick Thornton an actor in the Steppenwolf Theatre Company production in 2011 adds:

Many of the scenes are about people running into someone on their way to somewhere else. This is a play that talks about huge issues in a such wonderfully fun and playful and also heartbreaking and devastating way.

(Thornton 00:03:30 - 00:03:50)

Fiona Byrne who played in the Shaw Festival production in Niagara-on-the-Lake says:

I remember first reading Middletown when the season was announced, and I didn't know I would be part of the production so it was just as an interested reader. I read it from start to finish really quickly, and found myself both moved and deeply amused. Eno's self-effacing humour throughout the play belies the inherent depth of the piece. I could really feel the writer in the work. And it was very original! I hadn't read a play with that kind of voice in a long time. It really stuck with me. I think the play is about being human. I think it's about human experience and what it means to be alive. The town is the world and we are all in it. We even going to space and we still feel part of a town of sorts. (Byrne)



## Research of CHARACTER

In small towns, colourful characters seem to be highlighted. In Marsden we had the post lady who knew everyone's business and who sent whom letters. The garbage man, who drove around in a tractor year-round, reminds me of John Dodge. My mom the local hairdresser, the vault of all the secrets. *Middletown* is no exception to the rule of dynamic characters. The four characters I am playing for this thesis role: the Female Doctor, Tour Guide, the Aunt, and Attendant 2; are women full of the elements of the earth which trickles into full bodied people. These characters are definitely the rich middle part of life, "where it all happens" which Will Eno talks about so fondly. They are the accumulations of life, from daily repeated routines that makes this town called Middletown unique and similar to every small town.

In my movement class I always ask the students to bring a daily movement to class; to bring awareness to everyday unconsciousness. Playing with the daily movement allows them to apply weight, time, space, and flow. It is the ability to take these Laban principles resembling simplicity, and turn a daily unconscious into consciousness. This can translate into beauty that is similar to *Middletown*. I am fascinated by daily pedestrian movement. Often when I am on the train, I will witness people living in their daily routines. For example: hanging onto the railing, reading a book or checking a phone. The repetition of our movements impacts our worldview and body greatly. We may suffer from muscle aches because of this rigorous daily routine or experience deep delight in the precision of it.

In Act One, Scene Four of *Middletown*, Tour guide has a resemblance of myself when I was a child growing up in Marsden, Saskatchewan. I saw the same mailbox, gravel road, house for eighteen years. I did not think about how extraordinary my world was covered with hills and pastures. It was not until I moved away for over twenty years that I realized the oasis I grew up in:

TOUR GUIDE: Sure, of course. *(pause)* I grew up here. *(referring to monument)* This thing was just always - I don't know - There. I'd see it in the rain and snow, serving its purpose. So that we remember, I guess. In general. So that we have memories.

When the Tour Guide is able to give a tour to this odd couple whose perspective loves ordinary, she starts to realize just how the repetition of ordinary life can be extraordinary. In my thesis work, I am striving to find this same dynamic awareness for repetition in my work.

When we get to the middle part of the show, the play takes on staccato scattered thoughts, feelings, and opinions. The Aunt in Act One, Scene Ten seems to be the loud, brassy note that is horrible if it is played out of tune; having the potential to make us smile or roll our eyes in exhaustion:

AUNT: *(leafing through the program)* People are born, people die. *(patting SWEET-HEART on the knee)*. We'll go to that nice place you like, after. We can do the treasure map on the placemat. I always loved those. And here we go. Exciting.

The Aunt hits the deep crux of the play, sitting in her cushioned seat in the middle of the play and middle of her life by referring to: death, birth, and "the treason map." Eno seems to leave the audience hanging with this jewel into the intermission with the potential of missing it. This is because the Aunt can be loud, disruptive and off topic; yet she nails it. I interviewed Fiona Byrne who played the Aunt in the Shaw production directed by Meg Roe:

In terms of the lens through which the Aunt sees the play, she is an eager audience member... Someone who clearly goes to the theatre a lot... She is looking at the experience as a possible social experience, and so she wants to discuss at intermission what she has seen, and make predictions. She is the excited and willing participant. She will be keeping the program after the show! (Byrne)

When I first met the Attendant 2 in Act Two, Scene Thirteen, at first she felt like a whisper, juxtaposed with a dead body needing to be transported. The first dead body I remember seeing was my Mom's father in his casket. I was twelve years old and was faced with mortality in a sudden way. I remember my brother and I standing in front of the casket, my brother whispering as his hand grazed the still body, "he is completely cold." The curiosity overwhelmed me and I will never forget the sensation when I put my hand on top of my Grandpa's hand. There was no life. No blood. No warmth. The colour of the character had drained and there lied a corpse. Looking at my brother, I repeated the obvious, "he is dead."

ATTENDANT 2: (*to JOHN DODGE's body:*) Goodbye, person. That was nice about the flowers. I hope you're not sad.

It feels as though it is a beautiful chime of one last breath of life sent into John as he tips into the next dimension. I imagine a small chime played to emphasize the final phrase:

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 some 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 moments of emotional difficulty, yearning, wonderment, etc., but in general, the play should move along at a pretty good clip, like life. (Ryan Pointer, Middletown: A play about a town, the world, & life, Breakingcharactermagazine.com)

When I listened to Will Eno in his interviews, he spoke with hesitation, littered with new thoughts while searching for words. I believe it is important for each of the characters to own an individual rhythm/tempo within the poetic text.

I have taken the four characters into the studio. So far, I am learning it is important to start with Clarity from the ACE process before going into the studio. This gives a dimension to the character. For example, I completed Clarity of the ACE process prior to entering the studio with the Female Doctor. In the practice of Authentic Movement, a piece of her text came up which formed the crux of the character: "is the point". I took these three words into repetition and formed a walk for her, which included her home pattern (i.e. *shape* from coordination pattern), and a definition of accuracy was brought to light. This resulted in a gesture what may be a part of the female doctor's daily life. In this daily image and gesture, a story of her past revealed itself. When I read Fiona's analysis of the Female Doctor after I had played with her in the studio, her words embodied what the character had revealed to me in Authentic Movement:

The lens through which the doctor sees the play is in telling the patient this bad news first of all, that his botched suicide attempt has actually led to something more medically serious. It isn't the best or worst part of her day... It is part of her workday. The stakes aren't monumental, it won't change her life. She has a job to do. We don't really get to know her in the first scene. And then we learn a little bit more in the second scene, that she has with the mechanic. She wants a break. We know that she has a son, she mentioned it in the first scene. So perhaps she's tired, we don't learn whether or not she's actually from Middletown originally. I am imagined that she wasn't. During the scene with the Mechanic, we learned that she has what seems like compassion. She's willing to give him the pills. It's his birthday, after all. So I think that her meeting with John has made her unconsciously reflect upon death and missed opportunities and accidents. So a little window opens up and we see her for a moment decide to give the Mechanic a break. And that's it. And then her day is made when she gets to deliver a baby. Maybe she feels a bit better, but in no way do I think she is sad or permanently affected by any event on that day. I think that's the spirit of the town. It's just a day. And that's what makes it so simple and that's what makes it so moving. (Byrne)

### **Integration of Artistic Challenge**

This summer I dug deeper into my research of ACE while working with a visual artist named Verna Vogel. I took the three characters from my solo show *Hanging by Heartstrings*, into Authentic Movement, while Verna drew me in the process. When the characters started to speak their text, I would land on specific facial or body gesture. Verna requested to "loop it" in order for her to capture the expression in real time. I was able to practice repetition with the text;

re-finding the physical sensation. I began to understand the rigorous work of repetition and became aware of my place of default to “check out” and repeat with no intention or guiding sensation. I remember how Simon Fon challenged me when running a fight to play each moment with strong intention. Even if we did not have the fight at full speed, the intention, flow, and specificity were the necessary bits. Going back in language with this same slow flow; specific intention has proved to deepen the language, breath, and sensations. The record of the expression Verna captured on paper was riveting. I saw the essence and accuracy of the character. In an article titled “The Art of Fine Tuning: conversations with Steve Reich, Lincoln Kirstein, and Peter Brook”, Brook fleshes out repetition for the actor:

The scraping is a pure example of repetition. And in the same way once say that an actor learning his lines penetrates his character and the meaning of the role or the themes of the play by this same process. This coming back again and again allows time to enter as a progressive force, and repeating the same action enables the penetration to go deeper. This also enable the force of misunderstandings, the barriers of misunderstandings and false notions, of confusions, to fall away. (Peter Brook 57)

In the practice of Authentic Movement, a humanness of these characters is being revealed. I was able to talk with Gerry Trentham more about his research around reception and accuracy:

Many performers attempt to be more precise than they can be accurate. Accuracy has to do with physical research, embodiment and authenticity, in both real and imagined realms. Deadening the imagination through an obsession of “authenticity” or avoiding theatre or dance form is detrimental to performance. Instead the performer has to do the

rigorous work it takes to inform each moment. Layer each moment - under its clear intent - with a plethora of potential choice - emotionally, physically, vocally, and intellectually. Then introduce accuracy. (Trentham)

When I stick to the ACE process in my prep work, it keeps my eyes on the steps and I am able to feel like I have an achievable target. Though when I tested the ACE process in a showing this fall, I performed the first part of *Hanging by Heartstrings* for the faculty. I was overcome with the shadow of the monster in my performance in front of the faculty and cohort. In the dress rehearsal, I had strong confidence and a lot of fun performing. When I did the actual showing, I lacked confidence and felt left with a shell of myself saying a bunch of lines. I felt like I could not feel an impulse as if I went numb. I had done “everything” according to the ACE process and was devastated because I failed. Dr Beth McCharles challenged me with a few questions:

What do you REALLY think and believe about yourself? Are you confident and feel deserving of a part or do you give yourself every chance to 'back out' from positive thoughts - no matter if you are working hard or not?(McCharles)

It is in my talk with Cindy Block who is an actor, voice and movement teacher, as well as member of Embodied Practice Guild® that I was able to pull back the layers of presence in a performance:

The root of PRESENCE is 'sense'. If I begin to lose the sensation in what I am doing and simply go through the motions of the rehearsed action, my only way back is to return to a breath that lands fully with my centre and re-connects my thought with my body and with

what is in motion (the balance of intellectual, physical and emotional presence). What is necessary for me to be able to even notice in the heat of performance is that I have gone off the presence track. I believe this requires a skillful inner witness; the ability to notice what I am doing, as I am doing it (without judgement).

As I continue to prepare for rehearsal, I am aware that my inner witness has deep judgement. Terese Marie Mailhot sheds light on self-esteem in the book titled “Heart Berries”. I have been told I have a high self-esteem and low confidence. Mailhot has a different outlook:

I think self-esteem is a white invention to further separate one person from another. It asks people to assess their value and implies people have worth. It seems like identity capitalism. Mom did teach me story, though, along with Grampa Crow. She knew that was my power, and she knew women need their power honed early, before it's beaten out of home by the world.

(Mailhot 29)

This has turned my thinking around. What if I do not chase self-esteem or confidence, but instead turn deeper into my ground, belief, senses, and inner witness? These are tangible things that I can access. Besides, they will be a bigger blow in my quest to defeat the monster. The power is in the storytelling.



## The Path of Conclusion

I definitely took a swipe, a blow, and a cut at my monster's neck. Did I sever the head completely?...no, but I have made contact and know where the next targets lie. I found the monster had two heads. One called *outshining* and the other named *plough*. The Crime of Outshining is a phrase I learned from *The Big Leap* (2009) by Gay Hendricks bestselling author:

The unconscious mantra of the outshining barrier goes like:

I must not expand to my full success, because if I did, I would outshine \_\_\_\_\_ and make him or her feel bad. (55)

This outshining was eroded in further development of the ACE process. I found myself backing down from my work, and was distracted by this fear I could not explain. It was not until I talked to my mentor, Val Campbell who introduced me to *The Big Leap*, and a therapist who uses the book as reference in her therapy. I started to understand the monster's head of outshining was looking me straight in the face. I began to comprehend my earlier reference; why is the warrior in me "backing down"? I have struggled with this for years. I could never put it into words. It comes from many fears, especially that of not being liked. This helped me to identify the judgment that lives in my inner witness.

ACE also helped me understand the concept of time. I will hurry through a process to get to the end result. I named this head, plough. I will plough through to get to the other side. In my process of ACE, I started to become aware of this tendency. I silenced the voice by listening to the *must*, Judith Koltai had talked so much about in the practice of Authentic Movement.

Moreover, in my work of getting closer to the ground (i.e. grounding myself), I was able to complete the stage combat and received my Basic Actor Combatant Certificate from Fight Directors of Canada. The stage combat course made it evident that a daily practice of working through the fight choreography played a significant role in the embodiment of the routine. When I applied the same principle of repetition via CANDY COVSAPO and Authentic Movement, this kinesthetically allowed me to feel the difference between memorized and embodied text.

I was able to build trust in all four of the characters I played because of the ACE process that I had done prior to going into the rehearsal hall. The step by step process allowed me to trust that these characters were already living inside of me, waiting to be seen.

Overall, I believe in the process of Authentic, Clarity, and Embodiment; ACE. The actor must have a place where they start. In an impromptu conversation with one of my favourite Canadian actors, Elinor Holt stressed to me that the various tools we have in our actor kit are ours to play with, as well as using a specific tool for the task required. These are good principles to keep in mind and practice. She also believes that a great part of what the actor does is adapting process to fit with the processes of others.

It is in the repetition of the work of practice and rehearsal that accuracy will be unearthed. You cannot wake up and be accurate, but rather an evolving consequence of the work. It is like the unconscious; you do not wake one day knowing your unconscious behaviour. It is years of pursuit that will reveal its awareness. Mary Stark Whitehouse was one of the pioneers of Authentic Movement, and in her essay titled, C.G. Jung and Dance Therapy:

Co-operation means the long journey toward what he calls Individuation – the unique and conscious development of potential in a particular person, the slow unfolding of a wholeness already there. Through self-knowledge, individuation puts the ego in the service of

the Self, the whole. The growth of personality is only possible through inter-penetration of consciousness and unconscious. (78)

The actor must work at honing a practice that makes sense to them, enlightens, and brings joy. Joy is part of the *must*. The repetition of the practice starts to occur in every part of life, and the deep listening takes you to a place of accuracy inside the work.

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## **Appendix A: Selected Journal Entries**

December 3, 2018

My Goals:

Accuracy & Repetition

1 – to catch my “outshining” pattern

2 – to revel in language

3 – to listen fully: all of me

4 – take the time to learn and try fully

What takes me out of precision and the desire to be accurate? I have the capability to be precise and live in accuracy. I know this because of my practice in Syntonics®.

Dec 4, 2018

Explorative work with Jackie Maxwell, the director.

Behaviour

How do the characters behave?

Alone: what are you like?

How much will you present?

Notion of: Being

What is the cost of talking?

- of maintaining conversation
- of maintaining relationship

Thinking – Air – Everyone has a philosophy.

Dec 7, 2018

Focus. My mind must stay in the work. I can allow my “fears” to get in. To overthink. As I witness Jackie Maxwell holding the room, there is a firm form in the work and joy. Keep it “real”. Keep the storyline so we can tell the story. Rooted in story, I have my ground. Table work with Jackie continues to teach me to “mull” over the words, sentences, thoughts...her love of literature and breaking it down is opening up a new – revealing a world to me that in the past I negotiated – bypassed. She speaks of female writers; Iconic, Canadian female writers and I find myself going to the library after rehearsals to get their books. Jackie is a storyteller. She creates an atmosphere of story. Her generosity in the room is palpable. It is almost like she reads you/me like a book then reflects back her deep intuition of you.

My upper limit lives in the worry of how I am perceived.

*The Big Leap:*

Each of us has an inner thermostat setting that determines how much love, success, and creativity we allow ourselves to enjoy. When we exceed our inner thermostat setting, we will often do something to sabotage ourselves, causing us to drop back into the old familiar zone where we feel secure. (20 Hendricks)

When these thoughts of “worry/concern” start I know that “good” is trying to find its way to me. That deep and pure impulse is finding its way up.

*The Big Leap:*

When the old belief clashes with the positive feelings you’re enjoying, one of them has to win. If the old belief wins, you turn down the volume on the positive feeling. If the good feeling wins, congratulations! Your practice in expanding your capacity for positive energy is paying off. (21 Hendricks)



December 23, 2018

There is a fear that berates me. That can almost take my breath away. Resistance...Judith Koltai would ask: Where does it live in me? What does it feel like physically? Why name it?

I built a process. So that I have steps, goals, and benchmarks. To do. I practice. To try. JK always says you do or do not. Tola uses the word “try” very differently than I have heard before. He says, “they really tried.” When his mother and father saw a one person theatre performance, afterwards they said “he really tried.” There is no arrival in the way they are using the word. It is an attempt. It is a doing. However, there is no good or bad: no judgement. They tried. It does not qualify the performance, but says what happened. It is the depth and purpose they say it with.

There is so much weight in the words and deep respect the words are put into the air with. They are not fluffed away, but there is a silence that hangs after. “He really tried. He really tried.”

They repeat it a couple of times.

I want to really try. To try.

Authentic Movement from Judith Koltai’s essay:

Cheryle L’Hirondelle (1998), a Cree woman and actor/singer, tells me that the Cree’s original name for themselves is *Nehiyaw* (pronounced Nay-hee-aow) and that it means “exact speaker.” She explains that this has nothing to do with using words “correctly,” with grammatical or syntactic exactitude. To be an exact speaker is to be exact and faithful to what you mean, what you experience, and what you want the other to understand of your experience. (Koltai 378)

January 8, 2019

Jackie is a light; an example of the craft. Her ego is not guiding the process nor is her insecurity. She is there to work and to give life to a story. Jackie has worked with the best actors in the country. Even though our class is far from them, she works with what is in front of her. She gives deep assurance to the actor every step of the way.

Her guide is the text. She understands language in complex way.

I am learning that text is the guide. The learning is in the repetition – it is not fast nor ploughing repetition. It is:

- a gentle caress of the words
- going over and over
- let them sit
- be still
- come back

.... rehearse

In my practice of Syntonics®, I am taught to be guided, and never to push. There is no arrival; only to allow and reveal. To not *get in the way*. To not *figure out the why*. But to keep *coming back*. Less effort, more mobility. This principle I have to apply right now and always. It is the coming back: repetition – that allows the work to become deeper, and to arrive in accuracy. I witness this principle in Jackie as she always comes back to the text. To the content.

Right now, it is survival and surreal and do not push. To come in with ease. To look over and over my text because moving too much is too tiring for me now. I have to sink deep within me and allow all I know to run the show. The work I did physically before rehearsal has to manifest. To trust.

To remember breath is the teacher. My guiding principle.

When I combine breath, text and trust, the embodiment of my practice, there is a deep intuition and knowing that will bring me to the next part of the path. For it is a path and not an arrival.

January 10, 2019

EMBODY in the TEXT, build character and voice in practice.

Jackie today came up to me and said, good work. You are starting to understand where you are in the scene and that is good.

Clarity of Intention: Knowing where you are entering in the scene and leaving.

Today in my Tour Guide Scene: I need to rely on my language.

Leaning:

- It is in the rehearsal hall the character is discovered
- The character is discovered by choices
- Making strong decisions so the director can decide a yes or no
- The text is the set structure and the body is improvisation

Process:

- It is more about having the tools than a set plan
- For me, a set plan is not my nature – it is getting into the room understanding the director, the room and getting out the right tool to fit
- The prior work of ACE is a must and big, massive, yes

Character:

- Slice of life
- Weight
- Bring into text “slice of life”
- How does my body deal with that?
- Body is responding to language and story

January 9, 2019

Deep Realization:

Memorize Text

vs

Embodied Text

There is a major difference that is very noticeable when the text is spoken with embodiment versus when it is not fully in me.

The IMAGE has to be there.

It is not so much knowing the word which my deepest fear has always been, but when the text is truly embodied.

When it is:

- Felt
- Imagined
- Played
- Repeated

Then you can begin – ACCURACY.

Yesterday I realized OPINON (from CANDY COVSAPO) has to be now LIVED, FELT and IMAGED for the text to have further impact.

January 11, 2019

Working the DR scene, I was able to dive/live in the depth of the language. To really discuss with Jackie the deep motivation of the character.

January 12, 2019

Combat: language

My deep fear of language is being sliced open. Besides, when I start to truly wrestle with language, and live within the text, the fear starts to subside. Everything becomes less scary when language takes deep precedence. I can live – I can really start to find the craft. It is as if scales were on my eyes and now they are falling off.

January 16, 2019

Rhythm

I started to understand the energy of rhythm today. The importance for the character to have a specific rhythm energy. In my scene with John Dodge, Corey and I were running lines. My habit as a person is to match; to observe another person's energy and somewhat match it. The notes I have been getting for this scene are: authority and energy. I started to bounce and move a bit faster as we were running lines. Then organically Corey and I changed rhythms. I started to embody how different our rhythms needed to be in the scene. In this scene, the text rhythm changed four times. This gave me insight into what the rhythm of the text actually meant.

I feel that I am finally able to start honing my language, comprehend the complexity of text and how it is so wonderful to fall into.

To deface the fear of having it roll around in my mouth and dig my teeth in and chew on it. Instead of it bossing me around.

The narrative of the language

Rhythm Energy

January 18<sup>th</sup>, 2019

Will Eno uses the same words and conceptual patterns throughout the play to allow his voice and concepts through.

Repeat

Words

Ideas

He stays true to the journey he is on.

Every time I hear this play, I hear the words that are repeated over and over.

REPETITION

Eno keeps in his repetition and pattern concept to allow it to penetrate.

January 19<sup>th</sup>, 2019

Pace and Tone

New thoughts

January 22, 2019

The monster of fear of *not being good enough*, the fear of being seen...of stepping outside of myself took priority last night in my Female Dr/John D scene. The inner witness turned critic. Instead of roots and warm embrace.

January 23, 2019

The step from rehearsal to performance is the hardest step. The beast starts to speak and my trust spills out of me. The ground ceases to exist. I am left alone floating in complete nothing, flailing around like a sick animal. The flogging begins. The deep disappointment. I talk to Corey: one step in front of the other. Rely on the technique.

JM: you are aware so that is good.

Jackie sees the importance of grounding the actor at the top of the scene.

I see how my text starts to slip if I do not bite into it.

Linking thoughts!

The *thinking/linking* behind the text each thought is new.

How embodying the thought – breath is the vehicle to a new thought.

I see that the only way to truly understanding is practice.

Practice:

- Reading
- Memorizing
- Technique
- DOING

It is like trying to run a marathon with half the training.

The skill comes from practice and deep precision inside practice.

That precision is the practice.

Then the precision & practice takes me to Accuracy and Repetition.

Refining the tools and working on them infinitely.

I am involved in the rooted work of Self; the actor lives life by doing.

It is refining the tools of text.

As a kinesthetic learner, it is in the doing that drops me closer to the ground.

February 6, 2019

What I am learning about process is that I live by what I feel. I have deep intuition and impulse that has been further developed by Embodied Practice®. I get into a role by *feeling* my way in.

That is part of my technique and process.

Find the original impulse from the studio. In the rehearsal hall, I did not trust my original impulse of the character. Eventually it came back and was what I was being directed towards. In the rehearsal hall, it is the text that takes you back to the original impulse when the ACE work is done from text.

Working with Text Path (break down)

- 1) Look over
  - CANDY COVSAPO scansion
  - On feet in rehearsal
  
- 2) Sat with words slowly imagined
  - Research of doctor: Grey's Anatomy



## 3) Read lines &amp; Recorded

- Improvisation moved scenes to audio reading

## 4) Added Metronome

- Found tempo and metaphor of scenes

## 5) Listened to Scenes

- Imagined the environment: the exact room, texture of floor, and details

## 6) Moved in the practice of Authentic Movement

- Gestures arrived
- Opinion and relationship to text, imagination and memory

For example: “kind” what kind of person?

Kind: variety pack cereals at the lake when I was kid. I always chose fruit loops because we never got sweet cereals any other time of the year.

## 7) Memorized text regularly with person prompter

**Appendix B: Studio & Working Script**

A C E in to practice

female doctor ♡ forward SHAPE

♀ arms swing opposite of leg

♂ good listener, reliable, organized

chakra ♡ centre lead with heart

one person at a time

fear of failure

too slow & deliberate

pg 59 biopsy: sample of tissue taken from  
the body in order to examine it  
more closely - remove cells/tissues

Anti-toxin: neutralize a toxin

↓  
Neovitamole

tempo can be slow but picks  
up into a steady pace.



In authentic movement into a lil  
RIVER.

I found myself slow and detailed.  
Heart first and fully present in each  
movement. Like water as a element.  
moving with a steady joined flow.

Match steps, steady pace,

Kiss and wave and move  
the hand fully forward I kissed  
to my 7 year old Eric. When I  
can I enjoy dropping him off at school.  
It doesn't always work with my  
schedule.

# TOUR GUIDE

p923

Sure of course <sup>perspective</sup> / I grew up  
 here. This "thing" <sup>monument</sup> was just always-

I don't know - There I'd see  
 it in the rain and snow,  
 serving its purpose. So that  
 we <sup>town people</sup> remember, I guess. In general  
 so that we have memories.

FT: That's a thought.

AUNT

I "should" have brought a <sup>green</sup>  
 sweater. / Are you cold, sweetheart?  
 Press

Remember, we're inside. / Excuse <sup>Dad</sup>  
 me. / Would you like some  
 candy?

Nice and quiet, dear.

Dad

You're busy.

Dad

Oh?

Press

What do you like to see?

# Attendant 2

up talk  
wrist rub together  
big smile

Whisper  
amplified

WRIST  
lead

trying to  
impress  
attendant.  
But is too  
her body self?  
+ bouncy

Goodbye,  
Person.

He's  
nice.

I hope you not sad

bouncy?



press

versig

FLOAT THOSE STUCK

*buying* TOUR GUIDE. Sure, of course. *Roll a bit* (pause) I grew up here. *purpose* (referring to monument) This thing was just always - I don't know - There. I'd see it in the rain and snow, serving its purpose. So that we remember, I guess. In general. So that we have memories.

FEMALE TOURIST. That's a thought.

TOUR GUIDE. I haven't traveled, ever. I'll walk around town, is about it. I'll notice a building or something, I'll look at people. I don't know. I grew up here. I thought this was the world.

MALE TOURIST. Of course you did. But, hey, let me get a quick picture of you being wrong. (He snaps a photo of TOUR GUIDE.)

FEMALE TOURIST. We always sort of want something more, I guess because there's a long history of death in both our families. I guess we like things that are potentially monumental, but that aren't necessarily monumentalized, yet.

TOUR GUIDE. Well, then, I don't know - (looking around) I guess then maybe that's everything else. Technically, (referring to the monument) Other than this.

FEMALE TOURIST. I guess.

TOUR GUIDE. I don't really know what you want.

MALE TOURIST. Just, something, you know. You're the one with the clipboard. (He takes a photograph.) *style*

TOUR GUIDE. Well, okay. Take the air. I wrote on it in school. Take a deep breath. (They do.) A hundred years ago, someone was digging a hole here, for this very monument, and he rested on his shovel and sighed. You just inhaled a molecule of the air that shoveler exhaled, in that quiet sigh long ago.

FEMALE TOURIST. (slightly surprised, as if she's sensed that particular molecule) Oh yeah.

MALE TOURIST. (He feels he's also sensed one of the ancient molecules.) Sweet.

TO STATUE  
defeated

Sit  
sit

WORLD

I'm not like  
you 2

1) I don't know - give up  
~~SORRY~~

Performance  
Preach it  
Sick

2) AIR - new thought  
- riffing

See thought: Take the AIR

word: Suicide. It scared me they even had a word for it. And then, suddenly, there I am, you know, on my kitchen floor, like a crazy person, right in the thick of that word.

FEMALE DOCTOR. Forgive me, but you used some kind of a knife?

JOHN DODGE. A house-painting tool. Like, a scraper thing.

FEMALE DOCTOR. That sounds dirty.

JOHN DODGE. What do you mean?

FEMALE DOCTOR. That it might have had dirt on it. Germs.

JOHN DODGE. Maybe. Probably. (brief pause) I pictured everybody with their eyes all red, saying funeral stuff like, "We hardly knew him." And, in reality, they really didn't. I never thought I'd have a lonely life. I do, it turns out. Like, medically lonely. Like I've got sad genes. Like, what's that word? (very brief pause) I don't know. I'm sure there is one.

FEMALE DOCTOR. I'm sorry.

JOHN DODGE. Please don't worry. I know I'm not crazy. I'm just sad. And not even that much, right now. I even feel hungry. That must be a good sign. (very brief pause) I keep explaining, but - I wanted to see if I had a survival instinct. It was a stupid way to find out, but I did. And I'm glad. And I'm better, I think. Not fine, but, better.

FEMALE DOCTOR. That's the thing.

JOHN DODGE. It really is. (brief pause) What do you mean?

FEMALE DOCTOR. Well, we're not sure. Now, I just want to take a look at this.

(She puts on rubber gloves and pulls up the cotton mask hanging around her neck. She gently opens the surgical gauze covering the wound on his wrist.)

JOHN DODGE. It smells really bad.

FEMALE DOCTOR. That's bacteria. It could just be topical. But we're concerned. We're worried you might have something serious.

Dab

Pres

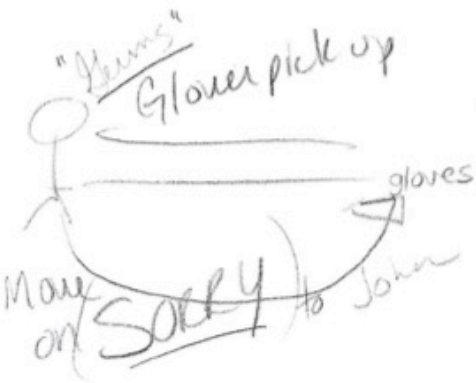
Press

Thrust

DAB

The change

So you used a rubber glove  
Tell me about that



\* Put on gloves  
"That's the thing"

..serious..  
Throw Gloves

no opinion  
no b/w

gotten worse  
this is bad

building  
a...  
of trust  
& truth  
w/ patient  
Factual  
TRUST